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Memories of an Iowa Farm Boy

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HERITAGE
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Memories of

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1994

an Iowa Farm Boy

recalled by **H. E. WILKINSON**

illustrated by **JOHN HUSEBY**

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H. E. Wilkinson was born in Cerro Gordo County, Iowa, in 1892. After graduating from Iowa State College, he farmed and worked for Iowa Mutual Insurance Company in De Witt, Iowa. He died in 1987.

John Huseby, a longtime graphic designer for Iowa State University, was active in Iowa art circles until his death in 1994.

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To Mary,

the curly-haired girl

a word from the author

I never really intended to write a book at all. I suppose there have been many, many persons who have sat themselves down at a typewriter and said, "Now I shall write a book." It didn't work that way with me.

I used to get to wondering why Jeremiah Wilkinson or Thomas Pickford or Mary Magee — whom you will meet later on in these pages — had apparently never bothered to set down any of the interesting things they must certainly have done. I wondered too, whether my grandchildren — of whom I already have some, and my great-grandchildren — if such there should be, would ever care anything about what that old rascal who was born in 1892 was like, and what he and his friends did.

One thing led to another, and there were encouraging and kindly words from men like W. Earl Hall, Paul F. Sharp, and Marshall Townsend. And finally, some drawings by John Huseby added just the right touch to a story of some of the old days that now seem mellower and happier than they may have been at the time.

There was a lot of help, too, from many of my old friends and neighbors. There was priceless assistance from my uncles and aunts who at one time lived, or

still live in "village on the Shell Rock." My thanks to all of them.

The county of Cerro Gordo was named away back in 1851 after the famous battlefield of that name in the Mexican War. The words are Spanish and mean *Great Hill,* though you would be hard put to find a topographical prominence of this description in the pleasantly sloping lands of this northern Iowa county.

Memories of an Iowa Farm Boy covers a period of nearly thirty years of living in Cerro Gordo County. It could be the story of most any boy's life in those times. It just happens to be mine.

H. E. Wilkinson

the memories

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Memories of an Iowa Farm Boy

CHANGE

I stopped to see the old home farm the other day—
The place where I grew up, and used to play
Around the milkhouse and the barn, and climbed the trees,
And once—I hate to think of it—I whipped the bees.

The dooryard does not look the same, the trees have grown,
Their branches interlaced where once they stood alone;
And only one, a spruce that scarcely grows at all,
Stands like a friendly dwarf that helps me to recall
Those summer twilight games of hide and seek
We played when all the chores were done, and heard the creak
Of lonely frogs beyond the orchard, where the road
Dipped in a hollow and a tiny brooklet flowed.

The barn has been remodeled—where the driveway stood
Are rows of cattle stanchions made of steel and wood.
I climbed the ladder to the mow, where in the hay
We boys dug pirate tunnels on a rainy day,
And in the shadows of that dim, mysterious room
Saw stealthy figures moving in the dusty gloom.
And in a horse stall down below I found alive
An ancient dappled gelding that I used to drive;
Decrepit now he stood, with gaunt and bony frame,
But still I thought he knew me when I spoke his name.

I wonder why the fields looked smaller to me now,
For when I used to shock the oats or drive the plow
They seemed a mile across on sultry afternoons,
When meadow larks and crickets played their lazy tunes.
And like the last in line of a forgotten race,
Upon what seemed a distant corner of the place,
An ancient cottonwood stood like a lonely tower,
A refuge that we ran to in a sudden shower.

The creek that wandered in and out among the hills
Up in the pasture has bequeathed its rills
To other streams, and now its lily pads and frogs
Have slipped away and left behind them muddy bogs.
Thus with all earthly things—and who am I to say
That old forgotten times were better than today?
I wonder what the difference can really be—
Have all of these things changed so much—or is it me?

Courtesy the CHICAGO DAILY DROVERS' JOURNAL

journey to lime creek township

On the twenty-second day of September, 1892, a young farmer's wife was feeling decidedly uncomfortable. She had, indeed, been feeling that way for what seemed to her entirely too long. Her name had been Ellen Pickford. Now it was Mrs. Wendell Wilkinson.

The reason for her acute discomfort was me. I was

taking my time — so they told me afterward. Too doggone much time.

I had given notice in no uncertain terms several hours earlier that my arrival was imminent. But a tendency to dawdle — a trait that was to crop up many times during my later sojourn in this world — was making everyone in the little one-story house on the old Pickford farm a few miles northwest of Nora Springs, Iowa, pretty uneasy over the way things were going.

Finally old Doctor Smith of Mason City arrived. He didn't fool around. Presently I gulped my first breath of Cerro Gordo County autumn air, and I presume, let out a series of protesting squawks. Doc Smith probably said he'd better be starting on that eight mile drive back to Mason City with his horse and buggy, and left me to make out as best I could with the female relatives who had gathered around for the occasion. I have an idea that my Grandmother Jane Wilkinson was on hand at the time of my birth, for, I recall that she was there when my sister Florence was born, and again when my brother Roger came along.

For some reason, which has never been explained to my satisfaction, they decided to call me Herbert Ellery Wilkinson. Where that middle name came from is an unsolved mystery. The only other fellow I know of with a name like that is Ellery Queen, the mystery story writer. That isn't his real name either. I wish I could run across him some day and ask him where he found the name. I might feel easier in my mind. Wouldn't it be horrible if he should tell me — if our meeting ever

occurred — that he had seen my full name somewhere and had swiped part of it? My brother, Roger, always says he never can remember what my middle name is until he happens to remember it rhymes with celery.

I was looking through an old history textbook of mine the other day, one that I had when I was 10 years old. On the flyleaf I had written my full name. Below it I had written "Nom-de-plume, Louis Conning." That's what I wished my name was then. It was the prettiest I could think of. I don't believe it sounds so pretty now. In fact, it sounds lousy. So I'll just keep the one my folks started me out with.

I'm pretty well convinced that I must have given my mother a rough time and my father a good scare when I was born, for they didn't get up courage to have the next baby, Florence, for seven years. Of course it could have been that I was a disgusting little brat after I got old enough to get around on my own power, and my folks may have thought, "Well if that's the way they're going to be, Heaven help us if we have any more of 'em." I have tried to convince myself that the foregoing could not possibly have been the case. Yet I recall uneasily Grandmother Wilkinson speaking to me pretty sharply one day, "Don't be so sassy!" No doubt I had been shooting off my little mouth.

It appears that my father, mother and I continued to live in that one-story farmhouse until I was about thirty months old. Uncle Rufus Pickford lived with us. He was the youngest of my mother's brothers. But the farm was small, only about 100 acres. Uncle Rufus was about

to get married and expected to bring his bride there to live. My father had taken a fling at carpentering — he learned the trade well too — but he was smart enough to see that there wasn't much future in it for him. So it was definitely our move.

Some years before this, a quarter section of land in Lime Creek Township had taken my father's eye. He used to walk across it whenever he went on foot from his father's home near Rock Falls on his way to the circus, or perhaps to Teachers' Institute at Mason City. It was a nine-mile walk but he thought nothing of it. I don't think much of it either. I'd howl my head off if I had to walk half a mile today. He often said to me in later years, "I always liked that farm. It laid just right, most of it sloping gently to the south; it had running water on it, and it was fairly close to Mason City. I was sure Mason City would be quite a place someday."

He resolved to buy that farm. The chance finally came about the time we were going to have to leave the old Pickford homestead. The price was $35 an acre. My father said he'd take it. The sellers, not expecting to be snapped up so quickly, backed down on their asking price and upped it a dollar an acre to $36. They thought Dad would back out. He didn't. He said he'd take it anyway. But he was probably pretty disgusted over having to pay $160 more than the original price.

There wasn't a building on the place except an old wreck of a cattle shed down in what came to be our creek pasture. Neither was there a fence worthy of the name. But there was a lot of good rich dirt on that 160

acres, and the prairie grass grew knee high to a man on horseback — and the little creek ran full and clear the year round. The prairie chicken, the jack rabbit and the meadow lark knew there was food and shelter and safety in the pleasant swales of this gently sloping land.

One blustery day in the spring — the year was 1895 — my father tied our high-wheeled buggy on behind a wagon with a hay-rack on it. My mother and I climbed in the buggy, and we were on our way to the new farm. It is almost certain that the roads were bad that day. They always were in the spring, either frozen into icy ruts or heavy with mud. My father, standing on the hay-rack, looked back frequently to see whether we were coming along all right. My mother, always an anxious person, held onto me tightly with one hand while the other one gripped the buggy seat. I'll bet it took us at least a couple of hours to travel the four miles to our new quarter section.

It must have been a rather desolate place. I have no recollection of how it looked then, of course. My father and my Uncle Theodore Wilkinson had worked there several months, getting a house and a shed-type barn built. There wasn't a tree or a bush of any kind nearby. Only the open prairie where a few small cultivated fields had struggled to push back the wild grass that grew so rankly in the spring and now lay thick and brown waiting for the summer's warmth to come again.

So here it was that we stopped that day and a new Iowa home began. This farm was to bloom under my father's and my mother's careful and expert hands into

a place of comfort and beauty and abundance. Here my sister and my brother were born, and here I was to bring my bride many years later. Here was to be a pleasant place of flowers, evergreens and shrubs of many kinds, an apple orchard, and a walnut grove. My father loved trees — too well, I sometimes thought on days when I had to clear away dead branches or stumps, or was sent with the old red bucksaw to cut up stove wood for the kitchen range.

Here was to be a place for comfortable living, with a furnace and running water and a wide veranda on which we kids invented our own game called "Keep Off The Porch." Farm buildings and silos were to appear as they became needed. Fences were to line the roads and run up and down the hills in the creek pasture, where there was a lovely lily pond at the foot of a steep slope. There was going to be good coasting in the winter time in that pasture too, and in the summer time there was even a spot near the lily pond where you could strip off your clothes and paddle in the sparkling ripples of the little creek.

But we didn't know all these things that cold day in March, 1895. Father and Mother were thinking more of getting a fire started in that new house, bedding down the horses in the lean-to stable, and no doubt, keeping me out from under foot while they moved our few belongings into what was to be our home for many many years.

you'll have to hurry!

Grandfather Benjamin Pickford often came to stay with us for several weeks at a time after we were settled at the new farm. Like most grandfathers when it comes to their grandsons, he spent a good deal of time with me. Though he was then well past 70 years old, he was an active man and liked nothing better than to go for long

walks with me about the fields and along the winding cow paths in the creek pasture.

We especially liked to set out of a pleasant summer afternoon for an entrancing thicket of wild plum trees that grew on the steep hillside above the lily pond a half mile or so from the house. Here the cattle, in search of a juicy bite of grass or a bit of green foliage had worn steep paths in and out among the trees. Grandfather and I would clamber about these paths pretending that we were mountain climbers and explorers. Often we could not stand upright without clinging tightly to the roots and branches about us, lest we slip and go tumbling toward the lily pond.

When we tired of this little game, we would sit panting in some shady spot where the grass grew soft and rankly, and talk of the many things that an old man and a very young boy can always find to talk about. Later on, as the sun slanted down in the west and the dull croak of the frogs among the lily pads began to grow louder, we would saunter toward home, hand in hand — though now and then I had to break away for a minute examination of a pocket gopher's mound or a meadow lark's nest.

At the supper table that night, if my mother asked us where we had been, Grandfather and I smiled at each other and said, "Oh, just out walking." We did not want her to know about our plum thicket and lily pond.

The happy days my grandfather and I spent together had to come to an end of course. One day sadness crept in, touching us all, when we learned that Grandfather

Benjamin, visiting then at my aunt's home, would not recover from pneumonia. I wonder that even after half a century the memory of a hurried drive through darkness and a slashing rainstorm to reach his bedside stands out so clearly. I wonder too, why it was that I was permitted, a few days later, to stand at the edge of his open grave in the little cemetery at Rock Falls, even while the sexton tumbled the first clods down upon the coffin. What a heartless way to tell a broken-hearted kid that his beloved companion of sunny summer days had gone away.

It was a good thing for me that during the busy years that followed on our quarter section in Lime Creek Township my Uncle Theodore Wilkinson was often with us. There were many new buildings needed on the place. A barn, a granary, a cattle shed, a machine shed, a chicken house, and some of the upstairs rooms in the house still had to be finished. Uncle Thee, as we always called him, was an expert carpenter, and a happy and good-natured companion to a lonely youngster like me. I was fascinated not only by the way he could fashion playthings out of odd bits of wood, but also by his trilling birdlike whistling. I tried for years to imitate this whistling but never could.

When the job of carpentering was completed, and my uncle had nothing else to do at the moment, he liked to hop on a train and, as he put it, "Go out west." As a matter of fact, I think he never went much farther than the Dakotas in those days, but that seemed a tremendous distance to us at home. He liked to tell,

upon returning, of having been in places like Fargo and Belle Fourche and Bismark, and how, if you didn't make the right connections, you had to "lay over" a certain number of hours in this or that town. That "lay over" business had me puzzled when I was very small. I didn't see why you couldn't stand up or walk around while you were waiting. After a while I learned what he really meant.

Now, nearly fifty years later, Uncle Thee is still adept with the hammer, the saw, the plane and the level, though he is past 80 years old. Not long ago, when I was in Mason City, I called his home by telephone. I wanted to reminisce with him about the old days in Cerro Gordo County. But his son, Frank, told me, "Oh, Dad left at seven o'clock for some carpenter job out in the country." What a lucky man! Though he's had his full share of the sorrows of this world he bears them lightly.

His thick curly hair that was so unruly when he was a young man is still there though the gray hairs far outnumber the black. When I finally got to see him, he didn't know me for an instant. Then, as he grasped my hand he exclaimed, with a quiet twinkle in his eye, "Gol, I thought you was some big attorney or somethin'." I have spent many happy times with this uncle of mine.

Life on the farm in the late 1890's was not all plowing and cultivating, harvesting, and digging the rocks — niggerheads, we called them — out of the fields where they sometimes bounced the walking plow out of the furrow to the great disgust of my father or the hired

man, usually with disastrous results to the plow itself.

A forerunner, no doubt, of the later-day carnivals and special festivals that are now common, was the "Street Fair" which ran for a full week in Mason City. I think the year must have been 1899, for the catch phrase of the Fair was "You'll have to hurry!" which everyone yelled at everybody else, for the reason, I suppose, that if you didn't watch out the old Nineteenth Century would be over and done with before you knew it. I've never heard any other reason for the rather catchy phrase, though there may have been one.

My father, mother and I were at the Fair at least once every day. We considered this quite an accomplishment, for we were not in the habit of leaving the farm more than once a week, when we went to town on Saturday to do our "trading." Prizes had been offered by the merchants for the best exhibits of farm produce, and my father won first on potatoes he had raised, due, for one thing, to the fact that he had the foresight to carefully wash the dirt off them. None of the other potato exhibitors, apparently, had thought of this.

The Mason City streets were lined with booths built out on the sidewalks after the manner of an oriental bazaar. There were vaudeville acts, too, out in the streets, but the only entertainment feature of this week-long event that I distinctly remember was an iron-barred cage in which was confined a terrifying-looking creature labelled "The Wild Man From Borneo." He was probably no wilder than I was, but the sight of him, and the blood curdling clatter he set up when he shook

the bars of his cage and screamed what were supposed to be jungle screams, nearly scared the pants off me. I did not know then that such things were usually faked, and though my folks assured me that the fellow was harmless, I wouldn't have touched him with even an eleven foot pole.

The playboys of that time carried about with them a mischievous little apparatus consisting of a small rubber ball fastened to one end of an elastic string about six feet long. The stunt was to conceal the ball and string in your hand. The free end of the string was looped around one of the fingers. Then when you saw some unsuspecting acquaintance with his back turned to you, it was more fun than anything to throw the ball at his head. Of course the ball bounced back fast, and you immediately concealed it again in your hand, pretending to be interested in something else. I craved one of these gadgets intensely, but I remember I didn't get one until the last night of the Fair and just as we were ready to go home. I was much disappointed, but a big dish of vanilla ice cream, at what was probably Vermilya's Cafe, made me feel much better. This was the first ice cream I had ever had away from home, and I thought as my father, mother and I sat around the white-topped table, we were certainly throwing our money around.

No summer was quite complete without at least one trip on the "excursion train" to Clear Lake. The electric railway between Mason City and the famous resort town ten miles to the west had been recently completed. I don't know whether the designers of the

passenger coaches of that era did it on purpose or not, but they had come up with a seating arrangement that just suited us kids. The cars did not have solidly built sides but only a sort of heavy wire screen railing along the outside of the rows of seats, so that the wind whipped thrillingly at your legs as the train swept along. Usually we got aboard at the corner of the City Park, boosting our heavy lunch baskets up the steps ahead of us. Then as we rumbled slowly down Main Street (now Federal), we looked snootily down on the less fortunate human beings along the sidewalks who were not going to go on this joyful journey.

As the train drew past the edge of the city, we would pick up speed and roll breathlessly by cornfields that crowded almost up to the track. There might be a short pause midway to the lake at the little village of Emery, a sort of division point — if you could call it that — of the railroad. Then the arrival at our long-anticipated destination, with the lake shimmering in the morning sun and stretching far off toward the western horizon. A sailboat might be slanting before the breeze. A little steamboat might be pushing its stubby nose through the blue water, while its funnel belched smoke and cinders over the passengers clinging to its tiny deck. Who wanted to stop to eat dinner in the City Park when there was so much to see? Usually there was quite a group of us — uncles, aunts and cousins — and while the women folks calmly spread tablecloths on the ground and started setting out eatables, and the men talked of crops and hogs and cattle, we youngsters took

a lot of admonishing, "Now set down and eat your dinner right and don't be running off down to the water, you'll get drowned sure."

After we had bolted our food we sometimes got a steamboat ride, if our folks happened to be feeling a bit liberal that day. Often, though, a rowboat ride close to the shore had to do. We never thought of going swimming for most of us had never seen a bathing suit, let alone owned one. Mostly, it was enough to just watch, wide-eyed, the pleasant panorama of water and shore and sky that spread itself before us and which was so different from our own fields and meadows and long vistas of prairie grass at home.

The excursion train was always ready for the return trip long before we were. We used to wish it would break down, and we would have to stay over night at, say, some place like the Outing Club. We didn't know then, of course, that the Club was a privately owned and operated group of cottages, but we thought the name sounded nice and we would have a good time if we could stay there.

Back at Mason City our teams and buggies had to be retrieved at the livery stable, the empty lunch baskets stowed under the seats of the surrey or the democrat wagon, cheerful good-byes shouted back and forth, and then came the jog homeward, pleasantly sleepy, under the stars.

The winters were rugged in Cerro Gordo County. In our newly built prairie home the only heat we had came from the cookstove in the kitchen which had an

enormous and never-ending appetite for corn-cobs and wood, and from the fat-bellied heating stove that was set up every fall in the living room — "sitting room" we called it then. When I was very young my mother used to come to the little northeast room upstairs to wake and get me dressed, and her favorite expression when the weather was especially frigid was, "Its chill-ay-ly!"

When we went to town in the winter time, it meant a tiresome, cold trip in the bobsled or the swell-backed cutter that had three sleigh bells on the under side of the tongue. They made a rather puny sound compared with the jangling strings of bells some of the neighbors had. My own particular peeve was the red shawl I was made to wear over my head on such trips to the city. I protested plenty, but it never did any good. My morale wasn't helped any when the town kids caught sight of me and bawled various derisive remarks.

On the better side of winter time was the coasting in our pasture, which was quite hilly. There were some bogs at the bottom of the best hill which gave one a delightful bouncing at the end of a slide. Occasionally there was skating on the creek, but as a rule the ice was drifted under a lot of snow or what ice there was would be scaly and unsafe because the water underneath kept running the year round. My first skates were a pair that belonged to my mother, but they were definitely unsuccessful because they had no clamps for fastening securely to the shoes.

That creek in the pasture came very near ending my career when I was six years old. One day a neighbor boy

named Roy Carmany and I were having fun keeping sticks afloat in the water, which was then just about up to its banks following a heavy spring rain. I stepped a little too close to the edge while trying to keep a stick floating downstream, and the next I knew I was three feet under water. I had my eyes wide open and can still remember how the water looked above my head. I came right up, of course, and grabbed wildly for the bank. Fortunately, I got hold of some grass or weeds that had solid roots and pulled myself out as quickly as I had fallen in. The water was about six feet deep there, and I wouldn't have done so well if the swift current had swept me away from the bank. I had on a wide straw hat with a fancy ribbon on it, and I still see it floating gaily on downstream. My friend ran for home when he saw me fall in. He was too scared to yell for help from our fathers who were fixing fence not far away. Mother was not too pleased when I arrived home thoroughly soaked.

Years later when trying desperately to swim in the college pool at Iowa State, I told the coach of my experience in the creek. He said it probably accounted for some of my fear of the water.

When our barn was still only the lean-to on the west side, it was struck by lightning during an early morning thunderstorm. I was still snugly in bed when the crashing bolt hit. Dad and the hired man were doing chores in the barn when they saw the storm coming. They ran for the house, and the lightning struck just before they got there. One of them felt a shock on his

head and the other felt it on a heel, but neither was hurt. The lightning knocked down one of our horses that the hired man had been currying only seconds before. Several boards at the southeast corner of the barn were splintered, but no fire was started. The neighbors said it must have been "a cold bolt." I was much impressed when I climbed up in the haymow to see the damage. It was as if some wrathful, mysterious giant had taken a poke at our little man-made structure.

Our two horses of that time were named Kit and Doll. I don't remember which one was hit by the lightning, but she soon recovered anyway. Kit was an easy-going gray mare, definitely on the lazy side. Doll was a nervous, high-headed animal that would have been more at home at a steeple chase than on a farm. She irritated my father no end. I used to wonder why he didn't use some swear words on her like most of the neighbors did with their horses. But he never did. "Consarn you!" was the limit of his vocabulary at such times. At least when I was around.

Later we acquired a fairly ancient mare called Nellie, who soon got the heaves so badly that she was never much good. I wonder if some sharp horse trader covered up those heaves just before we got her. Many times I felt very sorry for her as she gasped for breath somewhat as a person with asthma does. Other horses we owned soon after were Prince and Major. We raised Prince from a colt. We had another nice colt about the same age and the same color and expected to have a nicely matched team when they were old enough to break to

drive. One morning we came out to the barn to find this other colt lying in helpless agony in his stall. A bull had broken loose during the night and gored it so terribly that it had to be killed. A farm tragedy like that can give you a lump in the throat for days.

Most farm horses have dull, uninteresting names. But this was not so with two horses that we had later on. We bought them from Uncle Rufus Wilkinson, who had named one Romeo and the other Frisco. Uncle Rufus was good at thinking up unusual names for animals. He was fond of horses and dogs — dogs especially. He could train his dogs to do tricks too, and whenever we went to Grandfather Wilkinson's farm for Sunday dinner, we counted on an animal act or two by way of entertainment after we staggered away from Grandmother's marvelous table. Romeo and Frisco, while not matched in color, made a snappy looking team when hitched to the shiny surrey that replaced the high-wheeled open buggy.

