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## UA37/44 Tidbits of Kentucky Folklore

Gordon Wilson

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TIDBITS OF KENTUCKY FOLKLORE

by

Gordon Wilson

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## The Loafers' J'int ✓

The Romans had their Forum, a place where people met in official and unofficial ways to discuss everything; our counterpart of this institution was and is and ever shall be, I suppose, the loafers' j'int. Kings may die or abdicate, Presidents may succeed each other, the rivers ~~may~~ continue to run into the sea, but the loafers' j'int changes little from its ancient and honorable status. The one I know in old Fidelity was the exact image of the one you knew in Podunk or Headmore.

The activities sponsored by the loafers' j'int were many in the good old days. The Civil War, then a little more nearly like contemporary history, was fought all over again, usually to the advantage of the South. Ancestry came in for its attention, though I fear not many of the people of Fidelity had much to boast of. By counting distant cousins, however, nearly everybody could name some great or near-great relative. Since ninety-nine per cent of the Fidelity loafers were Democrats, politics could not get very far, except such political economy as concerned the county or the magisterial district. The few Republicans were hardly safe or welcome when the village wiseacres were deciding the national campaigns. Religion, though, was a subject that was open in proportion to one's ignorance of differences between denominations. The Methodists, the Baptists, and the Christians fought a triangular battle that seldom knew a truce. Nothing but the necessity of going home to do the milking and feeding could end the debates on baptism, the Lord's

Supper, church government, and such matters. The gentle art of quoting Scripture for one's own purpose never had a better illustration than in those old days at Fidelity.

The loafers were not all so intellectual as this would imply. There were tricks to play on the unvary, horseshoes to pitch, knives to swap. Blackguarding was the official language, innocently indulged in by people who would have sworn that they were not foul-mouthed. Boxes had to be whittled to their basic elements; Russell Parlor should have lived in ancient times so he could have been made the patron saint of loafers. Some of the boys and men could do tricks with strings and coins and buttons. Others could jump a grapevine rope in all the approved fashions. Some could wrestle like Jacob, but with less fortunate results. Nearly every generation of loafers had one boy who could do some fancy clog-dancing. A barn door with a little sand sprinkled on it was stage enough for this act. Some of the loafers were veterans who had lived beyond their years in this serious business of loafing; others were young men learning the gentle art of loafing; still others were boys too young to be allowed this great privilege of grown men, boys who hung on the edge of the crowd and laughed furtively and a bit shame-facedly at the risqué yarns and talk. When an older artist died or moved away, some younger yarn-spinner and whittler inherited his mantle and carried on the age-old tradition. Horses and buggies were succeeded by the automobile, and the very spot where the loafers used to sit now has a gasoline tank; but close by, others are whittling, and spinning almost the same yarns. Thus time goes on but does not and cannot conquer the loafers' joint.

## Hog-callers I Have Known ✓

Long before county fairs and the radio emphasized the music in the calling of hogs, I knew masters in this art that could have made any country famous. Most of them died without even a local reputation, since hog-calling was a necessary thing that might only accidentally become artistic. A few of these artists became well-known locally. Across many years I hear some of them now. Hog-calling when properly done, and with the proper setting, is as melodious as any of the other folk sounds that have found their way into music. The greatest hog-caller I ever knew bore the name of Green Adams; that was his actual name, and this is a tribute to him, if he still lives, or to his descendants, if any of them read this. Mr. Adams lived at the edge of the Mississippi River bottom in Fulton County, just south of Bayou du Chien Creek. He owned large numbers of hogs that ranged back into the big bottoms, which then were very largely in timber. Though I boarded a mile or more away from the home of Mr. Adams, I could distinctly hear his daily calling of his hogs. But there was something more than volume in the sound, a deep music, as if the calling had somehow risen out of the desire of the hogs themselves to come back to the farm to be fed and to be shut up in the pens. It must have been a hard-hearted hog that did not prick up his ears when he heard that sonorous, greatly-prolonged call of the master. X

If I were a musician, I would try to put into a fantasy of evening life on the farm that call, a recurrent ~~/xxx/~~ keynote to the poetry of coming home at eventide that the

poets of the world have known and expressed since the days of Sappho. Other sounds of the barnyard could be used to give it background and local significance; but, through it all, swelling into mighty harmonies would come that masculine voice, tying together the whole fantasy. Hog-calling has nothing of impatience about it, nothing of a feeling of ~~limitation~~: the master wants his hogs and calls them in a time-honored way, unconscious of the basic poetry he illustrates. His hogs, trained from earliest life to respond to this call, come home, home to the protection and hominess of the barnyard, home to master and shelter, to the center of their little dumb world. I have <sup>heard</sup> great music, great sounds of industry, great voices pleading for the good and the beautiful; but I can truly say that no aria has ever gripped me so long and so delightfully as the long-drawn-out call for the hogs, ringing out across the wild woods of the Mississippi River bottoms.

## Old-fashioned Courting ✓

## Part I

Nothing has changed more radically in the last two or three decades than the methods of courting, even though the later methods seem quite as successful and quite as romantic. When we late Victorians were young, the frankness of manner that is now the rule would have been little short of insulting. A well-bred boy did not make his own date. Like Miles Standish, he sent an envoy, even though the girl in question and he had always known each other, had attended the same school, and in earlier and less-grown-up days had waded in the same creek and climbed the same trees. With the coming of adolescence one grew proper in manner; courting was made a serious and beautiful pageant. Small brothers of the boy or girl made many a nickel by acting as note-carrier between the two. And such formal notes:

"Mr. John D. Williams requests the pleasure of Miss Patience Johnson's company to Mt. Carmel Church on Sunday morning, July the twelfth."

And Miss Patience Johnson answered quite as formally, the bare-footed brother profiting by the Victorian modesty.

Sometimes it was an older, more experienced person who made the date orally and came back to report, like John Alden. Jim, who had had a six-months' start of me in this important business of stepping out, was what the world would have called then an experienced man. Jinny was the thirteen-year-old daughter of a tenant who lived on an adjoining farm. For some reason I was not at school that day, but Jim and Jinny were. I rode my mule through the woods to school at playtime and hailed Jim. He, with the suavity of an old-timer, made the date for me, and I

galloped the mule away just as the teacher was ringing the bell for books. I was all of fourteen, if I remember correctly, and my voice was in that indefinite stage between coloratura soprano and basso profundo.

Sunday-afternoon calls were the acme of polite courtship. The front room was opened up just after Sunday dinner. If it were winter, a fire was built in the fireplace or the stove. The small brother~~y~~, so useful the day before as a note-bearer, was kept away from the Holy of Holies, the front room, as if he were stricken with some plague. By and by came the young gallant, riding his steed and faultlessly attired, his shoes shined with ~~W~~ Bixby's blacking with a brush made for that very purpose. (To give an added lustre, he probably had used some coffee in the blacking.) No doorman to a great official ever received a caller more formally than the young woman opened the door for her swain. Bashful and ready to run, he entered and spoke in measured phrases, often forgetting that he had known Patience since they were photographed as babies in the same washbowl(horrors!), and calling her Miss Johnson with all the dignity of a trusted servant. The weather, that good old topic of conversation, opened the way for the afternoon chat, which was sometimes a long time becoming normal. About sunset it was the duty of the young fellow to bow himself out quite as formally as he had entered, so that he could get home in time to feed the stock and get in wood for the night.



Old-Fashioned Courting<sup>✓</sup>

## Part II

When we used to be in the courting age, there were not many places for young people to go. Church was the one generally chosen. You could, if you were brave enough, sit with your girl on the women's side, while the other fellows, even the husbands, occupied the other side of the church. If it were hot weather, and it was generally warm for me, you could fan the girl and yourself and keep from being too embarrassed. However, hoeing corn or feeding the wheat thresher is not any warmer work than fanning a girl with an open-and-shut fan while all the other boys are looking on. You work up some of this warmth trying to ignore the envious boys and trying equally as hard to think only pious and holy thoughts about the boys. Of course, you might sit with your girl in the choir. On one such occasion I sat near the preacher while a bug on his wing collar vainly tried to make a complete circuit of the reverend gentleman's neck, probably feeling when it reached the end of of the wing of the collar that some monster had bitten out a part of the universe. I watched that bug so intently and with such a composed countenance that the preacher complimented me to my mother for my good attention. When he looked in my direction, I was always smiling; he thought I was agreeing with his sermon, but I cannot recall a single thing he said and would have made no higher grade that night than now.

Sometimes we did a big thing or two in our staid community. We had an all-day picnic on the Fourth of July, or we had the quarterly meeting at our church. Dinner on the ground just went with preaching all day, like cranberries and turkey, ham and eggs, or any other well-matched pair. Sometimes we brought the young

lady to church on such occasions and saw to it that she was sufficiently fed and noticed. Usually she was of the same community and had to help her mother lay out the food on the tablecloths spread end to end under the trees near the church. How eagerly you fed her the choicest dainties your mother had prepared, or she singled you out in the same fashion in an effort to convince you that good cooking is one of the characteristics inherited by daughters. If you felt a little grown-up, you and she might sit out in the buggy during the afternoon preaching.

If, after a few years of ardent wooing, you had arrived at the age when you felt able to start life away from the old folks, you began storing up courage enough to ask the girl's father. Orators have said a lot of foolish things about the courage of the soldier; what is a soldier's mere facing of gun fire in comparison with walking into the living room of a farmhouse and talking over the subject of matrimony with her daddy and mammy? You who have been there know; the rest of you are plumb ignorant. But, in my part of the world, at least, there was always a possibility of an elopement to Tennessee, which in those days had laws of marriage slightly laxer than those of Kentucky. Some ran away just for the romance of it, though their parents were not in the least inclined to offer objections to the match. You see, the prospects of a flight across four or five miles of bad road with the girl's father in hot pursuit, shotgun in hand, were very alluring. Anyway, the old Chestnut Tree, where one usually met the parson, was a much-frequented place. This tree, barely over the line in Tennessee, became our local Gretna Green. And so ended the back-country courtship; the next big problem facing the two was "living happily ever afterward."

Saddlebags, Reticules, Carpetbags, etc. ✓

Trunks on automobiles or even trailers themselves could hardly contain as many and as various things as people used to carry in saddlebags and other popular containers. There were many sorts of saddlebags. The best-known kind were ~~the~~ capacious and roundish, lying across the saddle and capable of holding clothes, bottles of sundry kinds, hymn books, et al. Of course, I do not imply that any one set had such a combination, but certainly saddlebags were put to sundry uses. (I just cannot get away from that sundry; it sounds learned; I heard it often in the country church.) The early circuit rider would have been lost without his saddlebags to hold his linen and his Bible. I have read that a copy of Wesley's sermons, a hymn book, and a Bible often made up the entire library of some of the itinerant Methodist preachers. All travellers took a pair of saddlebags along to hold their purchases when they went to town or their apparel when they went on a journey. Physicians had a special make of saddlebags, designed to hold their calomel, quinine, and other standard remedies.

The old-time carpet bag was much more ample and could be stretched to fabulous proportions. It came to be the badge of important travellers and similar in style to the aviation bag of our time. Then there was the telescope that we used ~~to use~~ when we went away to school, thirty years ago, which could hold nearly all of one's belongings. Suitcases of many varieties are still in use, but I fear the telescope is a lost institution. I can still recall how out-of-style I felt when the telescope began to lose caste; I coveted the more stylish suitcase of the other fellows.

In those earlier days we had trunks, too, great big fellows that had to be packed skillfully and roped tightly to keep them from being torn all to pieces. I wore out two perfectly good trunks in my early college days. Some of my earlier schoolmates used to help pay their way through college by hauling trunks, another passing institution, as you all know. A joke we used to repeat every year was that when our friends were ready to pack their trunks, we would come over and help tramp in the contents for them, a figure borrowed, of course, from the method used in packing tobacco into hogsheads.

I cannot define reticule. I suppose it means any small container for necessary articles, usually carried along by a woman. There have been so many varieties since I could first remember that I shall not attempt to list them. One such container used to be carried along full of teacakes when the family went to church. My brother was always decorous as long as the teacakes lasted; no amount of fear of the preacher or of what might happen when he got home could keep him quiet after the teacakes were gone. From fourthly to nineteenthly the wriggling continued, unless Mother grew tired of it all and sought the out-of-doors and a switch. Some poet ought to pay his respects to the teacake as a moral force in the preceding generation; many a good child at church owes his reputation to the adequate supply of these goodies stored in a reticule or handbag.

What containers we shall use next it hath not yet appeared, but what we now use will seem equally as funny then as reticules seem now. And I wish some collector would start right now to preserve all forms of handbags, reticules, telescopes, and trunks that can be found in attics and lumber rooms.

## Little wagons ✓

Some years ago a grown man told me that he felt his childhood was a failure because he had never had a little red wagon. Santa Claus, by some strange perversity, failed to do his duty in that home. The little red wagon became the best-loved toy on the place. It could haul everything imaginable, from Baby Sister to stove wood. It could coast down every slanting place near the house, sometimes with disastrous results to itself and its owner. Sometimes it would be drawn by a dog or a goat or a calf, that is, if the animal wanted to work. When I read about Byrd and others who have driven dogs to sleds, I wonder what he would have done with my contrary dog.

The little red wagon that my friend wanted was the aristocrat of wagons; the little wagons that the boys made for themselves were not so pretty but were more useful. We sawed the wheels from a log and bored a hole for the axle with an auger. Few trees in our part of the world remain exactly the same size and shape for a long enough distance to make four wheels; that meant that our wheels might have tendencies from the start that would ultimately lead to disaster. We made the frame, too, and had a wagon that was strong and serviceable. It was the official wagon for wood for the fireplace. It was the very wagon to hitch a yoke of calves to. After its wheels began to wear a bit, it could make tracks that would cause a snake to die of envy. I have worked twice as hard to make my load of wood stay on as I would have had to work to "tote" ~~the~~ it in my arms. But I would have lost the fun of having a wagon to do my work for me.

One did not have to own either of the two types I have mentioned. The frame of an old buggy is good enough for any live boy. You can take off the bed and the shafts and do some fancy coasting down hills, guiding your vehicle with a plow line or some baling wire. A steel-tired buggy works best, for it gives the maximum number of jolts. Should you try this device, do not try to run your vehicle across a creek in winter in your coasting; if trouble results, remember my conscience is clear.

Before ~~the~~ days of automobiles this was our way of experimenting with wheels, probably the most fascinating thing that man has ever invented. How much the wheel has meant in civilization only the scholarly can ever know; anyway, when you ride by some boys who are experimenting with an old car or the framework of an old buggy, do not swell up in your pride because you are riding in a good car; you could not trade it for the joy of discovery, the spirit of adventure the youngsters are experiencing with their batteredd-up playthings.

A Chapter on Boots and Shoes ✓<sub>2</sub>

Where are the cavalry boots that used to be the mark of the young man all dressed up? Where are the brass-toed boots with red tops that little fellows wore? Where are brass-toed shoes and brogans? Nearly all of these lasted down into our own time, but only brogans can claim to be alive in any ordinary sense of the term. The last boy in our neighborhood to wear boots went by that name as long as he lived. I think he rather enjoyed the distinction, too, for he could lope like a horse and clatter up the aisles at school, making enough noise to be the envy and despair of the rest of us. The last pair of genuine ~~XX~~ cavalry boots I ever saw on a civilian were as classy as any of those treasured as keepsakes of some distinguished ancestor who had fought in the Civil War.

Brass-toed shoes were great things, too. They were sturdy things, made with wooden pegs, and as hard as planks. The brass across the toe helped one kick a gate off its hinges without ill effects to the toe. My last pair lay around in the pile of old shoes for a long time; then my older sister threw them out the door toward a pile of things to be burned. By chance they landed in a tree and hung there until the tree died and fell down. They had been so strongly built that not all the weather could harm them. When the tree fell, I, then nearly grown, nailed them up against the side of the smokehouse, where they hung for a decade or two, getting lost when another building had to be erected. I wish I knew what became of these tough little wooden-pegged shoes that could last so long.

Our generation is too soft-footed. Some of these dainty men and women ought to know the exquisite torture of

putting on a pair of brogan shoes some cold winter morning. Some stones are harder than those brogans, but not all stones are. A piece of paper, lighted at the fireplace and inserted into each shoe in turn, can help a little; but one had better accept the hard leather as one of the ills that flesh is heir to and ram the foot into the prison that feet were long ago condemned to.

Two of my great-uncles were shoemakers, but they died long ago and were saved the humiliation of seeing the half-soles I used to put on my own shoes. We had a set of lasts and could do simple repairs. If the brogans were incapable of bedding before the original soles were thin, they certainly were not any less adamant after the clumsy half-soling. I did not use wooden pegs, however, for they were going out of style.

When shoes got old, they were discarded but not actually destroyed, for there were many other uses that shoes had besides wearing them on feet. The uppers could supply leather for all sorts of farm needs. The old shoes themselves, brogans especially, could be nailed to the wagon brakes, heel up, and thus help check the speed as we went down the hills. Long before brake lining for automobiles was heard of, we used this simple device for the same purpose.

Then as now old shoes came in handy at weddings. One raw winter day one of my neighbor boys came by on his way to water his horses at the spring near the church; he had just heard that one of the boys we had gone to school with was to be married in front of the church. We gathered up some old shoes and celebrated in true fashion, sitting astride and bareback on our mules. There the old shoes lay until the next spring, when they greeted the people who had come to reorganize the Sunday School, who probably wondered why no two of them were mates.



## Political Speakings ✓

Politicians may not have changed much, but the public political gatherings have. Formerly when candidates were running for office, even county offices, every candidate spoke publicly every day for weeks before the primary election. Earlier in the campaign he made his official announcement in the county newspaper, got out numerous cards, and began lining up his supporters by electioneering. High-pressure salesmen could have learned much from the old-fashioned candidates. Handshaking was such a part of campaigning that one of our ~~neighbors~~<sup>candidates</sup>, running for justice of the peace, shook hands three times with his nearest neighbor when he came electioneering, even though he could have carried on a conversation across the small field between his house and that of his prospective supporter. Women could not vote in those days, of course, but they were even more partisan than the men. How many times the candidate addressed himself in a chivalrous way to the ladies, urging them to persuade their sons, or husbands, or fathers, or beaus to see the light and vote for the long-suffering and worthy office-seeker! ✓ The children, too, got pretty warm in their support of their chosen candidates, often with disastrous results to noses. The great American game of electing its sovereign officers was played according to the rules of the time.

But all the preliminaries to office-seeking reached a critical stage when the speakings began. Some of the fellows had no platform, anyway, and had to work hard to find enough funny or risqué jokes to fill up the time allotted each candidate. My choicest stories I first learned on these occasions when

some candidates could afford to use their valuable time in making people laugh. Sometimes these yarn-spinners were the very ones/ who, by a sort of poetic justice, got the offices. Nearly all of the races, though, developed some warm contests, in which one's personal or family history, much of it forgotten, got a good airing-out. Henchmen trailed around after their favorite candidates and cheered or hissed at the right times. Out on the fringe of the crowd a few blows could be expected. The candidates took their turns day by day, so that no one ever knew when/ the fireworks might start. Government was thus brought to the people, who came from the hills and hollows and asserted their rights by sitting for hours in a stuffy schoolhouse or church or by standing in the blistering summer sunshine. Oratory was not the only thing that flowed freely, either. Hence the fervor for one's favorite might just as well have been called flavor. We certainly got warm in those days, but, to save my life, I cannot recall whom my father voted for in some of the hottest races. I have also forgotten whether dire things followed the election of somebody or other to a county office, even though we had been assured that tragedy was lurking just around the corner. Somehow this sounds so modern that I am afraid some one will think I am writing about some campaign now going on, when in reality half the candidates for this year have not yet announced and nobody has yet delivered a speech.

In the old days I could not have known what I now know, that all of this had been said and done ages before in Greece, in Rome, and in England. Rabble-rousers were not peculiar to Fidelity. The odd thing is that little old Fidelity, away on the edge of things, reproduced so faithfully so much that has always existed where democracy tries to find its way out.

## Sunbonnets ✓

Sun tan is quite the thing now, but a generation ago a tanned face or tanned hands, when borne by a young, eligible woman, was a family or neighborhood disgrace. The poets who used to sing about lily-white hands could have found plenty of them in any neighborhood. You see, every girl ~~and~~<sup>or</sup> woman wore a sunbonnet and half-handed gloves to shield ~~their~~<sup>her</sup> tender complexion from the sun. "Come back and get your bonnet" in those times would have been uttered in much the same tragic tone that you and I would warn some one of being in the danger zone of a falling building. To go bareheaded was to invite sun tan and to provoke comment. It was hardly safe for a girl to take such a chance. So ardently did the women folks seek this clear complexion that they would wear half-handed gloves when they were sitting indoors; I have seen only a pair of these gloves in the country school.

There were several varieties of bonnets. If I cannot remember them all, please attribute my mistake to my being a mere man who is trying to picture things of a third of a century ago. Little fellows of both sexes wore little bonnets, often fancy ones of various colors. I still remember one I wore; it was of gray checked gingham, I believe, however. I also recall that little boys and girls often wore their bonnets wrong side foremost, much to the amusement of older brothers and sisters. The most useful bonnet was the every-day one, gray, or blue, or checked, not especially fancy or pretty. Its purpose was to serve as a sun shade. Dress-up bonnets might be quite elaborate things, especially for semi-formal visiting among the neighbors. Starched to a degree of stiffness comparable with sheet iron, a sunbonnet could be as

perly as any dress-up hat you ever saw. The split bonnet was the aristocrat of the family. I cannot tell you how to make one, but I know the splits were made of cardboard and had to be removed when the bonnet was washed, starched, and ironed. There may have been other kinds of bonnets, but my memory fails me.

There was another thing about bonnets that I must record. Young girls who wanted to appear hoydenish, who grew up and became the mothers of flappers in our time, sometimes refused to wear their bonnets on their heads, especially if they were pretty or thought so. They would tie the strings loosely out near the end and let the bonnet hang down the back. That and the hair done up in a single plait and tied with a bow of bright ribbon made many a boy's heart skip a few beats. That was youth, beautiful youth, none the less pretty now in memory, though the flashing eyes have long become accustomed to double-lens glasses. Eternal youth goes on, whether it is associated with sunbonnets and ribbons or sun tan and skimpy bathing suits. Lily-white hands and faces are now non-existent, but in their day they were as much in vogue as sun tan itself is today.

## The Old-Fashioned Country Sunday School ✓

Few of the Sunday Schools today are like those we used to attend. On the first Sunday in April we assembled and organized for the year, with an abundance of good-smelling Sunday School books and picture cards and enough zeal to last until real winter froze us out. April meant spring, and spring meant wild flowers around the church and small fish building their nests in the shallow places of the creek. April meant new leaves on the trees and the odors of blossoming plants and the flickering lights through the windows. The lessons and the sermons afterwards sometimes turned on horrible things, but it was easy to look out the windows and forget all horrors in a blissful enjoyment of spring. All through the summer and fall the attendance kept up pretty well, though something exciting or sensational in another neighborhood might draw away some of the young folks. The preacher came pretty regularly through the summer and staged a protracted meeting in the hottest season. All of this kept our Sunday School going, but I doubt whether the working of miracles could have kept it "evergreen," that is, alive through the winter. Winter was <sup>in our</sup> ~~for~~ neighborhood <sup>for</sup> visiting and rabbit hunting and parties. No night ever got too cold or snowy for parties, however easily a mere Sunday School might freeze out.

Right today I could go through the catechism we used ~~to use~~ each Sunday when I was a little boy. It was not the Shorter Catechism or any other published version but concerned itself with the first, the oldest, the strongest, the wisest, and other famous men of the Bible. It became such a matter of associative memory that if the teacher had suddenly asked us who

swallowed a whale, we would have instantly laid this crime at poor old Jonah's door. Now this catechism was not a part of the lesson proper. The lesson, for the very small ones, at least, was printed in question and answer form, so that Mother or Big Sister could teach us. But these questions and answers were soon over, and while the classes of older people were wrangling over some abstruse point of theology, the teacher had to do something to keep the little wrigglers from wriggling. Hence this abbreviated catechism. I always shone on these drills, for I had a big voice and could drown out any number of aspiring Bible students.

For rewards we got cards, much like those mentioned in "TOM SAWYER." While none of the boys I knew traded for cards, some of them could have done this admirably if they had not feared parental authority and the "wrath to come." One year I attended Sunday School every Sunday and had a perfect lesson, whatever that meant. As a reward I got a small Bible. No retainer of a king ever felt any bigger than I did when I marched down the aisle to get this reward.

At Sunday School, as at church, people were kept divided into the two sexes, just as the Lord had made them. The men sat on one side, from the "Amen Corner," with its elders and respectable gentlemen, back to the disorderly bunch near the door. The women were stratified on the other side of the church. We even invented "Women Corner." Only daring young men with their sweethearts would sit on the women's side. Many a time I have seen a young gallant show his girl to ~~her~~ place and then retire to the opposite side. In some churches there was a middle row of seats, a kind of neutral ground, where both sexes could sit without attracting attention. Then there was the choir, after the organ

was installed, where one could sit with his girl and fan her with an open-and-shut fan while the service lasted.

But time passes, and so does any or every custom. I suppose one could hardly tell nowadays which side of any church was foreordained and predestinated for men or for women. And I also suppose, from inadequate knowledge, that the Sunday School does not freeze out now, when motor cars can so soon roll over the good road to the "church in the valley by the wildwood."

## Showing Off in Fidelity

The game of showing off, or strutting one's stuff, is not a new one; back in old Fidelity we used to know all the intricacies of this fascinating sport. Our particular kinds of showing off may not have been exactly like yours, but they probably resembled them. It seems to be innate in all of us to try to appear a little better than we really are; this gives us something to live for, something to hold out as a goal to be achieved.

Somebody always had a horse to exhibit. While we were sitting round the loafers' joint, the owner of a gaited horse would dash by, stirring up the dust between the two stores. Rarely some one would drive a good horse to a cart and would make several trips through the village before stopping <sup>near</sup> ~~before~~ the envious group of whittlers. In later times rubber-tired buggies enhanced the value of a gaited horse; no make of automobile, however expensive, can ever give the same amount of distinction as was conferred on the owner of the first rubber-tired buggy of a country neighborhood. Here is what I would call the thirty-third degree of showing off: a young man drives up to the country church in his rubber-tired buggy, with his horse's head reined up very high; he cuts the shafts around in the approved manner, springs out of his buggy, assists his young lady companion to the ground with a flourish, and then hitches his horse to a tree, while all the less fortunate fellows gasp or gape at the fine show.

Children of Fidelity were always bright, or, at least, their immediate ancestors thought so. One village wiseacre



said it was queer to him how bright children were and how dumb they were when they grew up. Bragging on one's self is seldom accepted in civilized circles. It was and is very proper to say great things about one's offspring, particularly if they are too small to go to school and thus show how dumb they may be in books. Some of the people at Fidelity could say fine things about their grown-up children who no longer lived in the neighborhood. Some of these foreigners had made a lot of money, some had uncommonly peart children, and others had married bright and attractive wives.

Ancestors were probably no better and no worse than the average. Some of the neighbors rated themselves rather high because of real or fancied forebears that did astonishing things back in North Carolina or Old Kentucky, as Fidelity people always called the part of Kentucky east of the Tennessee River. Even in those days I wondered how such great ancestors could be represented by such ordinary descendants; my wonder persists.

But the way people showed off in cooking was perennial. Not to be a good cook was to be far down the scale. And the poor husband came in for his share of praise by being a good provider. Pies, cakes, boiled ham, roast beef, fried chicken--what didn't people know how to cook? Once in a great while a new recipe got loose in our neighborhood: new brands of teacakes, or layer cakes, or cake icings. But for most purposes, when company was not expected, the same old round of ordinary cooking was in vogue.

Since Fidelity is now on a good state highway and has daily deliveries of ice and fresh "baker's" bread from the county seat, I wonder how my old neighbors "put the big pot in the little one" to show off when company comes.

## Books and Playtime

## I

Not all of the old-time schools are gone, but the few that remain are bordering on extinction. The same old buildings of thirty, forty, or fifty years ago can be found, but the old-time teacher has died of old age, and few younger ones have arisen to fill vacant places. The maximum education of a rural teacher of a generation ago was hardly the equivalent of a good eighth-grade diploma; theoretically, at least, no one can teach now as a beginner without two years of college. Since the old-fashioned school is decidedly a passing institution, I want in a few articles to recreate for the younger generation the school we ~~of~~<sup>in</sup> the forties and fifties and sixties knew and loved. Before I start, I must explain the title: "books" meant the time spent in the schoolroom, presumably time spent in studying and reciting; "playtime" meant the morning and afternoon recesses and the long period at noon. If you will go back to the old one-room school with me, where there are children from five to twenty-five years of age in attendance, all under one teacher, I will first introduce you to books and then give you a long diversion in the form of playtime.

All schools had to be called to begin. The most primitive way, the one my mother remembered, was for the teacher to come to the schoolhouse door and call sonorously: "Come in to books," much as the officers used to, and still do, call people in to court. One such teacher used to rap on the wall of the schoolhouse with a stick as a signal that it was time to start. The way of calling books for most of us was to ring a handbell; I still have the one I called my first school in with

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thirty years ago. It was a proud day in the lives of the children of our school, forty or more years ago, when a big bell was installed, a bell like those that summoned the farmers from the fields. We put the bell on a post by the side of the door and nailed it securely to the wall. This gave us a sort of ladder to climb to the roof when we lost our ball playing antny over. Nearly every child of the school district could hear this bell, for the schoolhouse was on a good-sized hill near the center of the district. It had only one other rival in the community, the bell on the union church on a neighboring hill, a bell that still sounds out in that neighborhood as a part of the county high school that succeeded the union church.

Now we are in the old schoolhouse. It was not a prepossessing place in looks. At one end was a platform where the teacher sat. Behind her and to the sides of her stage ~~were~~ the blackboards, ceiling planks painted black. Near the front was a large wood stove, with its mate at the rear of the room. Behind the doors at the end opposite the teacher's desk were the dinner buckets and baskets, with the water bucket half-way between. Equipment as we now know it was practically lacking. The crayon was usually provided, rather stingily, by the teacher. Sometimes we brought it from home. Erasers were chiefly made from sheepskins. As my father killed several sheep every year, I was always provided with erasers for myself and my best girls. If I remember correctly, there were two rows of double seats and two rows of single desks in our schoolhouse. We were a bit haughty over the fact that these desks were store-bought rather than home-made; some of our neighboring schools were not so fortunate. There may have been other supplies and bits of equipment, but I cannot remember anything to add to the rather bleak picture.

