



### 3. Crops and Livestock

The changes of the moon and the signs of the zodiac are very important in determining the best dates for planting certain crops. What the hillman calls the "dark" of the moon is the period from the full moon to the new, the decrease or waning of the moon; the other half of the lunar season, from the new moon to the full, when the moon is waxing or increasing in size, is known as the "light" of the moon. In general, it is said that vegetables which are desired to grow chiefly underground such as potatoes, onions, beets, turnips, radishes, and peanuts are best planted in the dark of the moon. Garden crops which bear the edible part above ground, such as beans, peas, tomatoes, and so on, are usually planted in the light of the moon.

Besides the moon's phases, there are also the signs of the zodiac to be considered, and almost any hill farmer can make out these signs in the almanac, even though he cannot read a line of ordinary print. Merchants in the backwoods settlements distribute large calendars in which the phases of the moon and the signs of the zodiac are graphically and plainly represented. If a man can "read figgers" and knows the date he can see at a glance just what the situation is for any day in the year. Instead of using the names of the twelve constellations as the astrologers do, the hillman usually designates the portion of the human body with which each is associated. Some very successful farmers believe that underground crops, such as potatoes, should be planted "when the sign's in the feet"—that is, when the moon is in Pisces. If a hillman wishes to indicate Aquarius he says "when the sign's in the legs." In the same way

Capricornus is connected with the knees, Sagittarius with the thighs, Scorpio with the sex organs or "privates," Libra with the kidneys, Virgo with the bowels, Leo with the heart, Cancer with the breast, Gemini with the arms, Taurus with the neck, and Aries with the head. It is interesting to note that some Ozarkers say "the sign of the crawpappy" when they mean Scorpio, simply because the picture of the scorpion in the almanac looks rather like a crawfish.

Mr. C. C. Keller, farm agent in Greene County, Missouri,<sup>1</sup> stirred up a great controversy once by advising farmers to plant their potatoes on March 17 every year, with no regard to the signs of the zodiac or the changes of the moon. One of my neighbors in McDonald county, Missouri, was so horrified at this heresy that he decided not to send his son to the village high school. "If education don't learn a man no better than that," said he, "I don't want none of it in my family!"

Uncle Jack Short of Galena, Missouri, told me that some farmers back in the 1880's used to plant potatoes on February 14. Mr. Short himself thinks that this is much too early; he plants his own spuds on March 17, or even later—sometimes as late as March 30. I have met a few old-timers who say that the one-hundredth day of the year is the proper day to plant potatoes, regardless of the weather or any other considerations.

However farmers may differ about the proper date for planting, they are generally agreed that potatoes should be dug in the light of the moon, as they will rot otherwise.

There are men in Arkansas who are always careful to plant onions and potatoes on opposite sides of the garden, believing that potatoes will not do well if onions are growing too close. A little boy who asked about this was told that the odor of onions "makes a 'tater cry its eyes out." This was only a joke, of course, but the fact remains that these people *do not* plant potatoes and onions together.

It is very generally agreed that beans should be planted when

<sup>1</sup> Springfield (Missouri) *Press*, Mar. 15, 1933.

the sign is in the arms. Plant them in Virgo, the old-timers say, and you'll get large plants and plenty of bloom, but mighty few beans and poor quality at that. An old woman fingering some very inferior beans at a crossroads store remarked: "They must have been planted when the maid held the posies"—in Virgo, that is. Bunch beans should be started on Good Friday regardless, according to some very successful bean growers. All beans should be planted in the morning rather than in the afternoon, and there is a widely accepted theory that beans planted in May never amount to much. Some old hillmen contend that one should never plant beans until after the first whippoorwill's cry is heard, no matter what the weather conditions are, or what the signs indicate. The farmer who burns the hulls of his seed beans or peas will get no crop anyhow, no matter what happens.