A common happening on the farm in those days was a "runaway." Horses rarely saw a train or anything of that kind and were easily frightened. It is a most terrifying experience to be in a vehicle dragged by a runaway team. When I was perhaps five or six years old my two aunts from Rock Falls, Jessie and Mabel Wilkinson, picked up my mother and me to drive with them to Mason City. They were driving a team of what I remember as bay horses, though they may have been some other color. They were hitched to what we called a two-seated spring wagon, or high-wheeled buggy. It had no top.

We got to town all right and were about to go under a railroad viaduct on what we used to call the north way to the city. Just then a train came roaring along the right of way high above our heads. I couldn't much blame that team for instantly reversing their direction.

The buggy turned upside down, dumping us all into the dusty street, while the horses dashed madly back in the direction from which we had come with only the tongue of the buggy still attached to them. A basket of eggs that we were taking to market was well distributed over me. I remember peering through a dripping mass of yolks and broken shells at the team which was disappearing around a curve in the road. None of us was hurt in the upset, but I do seem to recall that Aunt Mabel sustained a broken garter. Some men who were working on the road a half a mile or so away finally caught the frightened horses, saw that our buggy was repaired and put back together again, and assured us we could safely drive on our way.

Another time one of the Heinold girls was driving past our place with a team hitched to a single buggy. I was mowing our lawn and the sound startled the horses, and away they went down the road to the west. They were down to John Hanson's hill and over the creek bridge while I stood trembling in our yard feeling that this runaway was my fault. The girl stayed with the outfit, and as far as I can remember, got the team stopped finally without much damage.

It is amazing how much speed a terrified horse can develop. We used to have arguments over what kind of a bit would hold a horse if it got frightened. The

general conclusion was that no matter what kind of a bit was used it didn't do much good in a runaway. There was a bit called the Jay-eye-see that was supposed to be pretty wicked, and there were, of course, many others that were jointed or had chains and levers of various kinds to pry a stubborn animal's mouth open when he got a notion to set his teeth on the bit and run.

Another thrilling runaway occurred when my father decided to hitch up two colts. We got them fastened to the wagon without too much trouble, but they were uneasy and had wicked gleams in their eyes. The outfit was headed east just by our old chicken house. Dad got in the wagon, grabbed the lines, and I jumped back from the horses' heads. They started like sprinters at the crack of the gun and headed for a big wooden gate that led to the hog pasture, which they took like high hurdlers. The wagon knocked the gate to kindling wood. They tore at a mad gallop through another narrow gate that led to a ten acre field. Dad's hat blew off as he slid down in the wagon box with his feet braced against the front, sawing away on the lines. He might as well have been trying to hold back the 20th Century Limited. The team circled that field as fast as it could go, staying just inside the fences. All I could see of my father was his head bobbing up and down above the top of the double box that was on the wagon. Finally the terrified colts wore themselves out and slowed down. Then Dad got up from his hard seat and lashed the horses until they were all in. They had absolutely no more run left as we unhitched them.

It may have been only a coincidence, but a few days later one of the local horse traders appeared at our place and inquired innocently if we had any young horses to sell or trade. The two colts that we had hitched so confidently to the wagon in anticipation of a dignified and leisurely jaunt through the fields on a pleasant spring day were decidedly unpopular with us just then. The rural underground had got the word through to the trader that he could probably make himself a good deal if he dropped in to see my father. It worked out exactly that way. After a couple of hours or so of haggling, at which the horse trader was far more adept than my father, the colts were led away, dancing along in sprightly fashion behind the trader's buggy and kicking up their heels at us in a contemptuous good-bye.

My mother was greatly relieved when we acquired a sedate and elderly team of mares to replace the fiery geldings that had circled the ten acre lot with such abandon. She had a high regard for my father's ability as a carpenter and a farmer but was outspokenly critical, with considerable justification it must be admitted, of his aptness for horse-trading. I was presently to understand why she especially did not want to be riding just at that particular time behind a pair of horses that would just as soon run away as not.

A mile to the north of us, on the farm later owned by Elmer Hersey, lived an amply-built, kindly, middle-aged lady named Mrs. Lyman Leach. She was an extremely welcome visitor in the farm homes nearby for she was the official midwife for the neighborhood. When

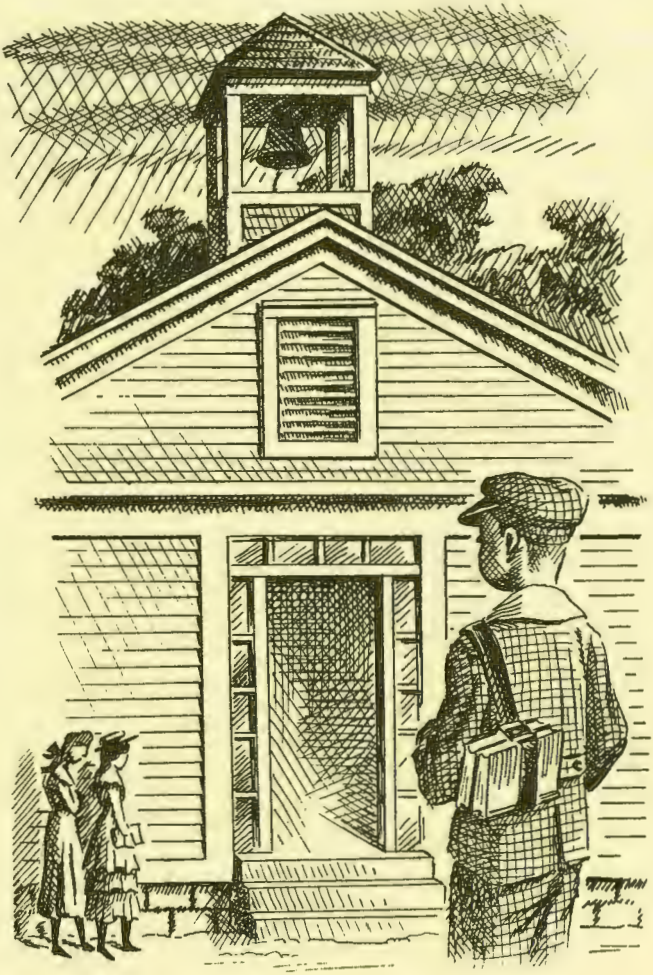
the order was given in a household, "Get Mrs. Leach!" it meant someone was about ready to have a baby.

One February afternoon my Dad came driving into our yard with Mrs. Leach sitting beside him in the buggy. I was seven years old then. I thought it was going to be nice indeed to have company and she seemed to make herself right at hime. Of course I saw nothing unusual in her visit, though I knew my mother had not been feeling well that day. I had been a bit concerned over this and had asked her whether I might do something to "amuse" her. She replied that she might play a game of Halma (Chinese checkers) with me. We did play a game or two, but I have often wondered since how she could have concentrated at all on what we were doing. That night my sister, Florence, was born and the reason for Mrs. Leach's visit was clear even to me.

That last statement, I am going to have to admit, is not strictly true. The next morning I was ushered in to see my new sister, but when I made some mild inquiry as to how she had gotten there, I was given some evasive answers. I rather think the old gag was pulled on me about the Doctor bringing her in his satchel. It took me quite a while to find out the truth.

Many years later, the night my son, Jack, was born there was the usual tension and excitement around the house. Someone, not me, had told my oldest son, Dean, the Doctor was bringing a baby in his satchel. This didn't seem to make sense to the young lad, although he was only six and a half at the time. I was trying to get him to sleep, for it was nearly midnight, but he was ex-

tremely curious about what was going to happen. He asked me, if what he had been told was true. No believer myself in trying to fool youngsters, I explained to him as best I could how babies were born. This appeared to satisfy him perfectly, and he immediately turned over and went to sleep. I was pleased with myself. After Jack was born an hour or two later, I was more pleased with myself.



district number seven

I wish I could somehow add a touch of glamour to the little white schoolhouse, known simply as District Number Seven in Lime Creek Township, where I arrived for the first time on a September morning in 1899. I should like to be able to say that a little vine covered building snuggled hospitably in a charming grove of maple or cotton-wood trees whose leaves were already

touched by the witchery of an early frost; that bright-colored chintz curtains framed the windows; that a bit of white smoke curled lazily from the red-brick chimney; that the shining morning faces of the other children welcomed a newcomer into their midst; that, in fact I was not scared to death and very, very lonely. But I would not be telling the truth. As my father left me at the door and waved good-bye to me before he set out for home, I was surrounded by my future playmates, who, I observed, seemed curious about my arrival, if not openly hostile. There were no vines over the schoolhouse, no curtains at all at the windows, and the only smoke seemed to be coming out of the door of the tall, round-bellied stove where the teacher was trying vainly to get a fire started to take a bit of the chill off the morning air. Nor was there any pleasant grove in the background, only one huge maple tree on which I was later to learn to "skin the cat," a few scraggly wild plum trees, and those two little structures standing modestly well apart and labelled in no uncertain terms, "Boys," and "Girls."

But there were compensations. The teacher, Miss Martha Byington, was marvelous. She knew just the right things to say and soon had me feeling right at home. The seats were all double ones, and for a seatmate Miss Byington gave me a good-natured, brown-eyed boy named Elza Shook. I liked him at once and we became great friends. He was a year or so older than I and knew the ropes, so to speak, and assured me that this was a pretty good place to go to school after all.

Besides Elza, some of the others who were in school that first year were Hugh and Anna Tietjen, Willie Olson, Gertrude and Fern Prescott, Elmer Russell, Ruth Leach, Olive Shook, Maude Davis — on whom I soon developed a terrific crush — Etta Pearce, Daisy Van Kleek and two or three others whose names I can't recall. For a few weeks a boy attended, who, they said, had run away from home sometime previously but had been caught and put in jail while the police waited for his folks to come after him. He used to refer casually to the episode. "When I was in Yale," he'd venture, thinking to impress us. But we all knew he meant "jail" instead and intended the little play on words for a joke. We considered him quite a man of the world and were actually a little afraid of him.

The first year at District Number Seven went by rapidly. No doubt we learned the things we were supposed to, but with Miss Byington showing us how, it was a pleasant and painless process.

Sometime during the winter term she broke the news that we were to gather on a certain Saturday at the Talmadge Studio in Mason City to have a group picture taken. We were there at the appointed time, all seventeen of us, and after a good deal of jockeying for position, the photographer finally got us all sober faced and looking in the general direction of the camera. Miss Byington even had the courage to appear with us. I still have the picture and it's almost as clear as the day it was printed.

What a resplendent bunch we were! My white wing

collar and enormous vari-colored bow tie were only slightly off center with relation to my Adam's apple. Hugh Tietjen wore a stiff white turnover collar that must have been at least four inches high. Willie Olson went in for a starched stand-up collar with a knife-like edge that sawed none too gently on the under side of his chin and which was clamped firmly around his neck with a ready-tied four-in-hand. With his black hair parted slickly in the middle and well plastered down over his temples, he had a certain Rudolph Valentino look. Elza also endured the raking of a stand-up collar. One side of his bow tie persisted in popping out of place under the lapel of his coat, giving him a slightly one-sided look.

I'll not try to describe what the girls wore. It was winter time, and they all came in what now appear, so far as I tell from the picture, warm, wooly-looking dresses that must have scratched something terrible as we sat about the warm studio. There were positively no plunging necklines.

As we posed for the picture I had managed to maneuver myself into a seat directly in front of my current love, Maude Davis. But in so doing I had carelessly left my right flank exposed, so to speak, and another girl whom I distinctly did not care for at the moment — she had stringy hair and large, prominent front teeth — got herself located next to me, and before I could do anything about it, the photograhper had recorded the situation for all time. No doubt this girl has grown up to be a good-looking woman by this time, but back

in 1899 I had a feeling that I was being run after. The human male — even at seven years of age — does not like this.

Miss Byington left our school at the end of the spring term the following May. I remember her yet as one of the best teachers I ever had. On the last day of school she stood at her desk and gave us a little talk. She said she'd always be interested in each and every one of us. That made a great impression on me. I have often wondered how many of us she was able to keep track of in later years. If a good teacher could only know how much she affects the lives of her students what a satisfying thing it could be to her. I hope Miss Byington has had a long and happy life, and this is the only way that the man who was a little boy back in 1899 has been able to tell her how pleasant she made those first days in the little country school.

The teachers who followed Martha Byington were her sister, Carrie, Henrietta Hubbard and Pearl Radford. Carrie was a beautiful penman — or do you say penwoman? She was a wonder with colored chalk and put gorgeous drawings on the blackboard. It was, perhaps, our first training in art, and we liked watching her at work far better than digging into our arithmetic or geography books. Sometimes she had to warn us to get at our lessons instead of sitting, entranced and open-mouthed, wondering what the picture on the board would turn out to be.

Miss Hubbard was a bit too easy with us I think. Of course we liked her for it, but I have an idea we worked

more than we should on what we called sewing cards rather than on our history and spelling.

I was about ten years old when Miss Radford came to teach. She was small, dark-haired and brown-eyed, and I must have fallen quite in love with her for I wept when she left our school at the end of a year's teaching. Thirty years later I wrote the poem, "To A Country School Teacher," remembering her days with us in District Number Seven. The poem was printed in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette.*

In those early days all the kids walked to and from school, except in the coldest weather when one of our fathers would hitch a team to a bobsled and pick up a load of us. I usually cut across the fields as it was two and one-fourth miles by road. I had several favorite routes.

On the way to Lime Creek No. 7 there was a creek that meandered through our pasture and the fields of our neighbors to the north. I liked to pretend I was an explorer mapping a new river, and there was nothing of the creek's banks that I didn't know. I knew just where I could jump across and where it could be safely waded. I was always on the lookout for quicksand though, for I had read of the horrible death one could come to if caught in that treacherous stuff.

In the spring it was really fun to walk to school. The wild flowers grew in abundance in the creek pastures, and at that time some of the fields were still original prairie. The tall, rank growth of grass on these few remaining reminders of pioneer days was something to see. It stood shoulder high later in the sea-

son, and a school kid had little trouble getting lost in it. In the lower ground we called it "slough grass," and sometimes cut it for hay to put on top of stacks that were in the open, for the hard, wiry stems made good protection against rain.

About the third or fourth year that I was in the country school I was the only boy attending. It seemed that all the neighboring families ran to girls. I didn't like this at all. I wanted some boys to play with. I finally rebelled so much at being the only male at No. 7 my folks agreed it wasn't a good situation. My father went to see the director of the Falls Township school a couple of miles east of our own district and explained why I wanted to change over. I don't recall who the director was, but he must have been a reasonable man. Probably said, "Us men have got to stick together." Anyway I was granted permission to go to this school which a number of my good friends attended. There were the four Heinold boys, Louie, Artie, Oscar and Elmer; Eddie and Loretta O'Donnell; Willie Chute; Clarence Jensen and his younger brothers and sisters; the Heintzelman children, and a few others whose names I can't recall. Harvey Moule was the teacher, and a good one. I had myself a fine time indeed during the year that I attended this school. Harvey was like one of us, entering into our games and contests. Our favorite game was prisoner's base, or prisoner's "gool" as we called it. Many times this game got so exciting that Harvey, playing with us, looked at his watch to see whether it was time to ring the school bell — it

would be during the noon, or recess, periods — but let us go on for several minutes overtime.

Our special Friday afternoon fun was always either "spelling down" or "ciphering." We would take a vote to see which one it would be. Then we would choose up sides, and the battle would be on. Almost everyone is familiar with the spelldown because it is still common, even in state-wide contests. But perhaps ciphering requires some explanation. After we had chosen sides, one member of each team would go to the blackboards on the wall at the front of the schoolroom. One or the other of these two students was then given the privilege of telling the teacher what kind of ciphering he or she wanted to do. This might be addition, subtraction, multiplication or division. The teacher then read a problem, which each competitor put on the board before him. The one finishing the problem first with the correct answer was the winner. The side with the most winners, of course, came out ahead. It's one thing to figure out an arithmetic problem quietly at your own desk, and quite another to work tensely at a blackboard in front of the whole school while your opponent is chalking figures up noisily just a few feet away from you. All we needed to really get ourselves keyed up was a cheer-leader for each side. Fortunately nobody thought of anything like that.

The big school entertainment event, which, incidentally, was supposed to and did make money, was the annual basket sociable. In later years it was considered much better form to say "box social." We held

some stem-winders in the early 1900's. At the Falls Township school we had enough pupils to put on quite an evening of dialogues and "pieces." Musical numbers were not much in evidence, for hardly any school had an organ or any other kind of instrument. Harvey Moule coached us in an elaborate program the winter I went to this school. Some of the dialogues were quite complicated. The grand finale of this particular evening's entertainment was a skit purporting to represent a meeting of the Frog Hollow Lyceum. Even Jim Chute, an older brother of Willie Chute, who was not even in school had a part in this. At one point in this allegedly humorous sketch I was to stand up and say, "Mr. President, I rise to a point of order." Then Oscar Heinold was to shout, "Can't see the point!" This was supposed to be funny and probably would have been if Oscar hadn't got excited and called out his line before I had a chance to say mine. Naturally the crowd attending the performance failed to see anything humorous whatsoever in the two lines.

The schoolhouses were, of course, always packed for these sociables. There was nothing else to go to during the winter. Most of the lighting for these evening affairs came from lanterns brought by farmers of the neighborhood. The school rarely owned even a decent kerosene lamp. Looking back it makes me shudder to think of what might have happened if a lighted lantern had been knocked off its hook and had exploded among the folks crowded into every inch of these schoolrooms.

The box lunches which all the women and girls

prepared for the sociable were in many cases most elaborate. A shoe box was the container for most of them. Fancy colored crepe and tissue paper transformed these prosaic boxes into such eye-catching bits of merchandise that when they were auctioned off after the program they often brought several dollars apiece. And those were days when dollars were almost always extremely hard to come by. Occasionally a more daring female would fix up a heart-shaped box or something out of the ordinary. Another with a flair for the original might wrap her lunch box in a big red handkerchief. This always got a laugh from the crowd and a good price, too.

The men and boys present did the bidding of course, and it was considered great fun to make some young swain pay a good price for the basket of his lady-love, that is, if he knew which was her basket, and somehow or other he usually did know. Sometimes a well-heeled farmer would buy two or three baskets, to the great disgust of some of us young fellows, who never had any money to speak of. I remember buying my first basket for 40 cents at the Falls Township school. It was all the money I had. Naturally, I hoped that some cute little country girl had fixed it, for after you bought a basket and the auction was over you sat and ate lunch with the girl. But to my chagrin I drew an elderly, married woman of the neighborhood. To make matters worse, she had a reputation for being a rather untidy housekeeper and an indifferent cook. I could hardly eat a mouthful of that lunch. The bread was sour and the butter stale.

Usually a considerable sum of money was raised at these sociables, and it was used by the school to purchase lamps, a second-hand organ, books, a globe of the world and many other things that the country schools of that day needed so badly. The average price of the baskets and the total amount spent for them was always announced at the close of the evening by the teacher or the auctioneer, and there was great rivalry among the various country districts to see which could make the best record.

One day in March while I was still attending the Falls Township school, I walked home in the late afternoon with the Heinold boys. As I was slowly approaching the corner about a quarter of a mile east of our house, Eddie O'Donnell came splashing through the mud on horseback to meet me. He was riding one of the O'Donnell work horses bareback. He told me my mother was not feeling well and that I was to go home and stay overnight with him. I thought it rather queer and argued violently with him for a while. It seemed strange that my folks did not want me to come home if there was illness in the family. But Eddie was insistent, and I finally went with him. As soon as I got to the O'Donnell place I started getting homesick. It worried me to be away from home if my mother was sick. I could hardly eat any supper that night.

Eddie and I slept in a south bedroom downstairs. Or rather I should say, he slept while I lay awake most of the night. It was one of the worst nights of my younger days. I even considered sneaking out of the house in the middle of the night and high-tailing it for home.

Finally morning came as it always does, and I went off to school with Eddie and his sister Loretta. I kept wondering why I wasn't wanted at home. Of course when I got there that night I soon found out. The house was full of women folks, all of them just busting to tell me about my new little brother. It was Roger Ivan, in person. I don't know whether he gave our mother a bad time the night he arrived, but I thought I had had a pretty bad one myself. I remember thinking "My gosh, haven't my folks got enough to do without having *another* one?" I was only ten years old at the time so my judgment was not the best. It wasn't long until I was as proud as could be of the new baby.

TO A COUNTRY SCHOOL TEACHER

She taught our district school in years gone by,
When I was but a lad of nine or ten—
How fast the time has slipped away, and now
I wish that I could be a boy again.

How far it used to seem across those fields,
Our shiny dinner pails were such a load;
And I remember how with stubby boots
We drew quaint figures in the dusty road.

She had a smile for every one of us,
She helped us hang our coats out in the hall,
And if she ever had to scold it seems
As though I can't remember that at all.

We hunted flowers for her in the spring—
Sweet Williams grew along the railroad track;
We foraged far and wide for violets,
Until the schoolhouse bell would call us back.

And then there came a day along in June
When school must close and she must take her leave;
We loved her dearly, for she loved us all—
I tried to dry my tears upon my sleeve.

We children wept, and maybe she cried too,
It seemed no one could ever take her place,
And I recall that when I started home
She kissed my grimy, freckled, tear-stained face.

I have not seen her since, and where she lives
I cannot tell, but I'd like her to know
That I still think of how she taught and loved
Within that prairie schoolhouse, long ago.

Courtesy THE CEDAR RAPIDS GAZETTE

the machine age arrives

I wonder why someone with a flair for collecting does not start a museum of early American farm machinery. It shouldn't be nearly as expensive as, say, acquiring long-forgotten models of automobiles, as the great singer, James Melton, does. Here and there you do see an ancient machine or two, but I know of no place where a considerable number of old and unusual machines are

gathered together. Maybe I ought to start on the job myself. It would be interesting to display in the proper surroundings such items labelled as, "Early American Neckyoke," or "Lumber Wagon — Circa 1897," or "Sulky Plow — In Use About the Time of the Spanish-American War."

Just why they called them sulky plows has always been more or less of a mystery to me. The operator, if he chanced to be a boy around ten years old, was far more likely to be sulky than the plow was. The job probably interfered with fishing or a dip in the water down by the lily pond. A sulky plow resembled in no way a racing sulky, which most people recognize at once, nor did it ride at all like one. I shall have to see what I can do about this museum business. However, please do not ship me, collect, that breaking plow or that McCormick reaper that you've had kicking around in the back part of the machine shed all these years. I simply don't have a place for them yet.

