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Dieffenbach on Steers: Superstitions, April 12, 1952

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Steers. 4-(a)

“We der schnitter doot cooma,
Gate der bull ons brumma!”

(When the gelder comes, the bull starts to grumble.)
Years ago, on a farm near Mt. Acton: “Wohlaiwen-
stetdli” a farmer had a bull-calf that he wanted to
have castrated. When the gelder started to make a cut,
the bull tore loose, and ran off. Not being able to get
him again, the farmer said: “Luss ew schpringer-
mer greego ihw ew owner mohl.” (Let him run—will
get him another time.)

As soon as that bull-calf saw old Mogel coming up
the road with the old white mare in the sucky, he ran
around the field along the fence, and bellered, and made
an awful racket.

Some said he belonged to Ike Haas, and others said
John Stamm owned the bull—both farms were ad-
joining, and they did not know which one owned him.
But old Bingham told me about it while we
were husking corn for a farmer in that neighborhood,
years after it had occurred. But the bull always re-
mained unchanged, because of the resentment he showed
whenever he saw the familiar team appearing.

Old Bingham said: “Ja, des iss so woter as
ew Gott iss. usht wellen os der bull waw, sell dort
wase Ich net.” (Yes, this is as true as there is a God;
only to which one the bull belonged—that I don't know.)
But to this day one hears the above quoted expression.

Steers. 4-(a)

a-204-16

If a shoot or full-grown boar is cut while in the waning of the moon - "in ob-nemmeda", he will die, from the effects of the operation.

If the nuts or testicles, after being removed, are left lying on the ground, or any place where it will rain on them, then the animal will swell badly, and may die. (These two were standard folk-lore in this section years ago.)

If a dog or a cat or any animal eats these glands after they have been removed, the animal that had been cut will die. (Old Vogel, the veteran gelder.)

If the gelder throws each of the nuts - "de shtay" over his left shoulder, as he removes them, then the animal will not swell, and will quickly recover.

If the gelded animal can lie down on the bare ground and have his rear end in such a position that a full-moon can shine on the wound, it will heal in short order. (A gelder that came from Lancaster Co. Graybill by name.)

If three crows fly overhead while any animal is being castrated, it will surely die. (Same author as above.)

If a black cat sits close by and watches the gelder then the animal being operated on will die. (anonymous)

"Wou der ewer sie ferschnittner seckel in sell eck in sell sypinner. neshter nei-reimt, no is er gly goot". (If the boar will draw his cut-up scrotum into that corner into the cob-webs he will soon be well.) This last one was told by John Wunderlich, a big red-bearded man, who used to work for Dad years ago, after he

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had helped to castrate a big boar. Cobwebs were often put on a wound to stop the bleeding, in those days.

Never have any pigs "cut" - castrated during rainy weather; they will get locked-jaw, and will die. (Standard)

We often experienced the contrary to the above, as the wet and damp condition of stables and pens would lay all dust, and prevent many infecting germs from gaining access to the wounds. I remember when our customary gelder failed to arrive as intended, owing to him having been taken sick. Dad had eight sows that gave birth to some fifty pigs, within two weeks time. It was a rainy spell, and as he had heard of rain being beneficial, because of some germs possibly being ^{thus} prevented from infecting the piggies, so he was anxious to give this a trial. I do not know who had told him about it, but I do know that we both had read the same thing in a little live-stock paper, called "Blooded-Stock", published at Oxford, Pa.

It still rained nearly every day, for the second week, and as the gelder didn't come, I one day asked Dad if he cared if I cut the boars in just one litter. He studied for a few minutes and said: "I se dei messer scharreff?" (Is your knife sharp?)

I handed it to him and he passed his thumb over the edge, nodded his head, handed it back to me, and went for the pig-pen. He caught and held one, and I deftly did the required job; 4 out of 9 were boars, and we had 4 nice and

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lively barrows by the end of the week.

"Now gaina mer draw," (Now we go at it) he said.

"Now awe pawr fer-recka - ew oldta, mogel gaina awe dale dote." (Even if a few die - some also die for old Mogel.)

So we cleaned up on the job; some thirty in all were operated on. The last litter were sewed, and four of them were boar-pigs, and they were only three days old. Out of that bunch all but three survived; and the old experienced gelder had sometimes lost over 50% of them.

When once we saw the results, Dad was overjoyed; he said: "Now gevich Icu draw drum won er count!" (Now I don't give a damn when he comes.) I have "cut" lots of pigs since that initial trial with very little loss. I never cut into the testicle if I can avoid it; I still think the pain and shock to their nervous system from that cruel and needless incision is the cause of more deaths from castration than any other contributing factor. I have repeatedly seen experienced gelders cutting the glands almost in half and had one of my own shoots die from the effects of it within less than three minutes after the cut had been made.

Some old gelders would ask for lard and/or tar, to smear on the wound. One of them always asked for coal-oil to pour into the wound. Personally I prefer to use pine-tar or any disinfectant to put close to the

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Steele, 5-(a)

wound, but never into it. But I want a knife with a super-fine edge, and a bucket with a luke-warm solution of some dis-infectant to dip my knife into after each cut, before making the next one,