Cucumbers are best planted in Gemini, other things being equal, but some old-timers insist that cucumber seeds must be planted on May 1 before sunup—this protects the vines against insects. Many hillmen believe that the size of a cucumber depends upon the virility of the man who plants the seed—cucumbers planted by a woman or an old man never amount to much. A feeble-minded person is particularly successful in growing certain crops, and there is an old saying that "it takes a damn fool to raise gourds." Peppers thrive best if the individual who plants them is angry at the time, and if a lunatic can be induced to do the planting, so much the better. It is considered very bad luck to plant sage in one's own garden—the backwoods housewife always calls in a stranger to do this job if possible.

The old-timers around Marionville, Missouri, tell me that watermelon seeds should be planted on May 10, regardless. Many farmers in Arkansas, however, plant watermelons on May 1, before sunrise, just like cucumbers. Some hillmen soak watermelon seeds in sweet milk overnight before planting them,

and one fellow near Clinton, Arkansas, told me that this trick is supposed to make the melons sweeter.

Cabbage, head lettuce, or any vegetable that heads, is supposed to be planted in Aries. There is a widespread notion, however, that all lettuce is best planted on Saint Valentine's day—February 14, which the old-timers still call Groundhog Day. Otto Ernest Rayburn tells me that once, when Valentine's Day fell on Sunday, the people at Kingston, Arkansas, got up before daylight to plant their lettuce, so as not to be seen violating the Sabbath. Peas are always planted on February 14—many gardeners cling to this idea after they have discarded most of the other superstitions.

People who used to raise hemp for cordage—the same weed that is called marijuana by the moderns—say that this stuff is best planted on Good Friday. Flax *must* be planted on Good Friday no matter what the weather conditions, according to the old settlers, but not much flax is grown in the Ozarks nowadays.

Farmers who differ widely about the proper signs and dates for other crops are pretty well agreed that turnips should be planted on July 25, regardless of signs, weather, or the phases of the moon. Uncle Jack Short, of Galena, Missouri, quoted a little rhyme:

Sow your turnips the 25th of July,  
You'll make a crop, wet or dry,

and he tells me that this has been known and followed in his family for more than a hundred years.

Oats which are to be thrashed must be sowed in the light of the moon, to insure good full heads. But many hillmen believe that oats intended for fodder should be planted in the "olden moon"—the dark of the moon, that is. Some people near Forsyth, Missouri, contend that all wheat and oats are best sowed in the dark of the moon—if planted in the light of the moon the stalks will be too tall and spindlin', and likely to fall down.

One of the men who told me about this remarked also that a man who is raising oats should not have his hair cut during the growing season, but the younger members of the family smiled at this "old foggy notion."

The best time to plant corn is when the oak leaves—or the hickory buds, according to some hillmen—are as big as squirrels' ears. Some think that it is better to plant corn immediately after the first dove coos in the spring, or when the first martins appear, usually in late March or early April. There is an old saying that one should never plant corn the first two days of May, no matter what the circumstances or the weather. Corn never amounts to much if it is planted on one of the "blind days"—the day before the new moon, the day of the new moon, or the day following the new moon. If a man laughs loudly while planting corn, it is said that the grains on the cob will be irregular and too far apart. Many farmers plant corn in the dark of the moon. Roy Cole, of Taney county, Missouri, says that the light of the moon grows tall stalks and lots of top fodder, but mighty few ears of corn. Many hillfolk believe that corn is best planted in Scorpio, other things being equal.

Some hillmen always plant sugar cane on a certain day in July, and it is said that this is figured from the number of snows in the preceding February, but I have never been able to learn just how it works. Mrs. Pearl DeHaven, of Springfield, Missouri, says that "when the katydids first begin to sing it is time to plant cane, if you want your stock to eat it." There are substantial farmers in Arkansas who believe that a man with a child less than one year old should never plant cane or "soggrums" at all, though what the penalty is for violating this rule I do not know.

Fruit trees are set out in one of the "fruitful" signs, such as Scorpio, and in the dark of the moon, although any country boy will tell you that trees must be *pruned* in the light of the moon. Transplanted trees should be set in their old positions relative to the points of the compass—the north side of the

tree must still face the north. Some farmers contend that any sort of tree may be transplanted at any time of the year (in the dark of the moon, of course) if one is careful to water it every day exactly at noon, and keep this up until the first rain falls.