At the turn of the century farming was a hard, grinding business. It isn't easy now, but 50 years ago it was tough. The mechanized age of agriculture was a long way off. Now and then we heard vague rumors of some crazy inventor who had been trying to transform the power of steam or gasoline into a crude form of tractor. We dismissed such rumors as impractical if not impossible. Horses, of course, were here to stay and nothing would ever replace them.

At our farm the first job in the spring was getting the oats seeded. This meant that my father would

borrow an end-gate seeder and high-wheeled wagon from our neighbor, John Moule, who farmed a small place next to ours and whose seeding was finished early. I sometimes got to drive the team while my father dumped oats into the whirring, whining seeder on the back end of the wagon. We usually sowed 25 to 30 acres of oats. Then they had to be disced in with a little three-horse disc that we owned ourselves. This antiquated contraption couldn't cover much ground in a day nor did it do a good job, but it was the best we had.

Then came the harrowing. We called it "dragging," and that's about what the farmer or his boy or his hired man were doing by the time they followed one of those drags all day on foot. We had two harrows, one 12 feet wide, the other 10 feet. Once it took me one whole day to cover ten acres with the 10-footer. Maybe I rested a lot at the ends of the field.

I can just faintly remember a corn planter that we either owned or borrowed before the days of the check-row planter. With this early day outfit the corn field had to be marked off in squares the width of the corn rows with a wooden marker. Then the planter was driven down a pair of the rows that had been marked off, while a man or boy sat on the front of the machine, and, by working a hand lever as the planter moved forward, dropped the corn in hills where the cross marks intersected the rows. This did not turn out a fancy job of check-rowing, but it was a vast improvement over putting the corn in one hill at a time with a garden hoe. We tried to harrow the corn fields a time or two before

the corn came up, just as we do now, in order to set the weeds back as much as possible, but our equipment was limited and the weeds often got a good start anyway.

The first corn plow we had was a Tower walking cultivator. Don't misunderstand me, any of you younger folks. The cultivator didn't walk, but the operator did plenty of it following that machine up and down the corn rows all day. It had three long blades on each side instead of shovels or sweeps. These blades were set at an angle so they sliced off the weeds and stirred up the surface dirt as the machine moved forward. The Towers never became popular with farmers.

When I was old enough to help in the field, around ten or so, my father bought a Deere riding cultivator, and I learned to plow corn on this. It was a pretty good outfit too, with a hammock seat made of extremely hard iron and steel. We had the pelt of an old sheep that had died, and we used this for a seat pad. The machine had both handles and foot stirrups for guiding the shovels. It was painted bright green, a color that has persisted on all John Deere machinery to this day. Dad would go ahead of me with the Tower cultivator, skipping every other row. It was my job to take care of the skipped rows. At first I could not do much of a job for my legs were hardly long enough to reach the foot stirrups, and I didn't have enough weight to hold the plow shovels in the ground properly.

It was during those years that I learned to hate morning-glories. Our farm had plenty of them, and they clung like long trains to the corn plow shovels. That

meant frequent stops to clear the pesky weeds off the shanks and shovels, and after you got them off they would pretty near take root again before you could make another round of the field. No field cultivator has yet been devised to do a good job of cleaning out morning-glories, but modern sprays promise to lick them. Other weeds that we constantly fought on my Dad's farm were artichokes, mustard, smartweed, pigweed, lamb's quarter and bull thistles. In later years quack grass and Canada thistles appeared, apparently brought in with northern seed oats, barley or flax. I still hate weeds, probably due to my early encounters with them, and a clean field of corn or small grain delights my eye.

The haying always crowded the corn plowing. We often started putting up hay the day after the Fourth of July, usually mowing along the road first and around the fields for we always had grass headlands. It was quite a step toward the mechanized age when we acquired a secondhand hay loader from Henry Siewertsen, probably in 1905. It cost us $17. Fifteen years later, after dolling it up with red paint, I sold it in our dispersion sale for $27. We also bought a C, B and Q (Chambers, Bering and Quinlan) side-delivery rake about the same time as we got the loader. I think this rake was acquired from Jim Schweiger, who ran a blacksmith shop and sold some machinery in Mason City. I remember we got the rake fairly cheap because it had stood around in Schweiger's yard until the original paint was well gone.

For a few years we used slings for unloading hay at the barn. The slings took a load of hay up to the mow

in three trips, but they were a nuisance to handle both in the field and at the barn. Besides that a sling load of hay put a tremendous strain on the hay rope, track and everything else. We finally discarded them and went back to the ordinary double-harpoon hayfork.

My job was driving the team on the hayfork. We had the running gear of an old mower to which the team was hitched and to which the end of the hay rope was tied. When I was small and just learning to drive I had a terrible time getting the team turned around without getting it all tangled up in the hay rope. I remember the name, "Walter A. Wood," stood out in bold letters on one of the iron castings that made up the frame of the mower. At one time the Wood machinery was popular with farmers, but it is no longer manufactured under that name, the firm having long since been absorbed by some other company.

The oats harvest often came on so quickly that we barely had time to get the hay out of the way. This meant getting the old Plano grain binder out of the shed, always with a great deal of prying and grunting and shoving — but no swearing. This machine cut a swath 6 feet wide, was pulled by three horses and was a trouble maker until the crop was cut. My father used the Plano for over 30 years, and in all that time I doubt if that binder made a complete round of the field without clogging, missing tying bundles or otherwise causing a stop. Here again this manufacturer was later taken over by another company, so that the old name is almost forgotten.

One year we had a lot of rain at harvest time, and the oats were down to such an extent we had to cut them all one way. That season we put four horses on the binder, a lead team and a wheel team. I drew the job of riding one of the lead horses. This was great fun for a day or two, but I was soon trying to persuade my Dad to let the hired man do the riding while I shocked the grain. I didn't put this idea over.

There were not many threshing machines in the early 1900's. Nearly every farmer stacked his grain — he could then wait until late in the fall to thresh. It was quite a trick to build a stack of grain bundles. I am afraid the art is almost completely lost now.

The stacker started by making an ordinary shock of bundles on the ground at the center of the space selected for the stack. Rows of bundles were added until the circle was perhaps 12 feet in diameter. Then the stack started to grow upward with the addition of more and more circular rows of bundles, laid with the heads toward the center and with the butts sloping slightly down to shed the rain. The bundles were laid so that the circumference of the stack increased slightly up to about 4 feet from the ground. Then the stack was drawn in gradually to a peak perhaps 15 feet above the ground. A good stacker would have a perfectly cone-shaped job above the "bulge." If the bulge was built out too rapidly there was likely to be a "slide-out," which often meant that the whole stack had to be started over.

The man who pitched the bundles up to the stacker was supposed to drop them at his feet in a position such

that they could be laid in the stack with the least possible handling. Some stackers used pitchforks for laying the bundles in place. Others did it all with their bare hands. Stacks were said to go through a "sweat" during their first few weeks. If they were well built the grain did thresh out of them in excellent condition. A group of four stacks was called a "setting," which meant that the threshing machine, when set in the proper spot between them, did not have to be moved until all four stacks were threshed. The grain separators had no blowers then, and the swing stacker attached to the rear of the threshing machine was considered best for handling straw. Many of the older farmers declared they wouldn't let a threshing machine on the place if it had a blower. In a few years they all changed their minds.

The last big job in the fall was getting the corn out. It had to be done by hand, one ear at a time. Usually we were able to hire some extra help to pick by the bushel. Anyone who could husk 100 bushels a day was looked upon as a sort of superior man. There were some Olson boys who lived not far from us who had great reputations as corn huskers. One year we got Ole Olson to help us, and the way he fired those ears into the wagon was amazing. A corn husker, working at so much a bushel, would be in the field at daybreak. Some of them used to brag that they got to the field so early they had to sit around until it was light enough for them to find the ears. Hardly anyone believed this boast.

The huskers wore mitts of cotton flannel on their hands. A trick to make these mitts last longer and

roughen them so it was easier to grasp the ears of corn was to pour thick black tar over them from a small can carried on the husking wagon. Then, because this was sticky stuff, the huskers hunted around until they found a cornstalk with a growth of brown smut on it. This smut was rubbed into the tar, and with this odoriferous combination on the mitts, a husker was supposed to be geared up to the highest notch for fast and clean corn picking. A good man like Ole would have 40 to 50 bushels on his wagon by ten o'clock. Then the load had to be shoveled off at the crib, dinner eaten, and a similar load brought in before dark.

Twenty-five years or so ago I had the audacity to write a poem entitled "Corn Husking." This appeared in the *Chicago Daily Drovers' Journal.* Some time later I happened to meet my good friend, Bill McArthur, who said, "I see where a poem of yours was printed in a Chicago paper." I admitted as much, no doubt being unable to conceal a certain amount of smug pride. "Well," said Bill, "the only thing wrong with it is that it gives the impression you had actually picked corn yourself!"

Changes in farming methods usually came slowly, too slowly in fact for us younger fellows who thought there was entirely too much hard, back-breaking labor connected with the "way of life," as Herbert Hoover once called it. But in the decade from 1910 to 1920 many new machines began to appear. The first tractors came into use, none of them too satisfactory, but they pointed the way for the almost complete mechanization that was

to come later. I once heard my father say that a manure spreader was the last machine he would ever buy, but we soon followed the example of our neighbors and bought one, an "American," I believe it was. Bigger discs and harrows were manufactured; two-row corn cultivators were used by some of the bigger farmers; the eight-foot grain binder became common, most of them made by McCormick, or Deering, or Champion or John Deere. Corn binders came along to replace the old, terribly slow way of cutting corn by hand and building shocks around a three-legged frame designed for that purpose. Nearly everyone switched to threshing grain out of the shock, and the art of building shapely grain stacks gradually disappeared.

As soon as I was big enough to pitch bundles I began to pester my Dad to let me go threshing. This was the most fun of the whole summer, for it meant getting together with the other boys nearly every day for a couple of weeks or so while we threshed out all the jobs in the "ring," as we called the group of neighbors working together. I was delighted when I was told to take the team, wagon and rack and go haul bundles to the threshing machine. The Heinold boys would be there and Eddie O'Donnell, John Hanson, Elmer Hersey, George Patton and others who lived for a time in the neighborhood and whose names I am sorry I can't remember. Usually there would be eight wagons hauling bundles, two or three wagons to haul the threshed grain away from the machine, a man or two at the grain bins to help unload, a couple of men in the strawpile, and, of

course, the crew that ran the threshing outfit. When a job was being started, or at the beginning of a day, there was always a lot of friendly kidding and rivalry to see which bundle haulers would draw the "clean side," and which ones would be stuck with the "dirty side" – meaning which ones would get to unload with the wind blowing the dust and chaff away from them, and which would have to face it. Once you drew a certain side of the machine it was considered bad manners indeed to change, especially if you tried to change from the dirty to the clean side.

Oscar Heinold was always the clown of the outfit and took special delight in playing jokes on the rest. He had a lot of steam. Sometimes he would pick up a whole shock of grain bundles on his pitchfork at one time and heave it into the wagon. Most of us were satisfied to pitch one bundle at a time, or at the most, two. Any showing off that we did usually took place only if we were working in a field near the house and thought some of the girls might be watching.

No one should ever write about threshing days without telling of the marvelous meals those farm women put together. Duncan Hines has glamorized a lot of eating places both for the gourmet and the straight meat and potatoes trade in his "Adventures in Good Eating." I venture to state, however, that I doubt whether he ever sat down at a real old-fashioned threshers' dinner table. Getting meals for threshers meant serving both dinner at noon and supper at night. The idea of sending the men to a restaurant in town for dinner, or

letting them go home at night without their supper, would have been considered downright sinful by the farm wives of that era. If you couldn't set out a banquet at noon and again at night you just weren't the kind of woman the neighborhood liked to have around. Nearly always, when a thresher got home at night, his wife or his mother could be depended upon to ask casually "What did you have to eat today?" If she was able to pry any of the details out of her tired man, she immediately set about planning the meals that she would serve when the threshers came to her place, with the idea in mind of serving something no one else had thought of.

How those women ever got together the great quantities of potatoes and gravy, the beef, and the pork and the chicken that often appeared simultaneously at the table, the light bread, the brown bread, the baking powder biscuits, the cabbage salad, the sliced tomatoes, the baked beans, the pickles, the jam, the preserves, the mince, or apple, or cherry or custard pies, the chocolate cake, the white cake, the cookies and all the other gustatory delights that tried to crowd each other off the table will always be a mystery to me.

We could hardly wait to get to the table when mealtime came. But we did have to go through the motions, at least, of washing some of the threshing grime off first. There would be wash basins, soap, towels and water — sometimes warm — set out for us under a tree in the yard. There was always a lot of friendly water splashing, fighting for a clean place on the towels and wanting to know why so-and-so even bothered to come in for dinner

at all — "He ain't done nothing all morning." When we got to the table and settled ourselves on the planks along each side — there were seldom enough chairs to go around — there was little talking. We just ate — "fed from both sides," as some of the boys called it. I envied those who could hold two or three times as much as I.

Perhaps the queen of them all when it came to putting on a feast was Mrs. Peter Olson, who lived on the farm joining ours on the north. She and her husband had both been born in Sweden, and no doubt it was there she learned to prepare those gastronomical masterpieces she set before us. There never was room for every dish on the dining table itself, and extra tables had to be provided to set some of her culinary creations on. Her layer cakes with fancy icings were famous throughout the neighborhood. As a matter of fact dinner or supper at the Olson's was a treat any time of the year, not just at threshing time.

It was rare indeed to find a family that did not come up to the standards set by others for threshers' meals. If it got around that the food was not good at a certain place, the men and boys were adept at finding excuses for going home at mealtime.

A friend of mine told me once of sitting down to a threshers' dinner at a farm where the food was known to be somewhat indifferent. A dish of unappetizing food was started at one end of the long table. Each man glanced at it and passed it along to the next fellow. The last man was sitting close to an open window. He sniffed briefly at the dish — and dropped the whole mess out the window.

Among the threshermen we employed over a period

of perhaps 20 years were Mr. Carmany, whose first name I have forgotten; Fred Friday, who was a huge red-headed man of German descent; Fred Heinold, who was an older brother of the boys who went to the Falls Township school when I did, and later on, the Gildner brothers, Arthur and Albert. Arthur ran the separator and Albert ran the steam engine. These boys were extremely popular with the farmers and were excellent threshermen.

Arthur liked to jump from the separator, where he stood most of the time closely watching the whirring pulleys and belts, onto your load of bundles, grab your fork and unload part of the load while you took a short rest. Then he would solemnly hand the fork back and say, "I thought that was kinda nice of me, didn't you?" Then he would burst out with his booming laugh and hop back on the separator, leaving you searching for a comeback. I find myself still using this remark if I think I can embarrass someone.

There were endless arguments around a threshing crew about which machine was the best. Some of the boys said you couldn't beat a J. I. Case; others stuck up for the Nichols and Shepard separator, while still others declared the only machine that was fit to pull in your yard was a "Yellow Fellow," so named because of its paint job. I don't think these arguments ever settled anything, but they went on year after year. Once in a while a threshing machine would have the bad luck to catch fire and burn up. That particular make would then be in disrepute for some time. But, generally speaking, they all did a pretty good job.

You could get in just as hot an argument over the

relative merits of the steam engines which furnished the power for the outfits. Here again, the proponents of a return-flue boiler job were just as sure of their ground as the ones who said that it was all foolishness to make the smoke and flame travel so far, and that the place for the smokestack was at the front of the boiler where it belonged. Now and then an engine, probably through the carelessness of the engineer, would blow a cylinder head to kingdom come, and it was unhealthy indeed to be in line with it when it happened. My own favorite among the steam engines of that day was the Gaar-Scott. This was due, no doubt, to the fact that my Uncle Cal Bitterman owned one, and I thought that what was good enough for him was certainly good enough for me.

Threshing engines had a certain individuality due to the fact that each had its distinctive whistle, which the engineers liked to cut loose with shortly after dawn when they had gotten steam up for the day. We could tell from those early-morning blasts just whose threshing outfit was in the neighborhood. There was one that had a rising and falling siren effect, and when we heard it we would exclaim, "There's old Pete's outfit!" Other whistles were hoarse and throaty. Some were so shrill they nearly split your ears open if you happened to be standing near.

However they sounded, they meant just one thing at an hour when the sun was scarcely over the eastern horizon, "Hurry up boys, and get here with your teams and wagons, there's a threshing job to do!" During the day, while threshing was going on, the whistles meant

other things. For instance, a long series of short, impatient blasts was a signal to the water hauler to get back to the engine with his tank wagon. Those old steamers needed a lot of water to keep up a head of steam, and many times the water supply at the farm where threshing was going on would be too low. Then the water hauler headed for the nearest creek, where he pumped his tank full with a suction pump the hard way, by hand. A few short toots, sort of in the manner you would say, "Ah, ah, ah," to an erring child, meant that the engineer had caught some of us crowding bundles of grain into the separator too fast, or perhaps wrong end to — they were supposed to be pitched into the self-feeder heads first. We would turn and grin at the engineer sheepishly, and the engineer, if he was a "good" guy — and he usually was — would grin back and shake his head warningly.

Often, in order to finish a job, threshing went on until dark. Then the men who ran the outfit — there were usually three or four — had to move to the next farm in order to be ready to start threshing the following morning. This slow, tedious trip was often quite hazardous, for if any wooden bridges or culverts had to be crossed there was always the chance that the tremendous weight of the steam engine, or the separator, might break through and let the machines fall into the ditch or creek below. Sometimes this happened, and a thresherman was carried to his death. My Uncle Cal Bitterman was once caught between the cab of his engine and the self-feeder of the separator when a bridge gave way

without warning. He survived, however, with only a badly bruised chest to show for it. Usually the threshermen carried heavy planks with them to lay across the smaller bridges for the great iron wheels of the machines to cross on. If the outfit had to be taken across a bridge that was too wide to be planked, the man at the steering wheel of the engine said his prayers and stood at the outer edge of the cab or platform ready to jump clear if anything gave way.

As I grew older, threshing gradually lost its glamour and excitement for me and became just another dusty, dirty job that had to be done every summer. With the coming of the small combines, owned by nearly every farmer, the old-time threshing rig has just about disappeared. It had its day, just like the surrey with the fringe on top, and nobody was very sorry to see it go. But gosh it was fun to haul bundles, back in 1910!

board, room and washing

No doubt nearly every farm family in Cerro Gordo County must at sometime or other have employed one or more "hired men." I never liked that term for it seemed to imply that the person hired was in some way definitely inferior to his employer. As a matter of fact this was often not the case at all for the hired man might be a neighbor's son, or a youngster learning about farm-

ing during school vacation, or an older man such as I shall describe a little later on.

In some sections of the country the men who are employed on farms are called "hands." We once entertained a visitor from Indiana, who, upon observing our current employee at work around the place, inquired in his delightful Hoosier dialect, "Is that there your hard hand?" It took us a while to figure out that "hard" was just his way of pronouncing "hired." In the South they call them "field hands," while in the great wheat growing states of the West they are "harvest hands." In the Southwest a good man around a cattle ranch will be a "top hand."

The more elaborate farms may add a bit of swank by stating that they are paying wages to a herdsman, or a foreman, or even a superintendent. The modern day worker on a farm is likely to arrive at, say, seven o'clock in the morning, driving his own car which is often just about as late a model as his employer's. He will work till six in the evening, and then, if he is not furnished a house on the boss's farm, will drive back to his apartment in town. It's a pretty good arrangement all round.

In the late nineties or the early 1900's nearly all the hired men were single. We took them in almost as one of the family. Their wages included board, room and washing. Washing their clothes, I mean, not the men. They worked whatever hours were necessary, though I can't say they always did so without a certain amount of griping. It would be going too far to state each and every one of them was a model of deportment, content

to perform his employer's every wish, and, like the boys in the famous Light Brigade, "Their's not to reason why."

I don't care to say much about some of the men we had working for us. Edwin, to whom we paid the magnificent wage of $8 a month, was one of these. His principal talent was telling dirty stories. Jimmy, the ex-prize fighter, was another. He had what he called a "callyflower" ear, a permanent reminder of the days he had spent with a touring troupe of athletes which included the great wrestler of his day, Farmer Burns. Yet another was a gangling character whom we nicknamed "Colonel" because for a long time he declined to tell us what his first name was. Finally, his resistance broken, he hung his head and admitted, "It's Sylvester." We couldn't much blame him for his reluctance.

As long as he could ride a corn plow or do something equally easy, Sylvester did well enough for us, but when it came time to shock grain he stood the gaff for about half a day and then approached us with the demand, "Gimme my time!" We were disgusted with him, of course, for pulling out when we needed him most, and told him so. Somewhere along in his no doubt mottled past he had acquired a stock of French words. At least they sounded French. So he merely shrugged, retorted in his foreign-sounding lingo, picked up his valise and started down the dusty road to town. We never saw him again.

Three men who worked for us do stand out against the sometimes dim background of the past. One was

Alfred Moule, the lanky, slow-moving, drawling, dependable son of John Moule, our neighbor to the east. Wages then were about a dollar a day, plus dinner and supper. He would come walking in our gate about seven o'clock each morning, and then he and my father would discuss the day's work ahead of them. When evening came and we all sat at the supper table, Dad would ask him if he could come back the next day, and his answer was invariably, "Guess so," unless the next day happened to be the opening of the fishing season. That was a special day for Alfred, not to be violated by anything as prosaic as farm work, as he headed for the Lime Creek River, where the catfish and the crappies might be biting. I always wished I could go with him but was never permitted to. Probably Alfred would not have been keen to have me tagging along anyway.

After his one-day fling Alfred would come back to us. Sundays and holidays were good enough for fishing from then on. He should have lived about a generation or so earlier, when men lived in reasonable comfort by simply hunting and fishing. In deerskin shirt and leggings with plenty of fringes at the seams, in a coonskin cap, and with a rifle in the crook of his arm, Alfred would have looked the typical frontiersman, and would, I think, have been extremely happy at it. He was somehow out of place behind a walking plow or with a pitchfork in his hand. Perhaps this was the reason he did not often smile, not even when I was able to pester him, after supper was done, into playing tag with me as far as our front gate. When I got his tag I shouted it out,

but when he got mine he merely dead-panned, "I got your'n."

Ralph Boothroyd, dark-haired, handsome, a glamour boy if there ever was one, came to work for us three different summers. He was the son of John Boothroyd who lived in Mason City. Ralph was reasonably well aware of his own good looks for every now and then he would say to me, "Wish I had been born rich instead of so darn good-looking!" He was a good worker and was paid about $27.50 per month for the summer, plus the usual board, room and washing. These vacation times were great fun for me, for Ralph, unlike Alfred, was ready as soon as the chores were done for a game of catch or a session of playing tag, with me chasing him around the yard and over the fences until we both dropped to the ground exhausted.