## Books and Playtime

## II

I do not know what the methods of our present-day schools are, but I think I could conduct a whole day of the schools I used to attend. For each lesson the children were called to the front. If the lesson were spelling, we lined up, even toeing a crack in the floor. We had regular places in the line and turned down those who could not spell a word. We also had headmarks, that is, the one standing head at the end of the lesson was given a mark of merit; he went to the end the next day and tried to work up again. To have the most headmarks was like being elected to Phi Beta Kappa in college. In fact, I was much prouder of my superior number of headmarks in spelling than I was when I got my Phi Beta Kappa key. If we were quite small, we "spelled on the book," that is, we called the letters and pronounced the words syllable by syllable and then were given some simpler words to spell orally. In much later times we wrote words on a slate or tablet, but oral spelling was the one big thing. We often spelled words that we had never heard of and probably never would hear of again: "t-i-n," tin; "t-i-n," tin, tintin; "n-a-b," nab, tintinnab; "u," tintinnabu, "l-a," la, tintinnabula; "t-i-o-n," tion, tintinnabulation. That was my favorite word, though I did not know until I was grown that the word meant the sound of small bells. After all, the word was in the McGuffey Spelling Book and was supposed to be spelled; that was enough. I also remember elephantiasis, incompatibility, and transubstantiation. You see, when a boy could spell big words like these, he had progressed far in his education. To be able to spell no farther than baker was to be only about in what would now be called the second or third grade. Sometimes

we brought an old Blue-back Speller from home for some extra drill or for Friday-afternoon spelling-matches. In one school we had a dictionary class, in which we spelled, gave diacritical markings, parts of speech, definitions, synonyms, and then used the word correctly in a sentence. Whether we were taught rightly or wrongly, we learned to spell, an accomplishment that is pretty rare today, though I suspect that many of the children still are wondering what eleemosynary and metempsychosis mean.

Reading was always oral. We took turns reading and watching the others for mistakes. I recall one tongue-tied little girl's saying "Her wepeated" after one of her classmates had finished her reading. We stopped at each comma long enough to count one, sometimes actually counting aloud. The semicolon counted two, the colon three, and the end of the sentence four. "When Columbus discovered America(one) he had three vessels(three) the Pinta(one) the Nina(one) and the Santa Maria(four)!" Most of the selections, fortunately, were designed for oral reading, for ours was the day for oratory. We memorized poems, wise sayings, orations, and even dialogues. Often when we studied a poem, we did concert work, either reading from the book together or repeating what we had memorized. I wanted to murder the boys who would not memorize anything but would just hum or even use ugly words when the rest of us did our concert reading. I taught my own rural schools very much after the traditional way. One of the poems we memorized was "Try, Try Again." One little girl in my school always started the second stanza:

"Onct or twict, though you should fail,  
Try, try again."

I tried more than twict to break her of the habit, but I suspect she is still saying it to her children or grandchildren.

## Books and Playtime

## III

Arithmetic gave us a chance to shine in practical ways. In fact, the old-time school was gauged almost wholly by the three R's. The slate and the blackboard shared honors in this daily showing off. The multiplication table looked good on the painted ceiling planks; so also did long <sup>columns</sup> ~~rows~~ of figures to be added and such high-brow things as mensuration, percentage, and square root. One teacher, still living and teaching, challenged me one day by asking me how much the stove pipe would hold. That was not in the book, but I accepted the challenge, brought a tape-line from home, and measured the pipe. When I solved the problem satisfactorily, I felt that mensuration had some meaning. Most of our arithmetic was hardly so practical, however. The most famous problem in Ray's Third-Part Arithmetic was John Jones's Estate. It probably got more great financiers started than all other forms of cyphering.

Geography was almost pure memory and was about as unreal as anything could be. We bounded all the states and countries, named capes and rivers and bays and lakes, but knew nothing about people, their industries, and their ways of living. "What ocean east of North America? What Gulf and Sea south? What ocean west? What cape at the southern extremity of Greenland? Name all the tributaries of the Mississippi." About ten thousand such questions we could answer, absorbing a little learning in spite of ourselves, the teacher, and the book. We could name all of the states and their capitals and even all foreign countries. (This was before the World War and its resultant complications in European geography.) The Negroes of my time were still teaching countries and capitals in a series of rhymes

given in a sing-song. The state lines looked as real as the rivers and mountains. When I crossed the line into Tennessee for the first time, I was surprised at not seeing a line fence at the least. Mother's old geography used to amuse us, for many of the states we knew were listed as territories. One book was called an "Atlas"; the reading part bore the strange title of "A Grammar of Geography." We drew maps galore. I liked the Western states, for they are cut out on rather straight lines. Without exactly knowing why, we liked geography, even though we rather doubted many of the things it said.

We learned many abstruse facts in history. We could fill the blackboards with dates, explorers, casualties in battles, names of Presidents, and other detached facts. Sometimes we had headmarks in history and geography and had to work hard to keep our records and those of the others, for we trusted no one, the teacher included.

Facts were our stock in trade. In civil government we could name all the officers in state, county, and nation. In physiology we could name the bones, the muscles, and both sets of teeth, though we knew nothing about a toothbrush except one made from blackgum or from hickory bark. In grammar we memorized rules galore, twenty-two of them in Harvey's text. The strange thing about grammar was that no amount of study seemed to make our daily language any better. We could diagram and parse the longest summer's day, but we said, with no compunctions of conscience: "Miss Eunice, can me and Jim go get a bucket of water?" Facts as such seemed the big thing, not an application of facts.

## IV

I do not know how much studying we did in the old-time schools, but we did a lot of pretending. To give the appearance of being hard at work, we would walk up to the front to ask the teacher to pronounce a word for us or to get some help in arithmetic. This constant procession, equalled by the one going in the other direction to the water bucket, kept the poorly-built old schoolhouse in a constant state of unstable equilibrium. Sometimes mischievous boys stuck out their feet and tripped us; I shall not dwell on what happened next, except to say that no amount of punishment seemed to stop the recurrence of this infraction of rules. Talking was always forbidden. Some teachers had us tell at the end of the day how many times we had talked. Those who had fallen from grace used many ways to induce others to fall, like Eve getting Adam to eat that apple.

All of us liked to study geography, for the big book could cover a multitude of sins. We might filch something from the dinner buckets and baskets, we could write notes to our best girls, we could play with our popguns, or we might even take a nap in the shelter of the big book. I once caught a boy in my school brandishing his knife at me, much to the amusement of the other boys; he got so interested that he flourished the knife beyond the range of the geography.

Note-writing was always in style. If we got in a tight place, we sometimes chewed up the note hastily and swallowed it. If it were on a slate, a grubby hand could soon obliterate all offending messages. Woe unto him who got caught! He might have his note read by the teacher for the amusement of the rest of us. He might have to read it himself or might have to sit by the girl to whom it was addressed. I suspected some of my schoolmates



of wishing for this sort of punishment. In the wall were cut several slits through the ceiling. Into these the notes that had been "received and contents duly noted" were slipped to prevent the teacher from finding them. When the old schoolhouse was torn down, several bushels of these notes were found between the weatherboarding and the ceiling. I wish I could have salvaged some of these, partly for fun and partly to see what was the general style of the notes that we wrote with such palpitating little hearts and such grubby fingers.

There were never enough books. It became necessary, then, for two or more of us to sit together to study the same book. It was a great event when the one to use the same book was one's best girl. We used thumb cards in those days, a combination of a book mark and a device to keep the pages clean. Since we used the same books year after year, we gradually memorized the greater portion of each, so much so that I can still repeat part of the table of contents of some of the texts.

Sometimes visitors came. Nearly every boy or girl had a younger brother or sister who came for a day or two to get the hang of things. Most of these small fellows were quiet, but some of them got to crying so loudly that the whole school had to cease operations to calm Little Brother. I remember one such youngster coming to school ~~dressed~~ in a boy dress, even though he had a voice like an auctioneer. Parents came sometimes to help break in little fellows; irate parents dropped in to question the discipline (accented on the second syllable) meted out to their young hopefuls. The county superintendent came around one or two times a year and regaled us with good advice and a new joke or two. The great visiting day was at the end of school, when we said our pieces and got our treat.

## Books and Playtime

## V

We had never heard of athletics, but we did a lot of stunts and played many games. Long before I could remember, the boys put up an acting pole, between two trees. There we learned to skin cats, hang by our toes, walk the pole with perfect balance, and do other things. (I say we rather guardedly, for there are many men now living who know that I could do none of these, since I was too big a coward.) Town ball, bat ball, mumblepeg, hat ball, dare base, wolf over the river, antny over, prisoner's base (stealing goods), hare and hounds--we did not lack for diversion. Such highly competitive games as stealing goods ended at least once each day in a fair-sized fight, for somebody was always breaking the rules, such as stealing more than one stick at a time or taking French leave when he was supposed to be a prisoner. Wrestling ended much the same way and was usually frowned upon by the teachers. In hat ball we "nailed to the cross" the loser, that is, the one who got most "pigs," or forfeits, in his hat. Nailing to the cross was quite a ceremony, our version of the Inquisition. The boy, usually one of the smaller ones who could not throw well and consequently had acquired many "pigs," was stood face against a tree, and all the others threw the ball at him. The ball was one made from a yarn sock or stocking and sometimes contained a small stone or two. We soaked this ball in water to make it even more dangerous. The boy who could stand this ceremony without crying was game, like a kitten that could be lifted by the tip of its ear.

Wood and water were seldom furnished for the school. That meant that we boys had to get the supply. There was a cistern, but it was nearly always dry or had dead frogs or rats in it. There were cisterns in the neighborhood that we could use. Two boys were dispatched with a bucket and a long pole to carry it on; when they returned with the water, or as much of it as they had not spilled, it was passed around. I have seen the bucket dry long before it got entirely around; that meant another trip for two other boys. When the school lasted into cold weather or there was a subscription school after Christmas, we dragged up dead logs from the immense woods around the school-house. One of the larger boys would hitch up four or six of the smaller ones like so many mules and drive them a-logging. Hickory-bark whips from the spring before or a blacksnake whip from the farm made the drudgery pretty hard sometimes. I hope some old fellow will read this and remember through the mist and his bifocals how cruel he used to be. There may have been some wood actually cut for the school, but I cannot remember having seen any.

But we forgot all this cruelty in the sheer joy of being out of school. The same spirit animated us when we imitated our elders. The protracted meetings that I have witnessed at our school were often so realistic that the teacher had to interfere. One of the boys ~~of our school~~, who was very deep in the gosling age, could imitate to perfection the angular singing-school teacher who conducted a school nearly every winter. On rainy days we had him put on his act at noon or recess, and the teacher enjoyed it as much as we. If extra-curricular activities are all events of school life except books, we had a complete assortment of them.

## Books and Playtime

## VI

Since we stayed in school from eight until four and sometimes got greedy and ate our lunch at morning recess, we were literally starving to death by the time we had fought our way home after school. A raid on the safe and the left-overs from dinner was necessary before we helped with the chores. There may be saints in the calendar who suffered from a death worse than starvation, but from rather keen memories I doubt whether any of them deserve notice who died from anything less than starving. Cold biscuits, cold potatoes, teacakes, gingercakes, anything will do to ward off a sudden and horrible death. But this mid-afternoon lunch did not count when supper time came, for we were ready for another heavy meal, with all the trimmings.

I suppose that the punishments for misdemeanors have changed greatly since my time. Standing up was our favorite one, I mean our teachers' favorite one. The humiliation of having to stand up in full view of the whole school was a real punishment, lightened only by the notice that we thus got. Sometimes we stood on one foot; I have heard of boys who had to stand with their noses inside a circle drawn on the blackboard, but I never saw any such punishment. One of our teachers told of having seen another teacher punish by butting the head of the offender against the wall. Writing a word or sentence for a certain number of times was common and probably useless. When a fight was stopped, small children often had to shake hands or even kiss each other before the whole school. The switch was still in vogue, at school and at home. It was no worse in one

place than in the other. In spite of all the bad things that have been said about corporal punishment, it was never as bad as it was pictured. The children were used to <sup>it</sup> and got hardened to it. If the teacher had been the all-wise being he is supposed to be, he could have often devised better methods of discipline; but he had too many things to do to be studying up novel or high-brow ways of punishing infractions of school rules. I have attended whole schools where no switch was used, and children were no better and no worse than the average. Whipping was often the only remedy that the teacher knew, and the child expected it as a matter of course.

Like the dissolving scenes that the magic-lantern man showed us when he came along are these scenes from our school days. The boys and girls who took education so lightly are now middle-aged parents and grand-parents. It seems millions of years ago, but in reality it was just around the corner from the present. The school was not so good, the teacher had little education, but they were considerably better than nothing. And hundreds of us, who have better advantages for our children, would not trade our memories for a king's ransom. The old, unsightly, unsanitary building was ours, the only one we knew. It met us half way and gently led us into another world, away from the drab facts of every day, beyond the farthest hills that we knew. All sentimentality aside, it was our great bulwark against ignorance; though nothing to brag about, it certainly was <sup>nothing</sup> ~~something~~ not to be ashamed of.

## When Telephones Were New

None of us have lived in times before the invention of a wagon, but many of us can guess how these objects must have impressed the people who first knew them. The telephone was invented some years before I was born, but it did not come into general use in rural sections of Kentucky until I was a good-sized boy. I helped put up the first line in our neighborhood. We organized a local company called (really) the Sunripple Telephone Company; the local postmaster was the promoter and most of the company. When we tried to get a right of way for the line, we met some difficulty, because some of the farmers were afraid the contraption would injure their crops. One man who gave in and allowed the wire to be strung up across his cultivated fields stoutly maintained that the corn was much poorer under the wire than elsewhere. He forgot to observe that the ground there was very poor and worn out. Since I was just a boy, I did not get to climb the posts and attach the wire, but I could hand up brackets and insulators and run errands; I could unroll the wire and help with the stretchers. That made me a part of it, anyway, and I can still boast of having helped install this new invention.

When the line was up, it was some days before our boxes came from Sears, Roebuck and Company or elsewhere. Meanwhile an old citizen died. As the funeral cortege was passing along by the singing wires, a daughter-in-law of the deceased remarked: "There goes a message, and I haven't got my box." But the boxes came by and by, and the party line opened up new experiences for all of us.

Our neighborhood very quickly widened. At one time there were forty-four boxes on our line. It was about all one could do to keep up with so many conversations, not through any desire to be nosey, but from sheer interest in what others were doing and thinking. The man who lived on the other side of the farthest hills that we knew sounded as near as the neighbor right by us. He and we were much more natural, after the newness of the experience wore off, than we had been when we had met at the country store or the country church, for both of us had on store clothes then, while with the telephone we could talk just as we were. Before we knew it, we found ourselves vitally interested in the whole side of the county, for we sometimes listened in on conversations that went through two or three centrals, so that people ten or twelve miles away were connected.

There was no use in having a contraption like this without using it. It soon became the means of afternoon and evening entertainment. Love affairs or near-love affairs grew up. It became easier to make a date by telephone than by sending a boy on a mule with a formal note. Some of us learned to talk to the girls in this way when we were entirely too bashful to speak to them in public and too cowardly to ride our mules over and hitch them to the fence on Sunday afternoon.

Sickness, death, birth, marriage, visiting, all had their part in the news that flashed over the wires. Neighborliness was behind it all; it might have been a little provoking when we had to repeat our messages for the benefit of the listeners. It was ever so much better than the weekly paper, for the bare news items there hardly did the subject justice. Besides, we heard by telephone many things that no newspaper ever printed. And so, after so many years of isolation, the telephone brought us together, and we learned to know and respect an ever-widening group.

## "Christmas Like It Used To Be"

"Christmas like it used to be" runs one of the artless poems of Frank L. Stanton, the Georgia poet. That is what I want to tell you about. First there were the preliminaries: the end of school, with its treat and its speaking of pieces; the knitting and dyeing of new stockings; the preparation of the numerous cakes. Treats and pieces have already had their inning in this column, as have home-knit yarn stockings. But I would like to add that it was much more aristocratic to have a pair of new stockings than to have only a pair that had had new feet knit on. When this last kind was dyed, the new feet looked blue in comparison with the twice-dyed legs. I wish I could even remember the names of the cakes: marble, pound, orange, banana, etc., etc. We children were allowed the rare privilege of scraping the bowls after the cakes had been "put in." Nothing seems so insipid to my middle-aged sense of taste as raw cake batter, but that used to be nearly as good as candy. Often we ate so much of this stuff and the remnants of icing that we had a good-sized stomach ache long before Christmas Day.

On Christmas Eve some members of the family--older brothers or sisters along with Mother--went to the country store and returned with some mysterious packages of various shapes and stored them with great secrecy in the closet where we kept our clean clothes. When I was big enough to have lost some of the few delusions that children were allowed to have, I went shopping in person and gaped at the counters of toys and good things to eat, spending very carefully the few cents that I owned for what I felt would be the best investment for toys. Somehow I expected Santa Claus or his henchmen to provide the other things.



Hanging up the stockings was a great ceremony. The stockings were tied together when they were dyed; we swung them across a chair in the front room and sometimes set, when some one gave up a tip, a box for things that might be too big for the stockings. We retired to the trundle bed to sleep, secretly hoping that we could play 'possum and hear Santa Claus when he came. I actually did this once, and as a result I have felt sheepish all the rest of my life. That was the Christmas when Santa brought me a monkey that could climb a string; Santa tried the monkey out--put him through his paces--while I lay with saucer eyes and throbbing heart on the trundle bed in the next room.

Long before daylight the next morning we were up, eating our way down through the stocking. At the top were firecrackers and a small Roman candle; then came an apple, some nuts, some figs or raisins, an orange, and some peppermint candy. These things seldom varied, so much so that we expected them as a matter of course. Santa apparently had a patented formula for filling stockings. Before breakfast we continued to eat, meanwhile getting a shovelful of live coals to take out into the yard or horse lot to fire off our tiny little firecrackers. We always screamed so loudly when our big guns went off that we often drowned all the noise. After breakfast we were eager to get into the box of goodies that we knew instinctively was in the closet, but that treasure was guarded for the later days of the season. Rather stingily Mother or Big Sister brought out some of the goodies, trying to make them last as long as possible. Too much eating nearly always brought cramps, but that was a part of the season. Rowdy ones got drunk, older boys and men; we contented ourselves with cramming and cramping. And so the season ended, always eagerly longed for, always enjoyed to the limit.

Descriptive music can be and often is comic, but there are some great illustrations of it that we could ill spare. The "Ride of the Valkyries," in Wagner's <sup>Die</sup> ~~Die~~ Walkure, the incidental music for Midsummer Night's Dream, and "Morning," from the Peer Gynt Suite, are a few of these descriptive passages that I love. In the first one the whinnying of horses forms a motif, in the second the braying of a donkey, and in the last the sounds associated with morning. What Wagner and Mendelssohn and Grieg have made of these makes me wish that some musician could take some of our every-day sounds and give them their proper musical interpretation. There is the calling of hogs, for example, which is often a long-drawn-out, sonorous thing, capable of musical setting. The calling of other farm animals is almost equally musical: sheep, cows, calves, horses, chickens. Even the calling of children to dinner or the summoning of the husband from the fields or the barn could be worked into something beautiful.

Elsewhere I have called attention to the musical "hollers" of the Negro men and boys I used to know. The white farm hands developed a similar series of mournful, prolonged calls, each one a little different from the others. I must have known half a hundred at one time. Once when a Negro boy was mournfully giving his call, some one asked him what was the matter; he said, rather oddly: "I'm just glad I'm living." On a typical spring morning, when we had risen early and were at work in the fields not long after sunrise, boys called to boys, white or black, across the intervening fields, unconscious of their

contributing to anybody's musical education. Joyous though most of these boys may have been in actual life, the calls had minor tones that allied them with primitive music of all times and places.

Much has been made by some musicians of the ~~dis~~queals and cries and growls of farm animals, but I believe that only a beginning of interpretation has been made. A combination that I always treasure in my memories is that of the ringing of farm bells, the greeting of the boy at the plow, and the braying of the mule. Again across the fields comes this succession of sounds, every farm bell with its distinctive ~~sound~~ tone, every boy or mule with an individual shade of difference from the others.

Night, and the baying of dogs and the crowing of cocks! On still winter nights, when the very wind seems to have frozen and stopped, the deep hooting of owls, with an occasional dog baying the moon, probably to keep alive his poetic nature in the same fashion that the boy gave his calls in the morning! Trivial seems this to many who have not felt its spell; but to others, who remember and remember aright, it seems the essence of poetry, the something in nature that "alway, alway sings."

## Victuals, Grub, and Food--I

What we eat may not vary much in calories or vitamins, but it varies enormously in dignity. "It is a well-known fact that the very idea of eating is itself capable of many interpretations. Some eat to live, some live to eat, but most of us have habits that lie somewhere between abstemiousness and gluttony. Similarly, we may not always eat in the same sphere. Sometimes we range from the super-dignified to the plebeian. I must tell you about these various levels of eating, so that you may know where you are, socially and otherwise.

Most words borrowed from the Latin have a tendency to be dignified; it is otherwise with victuals. It has now fallen on evil days. When you hear it, you recall certain homely foods, foods associated with the old-fashioned country home, with its well-stocked smokehouse and with plenty of frying-sized chickens running around in the front yard. Cabbage and cornbread and fried ham and fried pies are assuredly victuals, the kind that Aunt Mary used to cook and serve in abundance rather than in style. You are invited to "take out and help yourself." No napkins are needed, since most of the men at the table have red bandanna handkerchiefs and the ladies wear aprons. The word victuals may sound harsh to modern ears, but to many it brings a watering of the mouth, a longing for "square meals" of other days. The word, though, is "not nice" now and is tolerated only out of courtesy to Grandma.

Grub has a plebeian smack, with a hale-fellow-well-met sound. Grub is coarse but substantial food, cooked usually

by a man for men. It is found at logging camps, at wheat-threshings, at log-rollings (whenever and wherever such now occur), and at other activities where men are both (the workers and the cooks. Potatoes cooked in plenty of grease or boiled in the jackets, beans and bacon, plain hoe cake, and sliced potato pie are grub. You know you are getting enough to eat. Grub tastes better when eaten out of tin pans with iron forks and knives and spoons, with coffee served in tin cups. Table manners were not meant for grub, but many people have lived and died without ever having eaten anything else.

Eats are of recent origin and have a sophisticated air. We could almost say that eats are of college or high-school rank. Pinnies are responsible for eats. You take along sandwiches and pickles and olives and peanut butter and fancy cakes of all kinds. Eats are served in fiber plates or are eaten right out of the hands. If coffee is on the menu, it appears in paper cups, or, if the crowd is select, from actual china. The lunch is not complete without ice cream, served in cones or small cups. Eats are decorous, even to the paper napkins. By a figure of speech or transference of meaning, you may call boarding-house food eats. This should be used sparingly, however, unless it is to designate special preparations on the part of the landlady. Ordinarily it is better to call what is served at the boarding house grub, or, using a part for the whole by another figure of speech, hash.

## Victuals, Grub, and Food--II

Victuals, grub, and eats are served at mealtime; something-to-eat, usually shortened to som'n-d-eat, comes between meals. Grown people prefer food or dignified things: children like everything but especially som'n-d-eat. This is served to allay that starvation feeling that comes regularly about the middle of the afternoon. All sorts of things are included under this interesting name, but I prefer chicken and cold biscuit for the first course and jamanbread for the second. If there is company and the second table still holds its time-honored place, som'n-d-eat is usually called a handout. This is ordinarily more substantial than the regular afternoon meal and serves as a life-saver until the second table is ready. Whatever its local habitation and its name, som'n-d-eat was and is a great institution and has never been routed by dieticians and physicians and trained nurses.

And now, with apologies to Home Economics for my long delay, there is food. The big difference between food and its poor relations is that it is a balanced affair and is served in style. There are china plates, if such are available. And there is silverware, as much as one has and all that can be borrowed from the neighbors. And there is a menu! Think of a menu for victuals or grub! Food comes in stratifications, called courses. It starts with soup or cocktails and ends with fruits or nuts, or it did the last time I ate food. You eat with appropriate gestures and with a certain knife for butter, a certain fork for salad, and with several plates, sometimes. You are not invited to "take out and help yourself." (Horrors!) Instead, you are rationed. Lettuce, cut up

with green onions and new radishes and doused with fried-meat grease or vinegar, is to be classed as victuals or grub but never as food. Lettuce must be served with some sort of oil dressing before it ceases to be plebeian. Biscuits may be victuals, or, if they are large and hard enough, they may be grub; but when they are food, they are served on a silver tray lined with a pure-linen napkin. Sometimes they are not biscuits at all but are hot rolls with a little flap folded over and with a minute pat of butter inserted. But food is contemporary; you all know it yourselves; just watch the next banquet or luncheon or formal dinner you attend, or, if you are thoroughly civilized, your next regular meal.

All food is good, even victuals. What would camp life be without grub, or picnics without eats, or afternoon teas without food? If food is destined to be the aristocrat of the family, let him not strike too lofty a pose but let him remember that his relatives now degraded to lower positions have long held high rank among certain classes of people and among most classes at some time.

## On Big Brothers

As a younger brother I want to plead for justice. All my childhood I suffered from the greatest malady that a small boy can have, that is, being a younger brother. While I probably got more than my share of pie and cake, entirely too much for my digestive system, there were other things that quite overbalanced this favor. Why some one has not already demanded justice for the younger brother I cannot guess unless writers were themselves older brothers or else came between brothers and thus were able to pass on the treatment they had already received. Now I was at the end of a pretty long line and had no one that I could pick on; my oldest living nephew was born after I was practically grown. Thus I have been cheated out of my rights, but I can at least take the part of other poor, submerged younger brothers.

In the first place, in my indictment of big brothers, I resent their making younger brothers feel small and young. They are forever reminding you of something that occurred before you were born. It seems that their favorite conversation centers about things that you cannot remember. Then they are naturally larger, anyway, and they lose no opportunity to remind you of their superior size and strength. If you cry, they laugh at you and call you a baby. If you get sick, they assume that nothing else could be expected from a mere infant who has not yet lost all of his baby teeth. If you retaliate when Big Brother is sick, he promises you a beating when he gets well; and he usually keeps his promise, or, at least, you get the beating.



And then there are the clothes. Younger brothers, from Abel down, have borne this humiliation. If Abel had been the one to attempt the first murder, it might have seemed justifiable to all succeeding younger|brothers. As it was, Cain has never had a real defender. I was never lost as a child; but if I had been, finding me would have been easy. Everybody knew my oldest brother's overcoat, which had served the family down to me; and the next brother's coat, cut down a size or two, was equally familiar. Worst of all, I sometimes had to wear out a pair of shoes that my older sister had outgrown. Stylish occasions, when older people strutted and looked comfortable in their new toggery, were times of wretchedness to me, with my collection of family relics.

The worst humiliation that can come to any one is to be regarded as So-and-So's little brother. Big Brother, by arriving a scant two years before you, is George Brown or Henry Lewis; just are just George Brown's or Henry Lewis's little brother. And if Big Brother does something good or bad, everybody assumes that you cannot do otherwise. We seem to be unable to get away from the English idea that the oldest brother inherits all that is valuable in the family. I wonder whether Lawrence Washington used to introduce George as his little brother. And do you suppose that the sixteen other Franklins talked patronizingly to Ben merely because he was away down the line.

It is altogether possible that big brothers are not so tyrannical as they used to be. Anyway, this defense of little brothers is a bit delayed, as only two of my brothers are left. But I just had to champion the underest-dog of all under-dogs, the younger brother.

## On Dignity of Disease

Murder unrelieved by sentiment is brutal; add a little wild-eyed patriotism, and it becomes a great international sport. Mere overeating is gluttonous, but if we get sick from eating green apples, we have a source of poetic sentiment all the rest of our lives. Disease in general follows this rule. Our grandmothers thought it not nice to discuss bones and similar things, but how decent and dignified it sounded to say that Mr. X. had sustained a compound fracture of the lower limbs. Before the refined days of Queen Victoria people were subject to spells of colic; that was what everybody called it, doctors and all. It was not regarded as anything to be proud of or to be ashamed of, either. All normal, healthy people were likely to have such a spell. Then came the reign of Queen Victoria and nice speech. To mention such a thing as colic was to place oneself among the boorish, and our ancestors--and our ancestresses, most of all--did not want to appear boorish. But modern science came to the rescue. Colic received a new lease on life; now we talk, even in the Ladies' Aid Society when the preacher is present, about colic, except that we call it autointoxication. MY! a fellow could almost afford to die of such a thing as that: it would look so good in the obituary. Should one go under in a fight with autointoxication, the neighbors would be envious and would believe in truth that the stronger force had overcome the weaker one; if one died of colic, everybody would feel contempt for a poor fellow who could not afford a fashionable disease.

Tonsils, appendixes, and teeth are the most talked of members of our bodies. One refers to having his tonsils out

in much the same nonchalant way as one mentions the fashionable college from which he graduated. New dates are established by our operations, just as the Romans indicated time by referring to the two consuls for a certain year: "That was the year ~~Sister~~ Sister Sarah had her appendix operation." Digestive organs have assumed a dignity they never had in the old days when they were mentioned only in a whisper, even though only ladies were present. The tendency of the appendix, a rather useless organ, to go cavorting around, stirring up such troubles as rheumatism and fainting fits, has brought dignity to the whole digestive system. I have seen the daintiest ladies, old and young, line up to view the preserved appendixes on a hospital museum shelf. One of my friends says he knows a man who turned one of his gallstones into a precious stone for his ring. I suppose that we take a sort of delight in these things, much as one of my former students kept in his purse a bit of shrapnel that had wounded him in the leg and a short piece of rib that had to be removed when he had pneumonia and pleurisy.

When anything is wrong with us today, we do not blush. No, sir! If we have a boil, we cover it up with a few strips of adhesive tape or paint it red, literally, with mercurochrome or merthiolate and feel our superiority to the rest of the world not thus decorated. Disease as such is not sought after; but if it comes, we make a fashion of it and get our names in the society column.