In planting peach trees, it is always well to bury old shoes or boots near the roots. Not far from Little Rock, Arkansas, I have known farmers to drive into town and search the refuse piles for old shoes to be buried in peach orchards. The older and more decayed the leather, the better it works as fertilizer.

Many hill people drive nails into peach trees, but just what effect this is supposed to produce I do not know. Some say that nails are driven into barren trees in order to make them bear fruit, or to keep the peaches from falling off before they are ripe, but others are noncommittal or evasive. "Them's *family* matters," one old man growled when I asked why a certain peach tree was so thickly studded with big old-fashioned nails.

I have met intelligent and educated farmers in Arkansas who believe that if the wind is in the south on February 14, the peach crop will fail. Some farmers prefer to express this notion in another way, saying that "if the wind *aint* in the south on Groundhog Day, we'll get peaches no matter how cold it is."

There is an old saying in southern Missouri that a big yield of peaches means that certain other crops—especially corn, wheat, and oats—will be poor and scanty; this notion is stoutly defended by farmers who pay little attention to other superstitions. Akin to this is the theory that a season which is good for tomatoes is somehow bad for walnuts; a man who has run a "tomater factory" (a cannery, that is) for many years tells me that when the tomato crop is exceptionally good there aren't any walnuts at all.

Up around Marshfield, Missouri, many farmers say that if it rains on May 23, there'll be no blackberries that summer. Near Rogers, Arkansas, I met a family of berrypickers who believe that even a few drops of rain on June 2 will ruin the prospect for berries, while other hillfolk claim that June 13 is "black-

berry day"—if it rains or even thunders on June 13, the blackberries will not be worth picking. Many people feel that rain on June 1 is bad for the grape crop, both wild and cultivated. Otto Ernest Rayburn, of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, told me of the belief that if it rains on June 20, the grapes will fall right off the vines.

Some people insist that mushrooms must be gathered when the moon is full—gather 'em at any other time and they will be unpalatable, or perhaps even poisonous. It is said that any mushroom which grows in an orchard where apple trees are blooming is edible.

The clearing of underbrush and the killing of sprouts is a serious matter to the Ozark farmer. There is a widespread belief that on *some certain day* one can kill large trees merely by touching the trunk with the blade of an ax, but there is so much difference of opinion about the proper date that little practical use is made of this theory. Nevertheless, nearly all of the old-timers are convinced that there is something in the idea.

Some hillfolk believe that if sprouts are cut on the ninth or tenth of May, they will never grow again. One of my neighbors near Pineville, Missouri, insisted on clearing his garden patch on these two days, although his wife and child lay dying only a few yards away.

Roy Cole, of Taney county, Missouri, says that "if you stick an ax in a saplin' in the spring, *when the sign's in the heart*, the leaves will wither in a few hours, and the tree will be dead in three or four months." Uncle Jack Short, of Galena, Missouri, would not commit himself about the *sign*, but told me that he had killed big oaks in May, when the oak leaves had not quite reached their full size, by making two or three deep cuts. The trees were positively not "ringed" or "girdled," he said, as in an ordinary deadening, but the leaves shriveled up in about six hours.

A woodsman near Walnut Shade, Missouri, told me that June 2 was "tree-killin' day" in his neighborhood, and that one man

cutting brush on this day can accomplish more than ten men working at any other season.

In general, I think that most Ozarkers believe it is best to cut weeds and grub sprouts and deaden timber in August—some say between August 1 and August 20. There is a pretty general opinion that the dark of the moon is better than the light of the moon for this work. I have met men who prefer to grub sprouts in Virgo, or Gemini, but the great majority speak for Leo—“when the sign’s in the heart.”