One thing that added greatly to Ralph's glamour, in my opinion at least, was the fact that during the school year he went away to *college*. This seemed to make him thoroughly a man of the world, and I lived in hope that someday I, too, might travel afar like Ralph and have thrilling experiences to tell my younger friends. Actually the college that Ralph went to was little Cornell College at Mount Vernon, Iowa, a most excellent school, but not the huge institution that I pictured from Ralph's description of it. I often drove through that town many years later and had always to smile to myself at the recollection of what I thought the place must be like, back in 1903.

Ralph was a member of the class of '06. Often while

he and I were out in the fields on our farm he would cut loose with the booming college yell, "Rah! Rah! Rix!, Rah! Rah! Rix!, We're the Class of Naught-ee Six!" I was greatly impressed by this, and learned as he did, to despise the class ahead of his, which, he told me, had the unpardonable nerve to go about the campus shouting, "Eat 'em alive!, Eat 'em alive!, Cornell! Cornell! Nineteen-five!" I was sure that the '05's must be a bunch of bums.

Ralph let me in on a little secret about his college course. It seems he was enrolled as a divinity student, mainly because such potential preachers were not charged tuition. He confided in me that he had no intention of becoming a minister, though he delighted in sending me into hysterics with mock sermons, delivered with immense gravity as we rode to and from the fields on a rack of hay or a load of manure.

It was about 1909 when "Mister" Strickson came to work for us. Ordinarily we did not use such formality in speaking to or about our hired men. But this man's personality seemed to warrant it. He showed up at the farm one day when we badly needed help, and my father hired him for, I believe, $1.50 a day, plus the usual extras. He was probably about 40 years old, though he seemed much older to me then. A smallish man, very neat in appearance, and quite intelligent, he even had with him a book of Herbert Spencer's to read, and did the unheard-of thing of carrying a kerosene lamp to his room to read by before he went to sleep.

Now and then he gave us a glimpse or two into his

past. He had been a potato grower in Colorado, a "super" or bit player and a scenery shifter in the theatre, and a restaurant operator. He told us that the only money he ever made in the restaurant business was when he ran an establishment called for some reason that he overlooked explaining to us, "The Second-Class." Those jobs sounded more interesting to me than the drudgery of hoeing corn or pitching hay, and I asked him one day if he didn't get tired of such work. He thought a bit and then said, "No, one job's just the same as another to me. I figure it's all work and somebody's got to do it." A queer fellow, indeed, I thought, for while I liked some jobs around the farm I thoroughly despised others. From remarks this unusual man dropped occasionally we felt that he must have had some unlucky breaks in life or had a weakness of judgment somewhere that found him working by the day for common wages. Or could he have been a writer or a research professor studying how we farmers of 1909 lived? We never knew, and when the harvest season was over and we no longer needed him we were genuinely sorry to have Mister Strickson leave.

QUITTING TIME

The last round turned—the sweating team slows down,
And from his seat a weary driver climbs;
Long shadows point the way to coming night,
And down the lane a distant cow bell chimes.

The neckyoke dropped — the clanking tugs unhooked—
The leaders swing off toward the barnyard gate;
They know that oats and hay and welcome rest
Are things that horses can anticipate.

A crimson sky—a gentle southwest breeze—
Tomorrow night this field will all be done.
A pale new moon sends word of pleasant days;
And up the lane the cows come, one by one.

The team unharnessed, milking done and then
What magic in that welcome supper call!
A pipe, a paper, childrens' laughter—yes,
This world is pretty decent after all.

Courtesy the CHICAGO DAILY DROVERS' JOURNAL

these were our neighbors

A neighborhood courtesy that I am afraid is too often neglected today is that of calling on newcomers who arrive to live on nearby farms. It may have been neglected 50 years ago too. I am not sure. But I do know that my father and mother, my mother especially, were particular about this little act of welcome and friendship. Mother always said it was only the courteous thing

to do, and of course it was. Many times, on a Sunday afternoon, perhaps when I had been able to persuade my father to engage in a game of catch with me, Mother would appear at the door and say, "Wendell, we should go and call on those folks who just moved in up the road a piece." Father immediately agreed and went to harness a horse and hitch it to the single buggy. I used to wonder if sometimes he would not have rather kept on playing ball. But he and mother drove away for an hour or two, returning in time to do the Sunday evening chores. Some of the new neighbors returned these calls, some did not. But certainly my folks did their part.

One lady who did return calls was Anna Moule, who lived with her folks a quarter of a mile east of us, the same folks from whom Dad borrowed the seeder every spring. She was a school teacher, tall, spare, not handsome, but friendly, smiling often and displaying then an extraordinary mouthful of very white teeth. She visited by the hour with my mother, and while of course they talked of many things as I played about near them it always seemed to me that their conversation revolved principally around "bulbs" and when to set them out and when to take them in from the garden. They were forever exchanging "slips" and comparing notes on how this or that plant had turned out. Both of them seemed to have what we now call "green thumbs." Mother's windows were always packed full of plants of many varieties, none of which I ever could learn to identify with certainty, except geraniums. Anna knew them all though, and while I doubt whether either she or my

mother ever went in for calling them by their scientific names they loved the plants almost like children and they certainly knew how to make them grow. Anna taught in several of our nearby district schools for many years, returning every summer to the little farm near ours. I think she must have been a most welcome visitor in our home those long, quiet, rather lonely afternoons when she arrived, walking unhurriedly along the dusty road with a packet of "slips" or a new "bulb" or two.

Anna's father and mother were John Moule, an elderly Englishman, and his Swedish wife. Occasionally they came to call on us, always on foot, with John walking about 20 feet ahead of his wife. We all thought this funny, and rather rude. As a matter of fact it wasn't rudeness at all. Many years later I learned they were simply following an old custom that had developed when there were only footpaths wide enough for one person. Further, in the days when danger from Indians or wild animals lay along these paths, the man always went ahead, his musket loaded, ready for trouble.

Whenever we saw the Moules coming my mother began to worry about being able to understand Mrs. Moule who spoke very broken English. This fact did not dismay the little Swedish lady at all for she chattered continuously and animatedly, with Mother rather anxiously nodding her head and saying "Yes, yes" and "Well, well" in an effort to be polite. Incidentally, one afternoon when ripe water melons were in season and I had developed an almost overpowering hankering for one, Mrs. Moule had no difficulty in making me under-

stand that she most emphatically desired me to get the hell out of their patch. Fortunately the melons were quite a distance out in one of their fields, and I don't think she knew for sure who I was. No doubt she had her suspicions.

On the farm north of the Moules lived the K. K. Prescotts. The "K.K." stood for "Kimball Kemble" and I thought this remarkable, though it was no more so than my father's first and middle names, "Wendell Waldo." We always called Mr. Prescott "K.K." What I remember most about him is that he was an enthusiastic and expert checker player, and, I believe, usually able to beat my father, himself no slouch at the game. Many times I watched them play, silently intent on their game, moving deliberately, then suddenly bursting out in loud laughter as one or the other of them cornered his opponent.

Mrs. Prescott was quite a stylish person, with a decided eastern accent. She persisted in calling me "Herbie," pronouncing it "Huhbie." I didn't like this and once told her, to my mother's intense embarrassment, "My name isn't Herbie, it's Herbert." Instead of offending it seemed to tickle her for she grabbed me and laughingly gave me a big hug and kiss. This procedure left me on rather uncertain ground, and I had no more to say.

Sometimes we were invited to the Prescotts' for supper. We always had wonderful food there, and Mrs. Prescott brought out her best glassware and china. There were enormous layer cakes served on one of those

glass cake dishes — the kind that stands up on a glass leg about ten inches tall, so that it made a mouth-watering centerpiece for the table. There was also a beautiful glass caster for holding the salt and pepper shakers and the vinegar cruet. Perhaps it held other condiments too. No doubt the meat and the potatoes that Mrs. Prescott served us were just as good as the cake — but cake is what a youngster remembers. It never took long after supper for the checker board to appear.

One thing that the Prescotts had hanging on the wall of their dining room made a great impression on me. It was a picture of a ship under full sail. No matter where you stood in the room the ship appeared to be coming right at you. One evening K.K.'s son, Norman, took a kerosene lamp in his hand and had us follow him from one end of the room to the other, keeping our eyes on the ship. I thought the thing must be loose in the frame the way it apparently kept turning toward us, but, of course, it was only an unusual optical illusion.

I got pretty well acquainted one winter with Henry Siewertsen (pronounced Seeversen) who lived about three miles east of us. One day Henry was driving to town with a team hitched to a lumber wagon. The roads were muddy and the going slow and heavy. Just as he got to our place one of his mares became sick and could go no further. Hurriedly the team was unhitched and put in our barn where the sick animal was given the double stall in the southeast corner. The veterinarian was called and pronounced the trouble azoturia. Most

farmers call it "Azztereeyah." It's a paralysis of the kidneys brought on by too much exertion or too fast driving after the animal has been standing idle in the barn for a few days on full feed, and is sometimes referred to as "Monday morning sickness." The paralysis usually affects the whole body of the animal in a short time if treatment is not prompt.

The poor mare soon went down and never got up again, though she lived in agony for several days. I remember the veterinarian telling Henry emphatically, "Now, you've got to take her water from her, her kidneys are paralyzed." Henry, being a mild and easy-going sort of person, didn't think he could. Doc told him he had to or he pretty soon wouldn't have any horse, and maybe he wouldn't anyway. The veterinarian had to get to other calls of course, and couldn't stay at our place all the time. I think Henry did try, rather timidly, to help the poor mare's kidneys, but without much success. I was goggle-eyed at the procedure, and decided, for a few days at least, that I must learn to be a veterinarian.

I was going to High School at the time and studying German. Henry, who spoke German fluently, was the son of Paul Siewertsen, a well-known farmer who grew up in Germany. Evenings Henry and I would sit in the stall beside the suffering mare, wondering whether she was going to pull through or not. It gave me a good chance to practice my German. I would say, indicating the mare, "Das ist ein Pferd." (That is a horse.) Henry would reply, "Ja, das ist ein krankes Pferd." (Yes, that

is a sick horse.) And so on. My evenings were most interesting as long as that poor animal lived. After that experience I could always remember to cut down the feed of idle horses or else turn them out to pasture so they would be sure to take exercise.

On their father's farm a quarter of a mile west of ours lived the Hanson boys, Louie, John and Hans, big rugged fellows, whose folks had come from Sweden. All three of them were several years older than I. There was a fairly deep swimming hole under the old wooden bridge across the creek that ran through our farm and the Hansons'. Hans was locally famous for being the only young fellow in the neighborhood with nerve enough to dive head first off the top rail of the bridge. None of us had ever heard of a swimming suit. If a horse and buggy came along during a swimming session we simply ducked under the bridge out of sight.

John Hanson's great accomplishment was in being able to imitate perfectly the cooing of pigeons as you might hear them fluttering and fussing on the ridgepole of the barn during the mating season. We all thought this was very remarkable, and we got him to do it for us as often as he would.

Louie loved to hunt, and one day, as he walked into our yard with his rifle under his arm, he suggested I go with him. He said there were a lot of gophers down in the pasture that should be killed. All I would have to do, he told me, would be to bring a pail and carry water from the creek to pour into the gopher holes until the disagreeable little creatures struggled up for air,

soaked and gasping. Meanwhile he would sit with the rifle trained on the hole, ready to pick a gopher off as soon as one appeared. This somewhat one-sided division of labor seemed eminently fair to me however, and I enthusiastically proposed to my father and mother that I set out with Louie at once. You can imagine the answer I got—an emphatic "No!" They wanted the gophers killed all right, but they did not warm to the idea of me standing over the gopher hole, bucket in hand, in line with Louie's rifle. I was disgusted over having to stay home. Louie went on and presently I heard the crack of his rifle down among the hills in the pasture.

When the Hanson boys got older, Hans and Louie moved away, while John took over the running of the home place. One year he hired a man whom most everyone spoke of as being a little "off," though he was a good enough worker around the farm. This fellow's folks were old friends of ours and had lived not far from the old Pickford farm where I was born. One day this character appeared at our place looking pretty scared and with one of his hands wrapped up in a handkerchief. It seems he and John had gotten into a rather heated argument over wages or hours or something, and in the scuffle which followed the hired man got one of his fingers in his employer's mouth, figuring, no doubt, to do considerable damage in that locality. John immediately countered by clamping down hard with his strong Swedish teeth, and the finger was decidedly the worse for wear.

My folks were not at all keen about mixing in the affair in any way, but the man, as I have said, was from a family which had been old friends of my mother's, so there wasn't much to do but bandage up the damaged finger — I saw the teeth marks on it — and then my Dad took the fellow to town.

This irritated John considerably, and for a year or two he would not speak to any of us. This was an awkward situation, with our farms only a quarter of a mile apart and with the men thrown together at threshing time and at other neighborhood gatherings. Once as my father and I were driving to town we met John on the road. Dad said, "I'm going to speak to him anyway," and called out "Hello, John." John merely looked the other way and drove on. Some months later, however, to our pleasure and surprise, John came to our house one evening — we were having a neighborhood party — and said that he couldn't see much sense in such close neighbors being on the outs. My father agreed with him at once, and they sat on the kitchen table and talked things over and were always good friends after that.

There were many other neighbors, some of whom spent their entire lives in Lime Creek Township, while others came and stayed a year or two or three and moved on, as renters always have. There was Simon Pearce, his wife and his family of four daghters, Gladys, Ina, Lulu and Etta. Simon was a carefree farmer. If his calves broke out on the road or into the cornfield, he sold the calves rather than fix the fence. Once I went on

horseback to help him drive some of those calves to the stockyards at Rock Falls. It took us over half a day, and when we got back he handed me thirty-five cents. I was perfectly satisfied with this and thought I had been well paid.

But nobody ever got on the job earlier than Simon did at threshing time. He was up before dawn, getting the milking done, harnessing his team, rushing through his breakfast, and as a friend of mine once expressed it, "Running around like the head of a chicken cut off!" He'd go by our place with his team and rack while we were still at the breakfast table. Finally he and his family moved to town where he hauled sand and gravel for many years.

There was Peter Jensen, one of the best farmers around, who had us all worried for weeks while he lay in bed with a terrible case of blood poisoning in his arm. The first topic of conversation among the neighbors was whether Pete was going to lose that arm. Everyone had a horror of amputations. It seemed almost as bad as dying. But Pete was lucky, for Nature and a skillful doctor finally won. Pete was positively the best grain stacker in the neighborhood. I have told how the stack had to be drawn in gradually above the "bulge." Pete's stacks looked as if they might have been carved out of the golden bundles of grain, as they stood in stately "settings" of perhaps a dozen stacks all told, for he always raised a lot of oats and other small grain. When threshing time came and the pitchers clambered to the peak of each stack ready to toss the bundles down

to the self-feeder of the separator, it seemed almost shameful to disturb those well sculptured works of a good farmer who must indeed have had a bit of the artist in him.

There was Boy Hansen, who had no other interesting characteristic about him, for me at least, except that unusual first name.

In the fall along came Ernest Stebens, who in addition to running his good-sized farm, had time to look after a big orchard, and when apple-picking time arrived we looked for him and his single buggy on which he loaded several baskets of the Wealthies, the Whitney Crabs, the Patten's Greenings and the Hass apples that his trees seemed to bear nearly every year in abundance. He peddled these out on the way to town, and if he had any left by the time he reached Mason City, I suppose the grocers there traded him flour and sugar for them. As I recall it, the Hass apples were only fair in quality; the Greenings were all right for cooking, but if you wanted a tasty morsel for eating, a Wealthy or a Whitney were hard to beat. Like some of the old makes of machinery, these varieties of apples have had to give way to newer, better ones, and are now almost forgotten.

Two miles north of us lived the Prescotts, Lou and his wife, Cora, and their handsome daughters, Fern and Gertrude, who were among my best friends at the country school. You would not have called their farm a good one in those days for the buildings were old, unpainted, and not in very good repair, and the land

dipped here and there in gentle swales where the wild grass grew tall and rank. But it was an enchanting place to visit on a summer Sunday afternoon or a moonlit evening, for the rambling ancient barns and sheds were perfect for an exciting game of hide and seek. The girls were lively, and important indeed was the fact that they nearly always had two or three Shetland ponies around. Lou had taught his daughters to ride like cow-girls, which they did with verve and abandon, to the dismay of us boys who often fell ungracefully from the ponies' backs. A boy at the age of ten or twelve is not always sure which is the greater attraction, a girl or a pony, but in this case I am quite positive the girls had the edge.

Lou himself did not care too much for farming, but he loved horses. We liked to stand at a respectful distance and watch him hitch his spanking team of sorrel driving horses, perfectly matched and with silver manes and tails, to a canopy-top surrey. With their heads check-reined high they made a sparkling turnout. Sometimes he drove his girls to school with this team, and if I happened to be footing it along the road in the same direction, he never failed to pick me up, slowing down with a flourish while I climbed in the surrey, then shaking the sorrels into a smooth fast trot with a flick of the lines. A ride like that on a dewy spring morning was pleasant indeed.

We used to sort of turn up our noses when we passed a certain farm that lay between our own and Mason City. A lot if it was swamp land, some of it was thickly covered with timber, and much of the rest consisted

of gravelly knolls that refused to produce satisfactory crops. It was owned by as pleasant and amiable a young farmer as you would want to meet. I thought he was also one of the handsomest, and he had a name that was glamour itself, Ulysses Grant McGowan. You just couldn't ignore a man like that. Everybody liked him, but, well, why didn't he get rid of that farm and acquire one that would raise 80 bushels of corn to the acre and tons of lush hay? It was too bad, we thought, for one with his life ahead of him to waste his time on such an unpromising piece of land. Everybody said his place might have suited the Indians fine, and the story went that in centuries long gone the Lime Creek River — now the Winnebago — had its main channel through the farm but had changed its mind and course and left a great swamp that resisted all efforts to drain it.

But we had to eat our words. Under those gravelly knolls there turned out to be a treasure of sand and gravel, a discovery that was perfectly timed, as it happened, to coincide with the vast production of Portland cement in Mason City as well as elsewhere. Before many years towering structures appeared on this farm to handle the screening of gravel. The railroad that bisected the land — another disadvantage, we had thought — installed extra trackage to accomodate the gondola cars that were shunted alongside the screening plant. Huge trucks came and went all day long over a road that led to the plant past the edge of one of the smaller fields on the farm. Grant, as everyone called him then and as they still do, did not have to bother

much with farming. Gravel was big business, and we who had once been critical of the acres that lay near the swamp and the densely growing timber had to admit they were rich indeed.

What is true of nearly every farm neighborhood was true of ours, in that the most fascinating stories and incidents had best not be told, at least not until another generation has come and gone. The frantic midnight search of a distraught father and mother for an eloping couple; the sudden rush of hoofbeats mingled with loud, angry shouts along our quiet country road in the small hours before dawn; what happened when young couples strolled slowly home after a late country dance; a sensational murder case; the mysterious shot that seemed to come from nowhere — and fortunately missed its mark — all these and more had better be left to lie quietly until the leaves of memory have covered them gently and time has pressed busily on its way.

r. f. d. and the party line

There must have been some sort of a code among the Syrians, the Italians and the Jews, the itinerant peddlers who traveled the country roads and lanes in the early years of this century, for they all seemed to know that our farm was one at which they would be permitted to stay overnight. Often it was after dark when one of these swarthy merchants drove in our yard, always

with the plaintive story that he and his old horse could not go a step further. My folks never turned them away, though I know my mother was often uneasy with these foreign-looking men in the house.

A light wagon, usually rickety, carried their entire "stock" of shoe strings, pencils, bright-colored handkerchiefs, small rugs, and perhaps a bolt or two of gaudy calico cloth to catch the eye of the farmer's wife. We watered and fed their horses and bedded them down for the night. Then the peddler himself was asked into the house, given a place at the supper table if the meal was not yet over, or if it was late at night, my mother set out coffee and bread for him which he invariably wolfed greedily and noisily, while my brother, my sister and I watched timidly from the shadows of the adjoining rooms. We knew it would not be long before our visitor brought samples of his wares to spread out on the sitting room floor for us all to see while he tried to explain in his halting English what wonderful goods they were and what bargains.

We kids, of course, always wanted Father to buy everything the peddlers brought in, for, shoddy as the articles must have been, we seldom got to see such things at all. Dad liked to haggle with them over bits of merchandise, knowing full well they expected it. No peddler, we learned later, ever counted on getting what he first asked for anything he offered for sale. Nor did they ever pay in money for their lodging but offered instead a handkerchief or two or a few yards of calico. In the morning they were often up and on their way at

dawn, and as we stirred sleepily in our beds, we heard their carts clattering out the front gate, past the orchard, and over the little wooden bridge that spanned the tiny brook in what we called "the hollow."

No year went by without two or three visits from bands of those summertime nomads of the midwest prairies, the gypsies. No one ever knew from where they came. And no one ever knew where they went. They seemed to migrate with the birds, and every spring we knew they would soon be along, riding in perhaps a couple of grimy, covered wagons, the only prairie schooners we actually ever saw. One of their favorite camping spots was the roadside close to the willow grove that sheltered the John Moule homestead a quarter of a mile east of us. We watched them warily as they halted here, turned their sad-looking horses to graze along the road, unloaded dozens of ragged children, and started their campfires from which the gray smoke soon rose to hang lazily in the tops of the willows. We knew they wouldn't bother the Moules for there was always a big, tough watch dog on guard there. But we knew they would soon show up at our place, the women to beg and offer to tell fortunes, figuring to keep us occupied while the gypsy children stole anything they could. Once my mother and I were home alone when a delegation from the camp arrived. We stood in a screened porch we then had at the back of our house, being careful of course to hook the screen door securely from the inside. This was a vantage point where we could keep an eye on the whole back yard. One of the gypsy

women, evidently the leader of the crew, when she found we were not going to let her in, tried subtle flattery. She salaamed before me with a great show of humility, kissed the screen at my feet, and went into a dramatic plea about what she could do for "the young master."

My mother was not taken in by this nonsense and told the gypsy she could clear out at once, "or I'll call the menfolk." Mother was bluffing for the menfolk were miles away, but the threat had the desired effect. The woman called to the children, who had been peering into the woodshed and the milk house, scowled darkly at us and muttered what were probably swear words in the gypsy language, and marched off toward the camp.

The gypsy men seldom appeared at our place. They loafed about their campfires, smoking, and eating out of the great pots that always hung over the constantly smoldering embers. Their business was to trade horses with anyone unsuspecting enough to risk dealing with them. Their horseflesh was the sorriest, and you wondered how such emaciated animals had strength enough to pull those creaking covered wagons from camp to camp as these strange people, whose past is still almost unknown wandered through the summer, following the sun as it slanted southward and the autumn days grew shorter.