## Whiskers

What is so funny about whiskers? They are as natural as hair or finger nails, but to this generation they are practically unknown. Even Van Dyke beards and skimpy mustaches as they now exist could be left out of account, for they are too small to be classed with the beards we used to know. The term whiskers could be applied only to the hirsute adornment that once marked out a man as a real personage. In those days it was considered an honor to have a long and flowing beard. And all owners of beards had a pardonable pride in their chins and upper lips. Before going to some dress-up occasion, they spent a long time curling or waxing or trimming their beards, in order to strike envy into the hearts of others not so blessed with such a rank growth on chin and lip.

First and last all sorts of beards held sway. In one generation the Uncle Sam, or shaving-brush, style was in order. I have seen tintype pictures of young men who were not old enough to vote but with a shaving brush well developed. During the Civil War, judging by Brady's famous pictures, beards formed the chief distinction among men. There were the full and flowing patriarchal variety; the floor-mop type, such as Lincoln and Greeley wore; Burnsidess--named for the great general; and so on and on. A little later the Prince Imperial, imitative of Napoleon III, came into vogue. The two-gun man of the plains wore a villainous-looking mustache. I knew one such fellow, tame as a drugstore cowboy, who could twine his mustache around his ears. A long, drooping mustache, with clean chin and a sombrero hat made a type as distinctive as a clerical collar, a flat felt hat, and Burnsidess made up another. The Van Dyke

betokened the college professor-lecturer, who traveled into the remote provinces and scattered culture, or the physician who spent his **spare** time between calls reading Russian or French novels.

Now there are few beards. Only a few patriarchs cling to the old-time whiskers. At a protracted meeting or Baptist association we sometimes see a few elderly men in the Amen Corner who might have sat for the portraits of one of the major prophets. By watching around courthouses one sometimes discovers that whiskers are not entirely passé. But as an institution<sup>for a way</sup> they are <sup>as</sup> Free Silver hats and fascinators. Judging by the Romans, however, we can expect a return of whiskers, probably not soon but at some future date. The busts of famous Romans that have come down to us show that styles, like Sir Roger de Coverley's coat, come round and round again. Who know ~~but~~ that some beardless youngster who reads this may live to wear a beard that would remind us older ones of Longfellow or Bryant?

## On the Smell of Books

Much has been made of the contents of books, but I cannot recall having ever seen any discussion of their odor. Emerson says something about the odor of good deeds. This is rather far-fetched as a figure of speech, but the smell of books, a sort of distinctive one for every book, is a matter of common experience. You practical-minded ones will hasten to tell me that this odor arises from the kind of ink used, the paper itself, or the musty places where the books have been stored. I suppose you are right, but I just must believe that some of the odor comes from the contents of the book itself. If there is an odor of sanctity, why not an odor of literature, or religion, or even politics(God save the mark!)?

Our old family Bible had an odor all its own. When I used to look at its pictures, which I thought to be photographs, I noticed the odor and/unconsciously associated it with some of the rather lurid pictures of Hell. Even today, when I accidentally encounter a book with a smell like that, I find myself reviewing such scenes as Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, Adam and Eve's flight from Eden, with a very kind-faced angel in pursuit, or of the Last Judgment. This last picture is especially vivid. A rather wily old fellow is inviting a group of people wading a river to come into his den, from which smoke, apparently not from cookery, is issuing. Especially did I associate the smell of that picture with the smell of that smoke. Many times since childhood I have smelled burning flesh, horseflesh, chiefly, and it has always reminded me of that old half-tone plate in the family Bible.

One day our teacher brought to the little country schoolhouse a copy of Shakespeare's complete works. My, how that odor mystified us! I heard the teacher say strange words about somebody named Shylock and somebody else called Hamlet, but I remembered the odor of the book better than the names and still associate Hamlet's spectacular career and Shylock's pound of flesh with that old book and its smell.

In the bureau drawer we kept a package of old letters. Letters used to mean so much more than they do now that families rather prided themselves on the number and the age of the letters on hand. On sacred occasions some of them were brought out and read, painfully, for the writing with a quill pen was probably none too plain at first, and the years had faded the ink, too. What they were about at our house I cannot remember, but I know that there was a smell about these old letters that many years cannot destroy in memory.

Recently I reread my dog-eared copy of Thoreau's Walden, a copy that I owned when I lived in the country near old Fidelity. This experience took me on ~~many~~ an excursion into my boyhood, for the odor that I first detected in the book when it came through the mail is still there. Besides, from numerous trips to the woods with me it had acquired the smell of fallen lea/vs and ferns and moss and spicewood and numerous flowers that were pressed in it. And a lot of invisible things got mixed up with the little old volume, so that a whiff of its distinctive odor brings back trees, landscapes, hills, streams, and all of my boyhood. You probably would say the book smells musty, and you would probably be right; but you do not have my memories.

## The Country Postoffice

Within the last twenty years thousands of country postoffices have been discontinued, and rural mail routes now reach nearly everywhere. Many people old enough to vote have never known the strange thrill of going after the mail; all that is necessary is to walk to the main road and open the mail box. In the days when the mail came only twice or three times a week one really got up a lot of enthusiasm for what might come. Letters were fairly rare, but they were treasured highly, regardless of their contents. Rarely was one destroyed; they were kept and read over and over from time to time. Once a month came a small story magazine, printed away up in Maine, where paper is cheap. We got two such, which would be readily recognizable if I were to name them. I sought the opportunity to go after the mail when one of these was expected, for I would thus get the first chance at the continued stories and want to tell the other less fortunate ones all I had read. Mrs. Wilson's St. Elmo, tearful and melodramatic, ran for twenty-two months in one of these small magazines and always left off each installment at the moment of greatest suspense. We had to wait a whole month before we could sleep well, and then we were left in an equally tearful place in the novel. Thomas Dixon's The Leopard's Spots, that rather moving novel of Reconstruction, is always associated in my mind with a certain gravelly hillside where I was thrown by the old family nag while I was burying my head in the twice-a-week newspaper in which it was appearing. I do not know what the phrenologists would say about it, but a certain place above my right ear is still sensitive to tales of the unpleasant days following the Civil War.



There used to be more importance attached to mailing letters and cards as well as to receiving them. How big a fellow felt when he marched into the general store where the postoffice was housed and bought some stamps or some postal cards! A certain amount of Scotchiness often made us use postal cards, even though we knew the postmaster would read them and also the postmaster at the other end of the line. Thus one always could count on three readers: the person addressed and the two postmasters. That was taken for granted, just as listening in on a conversation on a party line, then and now. When some of us were just about grown, the picture postcard came into style. Then we really were important, for those first cards were of many kinds. Some were in the form of old-fashioned slates, with messages printed poorly, the S's and N's turned around the wrong way. One such card has supplied me with many an illustration for my classes in grammar: The message read: "The more I see some people, the better I like my dog." Picture postcards got to be a means of decoration for the front room, since they were exhibited on racks made for the purpose. This postcard rack vied for years with the stereoscope and its pictures in popularity. When the beau on Sunday afternoon was hard to entertain, he could be shown the cards on the rack, with the privilege of reading their messages. Rarely these days could one be sure that his written words would be read as long after they were written as were these messages on postcards.

To many of us, who get the mail once or oftener a day, the importance of the institution seems much less impressive than it used to. We take it as a matter of course, forgetting how we used to wait breathlessly until the postmaster could sort out the few letters and newspapers.

## Feeling Big

Children of today probably feel as big when they ~~are~~ are allowed to do things slightly above the level of their ages as we used to; the only difference between them and us is that the styles have ~~changed~~, and, consequently, the things that made us feel very much grown up now appear insignificant to our children. When there was a working--barn-raising, wheat-threshing, log-rolling--, we small boys were allowed the great privilege of acting as water boys. Only the man who carried the corner in the barn-raising or cut the bindings in wheat threshing felt bigger than the water boy. Elsewhere I have suggested that a monument of considerable magnitude should be erected to the memory of the water boy of all time, from the building of the Pyramids down. When Father salted the meat after supper on hog-killing days, the small boy was allowed to carry the lantern and hand salt from the barrel. Then when we went across the fields to sit till bedtime, again the boy was given this enviable task of carrying the lantern. The drum major of a college may step higher than we did, but he feels his importance no more. We felt large when we were allowed to collect the eggs, especially if Mother promised us ~~something like~~ candy when the eggs were traded in at the country store. Every boy liked to make up orders, and girls were even more skillful than boys in this time-honored way of selling people something they did not especially want. Father usually had to finish out the order by purchasing the packages that we could not sell. But we got our reward, in the shape of a ring that left a green band around our fingers or a water pistol or some other contraption that worried the family until a few days of use

destroyed the much-sought-after prize.

Work on the farm sometimes brought us our first chance to earn something. I made my first fifteen cents by dropping tobacco plants ~~and~~ felt rich and important. After I got a little larger and dropped plants as a matter of course, without any prospect of immediate reward, somehow the poetry of the task faded. A similar experience came when I took the down row in gathering corn. I have always wondered whether my older brothers really could not hit the wagon with their corn or deliberately threw the ears so I would have to pick them up. Before long the down row became monotonous and even hateful. It came to be the symbol of a small boy. A friend of mine once said that an acquaintance of ours should not have gone to college but should have been kept on the down row at corn-gathering. Since corn can be gathered at only one season, I suppose that the same young man could drop tobacco plants in spring, build smudge fires in summer to keep the gnats off the cows and calves at milking time, and pick up chips for the winter kindling. Distasteful as all these tasks ultimately became, they were very alluring when we first did them.

The element of daring that sometimes entered into feeling big left many a scar, for the small boy was not always able to carry off his plan. Climbing trees against parental advice was fine and daring sport so long as one got back down without any disasters; when a torn shirt or pants or skinned knees revealed the offender, somehow the big feeling got rather small. Similarly, chewing one's first tobacco gave a large feeling that shrank pretty fast after the chew took effect. Maybe life among grown-ups is a sort of daring to do what has never been done the same way before, a grown-up version of feeling big.

## The Blacksmith Shop

As the horse is becoming less and less important, the blacksmith shop, so intimately connected with horses, is becoming rare. There was a time when the shop shared with the general store the honor of being a loafers' joint. Ostensibly the people who gathered at the blacksmith shop had some on business, but one was in no hurry to get his work done and leave the fascinating conversation that was always going on.

The blacksmith shop had its own peculiar odor. The coal used in the forge was a semi-powdered, vile-smelling stuff that made a heavy smoke. Soon the whole building was saturated with this odor and the smell of horses' hoofs. This odor was as distinctive for the shop as was the odor of the smokehouse or the livery stable. No one seemed to mind it and probably was not aware of it.

The blacksmith was a man-of-all-work. His stock in trade was, of course, shoeing horses and welding iron; hence his name. There was still, a generation ago, something of the mediaeval wonder at the blacksmith's art; not every one could weld iron or do the many other skillful things that the blacksmith found a part of the day's work. Most blacksmiths were pretty fair cabinet makers and could repair or even make any of the furniture in the average home. Making V harrows was just an ordinary part of the art of working in iron. Our Fidelity Smith also ran a grist mill on certain days, so that his shop could turn out nearly everything not grown on the farm or bought at the general store.

The small boy who went along with an older brother or his father to the shop was sometimes allowed the privilege of working the bellows. How big he felt as the horseshoe or bit of iron became red and then nearly white with heat, while the flames danced among the cinders! Then the sport continued with the blacksmith's hammering on the hot metal, while the sparks flew in all directions, sometimes falling on bare feet. How the iron sizzled when it was dropped into a tub of water to temper it!

All blacksmiths could "tickle the anvil," that is, add a lot of grace notes by striking the anvil between beats on the iron being hammered. Nothing sounded any more like music of the numerous noises associated with old-fashioned ways of working. If one had not developed this form of skill, he was still regarded as an amateur.

Our blacksmith was a sort of philosopher. I suppose that his daily association with horses and mules gave him a goodly portion of horse sense that we all admire, whether it is borne by man or beast. He had the rare gift of laughter. Many a man would have cursed man and the earth for what he had drawn as his lot in life, but he laughed his weak little giggle and went ahead. When political or religious prejudice got others in a stew, the blacksmith laughed again, often clearing the atmosphere for the rest of us. On Sunday morning at the country church, when some fine point of theology was about to disrupt the community, again he laughed, making some of the brethren feel sheepish for such outbursts of fervor (another name for temper). Who knows but that the philosophy of the toiler at the forge was just what we all needed? For some reason I remember this simple smith and have forgotten many another person who owned more and had more notice.

## The Old Water Mill

In few neighborhoods outside the mountain counties are there left any of the old water mills that used to be found on every stream. I can recall when a single small stream, nothing more than a creek, had three active mills, two of them grinding both wheat and corn and having, in addition to a saw-mill, a cotton gin. One of these old mills is still running, now well over a century old. A treasured memento of old times is its toll cup, worn smooth from long use and bearing a date little later than that of the earliest settlement of the section. By the mountain brooks the mills still stand, and I have seen in recent years the once-familiar sight of people going to mill with turns of corn to be ground into meal.

Going to mill was nearly as great as going to town. One was likely to see fewer people there, but with those few he was thrown intimately for several hours, while his turn and others were going through the mill. The typical turn was a two-bushel sack full of shelled corn, thrown across a horse's back and used for a saddle. After the corn was ground, the sack was still full, even after the miller had taken his toll. Riding home was easier, for a bag of meal is a soft seat. A more pretentious trip to mill was made in the farm wagon, when several neighbors may have had turns to send. With a half dozen sacks of corn to grind, the boy who went to mill could count on being gone all day.

There were many things that one could do at the mill. It was always great sport to watch the miller with his thumb of gold, as Chaucer says, feel the meal as it poured out and adjust

whatever machinery was too loose or too tight, in order that the same quality of meal might be ground. Tiring of this, we could wander over the rambling millhouse and look out on the dam. Under us the wheels were rumbling and the water rushing. Leaves and trash were floating on the mill pond, ready to swish over the fall. Sometimes we were allowed to use the canthook to push over some of the drift and imagine ourselves raftsmen or flatboatmen. When this became common, we could play games of Odd and Even with corn grains or exchange stories with boys from other sections or work practical jokes. When one is very hungry, raw corn meal tastes good; do not try it unless you are literally starving, for it has a flavor much stronger than when it appears in cornbread. By and by the turn is ready, and you ride back on your fat sack of meal, to feast for days on the product of the old water mill.

Every time I get a chance, I buy some water-ground corn meal, partly because I like its coarse, unsifted feeling and partly for old times' sake. The cornbread you and I now eat may have been made from meal ground far away, but in the old days we lived with the corn from the time it was planted in the soil until it was transformed into muffins and hoe cake and corn pone. Biology in our times makes much, and rightly so, of life histories. We who used to go to the old water mill certainly knew the life history of corn, a poetic history that has never been sufficiently written.

## Planting the Garden

An annual event that always brought much joy to the smaller farm children was the planting of the garden. After the boys grew up and could work in the fields, gardening was regarded as sissy. How romantic seemed the very soil as it was turned over after its long winter rest! The plowing, the making of ridges, the opening of the small furrows for the seeds, and the dropping of the seeds themselves became a species of poetry, common but mysterious and mystical. I always liked to observe the various forms and sizes of seeds. It was hard to keep me from opening the packages before planting time, for I was eager to see and feel these potential little bodies that produced accurately "after their kind."

From the earliest planting to the latest several weeks intervened. Lettuce, cabbage, and mustard could be sown on the tobacco plantbed, and peas, potatoes, beets, and radishes could soon follow in the open garden. But tender things like beans had to wait until danger of frost was over. Good Friday was our neighborhood's official day to plant beans. The late summer, after all the spring garden had been used up, was the time to plant mustard, winter and summer turnips, and sometimes other vegetables. One old man of my acquaintance set July 26, rain or shine, for the day to plant turnips.

Poetic as all of this is, there is another side quite as poetic, the folk side. Nearly every vegetable was planted according to some folk rule or custom. Potatoes and root crops should be planted in the dark of the moon; vegetables that grow above the ground are light-of-the-moon plants. Corn, however, grows a stalk according to the time of its planting:



heavy and short if planted in the dark of the moon; slender and tall in the light of the moon. If any one gives you vegetable or flower seeds, do not thank the giver; to do so will prevent the seeds from doing well. When you get ready to plant pepper, be sure to get thoroughly angry if you want the pepper to be hot. (Parenthetically, it was usually easy enough to get up a little temper when the burden of planting the garden fell on the head, or heads, of the household.) It is not advisable to plant watermelons and pumpkins near each other, for the bitter taste of the pumpkins will invade the sweet of the watermelons. Lettuce grown on a plantbed will taste like tobacco. Plenty of it does so, anyway. The odd-shaped grains of corn at the stem end will produce odd grains and should not be allowed in the seed corn. Similarly, the smaller grains at the end of the ear will produce small grains. Only the regular grains in the middle are to be planted.

It would be a great study for some one if he would test all these strange beliefs, some of which are evident superstitions, others with a grain of truth. Good Friday as a time to plant tender things is not so bad, for there is seldom much severe weather after that day. Like signs of rain, all garden signs fail sometimes, but that does not render them invalid to most people. One weather prophet of our time said it never rained at night in July. There is enough truth in this to prevent most people from testing it, for summer rains are usually afternoon showers. However, some of the hardest rains I have ever recorded fell on July nights, even in the neighborhood where the wiseacre lived. Probably the gardeners do not want to be convinced and would rather attribute success or failure to the light or dark of the moon.

Just as pumpkin pie is appropriate to November and plum pudding to Christmas, sassafras tea is the ideal thing for early spring. The earliest visitors to America were struck with the aromatic tree they found growing here and at once believed it endowed with great medicinal virtues. Some of the early explorers carried home a cargo of sassafras. If these people could have come inland a few centuries later, they could have found enough for several cargoes, especially on worn-out hill land where only sassafras and persimmon bushes are hardy enough to grow. Europeans were thus introduced to sassafras, and the tea that we enjoy every spring became well known. Charles Lamb, in his essay "In Praise of Chimney-sweepers," praises highly this beverage, which, he says, is a favorite with the small boys who clean out chimneys. It is effective in washing down the soot they have acquired in their dirty task. However much this beverage may be liked by chimney-sweepers, it is better liked by plain Americans, who annually must go through the process of thinning down their blood after the winter has waned. Burdock bitters will help in this process, but nothing turns the trick like sassafras tea. Coffee is a good beverage and is suited to all seasons, tea is the national drink of Great Britain, but sassafras tea is the brand of the real American. Not to like it subjects one to a strong suspicion of disloyalty to the principles for which our ancestors fought. Some Americans would prefer to replace the red stripes of our flag by stripes colored like sassafras leaves in the fall, a queer blend of pink and orange.

Tea is the poetic side of sassafras; the unpoetic side is sassafras bushes to be cut in the spring before the plowing starts. Look around you today and take note of the great men; nearly every one of them got his start<sup>by</sup> cutting sprouts, persimmon and sassafras sprouts. The skill required and the patience started these eminent men on the way that led to fame. Undoubtedly the fathers of these same boys were greatly surprised when fame arrived, for keeping boys at cutting sprouts is one of the harder tasks of farm life.

There is still another side to sassafras that few people associate with either tea or sprout-cutting. In the fall no bushes have such exquisite colors. Old fields that are too poor to produce crops of value suddenly blossom out in pinks and yellows and oranges that mock the artist's best efforts. Fence-rows are outlined with brilliant bushes. Long ago the sassafras trees have disappeared from most places; now we associate the name only with bushes along the fences and out in the upland fields. No color of autumn is more distinctive than that of sassafras leaves; no flavor is more distinctive in spring than the aromatic sassafras tea. Just why the bush and its various virtues have never found their way into poetry is a puzzle to me.

## Old-Fashioned Fathers

It is easy to place a halo around the heads of the fathers of yesterday, particularly after we have forgotten or forgiven their faults. When we stop to think the matter over, we must recognize that the old-fashioned father suited his own time and place but would be an anachronism in our own time.

We of my generation grew up under the shadow and the light of the Civil War. Most of the fathers had been in the army or had helped on the farm while older brothers and even fathers marched away to the battlefields. The thrill of the war lasted down until 1900 at least. Ulysses and his men who strove with gods could hardly have felt any greater pride in their achievements than did these ex-soldiers or these younger brothers of men who laid down their lives for what they believed to be right. The military organization of the army was transferred to the family: the boys came or went at the fathers' commands, like the servants of the great man in the Bible. One did not ask or probably wonder why. Again like some one in the Bible, the fathers of yesterday did not spare the rod.

The old-fashioned father, in spite of his limited education, had plenty to talk about. Politics formed a large part of every conversation when visitors came. The stirring times of Reconstruction made every one alive to political events. Then there was always the subject of religion to discuss, not that any one might be convinced, but to enliven things. My own father was a Presbyterian and could be rather neutral in our neighborhood, where everybody else belonged to the Methodist, the Baptist, or the Christian church. When politics or religion stirred up too much feeling, he could always start

the conversation in the direction of the Civil War, a topic on which all the neighbors agreed. Pioneering was just behind us all, and stories of adventures in the woods or on the river were always in place, regardless of the number of times we had heard them before.

The fathers of a generation ago had not been bitten by the bug of civic improvement. The old schoolhouse was no better when I left home at eighteen than it was when I could first remember. In fact, it was not nearly so good, for no paint had ever been used on it, and a generation of use had tarnished the old structure somewhat. The old church organ was a new thing, that is, until it developed quinsy and other diseases from sitting in the damp little church down in the creek bottom. Most fathers believed that their first duty was to their families. When bread and meat was supplied for the large family, and a horse, bridle, and saddle furnished each boy when he was twenty-one, the father felt he had done well; and he had. He thought that if each father of a family would do equally well, the world would get along all right, without any neighborhood efforts to improve society.

The doctrine of work was a little overdone. The equally desirable doctrine of play was slighted. Recreation was looked upon as almost sacrilegious. From early morning until very late at night we toiled at something, slipping in some play in the form of neighborhood workings, such as barn-raising, log-rollings, corn-shuckings, and quiltings. We played sometimes but felt that we were doing something unholy.

All of this sounds and is far away from our times. The small country neighborhood is today linked with the ends of the earth, and the father of today must be a citizen in a world infinitely larger than the old-fashioned father ever dreamed of.

## Saint Russell Barlow

In the Middle Ages nearly every activity had its special saint. There was a saint of hospitality--St. Julien--, and there were saints for every kind of learning--St. Catherine for grown-ups and St. Nicholas for children, whence Santa Claus. And there were saints for travel, and certain farm activities, and so on and on. But there was no saint, so far as I know, for idlers. I wish to propose the name of Saint Russell Barlow for this position in the canon of saints. I do not know when or where he lived; he probably had a mysterious life. Anyway, he devised a knife, handy and cheap. Apparently he wanted to confer some benefit upon his fellow-men and thus devised an instrument that was effective but not fancy, capable of indefinite use in whittling.

A Russell Barlow knife can be used for all sorts of things. On the farm it is in constant use, for everything needs mending at some time. A Barlow knife can open cans or pare nails or cut leather or wood. It is the most useful instrument one could own. But it is not the practical uses of the knife that one thinks of when he hears the name of Russell Barlow. The special province of the knife is whittling. Since the loafers' joint is the best place for whittling, the knife does its best work there. Just what whittlers ever made with their knives I have never known. It would be sacrilegious to ask them what purpose they have in reducing packing boxes to shavings. Whittling, like fishing, is an end in itself, art for art's sake. Skill as such is not required. Probably the good saint made the knife to give the loafers something to do

while they listened for the fiftieth time to some remarkable yarn about the Civil War or about pioneer days. To require any evidence of one's skill in whittling would be unkind to the men <sup>have</sup> who earned a few hours of leisure and wish to use it in artistic efforts.

I have been trying to think of a suitable memorial to the saint of whittlers. A bas-relief showing the devotees at their worship at the loafers' joint would be appropriate, if any one could be found who could carve so skillfully. Maybe a goods-box should be used for the pedestal on which to erect a statue of some sort. A pile of miscellaneous shavings might be worked in artistically. But no monument in wood or marble or bronze would do the saint justice. A memorial of real value would include a speaking part, the drawl of the yarn-spinner, and would be flavored with the odor of tobacco. No materials can be discovered that would show all of this. I suppose that I will have to leave the type of memorial to some more fertile brain; it is enough for me to propose the canonization of this long-neglected saint.

The purpose of this article, be it said honestly, is to make your mouth water when you remember the things you used to eat. Few poets have sung of the things we old-timers liked. Poets are a bit snooty, anyway, and are afraid to talk about eating except when dainty foods are served. Now very few of us are artistic, and least of all in eating. What we liked, and enjoy remembering with watery mouths, may not have rivalled the celestial ambrosia and nectar celebrated by the ancient poets; but we would not trade our memories for any amount of etherial stuff like ambrosia and nectar.

Since we were taught, even on the farm in the old days, to eat in courses, I must begin with the meat course. Now, 'possum-and-'taters would be a good starter. Real 'possum, real gravy, real 'taters! Unless you have a cast-iron digestive system, you had better take warning from me and go slow until you get adjusted to this rather solid diet. But when you can take it, yum-yum! Now 'taters are good enough alone, especially those cooked in ovens with coals of fire above and below. Hog's jowl and turnip greens form a reasonable substitute for 'possum-and-'taters if you must give up your first choice. Specify plain corn hoeecake or cone pone. A cup or bowl of potlicker would do no harm as a side dish. Crumble your plain cornbread into the soup and eat in any manner approved in your community. Some home-made lye-hominy would help along.

All this first course is to fill; the real meal for a boy begins with the sweets. All boys have a sensitive tooth for sweets. Sweet muffins, fried pies, gingerbread, teacakes, green-apple pies, friedocakes (we never called them doughnuts)--why can't a fellow get enough of these. Even in



memory my mouth waters frightfully, almost enough to warrant a bib such as those we used to wear. On my birthday I always wanted sweet muffins; I usually got them, or as much of my share as I could get before my older brother started on them. After school it was great to stop that mid-afternoon starvation feeling by eating three or four fried-apple pies. Gingerbread, cut into long strips and cooked as gingercakes, was my favorite kind. If and when there was cider, how the two blended! Cider and gingerbread! Blessed pair, ranking with turkey and cranberries, ham and eggs, liver and onions!

The old standby for afternoon lunches was jam. We had a supply, if I remember correctly, that somehow lasted from season. Cold biscuits and blackberry jam may not sound palatable to highly aesthetic ones, but if you have lived on the farm in other days and come home from school starved to death, you know why jam and bread even now can stir memories.

A sweet tooth was often satisfied with molasses candy. Just how to make it so it will have the proper hardness is a secret I never acquired, partly because I always ate my candy up before I got through pulling it. But I have eaten it when a professional candy-maker would ~~have~~ had nothing to add to its goodness. Popcorn balls made with molasses candy can also remove starvation a few more paces.

These are some of the things that still taste good, after all the years. How coarse they must seem to some people, but how exquisite to those of us who grew up when food was to fill up and satisfy!

## Folk Types--The Indian

We sometimes think that the Indian did not become prominent in literature and tradition until he was a vanishing remnant of a former grandeur. In reality he was idealized in the eighteenth century quite as much in America as in far-away Europe, where there was no danger of scalping and captivity. One of the oddities of our American literature is a play called Ponteach, written by Major Robert Rogers in 1766, the year after he had helped crush the conspiracy of this valiant Indian chieftain of the West. No later writer has made more of the noble savage than this hardened Indian fighter. The whites of the play are deceitful, overbearing, and worthy of the contempt felt for them by the savage chief. Before the Revolutionary War Philip Freneau was singing the praises of the Indian, in such poems as "The Indian Burying-Ground," "The Indian Student," and "The Dying Indian." Just at the turn of the nineteenth century Alexander Wilson, a Scotch weaver who had come to America, found the vanishing red man very poetical, especially the Indians of New York State, who were at that time being forced from their ancient hunting grounds. More than a generation before Cooper was singing the praises of the Indian in this very area Wilson was writing rather creditable verse about the native warrior who reluctantly was leaving the places where he and his ancestors had lived for unnumbered centuries. Bryant, Whittier, Cooper, Simms, Bird, and Thoreau are only a few of the writers who found the Indian a great literary figure a century or more ago. The culmination of this whole tradition was the writing of Longfellow's Hiawatha, which is itself a versification of

legends and traditions collected by Schoolcraft among the Ojibways of the Lake Superior region. Cooper has often been accused of making his Indians too noble, a criticism that certainly would not apply to the Indians of Simms and Bird. In the novels of these two men the American savage is a brute, with few if any good qualities. Without doubt each of these had determined to modify the entrancing picture of the savage as Cooper had painted it.

In more recent years there has been a determined effort on the part of scholars to record faithfully the actual achievements of the Indian. Indian music has come to have a real value, and such musicians as Lieurance have done much to make everybody appreciate the haunting melodies of the natives of America. Folklorists have been equally busy in taking down the stories the Indians have told for ages. Some of the scholars in this field have had Indians tell the stories in their native language and have recorded them in a written code or even had them reproduced on a victrola. Indian basketry, pottery-making, and other arts are gradually becoming known everywhere. Though our real knowledge of the Indian is late in developing, it is sure to influence many of our artistic creations in future years. The folk conception of the Indian for a long time blinded us to actual values.

Mammy as an institution is rapidly passing, especially in the border states, though she still is fairly well known in the Far South. Probably few of this generation know her as she used to be. The modern colored maid sometimes takes her place in some ways, but she is not Mammy. Mammy felt herself a part of the family, after the Civil War as well as before. Her young charges were reared according to the traditions of the Big House and also according to Mammy's own rigid ideas of what is right and wrong. She never thought that white and black children should be reared alike; black was black and white was white to Mammy. The only compromise between the two was "pore white trash." Somehow Mammy seems to have always been plump, with beaming face and white teeth. Her voice was one of her most valuable characteristics: she could be heard, and she knew it. Her frankness and freedom of speech resembled those of an ancient court fool. Many a time her remarks must have cut pretty deeply, but it would have violated a tradition to condemn her for frankness. She knew quality when she saw it and tried to enforce an appreciation of quality on her charges. Mammy herself was known among her own people for the quality of the people she served rather than for any personal <sup>goodness.</sup> ~~quality.~~ No real Mammy ever forgot the famous people she had raised and "nussed." Regardless of the actual <sup>value</sup> ~~ity~~ of her white folks, she could prove to all comers that her people were the best. Otherwise she would not have been their servant. No, suh!