By the same token, experts in these matters say that one should never cut hay when the sign is in the heart: if you do, it’ll kill the roots, and you’ll have no hay next year. “Lots of these here book farmers, when their clover or alfalfa dies, think it was froze out,” one old man told me. “But the facts o’ the matter is, the damn’ fools cut it when the sign’s in the heart, and that’s what killed it.”

A man who owns land near Carl Junction, Missouri, tells me that some farmers in his neighborhood cut sprouts only on the dates marked “Ember Days” in the almanac; they hire all the men they can get on these days and “sprout” large areas, claiming that this is more economical than the ordinary way of sprouting fields.

Ask almost any Ozark farmer, and he will tell you that if you fell a tree in the dark of the moon the log will show a definite tendency to sink into the ground, while a log cut in the light of the moon will not sink. Shingles or “shakes” rived out in the dark of the moon lie flat, but if made or put on during the moon’s increase they warp and turn up. In recent years I have met several men who say this is all wrong, that shingles must be made and roofs laid in the *light* of the moon. All agree, however, that “board trees” from which shingles are made *must* be cut in the dark of the moon, otherwise they will rot. Rail fences are subject to the same principle; if the rails are split and laid in the light of the moon they are sure to curl and twist, and decay much more rapidly than if they are cut when the moon is



dark. Even seasoned planks, if laid on the ground in the light of the moon, invariably warp or cup, while in the dark of the moon there is no such difficulty. Hog raisers sometimes build their fences during the moon's last quarter; they believe that this causes the bottom rail to sink into the ground, so that hogs cannot root under the fence.

Many Ozark farmers say that it is very bad luck to drive fence posts in the light of the moon, but just why this is so I have not been able to learn. Mrs. C. P. Mahnkey, Mincy, Missouri, tells me that a posthole dug in the dark of the moon can be filled up level full with the dirt that was taken out of it; when a posthole is dug in the light of the moon, however, there is always more dirt than can possibly be replaced. In Baxter county, Arkansas, I was told that in making posts one should sharpen the end that was nearest the ground in the living tree; it's bad luck to set a post upside down.

The old-timers long ago discovered, or at least believed, that chickens which roost in cedar trees are healthy and free from mites and other parasites, so that many farmers periodically cut cedar boughs and put them in their hencoops. A few years ago, when bananas became common in the village stores, people somehow got the notion that a banana stalk hung up in a chicken house would rid the whole place of mites and chicken lice, and these stalks are still seen in outbuildings occasionally.

Some chicken raisers tell me that it is a mistake to keep chickens near a potato patch, or near a place where potatoes are stored. The smell of potatoes, it is said, makes hens quit laying and want to brood. I have often seen hens with corn shucks fastened to their tails—this is supposed to discourage a settin' hen in a few days.

It is generally thought best to set eggs in the light of the moon. Never set a hen or an incubator when the wind is blowing from the south, or mighty few of the eggs will hatch. Eggs carried in a woman's bonnet, it is said, invariably make pullets. Mrs. Pearl DeHaven, of Springfield, Missouri, repeats the story

that if eggs are carried in a man's hat, they all hatch roosters. Unusually long eggs, or eggs with shells noticeably rough at one end, are also regarded as "rooster eggs." It is said that eggs set on Sunday produce roosters, but one hears also that eggs placed under a hen in the forenoon, no matter what the day, always hatch a majority of pullets. Some hillfolk believe that chicks hatched in May, regardless of how favorable the other conditions may be, will never mature properly.

There are several magic tricks to protect domestic fowl from birds of prey. Mrs. Lillian Short, of Galena, Missouri, tells me that one of her neighbors used to take a smooth stone from a runnin' branch, just about big enough to fit the palm of the hand, and keep it in the oven of the cookstove—this was supposed to prevent hawks from killing the chickens. Most hillfolk of my acquaintance use a horseshoe instead of the stone, and some think that a muleshoe is even better. It is frequently fastened in the firebox of the stove rather than in the oven. In the old days the muleshoe was hung up in the fireplace, or even set into the mortar at the back of the chimney.