Four miles southeast of our farm the little village of Portland clung stubbornly to the bank of the Lime Creek River, even as it does today. Here, a half century

ago, was conceived and put into action a merchandising idea many years ahead of its time. It was the unique and remarkable store on wheels that we perhaps wrongly called the "egg wagon," and which was sent out on daily trips to the surrounding farming country by the general store in the village. Unlike the peddlers and the gypsies, the "egg man" was a most welcome visitor at our farm, to which he came every Thursday afternoon. We watched for him expectantly as he drove slowly down from the O'Donnell place, turned the corner at Moule's willow grove, and presently pulled up at our front gate.

We were always out there waiting for him, with a few eggs if we had them, or a little cash if we didn't. As the egg man swung down from his seat where he sat high up behind his team like the driver of a circus wagon, and opened the brightly painted red doors that protected the many shelves, drawers and compartments that filled every inch of the interior, what entrancing smells of spices, candy, fruit and cookies sprang forth. Once, when my mother had bought an especially big order, the egg man handed me a package of gum, the first I had ever seen. I chewed up the whole business within fifteen minutes.

Full crates of eggs were slid under the main part of the wagon, just in front of the rear wheels, while up on top, higher than a man's head, there was a little iron railing that kept brooms, mops and empty egg crates from falling off. There was a canvas top which could be raised or lowered to keep the hot sun or the rain off the

driver. How his team ever handled that heavy load on those Iowa dirt roads when a summer shower came along I have no idea.

The egg man and his wagon called on us for many years, but the coming of the automobile along about 1910 finally stopped his visits. I missed them both for a long time.

Nearly every summer a cream gathering route was started, only to die out when winter came. Sometimes it was a driver from Plymouth, or from Portland, or from Mason City who arrived with a team and a light wagon, promising to make regular stops and to pay a good price for what cream we had. I suppose the men who started these routes found them too expensive to operate, or prices fell and put them out of business, or the patrons along the route thought they were being cheated on the butterfat test of their cream and refused to sell.

Most of the time we hauled our own cream to Mason City and for many years we sold it to Higleys. During the years that I drove a horse and buggy to school in Mason City it was my job to deliver a five-gallon can to the creamery about twice a week. I detested having to carry that cream can in my buggy, not realizing, of course, that the income from it was probably keeping me in school. The town kids laughed at me and yelled derisively, "Look at the old farmer and his milk can!" I wish I hadn't been so thin-skinned at that age, for I can see now I should have just grinned and yelled back louder than they did. I was thoroughly ashamed

of that old cream can. I tried to hide it by throwing the lap robe over it, but it still looked like a cream can. In later years when I was in the dairy business on my father's farm I was glad to haul a whole truck load of milk cans to town. Nobody ever yelled at me then.

One day in the early summer of 1902 a man appeared at our place and introduced himself as a representative of the United States Postal Department. My father was working in the garden, while I hung around nearby, probably doing as little as possible, though no doubt I was supposed to be weeding the carrots, the parsnips or the beets, for we seemed always to have interminable rows of these vegetables. As I edged closer to hear what the visitor had to say, I heard him tell my father that he wanted the full names of every member of our family so the post office could tell where to send mail when any arrived. I felt terribly important when he wrote down my name. Just imagine me, ten years old, getting mail and having it delivered. It was almost unbelievable. We were a little skeptical about the whole thing. We didn't see how we could expect anything much better than picking up an occasional letter or a copy of the *Chicago Record-Herald* on Saturdays when we took the eggs and butter to town.

But on July 1, 1902, the R.F.D. came to our front gate, where we had carefully set a sturdy post with a metal mailbox securely fastened to the top and my father's name boldly lettered in red paint on each side of the box. Close beside the mailbox stood another post with a small blackboard nailed to it, an advertising

idea of one of the Mason City furniture stores. One side of the blackboard had the word "Wanted" at the top, while the other side was headed "For Sale." We were appalled and mortified one morning when we went out to admire our mailbox and our advertising signboard to find that during the night some barbed-wire humorist had scrawled in huge letters the word "beer" on the "For Sale" side of the board for all passers-by to see. This struck me as being very funny, but I do not think my father, most certainly a teetotaler, was pleased.

Rural mail delivery and the name of B. C. Waughtal were practically synonymous so far as our family was concerned. "Bash," as he was called by nearly everyone, started as a substitute carrier on that first day of July, became the regular carrier later on and continued on the job until 28 years later, when, at the age of 72, he retired. "Bash" was a contraction of his first name of Bashford, though for quite a while, until I learned better, I thought it might mean he was a handy man in a fistfight and had actually "bashed in" somebody's face.

Carrying the mail on the 20 miles or more of the average route was not what you would call a highly paid job in those early years. The pay was $600 a year, certainly no bonanza, but those first carriers managed on it somehow. They had to own and feed several horses, for on a daily trip of 20 miles or more a change of teams every few days was necessary. I think Mr. Waughtal did a little horse-trading on the side for he owned a great variety of horseflesh from time to time, none of it choice. More than once we saw him stop

to visit at the gypsy camp, and I have a notion that he could hold his own in a deal with the gypsy men.

Winter driving was the worst, with the roads almost impassable at times. But the farmers were so eager to get their mail they often got out their teams and sleds to break a track for the mailman. Often we watched for Bash until nearly dark, when at last he would appear, riding in an old swell-backed cutter, muffled to the eyes in a coonskin coat, with scarf, fur mittens and fur cap, with the lines around his neck so his hands were free to get at the mail pouches beside him and at his feet. Then, too, he needed to slap his hands together continually to keep them from freezing. His horses and his fur cap and collar would be white with frost for it was often 20 below zero with a wind blowing. I never saw him the least bit downhearted no matter how bad the going was. He would visit a minute or two as he handed out the mail, then slap the lines on the rumps of his tired horses and go on.

Some of the carriers used a rig that was a box-like affair, entirely enclosed and with small windows on all sides, and which could be mounted on wheels in summer and on a light bobsled in winter. A small oil-stove was sometimes installed in these cabs so that the driver could be fairly comfortable. These outfits had disadvantages however. They were heavy for a team to pull, upset rather easily, and so could not be used on badly drifted roads. Always I wanted to ride the route in one of these cab-like affairs, but I never got to do it. I think there was something in the R.F.D. regulations

anyway against carrying passengers, especially small boy passengers.

As the bottom fell out of the country roads in the early spring when the frost had to give way to the warming sun, we saw a mail carrier on another route discard his cutter and his buggy in disgust, throw a saddle on one horse and his mail bags over another, and, like a prospector heading for Deadman's Gulch, travel the weary miles to reach those lonely mailboxes. The R.F.D., once started, never gave up.

Much has been written slyly poking fun at the rural telephone party line. Everyone who has ever lived on a farm is familiar with, and in fact almost expects to hear, the telltale click of receivers being quietly lifted from the hook within a few seconds after he has finished cranking out the ring of central or someone else on the line. It's part of the fun of living in the country, and you guard your conversation accordingly, knowing full well that the entire neighborhood would like to know how much you are going to get for that truck-load of hogs, whether you are out of feed and want some delivered, or whether you stayed out too late at that party the other night and are now paying for it with a fine cold in the head. You learn not to gossip over the party line and are embarrassed to death when someone from town calls and, forgetting the lack of privacy on the country line, proceeds to rake somebody else over the coals. Once a good friend of mine, a preacher, called to tell me about something that had gone wrong with the plumbing in the rather ancient house into which

he had just moved. When I admitted mildly that the house didn't look like much on the outside, he exploded, "Well, it looks like hell on the inside!" Several curious ears must have backed away from their receivers in stunned surprise.

We were connected with our first party line within a year or so after mail delivery began. Most of the others on the line lived well to the southeast of us and we did not know any of them well, so our ring, which was four longs, seldom came over the wire. We always wished it would ring more often, and when a series of long rings started we waited breathlessly, hoping it would be ours. When it turned out to be two or three rings we were much disappointed.

Later on, however another line was organized among the farmers who lived closer to us, and then our ring, which was a long, a short, and a long, came fairly often. My father installed most of the telephones on this new line for, apparently, he was the only one who knew how to do it. Where he learned the trick I don't know, but he made them work. He was the first trouble shooter for the line. My brother, Roger, who was later to become associated with the Bell Telephone Laboratories in New York City in research work, must have inherited this knack with telephones.

The farmers on a party line did all their own construction work. Some hauled poles, wire, brackets and insulators to the proper places; some dug holes and set the poles, while still others took over the job of unreeling the wire, stretching it and fastening it to the in-

sulators. I liked to watch all this of course, for it meant getting away from the duller jobs around the farm. I heard lots of talk about lightning arresters, grounds, dry cells, generators and so on, but unlike my brother, I never did know how the darn things worked — and still don't.

We often made good use of that party line for an evening's entertainment. With no radio, no television, no record player, no car to dash to town in, and no movies to see if we did get to town by team and surrey, a one-legged peddler who played the jew's-harp was the sensation of the neighborhood. "Pegleg" Roach made a sort of hand-to-mouth living in the county by selling linens, laces, piano scarfs and other odd bits of dry goods. No one seemed to know much about his past, but he was more readily received in the farmers' homes because he was not of foreign descent as were the peddlers who often stopped at our farms. He was friendly with the Dennis O'Donnells, and often stayed with them for a spell in the winter time when the roads were bad and it was hard to get around.

At such times we could expect to hear the general ring over the party line along about the time supper dishes were out of the way. It would be Dennis, his wife or his son, Eddie, calling to let everyone know they had persuaded Pegleg to play his jew's-harp close to the transmitter of their wall telephone. Every receiver came down at once, and at our place, where there were five of us to crowd closely around that little instrument, reception was somewhat difficult to say

the least. There was a good deal of shoving and scuffling and anguished cries of, "Mother, make him let go of the receiver, it's my turn now!" But we thought the music was wonderful, we who were so hungry for diversion of any kind, and when Pegleg came to the end of a piece we applauded loudly and happily into the transmitter. It was entertainment, and it was coming mysteriously over that slender thread of wire strung on poles along our fence lines. The angry northwest wind might be whipping the snow into six-foot drifts outside while the frost imps nibbled away at doors and windows trying to drive us closer to the glowing base burner in the sitting room, but Pegleg Roach and his jew's-harp were coming in with the faint but twangy notes of "My Old Kentucky Home." What more could you want on a wintry night in Lime Creek Township?

uncle thee

Our family was in a state of pleasant and subdued excitement one quiet August evening in 1900. The Wilkinsons were throwing a party — only we didn't call it "throwing" then — our first since we had arrived at the new farm in Lime Creek Township. There had been a rush of preparation all day, getting sandwiches ready, icing fancy little cakes and making ice

cream. Making ice cream was quite a trick in itself, for the ice had to be brought out from Mason City carefully wrapped in gunnysacks lest it melt down before we got it home.

Naturally we hoped to make a good impression on the neighbors, most of whom we knew pretty well by this time, but whom we had never entertained before. We hoped, too, that they would all come. Invitations had gone out several days previously, delivered in person by my father and mother, for there were yet no telephones nor rural mail routes. We knew one thing — there would be no parking problem. Most of the guests would arrive on foot. None of them had to come over a mile or so, and who wanted to bother with hitching up a smelly, sweaty horse when you could just as well walk it in ten or fifteen minutes. One's shoes might get a bit dusty, but it was easy to polish them up with a flick of a handkerchief before turning in at the host's front gate.

We waited for our guests in the gentle flutter of anticipation you always have when looking forward to a long-planned evening you hope will go well. While we watched, the long shadows of the sun crept eastward as, "Now deep in ocean sank the lamp of light, and drew behind the cloudy veil of night." Only there wasn't any ocean for the sun to sink into — just the willow grove on the Carmany farm west of us. Then we saw the first of the guests approaching, some from the east and some from the west. No youngsters had been invited so my job was mainly keeping out from

underfoot. I did have a vantage point back of the kitchen door where I could observe what went on without being seen.

It was a sedate affair, or at least it seemed so to an eight-year-old boy. What impressed me most was the splendor of attire of two of the male guests, Mr. Wheaton, who lived a mile east of us, and elderly Mr. Hanson, our nearest neighbor to the west. Both displayed enormous white shirt fronts, very stiffly starched, as large indeed, as were ever worn with white tie and tails, only each man wore an ordinary suit. With Mr. Wheaton's expanse of shirt front went a stiff white stand-up collar and a black bow tie. I thought he was just about the best dressed man I had ever seen. Mr. Hanson's shirt bosom was just as glistening, and his collar just as spotless, but he had a distinct advantage over Mr. Wheaton because of wearing a full beard. Carefully combed and brushed, it fell neatly down over the spot where a bow tie would ordinarily be found, and it was well on into the evening before any of us noticed that Mr. Hanson had, indeed, come without any tie at all. Always after that we referred to this party as the party of the shirt fronts, with considerable merriment concerning the gentleman who figured he needed no tie.

It was likely during the following holiday season that my father, mother and I went to a Christmas party at Mr. Wheaton's home. A program had been arranged by someone, and while I am not sure, I still have a sneaking suspicion that I was supposed to re-

cite that famous poem by Eugene Field, "Jes 'Fore Christmas." You remember, of course, the familiar lines of this well known story in rhyme, "Father calls me William, Sister calls me Will, Mother calls me Willie – but the fellers call me Bill." And every stanza ending with, "But jes 'fore Christmas I'm as good as I can be." Anyway my Dad stood up before the assembled guests and read the piece while I cowered beside my mother with a bad case of stage fright.

Ordinarily everyone was extremely well behaved at these country parties. There was one exception, however. When I was around fifteen years old we invited the neighborhood kids to our place one evening for the usual round of games and refreshments. For some reason or other there was bad feeling between two of the boys who came. Probably some girl's affection was involved. One of these boys was Walter Page, who later married Ina Pearce and in a few years met a tragic end when he was crushed to death by a steam shovel at a gravel pit. The name of the other boy has gotten away from me, but he was a newcomer in the neighborhood.

As the evening's fun went on these two kids got to calling one another unpleasant names. Finally one of them invited the other out into the road to "settle things." Here is where the rest of us should have stepped in and stopped the trouble, but, little animals that we were, we tingled with excitement over the prospect of seeing a real fight. We gathered in a tight circle in the dusty moonlit roadway while the two

boys went after each other. The Page boy was definitely fighting out of his class and was soon getting his head rubbed into the dirt. Some of the girls who had been fearfully watching the battle ran to tell my mother what was happening. She went into action fast. Ordinarily the mildest kind of a person, she was quickly in complete command of the situation. She ordered the combatants to her presence immediately, and in superb and artistic language gave them one of the most thorough tongue-lashings I have ever heard. In no uncertain terms she gave them to understand that they could leave for their respective homes at once. They did so. The party didn't amount to much after that.

In the winter time there were dances at somebody's home about every Saturday night. The square dance and the waltz were extremely popular about 1905. Now, nearly 50 years later, the square dance is again giving entertainment to a lot of people. The girl who taught me to waltz was Anna Tietjen, a handsome, willowy blonde who lived on one of the best farms in the county, about two miles northwest of us. She was a superb dancer, but I was so clumsy and bashful I made hard work of the waltz for both of us. She was patient with me and so I learned, after a fashion at least, though it took the practice I got later at college to make waltzing a real pleasure.

Most of us preferred the square dance in those days. It took four couples to make a "set." Our footwork, unlike that of the waltz, could be pretty much free style,

just so we bobbed and shuffled in time to the music. And, by the way, the "music" was usually furnished by just one fiddle, and the same tune was played over and over all evening. Sometimes the fiddler had an accompanist on an organ, or very rarely, on a piano. For hardly anyone was well-to-do enough to own a piano then.

But the real star of the square dance was the caller, who stood usually in a doorway between the rooms where the dancing was going on, and called out the various movements that the square dancers were to perform. A good caller always received some pay, as did the fiddler, and if folks knew that a caller everyone liked was going to be at a dance, it meant a bigger, happier crowd. Invitations to a dance invariably told who was going to "call." One of the best in our neighborhood was old Bill Lloyd, who "worked around" for different farmers. He was always good, but when slightly drunk, he was very, very good at calling.

Depending on the size of the house where the dance was being held, the number of square dance couples on the floor at one time would be either four, eight, or twelve. Each four couples would form a square at the start of a set, with each lady at the right of her gentleman partner. Then as the music began, the caller might start out in a sing-song rhythm something like this: "Salute your pardners, right 'n left, all join hands and circle to the left; alleyman left; grand right 'n left; back to yer pardners 'n do-se-do; first couple out to the right 'n four hands round; ladies do-se-do and the

gents you know; chase the rabbit 'n chase the squirrel, chase the pretty girl roun' the world." This went on until each of the four couples had gone "out to the right." There were endless variations of these calls, with many added to suit the individual whims of the caller, all performed with a continual stamping and shuffling of the dancers' feet in time to the music, until the caller finally wore himself down and directed everyone to "promenade all to the hole in the wall," which meant that the set was over. The most graceful square dancer I ever saw was Dennis O'Donnell. His feet never missed a beat, and with his beaming red Irish face, his flowing white mustache and his courtly manner of bowing to his partners, he was a model of rhythm for the rest of us.

There were almost no automobiles in the country then so that everyone who went to a neighborhood party or dance either walked, rode horseback, or drove a horse and buggy in the summer time or a cutter or bobsled in winter. Most of the young fellows owned horses and buggies, much as the youngsters acquire some kind of a car now. Rubber-tired buggies were fairly common, though the tires were not pneumatic but simply rims of hard rubber instead of the usual steel. The more daring show-offs went in for shiny black or bright red buggies with spindle-back seats and no tops. The sensible boys stuck to the more conventional buggy which had a top that could be raised or lowered depending on the weather. There were side curtains to be attached if a heavy shower

came along. Always there had to be a fancy fringed lap-robe to keep the dust off one's sharply creased trousers and to keep the chill night air away from the girl friend's knees.

Many of the driving horses were fairly fast trotters or pacers, and more than one impromptu race took place on those dusty country lanes. I never acquired a horse and buggy of my own. Just improvident, I guess. But at an age when most young men had these things I went off to high school and then to college, so there never was quite enough cash to go around. I often stood and watched with envy while some of my friends flashed by with their fast-stepping horses, harness polished and sparkling in the sun, fancy fly-nets rippling in the wind — some of those deluxe fly-nets even had cute little pockets that fit over the ears of the horse, with flaunting tassels bobbing at the end of each one. Beside these aesthetic marvels the present day squirrel-tail flying from a radiator cap is a mediocre gesture indeed. Of course there was always one of Dad's horses for me to drive and a buggy of a sort. But I couldn't take much pride in them for they were strictly utilitarian, while I craved something a little more showy.

On one occasion, however, I did go to considerable effort to make the single buggy that we had look more presentable. The reason for this outburst of energy on my part was that Ringling Brothers circus was coming to town, and I had a date for it with one of the neighbor girls named Osa Whitney. The old buggy

was pretty shabby, and I was ashamed of it but saw no way to get anything better. So I got some red paint for the wheels, black paint for the body and a can of black top-dressing for the top. I wonder how many hours I spent on that vehicle when I should have been doing more useful work around the farm. But it did look pretty well when I got through with it. I was given permission to drive Romeo, one of my father's black horses, on circus day, and with the old single harness shined up with oil and our fanciest lap-robe tucked about my knees I thought I looked fairly snappy as I drove into Osa's yard about twelve-thirty in the afternoon. She came out dressed in a fluffy white gown, a big picture hat, and long white gloves that came to her elbows. I have no recollection of what I was wearing but very likely my suit was a medium-priced model from "Patton Brothers — The Bell Clothiers — A Child Buys As Cheaply From Us As A Man."

We got to town without a runaway or an upset. I didn't know much about where the circus lot was located, but I did know I had to find a place to tie my horse while we saw the show. The only place I knew of was the long chain hitch rack around the Central school grounds downtown. Finally we found a spot where Romeo could be safely tied. Then we started out to look for the circus. It turned out to be in the north end of town, in what was then called the Brice and Ong addition. I'll bet I walked poor Osa 3 or 4 miles going to and coming from that circus. The chances are that the fluffy gown didn't look so good by late afternoon.

As I recall it she was rather quiet on the way home. She was probably good and mad. I was always so petrified in the presence of a girl that I was uneasy most of the time trying to think of something to say to her. But I guess the circus was as good as it always is, and in the excitement of watching the "Slide For Life," "The Aerial Marconios," the elephants and the clowns I probably forgot my self-consciousness and enjoyed the day anyway.

I think my folks had a pretty good idea that I was taking Osa that day though I had told them nothing about it, for when I got home they kept slyly asking me whether anyone went with me, whether I sat alone and so on. For the life of me I can't understand now why I didn't tell them all about my date. My own children never showed any hesitancy in discussing their dates with their mother and me.

The best pal I ever had when it came to going to the circus was my Uncle Theodore Wilkinson, whom we called Uncle Thee. He was a bachelor until middle age, and often worked at our place during the summer doing carpenter work and repairing of various kinds. Nobody was ever more ready than he to knock off work and go to town on circus day, and invariably he took me along, to my great delight. We went for the whole day, too. First, the parade in the forenoon, which gave us a peek at the stupendous wonders awaiting us in the afternoon and night shows, split our ears with blasts from the steam calliope and warned us to "hold your horses, the elephants are coming!" Then

dinner at Vermilya's Cafe costing as much as 25 or 30 cents for all I could eat, before the long walk to the circus lot in "The Addition," with me fairly tingling with excitement and anticipation every step of the way. Finally we'd get to the Big Top itself after the tour of the animal tent. I always wished I could go right back for the evening performance, but of course, I never could. For hours after I got home I could hear that circus music in my ears, and there was the almost overpowering desire to run away and become a bareback rider or a clown. But does anyone ever go to the circus without feeling that way? For days afterward I would be trying to balance pitchforks on my chin or to walk the top of a tight-board fence. Probably Uncle Thee never knew what a stimulant these events were to the lively imagination of his small nephew.

My uncle also took me to the first stage show I ever saw. It was "Tillie Olson" at the old Wilson Theatre. We drove to town one summer evening, put our horse and buggy in the livery barn — the warning sign of which read "Not Responsible For Whips And Robes" — and got some good seats for the show. Probably it was poor comedy, but I thought it wonderful. I remember two gags from it. In one scene, Tillie Olson, who was supposed to be a slow-witted Swedish hired girl, was told to go and fetch a box of good matches. Soon she was back, lighting each match or trying to as she came down stage, and saying "Dot bane a good one," or "Dot bane a bum one," depending on whether they lit or not. She explained that was the only

way she could tell whether it was a box of "good matches." Pretty awful. The other gag showed a scene in a hotel lobby. People in the cast were sitting around visiting idly. Every minute or so a man rushed in with a drinking glass in his hand, filled it at a water cooler and rushed out again. This happened three or four times to build up the gag. Finally it occurred to someone to ask him what he was up to. He explained loudly and indignantly, "There's a fire up in my room!" I used this alleged joke nearly 40 years afterward in a home town minstrel show, and it still got a laugh.

