

THE "SWAMP ANGEL'S" WAYS

PEOPLE LIVING TEN MILES FROM NEW-YORK WHO NEVER SAW THE CITY.

FISHING, HUNTING AND TRAPPING, GATHERING CALAMUS ROOT, CAT-TAILS, FLAGS AND BERRIES THEIR MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD—A TALK WITH "THE SWAMP ANGEL"

"There may be better places than the Hackensack meadows," said "Abe" Smith, known as "the Swamp Angel," who was found a few days ago repairing a small cabin at the eastern end of the Paterson Plank Road. "But," he continued, "I was born here, and I've lived here twenty out of the thirty-six years of my life; and I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to work for the Western Union Telegraph Company this winter, and then next spring I'm coming back here and build me a little home out there in the middle of the meadows among the flags, and I'm going to live there all the rest of my life."

"Abe" is not a fair example of the swamp-dwellers, some of whom have lived within ten miles of New-York all their lives, and have never seen the big city. He is tall and straight as an arrow, with bright eyes and a bronze complexion, good-humored and almost handsome. He is quick-witted and intelligent; too—characteristics that are not common to the swamp-dwellers.

"They call him 'the Swamp Angel,' said his friend, Fred Sherry, somewhat proudly, "because he'd rather live in the swamp than anywhere else.

them every little while. We don't pay any attention to snakes down here. But I caught a snapping turtle that weighed sixteen pounds and a half on a hook the other day. That's the sport, though—catching turtles."

His eyes glistened. He had struck the subject that he knows more about than any other man on the Hackensack.

"Snapping turtles beat green shells for making soup, you know. We catch them here weighing all the way from ten to thirty-five pounds apiece. They are worth six cents a pound now. There are different ways of catching them—on a hook, picking them up in the spring, and spearing for them in the winter."

"In the spring the female turtles come up on the sand to lay their eggs, and it's easy to catch them then. Did you ever go turtling in the winter? That's the best sport of all. You wear high top rubber boots and have a pole with a hook on the end of it. You go around and wherever you see a turtle's hole in the mud, you stick the pole down in until you strike something hard. If it's a turtle he kind of humps his back up to let you know he is there, and then you feel around with the hook until you get it up under his shell and pull him out. I caught twenty in two days that way last winter."

FROGS BY THE BUSHEL

"Frogging's a great business down here, too. The way of catching frogs on a hook with a piece of red flannel tied to it is too slow. I went out one night last week with a small handnet and a lantern, and got a two-bushel bag chock full of them in a few hours. You wade out in the pool with your lantern and the frogs go out of sight at first; but pretty soon you see their heads sticking up all around the water. They can't keep their eyes off of the lantern, and all you have to do is to reach out and rake them in."

"The trapping season is in February and March. We catch muskrats, minks and 'possums. In the fall of course duck hunting is the principal thing. "There are other ways of making a living, but I



WHERE THEY LIVE.

He knows every snapping turtle's hole in it, and if there are any muskrats that don't get caught in his traps in the spring, it's because they are strangers on the river and haven't caught on to the ways here."

With which joke Sherry slapped his mud-covered overalls appreciatively and added: "Say, write me down as 'Fred Sherry, carpenter and builder on the Hackensack meadows,' will you?"

"You see," the "Swamp Angel" continued, taking up the line of conversation where it diverged from his favorite subject, "we work here in summer and have sport in winter. What do the people do for a living? Why, all kinds of things. There are more ways of making a living down here than you ever dreamed of. We fish and hunt and trap and let boats, and pick huckleberries, and there are lots more things that people can do who like to work. We pick cat-tails to make beds out of. That's a

don't happen to think of them now. Picking magnolias, for instance. The swamp magnolias bloom earlier in the season than the upland magnolias, you know. I used to get five cents apiece for the blossoms when I was a boy; but they only bring one cent now."

"How about malaria?"
"Oh, we don't have that around here. Newcomers get it sometimes, but none of the natives. There used to be a good deal more of it than there is now. The railroads dug up the soil and that started it. I guess. Whenever I used to get a fever my mother would give me tea made out of burdock root, wild cherry bark, dandelion root and sassafras root; and that knocked it galley endwise. When the railroads were going through here, and everybody had the fever in aague, the doctors couldn't do nothing for it, but Indian calyog would always knock it out. That's made of burdock, pitch tar and quinine, and it's the vilest stuff to take you ever saw."