Just how much authority Mammy had I do not know; it was probably considerably less than she pretended it was. Her big voice and her husky frame enforced more authority than

she had. She was a creature of dignity, especially in the presence of the white folks or of her own race who were not so highly favored by being trusted with the white folks' children. She gave the appearance of knowing a great deal more than she would like to tell, a characteristic that was sure to impress her own race. Mammy was a great moralist, in spite of her own shortcomings. She upheld the rigid standards of her church and was fairly bristling with platitudes on all occasions. Not being very scientific-minded, she did not check over her previous pronouncements to see whether she was consistent. Mammy could sing, and did sing, the old melodious songs that she and her ancestors had learned from generations of masters, with added touches of African melody. If she did not know enough words for her songs, she could improvise as well as a poet and make her words fit the tune she was singing. More than the other Negroes she represented the ancient traditions. She knew all sorts of stories, she never lacked for picturesque figures of speech, she always had a grace of language. Biblical words flowed from her mouth, often pretty badly scrambled, but genuine in their sound. And Mammy has found a place in song and story, a place she deserves. She varied greatly in different parts of the South, but there were many similarities in the Mammies of all states and areas. Whatever her own ideas were, she hid them completely in the tradition that made her a trusted servant, a member of the inner circle, <sup>worthy</sup> ~~a source~~ of genuine respect.

Nothing has changed more in our lifetime than dolls. The rag doll, still found, does not have the importance it formerly had. It used to be the badge of the very small child, boy or girl. Frequently it was nearly as large as the little toddler who dragged it around all day and took it to bed with him at night. From rather rough treatment it soon became a sorry-looking spectacle, with grease and dirt all over it. One little girl that I knew fed her doll a sausage, leaving ever afterward <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ round, greasy smear the shape of the sausage. The china-headed dolls we used to play with were made by people who apparently knew nothing about anatomy, for they were exceedingly slender and shapeless. I strongly suspect the same people as the authors of the slatty figures in most fashion plates. The bodies of these dolls were stuffed with sawdust; hence the modest expression about having a pain in one's sandust after a heavy Christmas dinner. Too rough treatment often destroyed the shapeliness, such as it was, of these dolls, for the sawdust boozed away and could never be replaced very skillfully. We dressed our dolls as children still do, with plenty of interest but with very little skill. I once owned a doll that I dressed as a boy, though it had the same inane expression of sexlessness that other dolls had, a blank stare that may have betokened more sense than that of the human beings that devised it. Sometimes there were dolls that were slightly different and much more expensive, dolls that older sisters or mothers had dressed up in clothes of another day and generation. These were lovingly kept hidden in a trunk or a chest of drawers, sacred relics of other days. Queer old buttons, odd styles of dresses and coats,

even queerer shoes--all these made the old-fashioned doll a source of wonder to younger brothers and sisters who could not recall the days when these same things were the latest style for Big Sister or Mother.

Changes have come rapidly in the styles of dolls and other toys. I suspect that the teddy bear has done more than any other toy to bring about this change. A great toy manufacturer told me that his company would make only a few of any type of toy at first and then try them out on children. If a majority of the little fellows took them to bed at night, similar toys would be run off by the millions. This same man said that his company had made several millions of the ricker that clicks a string, the most consistently popular single toy ever made.

I suppose that my old likes and dislikes are unchangeable, but many of the modern toys seem hideously ugly and unnecessarily so. Some of the toys are beautiful and artistic, but why should there be also those ugly, nightmarish things that one would hate to meet in the dark woods at twilight? I see no reason why babies should be forced to live among ugly things when beauty is everywhere about us and, as you would expect me as a Scotchman to say, equally cheap. The most exquisite trains and cars and dolls are exhibited on the same counter with other things that look like the dreams of a victim of delirium tremens. Baby dolls, pretty as pictures, are often side by side with others that look like patients that had escaped from the psychopathic ward. Our old toys were not so pretty and may have been dumb-looking, but at least they were not deliberately made hideous.

It is interesting to probe around in beds of ashes and dust left by a former race, to pick up as if it had just dropped, some spearhead or arrowhead, fashioned by an unknown Indian brave. Archaeology has a fascination for all sorts of people, professional or amateur. Right in our midst, chiefly unregarded because it is common, is an archaeology that is equally interesting. It is not regarded as true archaeology, since it is still partially alive, but hardly a generation hence it will assume an importance equal to that of any other time and place. All archaeology was once living, present reality. The Indian or the cave man who cooked his shellfish or his deer or ground his corn was no more conscious of being queer than you and I are. What he did was traditional, already approved by his immediate ancestors, who had taught him what he knew, practically all that was common knowledge in the tribe. He hunted or fished or trapped or cultivated plants in the accepted fashion. Certain things were holy, others were tabu, still others were neutral. Gradually the primitive man built up his customs, customs that meant more to him than anything can mean to you or me. There was a sense of finality about the things that were or were not allowed. Without knowing it, he saw many of his ways of doing things replaced by other customs that were unfamiliar or repulsive. Into the midst of the Indian's age-old customs came the European, with his different traditions, more dominant and persistent. Almost from the first there was a struggle between the two, with the conclusion always easily foreseen. Sheer numbers and greater adaptability foreordained the whites to ultimate victory. However comfortable we may now feel about this epic struggle, the actual working out of the



conquest of one type of civilization by another was *stragic* and bloody. Whenever I see a sad-faced Indian looking away across his tribes' limited lands, I cannot help wondering at the ruthlessness of any system of living, even one that promises a higher type of civilization.

We are so intent on believing that our way is the right way that we fail to see the pathos in the passing of institutions right in our own time. Those who are in style feel so superior to those who are behind that it takes many a year to evaluate anything that is not up-to-date. Within our own lifetimes we have readjusted ourselves several times to changes, probably feeling each time that the world was better, though it may have been only different. Thirty years ago it was evident that many things that had lasted for generations were on the verge of change. New methods had come, the railroads had penetrated nearly every part of the country, a fairly good standard of education was being demanded, newspapers were finding their way into even remote places, foods and clothing were rapidly becoming standardized. Thirty years is a brief time as humanity reckons time, but so many things have changed that even in that time living people are literally artifacts of another time and place. To many of the younger generation these old-timers are as queer as any spearheads or arrowheads dug up in the ashes around old campfires. Before these living specimens of archaeology entirely disappear, it is the province of scholars and antiquarians to put into some permanent record the stamp and image of the past, not that these old customs may be revived or kept from dying but that those who come after us can know accurately what we have been like.

A few days ago I read in a county paper a letter from a former Kentuckian who had returned for a visit after an absence of forty or more years. Rather oddly, the very place he had visited here was my own Fidelity, now long known by another name. He reviewed the former grandeur of the little village, mentioned many people whom I knew or had heard of, and set my mind awork with memories that should have died a natural death with the nineteenth century. Since Fidelity was a typical village a generation or two ago, a few words about it might not interfere with your own memories of places equally large and equally important.

It was a self-sufficient place, with everything from a flour and grist mill to a wagon factory. The nearest railroad until I was a good-sized boy was twenty-five miles away. People had never known the so-called modern conveniences. They raised what they needed or did without, a fine old pioneer way of doing things. Every spring branch was a potential source for power for a sawmill or grist mill; it was not far away to a carding mill, where the wool from our own sheep was made into rolls for spinning; even a tobacco factory grew up on a large plantation to give employment to Marse Peter's slaves and their descendants in the winter months when farm work was slack. The county seat was a necessary evil, but not very necessary; paying taxes, serving on a jury, and buying a few things, spring and fall, that the village stores did not keep about constituted its importance as a center of population.

Then the railroad came. Our little Fidelity, like most of the places missed by the railroad, began to dwindle. "Fetched-on" wagons took the place of those laboriously made in the shop; flour could be bought in barrels from elsewhere; even the tobacco factory moved to the county seat, to be nearer the railroad. But on its gullied hills the little village remained, growing a bit shabbier year by year, but still interested in the big world that had run away and left it. Now it is connected with the world by a modern state highway, it has a good four-year high school, some of its downhill tendency has been stopped, but it <sup>is</sup> really a ghost of what it was forty years ago, when memories were still vivid of the Civil War and the passing of soldiers through its one street, if the road could be worthy of such a name. Something it had, however, that time cannot kill, a vigor that crops up in all of its children, wherever they go. None ask other than a reasonable chance for themselves; they are able and willing to take care of themselves. Fidelity folks, no matter where they now live, will admit that the soil is of the very poorest, that there is nothing fine about the community in agriculture or wealth or other showy things. But every one of them will tell, even at the expense of being boresome, how some mighty fine people have originated among the hills and hollows around the village. Remote relatives who have visited in the village have caught some of the same loyalty; some rather good poems have been written about the hills there. And not a person from old Fidelity ever is ashamed of his origin; he never says he is from the county seat if his home was really in the hills ten miles away. Here I am, more than thirty years away, boasting of the seedy little place, glad to call it and its surroundings mine. And every other native son of Fidelity is just as foolish as I am.



## How Do Institutions Start? 41

All of us are aware of the passing of institutions, but an equally interesting study would concern itself with the origins of institutions. Just why do certain things become the rule, and others equally interesting fail to materialize? So old is humanity and so lost in pre-history are the origins of many of our customs that it is nearly impossible to recreate the actual conditions that went into the making of traditions. For example, how did language start, or, more specifically, how did a ~~specific~~ given language become differentiated from its nearest relatives? We have plenty of data to show how such kindred languages as French and Spanish gradually developed from the parent Latin, but the Latin itself was originally a part of some other language stock and became different through many decades or centuries. When one thinks of this, he finds himself as puzzled as when he tries to trace his family line back a thousand years. Pretty soon he discovers himself kin to more people than there were in the world at the time, at least, theoretically. Try to think of a time when humanity had no domesticated animals, no cultivated plants. Even the turkey, formerly regarded as the last fowl to be domesticated, is now known to have been tamed by the Indians long before the coming of Europeans. Similarly, no great food crop has been developed within historical times. Many related plants have long been known in their wild state, but even scientists have not been able to bridge the gap between the wild and the cultivated in their experiments. Teosinte, the nearest relative of Indian corn, is still teosinte, and Indian corn shows little tendency to return to its wild state, though a few plants in every field may show some signs of their wild origin.

Customs are shrouded in even greater mystery. How did cookery begin? How did the race learn that certain things were good food, and others were not? How did the idea of monogamy develop? Some theorists would argue that our development has followed the lines of least resistance, but any fair-minded study of customs would soon prove this theory false. Taboos, known and practiced among all sorts of people, nearly always impose definite hardships. Very seldom is the right way in any code of conduct the easiest way. The farther back one goes in language, the more complicated it is found to be. In like manner there is greater complexity in the customs of savages than in those of the highly civilized.

When the horse-drawn vehicle finally yields to the motor car, all of us will feel that a great era has been closed; but the motor car is only a further adaptation of the wheel. Who invented the wheel? Radio uses the air waves, but they have always been there and have been used crudely in other times. Electricity is our servant and is all about us, but the remotest savage came under the spell of lightning and knew as much about it as we. Inventors, after all, are mere adapters of ideas long known by humanity but inadequately used.

We laugh at rigmaroles that children and primitive people know and use, but our simplest ideas and statements have usually evolved from just such conglomerations. Simplicity of speech, of manners, of religion, of political organization, of social life has come laboriously and was preceded by ~~a~~ more complex methods.

## Afraid of the Dark --I

With electric lights nearly everywhere and with automobile lights flashing even on remote country roads, the nights are not so dark as they used to be, and not half so scary. The fear of the dark itself may some day become a lost institution. I wonder whether the younger generations fully realize the fears of other days, when night was a terror to small children and to many grown people. I cannot confess that I was especially afraid of dogs or snakes or Gypsies, but I was mortally afraid of invisible things, such as spooks, or "haints," and ghosts. The stories that were a part of our childhood when people came in to sit till bedtime increased rather than diminished our fear of the dark. Just how much the story-tellers believed the strange yarns they spun I have no way of knowing, but I have always suspected that they made good time going home after some of the hair-raisers were told. The children, I distinctly remember, while trying to regard the whole crop of yarns as just "play-like," were afraid to move afterwards. On hot nights, after such an orgy of story-telling, we would cover up, head and ears, with a jeans quilt, if such were available, to shield ourselves from things that might devour us or swallow us whole. We fairly died of thirst, that great enemy of childhood, rather than go to the water bucket for a drink; we felt too old to ask Mammy to get it for us. But along with our own fears we had a persistent desire to scare others, either with stories or with practical jokes.

The most common device for scaring the weak of heart was known locally as a "tick-tack" or a "dumb-bull."



A five-gallon lard can, a string, and some rosin were the materials used to construct this engine of terror. A hole was made in the bottom of the lard can, a string inserted, a fish-hook fastened to the other end to hook to a window casing or the corner of the house, and the lump of rosin was rubbed along the string. This produced a noise that would wake the dead. Another device that I have known was a thinly-whittled paddle of wood fastened to a string and whirled rapidly. A neighborhood that I knew of was fairly scared to death by this contraption by some boys who had previously scattered the news that a wolf had been seen in the woods. As wolves were actually still seen in certain parts of the state at that time, the trick was a clever one. Dogs were frightened as much as people and refused to follow the strange brute when it howled in the cornfields.

Haunted houses excited fear, but every neighborhood had some dare-devil who secreted himself in suspected houses and helped carry out the neighborhood tradition. Those who were in on the trick got too much fun out of it to reveal the secret; the others indulged in the most primitive types of fear, probably not even daring to find out the truth. Graveyards were places to test out people's bravery. All sorts of foolish things were resorted to: bringing a clod of dirt from a new grave, plucking a flower from some well-known grave, or sleeping on a grave to win a wager. These neighborhood fun-makings are probably still going on, but with matches and flashlights and car lights. they must not seem half so scary as they used to.

## Afraid of the Dark--II

If darkness itself is no longer scary, I wonder what about noises of the night. Sounds are so much more obvious at night that many superstitions and fears have grown up around them. Owls hooting have frightened many a weak-nerved person, especially screech owls, with their quevering, whining, despairing notes. It used to be the custom to burn an old shoe to run away such purveyors of gloom. I do not know whether owls have a keen sense of smell or not; if they do, the old shoes are very effective. Larger owls are seldom associated with bad luck except the barred owl when he gives his almost human shriek. Bad luck, even death in the family, is portended by owls. Probably no sound carries farther and sets more nerves tingling than the howling of dogs. It has been believed in all ages that dogs could see and hear things that our coarser ears and eyes could not take in. Hence it is feared that dogs sense the presence of invisible things, especially evil spirits. Aside from any superstitious fear associated with it, the howling of dogs awakes in many of us a primitive feeling that allies us with the most ancient of days. Some people I knew would scold the dogs when they began to howl and would thus force them into silence; others feared to disturb them, and let them howl on.

Indoors there are sounds that have made many a head of hair stand on end. Certain beetles in the walls have acquired the very unjust name of "death-watches" because of their clicking sounds. On cold nights the furniture and the walls themselves pop and crack, making many a child and superstitious grown-up fear that spirits are walking abroad. The fire often makes a sound that is usually



interpreted as treading or "tramping" snow. Some fearful ones read this as a bad omen, connected with sickness and death rather than snow. Flying squirrels can create a weird impression when they scamper around in the "loft" and suddenly reappear in another place, as if they, too, were spirits. Squeaking mice, out for a bit of food, have many times frightened people who in daylight could have faced a panther.

In the night we seem to lose much of the fine bravery that civilization has built up. We revert to the days when primitive man feared, and rightly so, the woodland inhabitants that might devour him in the darkness. In spite of our increasing knowledge of our surroundings, we still shiver at sounds that ought to be enjoyed or ignored.

## Going in a-Washing

Bathing, always a painful ordeal for boys in winter, used to be pure joy in summer, for it could be combined with fun. Other parts of the world may call a hole in the creek a swimming hole, but our name for it was washing hole. Swimming was necessarily a part of the Saturday-afternoon dip (in the creek. An astonishingly large number of the boys I knew never~~y~~ learned how to swim, even dog fashion. Besides, swimming was often regarded as a waste of time; that may have accounted for our insisting on the practical nature of a washing hole.

On Saturday afternoon we took a bundle of clothes and some Big Deal soap and headed for the creek. Undressing was easy, for two garments made up all we wore in hot weather. Some of the boys would be undressed by the time we got to the creek, having learned how to undress and run at the same time. The more daring ones jumped right into the cold pool, making the rest of us envious but not enough so to imitate them. Since our creek was fed by springs, it took more than an average amount of nerve for us to plunge in at once. The timid ones waded in by degrees until they felt they could stand the cold water. Sometimes it became necessary to back out and chase up and down the sandbars to get up circulation. Rolling in the sand or rubbing it on the body often brought back some needed warmth. Meanwhile the brave boys called us all the ugly names they could think of, trying to goad us into leaping into the pool.

Even the few who could swim were not at all

expert. Dog fashion was the approved style. Some of the big boys would stir up so much water that we smaller ones called them steamboats. It seems strange to me yet to see people swimming without kicking their feet so noisily. Only a few could dive, and they did it with much puffing and blowing. Those were the ones who were most envied, for the rest of us were too cowardly to try it. Sometimes we scooted down a muddy bank and got even dirtier than we were when we came to the pool.

In order to make it appear that we were practical minded, we sometimes drove the old nags to the family buggy and gave both of them a bath. Having to wash the buggy gave us a longer time to paddle around in the water. If we could get the horse to lie down in the creek, we were all the happier. You see, washing, or taking a weekly bath, was a solemn duty; swimming was merely play and was therefore wrong. Some of the bad boys of the neighborhood slipped away on Sunday and played in the washing hole. We always feared for them, but somehow I cannot recall that any of them ever drowned or broke their necks. A few of the good little boys, good because they feared parental chastisement, would hang around the pool and long to join their comrades. One such boy that I knew tried to walk a log across the washing hole. The log broke and dumped him into water over his head. The wicked boys got him out, but his Sunday clothes were never quite the same afterwards. His father for once did not apply the lash; probably he thought the boy's pride had suffered a plenty. When I think of the daring little rascals who used to lie in the creek until they were as brown as ginger cakes, I wonder why they could not have been born a generation later, when bathing is just the thing.



## Shave and a Haircut, Shampoo

Barber shops and beauty parlors are now in every town, so many of them that everybody has a chance to get prettied up. But it used to be otherwise. Ready money for such things was not to be found. When we were little, our mothers or big sisters put an apron over our laps and sheared us, maybe not very artistically but sufficiently, anyway. At first we felt rather big, for very little children, boys and girls alike, did not have their hair cut. Boys wore long hair until they were nearly big enough to start to school, and I remember one boy in school with his hair in plaits. After a fellow got big enough to have suggestions of a change of voice, he resented being shorn by the homefolks. Nearly every neighborhood had a boy or man who gave his services free to help heads look less like bushel baskets. To him we all resorted on Saturday afternoons, just before we started to the creek for our weekly bath. His scissors may not have been very sharp, he may not have been very artistic as a hair-cutter, but we always felt that we had grown up a bit when we could use his services. If he clipped a few places on our ears or neck, that advertised to all comers that we had been through the ordeal and were entitled to respect. In general the events of English novels seem strange to me, but when Thomas Hardy, in *THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE*, mentions how the neighborhood boys and men got their haircuts and were bloody around the ears, I feel that he and I could have soon struck up an acquaintance.

In general the neck was left unshaven when the hair was cut. Some people then and now feared that shaving

rather than clipping would make the neck hair grow coarse and abundant, as if a hair could tell whether it was cut with shears or a razor. Nearly every year or so there would come a craze for clipped or shaved heads. Most of the boys who submitted to this ordeal wanted to hide out for a week or two afterwards, however funny it may have seemed at the time. Once and only once I had my hair clipped. The (result was not very pleasing. The next Sunday I came into Sunday School late and sheepishly. The choir had already gathered around the new organ and started a hymn. A solemn hush fell on the whole congregation, followed by what was, in spite of efforts to stifle it, unmistakable laughter, and in church, too. It was a wonder I was not fined for disturbing public worship.

The neighborhood barber often had to trim beards, too. Nearly everybody shaved his temples during the hot months but allowed the stubble to grow out during the winter. There was a great deal to do to get this winter growth out of the way. Mustaches were seldom trimmed; the more walrus-like they were, the better.

Of course no barber, local or otherwise, did a shampoo for you. The tin washpan or the creek was good enough for that. Plain creek water and Big Deal soap can raise enough soapsuds to cleanse anybody's head.

There was something about haircutting that was so eminently masculine that women were not welcome when the community barber was doing his work. Victorianism forbade that. It was well enough for the grown women to cut the hair of little boys, but that was as far as propriety could go. What would those old-fashioned ones say now if they could see our barber shops and beauty parlors?

## Folk Documents

Frequently some of the indulgent readers of this column ask me how I get <sup>the</sup> data for my tidbits of folklore. My reply has always been that I lived through the time when these things were going on. Recently I have been rereading some old diaries of mine that ought to convince even the most skeptical that these experiences are not second-hand. Here are a few extracts from my diaries for the first four months of 1906, just 32 years ago. Put them together in your own way and draw your own conclusions.

January 23--"I whittled out a lot of hickory bark today for toothbrushes."

Toothbrushes, other than those made of blackgum or hickory, were scarce a third of a century ago. A hickory bark toothbrush was a very select present for a young blade to give his lady love.

January 26--"I received my January COMFORT today."

COMFORT was a small <sup>monthly</sup> magazine, published in Augusta, Maine, that many rural people read in those days. It was in it or THE AMERICAN WOMAN, I cannot recall which, that we read ST. ELMO, in twenty-two monthly installments, waiting breathlessly from issue to issue. Others read the same thing, I am sure, as nearly every year I enroll some one named for the heroine, Edna Earle.

January 30--"This eve we cut and hauled five white oak and two chestnut telephone poles which are to be used on our new line."

~~That~~ <sup>line</sup> telephone was the first one in our neighborhood, the one I have referred to as uniting sections that had <sup>been</sup> formerly separated by creek bottoms and hills. "Eve,"



of course, is poetic for evening, the time after noon.

February 7--"According to ancient weather signs there will <sup>more</sup> be snow, two frosts having fallen on this one and the fire keeps an almost continual noise like one treading on snow."

How seriously I believed this is now impossible to prove. The entries in the next several days fail to show any additional snow.

February 8--"This morning I bottomed a chair with white oak splits, my first work of this kind."

I am sure that my first effort was no worse than many another first effort. Anyway, I learned how this work is done and acquired a respect for those who can do it skillfully.

March 20--"This evening I attended three trials in Magistrate's Court. The offense was running horse on public highway."

Talk about being born thirty years too soon! I had seen one of the rash offenders of the majesty of the law, but I was too far away in the fields to make a competent witness. A further reading showed that ~~the~~ one <sup>was</sup> proved guilty ~~was~~ <sup>and</sup> fined \$10 and costs, the other two acquitted.

April 14--"This eve I went to a log-rolling down in the bottom on \_\_\_\_\_'s land. There were some fifteen hands, and we rolled until 5:30 P. M."

I note that I attended two other log-rollings within two weeks. I could repeat some of the stories I heard on these occasions, but I do not want to antagonize the censor.

And so I could go on for weeks. These small items were set down as the most natural things in the world; now they have begun to have some historical and folk value.

## A Village Wag

Every village has its humorist, and Fidelity was no exception to this rule. Our wag was a tenant on one of the larger farms in the bottom, but he lived in a small, new house, about the only new thing in Fidelity, down by the graveyard. He was not a native, that is, he was not born in the community but had come from some six or seven miles away and thus had the aloofness that every great critic of society is supposed to have. He also had the advantage of being fully grown and married before he moved into Fidelity; thus he did not grow up with reverence for any of our local idols. Every community needs at least one person who neither knows nor cares for the amenities, so far as the rigid rules of society are concerned.

Things that struck us as a matter of course rarely so impressed our village wag. Even a funeral had its comic side to him. He was a born mimic and could set us all laughing by his antics, though he seldom so much as smiled. He had no vested interests to protect and could have his say about everything. When he made his remarks, often a whole situation was clarified for us all. None of the wiser ones could possibly put us right in some of the predicaments that he would settle with a single incisive, though not quotable, comment. He looked upon the world from his tenant's house and found it interesting but funny. There was no malice in what he had to say, even though there was little reverence; he just saw without prejudice.



Shan and pretense fell before him, not because he was a norralist; he would not have known the word if he had heard it; his education was exceedingly limited, though he could spell out the items in the county paper. When others felt that the world was in a bad way, just after election or during a drouth, he would take a fresh chew of tobacco and fling out some childish but profound comment that would make us wonder why somebody with more sense and more prominence had not said it. He was one of nature's naturals, to <sup>misinterpret</sup> ~~misinterpret~~ Shakespeare rather slightly. That did violence to his native fitness of things deserved a comic remark. The neighbors knew that he was just a tenant, just a country ignoramus; but they quoted with glee his fat remarks and passed them on to relatives and friends in other neighborhoods. If he said that Fidelity kept sun time rather than railroad time because it was nearer the sun, everybody thought that just pictured the little God-forsaken village away out in the hills. And here I am, a generation away from Fidelity, laughing at his artless wisdom, when I have forgotten some of the wiser things uttered by people of more importance.

## Cutting down Clothes

If you have worn the made-over clothing of your parents or of older brothers and sisters, you will understand the title of this article. If you were an older child or else lived in more modern times, you may not know enough to sympathize with us younger brothers and sisters. We youngsters of a generation ago felt, quite often, our greatest humiliation when we appeared in public clad entirely in well-recognizable garments, in spite of their having been cut down to fit us. Worse still, we often had to wear cast-off clothing just as it was, regardless of our size or shape. As I am very short of legs, I have had to suffer agonies by wearing pants that had to be rolled up, and the bag at the knee made the lower part of my leg look like Alley Oop's ample ankles. Why, if I had got lost, up until I was, say, fifteen years old, there would have been no difficulty in finding me, for my three older brothers' garments were known far and wide, by size and cut and color.

When there were so many children to be clad, and so little to clothe them with, it took magic to provide enough clothing. Fortunately cottonnade and jeans are pretty tough and can stand several seasons, making due allowance for tears and scratches such as any boy's garments are subject to. Hickory shirts never wear out and can help raise a whole family of boys. All of these things shrink, though, and help in the natural process of growth to make clothes too small for the big boy. Now, I know that some defining is necessary at this point. "Hickory" is strong shirt material, thick and tough; "jeans" is heavy woollen cloth to make pants (and warm quilts from the scraps); "cottonnade" is heavy

cotton pants cloth(denim is it or something like it).

The small brother is waiting in suspense for the garments to become too small for the ~~one~~ one up the line, waiting with wicked desires in his heart that earthquakes or fires or floods or death may remove the cause of his humiliation. If there is still a younger brother, though, he can have his reward by feeling superior when the much-worn garment passes on down to the unfortunate little rascal. It is hard on a boy that does not grow rather fast, for then cast-off garments pile up on him. I was slow of growth and had my humiliation increased year by year. I had my share of garments, so far as numbers were concerned, but such numbers!

If a boy lives long enough, however, he comes to the day when he can have a suit or an overcoat or a pair of pants all his own. Never again can I feel as big as I did in my first overcoat, one bought just for me and not already a family relic. Some of us may have forgotten how deep was our sense of disgrace when we had to wear out a pair of Sister's shoes, but I suspect that we have never forgotten the sense of triumph when we could sail under our own colors, without being twitted by the big boys because of our museum of inherited clothing.

## Smokes

Every normal boy feels that he must smoke something. And nearly every boy of my acquaintance has smoked something, harmful or otherwise. Just how we escaped poisoning I do not know, but nearly everything that even resembled smoking materials was used. For some strange reason people of all ages think there is something big about puffing smoke out of one's mouth and especially out of one's nostrils, though I must confess that we did not try inhaling the smoke of the things we used in our boyhood.

There are gradations of respectability in smokes, just as there are grades of tobacco. Cornsilks are mild and make a good beginning for the fearful and sissy. But grapevine, with its savage bite, satisfies for years. Whether any of the men who smoked grapevines grew up and developed cancer of the tongue would be a good investigation for medical men. Anyway, a grapevine can produce about the sorest tongue I have ever known personally. Life everlasting, which we called rabbit tobacco, makes good smokes and good chewing, that is, if one does not have a very exquisite sense of taste. Really, the smoke from burning life everlasting is not bad, unless it is in one's own mouth. It suggests something Oriental by its odor; to the smoker it suggests burning off fields in the spring of the year. Mullein is a great deal like tobacco in appearance but rather unlike it in taste. Grannies tell us that mullein has medicinal values; hence we ought to have healthy nasal passages, we who used to smoke it so much.

Since big men used corncob pipes, so we boys made our own, stem and all, rather clumsy affairs. But they gave us a thrill, the thrill that comes to boys, old and young, when they think they are doing something naughty. We tried to make cigarettes from our mallein and rabbit tobacco, (but with rather poor success; for the paper we used was likely to be coarse wrapping paper that tasted a bit strong.

But one just had to have a cigar-like smoke. That helped along the case for grapevines. Another kind of cigar was made from a buggy-whip, for it was porous and would draw well. I cannot recall what flavor a buggy-whip had, especially one that had been long in use, but I suppose that it resembled grapevine, without the sting. In the bottoms grow cross-vines, which, when dried, form excellent substitutes for cigars. It has been many a day since I have heard of cross-vine cigars; they may have gone out of style by now.

Isn't the whole thing funny? Just why one would want to disturb the pleasant taste in one's mouth by smoking or chewing rabbit tobacco is a puzzle that my poor brain cannot solve. Maybe the very bitterness of it makes life endurable by contrast.