Nearly every summer there was some building or remodeling to do on our farm, and I looked forward eagerly to Uncle Thee's coming to help, for he livened things considerably for me. There would be a new hog house to build, the barn to shingle or paint, and it seemed to me that we were constantly fixing over our house. One year the big front porch was put on. Another time a second story was added over the kitchen, which meant the passing of the old flat tin roof thereon and the end of the terrifying racket every rainstorm made on that roof. If hail fell the noise was so deafening it drove us all to some other part of the house. It seemed the hailstones must surely batter their way through onto the kitchen floor. Another project was the building of a back porch, which contained, wonder of wonders, an inside toilet which connected in some mysterious manner with a septic tank out east of the house near the garden. At first we didn't exactly trust that toilet to work all the time, so we left the old

outdoor structure standing for a year or two out by the lilac bushes, just in case.

There was a water system to be put in another time, and later on a hot water heating plant. All of this meant feeding extra men, for workmen did not dash back to town for meals then as they do now, and my mother must have gotten pretty tired of it. I know now that my father wanted to get these things done so her work would be easier, for she had to work hard and her health was not the best, though we kids did not realize it at the time.

With Uncle Thee and other workmen around, my days on the farm were not so lonely and monotonous. If there was brick-laying or plastering to do George Duff of Rock Falls would come to take care of it. I loved the kidding that went on between him and my uncle. Duff was a big, dark-complexioned man with snapping black eyes and a fierce mustache. Now and then he cut loose with bursts of mock oratory, the only bit of which I can remember was when he told Uncle Thee with appropriate and dramatic gestures that unless my uncle sawed a certain board a certain way there would be "Wars and famines and pestilences!" He loved to catch my uncle making some mistake in carpentering and often boomed out, "By God, Thee, you've cut that damn board off twice and it's still too short!"

kill kare, barney oldfield, and the diving girls

One of the really great contributions to Cerro Gordo County culture and entertainment during the first decade of the twentieth century was the Y.M.C.A. lecture course sponsored by a group of Mason City folks. This was not all lectures by any means, but instead was a series of about half-a-dozen numbers which often included magicians, impersonators, quar-

tettes, orchestras, poets and writers of national reputation, as well as the serious talks by lecturers. We could buy season tickets every fall which admitted us to the events held about once a month through the winter. We always bought two tickets. My father and I would go to some of the entertainments, and my father and mother attended the rest. There was always a humorist or two included in the series, and these were the ones I tried to talk my folks into letting me attend.

At first the various numbers were held in either the Congregational or the Methodist churches. Later they were presented from the stage of the Wilson – now Cecil – Theatre. What a treat it was, after driving three or four miles to town on a frosty winter night and turning our horses over to a hostler at the livery stable, to walk the few blocks to the theatre and be at once transported into another world of bright lights, soft carpets, music, and gay, handsomely-dressed men and women. In the boxes near the stage sat the elite of Mason City. Probably they were the ones who had to make up the deficit if the season did not show a profit. Across the stage before us as we waited expectantly for the show to go on, hung the great curtain, conspicuously lettered "asbestos" and displaying the picture of a lone Indian riding his pony down a rocky trail and shading his eyes with one hand as he gazed out over a vast canyon. I wonder what the Indian was supposed to be looking for. Bad white men, probably. The word "asbestos" was to reassure everyone against

fire, for we were all a little uneasy in a theatre because of the horrible Iroquois Theatre tragedy in Chicago that had taken so many lives only a few years before.

Presently the curtain would rise slowly and majestically, and the evening's entertainment would begin. Once it was Strickland Gillilan, the poet and lecturer, who wrote "Off Ag'in, On Ag'in, Gone Ag'in, Finnegan." Of course, he recited it for us that night. I wish I could recall some of the others who appeared on that stage. It seemed to us who were so hungry for these things that the talent was the best in the world, though probably it was not. I was certain that I wanted to be a traveling Y.M.C.A. entertainer when I grew up. From where I sat that looked like a perfect career.

How I hated to have an evening at the theatre come to an end. The night would be frostier than ever when we came out, struggling into our winter caps and overcoats. Our horses at the livery stable would be led out for us from their stalls back along the dim alleyways of the big old frame barn. The thunderous "clop-clopping" of their hoofs on the wooden floors of the carriage-storage part of the stable was a sound I have never heard anywhere else except at the Chicago International, where the fancy gaited saddle and driving horses move out to the main arena over wood planking.

The horses would be chilly and anxious to get home. Our livery fee of perhaps thirty-five cents would be paid. We would pull our robes and blankets about us to keep out the biting air, and in our sled, cutter or

buggy, depending on the state of the roads – and they were usually in quite a state – we swung out of the stable doors into the quiet streets, across the deserted tracks of the old Iowa Central, down the lime kiln hill, across the clattering Lime Creek bridge, past Dr. Marston's bungalow snuggled back of its manicured shrubbery, and on to the country road leading home.

My head might still be buzzing with the lilting music of a stringed quartette doing "My Old Kentucky Home." Or nearly aching in an attempt to figure out how that magician had made those cards appear out of thin air. Or I might still be giggling over the jokes and antics of a black-faced impersonator. School, milking cows, hauling in corn fodder and turning the cream separator were all far, far away on such nights.

The summer-time cousin of the Y.M.C.A. lecture course was the Chautauqua. This usually came along in August and lasted for a week, with entertainment of some sort every afternoon and night. Here again we got both culture and fun furnished us. It was all the more interesting because a stage and plank seats were set up under a huge tent located sometimes in the school yard, sometimes in a vacant lot near the main part of town. The talent was much the same as that booked for the winter courses. Again, we always had tickets for my Dad and mother were great hands for anything of this sort. Those plank seats got extremely hard after a couple of hours of sitting, but we were immensely grateful to the Redpath-Vawter people who thought up the idea of the Chautauqua in the first

place, and sent their advance men around to the middle-western towns to get guarantees of enough money to make the series a sure bet for the promotors. Lots of people brought tents, groceries and cooking equipment and camped for the whole week near the show. They made it their summer vacation. I always wished we could do that, but of course, such frivolity was out of the question when we lived only a little more than three miles away. Can you imagine a modern family spending a vacation like that? I should say not. But it was great stuff then.

During that first decade of the twentieth century, when we were so eagerly attending the lectures, the concerts, and the humorous skits and sketches the Y.M.C.A. and the Chautauqua people brought us, something new was stirring in Cerro Gordo County. This seemed to occur almost simultaneously in several localities. Farm people, exposed at too long intervals to a bit of culture and entertainment, felt the urge to create something of their own. They wanted something more than just a party, a dance, an occasional "shivaree," or a box social. And so rural clubs began to appear, organized and run by the farmers themselves, their wives and their families. Most of them met about once a month, sometimes to attempt to settle, or at least to argue, affairs of local, national, or even international importance. Sometimes they gathered just to have fun, to blow off steam as it were, and it was often surprising indeed to see how hitherto unsuspected talent of one kind or another came to the surface at these neighborhood meetings.

If I speak mostly of one special club it is because I saw it at its birth, watched it grow, and sort of grew up with it. In any farm community the families who become best acquainted with one another are those who "change work" at threshing or silo-filling time. So it was perfectly natural that six of these families became the charter members of the club organized at a meeting in our home in December, 1910. Present were the Elmer Herseys, the Dennis O'Donnells, the Ed Fitzgeralds, the Simon Pearces, the Jim Devoys, and, of course, our own family.

My mother was elected to be the first president, and Mrs. Hersey, who is now Mrs. Bernard Manley of Mason City, the first secretary, since they were the two who had perhaps been most active in promoting this new idea. It was decided then to hold meetings once a month, rotating these gatherings in order at the homes of the six members. Next we debated on what to call ourselves. There were many suggestions, but it fell to Alta Gallagher, then the teacher of the Falls Township school that I have mentioned before and who then boarded with the Herseys, to come up with the name that struck everyone as being just right and which has persisted to this day, the "Kill Kare Klub."

You might think from that name we were interested only in fun and frivolous goings-on at our meetings. We had plenty of that, of course, but there was nearly always a serious discussion of some sort, a paper that someone had put a lot of work into, or perhaps a debate. We didn't know much about parliamentary rules or procedure, but we went ahead anyway and if

somebody got "out of order" we didn't worry about it. Once there was a lively debate over which type of farming was better, livestock or grain farming. As it happened, Elmer Hersey was assigned to defend grain farming and argued spiritedly over what a thrill it was to sit on a grain binder at harvest time and watch the machine kick off the bundles while you thought, "There's fifty cents, fifty cents, fifty cents, every time a golden bundle comes out." We rather thought his heart wasn't in it, however, for he raised a lot of hogs himself each year. But he made the debate a lively one.

My sister, Florence Dean, recalls my mother particularly liked to drill the young girls, of whom there were several in the club, in rather intricate marching formations performed to music — the girls carried banners proclaiming "Kill Kare Klub."

Everyone in the club lived on a dirt road at that time. This meant watching out for a sudden shower, for if we had risked driving to the club meeting in an automobile, which was a new thing then, we were likely to be stranded away from home overnight, if not longer. One evening our family had arrived at the Chamberlains, later members of the club, in our rakish and shiny 1911 Abbott Detroit, when the Herseys pulled in with their equally stunning new Colby. A dark cloud hung threateningly in the west as we left home, but we did want to drive that new car. In an hour or so the dull rumble of thunder and jagged flashes of lighting along the western horizon gave notice in no uncertain terms that a downpour was

imminent. My father and Elmer dashed for those new cars, cranked the engines hurriedly, and drove home, returning later, each with a sedate team and surrey which reassured us, as the rain finally came splashing down, that we would get safely home, "What matter how the night behaved."

I must tell you about the masquerade party we had one Halloween. This party was the idea of Mrs. Hersey, as gay and lively a woman as could be met in a long time, and it was held at her home. When all the guests had arrived, in self-designed costumes they hoped would conceal their identities for a short while at least, they found nearly all the furniture moved out of the house. Corn shocks had been moved in and golden pumpkins peeped out at us from dark and spooky corners. It seems to me there was a goblin or two floating about, and from the depths of a closet came the occasional rattle of something, which, we assured the squealing younger feminine guests, could be nothing but the bones of a long forgotten skeleton. That night we did, indeed, kill "Kare," and the cider flowed like – well, like cider. We all wore masks, of course, during the early part of the evening, but my father had come up with an idea which went still further as a disguise. Somewhere on our farm he had found a huge yellow pumpkin, from which he removed the bottom and the insides. Then he cut holes in its side as you would for a jack-o-lantern, and slipped the whole thing over his head. Nobody could guess who he was, but everyone had fun thumping the pump-

kin and making derisive remarks about how hollow-headed the thing was. Loretta O'Donnell, a vivacious little Irish girl about my age, declared he was Paul Fitzgerald, a youngster she was currently quite interested in, and proceeded to sit on his lap whenever the opportunity offered. This delighted my mother, brother, sister and me, who were in on the secret, for my father was ordinarily rather a dignified sort of person. We waited in great anticipation for the unmasking later in the evening, and when the pumpkin came off Dad's head Loretta gasped and fled blushingly out of the room. It was late indeed, and the harvest moon hung high in the sky that night before we bobbed for the last apple, drank the rest of the cider, and drove down the quiet country roads toward home.

It was not many years before there were so many rural clubs in Cerro Gordo County it seemed a good idea to form a county-wide organization. This was finally done at a banquet sponsored by Charlie Barber, secretary of the North Iowa Fair. Every summer after that the clubs got together for a picnic, usually in East Park in Mason City, where each contributed a number to an afternoon program. At first there was no band shell, stage or even any seats for the audience, but we discovered a pretty good natural amphitheater at one spot in the park, and the various acts were presented there.

Our county agent at that time was Pat O'Donnell, a genial and capable Irishman. The Farm Bureau had been newly organized, a struggling infant that was

a far cry from the present smooth running and powerful organization. The Kill Kare outfit decided one summer to present a skit at the East Park affair which would be a sort of plug for Pat and the Farm Bureau. It was proposed to show a farm neighborhood that was not getting along too well – farmers scrapping among themselves, crops not doing well, and things generally going haywire. We had parked Charlie Kiser's car back of a screen at the rear of the stage, with Roy Kiser at the wheel. We proposed to have County Agent Pat "O'Flanagan" arrive with a flourish as the motor of the car roared to a halt, with Roy leaping out of the car and dashing onto the stage in impersonation of the real agent. Everything, after Pat's arrival, would, of course, be lovely for the hapless farmers.

The motor of the car was supposed to be idling as quietly as possible backstage while we built up the scene before the audience. But something went wrong. Roy may have forgotten to start the car, or maybe those of us on the stage didn't quarrel loudly enough for him to get his cue. And when the moment arrived for some actor to announce loudly and dramatically, "Pat O'Flanagan arrives in his car!" the motor wasn't even running. There was an awkward pause on-stage while Roy cranked frantically at the engine, which suddenly caught hold with a deafening roar, more like an airplane warming up than the smooth purr of a motorcar. When Roy finally bounded on stage, redfaced and breathless, the audience was delighted at our chagrin

and applauded more happily than they likely would have, had everything gone according to plan.

The story of the Kill Kare Klub could be duplicated by many of the other rural groups that were started at about the same time. Several of them still meet regularly, as they have been doing for going on half a century. But there are a lot of other things to do now. Roads are better, cars are faster and far more comfortable, and there's more money to spend for outside entertainment. The rural club was a training ground, a minor league, so to speak, for many who went on to become prominent and even famous, not only in agriculture but in other fields. Those friendly neighborhood gatherings were, and, to a certain extent, still are an important part of country life as we have known it during the first 50 years of the twentieth century.

Hardly anyone who lived in Cerro Gordo County and went to the North Iowa Fair during its early struggling years could have missed knowing or at least hearing of Charlie Barber, the immensely popular, extremely capable secretary of the Fair for many years. A slender, slightly-stooped little man, with a high, penetrating voice, snapping brown eyes, and a sort of perpetually-harassed look, he seemed always to be going some place in a hurry. As Fair time drew near he began to appear still more harassed, and hurry just a little bit faster. For several years my father was superintendent of the building we called Floral Hall, where there were exhibits of corn, grain and vegetables, and some-

times quite elaborate displays created by the rural clubs from products their members had produced. This meant many conferences with Charlie about location of the exhibits and decorating the building. I liked to watch Charlie getting his way – which he usually did – without offending anyone.

The stuff in Floral Hall was all right of course, but at the age of 15, I was much more interested in the entertainment features the amiable secretary of the Fair lined up for us each year. It was the era of auto polo, that slashing, crashing game played every afternoon and evening on the race track in front of the grandstand by several rugged young men with reckless disregard for the antiquated carcasses of the stripped-down Ford cars they drove. The cars often pitched and rolled wildly under the impact of the game, but the young men, certainly a hardy breed, rarely got hurt.

It was the era, too, of Ethel Dare and the Great Locklear, who appeared suddenly in the skies before us on the days called for by their contracts, and looped, wing-walked and changed planes in mid-air in rickety crates no self-respecting pilot would set foot in today. Those shaky old biplanes are museum pieces now. That is, the few which survived the early days of barnstorming are now resting in museums. These great and courageous pioneers of aviation did their stuff for us, then swooped low in front of the grandstand, waved a friendly hand at us from the maze of struts, bamboo and piano wire in which they sat, and were off to their next job miles away. For all we knew they might have

come from another world, and we scarcely dared to believe that they were ordinary mortals like us.

One year the Fair advertised that the most breath-taking, heart-stopping stunt of all time would take place before our eyes. Two railroad locomotives were to meet head-on in a collision that might well blow the whole infield into the next county. People were warned to stay way, way back from the giants of the track which would rush madly at each other at a certain hour on a certain day. It was even intimated that perhaps the only really safe place to observe this world-shaking event would be from the roof of the old frame icehouse across the street from the Fairgrounds, where, with a borrowed spyglass at your eye, you might watch with little or no risk to health and happiness.

The appointed day came. Most of us decided we would risk sitting in the grandstand after all. We had to see this thing even if it meant losing an eye or a leg. The locomotives were in place, at opposite ends of the infield, where they steamed noisily and glared balefully at each other. Two brave men had been assigned to open the throttles and start these leviathans of the right-of-way down the track toward their crashing climax. The fateful hour arrived. Each locomotive whistle screeched defiance of the other. The great wheels started to revolve, and the lumbering giants picked up speed. The engineers leaped from their cabs and tore madly for protective ditches lest they be blown to kingdom come. Meantime, we gripped our seats, not daring to breathe. The onrushing engines, whistle

cords tied down, steam domes pouring forth venom, bore down on each other. Two seconds — one second — it was all over. We still lived and breathed, and the locomotives were still there. They had not blown into a billion pieces as we had hoped they would. In fact, after the first impact, they bounced back, then settled rather cozily together, steamed gently, and seemed to say, "Well folks, that's it." We waited around hopefully for a few minutes, thinking that at least one of them might blow up. Nothing happened. I was disgusted and told the fellow sitting next to me that I guessed I'd go back over to Floral Hall.

A great, almost legendary figure of the dirt race tracks of his day was Barney Oldfield, billed quite modestly in the advance advertising of the Fair as "Barney Oldfield and his Golden Submarine!" This nautical description meant simply that the racing car in which Barney would appear was ultra streamlined, covered with gilt paint, and could go round a half-mile track like the very dickens. Complications arose for some of us on the day this event was to be presented at the Fairgrounds. Our "ring" had not finished with the shock threshing, and it was unthinkable that the work should be stopped for Barney Oldfield or anybody else. I've forgotten which neighbor we were helping, but several of us, all about my age, drove in the yard with our teams and racks rather sulkily that morning, wondering why the job couldn't be called off for just a few hours.

Things turned out better for us than we expected.

About ten-thirty a few low scudding clouds dropped a gentle shower of rain on the field where we were working. The separator ground to a halt for the grain had to be dry to thresh well. Without waiting to see how long the rain was going to last, every one of us made for home, clattering along at a fast trot if our wagons happened to be empty, and one or two with their racks loaded with bundles simply unhitched hastily, jumped on the "off" horse or the "near" horse, whichever one rode the best, and cantered happily away. We were going to see Barney Oldfield, rain or shine, and the hell with the threshing.

By noon we were waiting at the grandstand, ready to buy our tickets. But the most delightful thing of all was the way the sun broke forth after the rain clouds had disappeared far off to the southeast. At one o'clock the track was almost dusty, and when at two p.m., the Golden Submarine rolled down the stretch before us, and Barney, cigar clamped tightly in a corner of his mouth, leaned out to wave to us, we marvelled at our good luck. We were entranced at the skill with which he skidded the Submarine smoothly around the turns. It was long afterward that I learned Barney claimed to have been the first to discover the simple trick of turning the front wheels of a racing car in the direction of the skid.

The next morning we all went back and finished up that threshing job. But I thought the neighbor concerned was just a bit cool toward us. Likely he wondered why we didn't show up the afternoon before

when the sun came out and dried the grain in no time. He didn't say so, but I've wondered if he didn't sneak in himself for a look at the Golden Submarine.

It occurred to me one season along toward Fair time that I might make myself a little spending money by getting some sort of job at the grounds. It didn't matter much what kind of a job, just so I could be around and perhaps bask a little in the glamour and excitement of the place. I spoke to Charlie Barber about it. He said, "Sure, come in on opening day, and we'll have something for you to do."

I found Charlie stretched full length on a hard wooden bench in his cluttered little office under the grandstand the day I reported for work. He explained that if he could just relax that way for a few minutes after his lunch, he could go on the rest of the day and the evening at full speed. I inquired what I was to do. "Go on over to the Midway and take tickets for the Diving Girls show," he told me. This was somewhat different from what I had had in mind, for I had sort of expected that I might be delegated as a kind of glorified assistant to Charlie, with authority, perhaps, to announce the next harness race, or to chauffeur a car labelled "Official," or at least to wear a big star and stand at the gate to the race track shaking my head sternly at the folks who wanted to cross over to the infield.

However, I proceeded meekly over to the carnival stand and presented myself to the man who appeared to be in charge of the Diving Girls. A typical "carny,"

he didn't even bother to ask me, "Are you with it?" He could see plainly enough that I wasn't, and after giving me a hard stare, he jerked his bullet-shaped, derby-hatted head in the direction of the doorway to the tent behind him and growled something out of the corner of his mouth that seemed to indicate that I was to get over there and go to work. The early-afternoon crowds were just beginning to surge curiously along the Midway, pausing to stare at the garish canvas fronts of the sideshows. Old Bullet-head, with a scowling glance in my direction to see that I was in the proper place to take tickets, was watching the crowd carefully, getting ready to start "spieling." In a minute or so he stepped back to the door of the tent and bawled "Bally," pronouncing it with the "a" as in the word "cat" and the accent on the first syllable.

Presently the "bally" appeared, consisting of a stoutish woman well past middle age, and a half dozen assorted girls, none of them very shapely. All of them were wearing rather dirty bathrobes which they proceeded to shed in what I presume they hoped was a tantalizing manner, to reveal bathing suits in not much better condition then were the bathrobes. As they lined up at the front of the platform before the tent they went into a somewhat listless dance, and broke into the chorus of a song which seemed to revolve mainly around something that happened "Down among'st the sugar, all round the sugar, down among'st the sugar cane." Bullet-head clanged loudly on a gong as the song ended and started rasping out his exhortation to

the crowd, which by then was quite sizable, to "step right up boys – see Cora Beckwith and the Diving Girls – and the Diving Girls – see them swim – see them splash – see them dive – the show starts in just a moment!"

It was then that I first saw the "shill" in operation. Two or three roustabouts who travelled with the carnival and whose main job was putting up the tents and then tearing them down at the end of Fair week would mingle with the crowd out in front of the platform. As the spieler reached what they considered the peak of his frenzied appeal the shills would worm through the crowd to get near the platform, reach in their pockets as if getting out their money, pretend to hand it to the ticket seller who was adept at appearing to sell them tickets, and then make me a party to the deception by pretending to hand me something they did not have at all. Strangely enough, this bit of crude crowd psychology often worked. The bally skipped back inside the door of the tent just as if the show was ready to begin.

It was Bullet-head's job to decide when there were enough persons inside the tent to start the show. If only a few suckers were caught the first time, he yelled "Bally!" again and the same procedure started all over. Sometimes it took three or four trips out front by Cora and the Girls before the spieler was satisfied. A sharp-eyed friend of mine, George Barrett, who was in several of my classes at school, saw how the shills operated and figured quite correctly that I wouldn't make a scene

and stop him at the tent door for the ticket which he didn't have. I was rather uneasy over this and the deception did not escape Bullet-head, who bawled at me to "Get them tickets!" Even Cora, who happened to be watching at the time, used some very unlady-like language addressed directly to me. I wonder how many of the Midway shows George got into that same way.