Some chicken grannies pull one feather out of each chicken in their flock and bury these feathers deep in the dirt under the henhouse or henroost. As long as the feathers remain there, it is believed that those particular chickens cannot be carried off by hawks or varmints, or stolen by human chicken thieves.

I once saw a large flock of chickens in the Arkansas backwoods, and about half of them had dirty rags fastened round their necks, like collars. "There's coal oil on them rags," an old woman remarked, "an' it cures the roup."

Mrs. C. P. Mahnkey, Mincy, Missouri, says that a handful of "polecat brush," put into the chickens' drinking water, will stop an epidemic of roup or chicken cholera quicker than any other treatment. Polecat brush is a shrub with tiny yellow flowers—I have not been able to identify this plant. Some people call it aromatic sumac.

It is very commonly believed that people who raise chickens

should never give away a chick—always take some sort of payment, even if it is only a matter of form. A neighbor told me that when she wanted to give some chicks to her mother-in-law, the old lady insisted on “paying” her with a handful of wild strawberries, carefully counting out one berry for each chick. The old saying is that if you give away a chick, your luck goes with it. I remember a woman who had two black chicks that the hen wouldn’t own, so she gave them to a little girl from the city. The old-timers predicted ruin for the whole family, and the prediction came true with a vengeance. Before the year was out, my neighbor’s husband was sent to the penitentiary, and her only daughter “went wrong.”

Down around Rogers and Bentonville, Arkansas, there are many people who believe that healthy geese lay the first eggs of the season on March 17—if the eggs appear very much later, it means that the geese will have a bad year. Most backwoods women are taught that live geese must be picked in the new moon, and never at any other time; some say that this makes the birds produce a fine new crop of feathers, others think that it somehow affects the quality of the feathers already plucked.

There are several peculiar taboos against mentioning aloud the exact number of chickens in a flock, or cattle in a herd, particularly if it happens to be an *even* number—one divisible by two. A real old-timer never counts aloud the flowers or fruit on a tree, or the number of peas in a pod, or even the number of ears on a stalk of corn, because of an ancient notion that this counting may injure the crop.

A hill farmer, when asked how many bee-gums he has, never mentions the exact number—if he did so, he would get no honey that season. Some beekeepers believe that every hive must be moved an inch or so on February 22, in order to prevent an infectious disease called foul brood. Moths which destroy the honeycomb are driven away by scattering splinters from a “lightnin’-struck” tree over the hives, and I am told that the same treatment will rid a cabin of fleas and bedbugs—which

latter pest the Ozarker calls "cheenches." When a death occurs in the family, the hillfolk attach a bit of black cloth to each hive; if this is not done, the bees are likely to leave the place and carry their stored honey away to bee trees in the woods. Honey is best removed from the hive in accordance with the state of the moon and the signs of the zodiac, but a man who can hold his breath is never stung by honeybees, anyhow. In the case of yellow jackets one protects himself by chanting:

Jasper whisper jacket!  
You caint no more sting me  
Than the Devil can count sixpence!

There are many cattlemen in the Ozarks who will not feed an even number of cattle. I knew one man who bought forty-one steers, expecting to feed them through the winter and sell them in the spring. When he discovered that one was missing he was much disturbed and immediately tried to buy another animal to replace it. Failing in this, he *sold* one at a very low price, preferring to winter thirty-nine steers rather than forty. When I asked what would be the penalty for violating this rule against even numbers, he said that the cattle would not be "thrifty," by which he meant that they would not fatten properly. The same man told me that it was bad luck to pull a pig's tail, as this may cause the animal to become "unthrifty."

Mr. Blaine Short, of Carl Junction, Missouri, tells me that his neighbors always dehorn cattle in Aquarius, believing that this prevents hemorrhage and infection. My friends in all sections of the Ozarks know better than to castrate pigs without considering the signs of the zodiac, for animals cut when the sign is in the heart are almost sure to become infected and die. The best time for this operation is "when the sign's in the legs."