## A Country Parson

Today I would like to add another character sketch to the many that have appeared in this column, for the man I am to tell you about represented a whole generation. He was a retired Methodist preacher who made his home in old Fidelity. He had been a dentist in his earlier years before he was a preacher. After his superannuation he took up his earlier calling and lived to a ripe old age, becoming for many of us youngsters a sort of modern representative of the elder prophets. He was quite tall and strong of build, with a long, flowing beard. Older ones told us it used to be red, but we remember it only as snowy white and very ample. Service in the Confederate Army had given him a dignity and military bearing that even advanced age could not overcome.

When the regular circuit rider failed to appear, he would preach for us. Sometimes he would also preach on the Sunday nearest his birthday. I still remember some of his birthday sermons. Like most of his generation, his sense of humor was a bit dim, but he could see great truths and present them greatly. He had a slow, dignified voice, and his gestures suited his bearing in every way. When he raised his hand and slowly uttered some condemnation of ornery living, I thought of the pictures of Elijah in the old family Bible.

One of his interesting habits that was once a part of all circuit riders and preachers in general was his

singing. Not only did he join ~~in~~ lustily in the songs that he lined for us, but he also sang a solo just before his sermon, a hymn that helped interpret the Scripture he was to use as a text. Evidently in his younger days he had been a good singer, for even advanced age could not wholly take away the charm of his big, impressive voice. The younger generation sometimes smiled very broadly when he sang, but their elders were respectful, for they could remember other times when the old gentleman could hold his own with the best in the singing school and the camp meeting.

We were told by those who knew that his false plates were among the best, for that was his specialty. Since I had no occasion in those days to judge such things, I remember only his public appearances in his other role of superannuated minister and elder prophet. And there are few more pleasant memories than those of him in the pulpit of our little country church on some spring morning, when the birds were singing in the woods, and when odors of spring flowers drifted in through the windows.

## Red-hot Flannels

All of us know how much a passing institution the home-knit yarn stocking is; probably few have thought how equally passe are red-hot flannels. Not long ago I made a talk to a <sup>parent-</sup>teacher association and exhibited a pair of home-knit yarn stockings to show how they would hold enormous quantities of Christmas goodies. Nothing that I have been connected with in years created so much interest. I did not talk then of the passing of red flannels, but I will now. With the coming of better methods of heating houses has come a custom of dressing less warmly. Those who spend their days out in the cold probably still cling to warm underwear, from necessity; but imagine sitting in a room with a temperature of 70 degrees all swathed in woollen underwear! It makes me warm, even though I am writing this on one of the coldest days of the winter. Even outdoor men tell me that shorts or R. V. D.'s are sufficient for the worst weather. Evidently we have developed warmer blood or are less sensitive to cold.

When we went to the country school, we wore so many clothes that we looked like Dutchmen. Next to the skin we wore red flannel shirts, or "bodies." On top of those was an under garment of cotton flannel. Then with a hickory shirt, a coat and vest, an overcoat, a fascinator or a pair of ear-muffs over our ears or a cap pulled down with the ears, the upper parts of our bodies ought to have been sufficiently warmed. We were equally well clothed on the lower part of the body, though I cannot recall having seen any red flannel drawers on the clothes lines in our community. That was reserved for Indiana, many years after



my flannel-shirt days. I think that I first felt an interest in Huckleberry Finn when he mentioned itching in eleven places at once. Any one who wore red flannels lived in a perpetual itching, so that on Sunday when the preacher described certain warm and torturing places, we experienced them in advance.

You middle-aged people and I ought to be much better than we are, for the tortures we endured as infants and small children should keep before us always the horrors of eternal punishment. I have seen more than my share of sweating, prickly-heated little red bodies, swathed in voluminous petticoats of red flannel. Parboiled we looked; parboiled we were until we could outgrow this curse of childhood. A monument ought to be erected to the memory of the first physician or old granny ~~to~~<sup>who</sup> believed that red flannel was necessary for the comfort and safety of a small child. That monument might take for its theme some of the warmest passages from Dante's *INFERNO*. It might represent a man, dressed up to represent a doctor, clad in a clinging garment of flame that quenches not, like the fire kindled by lightning. I would have visions of babies swathed in the same fashion float forever before his eyes, like the visions of water and fruits before suffering Tantalus.

Where is linsey-woolsey, and petticoats of wagon-sheet proportion? Where is red flannel, the enemy of comfort and the promoter of itching? Where are the layers of hot clothing that we used to sweat in until we were offensive when we stood around the schoolhouse stove? Whether we are warmer-blooded than we used to be it doth not yet appear; certainly we can keep warmer with fewer garments than formerly and suffer only occasional chilblains.

## A Cycle of Houses --I

First the log house, then the boxed house, then the framed house—that would summarize many a family that I have known and at the same time summarize three whole periods of American history. In the very nature of things this order is the one to be expected; our stage of development could not have decreed otherwise.

When the pioneers came to Kentucky, forests were nearly everywhere. Saws were then unknown, cross-cut saws, I mean. The axe, that great tool of civilization, was the companion of the gun. From the native forests the trees were cut and built into a cabin, rude and small at first but growing, as easier times came on, until one might build a log mansion. Such a one is the home of the late General Simon Bolivar Buckner, in Hart County. Between these two extremes are all the combinations of the simple log pen, the two rooms in front and a dog-trot between, the two-story front with a L. When saws became more common, and especially sawmills, weatherboarding and ceiling covered over many a log house that today may be on the fashionable street of a good-sized town.

The boxed house rapidly grew up, partly because of the accessibility of sawed lumber and partly because of the ease with which such a house could be built. With some cut nails and a hammer, almost any amateur carpenter could build such a house. The simplest form was made of undressed lumber and stripped. There is still something very gratifying about the sight of such a house when it is properly built, a something that has made it reappear in many a summer cottage in our own times. More elaborate boxed

houses were weatherboarded and ceiled, and even painted. Some parts of the state today have many of these houses, ranging from very small cottages to really elaborate houses.

With increasing ease of life and desire for comfort, men began to build frame houses. Local customs largely determined the size, plan, and materials. Whole areas are or were regions of the standard "big" house: two rooms in front and a hall between, both upstairs and down, with an L of one story. In New England the gambrel roof was common, but in this part of the world it is rarely seen. This sort of big house usually had a chimney at either end, with fireplaces on each story. There is nothing rare about this kind of house, for the carpenters did their work so well that hundreds of these symbols of respectability and rural prosperity are everywhere.

The furnishings suited the type of house. Americans have been forever changing from the older to the newer. The log cabin had its crude and meager furniture; the boxed house added somewhat to this; the frame house would have been ashamed of itself if it had not been furnished in the latest style. Rather humorously, some of the best furniture that Kentuckians ever had was discarded as old-fashioned when the family moved into the frame house, furniture that was later found in the store rooms or smokehouses and valued as antiques.

Of course, the brick and stone houses came along in the natural course of events, but they have never been, until recently, any very large part of Kentucky rural life. Hardly a neighborhood exists that does not have some one or two old brick mansions, rare in their early days and quite as rare in some parts of the state today. For all practical purposes Kentucky until the last few decades has been the place of the log house, followed in turn by the boxed and the frame.

## A Cycle of Houses--II

Probably the towns and cities illustrate changing styles in houses in our time more than do rural districts. The farmhouse, especially the well-built one, is likely to last through several generations. The farm cannot very well be left behind merely because styles of building are changing. Of course, the younger generations, when they inherit part of the old estate, may build as they please; still the family residence, in or out of style, will remain, to remind all comers of other days and other styles. But in the towns the population is unstable; natives and outsiders live side by side; the social standing of a house or of a neighborhood may change in a short time.

Even in our small Kentucky towns one can find evidences of how the coming of the railroad or the building of the highway or the opening of a park has drawn the fashionable people in a certain direction. Ancestral homes, beautiful in their day and in their original setting, must be given up for modern bungalows in the latest addition. There the old-timers stand, tenanted often by a population that changes almost yearly, gradually hemmed in by cheap tenement houses, and growing dirtier and more unkempt in appearance year by year. Victorian decorations, fittings, "thingumbobs," and "dodads" fill up with grime; loud-voiced children disturb the quiet of the aristocratic old mansion and scamper over the old rose garden. Later generations, not having seen such a house when it was on the most select residential street, wonder why so much money was spent in architecture that now seems so useless.

Much as we of the older generation lament the passing of certain phases of country life, we must admit that more rapid changes have been meanwhile going on in the town and city. The reason why this rapid <sup>(evolution)</sup> is not always evident is that enterprising realtors often buy up the old places in their decay and completely obliterate what was left of other times and places. Newer houses rise unabashed where the old mansion ~~stood~~ <sup>and</sup> until the "chimney's falling down and the roof is caving in," as Colonel Will S. Hays's song would have it. But in the country, where there is less occasion for building, the old lives on in the midst of the new, sharing its bright new paint, and preaching, though without sound, of days that once seemed as everlasting as do our passing years.

One of ~~the~~ <sup>my</sup> most tragic visits to a famous house occurred some ten years ago, tragic, that is, because of what I saw. In this suburban mansion had lived a former governor of our state, from this house had gone to the Confederate army a general who was to fall at Shiloh, to this house had come the great of the whole land and even visiting foreigners. A huge plantation surrounded the mansion. When I was there, the farm and the house had been given up by the descendants, and the owner was trying by every means to pay for the farm. The shade trees, huge pines, were being cut for sawlogs, so that I could not drive my car up the driveway. The carriage-shed, built to house five vehicles, had most of its ~~doors~~ <sup>doors</sup> off their hinges. The flower-pit, or green house, was wrecked and being filled up with ashes and other trash. Inside, the wallpaper was peeling off in strips; <sup>many of</sup> the big old rooms were bare and echoed in a ghost-like way to my footsteps. To crown the whole feeling of tragedy, I found a T-model Ford car parked, not in the carriage house, but on the hardwood floor of the back porch, with grease and dirt an inch deep beneath it. Thus passes grandeur: "sic transit gloria mundi."

## Horse, Bridle, and Saddle

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We have so changed our standards of values that only the middle-aged will know what today's essay is about before reading it. There was a time, a rather long one, when every boy of respectable parents was given a horse, a bridle, and a saddle on his twenty-first birthday. This was his start in the world; he could saddle his nag and ride forth to conquer the world, like a knight of old. Society regarded this as a handsome start for a young man, and it was. With his strong arm and his horse he could make his way in the world. Land was abundant and practically free. The frontier was calling to all the restless younger generation. Given this start, almost any boy might soon be the owner of a quarter section of land, which he might hope to add to as his own family grew up about him. And to each successive boy who became a man there would be given a horse, a bridle, and a saddle. Each boy expected it; few families of the middle class could not afford it.

How delightful the old custom of setting up the newly married couple in their first housekeeping! Her parents usually gave a cow and some chickens; both families gave feather-beds and pillows and quilts and sometimes furniture. The ~~old~~ cowry as such had long ago vanished, but a family pride saw to it that each new couple had an even break with the world.

Some of us lived just when this ancient custom was passing. Since I was the youngest boy, I barely got in on this tradition. But my steed was a little red rule named Jenny, and I bought the saddle myself with money I made

raising onions. Anyway, I was able to cash in on the custom a bit early, for I sold Jenny when I was eighteen and went to school on the money. Thus Jenny was the steed that I rode away to distant lands beyond the horizon, not a very ~~very~~ beautiful or valuable one but connected with a fine old tradition.

Many of fathers that I knew as a boy would talk with pride in their declining years in some such fashion: "He and Mary was purty pore when we got married, but I had my horse, and she had her cow and some chickens. We started keeping house in a log cabin, with jest a jacob for a bed. But we worked hard, and, I gum, I give ever' one of my boys a horse, bridle, and saddle when he was twenty-one year old." A familiar formula to the old-timers, a strange rignarole to youngsters; but only another illustration of how impossible it often becomes for one generation to talk understandingly to another. How can you and I make our children understand the value of a buggy, when they are used to the family car? What would they think to hear Grandpa brag about buying a new surrey?

Human affection for children has in no way changed; we have merely changed the ways of showing it. Your boys and girls go forth to conquer the world today, not on a horse properly bridled and saddled, but equipped, well or poorly, with an education that must be their means of finding their way in an age when free land no longer exists. And, let us hope, they, too, will provide whatever has again taken the place of horse, bridle, and saddle for those who come after them.

## Show Yo' Raisin'

The best sermon I ever heard was not intended as such, but, by accident, it was given by a preacher, to be more exact, a colored preacher, some forty years ago. It was summer in the Fidelity neighborhood. For weeks a protracted meeting had been going on at Mt. Zion, where the numerous Negroes that worked in Harse Jeffy's tobacco factory and the other farm hands belonged. Several visiting preachers aided the regular pastor, and some thirty-six additions to the church rewarded their efforts. Since Mt. Zion is true to its name and stands on a high, dry hill, it was necessary to bring the converts to the creek in our neighborhood for the baptising. All the colored people for miles around and fully as many white people were there; the colored ones on the side where there was a sandbar and hence easy access to the water, the whites on the steep bank among the trees. Just why all the white people went I cannot recall, for it was not often that so many would steal away to Negro meetings.

Since so many converts were to be baptised, it took some planning, in order not to rush things but still give dignity to the whole event. One preacher stood in the middle of the creek and performed the rites, another stood half-way to the sandbar, and another stood at the edge of the water to pass the candidates for baptism in and out. Hessed on the sandbar stood the others, led in song by Bill Palmer, a local preacher and exhorter. Bill would line the hymns in the old fashion, often inserting ~~appropriate~~ lines of his own coining. For example, when a particularly large girl gave a shout just as she reached the sandbar, <sup>and fell with a flop,</sup> Bill appropriately intoned, "And heal my broken bones." Sounds of



suppressed laughter came from the steep bank, laughter reproved by glances from the older people. Curt, the colored boy who worked on the farm next to ours, pretended to be afraid of the water, in spite of the fact that he had been in a-washing in that hole every day since early spring. He apparently tried to climb the preacher. Actual laughing broke out at this, but the singing and shouting continued unchecked. One funny thing followed another until the whole group of white people, young and old, were actually laughing without any restraint. Then came the sermon. The preacher out in the middle of the stream held up a long, bony finger and in the deep-voiced tones of one of the major prophets said, "Show, yo' raisin', white folks; show yo' raisin'."

And then the noise on that bank subsided. If there had been anything to drop a pin on, one could have heard it. The <sup>people on the</sup> other bank, unruffled by the rudeness of the visitors, kept on their way, singing, moaning, shouting, gesticulating, clapping their hands, until all the thirty-six candidates had been properly inducted into the rites of the church. From then on we who were there have remembered the unexpected sermon of the colored preacher, a sermon that I have wanted to hear many times when so-called superiority is acting in a very inferior way. I have repeated Brother Blanton's sermon to hundreds of highly-favored students in college, hoping that the stirring words might find lodgment and make a part of the impression that we of old Fidelity experienced on that summer day in the woods by the creek.

## The Spring

Water out of a faucet is certainly purer and more abundant than water from a spring, but something poetic has disappeared in the process of confining the stream in an iron pipe. Springs formerly had a much more important place in our little world than they have now. They often determined the location of the first settlements, but many of the pioneer springs have dried up since the woods were destroyed. Other springs that once figured in human welfare have been covered with sand or have become hopelessly polluted. Streets have been laid over countless springs and spring branches. In modern London, we are told, the trout brooks that Izaak Walton used to fish in are now underground drains and sewers. But in many country places the spring still holds a high place, as picturesque and necessary as the old well and its oaken bucket.

Springs are often associated with spring houses. An artist, looking for the quaint and antique, could find dozens of models for his art in the spring houses of Kentucky, from the simple boxed type to the stone houses, nearly all of them ancient in appearance and often overgrown with mosses and lichens. What an array of milk and other foods the old spring house sheltered! Since ice is a necessity in many country homes today, milk cooled in a spring may not seem cold enough, but we old-timers still prefer just that temperature given by <sup>its</sup> being exposed to the cold spring water for a day or two.

Sometimes a spring was a sort of neighborhood institution. One such in the neighborhood in which I was born has been of great value to the surrounding farms. For greater

health the early settlers built their houses on the hills, away from the malarial swamps. Water then, became a difficult thing to get. Wells dug in this soil often get clogged with sand; ours did. But the roadside spring, curbed with a hollow gum log, has supplied an abundance of pure, clear water for two or more generations. When the supply caught in the winter rains runs low in the cisterns, water is hauled from this spring for immediate use or to fill the cisterns again. Horses are brought to the spring to drink. Near at hand is a country church, always attractive in summer because of the cold water supply. No neighborhood center is more appreciated or better known. People from a distance have used this spring as the center for picnics for fifty years or more. The spring has become a symbol of nature's bounty.

Springs had many another association in the mind of the small boy. The spring branch was always a good place to see small fish and other water animals. Along the branch grew cardinal flowers and swamp asters and other water weeds. Crawfish built their chimneys near the little stream. In the coldest weather, when the larger streams would be frozen over, the little spring branch would be clear and free, often with green water plants still growing in it. Daring youngsters loved to wade in the cold water in summer to show how brave they were and often slipped and got their Sunday pants wet.

Fortunately such things as state and national parks and forests are utilizing the springs and restoring them to some of their former usefulness. Given a spring in a woodland, what else would one wish to make poetry a reality?

Poorly, Thank the Lord

Much good sympathy is wasted on people who are sick or in trouble, for a large percentage of us like to be martyrs and would not trade our troubles for any amount of happiness. Boys with ailments are downright envied by the other fellows. Think of the value, socially, of having a stone bruise or a stumped-off toenail! It is almost as good for a youngster as to have survived a major operation is for a grown-up. It is true that people who are injured or have suffered are supposed to develop a philosophy and to value things that they have experienced and things that they have missed. A boy with a dirty rag around a toe or with his arm in a sling does not have to develop any philosophy; he already has one and can strut around as if he were really to be envied. Of course, he may have <sup>cried</sup> ~~cried~~ like a baby when he got hurt, but to hear him brag about it afterwards, one would imagine him the sort of philosopher that we read about but seldom see. Fortunately, ever after some wound or other disaster the boy does not lament his hard luck but thinks of his heroism under adversity and pats himself, figuratively, on the back.

And that reminds me of grown boys and girls that take a delight, like Othello and other brave men, in recounting the dangers they have passed. Some of us like to give the impression that we barely escaped martyrdom a thousand times. A feeling of self-pity creeps over many of us, for we can think of our childhood only in terms of our grown-up philosophy. Then we compare our **present** comforts with what we once so sadly lacked, we wonder how we pulled through. If our days were now so lacking in material things as they once were, we feel that

we could not live through them. All of us forget how full those old days were and how little time was left to lament our not being something else. Everything that we met was new and became for us a source of experience and thrill. Getting in wood or slopping pigs or plowing in the newground did take some energy and muscular strength, but they were sandwiched in between other experiences that were and are pure poetry. Probably the reason some people think of childhood as a pure delight is that, as we grow older, somehow the rough edges wear off things, especially our hardships as children; we remember only the romantic events that were ours or the romantic phases of what must have been sheer drudgery. The broken arm, the stone-bruised foot, the aching tooth now seem far away and perfectly harmless; anyway, they probably did not hurt the boy as much as they would have hurt a grown-up. To be the envy of the neighborhood for a few days or a few weeks was worth a fall out of an apple tree or a splitting open of the foot with an ax.

There used to be a saying, "Poorly, thank the Lord," that was ascribed to old darkies when they were asked about their health. One old uncle said that this meant that he was thankful not to be sick; being poorly was, relatively, a better condition than being sick in bed. But this saying has deeper and darker meanings when one considers how a little illness, particularly when a hospital or a trained nurse is involved, may give the poorly one a free course to discuss, even to nauseating details, all the envied aches and pains that one has met and conquered.

### N;series

Disease, as I have said before, has been greatly dignified in recent years, what with the invention of merthiolate and mercurochrome. Even the language of the chronic complainers, whose ~~are~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~names~~ <sup>is</sup> legion, has taken on some of the strange dignity that is inseparable from modern illnesses. It has been many a day since I heard of any one's having a miser. There are aches, pains, arthritis, appendicitis, muscular soreness, and even charley-horses; but miseries are taboo. You see, miseries suggest vague, indefinite aches that no doctor can diagnose. They are borne by poor people who cannot afford anything more expensive than patent medicines at a dollar a bottle or six bottles for five dollars. Real folks, the aristocrats of the achers and painers, if I may coin two new words, have definite diseases: autointoxication, sinusitis, intercostal arthritis, pernicious anemia, and cerebro-spinal meningitis. When a fellow cannot afford such diseases, though, there is still left miser or miseries.

The back is the best place to have a miser. In fact, it is almost superfluous<sup>u</sup> to say "miser in the back." Indefinite aches and twinges in the snall of the back soon develop until a plaster is the only remedy. The old-fashioned porous plaster that pulled great humps of your skin through the body of the thing must have been great things in their day. I recall having worn one once until the snall of my back looked like a succession of parallel mountain ranges in Lilliput. Along about late winter, when one's blood needs thinning with sassafras tea and burdock bit-  
ters, and turnip greens would be the most appropriate thing to

wish for, one does well to escape a misery that only the plaster can reach. A mustard plaster can bring some temporary relief and plenty of heat, but it cannot draw one's back into so many little knots. An old-fashioned blister plaster, in severe cases, can relieve the pain by transferring it from the "innards" to the "outards." But for sheer relief from a misery in the back, give me a porous plaster, designed to produce welts a half-inch high.

Some few people have miseries in the legs. Even charley-horses, the favorite of athletes, are thus named by old-timers who have not yet caught up with the dictionary. Other miseries are arthritis or rheumatiz. Long inactivity through the winter and a heavy meat diet brings strange twinges sometimes. Bathing the legs in some stinging liniment with a nasty smell will give one some exercise and rarely hurt the leg. Sprains are sometimes productive of miseries, which appear according to the weather. A game knee or ankle is often worth more than any new-fangled barometer as a prophet of changing weather conditions. Naturally one would not desire to cure completely such an unfailing indication of the weather; it might be necessary to buy a barometer or consult ~~the~~ more than one patent-medicine almanac.

As I said before, it would not be dignified enough to report to the society column of the daily or weekly newspaper some such item as this: "Mrs. Samantha McFabb, the mother-in-law of our popular banker, Mr. George W. Johnson, is confined to her room this week with a misery in her back; Dr. Adam Thompson has applied a porous plaster and thinks that Mrs. McFabb will be up and about in another week."

### Square Meals

When meat ~~soaks~~ <sup>was</sup> so high that any of could believe that the cow really jumped over the moon, I get waterings of the mouth ~~when~~ <sup>as</sup> I think of the days of the square meal, an institution that is certainly less common than it used to be. Just why it was called square I do not know, unless that word signifies something well filled out in all directions. If one named it according to the way one looked and felt after an encounter with a square meal, the word round would be more appropriate. But square it was called, and square it will remain, with all of its delightful associations.

Scientists talk about atrophy of certain organs, that is, they grow weaker or smaller through long periods of time. I fear our digestive tracts have weakened greatly since the old days, when a square meal three times a day was supposed to be the minimum of what was expected of any one who was up and about. If some of us were to indulge in such an orgy of eating as we were once used to, a half dozen doctors would have to be called in to save us. When I think of the actual quantities that I could hide in a rather lanky, youthful body after plowing all morning, I actually wonder why I did not pass away in early youth, like so many of the boys in the tearful stories that we read in those days.

When a fellow is genuinely hungry and has used up about all his store of energy, dainty things are entirely out of place. They will do well enough for a toying-off course, but for the first few minutes one must have cornbread, hog's-jowl, turnip greens, or green beans, sauerkraut, with plenty of meat. Fried pies, good as they are, belong later in the course; green-apple pies in season help out



during the last few minutes of the meal. Milk used to be regarded not as a food but as a means to wash down the square meal. A jug or pitcher of it fresh from the spring house can help some of the famishing feeling brewed by pitching hay or cutting tobacco.

✓ Square meals are usually made up of grub or victuals. It would be bad manners to speak of square meals in the presence of home economics experts. The purpose of a square meal, no matter what may be the purpose of a luncheon or a dinner or a tea, is to fill, fill to satisfaction. If it can accomplish that purpose, what matter whether it is altogether dainty or in accordance with science? A few thousand calories more or less may make all the difference in the world between one luncheon and another; the more calories the better when one is trying to fill a vast and profound gulf engendered by hard farm work.

## Carpentry of Other Years

The building of houses is such a fine art today that it is hard to realize how far we have come in a very few years. It was only thirty or forty years ago that carpentry work was done by local men, who knew the trade as a part of their general accomplishments. Nearly every man knew enough to make horse troughs and chicken coops and to roof the henhouse or the stable or the barn. Fancy work, after log houses ceased to be, was likely to be done by some man of the community who knew a little more than the average. One of the queerest-looking houses I ever saw was built by its owner. It was a plain boxed house, with a flue and the usual windows. But the flue was decidedly out of plumb, and no two corners of the house were parallel. The roof of home-made clapboards kept out the rain and the sun and served its purpose quite as well as that of a more adequate and expensive house would have done.

Many people now living have made boards, and a small part of the ~~population~~ still make them annually. Formerly boards were about the only kind of roofing material one would find in remote places, though shingles as a badge of aristocracy came in early. So unusual is a frow that I remember having seen several people stop at a mountain cabin to view one, as if it had been the tool of a cave man. There was real skill in making boards with a frow; it took a knowledge of the kind of timber being used and a deftness of the wrist and hand that only practice could bring. To have many scraps when making boards was a sure sign of being unskilled. Sometimes we smoothed down the boards with a drawing-knife, so that home-made boards, with the sap edge removed, often looked and wore like

brought-on shingles. Piling the boards up so they would season and not warp was usually entrusted to the small boy, who soon came to pride himself on his ability to make the pile stand until a heavy weight could be put on it to hold the boards straight while they were drying.

Many articles now bought were then made at home. Nearly all houses had home-made "batten" doors, rather heavy but strong and lasting. Even weatherboarding was planed down by hand, and tongues and grooves were made on ceiling and flooring planks by planes especially designed for this. Plenty of floors and weatherboarded walls lacked this extra touch, however. Latches, so often heard of and so seldom seen, were primitive fasteners, worked by a latch-string that, in the words of hospitality, always "hung on the outside." Doors also were fastened with buttons, home-made wooden ones that held the doors quite as well as any modern locks. On my left arm I still bear a scar from a wound I inflicted when trying to trim a button that I had already nailed on and found too large.

When an old building was recently torn down, I salvaged some of the old cut nails as souvenirs. There was a time when cut nails could be bought in almost any country store. Long after wire nails were common, there were still kegs of cut nails for the old-timers, who were, as always, afraid of new-fangled things. It took a kind of skill to drive a cut nail: you either drove it or you didn't; there was no half-way driving.

Joists are still used, of course, but they are usually covered up, so that none of them furnish now a place to put things away. And few of this generation would believe me if I mentioned the cat hole, formerly cut in the door so that

the cat could come and go at will. And that reminds me of the old fellow who cut several cat holes, so that when he said "Scat" and meant "Scat," the cats could clear out without waiting their turns at the cathole.

Many old buildings now being torn down had mortised joints; some good-sized buildings were put up without any nails. But modern nails and sawed timbers have about routed these old ways of building, so that remnants of these older ways are seven-day wonders to the younger generation.

## Changing Styles of Houses--I

How much our houses have changed, inside and outside, since the present century began! The old log house, our first American home, now so rapidly becoming a lost institution, was fairly common some forty years ago in many parts of the state. Some of the log houses were quite pretentious, but the typical ones were very simple. They had been erected as the first homes in the wilderness and, because of their ability to stand the wear and tear of time, had endured down to a time when no new log houses were being built but when a house of any kind was too valuable to destroy. The former dwelling house, replaced by one of more modern type, was relegated to some menial position: smokehouse, hen-house, cornerib, stable. In some places it survived for a generation as the kitchen or as the servants' quarters.

With the coming of sawmills grew up the boxed house, varying enormously in its size and value, but again usually simple and unpretentious. The patterns of log houses were repeated over and over with the boxed house: simple room, room and lean-to, two rooms with an open passage, two stories in front and an L of one story, and so on. Even before the boxed house became common in some places, the more prosperous people graduated from a log house to a brick structure, from bricks made right on the plantation. Side by side for a generation or two stood the log cabin, the boxed house, and the brick house. The frame house came as the last early house, the one last was and is most typical in our own time, though every conceivable form of house is now being built.

On a typical street of a small town with some age can be seen all the beauty and ugliness of a dozen styles of architecture, each of which carried with it a high tone in its earliest days. A recent fire in my home town revealed what very few had guessed: that the core of a large and fashionable apartment house was a log cabin, covered deftly with weatherboarding, ceiling, and plaster. Side by side stand over-ornate Mid-Victorian mansion and ultra-modern bungalow, with an ever-changing form and effect. Colonial mansions or newer replicas of them may be flanked by the plainest cottage or the modern house, all windows and gables. A good museum of what has been stylish in buildings is a residential street.

Earlier styles of houses became standardized, so that "two rooms in front and a hall between" meant something as definite as could be named. Our modern houses have only one likeness, in their being hopelessly individual. To call a house a bungalow merely gives a general idea; Heinz's pickles are not more varying than bungalows. While in most ways we are decidedly standardized in our American life, we must admit that of the making of many styles of houses there is no end.

## Changing Styles of Houses--II

Everything in and around each type of house was and is a part of the same style. Ornaments, porch furniture, garden or lawn furniture, flower beds, lights, landscaping, the very trees and shrubs have been standardized. In fact, one could give an impression of a whole age by naming what one would pass while going into the yard and into the front door of the house, whether it was a log cabin or one of its numerous successors. Equally correct would be a description of the furnishings. Rather oddly, there was not such a blending of styles as would at first appear. Styles are too all-encompassing for that. When certain types of beds or dressers or cupboards were discarded, nearly all of such things were laid away or passed on to tenants or darkies. The antique furniture, now so highly valued, seldom had admirers in the days when later fashions came in; there may have been a few tears shed when such things were dragged away to the lumber room or the attic. For example, I have seen genuine antique furniture replaced by iron beds within the space of a year or so. Even priceless antiques were painted over, sometimes altered unskillfully. Fortunately, some of the old things were so completely covered with paint that rough handling did not wholly spoil them; a generation in the attic, and they come forth to be refinished and sold at top prices. In some homes the change did not come so radically, but I have had apologies offered for old furniture that would now bring a king's ransom.