Before the week was over the job on the Diving Girls show got tiresome indeed. Even the spieler at a nearby show who begged and entreated the crowds to come inside his tent and see "Robertuh! Robertuh! She eats MUD! She eats MUD! You'll never believe it till you see it!" could get nothing more than a bored yawn out of me. But I amused myself during the long hours at the tent door when there was little to do by improvising spiels of my own, one of which went something like this, "Ladeez an' gennelmun, we have on the inside of this tent the most riproarious, notorious conglomeration of amalgamated wonders ever seen on this side of the Mississippi — they were found on the isle of 'Frisco, jumping from branch to branch, from tree to tree, from precipice to precipice, living upon mushrooms and shingle nails and defying all the efforts of man to capture them. Think of it, ladeez an' gennelmun, fifteen minutes of laughter, of entertainment, of education, all for ten cents, the tenth part of a dollah!" Long after the Fair was over and I was back on the farm, perhaps riding the sulky plow on the long rounds of a stubble field on a lazy autumn afternoon, I startled my sleepy horses and many a

quietly-nesting meadowlark with the raucous shouts of a carnival barker. And once, thirty years afterward, I actually used that spiel in a home-town vaudeville show. People asked me where I had learned it. I didn't tell them about the Diving Girls. During all the time I took tickets at that show I never got to see their act. I don't know to this day whether any of the Girls could actually swim.

TRAVELOGUE

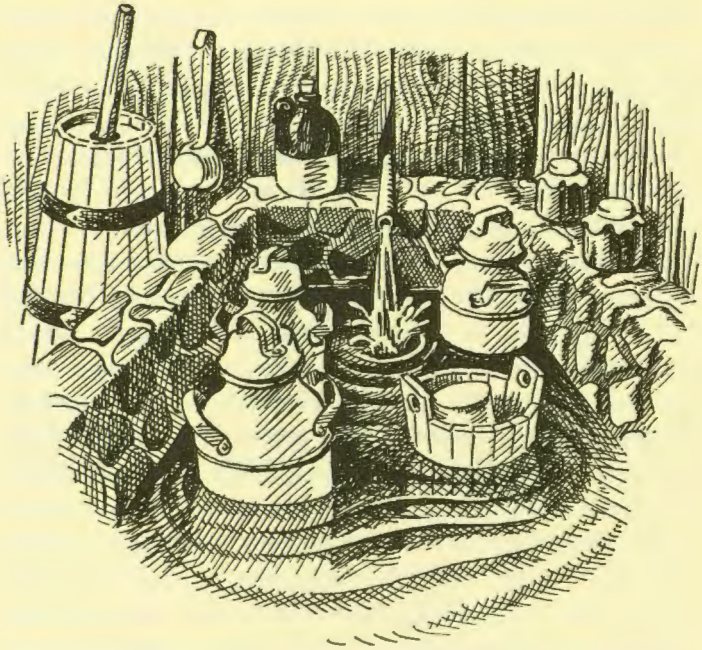
I sometimes think I would like to go
To Kalabahai or to Borneo,
Where the sun is warm and the breeze is mild,
And the people are almost completely wild.

I'd caper about in a seaweed skirt
With never a thought of an undershirt;
I'd sing "Hey, hey," and I'd sing "Ho, ho,"
For that, so that they tell me, in Borneo,
Is the way to do, for the people there
Are funny and woolly and long of hair.

I'd lie on the sand while the sun beat down
And all of my hide turned a beautiful brown,
And even the lifeguards who loll by the sea
Would lie awake nightly in envy of me,

On a diet of mostly bananas and pie
My tummy would thrive, in Kalabahai;
And I think in a week — or possibly two —
I'd want to go home — now wouldn't you?

Courtesy the De Witt Observer



four grandparents

One of the most interesting diversions, I think, is to speculate upon what sort of a person this or that ancestor may have been who appears in one's pedigree or family history. Most of the time it has to be pure speculation, for too often the only record there is tells only that so-and-so was born, lived here or there, and died at a ripe old age. That's too bad. It tells you practically

nothing. We are all pretty familiar, of course, with the good, the bad and the indifferent qualities of those who chance to be our close-up relatives, but what about all those folks farther back?

Now I knew my paternal grandfather, John Wilkinson, pretty well and I'll tell you more about him presently, but his grandfather, James Wilkinson, is not much more than a name on the record. The only things we know about him are that he lived in Shepley, which is in Yorkshire, England, and that he was a Quaker. Therefore, and here is that pure speculation, he must have been a mild, God-fearing, peace-loving citizen, a strict father and a good, though probably not exciting, husband. But was he? We just don't know. We don't know the name of his wife either, but the couple had ten children, Joseph, Mary, Jeremiah, John, James, William, Phoebe, Ann, Jane and Betty. That could have been a pretty lively family, but perhaps Papa James was not one to stand for any foolishness.

I am especially concerned with one of those ten children, Jeremiah, for he was my great-grandfather. Here again the record tells nothing except that he married Hannah Batty. She was a daughter of Elihu Batty. With a name like that, Elihu could have been a very distinguished personage indeed. But we can only guess. For some years I have corresponded with a second cousin, Clarence Wilkinson, of 1 Seabank Rd., Heswall, Cheshire, England, but he is unable to throw more light on Jeremiah, though he writes that he seems to recall that his own father had a brother whom

they called Jerry. Have you ever heard the story of the long-winded Evangelist who had been speaking for an hour and a half about the major Prophets and then announced that he was ready to talk about the minor Prophets? "Now," said he, "where shall we place Jeremiah?" A man in the back of the hall stood up and said, "He can have my place, I'm going home!"

On October 28, 1825, Jeremiah and Hannah Wilkinson became the parents of a son whom they named John. This was my grandfather. My younger son is named after him. The family still continued to live at Shepley, where there were woolen mills. Nearly everyone in the town worked at this trade, for which work was fairly steady but the pay small. Grandfather stood it there until he was 30 years old, but he was getting dissatisfied with the place. Now we come to a rumor that has persisted for nearly 100 years. Maybe it's true — maybe not. The story is that Grandfather went to the station to see a cousin, Jack Holden, off for America. Suddenly he decided that he had had enough of Shepley, so he boarded the train with Holden. They landed in the United States May 22, 1856. Just how passports, steamship fare and other such items were arranged for on the spur of the moment nobody seems to know, but the fact remains Grandfather got here and never went back.

He came first to Chicago where he worked for several years, went to night school and attended the Unitarian Church. He often said he could have become a millionaire had he just bought Chicago real estate

which was then very cheap. Later on he went to Exeter, Wisconsin, where on March 10, 1863, he married Jane Dezell, my grandmother. During the next five years the couple moved several times, meanwhile gradually acquiring a family. From 1868 to 1872 they lived in Waukesha, Wisconsin, where Grandfather became a boss weaver and made good wages for those days. For a long time I thought my father was born in Waukesha. However, his birthplace really was Monroe, Wisconsin, and the time was March 26, 1864. But I used to like to startle my friends in the country school by telling them my father was Wendell Waldo Wilkinson from Waukesha, Waukesha County, Wisconsin.

Stories of the golden opportunities to get rich quick on the marvelous, cheap land in Iowa kept drifting back to the Wilkinsons from their friends who had gone west, and they began to get dissatisfied with the humdrum life of the factories. About this time a certain Mr. Cordwell had 72 acres of land in Falls Township, Cerro Gordo County, he wanted to sell. He heard the Wilkinsons in Waukesha were getting land-hungry, so he made a trip back there to try to persuade them to buy his place. Grandfather, himself no farmer, told Grandmother to go out and have a look. Grandmother, a courageous woman if there ever was one, did so, taking two small children with her in order to keep busy. This was in the fall of 1871. She liked the farm. It had an old log house on it which was badly in need of repair. But there was plenty of woodland, a clear running little creek so that water would

always be handy, and a rock quarry from which the broad flat stones to rebuild the house's chimney and great open fireplace would come. Not much of a farm, we would say today, but in that day all the things for which she looked were needed. The next spring the farm was bought, and the family fixed the log house, bought a team of horses, two cows and some pigs and chickens. The woolen mill days were over for the Wilkinsons — they had begun to farm.

By the time I came along, a quarter of a century or so later, the original 72 acres had been added to considerably, a new frame house and barns and other out-buildings had gone up, and the exact location of the log house had almost been forgotten. I was sorry they hadn't kept the old log building for it sort of made the romance of the trek westward to Iowa complete. But when I pestered my grandfather to show me where the building had stood, even he was vague. "I think it was about here that we used to live," he would say, indicating a little knoll in one of the fields. "But I'm not sure. It was a long time ago."

From those placid Quaker ancestors Grandfather Wilkinson inherited a remarkable constitution, and while he was well past 70 when I first knew him — he lived to be 85 — he was an extremely active man, able always to get about nimbly, with good sight and hearing and blessed with marvelous digestion. When, just before the brief illness that turned out to be his last, he had gone with Grandmother to visit some relatives, and had returned home somewhat indisposed, he de-

clared he had only "eaten something." He loved to eat and, in fact, sometimes ate things Grandmother and his children told him he ought not to. Like most of the older men of his day he wore a full beard, which, like his abundant hair, was well grayed by the time I was old enough to be bounced on his knee. If, luckily, none of us who came along later shows any tendency to become bald, perhaps we have this rugged old gentleman to thank for it.

He was of medium height, slightly inclined to stockiness, though never fat. He spoke always with his inherited English accent, dropping the h's, so that I was 'Erbert to him. A pleasant custom indeed that he followed as long as he lived was that of slipping me a silver dollar every Christmas. This was always done on the sly. He would manage to get me away from the rest for a moment or two while he slid the dollar into my hand, with a wink and an " 'ere, 'Erbert." That was all that was ever said, and of course, each time I pretended to be greatly surprised though I knew the dollar would always be forthcoming. When I thanked him for it he appeared slightly embarrassed and walked quickly away as if nothing had happened. You can readily see why he was immensely popular with his small grandson.

Grandfather was interested in politics and argued violently for what he believed in. He was strictly a Republican and had no use for any other party, and once, in an especially heated discussion, he is said to have shoved a political opponent bodily out of the hall

where a debate was going on. I'd like to have seen that. I'll bet there were dropped h's scattered all over the place. I never heard of him holding any political office though I recall that at least once he was delegate to the county convention in Mason City.

I do not think he took readily to farming, for his more active years had, of course, been spent in the woolen mills. For this reason, perhaps, he was somewhat inclined to resist change. He may have been a bit of a procrastinator on some things too, for I know Grandmother used to land on him now and then with a fairly sharp tongue. A trait that I noticed in him has evidently been inherited by subsequent generations. He would talk animatedly on some subject that interested him, then suddenly stop and sit for a long time without uttering a word. My own father did the same thing. I am inclined that way myself, and when sometimes I observe my sons following a similar pattern, I can only smile and think of those sudden silences which seemed to come on Grandfather as he sat rocking on the porch at the Falls Township farm. Like so many Englishmen, he was a good citizen, never wanting much for himself, law-abiding always, kind to his family, content to let others branch out and make money, and at his death, sincerely mourned by everyone who knew him.

I think if I had had a daughter I should have liked to call her Jane Woolsey Wilkinson. I have said that my grandmother's maiden name was Jane Dezell. Her grandmother was a gal named Jane Woolsey, and here is a story that has persisted to this day. Jane Woolsey was

an aristocrat, a descendant of Lord Woolsey. Her family were aristocrats. Maybe they were even snobs. Anyway Jane's life had been pretty well laid out for her by her papa and mamma, and she was supposed to marry only a boy from the "best circles." But Jane had ideas of her own, and she proceeded to fall in love with and marry a handsome young Irishman named John Magee. Her family is said to have promptly disinherited her, though no doubt they forgave her later, as such families usually do. In the natural course of events John and Jane had a daughter they named Mary. I have a lot of good friends of Irish descent, and I like to startle them occasionally by stating abruptly, "You may not believe this, but my great-grandmother's name was Mary Magee." They think I'm kidding, but it's the truth.

A sturdy little Irish boy named John Dezell grew up in the village of Armaugh in Ireland. He lived there until he was 14 years old. We can only guess as to whether he then knew a colleen called Mary Magee, who, with her folks, lived in the same town. It would be nice to say she was his childhood sweetheart and that he had told her he wouldn't look at the Canadian girls when he and his family sailed for the new world. And it would be nice to go on and say that while young John did look upon the Canadian girls and found some of them exceeding fair he could never forget the black curls and the laughing eyes of little Mary Magee. And that Mary herself, lonely in Armaugh, often walked on the bleak moor at evening time and found that her

heart was reaching far across the blue ocean to the west. A nice story, and of course it could have happened just that way, but nobody knows for sure. But we do know that John and Mary did find each other somehow in America, were married, and, in the course of time, a little girl was born to them. This child was Jane Dezell, who many years later became my grandmother.

For some years the Dezells continued to live in Canada. Then they heard that Wisconsin was practically the same as the promised land, and moved there to try their luck at farming. By 1863 they had decided Canada was a pretty good place after all, and moved back again, leaving one member of the family behind. This person, as you may have guessed, was the woman who was to become my grandmother. There was a wedding that year in which she was a principal.

Grandmother Wilkinson was a rugged woman, a tremendous worker, a marvelous cook, an expert gardener. She had a booming laugh that sometimes startled us kids, but we loved her for it. She was the farmer of the family and made most of the decisions in the early years of living in Iowa. I have told how she insisted that there be wood and water on the land. The creek would do, of course, for watering the livestock. But for the family there was a spring, gushing clear and cold from the rocks in a sidehill fifty yards or so from the spot where the frame house was to stand. Over the spring, in the years that I can remember, had been built that immortal little structure of the earlier settled Iowa farms, the springhouse.

There's an atmosphere about a springhouse that you never find anywhere else. There's the gentle murmuring of the water as it comes mysteriously from some unseen cavern in Mother Earth, hesitates for a moment or two in the man-made wooden tank that is always there for the great crocks of butter and milk and cream to stand in, and then bursts out on its way to the creek, the river and the sea. There's the clean, good smell of cold milk and butter, the pungent odor of the wet planks around the wooden tank, the shadowed corners of the place — for a springhouse must be dark — and the welcome coolness as you step inside out of a hot July sun.

A springhouse is seldom in a handy place. Grandmother must have walked hundreds of miles in her lifetime carrying "vittles," as she called her food supply, up and down the little hill that sloped away to the spring. I wonder if that little cooling stream is running today. I must stop and see the next time I am in Rock Falls. Probably the folks who live on the farm now have a shiny electric refrigerator and would turn up their noses at a pat of butter cooled by the sweet water that the hand of Providence sent forth for Grandmother's never-failing refrigeration plant.

Grandmother was famous throughout the neighborhood for her garden paths bordered with pinks, a low-growing, brilliant flower that no longer seems to be common. Her garden was a big one, and these paths led to all parts of it. They branched out from a main path that started near the side door of the house,

extended south for a few feet, then turned and ran primly to the east, breaking finally into a magnificent sweeping curve that bore off to the south, ending at last at the vine-covered gateway to the orchard. Not a weed was allowed to appear in these borders, and when the pinks were in full bloom the paths were something to see. After Grandmother moved to Rock Falls in later years she again set out pinks along the paths of her new garden. But she was getting to be an old lady then, and besides, a town lot didn't allow for much room for a display such as that back on the old homestead.

Occasionally I was permitted to go and stay a few days at the farm north of Rock Falls. Grandmother was wonderful to me, and I remember she always let me drink coffee, saying, "I don't think it'll hurt ye." I loved coffee but was not allowed to have it at home. In those days it was a general belief that drinking coffee would stunt a young person's growth. We should have known better. I knew kids who were practically raised on coffee and appeared none the worse for it.

I don't recall ever having seen my grandmother read much, though she seemed to me to be an unusually well-informed person. If she sat down to rest she had knitting or crocheting to do, for she figured hands were to be kept busy. She was busy right to the last, and she died quietly one April morning as she sat in her chair, a piece of unfinished work in her lap. She was 84 years old.

I should like to visit Shepley, near Huddersfield, in Yorkshire, England, someday. For not only the Wilkin-

sons but the Pickfords as well originated in that little village. My mother's father, Benjamin Pickford, was born there. His father, Joseph Pickford, according to an old record that I have, had the more glamorous sounding birthplace of West Riding County, Kirkburton Parish, Yorkshire. Joseph was no doubt a carefully brought up lad for his father, Thomas Pickford, is said to have been a Quaker. What a lot of mild, peace-loving ancestors I seem to have had. But don't forget about Jane Woolsey and Mary Magee. I'll bet they were different.

Oddly enough, my Grandfather Pickford's mother was named Hannah, the same as was the mother of Grandfather Wilkinson. This maternal great-grandmother of mine was called Hannah Birkenshaw. For some reason or other I like that name, Birkenshaw. I don't know exactly why, but it seems to roll nicely under the tongue. Hannah was the daughter of Richard Birkenshaw and Elizabeth Rollin. About all three of these folks I am sorry to say we know absolutely nothing. I think that's too bad for they may have been interesting persons.

In 1866, Grandfather Pickford, then 44 years old, decided that he had lived in England long enough, managed to borrow $300 from his brother-in-law, Joseph Wood, and engaged passage to America for himself, Grandmother Sarah and their five children, one of whom was named Ellen, 18 months old, and who eventually was to become my mother. I used to try to get her to tell me about the ocean trip, but she always

claimed she couldn't remember much about it. Sometimes in later years when she said wistfully that she would like to travel more, we kids reminded her slyly that after all she was far more travelled than we, having once crossed the Atlantic ocean. I don't think she was much impressed by our argument.

It came about, then, that on April 18, 1866, this family went aboard the good ship, "City of London," and with all their earthly goods stowed in four great wooden chests, each marked "Benjamin Pickford, Passenger. Monroe, Wisconsin. U. S. of America," settled down in what comfort they could find along with 1,200 other souls, for the weary eleven-day passage to the new world. One of these chests stood finally in one of our bedrooms at the Lime Creek Township farm, where it fascinated me because it locked with a wooden peg and had come safely from a faraway land.

The chests and the Pickfords arrived at last at Monroe, where they rested for a few days with relatives, then went on to live in Freeport, Illinois, where Grandfather had found work — the only kind with which he was familiar — in a woolen mill. The panic of 1871 drove the family to seek a living elsewhere, and soon it was established in Monticello, Wisconsin. Here, in a quiet little country town, the population of which was, and still is, only a few hundred persons, Grandfather became not only manager of the woolen mill but a designer as well. It was work he liked, for always there was a bit of the artist in this determined little Englishman, and the intricate patterns woven by

the whirring looms were the expression of this inner urge that was too often almost submerged in the hard struggle to make a living. He was to stay there for only five years, but the mill was to stand for nearly three quarters of a century afterward, a redoubtable old three-storied building of native-stone and tough frame construction that grimly faced the winter storms and the summer suns until that night in May, 1950, when folks in Monticello awoke to the alarm that the old mill was on fire. But when they had raced down the winding country road that led to the river where the mill stood there was not much they could do. They knew then that the old looms had stopped whirring forever and that the churning water would no longer hurry down the millrace to the great water wheel below. Its many-paned windows glowed briefly in the blackness of the night, then winked out and sank at last to ashes to mark the passing of another era.

Not long ago I stood on the bridge near the sturdy rock foundation that was all that was left of the famous old mill. The rocks were scarcely wet by the trickle of the once powerful river. On the bank over there — I thought — Grandfather Pickford must have stood many times and watched the swift current go by. Through that gaunt doorway he must have walked to see if the ponderous machinery was in order, and to listen to the steady hum of the looms above. Up that dusty road he must have trudged at the end of each day to the tiny house where his family lived. Somehow I was glad he was not there to see the mute

remains of the place he had been a part of so many years ago.

You would almost wonder why some of us, descendants of the Wilkinsons and Pickfords, did not become dry goods merchants, with so many weavers back of us. But there was a hidden hunger in both these families that had to come out — the land hunger. It was stirring in the Pickford family in Monticello. They had been able to save a little money, for three of the boys worked in the mill managed by their father. But it was slow going, and they were impatient. They knew, too, what was likely to happen if hard times came again as they had in 1871.

In 1874 Grandfather went to Cerro Gordo County to visit friends and relatives in Mason City and in Falls Township. I have a notion that he visited that very 72 acres near Rock Falls where John and Jane Wilkinson were living. You remember, of course, that the Wilkinsons had arrived there in 1872. Old friendships formed in Shepley, England, were strong.

Back to Monticello went Benjamin Pickford, determined to buy Iowa land and get away from the mills once and for all. The records are a bit blurred as to when he bought the farm of 100 acres about five miles south of Rock Falls and four miles northwest of Nora Springs, but it was sometime in the year 1875. In the spring of 1876, on March 1, a cold, foggy, icy day, the Pickford family, Grandfather Benjamin, Grandmother Sarah and the children, took possession of the homestead that sometime later turned out to be my

birthplace. The children numbered seven by that time, including Henry, Arthur, Charles, Rufus, Amelia, Ellen and Annie. Do you begin to see how it chanced that I got my start in Cerro Gordo County? Wendell Wilkinson met Ellen Pickford — and there you are — or perhaps I should say — there was I.

I seem always to have thought of Grandfather Pickford as my *first* grandfather, and Grandfather Wilkinson as my *second*. The reason for this is, I suppose, that my mother's father was with me a great deal when I was very young, while later on that shining silver dollar on Christmas day helped to center my affections on my paternal grandsire. My mother told me a good deal about her father as I grew older. He was, as I knew from our pleasant walks together, a kindly, quiet man. I was to learn too that he was a great reader, a lover of music, a Unitarian and a booster for cooperatives, on the subject of which he wrote little pieces for newspapers. He could make up his mind on anything of importance if he could just "sleep on it." In the morning he would know what should be done. In this fashion he once decided to buy a neighboring farm so that his son, Charles, might have a place to live. He liked only plain food and not too much variety, for in Shepley there had been no frills on the dinner table. A real delicacy, he thought, was the drippings that gather in the bottom of a pan around a piece of well-done pork. He called the drippings " pork honey," and if he had some bread to eat with it, he wanted nothing more.

Grandmother Sarah Pickford, who, at the age of only 58, had died eight years before I was born, did not want to leave Shepley for the trip to a strange new land. No pioneer, she was content to stay among her friends in England. When the family possessions that would not go in those four great chests were put up at auction she could not bear to watch the sale. But when the time for sailing came she did not hesitate. Where her husband wished to go, she would go too. She fought seasickness, cold, and even hunger on shipboard for much of the food was so coarse and tasteless she could not eat. She was happy though, for the few short years she was to spend on the farm near Nora Springs, and she loved making a home for her large family. Grandmother Pickford liked to sit quietly and watch and listen while others sang or played some instrument, though she did neither herself. Her Methodist faith was strong and apparently never conflicted with that of her Unitarian husband.