Many hillfolk, in both Missouri and Arkansas, repeat the saying that "a man with lots of hair on his legs is always a good hog raiser," but whether this is meant literally I do not know. Perhaps akin to the above is a hillbilly crack reported by Nancy Clemens, of Springfield, Missouri, to the effect that "pigs born

in January always have black teeth." Miss Clemens isn't sure just what this means, and neither am I.

Some of the old folks are very careful to see that hogs, at least hogs which they intend for their own use, do not have access to garlic. Several country women have told me that if a hog eats one little sprig of garlic and is butchered within a week, all the meat is so impregnated with garlic that "it aint fitten to be et." To feed hogs on soft, frostbitten corn is another sure way to ruin the pork; some farmers believe that this spoiled corn spreads the cholery, but the best hogmen say there's nothing to it.

The hillfolk believe that sweet milk is not very good for grown-up human beings to drink, and that it is frequently fatal to hogs. Very few of the real old-timers can be induced to give sweet milk to pigs—they prefer to wait until the stuff has "clabbered up." Many backwoods fox hunters think that sweet milk is poisonous to dogs, too, and are horrified to see tourists feed valuable hunting dogs with messes containing sweet milk.

In many parts of the Ozark country I have heard stories of "mule-footed" hogs—a breed of swine with solid hooves. It was my impression at first that the mule-footed hog must be a mythical creature, comparable to the willipus-wallipus or the jimplicute, but Uncle Jack Short of Galena, Missouri, tells me that he once saw several mule-footed hogs exhibited at a carnival or street fair in Stone county, Missouri. The *Christian County Republican*, a weekly published at Ozark, Missouri, carried the following advertisement:

**INFORMATION WANTED:** Concerning what used to be known in this locality as "mule-footed" hogs. Anyone still having this strain or any information pertaining is asked to communicate with me. Floyd C. Goddard, Box 234, Olds, Alberta, Canada.<sup>2</sup>

I have always intended to write Mr. Goddard and try to find out just what he learned about this subject, but never got around to it, somehow.

<sup>2</sup> Dec. 30 1943, p. 8.

Some people believe that to steal a very young pig will bring them luck. I knew a man who caught a boy in the act of stealing one of his little pigs. He let the boy get away with it and made no complaint—which was not in character at all. I kept pestering the old man about it, and finally he said that the boy “didn’t steal it just for the *pig*.”

The best time for butchering hogs is a very important matter in the Ozarks, because apart from wild game pork is the hill-man’s only meat. Few Ozarkers will eat mutton, and they don’t care much for beef even when they can get it. The real old-timers butcher in the light of the moon, believing that pork killed in the dark of the moon is tough, has an inferior flavor, and does not keep well. Besides, most women claim that pork butchered in the decrease of the moon will “all go to grease” and curl up in the skillet when it is cooked.

Many farmers keep a few sheep for the wool, and goats are valued because they eat underbrush and thus help to clear the land. The old-timers never shear sheep or wash wool in the decrease of the moon, believing that the wool will shrink if handled at this time. Some Ozarkers who have no interest in breeding goats nevertheless buy or borrow a male goat occasionally and turn it in with sheep, cattle, or even horses. The idea is that a goat in the same pasture keeps other animals healthy, and is especially good for horses and cattle with diseases of the respiratory tract.

Barn swallows are supposed to bring good luck to cattlemen, and it is said that a barn in which swallows are nesting will never be struck by lightning. To shoot a barn swallow is always unlucky, and sometimes it makes the cows give bloody milk. It is generally believed that eating persimmons makes cows go dry; there may be some truth in this, and all cows seem to eat persimmons whenever they can get at them. Eating large quantities of acorns or turnips is also supposed to make cows go dry. “If a cow loses her cud, give her a dishrag to chew” is an old sayin’ in the Ozarks, but I am not sure just what is meant by it.

There is a very widely known superstition that to kill a toad will make one's cows give bloody milk. Most people think that nothing can be done about this, once the toad is dead, but Otto Ernest Rayburn found hillfolk in Arkansas who claim to be able to repair the damage, particularly if the toad was killed accidentally.<sup>3</sup> "Get seven pebbles," says Rayburn, "and throw them over your left shoulder into an open well at sundown. The milk will be all right after that."