Flower beds of a generation ago reflect a whole civilization. Somehow we, with all our newer ideas of landscape gardening, cannot excel the people who used to make what has come to be called old-fashioned gardens. Without regard to the season, let us call over some old-fashioned flowers, hallowed by long association with old-fashioned people. Jonquils (as daffodils are universally called in many parts of the state), japonica, asters, peonies, chrysanthemums, hollyhocks, bachelor-buttons, ragged robin, --- don't the very names bring a flavor? And in flower pots or tubs or humble boxes or cans were begonias, geraniums, fuchsias, abutilon or flowering maple. Hardy things grew in the yard, undaunted by the heat of summer or the cold of winter: yucca (usually called bear grass in my part of the state), honeysuckle of several kinds, calycanthus, snowball, lilacs. A volume of good poetry could be written about any one of these old-fashioned favorites, if only some one could be found who could translate his feelings into words.

The yard fences reflect changes in taste, from the simple but picturesque rail fence around the house in the clearing to the highly ornate iron picket fence that was the height of style in small towns a generation ago. When rails gave place to posts and rails, and they in turn to planks, the style of the family stepped up a few notches. When sided railings replaced planks and actually got a coat of paint, social importance increased visibly. Wire or iron pickets just about completed the score, except for town places and now many country ones, where yard fences are taboo. Some places still keep the old stile-block or the old fence posts as mute reminders of long-ago times.



### A Singer of Ballads

Back in old Fidelity in the long ago, when there were few means of entertainment, ballad-singing was still in vogue. Nearly everybody could sing, in his own way, traditional songs and religious songs and sentimental songs. Vigor of voice often took the place of pleasing sounds, but the singing did us all good. When we met together at church, we sang as a matter of course, at first by following the lining by the preacher and later from actual hymnbooks. But the pleasantest of all singing took place at our homes, when some of the neighbors came in to sit till bedtime. Sometimes we might have a fiddle and guitar or banjo to accompany us, but usually we sang *a capella*. In the better-fixed homes there were sometimes organs, often very cheery, that helped out in this neighborhood sing.

But better than anything else was the ballad-singer. Not many of such were left, even in those times, but our little country district could boast of one of the best I have ever known. Aunt Jane was my mother's best friend and often came to see us, accompanied by her daughter, Mary. We children so much liked to hear the two sing that we began soon after they arrived from across the hills to beg them for songs. They liked to sing so well that the begging was not wholly necessary. We had our favorites, which we requested again and again from year to year. Mary sang alto to her mother's soprano, a plaintive alto that I still remember. Their list of songs seemed then and now perfectly endless. Such a thing as a songbook for them would have been unthinkable; they sang from memory long ballads or long songs, some of them

With words that were strange to all of us, words that had come from across the sea and had been transmitted orally for generations.

Their repertory included besides ballads all sorts of things: church hymns, Civil War songs, love songs, trick songs (like their version of what is now called "Old McDonald Had a Farm"), patriotic songs. Sheet music was then unknown among us, but I know now that some of their songs had been published as popular pieces and had drifted to us in the backwoods from some far-off source. I never challenged her to try it, but I believe that Aunt Jane could have sung church hymns from memory for two or three days and nights without stopping. In addition to the fine old hymns, her list included dozens of songs in quaint old hymn-books that used to be found in singing schools all over the South.

No power of mine can tell of the quality of Aunt Jane's ballad voice. I have heard all sorts of queer imitations of ballad-singing, but all sound like imitations by the side of the genuine. There was a minor ring in Aunt Jane's voice that few of her contemporaries could approach. While most of the voices of our community were decidedly flat and unmusical, her voice had resonance, even in ordinary speech. Ireland will always be to me a land of romance because she sang "The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls" and "There Came to the Beach a Poor Exile from Erin." I greatly fear that when she and her daughter died, the singing voice practically disappeared from our little neighborhood. How I wish that someone could have recorded her ballads while her voice had all of its old-time ring!

Mrs. Daily Post knows a lot about manners, but she would be puzzled if she ran into remnants of former manners that so many of us remember. She would probably think them bad manners, just as so many people misinterpret left-overs in speech. Good manners are good manners still, however much out of style they may appear. Even Mrs. Post says that good manners are nothing more than kindness interpreted by means of words and acts. Nothing could have been kinder than the old-time gentlemen and ladies with their rather stiff, and now out-rigged, ways of making social life endurable.

In my youth we were told to remove our hats just as we entered the church door. The old-timers of the community, with a dignity that I cannot possibly make you realize, used to keep their hats on until they got to their places in the /men Corner and were sitting down. Then they pulled off their hats with a reverence and dignity that were certainly as admirable as we showed at the church door. Mother told me that this was the approved custom in her younger days. The children laughed a superior laugh at the old fellows after we had learned how to remove our hats according to the new style. But none of us have acquired any more real manners than these bearded patriarchs showed at the little country church.

When the fireplace was the center of our little social world, even the rudest children knew that they should ask to be excused when it seemed necessary to walk between people and the fire. A violation of this was regarded as very crude. Our mothers would hold up as horrible examples some children who did not know enough or care enough to ask to be excused

for such a rude act. When the company left, there would be a reckoning, and woe to the little fellow who did not know his manners. Now, when we have no immediate center of social life in the modern house, when it is not necessary to sit at a given place to keep from freezing, what should children be taught? So long as they do not step on our favorite corns, we pay little attention to where or when they walk.

Abner's "Yes, ma'am," heard nearly every day over the radio, is not so funny to some of us as to others. We were taught to say it as religiously as any little Frenchman says "Oui, Madame," or "Mademoiselle," or "Monsieur." Sometimes it degenerated into "in" only. Not to say "Yes, sir" and "Yes, ma'am" was to be ill-bred, almost to the point of insolence. I saw a small girl get a severe whipping at school because she said only "Yes" to the teacher. Both she and the teacher knew this was meant for pertness. The very proper and polite little rough-necks felt dreadfully pious when the punishment was being meted out, much as the earlier Calvinists pictured the saints in heaven as looking as pleased as the cat that ate the canary while a just and merciful Divinity was roasting some of their immediate relatives in another part of the hereafter. Just before the world war there had grown up a sort of hostility to "Sir" and "Ma'am"; but military discipline brought back "Sir," and it would be ungentle to single out only gentlemen for special marks of dignity. Thus a cycle has been rounded out, and we, like Sir Roger de Coverley with his coat, are again in style.

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## Fences

To the folklorist fences are keys to cultural and historical periods quite as much as furniture or clothes. Some of my generation have seen all the kinds of fences that are possible, each one belonging to a definite age or section. Clearings in the woods sometimes had only fallen trees and tree limbs for fences. This most primitive fence was succeeded for a long time by the most picturesque ~~fence~~ of them all, the rail fence laid worn fashion. As long as timber was plentiful everywhere, this was regarded as the normal fence, as much a matter of course as log-rollings and barn-raising. A well-built rail fence lasted a good lifetime and sometimes longer, depending pretty largely on the kind of timber used. In sections where cedar rails were possible, it seems that time itself is hardly to be considered in the life of a fence. Some old cedar fences built with slave labor long before the Civil War have lasted down into our own time, as good as new.

When timber became less common, all sorts of devices were developed to fence farms. The ~~h~~edge, always a doubtful, though picturesque, fence, developed in many places and is nearly impossible to destroy. Post-and-rail fences gave stability without using so much wood but lasted only a brief time before being replaced by palings, which in turn gave way to woven-wire fences of various kinds. I have had a part in building fences of all these kinds, from brush to woven-wire, and have thus seen the ~~whole~~ evolution of the fence from the beginning.

In the limestone sections of Kentucky stone fences date back to early days. I know one place where a single farm has more than five miles of stone fences, all built by the same Negro. On another farm a Negro hired hand spent all the winter months blasting out surface rocks and building stone fences for more than thirty years. Many of his fences have long been ~~been~~ a part of foundations of houses in my home town and its suburbs. Stone fences really have the pale for fences that last and that become a part of the landscape. Some have so completely taken on the appearance of ledges that children or visitors to this area might regard them as natural outcroppings. There is nothing more poetical than an old stone fence overgrown with vines and mosses.

Fences in other parts of the world have their own distinctiveness, such as the stump fences in the areas where the huge pine woods once stood. Long-settled areas in the Old World have had for ages mere earth banks and ditches, a system that may, conceivably, be known here if wood continues to decrease. Rather oddly, though, fences are not so necessary as formerly because of the stock laws; and it is possible that they will some time be regarded as expensive luxuries except for actual pastures. Meanwhile representatives of all the various types can be found in the average county, each one a monument to certain times in the history of settling and developing the country.

## Almost a Pioneer

Miss Lucy Furman, the famous Kentucky author, once asked me whether I had collected the folk experiences I discuss in this column from my immediate ancestors. When I told her that all of them had happened to me, she could hardly believe me. The same thing has happened over and over again since I began these articles. This little essay is to show the doubters that I have lived through what would ordinarily be called two or three generations, even though I am only middle-aged now.

The Jackson Purchase, where I was born and reared, was opened for settlement in 1819. Much of it remained in primitive wildness down to my own time. Large areas had been treeless <sup>plains,</sup> or "barrens." After the whites settled there and stopped the fires from burning off the prairie every year, timber soon grew on the hills and flats, just as it has always been found along water courses. When I was a very small boy, some of the older people pointed out to me the stumps of the first trees, trees that had been cut to build a milldam across one of the small rivers. Wolves occasionally were reported in the Tennessee River bottoms and were driven to the hills by high water. Wild turkeys were fairly common in the Coalings, timbered areas that were cut over periodically for wood to make charcoal for an old-fashioned "hillside" iron furnace. Wild turkeys sometimes came by our home. On one occasion Mother got out the old muzzle-loading shotgun, laid it across the yard fence, and aimed at a wild turkey; not until after the hammer fell did she remember that there was no load in the gun.

Primitive pioneers were quite common among the population. I have never read of any kind of odd character in history or fiction that did not have his match in our section. The lank, lean, hungry-looking fisherman and trapper, fond of tobacco and corn liquor, was a type that would have felt at home in one of Cooper's novels. The gunman was not unknown, ranging from a dapper youngster with a new pistol to a hardened old-timer who may have had a court record. Covered wagons passed through the neighborhood, going West. Ox-teams were common, especially in the bottoms when logging was going on. Buck and Bawl, Tom and Jerry, and other names for ox-teams were as ordinary as the names of tractors or cars today.

Wasteful extravagance of natural resources was the common thing. Enough valuable timber was wasted to make the present owners rich, even if only the less valuable lands had been left in timber. Hillsides that never should have been cleared soon washed into gullies. the little streams filled up with sand and mud, making hundreds of valuable farm <sup>acres</sup> land worthless. The actual pioneer spirit was no worse there than elsewhere, but I could see the whole process of wastefulness from the beginning. The tragic thing about much of the Jackson Purchase land is that the sub-soil of sand and gravel needs the protection of timber to keep the hills from crawling away. The raising of tobacco on fresh newground caused much of this ero~~s~~/sion, now so far advanced in many places. In my boyhood I often played in gullies, some of them big enough to bury a dozen houses in. A few of the smaller ones have been stopped by wise farming, especially the use of lespedeza, but some are too large for that sort of thing.



## The Folk Mind

I am eager to know the folk mind. This eagerness is partly scholarly and partly gossipy. I wish to know what and how the folk think so that I can judge people easily and justly. But even more than this desire to be just is the desire to know for the sake of knowing. So much has been written about folklore that is openly false that I would like to be able to show its falsity and set some one right. It is a fad in our time for many people to pretend an interest in folk things, when in reality some of these same people are ashamed of any folk connections they may have. No high and mighty attitude toward the folk will ever accomplish anything except a widening of the gap between classes. A belief that only the lowly and the ignorant are of the folk is utterly false; all of us, at some time or other, probably many times a day, are dependent upon the traditional as opposed to the scholarly or the scientific. A pseudo-folklore is about as genuine as the charity manifested by people who go slumming in order to see how the other half lives.

A very good experiment to try would be to put down for a single day one's impulses and decisions that are obviously prompted by tradition and not by any book knowledge. Suppose that you cut your finger or get stung by a bee. Do you use the medicine that science recommends, or do you fall back instinctively on what the neighborhood used when you were younger? When some sudden trouble comes into your life, do you use the fine philosophy that you have built up, or do you ~~fall back on~~ resort to the

traditional comforts? When night comes on, be sure to remember that nothing will bite you or snatch you away, that night is just as safe as day. But you probably are still consciously or unconsciously afraid of the dark and might be made a little more sympathetic with the folk if you would study folklore at night rather than in broad daylight.

The mob spirit has been always known. Most popular heroes have been able to control this spirit to their own advantage. Not to do this has often meant defeat or death. But the mob spirit in public affairs is no more ~~powerful~~ powerful or more obvious than the folk spirit in milder or calmer ways. Older than our oldest fashions in dress, now long forgotten, are fashions in thought. Houses, clothing, transportation, even speech may change rapidly, but folk attitudes are so much older than any style of clothing or transportation that they seem almost instinctive. Who knows but that our folk attitudes are our most impressive inheritance from an age so far back that recorded history knows nothing about it?

Christianity has now been the religion of a large percentage of humanity for hundreds of years. But nearly every person you ~~and~~ know, in spite of his church membership and his standing in his community, has folk beliefs that are older than Christianity. Our little superstitious observances go back, often, beyond civilization itself. Christianity has adapted some of these observances to its own use and has reinterpreted them, but there are many more that still exist and influence nearly every life. We were folk, pagan folk, long before we became civilized or Christianized; hence we show our origin much as a pig shows its origin. It seems almost impossible to breed out of us our basic folk feelings.

### Family Mannerisms

All of us are imitators, conscious or unconscious. Probably most of what we do is a direct imitation of something we have observed in others. Long before we were old enough to think about it, we had acquired the mannerisms of our immediate family: bodily movements, speech, even philosophy. So easy is it to fall into a family rut that only the very brave ones, or very hard-headed ones, succeed in being original. Most of the family mannerisms are, of course, traditional and very old. Some of them are racial, others are tribal or clannish, still others are distinctly of one family. Many of our ways of doing things are practically community-wide in origin; in this category are such things as habits of eating, of making excuses, of giving comfort or condolence. In a standardized society, such things become nation-wide.

Did it ever occur to you to compare your mannerisms with those of others, calmly and sympathetically, I mean? There are thousands of ways of doing things; your way is just one. How do you tie your shoes and which one first? How do you dress or undress yourself? How do you peel an apple, a peach, or an orange? How do you express joy, or satisfaction, or fear, or sorrow? There may be some individuality in your ways of doing these, but the probability is that you follow within bounds the ways of your immediate family. So persistent is this tendency to follow what was done in one's home that it forms the greatest obstacle to the teacher of English in breaking up undesirable language habits. Some time when you really want to do something that is difficult, try doing every

small act in a way different from what you ordinarily do it. For example, trying shaving differently, using the other hand, beginning in a different area, making a wry face on the other side. Probably this effort will put some interest into some of the dull drudgery of every day. The habit saves energy and time, but it also becomes dreadfully monotonous.

At various times in my life I have watched the "manners" of certain families. A Negro family of my acquaintance had exquisite courtesy, as most Negroes do. Every one of this family bowed in exactly the same way, spoke words of "thank you" in the same way, even pulled off their hats in the same way. I believed then and still believe that I could have recognized any member of this family anywhere in the world by these distinctive little mannerisms. Another family I know have very facile mouths. They can twist them into any shape and imitate any odd character of the neighborhood. When I have tried to do that, I have failed; my mouth somehow does <sup>not</sup> know the arts that have been developed in that family.

Long-continued absences from one's immediate family may develop personal eccentricities, but it is astonishing how long we keep intact the little ways we learned to do things years ago. Recently I was building a play shack for my boy. I needed several things that I have not seen made in over thirty years; almost instinctively I was able to make them, even though my experience in carpentry has been exceedingly limited all through life and especially since my boyhood. It is literally true that you can take the boy out of the country but cannot take the country out of the boy. What he learned then sticks as long as he lives.

## Washing Behind the Ears

Dante pictured many phases of punishment in his INFERNO; I wonder whether his mother or big sister ever washed behind his ears on Sunday morning. If he had suffered some such torment, why did he not put some of his worst enemies in a pit in the hereafter where ear-washing was forever going on? Probably Dante himself was too humane to subject any one to this sort of misery all through eternity.

Society had decreed that a boy must be clean when he presented himself at Sunday School. If left to himself, he would have scrubbed a place on the front of his head but never where he could not see, just as he blacked the toes or even the sides of his shoes. But Mother or Big Sister came into the picture and did her part of keeping the family name and the family ears clean. Though it was a long time ago, I can still feel the agony of having a week's accumulation of dirt being removed by pressure. My sister got as a washrag the cuff of a sleeve or leg of winter underwear, ridged just to scrape skin and dirt off together. Somehow she always rubbed me the wrong way, both physically and mentally. I let out such squawks as I now bitterly condemn in my son when he is enduring a similar agony. But a few minutes later at Sunday School I would know the wisest man, the strongest man, who built the ark, and all the rest of the questions without a trace of the agony I had gone through. Probably the reason I always listened when the preacher told of the indefinite extension of pain in the hereafter was the experience I had just gone through. I certainly did not want to take any chances on having some

such torment for a million years at a stretch.

Now washing one's feet was almost pure fun, at least in the way that I washed mine. I cannot recall having been small enough to have them washed by any one else. We had, as all good homes had in those days, a little wooden tub that seemed especially designed for foot-washing. It had been the container of mackerel, a strong sort of dish that my father and other men of the neighborhood liked. The tub fit our feet perfectly and held the requisite amount of water. I am <sup>a</sup> afraid, looking back a third of a century at the whole thing, that we merely soaked our feet a few minutes and rubbed off some of the outer layers of dirt on a mealsack towel. Anyway, we could do our own washing and could hop into bed without any further inspection. To have washed one's feet gave a feeling of self-righteousness that I somehow never feel now; there were said to be bad boys who actually went to bed with dirty feet that had waded dust or mud all day.

The only other agony that I can recall that somewhat approximated washing behind the ears was having the finger nails cut. Sister was the inquisitor in this agony, too. She seized a small pair of scissors that Father had used in his earlier days as a surgeon and had discarded; she pressed down the corners of the flesh and made me feel like St. Lawrence, I am sure. He was the saint who was flayed alive, I believe. I fully expected to die from nail-cutting and probably hoped I would and thus wring my sister's heart for her torture; but I escaped, as youngsters still escape, and wonder today why it was such an agony. Dirty claws and still dirtier ears were lots of fun when nobody interfered.

## Stick Horses

A few days ago I was sitting in a parked car on a fashionable street waiting for a friend. While I was pondering on how rapidly things have changed within the last few decades, two small children came riding by on stick horses. I was rudely shaken from my dream of old times, for those two youngsters showed that things are not so different after all. Automobiles have become as common as farm wagons used to be, aeroplanes pass over without causing us to look up from our work or our play, but the discredited horse, bereft of the glory that was once his own, lingers on in play horses, a species of poetic justice that <sup>is</sup> ~~one~~ rarely equals ~~d~~.

In old Fidelity neighborhood we had stick horses galore. Tobacco sticks make the best ones, for they are usually of hickory and can stand rough treatment. At one time the little girl who played with me decided that we should have a livery stable for our various horses. We took some limbs and converted a stump into a stable that any youngster might have been proud of. Each horse in our stable had to be taken out and put through his paces; each one had a decided personality. Dainty broomstick horses had gaits that suited their fine polish and bright colors. Tobacco-stick horses could jump and gallop and run, like half-tamed animals. Sometimes we <sup>were</sup> ~~became~~ attached to a mere crooked limb that became for us a steed of many gaits. A little childish imagination was all that was necessary

to transform a few unsightly sticks into a stock farm with prize-winners.

When we went to drive up the cows or to run other errands, we rode our horses. We ran races down the paths or dusty roads; our nags shied at imaginary goblins and often threw <sup>us</sup> ~~up~~ rather violently in the dust or grass. Even big boys sometimes joined us and helped us break in especially wild horses. Probably the best part of it all was to get two big boys to stage a horse race. It took an enormous amount of urging by "giddaps" and switches to get the winner across the line. Sometimes the jockey was so used up that his tongue would be fairly hanging out of his mouth when the race was over. As is too true in actual races attended by grown-up children, we sometimes had an infringement of the rules and a fight or stiff quarrel as a result.

Through the years we became quite attached to the sticks that we had endowed with life. We rode some of them so long that we ground off several inches of them against the sand and gravel. For whole weeks and months these inanimate sticks had all the elements of romance, a romance that somehow does not entirely disappear with the years.



## Grapevines

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There is enough lore about any common object to justify a whole book, an interesting one at that. One such book could be written about grapevines. Here are some suggestions for ~~such a~~<sup>this</sup> book, whoever wants to attempt ~~one~~<sup>it</sup>.

When I speak of grapevines, I mean wild ones, of course. In the early days of Kentucky there were grapevines in all the woods and along all the fence rows. In spite of man's efforts to destroy nature, there are still many grapevines, though I fear they are not so well known as formerly. Naturally, grapevines suggest grapes and going grape hunting in the late summer and in the fall. Some grapes that grow wild in the state are good before frost, but the typical 'possum grapes need the tang of frost to sweeten some of their acrid sourness. Such wild ~~cy~~lusters of vines as we used to climb among to harvest grapes! And such fine jelly was made from these rather unpromising-looking little grapes! Some people made a kind of wine from them that had a rather sour taste and a wildness that my palate could never exactly like.

The long grapevine has other uses, among them that of furnishing a rope for school play. We got smaller vines for individual ropes and could perform feats that now are done with actual ropes. The big fun was to get a long vine for general playing and skipping. With two deft ones to throw it, usually boys or girls that were not especially adept at jumping, the rest of us went through ~~all~~ the various steps and jumps, with all the thrill attached to the daring young man on the flying trapeze. We called the entering the swinging rope by facing it as it came toward us "going in at the front door"; the reverse was the "back door," of

course, and was supposed to be more difficult. Our term for hesitating to enter was called "catching flies," as the delaying boy or girl would move the head in rhythm with the grapevine as it came over. Some less skilled ones would get a resounding whack on the head as they miscalculated the speed of the vine and ran in at the wrong time. Mischievous rope-throwers often caused trouble by making the rope go too fast or by elevating it above one's ordinary jumping level. When we had become quite proficient in our jumping, we could jump on all fours or could keep up a steady rapid jumping for whole minutes. Sometimes several would jump at the same time, though our usual way was to run in at an angle and jump once, followed at each turn by some one else.

In the woods were long grapevines that hung at such angles that they formed natural swings. Fortunately some of these were nearly always near a school or pinnicking place. Many a boy got gallant and swung his girl in such a ~~w~~ swing, so that the poets could sing about the romance of it all.

Grapevines when dried made fine cigars, even though they bit the tongue rather horridly. Though a buggy whip handle tasted better as a "smoke," it showed more vigor to use a grapevine and endure the hardship.

And, finally, the sap of grapevines is said to have marvelous powers to grow whiskers and mustaches. You get out to the woods and cut a gash in the vine when sap is rising and then rub this sticky stuff on your lip and chin when nature is delaying a bit the adornment of your face with a grown-man's beard. One man I knew swore that his mustache was of an entirely different tint of red from his chin <sup>h</sup> whiskers because he had used grapevine juice on the former but not on the latter.

### Slickers

Not many will recognize the title of today's essay as applying to anything to eat. More refined people called them, even in my time and place, dumplings. If I can keep my mouth from watering for a while, I want to talk about them, call them whatever you desire.

Fried chicken is good, baked chicken with dressing is one of our standard foods, but stewed chicken with dumplings is, to my way of thinking, the best of the whole lot. Since it is nearly impossible to eat such things without making noises that are now forbidden in civilized society, one seldom sees this old delicacy. Again I do not know how to cook them, except to say that the bony parts of the frying-sized chicken are stewed in some salted water; and strips or gobs of ordinary bread dough are added to the water at the appropriate time, so that the whole concoction gets done <sup>together,</sup> ~~at the same time.~~ What Mrs. Post would do with such a mess it is wild to surmise; I know how to tackle it, though, with or without manners. Get a spoon and a fork and wade in; use your fingers freely; make as many noises as you please; pile your bones on a plate or the edge of your bowl. That is sufficient, but what a thrill awaits one who has never tried slickers!

Please do not mistake this for chicken pie. That is well enough in its place, but it is a refined dish, capable of being served as food, with napkins and table manners. Chicken pie is baked; slickers are stewed. Some people regard them as food for semi-invalids, but a full-grown man with an appetite equally grown has found them in recent months

as ~~for~~ good as they were when he was a small child.

Chicken soup or squirrel soup may be invalid food. The only objection I used to have to this kind of food was its watery nature; it seemed a bit too thin to maintain life. It is true that after a few hard chills and the accompanying fever even this watery stuff tasted pretty good. But for a well person, good old chicken and dumplings! The next time you hear the old ballad that has been revived, "She'll Be Comin' 'Round the Mountain," make a resolution to taste chicken and dumplings before you sing it again; then you will know how welcome she was, whoever she may have been.

## Shortening Bread

The recent popularity of "Shortenin' Bread" as a song has made many of us old-timers think back to actual days of shortening bread and all of its relatives. Since "baker's bread" has become a standard thing on thousands of tables, it seems possible that some of the arts of bread<sup>o</sup> making may be lost. Professionals make ~~our~~ bread today for millions of people; probably half of our women could not make any kind of bread, such as we formerly ate as a matter of course, thinking little of the great art involved in bread-making.

Corn meal has given us many forms of bread: plain hoe cake, egg bread, muffins, johnny cake, crackling bread, and even corn lightbread. As I am not a cook, please do not expect me to furnish recipes for all of these; my contact with them has been as <sup>a</sup> consumer, sometimes a pretty active consumer. Each type is good in its place. Plain hoe cake is good with turnip greens and makes fine eating when it is cut into V-shaped pieces and served in a bowl of potlicker. Corn dodgers are the easiest and simplest of all and are hard to beat when cooked properly. Some of the best I have ever eaten were cooked by men on camping trips on at a cook shack when the thresher came. Corn dodgers are eminently food for he-men; I can hardly think of a dainty lady munching one. Crackling bread is by many regarded as the best of the species. Young people, born an age too late to know crackling bread as it

was made on the farm, have learned its tastiness from revivals of its making by people who have not lost the art. One such youngster, in the age when most of her generation like cake and candy, declared to me that she liked better than any pastry or confection good old crackling bread.

I must confess that I never actually ate any johnny cake, though I heard of it often. Neither did I ever see a hoe cake cooked on a hoe, tempting as such a thing must be to the taste and to one's poetic imagination. But everything from the step stove or even the oven before the fireplace to the modern electric stove has contributed to my knowledge of cornbread in its many forms.

When we used to have quarterly meetings or political rallies or Fourth of July picnics, we always had an abundance of home-made lightbread. Though salt-rising bread as it is sold at the stores is good--in fact, all bread is good--it lacks something of the flavor of the home-made kind. No species of commercial yeast<sup>st</sup> brings the taste that home-made kinds used to give. Some of the women of Fidelity could make salt-rising corn lightbread, a delicacy I have not tasted in many years. I recall that it was regarded as something very unusual and not often appeared at the dinner on the ground.

All of these things are or were digestible. We also had other species that were not. Many people I once knew fried plain dough in grease just as doughnuts, "fried cakes," were cooked. We boys tried the efficacy of our digestive system by gorging quantities of these; I suspect that is one reason why I took seriously the preacher's picture of the place where fire is not quenched and the worm dieth not.

### In Praise of the Cow

Our modern farm management may have degraded the horse from its former position, but it has given additional honor to the cow. Milk has come~~d~~ to be one of the necessities of our time, in city as well as in country. Cows have had some place in poetry and other literature, but they deserve some more attention for the part they have played in building up our civilization.

I will leave to others the cow on the dairy farm, where old Bossy is made to fit into a scheme of specialized farming; I want to talk about the cow on the farm, where all sorts of occupations have sway. From the earliest settled abodes of man the cow has been a valued animal, contributing to the life and happiness of savage and barbarian and civilized man. After the days of pioneering in any part of America the sure sign of permanence was the arrival of the cow; then there would be a continuous supply of food, a care for the cow and her calves, a building up of a livestock industry that betokened permanence of life and food supply.

Some one ought to collect the names of cows in Kentucky. Each one would reveal some traditional or neighborhood way of doing things, some bias that shows racial origin or cultural background. Cows, like the old family nags, soon are called "old," regardless of their age. After a few years they seem to have been a part of the farm life since time immemorial. Successive calves often bore the names of their mothers, long before there was any effort to establish proper ancestry for cows as well as for people.

When the uncultivated areas were still unfenced, it was a great sight to see the cows of a whole neighborhood wandering in their unlimited pasture. Only recently I had to slow down my car in some mountain counties to keep from hitting some cows on the range. To keep up with Bossy, we put (a bell on her, a practice that may still <sup>be</sup> observed), even when the cow runs on the owner's pasture. The notes of the various bells have been celebrated over and over, but not too much for me. I cannot help regretting somehow that I seldom see cows roving around as in older times.

Milking time had its unpleasant features, especially in fly time and also in severe winter. But in fly time we could build smudge fires of chips and help allay some of the agony of old Bossy while Big Sister or Mother milked her. Then there was the calf to rope off, a job that Dr. Gunsaulus, ~~once~~ president of a great art institute, once declared was not only the essence of poetry but also the very making of a boy. He even went so far as to say that every boy needed the thrill of roping off a calf and that it ought to be made possible for every boy to do so. That may be going a little too far, but it was great sport anyway.

The cow as a domestic institution is here to stay for a long time, let us hope, even though as the years pass, it may be more and more common for the cow to be concentrated on a few areas rather than a part of every home. But the poetic cows were those that were almost a part of the household, like the cow in Burns's "Cotter's Saturday Night," which was chewing her cud beyond the partition separating the kitchen and her stall.



## Itching

If there are any fastidious readers of this column, they had better not read today's contribution. As I am a man, I was once a boy. The natural state of a boy is itching, <sup>just</sup> as Huckleberry Finn found himself itching in eleven places when he was trying to lie still and make no noise. Mothers and other polite people have long ago thrown the weight of their influence against itching and its corollary, scratching; but they have not stopped the source of the trouble. Until they do, the very repulsive habit of scratching will continue, under cover most of the time but publicly if necessary.