"But this is a healthy place to live in. I don't look very sickly, do I? Well, I should say not. Never had a day's sickness in my life that amounted to anything. The woman that lived in this house was seventy-eight years old when she moved away, and that was ten years ago. I s'pose she's living yet, and she spent forty years of her life here. There's another one up here that's eighty-four years old."

"And mosquitoes?"
"Oh, yes"—with a laugh—"we don't say there ain't any mosquitoes around here. We haven't got any building lots for sale or boarding-house to let. But you don't mind mosquitoes after a while. You get mosquito proof."

The Hackensack meadows extend from Newark Bay well up into the northern part of Bergen County, N. J., near the New-York State line. The river flows through a fertile and beautiful valley. On either side smiling fields and straggling villages stretch up the hillsides; church spires and the stately homes of suburban residents show through the trees; but the people who live on the meadows know little of schools and nothing of churches. Their lives are spent like the other inhabitants of the great swamp, and their houses are a part of the natural scenery. They are born and live and die there, apparently having no desire to take part in the life of the outside world. They are squatters on the land that they occupy, members of a primitive race, living on the very doorstep of advanced civilization.

The "Swamp Angel" belongs to neither one class nor the other. He was born on the marsh, and has lived in the outer world, and he chooses his birth-place for a home because he likes the free and easy life there. He is a good deal of a philosopher, living the simple life that suits him best in the place of his birth, and contented with the lot that nature has awarded him.

"I like it here," he says, "and I don't see why I am not as well off as people who work a good deal harder and have more trouble. They don't have anything to show for it after they are dead."



FISHING FOR TURTLES.

great business down here. Didn't you ever sleep on a Jersey bed? They're the finest beds in the world. They beat feather beds all hollow."

"How much do you get for the cat-tails?"
"Two cents a pound stripped; but that depends on where you sell them. Old Cox comes around and gets them, and pays two cents a pound; and if you take them to the market in New-York you can get four cents. You pick 'em when they are just right, and you can strip them right off, so. You see this fuzz is light and feathery. It takes a good deal to make a pound."

"That isn't the only use the plants are put to. We sell the flags without the cat-tails to coopers. They are cut off close to the ground and done up in bunches of a hundred. The coopers dry the flags and then use them in 'heading-up' barrels to keep the barrels from leaking. See? They put the flag right around on the edge of the barrel before they drive it in. When the flag gets wet it swells up like



ABE SMITH.

a sponge so the barrel can't leak. The flags are used in making boats, sometimes, too.

"Lots of people gather calamus root. They go around with a long, sharp blade, cut the root off about a foot below the ground, and then pull it out. Then they scrape it and dry it, and sell it to druggists. The druggists use it to make perfume out of, and some people eat it like candy. It makes your breath sweet. Huckleberries are in season now, and most folks are picking them. There are a good many elderberries, especially further up the river, and some people gather them and make wine out of them. They get a pretty good price for it."

MEADOWS WERE DRIER ONCE.

"Why couldn't the land be drained off and crops raised down here?"

"It could be, but don't say anything about crops. The land would bring more than, and folks couldn't live around on it without paying rent. Why, I remember a few years ago it didn't use to be so wet here as it is now, and I've seen good crops of corn growing all around here where now there ain't nothing but flags. You see, it don't pay to raise crops now because you can't tell when the water'll come up high and spoil them. In the springtime now we have to go around in high top boots where it used to be as dry as the Paterson Plank Road."

"I think the railroads made the difference. They came through here when I was a boy, and broke up all the sluiceways that used to let the water run off from the Krumkill and Panocck creeks. But then we have farmers in some places down here. The only kind of stock they have is pigs; pigs can feed on snakes and eels and other things that they find around in the swamp. Some people keep bees. There are lots of flowers down here and around on the hills that furnish honey for the bees. Of course gardening along on the edge just out of the swamp is good. They raise all kinds of crops along there."

TOO GOOD FOR FARMING.

"But this ain't no place for farming. There's too much sport going on around. Fishing, now, is good most any time. I've got a set line with 150 hooks on it up here in the creek"

"Yes, and he caught a blacksnake five feet long on one of the hooks yesterday," broke in Sherry.
"Oh, that's nothing," Smith continued. "I catch