Many farmers say that it is a good idea to bury a bit of a cow's afterbirth under a pawpaw tree, as this will cause her to bring forth female calves thereafter. It is best to begin weaning calves on the third day before a full moon—this makes 'em grow into big healthy cattle. Most Ozarkers wean calves when the moon is in Aquarius, without considering any other factors. When a calf is sold, some hillfolk always drag it out of the pen tailfirst, so that the cow will not miss it so much; I saw a man doing this once, and he said that it was all foolishness, but he always pulled 'em out by the tail to please his children.

Even today, in some parts of the Ozark country, cattle are not fenced up in pastures but merely marked or branded and allowed to roam the hills at will, so that the matter of finding one's cows is often difficult. However, a boy has only to consult a harvestman, or daddy longlegs, and cry out:

Longlegs, longlegs,  
Tell me where the cows are

whereupon the creature will immediately crawl in the direction of the strayed animals. If a daddy longlegs is not available, the farmer may spit in his hand and strike the spittle smartly with a finger; the fluid is supposed to fly toward the lost cattle.

If the white of a horse's eye shows all around the iris it means that the animal is a killer—many hillfolk believe that human beings whose eyes protrude are dangerous, too. Horses with certain white markings are looked upon with disfavor, according to an old rhyme:

<sup>3</sup> *Ozark Country*, p. 271.

Four white feet an' a white nose,  
Take off his hide an' throw him to the crows.

A horse foaled in May, it is said, always has a tendency to lie down in a running stream and often does so with a rider on his back. No matter when a colt is born, the old folks insist that it should be weaned when the sign's in the legs. "Try to wean a colt when the sign's in the belly," an old woman told me, "an' see what happens! He'll raise hell sure, an' maybe git sick besides."

Roy Cole, who lives on Bear Creek in Taney county, Missouri, says that it is easy to tell whether a colt will make a big horse or a small one. When a colt is first able to stand, measure the distance from the ground to the point of its shoulder—this is exactly one-half of the height the horse will attain at maturity. Some horsemen measure from the hairline of the colt's front hoof to the center of the knee joint—this distance is one-fourth of the height the horse will be when full grown. In other words, if the colt's hoof-to-knee measurement is sixteen inches, the grown horse will be sixteen hands high—a hand is four inches.

A great many hill people claim that when a mare's first colt is a mule, her second, although sired by a stallion, is sure to have a stripe down its back. Professional horse breeders ridicule this notion, but a lot of old-time hillmen still believe that there is something in it.

Akin to the superstition regarding prenatal influence and the "marking" of babies is the idea that a horse breeder can color a colt to suit his taste simply by hanging a cloth of the desired color before the mare's eyes when she is bred.

The fact that a horse rolls on the ground has no particular significance, but near Harrison, Arkansas, they say that if a horse rolls over *and back*, it means that he's worth a lot of money.

It is very bad luck to change a horse's name; to sell a man a horse and tell him its name incorrectly is regarded as a dirty



trick, since it means that he will never get any satisfactory service out of the animal. There is an old saying that one should "always name a good dog after a bad man," but a long list of dog names which I once collected in the Ozarks shows no evidence that the hillman really puts it into practice.

There are many outlandish remedies and treatments for the ailments of domestic animals. Ordinary soft soap made with wood ashes is regarded as a sort of universal tonic for hogs, so the hillman just mixes a little soap with the hog feed occasionally. "Soap will cure a hog no matter what ails him, if you git it to him in time," said one of my neighbors. Equal parts of soft soap and lard are administered to cattle as a cure for the murrain. Many old-timers mix soot from the chimney with the salt they give their cattle, but I have been unable to learn the reason for this.

To cure holler horn in cattle, some hillmen take a gimlet and bore a hole in the horn just above the hairline, leave the hole open for several days, and then plug it with a small cork. Others fill the cavity with salt, which seems to work as well as the stopper.