Every season has its own particular itching. In winter we once had a tough time of it with our jeans pants and home-knit yarn stockings. At night when we pulled off our stockings, it was necessary to claw a bit for relief that was not always possible in the day. In the spring and summer nature helps out in this itching. Ticks, chiggers, gnats, mosquitoes, and such like vermin seem to have been created just to add zest to scratching. Rather oddly, one is not ashamed to scratch his itchy places when he is on a fashionable camp or picnic; in fact, it is a mark of having a good time to collect enough bumps to warrant some scratching and some merthiolate or mercuriochrome. Blackberry-picking time seems to have been foreordained as the time to collect chiggers and seed ticks. Had it not been for fried-meat grease, some of us might have been devoured bodily by vermin when we used to pick berries. Driving home the cows was a good occupation

to follow if one wished to get his share of chiggers. I did not know it then, but these same chiggers had probably multiplied on the cows and had been rubbed off on the weeds. My bare legs and feet formed a fine landing place for them.

Somehow nothing itches so much or warrants so much scratching as nettles, either the ordinary horse nettles of sour soils or others that grow in deep woods. As a boy I often ran into a patch of the latter ones and had welks as big as nickels all over my bare legs. One time I feared that my running into nettles was a species of special punishment: some of the bad boys after Sunday School decided to go in a-washing in the creek; I knew that I might get crosswise with parental authority if I did; I tagged along to watch the other boys and ran into some stinging nettles. I cannot recall now whether my legs or my conscience hurt most.

And here is the most unfastidious part of my subject, the disease called itch, or, in the vernacular, "eetch." Plenty of fine people, with the proper amount of illustrious ancestry, have been through a siege of itch. In the very hard winter of 1917-1918, when water pipes were frozen in many houses of the towns and cities, itch broke out in some of the best circles. It very forcibly reminded us that it is only a step backwards to the time when sanitary conditions were so primitive that such diseases were common.

Talking about such a subject has psychological effects. If you have read thus far, you can stop while I look in all directions to see whether the coast is clear and use my finger nails for purposes that they have never forgotten.

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## Boils, Carbuncles, and Risings

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The summer of 1938 has seen a great outcropping of carbuncles. Many of my acquaintances who are middle-aged have suffered some severe pains from carbuncles, and one, at least, has died from the ~~eff~~effects. I have gone through <sup>am</sup> the agony of having a crop of the pesky things myself and about ready to start trying the thousand and one remedies that have been offered me. The standard one, of course, is nine buckshot, taken one a day. I have not tried this remedy; probably that is the reason I am still in misery. Some of those who have prescribed this remedy have felt a bit hurt that I did not forthwith subject myself to the danger of lead poisoning. Rather oddly, the doctors have seemed a bit antiquated and have not said that any certain thing would put to rout these hateful sores. I have been civilized, and therefore hopeless as a folklorist, by following the doctor's advice in detail. But I can still imagine how easy it would be to swallow buckshot or anything else when the pain was at its worst.

Sores of all sorts ally us with Job and Lazarus. I have found myself considerably more kind in my attitude toward the patient Job than I was when nothing hurt me. Probably I would have taken Mrs. Job's advice and said some naughty things if I had had a crop of boils equal to his. High and mighty people, who rejoice a bit too much in their buoyant health, need the chastening of a few boils to bring them down to the <sup>s</sup>lev<sub>l</sub> of common suffering humanity.

How proud we used to be of sores that we would now be dreadfully afraid of! You see, there was distinction in being able to bear pain without making too much fuss about it,

just as a boy who got a licking at school proudly showed the bloody stripes to the other fellows in the woods after school. A boy with a toe tied up in a dirty rag is among the most arrogant of the people whom I have known. He is usually outdistanced by the fellow who has an arm in a sling. This arrogance is nature's way of balancing things for a chap when he is hardly able to hold his <sup>own</sup> ~~own~~ among the rough boys. Toe-nails stumped off used to provide plenty of envious discussion of the pains we had endured bravely, even though we knew that we cried like very small babies when it happened.

Athlete's foot and kindred ailments get a lot of attention in the newspapers and magazines now. One would think that athlete's foot kills more than tuberculosis and pneumonia combined. The best I can figure it out, we used to have it all the time, that or hookworm. We called it toe-itch(eetch) and cured it by tying a yarn string around the affected toe. Sometimes we put something on the string, I think, but the string itself did the work, I am sure.

When dentists were rare, and when the forceps that extracted teeth sometimes left roots in the jawbone, gumboils were much commoner than they are now, "gumbiles" for some of the old-timers. Not to have one was to be immature, just as it was a sign of immaturity not to have a wisdom tooth.

Boils are bad medicine for oldsters, but boys thrive, or thrived, on them. I suppose the mental uplift the fellows got from being so envied counteracted the poison from the sores; middle-aged and older people somehow cannot get the same thrill out of a sore that boys felt and still feel. Probably some of you will read this and <sup>then</sup> go to the medicine shelf for some dope for tetter or some other skin defect, already allying yourselves with Job and Lazarus.

## The Bucket and the Dipper

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Science has made many strides forward since the days when some of us were young. Germs were unheard of; I have heard people say, still later, that such things ~~do~~ do not exist, because they cannot be seen. The schoolhouse bucket and dipper existed in the pre-germ days. Of course, epidemics of sour mouth and similar diseases just came; the dipper had nothing to do with that.

Now in their time the two partners in what the modern medicine men would have us think was black crime had some style. There were buckets and buckets, just as there were dippers and dippers. Each one represented a social order, with the poor old tin bucket and dipper at the bottom of the scale. Tin dippers had a way of springing a leak, unless the makers of them deliberately left a hole. The almost universal presence of this hole in the tin dipper leads me to think that it was placed there intentionally, or at least that the dipper had a weak spot that would soon develop this mark of the genuine article. Cedar buckets could have their tin dippers, too, but style decreed that something finer should grace the better bucket. Porcelain ware, under different names, branded the household as something above the ordinary, just as the dipper of the tin make was ahead of the homely gourd. Some stylish families had glass dippers and rather rejoiced in the fact. I can recall how proudly some of our neighbors always brought a glass dipper to Sunday School to dip up water from the spring and how many people wanted to drink from that stylish container.

Many of us old fellows with false teeth and bifocal glasses remember the thrill of passing around the bucket of water at school. At my particular school the cistern was rarely in commission; hence it was necessary to send two boys to a village a quarter of a mile away, where there was a strange institution, a public cistern. The boys would cut a pole to carry <sup>the</sup> bucket on and set out, glad to miss classes. When they got back with the water that had not been spilled out, they passed it down the aisles, with the leaky tin dipper doing its work. Sometimes on a hot summer day the water was exhausted long before the last child was reached. Then two other boys were dispatched for another bucket. I might mention grease and crumbs that accumulated in the bucket, but I am <sup>a</sup> afraid I might nauseate some respectable readers of this column.

When water was plentiful, the bucket or buckets sat in the rear of the school building and were constantly visited by thirsty children, who found thus a way to be moving without provoking punishment. Little fellows could not be taught <sup>not</sup> to lean over the bucket while they were drinking. Some little reprobates would <sup>put back</sup> leave whatever water was left in the leaky dipper, what had not leaked out while they were drinking.

That we are alive and well is remarkable. Probably we were and are tougher than we like to admit. If germs could have killed us, they would have done so in the days of the tin bucket and the leaky dipper.

### Some Miscellaneous Furniture

Every house has or had the standard bits of furniture, even though the number ~~of~~ of pieces may have been reduced to the minimum. Beds, tables, chairs, stoves, cooking utensils--these were almost as low as one could go. In more stylish old-fashioned houses there may be an unlimited number of things that clutter up space and make a big display when an <sup>a</sup>uction becomes necessary. It is this assortment of extra furniture that I somehow like to contemplate. People who have never lived in a home that was quite limited in money for furniture can hardly realize the thrill of making some luxury for the home.

Settees could be bought if one had the money. Fair ones could be made from the headboard and footboard of a discarded bed. The proper place for this home-made sofa or settee is the front porch, provided there is one. I have visited in many a home that had such a piece of furniture, often a rather creditable bit of workmanship.

The hammock suggests leisure, a thing that summer country life seldom had. "Boughten" hammocks cost too much. But fine results can be achieved with a few strands of wire and some barrel staves. Light-weight people can repose with impunity in these, but I have always feared them for myself.

When families were large, chairs sometimes were hardly plentiful enough for the living room and the dining-room-kitchen. Hence the head of the household made or had made a bench for the side of the table next to the wall, where the boys would sit. I have eaten many a square meal while sitting on a bench and somehow miss seeing one when I am visiting in a good-sized family.

One thing that ought to have got into poetry is the padded brick that holds back the doors. I have seen some of the best handwork done on the covers for these bricks, chain and briar stitching in bright colors, just like the silk, embroidered quilt on the bed in the front room. Some one who is fond of collecting ought to collect these bricks and their coverings, as a sort of lesson in how rural artistry can make a thing of beauty out of a very unpromising and prosaic brick.

The whole matter of extra furniture illustrates how necessity can turn to its own uses things that otherwise would be ugly. Not nearly enough has been said of the simple but persistent artistry of the simple people, people who would never guess that they had artistic souls that expressed themselves in these little bits of extra furniture, made right in the home, with no thought of their being important in the history of art.



I hardly know how to classify the things I want to talk about today; hence the rather general title. Every boy knew and knows how to make things with his knife. Some of these have definite names; others are nameless. Every season brings something worth while in whittling or carving.

In the spring whistles are very much in vogue. As simple a thing as a whistle requires a bit of art. There are two main kinds: those made from papaw and those from hickory. It takes some woodlore for one to know just when the bark will come loose easiest from the wood. I have seen awkward boys and men try to make a whistle ~~at the wrong end of the limb and thus~~ <sup>and</sup> split the bark in trying to peel it off the big end of the limb.

Flutter mills or water mills are distinctly a thing of fall in my life, but they can be made at any time. It requires a joint of cornstalk with the hard outside peeled off. These same stiff peelings are then converted into paddles and inserted into the soft pith or pulp of the cornstalk. Two small forked limbs stuck in the mud on opposite sides of the small stream are all that will be needed to make a real water mill. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, in her recent popular novel THE YEARLING, has rightly made much of a water mill, a sure badge of inventive, playful boyhood.

In summer try your skill at making a pumpkin pipe or whistle. Cut a pumpkin leaf, with its hollow stalk. Cut away the leaf proper and split a long place in the stem near the top. This, when it becomes slightly wilted, makes a good  $\times$  vibrator. The music can be regulated by

cutting off the stem. Skillful boys can make three stems that will sound a chord of music. By catching the sound in the hands, one can imitate, more or less accurately, all sorts of owls, wildcats, crows, and such like. Incidentally he can run some of the neighbors crazy.

The cornstalk fiddle, though not listed by the great makers of musical instruments, is a time-honored device in our state for producing sound. Cut a joint of cornstalk that has a deep fluting on one side. A thin slice through each side of the fluting will form the strings, which are held up by a small stick inserted beneath them. A similar stalk can be called a bow; then the sounds start when the two are <sup>r</sup>ubbed together.

Watermelon rinds are fine things to carve, particularly when one has eaten down as far as the red goes. It takes real skill to carve a watermelon-rind chain, with links that will hold. Try it some time.

Incidentally it is a form of skill to peel an apple in one peeling, and, of course, it is good ~~luck~~ luck to keep it intact while you whirl it around your head three times and cast it behind you, where it makes the first letter of your true-love's name.

Long before manual training had a name, whittlers and carvers were making these time-honored little things. That some of this seeming waste of time had good results is evident in many of our ordinary homes, where there are evidences of genuine woodwork that would do credit to any of the artistic nations of Europe and would command the attention of scholars if they were only located across the ocean in another country.

## Flowers in Cans

Flowers grow well for regular florists, who have all the knowledge and skill of their profession; they sometimes grow equally well in the remotest sections of our country, where no book knowledge is available to aid the growers. Particularly have I enjoyed throughout my life the flowers in cans and buckets that grace so many humble homes. Flower pots often are quite cheap, but even the pittance to be paid for them is more than some homes have. Not daunted by poverty, however, the women and children, rarely the men, save the broken pots and pans and have containers for flowers anyway. Neighbors divide their stock of flowers, and thus in a single humble home there may be a large assortment of begonias, lantanas, geraniums, and other favorites. Garden flowers of similar tastes are everywhere, growing as luxuriantly as they could or would in a greenhouse or an arboretum.

Across the years come memories of the flowers in cans. How skillfully many people can raise plants from cuttings! How eagerly they save from one year to another their stock of seeds or plants! Many a small house is not too small to keep alive through the winter a few stocks that will be treasures of beauty the next year. Even humble homes sometimes have a flower pit, where with a little trouble potted plants can be kept from fall till spring. I have helped dig flower pits and have kept my own flowers thus for years at a time. Pits do not need to be elaborate, either, for a door made of brown dometic saturated in linseed oil will serve for a glass window quite well, as I know from experience.

Some planks for a roof and an old quilt or blanket for severe weather are about all that is necessary to furnish such a pit. If the door is made to slant toward the south, winter sunshine can do its part to help in the process of saving a bit of flower beauty and wealth from year to year.

Somehow I seldom see now the flower stands that used to be common, a sort of stairstep affair, where the cans and pots were arranged according to height. Some marvelous effects were secured thus, with the smallest investment.

In any evaluation of our artistic, aesthetic life this impulse to create beauty for the humble home should not be neglected. So much is made of the artistic life of other lands and times that I wish some one would "stand up in meetin'" and say a few good words for the artistry of much of our own humdrum life, an artistry that has had to live under the buffets of mistaken zealots, many of whom regard beauty in any form as dangerous. I have heard fearful things said about people who sought to satisfy their souls' longing for beauty. One of the greatest artists I ever knew was punished as a child for drawing pictures. Worse still, he was prayed for publicly for thus giving his talents to the devil. In spite of these handicaps he is today a great man in his profession and is honored by the very people who once stood in his way. In much the same way the creators of beauty, even by planting flowers in tin cans, are slowly being recognized for what they are worth to a world that needs beauty and harmony and satisfying aesthetic life.

*Handwritten signature*

## Folk Fears

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Some weeks ago as I was sitting in the outer office of a physician, I listened to the conversation going on around me. One elderly, rather garrulous person was asking various people in the office what ailed them. One sad-faced woman said she was suffering from rheumatism. The old gentleman who had asked her, within five minutes, while talking to some one else, in the same loud tone, said, "There ain't no cure for cancer and rheumatism." That reminded me of many of the folk fears that are still to be found. No wonder all sorts of folk remedies are applied, in a ~~sort of~~ vain hope that something will turn the trick. The idea of cause and effect is not very obvious in many minds. Disease just comes, and some of it is incurable, just as a tree struck by lightning blights everything made of it, and a fire so started cannot be put out with water.

People who live in good houses and have a respectable income often forget how much a creature of fear their more humble brother may be. First of all, there is the law, which many a man fears worse than death. Some people are thrown into a positive panic when a legal request of some sort is presented them, just as many Negroes fear that there is some trick in a check. Fear of the dark I have already discussed in this ~~column~~, but much else could be said for what ~~it~~ causes people to think/ and do. One of the worst fears concerns itself with what is strange and new. The old-fashioned steam engines were such fearful things that some people are still afraid of anything that resembles an engine. I know plenty of people who are a bit

excited and puzzled when they talk over a telephone.

The old gentleman in the doctor's office voiced a fear that is found everywhere. In spite of the great advances that have been recently made in the world of medicine, many a person still fears that ~~many~~ of the diseases (that the educated ~~people~~ know can be cured are hopeless.

I can recall when tuberculosis was looked upon as a curse that could not be avoided. I believe that many a person whom I knew would have been living today if he had not become a victim of fear. Rheumatism, that curse of the days of bad tonsils and infected teeth, held terrors for many people and still does. The idea of germs is gradually making itself understood, but the chemistry behind rheumatism puzzles most people beyond words; hence the old man's assertion that it is incurable.

Fear of the weather and of storms does not seem so prevalent as formerly. I can remember when everybody disconnected his telephone when a storm came up, when people sat or lay on feather beds to avoid being struck by lightning, when anything made of metal was quickly laid aside during a storm. Even for the brave nothing is quite so puzzling as the freaks of storms, but a sort of curiosity in what is coming next often saves the day. People who have not prayed in years have been known to break forth rather fervently in a bad storm. Thus we are all of the folk when fear comes in some spectacular of <sup>unusual</sup> ~~unusual~~ form.

### Some Folk Taboos

It is astonishing to us who can look back a few decades to find how many things that are <sup>now</sup> discussed frankly were formerly taboo. I cannot believe that we are any less modest today, fundamentally, than we were in the other times, but our immediate ancestors, were they living, would be painfully shocked at our every-day language.

Male animals just were not mentioned if possible, though female ones were called by their ~~veal~~ names as often as one liked. One could feed the old sow and her pigs but not a boar, at least not by that name. He could be called a male hog without offending any one. Similarly, the dear old cow was almost a member of the family; the bull was unmentionable except under some softened name: male cow, hebrew, male, or even, in extreme western Kentucky, mayfield, I suppose as a sort of anagram of female. All sorts of devices were used to avoid using the names of other male animals, so many that a good-sized dictionary of modest Victorianisms could be compiled.

with a kick,  
Religious words, <sup>at</sup> except ~~in~~ church, were equally ruled out of ordinary conversation. Some of the softened words had emanated from the nursery but clung to the language of grown-ups. God was the Good Man; the devil, the Bad Man. Some pious older people spoke of Old Master when referring to divinity. Old Nick, with a slightly comic suggestion, was often used to refer to the devil. Heaven was on many a tongue, but one softened up the word for hell: the bad place was the commonest substitution in my early days. Very naughty boys sometimes told their playmates to "go to grass." I suspect that an uglier place was meant.

Taboos extended to clothing. The line of demarkation between the clothing of men and that of women was strictly drawn. Something of disgrace was attached to a member of either sex who transgressed this law. After a boy had put on pants and had discarded his boy dresses, then he would not be caught in women's clothing again, no matter what happened. I have sometimes wondered whether some of the unnecessary dislike in the South for Jefferson Davis after the fall of the Confederacy was not due to his escape in women's clothes. I have known plenty of people who would have thought that such a disguise would have brought disaster, even though Yankee soldiers were not on the trail.

Even more disgraceful was it for a woman to wear men's garments. It has not been twenty years since women <sup>were</sup> ~~have been~~ arrested in large cities for being attired in trousers, with no intention of deceiving any one as to their sex, either. When a neighbor girl of mine used to put on her brother's pants and ride a horse astride, older people gasped and predicted dire things for her; none of them seem to have happened yet, unless being past fifty is the curse, and it has long ago brought down her critics.

These taboos extended, and still do in some places, to occupations. In some sections men do not milk cows, though the heavens fall. I have known men to go hungry or to eat unpalatable food rather than do their own cooking. There used to be an idea that occupations were as permanent as the sexes and that any crossing the line invited tragedy.

If only some of the old-timers could have lived until our time!!



Whoa, Mule!

A poet--and, as Chaucer would say, "It am not I"--should write a rhapsody on the mule, the humble, ugly, stubborn critter that is associated in all our memories with the old-fashioned farm and is still one of the forces in our civilization. Race horses have many a champion; even the humbler horses can boast of <sup>a</sup> respectable literature in their favor. But the mule is at best a sort of scapegoat or a comic creature, humbly waiting for an immortality in verse.

It would not be fair to imagine that one's particular form of rearing is the one and only genuine; yet it is a bit hard to imagine a boy's growing up from childhood to maturity without any contact with mules. Morally he needs to know mules, so that he can learn patience and long-suffering, from them and from his own having to put up with them. Physically he can profit by contact with them, particularly if they are lazy and need frequent goading; muscles are thus developed with<sup>out</sup> the expense of buying a punching-bag. One profits even mentally by pitting his cocky human intelligence against whatever it is that a mule has, particularly a balky mule. Daily association for years with a mule hardens a boy to the kicks and gad-flies of life, so that he unconsciously acquires, quite unthinkingly, the philosophy that probably keeps a mule from committing suicide or from becoming cynical.

If one wants to moralize and to use the mule as a creature foreordained to be used as a figure of speech, it is easy enough to think how often this ugly brute does the

hard work of the world and gets from his master nothing but more work. The old family nag, when worn out in her service to the family and her rearing of a numerous progeny, is lovingly kept in her declining days, like some old retainer. Who ever heard of an <sup>old</sup> mule's being thus fed and cared for when it had got beyond the days of usefulness? The saddle horse is groomed until he shines; the buggy horse wears bright, good-smelling harness; but Old Beck knows only the plow gear and an apologetic scratching <sup>with a curry comb</sup> of her trace-chain-rubbed sides. ~~with the curry comb.~~

But it does not pay to be too tearful in this pleading for some poetic justice for Old Beck. Underneath all this outward humil~~ity~~ity lies the heart of a humorist, even of a mischievous one. How often I have watched a mule chasing and biting other livestock, as if it were gifted with a sense of humor, a kind of bad-boy humor!

No eulogy of the mule would be complete without a reference to the Negro and the Mule. Side by side they have gone down through time, especially in America; my figure would be better if I implied that they had gone with the Negro behind the Mule. Outwardly we may think we, in our supercilious wisdom, understand them both; the wisest ones know that lurking within them is the same inscrutable mystery. No man knows how to appraise properly the mule unless it is the negro ~~himself~~ himself, who has followed the humble beast of burden so many millions of miles across the tobacco and corn and cotton fields.

Some day probably a great poet will rise to give the mule his rightful place in a world of work, <sup>of misunderstanding</sup> ~~of inscrutable~~ <sup>of mystery.</sup> ~~mystery.~~

## The Village Actor

Nearly every neighborhood in other days had its mimic, who could always be counted on for entertainment, both public and private. In Old Fidelity our postmaster-druggist was just such a person. He had a very flexible voice, which could imitate just about every person he had met. He had the knack of looking like the person or thing he was "mocking," as we called <sup>it</sup> ~~^~~. When the Fidelity neighborhood ran its literary society through the winter and met around from house to house, he was often on <sup>the</sup> ~~^~~ program. Whether he gave a reading, at which he was a specialist, or just pretended to be making a serious speech, he kept us convulsed with his antics. His best performances were in the store, with the loafers or the people who had come for the mail for audience.

As an aid to ~~to~~ his acting he developed all sorts of occult tricks. He pretended to know all there is to be known about hypnotism, mind-reading, and similar things. I was one of the numerous ones he fooled with his tricks; and yet I was so taken in that I did not dare think him laughing in his sleeve. His fine acting covered up ~~his~~ <sup>the ordinary bits</sup> of deception. ~~most obvious tricks.~~

In other times and places he would have been a showman. Probably he would have done best as an entertainer with a medicine show, then very popular. Our rather awkward boys and men could hardly help envying his skillful hands, his smooth exterior, his flexible voice.

Whenever there were practical jokes to play, he was in demand, for he was the one man of our acquaintance who could do the most preposterous things without cracking a smile. Some unsuspecting young fellow, fresh from the fields, would look like fair game to the jokesters. Anybody could suspect them, and they knew it. But the postmaster was above reproach; whatever he did seemed serious. Hence the unwary bit at the trick and was laughed out of countenance by the loud-mouthed gang around the stove.

But our postmaster had many other traits. Frankly, he could make a talk at a funeral that would have done credit to the best preachers of our time, a talk that often had that aloofness that a true critic is supposed to possess. The best speech I ever heard him make was in the old Fidelity cemetery at the funeral of a man of rather doubtful reputation. Just how bad the man had been I never knew; neighborhood gossip made him pretty bad. But the cautiousness and graciousness of the postmaster left us all feeling that it was not our province to say where our late neighbor had gone. To this day I do not know whether the speaker was acting naturally or was merely playing a part.

## Playing-like

There are so many ways for children of today to amuse themselves that I wonder whether they enjoy playing-like as much as we used to. Toys were rather few, travel was limited, and so we had to work out ways to kill time. Play-houses were in a way a sort of institution. The outdoor kind was largely a matter of moss, gathered in the woods and laid out in the form of beds and tables and chairs under some tree. Some of our moss seemed never to have known that it was snatched from its original home and <sup>so</sup> went right on growing. A careful search in the remaining woods near where our old schoolhouse stood might reveal some moss that owes its present location to childish hands of a half century ago.

Indoor playhouses could be constructed anywhere and from anything. Attics, where there were such, were just about the best places to play house. But the shedroom of the smokehouse, the buggy shed, or any of the other farm buildings would do. The dim light from an attic window cast a romantic ~~the~~ glow over the imaginary realms that we were constructing with our ~~imag~~ dreams. What matter if we were surrounded with <sup>by</sup> chests of cast-off clothing and <sup>by</sup> broken-down furniture; a little imagination could transform these into royal attire and a throne itself.

Going to see is the official game to play when one ~~plz~~ has a playhouse. Since children are highly imitative, the persons who <sup>went</sup> ~~go~~ calling with their dolls were strikingly like the grown-ups of the neighborhood. Whipping was the official punishment for all infractions of parental

rules, in real and in play life. The things that were eaten in play-like going-to-see were reflections of the neighborhood ways of thinking, of course. I am doubtful whether any genuine food ever tasted better than some of the imaginary concoctions that were served to us by our hosts and hostesses.

In order to make going to see the more real, it was necessary to dress up in some of the cast-off clothing that every farmhouse once had. A little girl with a long dress can act the part of mother to a family of dolls much better than the same little fellow in a pinafore. Sometimes smaller children were drafted to play the part of youngsters and played their parts well until they grew tired of an older sister's superior airs.

Somehow most of life seems a sort of <sup>game.</sup> ~~playing-like~~. Lots of the grown people I know keep playing-like. They know that we understand their lack of prominence in the world, but they still insist that they are this and that, as in the old attic days. Often at a large dinner I have <sup>had</sup> the good fortune to sit by or near some one who insists <sup>^</sup> on telling me how he ~~had~~ done great things, though I <sup>was</sup> ~~am~~ hardly convinced. Nearly every day I catch some of the very mannerisms of children at play, when people who have left childhood long ago are still "strutting their stuff" as they did with Dad's overcoat and Grandpa's cane in the playhouses.

## Pets

In our time the cat and the dog are rapidly becoming the only pets of the average household; on the farm in older times almost anything could be a pet. G. K. Chesterton has written a charming little essay on "Pigs as Pets," declaring that only custom is responsible for our devotion to dogs and that if pigs ever become fashionable as pets, all sorts of strange pigs will be developed: lap pigs, watch pigs, Mexican hairless pigs, Airedale pigs, and so on. Mr. Chesterton was never on a farm in America, so far as I know, or he would not have written of pigs as pets as a sort of comical dream. I have seen plenty of them, have owned them, have heard their owners boast of their pets' great intelligence, enough to make the owner of a mere dog jealous. A colleague of mine, while he was teaching a country school not far from where I lived as a boy, went to a neighbor's house to use the telephone. While he was talking, he heard a step at the door, looked up, and saw a pig enter, scratch himself on the foot of the bed, and then, with all the necessary accompanying grunts, settle himself for a nap in his bed.

As small children our favorite pets were chickens, little fellows that we had to feed carefully and watch over for the few brief days that most of them lived. We often made great ado over the death of these pets of a few days, giving them burial in a special graveyard, where small blocks of wood, left from sawing the palings for the fence, <sup>served</sup> for headstones and footstones. Sometimes we had a mock-heroic funeral, a little shame-facedly, as I now recall it. <sup>At times</sup> ~~Sometimes~~ our pet chickens grew up, though, and became regular nuisances. It was almost like cannibalism to

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devour these pets when they were frying-sized.

Pet lambs were fairly easily raised. They became devoted little fellows, following us everywhere, except to school, after the fashion of Mary's little lamb. Association with human beings often ruined the morals and manners of meek lambs, especially buck lambs. They became eager for a fight and sometimes chased visitors and other members of the family. One such lamb, a black one, <sup>was</sup> ~~became~~ so bad that he became mutton for a dinner on the ground. But the sheep family did not profit by his tragic life, for later pet lambs developed the same sort of bad traits.

Nearly every family tried its hand at keeping a wild animal as a pet. Raccoons were probably the ones most often found. Very soon they became troublesome, but often saved their lives by their cute manners. A pet squirrel laughed and chuckled in many a farm home, traveling untold miles around and through its limited cage. Daring ~~xxx~~ people sometimes caged skunks, pretty animals as you know but hardly aesthetic to our modern taste. Caged birds were once common, before national and state laws prohibited the capture and imprisonment of wild birds except for scientific purposes. You might expect to find in the same home a caged mockingbird and a necklace of catbird's or bluebird's eggs, the latter a gift of some young swain to the grown daughter of the family.



Stenciled  
at 12/6/38

## Down the Mississippi

A popular song of recent years invites the listener to come with the singer down the Mississippi; that is what I want you to do today, while we view a long-past institution, the flatboat. In its day the flatboat was an institution that seemed as permanent as the later "floating palaces," also now largely a memory.

When the Mississippi was the great avenue of travel and trade, the flatboat procession down to New Orleans was an annual event like the migration of the ducks and geese in spring and fall. People at the upper reaches of the rivers loaded their boats with all sorts of things to sell and set out, with the current of the river as their chief motive force. These boats bore many names: arks, flatboats, Kentucky boats. Alexander Wilson, the great ornithologist, who visited Kentucky in 1810, having paddled a skiff down from Pittsburgh to Louisville, thus describes the arks:

"In the course of the day I passed a number of arks, or, as they are usually called, Kentucky boats, loaded with what it must be acknowledged are the most valuable commodities of a country; viz., men, women and children, horses and ploughs, flour, millstones, &c. Several of these floating caravans were loaded with store goods for the supply of the settlements through which they passed, having a counter erected, shawls, muslins, &c., displayed, and everything ready for transacting business. On approaching a settlement they blow a horn or tin trumpet, which announces to the inhabitants their arrival. . . . The arks are built in the form of a parallelogram, being from twelve to fourteen feet wide, and from forty to seventy feet long, covered above,

rowed only occasionally by two oars before, and steered by a long and powerful one fixed above. The arks cost about one hundred and fifty cents per foot, according to their length; and when they reach their places of destination, seldom bring more than one-sixth their original cost."

The flatboatman became a sort of professional. All the daring youths wanted to go down the rivers to the glamorous New Orleans; Lincoln, as you know, made a trip or two. Even whole families were known to go, though this was hardly the rule. After the long journey down the Mississippi came the long trek homeward, up the historic Natchez Trace, infested often with highwaymen, who fed fat on the poor flatboatmen. As for that, the river pirates did a thriving business in this same period, some of them, as Otto Rothert, secretary of the Filson Club, of Louisville, has shown, becoming rich with the spoils of the flatboats.

The whole experience was an adventure, calculated to rouse the imagination of the young bloods. To outwit the wiles of the river itself, "Ol' Man River," was not an easy thing, with no government lights, no surveyed channel, no protection against drifts and sandbars. The appeal of this early trade or profession has not wholly died: since this column began, I have seen large rafts in a Kentucky stream, one of them manned by a patriarch who has made dozens of trips of a hundred miles or more. When I last saw him, he was floating around a bend in a heavy snowstorm, with the temperature dropping toward one of the coldest nights of the winter. I saw him and all his predecessors in the brief moment I ran along the bank and questioned him.

"Yes, Ma'am"

Customs come and go. In Victorian times it was boorish past all words not to say "Yes, sir," and "Yes, ma'am." No better illustration of being ill-bred could be found than the child, particularly, who did not say "ma'am" and "sir." A flat "yes" or "no" was as unthinkable as for a nice lady to be seen with her hair down or for a he-man to be caught washing dishes. When a bad boy or girl wanted to show just how bad one can become, the respectful title was left off deliberately, often with disastrous results. At school I once saw a little girl get a whipping for being so naughty; after the punishment she said "yes, ma'am" with genuine feeling and has probably taught her children and grandchildren to follow suit.

When you did not understand what one said, you did not say "I beg your pardon"; you said "Ma'am?" or "Sir?" Every semester in my life as a teacher I have met this old style, a pretty good one, too. Probably most often the "Sir?" is "Suh?"—a genuine mark of the old South.

When good Queen Victoria was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, or wherever it was, it became stylish to drop formality and even to be shocking. "Ma'am" and "sir" disappeared from many a vocabulary, along with "reticule" and "bustle" and "hoopskirt." A whole generation <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ taught to let their communication be "yea, yea" and "nay, nay." Then came the World War. Whatever else it brought, it certainly revived the use of "sir," a military word that makes it plain that all this nonsense about every one's being equal ~~with every one else~~ must not prevent a private from being formally courteous to a second lieutenant. By a transfer

of this courtesy, learned with such agony in the army, came again "ma'am," so that again we old-timers find ourselves in style. The chief difference between now and our younger days is that (there is nothing exquisitely naughty about leaving off the title, though educated ears are beginning once more to listen for the "ma'am" and "sir."

Just as our familiar "you all" gets shortened to "yall/" (if that is the way to spell it), so "ma'am" becomes "'m" in "yes'm," sometimes spelled "yessum." <sup>Then</sup> ~~Sometimes~~ we have "mum," in such sentences as "I'm sorry, mum, to tell you," or "I hate to tell you, mum, but your little boy is sick." This, of course, may be a left-over from servant times.

All of this reminds me of another phenomenon that I have seen go and come, more than once: I refer to a child's calling its parents by their real names rather than by well-recognized titles. When I was a little boy, it was thought very crude and boorish for a child to call its father Sam and its mother Maggie. Then came a wave of this usage, with children from the best-regulated families indulging innocently in what would have caused a riot earlier. It seems to be on the way out again, but who knows when a mere infant may refer to himself and his daddy as "Me and George"?

## Sorghum Molasses

As I write this article, it is early fall, before frost but toward the close of the sorghum-making season. I have just eaten a breakfast of pancakes, butter, and new molasses. The taste of the delicious syrup, made here from cane grown right in the heart of southern Kentucky, has brought up many a memory of a good-sized life, a life punctuated every fall with new sorghum molasses. In the absence of a major poet to sing the glories of sorghum, I must say a few words for a much-neglected delicacy, as worthy of a place in poetry as maple sugar and cane sugar.

The sorghum zone is a rather large one as compared with that of sugar cane, at least in our country. For weeks now the odor of cooking sorghum juice has been abroad in the land. Out in the fields the mill has been grinding and the oven going. Skilled workers have been stripping the cane and hauling it to the mill. The patient man or woman who has converted the green juice into syrup is one of the uncrowned or unlaureled artists of our time. It is no accident that as unpromising a liquid as sorghum juice becomes molasses; it takes skill that has been acquired from observation and experience.

While the workers at the mill and furnace toil through the day, it is usually at night that visitors come by to see the progress of the molasses-making. Unwary ones slip into the skimhole; all taste the newly-made syrup, using a split piece of cane for a spoon. Gay young folks, with a lantern, come across the fields and watch the fascinating

process. They never seem quite able to believe that such unpromising material can be glorified by a few hours of cooking.

But a new cycle begins when the syrup is made. Stored in kegs or barrels or buckets, it forms a part of the farm resources for the winter; extra gallons find their way to city homes. All through the long winter we find molasses and butter and hot biscuits forming a major portion of many a breakfast and often of other meals. Some time or other I knew a name for the compound produced by stirring butter and molasses together, but I have forgotten it. Anyway, there are few better flavors in the world/ than this mixture has. At frequent intervals there will come molasses cakes or gingerbread. Gingerbread and cider are eternally mated, like turkey/ and cranberries and ham and eggs. Molasses cookies or cakes are stronger and more masculine than teacakes. I prefer the <sup>N</sup>kid that are cut out in long strips and baked in a big pan; this kind strikes a tenderer spot. Sometimes molasses has a way of sugaring in the barrel; then it is necessary to twist out quantities of it and reheat it with some water to make it syrupy again. When you are smoking the meat, nothing is better than chunks of this strong candy fished out through the bunghole of the molasses barrel. Then there is molasses candy, not so common, probably, as formerly, but still one of the delicacies. And popcorn candy, where molasses and popcorn form a new unit, almost like a special kind of nut or fruit. From cane to candy is a cycle, worthy of a whole poem of the quality of Whittier's "The Huskers," with its tribute to corn.

## Some Old-time Medicines

If one of us gets sick today, ~~we are~~ <sup>he is</sup> dosed with stuff that bears strange new names and tastes. One almost longs for the old medicine chest and its tried-and-true remedies.

I have been told on good authority that counter irritants are not so common as formerly, and these now in use are likely to be something different from the plasters we used to know. When a fellow had a severe case of cramps, a blister plaster turned the trick, and almost turned the patient, too. I can recall having one such plaster, and one was enough. The bad-smelling black ointment was spread out on a cloth and applied to my stomach. Not long after that it seemed that a hot iron ~~was~~ <sup>if</sup> burning into my flesh. After some minutes of agony I was relieved to have the plaster removed and a mush plaster applied instead. Then I puffed up as <sup>if</sup> I had been scalded and by and by got well, plaster or a strong constitution being to blame. Now, a mustard plaster can create enough heat to startle one, but I vote for the blister plaster made of Spanish flies or cantharides.

Are there still cricks in the neck? If so, how about cupping? There used to be regular instruments for this, but a wide-mouthed bottle into which has been dropped a lighted paper will form a vacuum and draw the skin into as many fancy shapes as you wish, thus relieving the crick. If there are cricks in the back, or any other back miseries, try a porous plaster. One's back, after it has been subjected to a porous plaster for a few days, looks like the board on

which one could play some fancy kind of checkers.

Spells of colic( Newspapers having a large percentage of mid-Victorian readers had better delete this word.) yield to various and sund~~ry~~ teas. A mild case will probably be stopped by ginger tea, with a little alcohol or whiskey added for flavor. Severe cases will require Indian turnip. In fact, any one who survives a case of colic and Indian turnip ~~✓~~ should be given a medal for endurance.

If an insect bites you, there are many things to do. For instance, mix soda and vinegar and apply while the mixture is still fizzing. Chiggers and ticks yield to fried-meat grease. A severe bee sting will lose its agony when ~~✓~~ the spot is covered with a fresh chew of tobacco.

Biliousness, once a much-used word, had many a remedy. Most of the herb remedies aimed at this disease. Good old calomel in its various forms, especially blue mass, so easily made into pills, gets at the seat of this trouble. If you want to be a little more stylish, buy for a dollar or two about ten cents' worth of calomel in some kind of patent medicine.

And then there are chills, "agers." Quinine is and was the remedy, whatever strides we may have made in other ways. If you can stand it, take it raw; you will think yourself brave to swallow it thus. Capsules, with both "cap" and "sule" full of quinine was the usual form. When a fellow has taken about six capsules of this drug in a single day, he has noises in his head that would make a rock-crusher sound like an accordion. Again, if you must be stylish, try any number of chill tonics, in which the quinine is disguised.

And always there is burdock bitters for things in general.



## Parties and Sociables

Dancing has again become so common that it is nearly ~~almost~~ the most recognized form of social amusement. But a generation ago dancing, harmless old square dancing ~~that~~ that, was very naughty. A few representatives of the world and the flesh and the devil still knew how to trip the light fantastic, and did it, too, in defiance of church and parental authority. Those of us who were afraid of our parents and the wrath to come still had our social life, a bit drab as viewed by our descendants. We had youth, and that was something; we courted and got married, and thus it goes always, regardless of the form of social amusement.

Our old-fashioned parties, after the square dance went out and before the "round" dance came in, had certain definite features that must have been rather common everywhere. Some communities, though outlawing square dances, allowed play-party games: "Suzie in the Ring," "Roxie Ann," "Rosie Betsy Lina," "Old Dan Tucker," "Chase the Buffalo," and so on. As I have already spoken of these games, it would be unnecessary repetition to write something more. But the rigid people of some parts of the state looked upon these games as wicked and equal to the square dance.

When we went to parties, then, we had to devise other means of entertainment. Our liveliest game was snap, a game that used to seem very exciting but now somewhat resembles drop the handkerchief. A couple stood up in the floor holding hands (that was a good part of the game). A boy would then snap his finger in front of a girl, who forthwith had to chase him around the couple until she caught him. Then he took the place of the boy holding hands, and the girl

snapped another boy. This continued indefinitely, often with rather disastrous results to the garments of the two holding hands, as the players would swing around roughly and take all sorts of chances to keep from being caught.

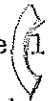
Then there were kissing games galore. Just why dancing was so wrong and kissing so right it might take a philosopher to discover. I suppose that postoffice was the best-known kissing game; since I have not played it in many years, please do not expect me to remember the rules of the game. There may have been no rules; anyway, somebody got kissed and appeared innocent.

Playing social was a standard game, if one could call it that. The girls were seated at intervals all around the room on chairs or <sup>or</sup> seats made by laying planks from chair to chair and spreading a folded quilt over them to make the sitting more comfortable. Some boy acted as introducer or passer-on or whatever you could call it. He took a boy around and introduced him to a girl, leaving him to talk to her until someone else was brought around. That was lots of fun until a fellow got stuck with some dull girl whom nobody wanted to talk to. Sometimes the boys agreed in advance to talk to such for a certain length of time, provided they would be relieved by other fellows who would make martyrs of themselves in the interest of ~~the~~ causing every one to have a good time. I could add, parenthetically, that there were dull boys, too, but they had the advantage of being able to get away better.

Refreshments at any kind of party were likely to be pickles and cake, especially if the party were during Christmas week. Indigestible, yes, but always suggestive of socialables and parties.

### Earlier Commencements

It is not merely older manners that are passing; some of our newer ones have come and gone like models of automobiles. One of the ~~these~~ institutions of our country, of course, is the annual high school or college commencement day. When there were private colleges galore in the state, or at least schools that called themselves colleges, some actual traditions grew up that died with the schools themselves. State-supported high schools have not existed long enough to have developed much tradition.

Once I attended a small denominational college, now long dead. It was my first look-in on the big world, and my diary and I had a good time recording all the school happenings. When the school term was over, the commencement was put on in a very dignified manner, even though there were only three graduates. The college band, about a corporal's guard in number, formed the head of a collegiate procession that wound around the campus and into the building. The address was given in great form, in English, but the conferring of the degrees was in Latin, pure Ciceronian, I can assure you. To each of the three girls receiving the diploma the  little speech was made, only the name, properly Latinized, being changed each time. I gaped at the odd words and wondered, since my knowledge of Latin had not then begun. It was really dignified and worthy, then as well as in memory.

My own experience as a commencement speaker is now of age, as it began twenty-one seasons ago. Even in that time many changes have occurred in high school commencements. As more than twenty of my hundred and fifty speeches were given

in communities that had never<sup>a</sup> had a commencement before, you may know that I have had some interesting experiences. Oddly enough, some of these same occasions were among the most impressive, <sup>because of</sup> ~~for~~ the sincerity of /the people who were present. One high school, which is now probably as regularized as most of them, used to have a flower <sup>bearer</sup> ~~girl/boy~~, dressed like the <sup>graduate</sup> ~~person~~ he sat beside, to receive the gifts, ~~for the graduates.~~ These flower bearers were very small children, somewhat like the tots used in elaborate weddings. Ordinarily they had plenty of work to do, for presents fairly flowed in. At other high schools the ushers came up after the ceremony with the gifts, sometimes with a considerable flourish. As for that, when I <sup>graduated</sup> ~~finished~~ from a junior college, the same practice was ~~still~~ in vogue. I can still recall how left-out I felt, for none of my family could come so far to my graduation, even though they had sent appropriate gifts through the mail.

Some of the commencements had the air of a funeral. Tears were common, on the faces of the graduates and in the voice of the numerous speakers, including the distinguished gentleman who had come by train or boat or buggy to deliver the chief address of the time. On one such occasion I shocked the audience, who had wept through a long harangue on "Mother," tearfully given by the valedictorian, by saying that it was not a tearful but a joyous occasion. I have not yet been invited back to that high school and may not ever be.

There were no caps and gowns in those days; it almost broke up the poor fathers to dress their children sufficiently to make the proper impression. In general, I must confess that our present-day graduating exercises are more dignified, if more regular, than those of other times.

## City Folks at Fidelity

The difference between country and town people is not so great as it once was, to the credit of both groups. Popular education, county high schools, county farm and home demonstrators, summer camps, district and regional tournaments in athletics and other~~s~~ things, and a freer atmosphere generally account for this. A third of a century ago it was hardly thus. Still there were connections between the two groups, as most of the people who lived in town were one generation or less from the soil.

Old Fidelity was poor but proud. It had never been other than a small village, but, like so many of us, it had ~~seen~~ better days. As long as the railroad kept away from our county, and it was necessary to go thirty miles or more to ~~a railroad~~ <sup>reach one</sup>, Fidelity ~~kept~~ remained much as it had been since the earliest settlement. There were two tobacco factories, a water mill near the village, a union church, several stores, and some other attractions, including a Masonic lodge hall. Then came the railroad through the county seat, and gradually the village began to show signs of decadence. Proud yet, in spite of its being off the railroad, it was lacking in any importance except locally. Some of its citizens moved to the county seat or on to other towns and cities. Enough ties were left, however, for the quaint old place to be attractive to visitors, as when some of the old-timers returned for ~~a few~~ a few days and brought along their families, born elsewhere but taught the special merits of Fidelity.

Local citizens, proud of their well-dressed visitors, brought them to church and Sunday School. One returned citizen ~~dropped~~ a dollar into the collection basket one Sunday, creating a small hurricane of excited whispers. If any of the visitors could be induced to talk, they were asked to teach the adult class or to comment on the lesson. Most of them wisely ~~declined~~ and sat in the Amen-corner and looked pious. Housewives vied with each other in inviting the visitors to Sunday dinner and, in the current phrase, "put the big pot in the little one." Language took a sudden flight upward, for some of us dropped expressions that the teachers had been fighting for years, that is, we dropped them during the time of the visit of the city folks.

If the visit came in week days, we took the city people to see the tobacco factory where the negroes worked and sang. This was probably the most outstanding thing we could do, for there was never anything else quite like this. The negro women sat in rows facing each other and stemmed the tobacco leaves, singing meanwhile spirituals or "white-folks" songs, giving their own musical interpretation to the words. People who visited that old factory have told me in recent years that nothing in their lives made such an impression as this.

For some days after a visit the younger generation put on airs at school because of the famous people who had been to Fidelity. We walked like them and talked like them and envied them immoderately. The children who lived in the homes visited were quizzed indefinitely about the great people from the outside world who had strayed into our little remote village. I wonder whether any such excitement could be created anywhere today.

## Playing School and Meeting

In addition to playing house we used to play school or church. The playing of children, at least when I was a child, was both consciously and unconsciously a satire on the elders. Since we were not gifted with rare vision, we did pretty much the things that we had seen, making them more ridiculous, if that were possible.

The old-fashioned school put up a good bluff. Viewed from the vantage ground of a third of a century, it does not look so fierce as it appeared and wanted to be. Rules, innumerable ones, sometimes, were made, apparently to be broken. When we played school, we even improved on what the teachers did. It was almost wicked <sup>just</sup> to be. The slightest encroachment on the teacher's dictatorship brought dire punishment. The children ~~punished~~ in the play school, usually unlike the ones in the one-room district school, cried loud and long when they were punished. The teaching methods were excellent travesties of what we had suffered in school. Sometimes, though, I have seen some genuine teaching and even some learning in play schools, for hungry little children often forgot to be actors and enjoyed the play. Of course, the bad boys preferred to break up the school or to accept their punishment like men, to make the smaller ones envious. That times have changed since then was brought to my attention not long ago when a woman with several children told me that her family when playing school did not use the switch but threatened the youngsters with low grades in deportment. The children of old Fidelity knew only the rod, fresh from the endless woods around the schoolhouse.

It was not always easy to play meeting, for some of the children were likely to have conscientious scruples about making fun of sacred things. Then, too, parents and teachers often took a hand when our satire was a bit too broad. Regardless of the religious preference of the children, our baptisms were always by immersion, preferably in a pile of leaves. Large boys resisted the preacher until the baptising often became a riot, with some deputies to help out those who were in charge. The preaching, the singing, the call to the mourners' bench were standardized, varying only a little from what we observed. The shouting was a bit overdone, sounding more like the ravings of crazy people.

And this reminds me, even if it should not, of playing jail. The weakest boys were chosen as sheriffs, to give the gangsters a chance to work their tricks with little punishment. The little sheriff got even, occasionally, with the gang by deputizing a large, rough boy to help him quell the mob. The jail was commonly a cleared place fenced in with huckleberry bushes; breaking jail was up to true gangster ideals. In one neighborhood near where I lived the boys dug a pit some three feet deep and built a rail pen over this for their jail. One boy was almost smothered in the jail, and the less closed-in type was used afterward.

Whatever we did, we nearly always had a fight. Young villains are very little different from older ones. But the game went on, from generation to generation, whether we played school or church or jail or any of the numerous games of the country school.



## Church-door Johnny

Earlier in this series I spoke of the formality of sending notes to the girls or of making dates through a friend. I remember that there was another type, a sort of makeshift for bashful boys who hardly knew how or what to write or who sadly lacked the nickel to give the boy who delivered the note and waited for its answer. This method was to stand just outside the church, preferably in the evening, and take a girl's arm as she came out with her parents or with other girls. This deaf-and-dumb method was quite effective in its way, though frowned on by the more staid and dignified ones of our neighborhood. The most embarrassing thing was to seize a girl's arm and start walking away into the darkness, only to realize that some other fellow had her other arm. Always one or the other grew faint-hearted and gave up the struggle, the blushing young woman remaining neutral.

This practice was particularly suited to the small village or compact neighborhood, where many people came to gatherings on foot. It would have been unthinkable to follow a girl out to her father's wagon and ride home with her. To the wagon was as far as any regular fellow could go. But how attractive it was to walk home, even along with the family, under the stars and the moon, the moon so famous in popular songs then and now!

I cannot recall whether the girl thus sought out ever rebelled; hence the practice must have been a kind of freemasonry that the elders did not understand. Maybe the young swain looked across the church and said more in his bashful look than he could have said in formal notes. Anyway,

the girl acquiesced in a system that seems a little too crude today, and she seemed to enjoy being thus sought after.

Not all boys were bold enough to seize or capture a young lady as she emerged from church. Older boys would shove them just as some girl came by, causing both boy and girl to blush to their roots of the hair. I have known boys who seemed to have accidentally walked into the church with the girl as she was trailing her family; very rarely he had the nerve to sit with her after he had followed her in. From painful experience I know that when he had done this, the best defense when the boys teased him was to remain silent; for his words were passed on from mouth to mouth when he said anything.

Growing up is hard work, and I am afraid that the youngsters do not get enough sympathy while they are engaged in such toil. In our time the older people seem hardly the ogres they once were, and, besides, the opportunity for boys and girls to be together is much easier than formerly. Since life is pitched on a more nearly normal scale today, it seems odd that one still finds the shy boy who ~~shy~~ can hardly get into society.

## Style in Towels

Those society people who think that style is only applicable to what they do or say or wear should have had a few years' valuable training in Fidelity. There was plenty of style in this quaint old place, even though there was no finery in the ordinary sense of the term. This style extended to such common things as towels.

Let us begin at the bottom of the social scale. Very plain people, with little or no impression to make, used towels made from grass sacks, cut in two and hemmed. For very dirty hands these towels are not so bad; they save a great deal of washing, too, for boys. But it would be hard to find anybody now who would admit having used such a towel.

The standard every-day towel for the farm hands was made from meal sacks, large two-bushel sacks at that. The cloth is heavy cotton stuff, nearly as thick as the hickory shirting that we once used and possessing just such lasting qualities. Less rough than grass sacks, these meal sacks also help scrub off the dirt after you have soaped your hands with home-made lye soap and started the dirt to coming off anyway. I might add that you must wash your face with water scooped up in both hands and must make a blowing noise with your mouth, whether any of the soapy water has got into your mouth or not. This is merely a part of the process of washing the hands and face.

When company comes, unless it is some boy who has followed us home from ~~company~~ <sup>church</sup>, finer towels are brought out, linen or near-linen, and smaller by half than the ~~meal sack~~ meal sack towel. These towels, unlike the standard ones, are white, rather than gray in color, and show dirt. Besides, it is best to use tinted toilet soap instead of Big Deal or lye soap. But the old washpan is still the container of the water, even with these fine towels.

In every style there is a best, and towels were no exception to this rule. Exclusive company used only the washbowl and pitcher in the front room. The towel supplied here was the best in the house and sometimes even had some embroidered flowers or initials on it. The soap, too, was in a dish, not a broken cup or saucer, a dish that often had been a present from the best boy friend of Big Sister, a sort of companion to the water pitcher and six-glass set that often graced the front room. Holding up the train of royalty has never and will never fall to my lot, but I have walked with swelling chest into the front room with a pitcher of water and a nice towel, all for the distinguished guest who had honored us with his company. Even better, I have been the guest who used the washbowl and pitcher; the scented, tinted soap; the embroidered guest towel. Style? You bet!

## Cutting Sprouts

When I begin to doubt the facts that I talk about in this rambling column, I turn back to my old diaries, kept when I was teen-age boy, and find all the material that I need and confirmation of everything I have thus far written. The diaries were written with no thought of their ever becoming of value; they merely recorded the day's weather and told what I did or where I went, with very rarely a few other things. Just now, in a diary written in 1905, I found this simple entry: " I have been cutting sprouts in the newground today." To many of the younger generation that means nearly nothing; to the old-timers it chronicles a whole cycle of life.

Sprouts were of several varieties. The kind I spoke of in my diary were those that had come up from stumps that still retained enough life to send up sprouts for a season or two after the clearing was cultivated. Sometimes these sprouts were a nuisance for years, particularly in the clearings in the creek bottoms, where the soil was rich and the moisture plentiful. But for the cutting of these sprouts it would have been pretty hard to see the corn in the newground after the last plowing was done. I have gone by fields that looked like young orchards with corn growing up among the trees. Our fathers warned us against just such places and tried to cheer us in one of the most tedious jobs I ever engaged in.

Newground sprouts, though, were only a small chapter in this annual cutting. Upland fields that may have remained in pasture for a year or more grew up in sassafras and persimmon sprouts. I verily believe that these shrubby trees have the most vitality of any of our native plants.

The labors with the axe or the grubbing hoe, followed by the plow, seem to cultivate the deep-lying roots, so that the next year brings as big a job of clearing the land for the plow as ever. The state of the sassafras or persimmon sprout is like that of the man in the Bible, worse<sup>at last</sup> than at first. It takes philosophy like this or even more to keep the boy clearing his young newground with axe and grubbing hoe.

Orators used to tell us that cutting sprouts, like turning the grindstone, produced great men. I have looked in vain for a large crop of geniuses from the rugged hillsides around old Fidelity.

Even worse than cuttingsprouts was and is cutting briars. Sprouts may whip you in the face when you hit them, but they leave no barbs. Long ago I learned the way to prevent briars from hitting you is to hit them hard licks, severing them completely; blackberry briars are not to be coddled. But when briars are all grown up with weeds and grapevines, expect the worst. If you escape without bloody marks, you are a better briar-cutter than I have ever been.

There is one thing that a boy who is cutting sprouts can do to make time pass: he can sharpen his grubbing hoe or his briar blade. In theory, at least, he is making time; I am afraid that in practice he is using up precious hours. A sharp scythe usually means potential rather than actual bushes or briars cut.

Just what do boys do now to become president or governor? I know that sprouts still exist, but I do not know whether cutting them paves the way to high office.

## The Wickedness of Laughter

Today we laugh when we want to, at home or at school or at school, and think little about it. In the more formal or more rigid days only the bad ones laughed, or so we were told. Consequently, things were funnier then than they are now. It took much more self-control to keep down a violent spell of laughing. Many devices were used, the commonest being holding the nose, which sometimes merely intensified the explosion. Then the teacher took a hand. Laughing was, indeed, wicked, except, of course, at social gatherings and on the playground, where things rarely seemed funny.

It must be due to this attitude toward laughing that many of the events of our youth seem now so funny. We hardly dared to laugh then; now we can never finish laughing at what took place then.

In school laughing was almost as bad as talking aloud. It was a rare teacher who allowed us such a privilege. It pleases me to find in my old diary this statement: "We've had several spells of laughing today." I did not state what we were laughing at; probably nothing particularly; we just had the giggles, a prevalent disease then and sometimes now. Evidently the teacher had allowed us to laugh with impunity. Some of the little girls were victims of hysterical giggles. We said their tickle boxes got turned over. They laughed in a kind of nervous hysteria; we laughed at them. It is altogether possible that the teachers who called us to strict account for laughing had plenty of good argument on their sides.

The punishment for laughing at school was present and humiliating; at church we feared immediate and future wrath. The preacher, our parents, society in general, and then an invisible fear of later retribution managed to keep us fairly quiet. Sometimes, though, human endurance gave out, and we cackled out as merrily as we might have in our own homes, only to come to a sudden and unmusical halt when we discovered what we had done.

Sometimes I wonder whether our loud laughter in the fields and at social gatherings, often horse laughter, was not an outlet for more refined feelings that had been pent up too fiercely. While some of the things that used to tickle me until I was weak are still funny, most of them seem very commonplace and inane. Our sense of humor has been allowed to develop unfettered, so that laughter is no longer a stolen joy, with its punishment following just behind.

This same repression of humor may also account for the tendency to practical joking that was once more common than now. A rather drab life it was in the fields and woods, with only occasional opportunities for social life. How natural to scare some one, to play tricks on innocent children or unsuspecting older ones! If all the reputed haunted houses were properly investigated, I would almost wager that they got their reputation from some mischievous boy who was probably afraid of scaring others but who rejoiced at finding that he could create a legend or tradition in a community.



## Hayrides

Often I have mentioned style in this series of little essays about folk customs. Hayrides once stood at the head of the column. Automobiles were still far in the future, but no car can ever bring quite the thrill that we once experienced on a hayride. There is nothing very elaborate about such a celebration. All you need is a hay frame on the wagon, some hay, and a tarpaulin or wagon sheet stretched over it. Then sit with your legs dangling off and bump over rough roads for five or ten miles, and you will have a hayride.

Any place will do for an excuse for a hayride. If you can find river at the end of the road, well and good. Then you can row the girls in paddle boats or engage a ferry boat to take the entire party on a trip up or down the river. A spring is another place that should be found on a hayride, for dinner goes with this custom, like cranberries with turkey. Chestnuts or hickory nuts or blackberries, whatever the season, may give some spice( and chiggers) to life. Even a church or an outdoor meeting can be attended on a hay wagon.

New-timers may think that their ancestors were very pious folk by the way they went to church. What they can never know, except by hearsay, is that church services comprised most of the events in our very drab lives. A church service can be as good an excuse as any for a trip on a hay wagon with a merry crowd. The gang may be well enough bred to behave themselves while the services are going on, but on the way anybody can mock the preacher or the singers or parody the most sacred songs.

Not to play practical jokes on some of the gang would be to admit that the hayride is not genuine. It is nearly impossible to get up a crowd without having at least one very loving couple, far gone in romance. These can become the butt of all the jokes, especially if they are in the silent, languishing stage. Some one of the crowd is sure to be just breaking into society; he needs frequent roasting from the more experienced. By all means there must be a mimic, who knows how to imitate animals and people, to laugh or chew or spit like the dignified members of his social group.

The wagonette, now completely lost as an institution, was good for small parties. This strange vehicle was a long covered cart or wagon, with seats along the sides. The ones I knew best would seat about six couples, enough for a very merry party, with the added advantage of having a roof against the sun or possible rain. Sometimes it was the custom for the boys to furnish the vehicle and the horses, the girls to furnish the food, now called eats but then often called, quite innocently, grub. Such Dutch treats are good things and should not be allowed to pass away. I have shared many a one and have no horror of seeing them return on a grand scale. There were no gold-diggers in those days; the girl regarded herself as part of the partnership.

Since peanut butter and baker's bread have come into general use, I fear I could not make you hungry by telling you what we ate. One thing I know: no cook of today can beat the cakes we had then. However stylish a trip by car can be today, it still lacks something of the hale-fellow-well-met feeling of the old-fashioned hayride.