If a cow has the disease known as holler tail, you must split the tail open and apply a mixture of salt and vinegar, then bind it up with woolen yarn. Mrs. Pearl DeHaven, of Springfield, Missouri, thinks that salt and pepper is a better combination than salt and vinegar. "Of course," she writes, "modern veterinaries tell us there is no such thing as *holler tail*, but these young squirts have a lot to learn." Any disease which involves paralysis of the hindquarters seems to be called holler tail.

A neighbor of mine, when several of his horses were sick, spent an entire day rounding up every horse and mule on the place. With a sharp knife he split the end of each animal's tail just a little, and let it bleed a few drops. I tried to find out what was wrong with the horses, but the man had no idea. He said that splittin' their tails always cured them, no matter what the trouble was.

When a horse has colic, these amateur vets just blow a little salt into each of its nostrils. If an animal's legs are cut by barbed wire, the hillman burns a bit of wool and blows the smoke over the wounds by way of antiseptis; sometimes he twists a cord tightly about the creature's tail, believing that this stops the injured legs from bleeding.

Farmers sometimes mix gunpowder with a watchdog's food, believing that it renders the animal more vicious. I have never known a hillman to give gunpowder to a foxhound or a tree dog. I did see a boy in Galena, Missouri, dosing an Irish setter with gunpowder—somebody had told him it was a sure cure for distemper. Many hillfolk treat distemper by rubbing kerosene on the back of the animal's neck. Others claim to cure distemper by burning chicken feathers in a paper sack and holding the sack over the dog's head so he is forced to inhale the fumes. A dog's nose, the hillman thinks, should be black, and a red-nosed dog is always regarded with suspicion. Many old-timers imagine that a dog whose nose isn't black must be sick, and they keep their own dogs away from such an animal, fearing infection.

Here is a "recept" from an old manuscript book belonging to Miss Miriam Lynch, Notch, Missouri.

## CURE FOR A DOG WITH A SORE MOUTH

apple sider vinegar .....	¼ pint
blue stone .....	teaspoon ½ full
allom .....	teaspoon ½ full
borax .....	teaspoon ½ full
coppers .....	teaspoon ½ full

then Take yellow rute and make  
a strong Tea and Dissolve  
the rest in it.

The "blue stone" mentioned is copper sulphate; "allom" is alum; "coppers" is ferrous sulphate, which is often called copperas; "yellow rute" is probably golden-seal (*Hydrastis*), also known as yellow puccoon.

To cure a dog of fits, just cut up some of your own hair into

pieces about one-eighth of an inch long, mix these pieces with lard, and make the dog swallow a spoonful once a week.

The best way to keep a dog at home, according to some of the old-timers, is to bury a little of its hair under the hearth or the doorstep. I once knew a hunter in southwest Missouri who had ten or twelve foxhounds. He was a man who moved frequently from one shack to another, as he owned no property and was unable to pay any rent. His wife told me that every time they moved he cut a little hair off each dog's tail and buried it carefully somewhere about the new cabin. This woman admitted that the hounds stayed at home better than most, but she attributed it to the vast quantities of "dog cornbread" which her husband required her to bake for them, rather than to the hair which he buried under each shanty. "Them dogs' hair is planted under ever' old shack for miles around," she said, "but I take notice they allus come home where the bread is at!"

Some hillfolk say that to keep a dog at home one has only to cut a green stick exactly the length of the animal's tail and bury it under the doorstep. Another method is to cut off the tip of his tail and nail it on a gate; I have twice seen this tried, but without any good result so far as I could perceive.

If a night dog will not bark "treed," some old hunters profess to cure him of this fault by smashing green gourds on the tree above his head. Otto Ernest Rayburn mentions this,<sup>4</sup> and I have heard of it in many different places. But experienced dogmen tell me that it is "just an old hillbilly joke" and was never meant to be taken seriously.

<sup>4</sup> *Ozark Country*, p. 157.