All four of these grandparents of mine lie in what I think is one of the quietest and most peaceful spots on this earth, the little cemetery just at the north edge of Rock Falls. No highway traffic passes near it, and to reach the place you drive past the old stone church for a block or two, turn right, and then follow a driveway north for perhaps twenty-five or thirty rods. Second-growth timber borders the driveway on each side. There is some crushed rock to drive on now, but there used to be only a deeply rutted track through the sod. A cement walk has been laid so that the villagers may walk

in comfort to the cemetery, but each year the walk hides farther and farther under the bluegrass that crowds in resentfully from each side of it.

The graves of my mother and father are in this secluded place, which I visited again one bright August afternoon not long ago. Here were many familiar names on the stone markers that stand beneath "the murmuring pines and the hemlocks." Back out of the mists of boyhood memories, and chiseled now in everlasting granite and limestone came the Sears', the Krugs, the Perretts, the Bliems, the Gildners, the Peltons. There are many more of course, names I had not thought of for 30 years.

I sat for a long time there in the pleasant shade of an ancient evergreen. In some such hallowed spot as this, I thought, Thomas Gray must have sat while he composed "Elegy in a Country Church-yard." At long intervals there was the faint hum of a motor car along the distant highway. A cow-bell tinkled now and then from a thicket at the other side of the quiet place where the dead slept peacefully forever, and from somewhere far off beyond the bordering woodlands came the rhythmic muffled throb of a well-driller, like the steady cadence of some great, eternal timepiece.

cooks and holidays

I am one of those lucky persons who seems always to have been associated with, or related to, marvelous cooks. In the preceding chapter I said that my Grandmother Wilkinson was a great hand with "vittles." She had good company. My mother could cook or bake anything well. No other pumpkin pies have ever had quite the gladsome touch she was able to give the

seasoning that went into these crusty creations. Then there were Aunt Annie, Aunt Myrta and Aunt Theo, all in a class by themselves with a skillet, roasting pan or baking dish. Perhaps my Aunt Myrta, wife of my Uncle Rufus Pickford, had a slight edge on the other two, for everything she ever set on the table before us seemed to be flavored just right. But Aunt Annie could make milk gravy that was like the nectar of the gods, and Aunt Theo, wife of Uncle Arthur Pickford, could turn out a roast fowl that was a gourmet's delight.

How we kids looked forward to the three great holidays of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. We were farm people, and evening celebrations were out of the question, for there were always the chores to be done at night. So the whole crew of us got together for a day-time dinner on each of these occasions. There were, of course, Grandmother Wilkinson's family at Rock Falls, with Aunt Mabel and Aunt Jessie always on hand to help; Uncle Rufus and Aunt Myrta Pickford with their two boys, Arlyn and Gerald; Uncle Arthur and Aunt Theo Pickford and their four boys, Lyle, Harold, Rollo and Hugh; Uncle Cal and Aunt Annie Bitterman with a variation in the way of girls, for they had, besides my cousin, Dale, two daughters, Ruth and Grace. The last three families lived from five to seven miles from us near Nora Springs.

Naturally, we younger ones had no responsibility at all for the preliminary arrangements by way of

deciding where each dinner would be held and who was to bring certain foods. I suppose there was a sort of rotation system, whereby each family entertained the others in turn, and probably there was some kind of an agreement concerning who furnished the pies, the cakes, the fruit salad, the escalloped oysters, the jam, the rolls or a dozen other things. Everything always worked out perfectly so far as we youngsters could see. All we had to do was gorge, and we proceeded to do just that.

My cousin, Dale, was easily the biggest and fastest eater among us, and I think he took a certain amount of pride in the distinction. The rest of us cousins tried hard to keep up with him, but we were simply outclassed. There were six of us boys close enough in ages to have a swell time together on every occasion. Usually there were not enough chairs or enough table space for everyone to sit down at the same time, so many times we lined up on the stairway steps with our plates on our laps and waited for the groceries to be brought to us. I think the family at whose home the dinner was being held furnished the meat and potatoes, while the other relatives brought the rest of the provisions with them. Fruit salad was new at that time, and I assume the jello this dish required had just been discovered or invented. We considered it a special treat indeed. Then too, there was always homemade candy. I think it was my Grandmother Wilkinson who made the round white flat candies with half a walnut resting on each center, toothsome morsels that were

simply out of this world. Goose, duck or turkey were always there in tremendous quantities — none of that half-a-bird stuff, it took several fowls to satisfy us.

After we boys had stuffed ourselves to the absolute limit it was immediately necessary for us to do something to "settle" our dinners. If we were at our place near Mason City, there was a good hill for coasting in our pasture, and sometimes our little creek had enough clear solid ice on it for skating. If we were at Grandmother's we often headed for what Uncle Thee always called "the timber," the delightful, and, to us, mysterious and silent woodland which began a mile or so away from the house and barns and stretched into distances we never had quite the courage to explore. Here on a snowy winter day was an enchanted land, where the great elms and basswoods and oaks stood in towering splendor, surrounded by slender saplings and thickets of undergrowth that were the quiet nesting places of the startled rabbits, the quail and the pheasants flushed as we followed winding and shadowy trails through the forest. Always we were on the lookout for bigger game, a fox perhaps, or even a wolf, for some said they had seen these crafty animals in the timber. But we might have known that our shrill chattering was enough to scare them far away.

If the ice was clear on the creek in Grandmother's pasture we went skating after we tired of tramping in the woods, and sometimes we could persuade our folks to let us go as far away as the Shell Rock River at "the Falls," as almost everyone called the village.

We knew the skating was likely to be much better on the larger stream, and we knew too that if we could talk my Uncle Rufus Wilkinson into coming with us — and we usually could — we would be thrilled with his expert figure skating. On just an ordinary pair of old-fashioned skates clamped to the soles of his shoes — no one had ever heard of shoe skates or the special runners for figure skating — he could do many of the stunts you now see in the big ice shows. His balance, his easy grace and his complete command of his "outside edges," to use a figure skating term, were superb. The rest of us tried to imitate these maneuvers but wound up sitting down hard on the hard side of the ice, and finally, giving up in disgust, we would unclamp our skates and plod back to Grandmother's. The holiday was over then. It was chore-time, time to hitch up and start the cold ride home.

There were no hills for coasting, nor creeks or ponds for skating, on the farms of our folks who lived near Nora Springs, but we discovered an immensely satisfactory substitute for them one Christmas Day when we had gathered at Uncle Arthur Pickford's for one of those enormous feasts which seemed to us kids to be so well planned. In their long dairy barn the Pickfords had recently installed a new manure carrier, which, if you have ever spent much time around a farm, you will know consists of a tublike container some four feet long suspended from an overhead track on which it rolls along on a couple of small trolley wheels. The tub can be raised or lowered with a chain hoist,

and when full of litter from the gutters in the barn alleys is pushed out through an open door where the track is carried on poles high above a fragrant and steaming manure pile.

We found, after some experimentation, that two small boys could comfortably sit in the carrier at one time. To be sure, the thing had been in use for a few weeks, but what of it? It wasn't so very dirty, and after all it was just that nice clean barn smell to which nobody should object. We found too, that if someone gave the carrier a hard shove at the point the track started, it would gather momentum rapidly down the long alleyway, arriving quickly at a thrilling sharp turn at the other end where it made for the door leading to the manure pile. We would lean far over toward the inside of the turn like the bobsledders do at Lake Placid. The trolley wheels made a deafening clatter as they got up speed, and the tub swung dizzily from side to side. We spent a couple of hours at this delightful new diversion, and altogether we felt the day had been far from wasted when our folks appeared at the barn doors late in the afternoon, took one horrified look at our clothes, and told us it was time to go home.

With my cousins, Dale Bitterman and four of the Pickford boys, all so nearly of my own age, you can understand, perhaps, why it was each year as the holiday season approached, I pestered my father and mother to let me go and stay a few days with these youngsters who were such delightful playmates. They were

unusual boys, every one of them, with sharp, active minds, interested in a great variety of things, from printing and photography to steam engines, and I enjoyed their company immensely.

One Christmas I was lucky, for my folks had consented to my going home with Dale, his father and mother, who were Uncle Cal and Aunt Annie to me, and the two girls in the family, Ruth and Grace. The feast that day was at Grandmother's, and in addition to being thoroughly stuffed I was in a seventh heaven of anticipation of my holiday vacation. About four o'clock in the afternoon — there were chores, you know — Uncle Cal hitched his fast-trotting team to the two-seated open buggy the family travelled in, and we were off in a whirl of snow and a clatter of wheels over the frozen ruts in the road. It was one year when not enough snow had fallen to make good sleighing. I felt sorry for my own family who had nothing more exciting to look forward to than returning to the home farm I was so glad to be leaving for a while. Soon we were at the steep and rocky bank of the Shell Rock River a couple of miles south of Rock Falls. We were about to cross the stream on the ice for there was yet no bridge at this point — the horses were sharp-shod so they wouldn't slip — and my uncle drove out cautiously after we had jolted down the approach to the crossing. We all held our breaths for we didn't know whether there was three feet or twenty feet of water below us if the ice gave way. The horses went into a

quick trot; the buggy swayed alarmingly on the slippery surface; then we were scrambling safely up the opposite bank. Everyone breathed again.

It was dark when we reached the Bitterman farm that night. My uncle and aunt changed their clothes and went out to do the chores, while we four kids stayed in the house and played Carom and Crokinole and Pit, games that were popular at the time. Always when I stayed with Dale we talked far into the night the first evening. After that we were tired enough to settle down and go to sleep at a reasonable hour. The day after Christmas Dale seemed a bit listless, but we didn't worry too much about it. When a fellow had been eating candy, nuts, fruitcake and two or three kinds of pie on top of roast goose with oyster dressing, perhaps he could be expected to feel a little off, couldn't he? After I got home several days later I didn't feel so good either, and when some telltale little red spots showed up all over my hide we knew the real reason — chicken pox. My mother said she might have known I'd pick up *something* when I went away from home.

It must have been about 1908 — I'm not certain of the year — when Dale and I made a holiday trip to Madison, Wisconsin, that neither of us will ever forget. We still talk about it when we get together. We saw moving pictures — with *sound* — went bobsledding on the hills that overlooked lovely Lake Mendota, and I had my first drink of brandy. But wait a minute — let's start at the beginning.

How our folks ever came to permit us — two kids

in their tender teens who had never been more than ten miles away from home before — to go on this adventure, is still a mystery to me. Anyway, two or three days before Christmas my father took me and my little travelling bag down to Dale's, bade me good luck, and left me to go on to Nora Springs that night to catch the "Flyer," as the midnight train of the Milwaukee was called. Uncle Cal took us to the station, where we learned the train was to be from one to two hours late. My uncle said he guessed he wouldn't wait, so he left us in the dimly-lighted station after warning us not to stir out of the place until the train arrived. I don't remember whether there was a station agent on duty that night, but there must have been. Dale and I were both so excited and impatient that it was torture indeed hovering around the fat-bellied stove in the dingy little waiting room. After an hour or so we began to get hungry. What to do? We craved food but had no lunch with us. Probably Aunt Annie had offered to put some up, and we had loftily waved it aside. The gnawing grew worse. Finally Dale said he was going to high-tail it over to town a few blocks away and get us something to eat. While he was gone I was in a torment lest the train come, for I certainly didn't want to get on it alone. But Dale got back in plenty of time. What did he bring to eat? A bag of horehound candy!

The train did come at last, and we quickly climbed aboard, thrilled by the hissing, steaming monster that appeared out of the frosty night and hesitated only long enough to pick us up. I believe we were the only

passengers leaving Nora Springs. The train coaches were, of course, the old wooden ones, with seats of dirty red plush, and dimly illuminated by kerosene lamps. If there was a sleeper attached to the train that night we didn't know it. We wouldn't have known how to act in one anyway.

Our folks had warned us to be careful about talking to strangers, but I don't think anyone paid us the slightest bit of attention. At that time of night nearly everyone was sleeping, or trying to. But to a couple of excited kids the new sensations of rushing through the winter night, stopping at towns we had never even heard of before, changing cars at Prairie-du-Chien, the long hoarse whistle of the locomotive for some lonely crossing, the arrival at Madison just as dawn was breaking over the snowclad hills, were all enough to keep us wide awake. Our cousin, Edith Sears, met us and took us home with her where we met Aunt Amelia, had breakfast, and fell into bed to sleep until late afternoon.

The ten days we spent at Aunt Amelia's home at 219 South Mills Street were glorious. There were no cows to milk, no cream separators to turn, no skim milk to carry to the pigs, and we were entertained like young princes. Our cousins, Ray and Theo Owen, a gay and lively young married couple, owned a long, rakish bobsled that easily seated ten persons, and Dale and I worked harder than we ever did at home dragging that sled up long, slanting streets to the crest of hills, where we would pause a moment in anticipation

of the exciting ride down with the biting wind and whirls of snow in our faces. Dale, a year or so older than I and a bit more worldly-wise, though that is hardly the right expression, drew me aside as we climbed the hill after one of our fastest rides and whispered that he didn't think Theo ought to be out there with us, because, as he put it, "She's that way, you know." I had to admit that I guessed he was right, though the fact had not occurred to me. We were a bit uneasy over this situation, for sometimes the sled upset on a sharp turn. But Theo, the picture of health and always one to enjoy life to the hilt, seemed to be worried not at all. She bobsledded gaily all afternoon, and was never the worse for it. We thought she was wonderful.

You must remember that this was back in 1908, and that talking pictures were not to become common for nearly thirty years. But at a Madison matinee one afternoon, for which Uncle Henry Pickford had supplied the tickets, the characters on the screen talked — or appeared to. Actually the sound was supplied by people standing behind the screen, and though we thought the effect was sensational, the attempt to synchronize voice with action must have been pretty sketchy. But moving pictures of any kind were new then so we didn't mind.

On Christmas Eve we all gathered at the apartment where Ray and Theo lived. Uncle Henry and Aunt Ella Pickford were there too. There was a tree, and presents of course, and lots of good things to eat. We

had a gorgeous time. Finally we were ready to go home. It was icy on the sidewalk, and I was careless enough to fall and bump an elbow hard. By the time we got in the house at Aunt Amelia's I was getting faint from the shock of the fall. They stretched me out on the living room floor, and Aunt Ella, dynamic and rising to an emergency as always, got some brandy somewhere, gave it to me, and brought me around in no time. I remember she said, "If you get to drinking when you get older it will be your Aunt Ella's fault." Well, I have never been much of a drinker, but I have often thought of her remark while I was mixing up a highball or a Tom Collins for my friends.

Dale tells me I wanted to go home at once but that he talked me out of the idea after we went to bed that night. He was burned up when we got back to Iowa after the holidays were over because Aunt Myrta said, after hearing about my fall and the brandy and everything, "I wouldn't have been surprised if it had been Dale, but I didn't think Herbert was that clumsy." I wonder where Aunt Ella got that brandy. It was the only time she ever offered me any.

It was a long, long wait from the Christmas holidays until the Fourth of July, but we kids started planning for it weeks and weeks before that great summer-time celebration arrived. Once in a while we were greatly disappointed, but usually we had a glorious time. One year my mother had been quite ill for several weeks, and it was out of the question for us to go anywhere for the day. I remember that my father and I took a

wagon load of oats to the elevator at Rock Falls the day before the Fourth, and I got some firecrackers at Bliem's store but couldn't set them off on the way home for fear of scaring the horses. Another time tentative arrangements had been made for me to meet Uncle Cal's family in Mason City to take the excursion trip to Clear Lake where there was to be a big celebration. The morning of Independence Day was rainy and the roads muddy, but my Dad took me to town, where we waited around for a couple of hours, with me in a lather over whether my uncle's folks were coming. Finally about noon we gave up waiting and plodded home though the mud. The sky was clearing as we splashed along the country roads. Just after we got home the phone rang. It was my uncle, calling from Mason City and wanting to know if I was coming for they were ready to leave for the Lake. Of course it was out of the question to drive back to town again for it was at least an hour's trip. I suppose I was about the most disappointed kid in the county — probably bawled all over the place — but my father certainly tried to do what he could for me when the rest of the family had to stay home.

Always for two or three days before the Fourth of July I watched the weather anxiously, hoping the great day would be a pleasant one, for rain just then was a catastrophe to us kids. I learned that if the wind blew steadily from the northwest it usually meant fair weather for a time; a southwest wind might mean warmer pleasant weather or it might mean showers; but

winds blowing out of the east meant trouble. On some of the long, lonely afternoons in the fields I made up a little verse that went "Wind from the north-a-west, that's where I like it the best; wind from the north-a-east, that's where I like it the least." One time I heard my Uncle Henry tell my father that the long, stringy, feathery clouds that sometimes hung in the sky were known as "mare's-tails," and were forerunners of rainy weather. After that I was always on the lookout for them and hoping they would not show up on the second or third of July. I liked the beautiful, fleecy, high-flying clouds that came floating grandly down from the northwest with a background of deep blue sky. Not for many years did I learn that these fair-weather clouds were called "cumulus" or "cirro-cumulus."

Since I have worked for a good many years with people who live in towns I have noticed almost none of them ever pays attention to weather signs in the sky and in the atmosphere, observation of which becomes almost second nature to farm folks. Many times I have heard city dwellers say they had no idea it was going to storm when there were many apparent signs.

If you are out in a field working a tractor or a team some distance from the barns, you keep pretty close watch on a brewing storm. I don't know how many times I have raced a team of horses from a distant field to the shelter of the old barn driveway just ahead of a thunder shower, arriving thoroughly breathless and tingling with excitement at having outrun one of

Nature's angry outbursts. Or perhaps arriving well soaked because I "guessed I could make another round before the storm hit." It isn't near as much fun to drive a tractor in ahead of a downpour. You can't lash a tractor over the rump with the lines and yell at it to get the hell home to the clatter of a riding cultivator or a half-loaded wagon and hayrack. I always thought the horses entered into the spirit of the thing and got as much thrill out of galloping home ahead of a storm as I did.

Our favorite town for Fourth of July celebrations was Nora Springs. It was about 10 miles from our farm, and going there meant getting up early and doing the chores, then putting on our best clothes and hitching up the team to our new surrey. This splendid vehicle, of which we were extremely proud and which we kept under a canvas in the driveway of the barn, had cost us $95 in hard cash at Schweiger's Wagon Shop in Mason City. We never had a snappy-looking team to go with the surrey. The ordinary work horses had to do extra duty on holidays and Sundays, wearing the same harness they wore all week, so that we always travelled to the clanking of trace chains and the creaking of wooden hames. Some of the farmers had expensive nickel-plated driving harnesses with checkreins for holding the horses' heads high. This was considered fashionable then but was, indeed, a cruel way to treat the animals.

The city park in Nora Springs was everybody's headquarters on the Fourth. Family picnics filled the place

at noon. The orator of the day held forth there. The kids hung around the big rock that still rests in the southeast corner of the square. Many years later my wife once asked me in all seriousness whether that rock was moved there or had always been at that spot. I've forgotten what I told her, but of course, the rock had been left by a careless glacier during the ice age.

Have you ever seen a water fight — the kind put on by members of the city fire department? This was a Fourth of July entertainment feature that used to be great stuff. Teams of about three men to a side were each given the nozzle end of a fire hose that was attached at the other end to a fire hydrant. The two teams squared off facing each other about 60 or 70 feet apart. Then the water was turned on. The idea was to see which team could make the other one back up a specified distance under the force of the water, which at Nora Springs came from a supply tank on a 100-foot tower. It was no laughing matter — except for the spectators — to face a stream of water under that much pressure. Team members were often knocked off their feet by the water and the struggle to hang onto and direct the nozzle of their hose. The men wore firemen's coats, boots and helmets, but they got well soaked anyway. Sometimes a hose broke completely away from the men holding it, and everyone within range got drenched too, to the great delight of all who didn't. I suppose the water fights are no longer held, for you can imagine how it must have run down the city water

supply. Having been connected with a fire insurance company for over 20 years, I have often wondered how many red faces there would have been had a fire broken out while the water fight was going on.

A terrifying invention of the devil himself during the early years of this century was the torpedo cane. A good many people were injured by these horrible noise makers, and they have been prohibited by law for a long time. The cane was a round wooden stick about three feet long, painted a bright color or gaily striped. It had a ball-shaped metal lower end in which was a slot for inserting a small dynamite cap. Below this slot was a short piece of iron rod, perhaps 2 or 3 inches long, that was forced violently up against the dynamite cap when the cane was pounded smartly against a cement sidewalk or a stone. The caps exploded with a tremendous bang and a burst of smoke and sometimes some flame as well. It was no fun to have one go off close to your ankles.

A certain groceryman in Madison, Wisconsin, had a good deal to do with what I always have considered my happiest Fourth of July. The year was, I think, 1905, though I may be a year or two off. Again I had been thrilled by an invitation from my Uncle Cal, Aunt Annie and cousin Dale to go with them to our favorite celebration town, Nora Springs. The weather had been showery on the second and third and the mare's-tail clouds had me worried, but the Fourth was gorgeous. "Nora" outdid herself to entertain us. The water fight,

ball game, horse races, picnic in the park, fat men's race — everything — was just right. But the best part was yet to come.

My cousin, Rossie Pickford, of Madison, was working at Uncle Cal's that summer. While he was at home and during the school year he had been driving a delivery wagon for a grocery store. Dale and I told him we thought that was about the best type of a job a youngster could have. We were thinking of the chance to grab a pocketful of cookies or a fistful of stick candy while loading a grocery order. Rossie admitted it wasn't bad.

Anyway, Rossie's outstanding personality had been working for him then, just as it did for many years in the life-insurance business. The biggest box you ever saw, packed full of Roman candles, skyrockets, "snakes," pinwheels, sparklers and ordinary firecrackers had arrived a few days before the Fourth from that great-hearted Madison groceryman, whom we were sure must have been a millionaire. You can bet he wanted Rossie to come back and work for him in the fall.

Ordinarily when the sun went down on Independence Day we figured the fun was over and there wasn't much to look forward to until Thanksgiving. But this day in 1905 was different. As we jogged home in the dusk from Nora Springs we knew there was still a big night ahead of us. After the chores were done the marvelous contents of Rossie's box were brought out in the front yard, and the fun began. Late travelers along the road pulled up their horses in startled won-

der at the display of skyrockets and Roman candles that rose from Uncle Cal's lawn. It was extremely late when the last pinwheel had been set off and the last sparkler whirled in the quiet night air. And when the evening's celebration finally came to an end and we had crawled wearily up to bed, the sudden rush of a violent July thunderstorm that came crashing and rumbling out of the southwest sky seemed a fitting climax to a great day.

town school

In the fall of 1904, when I had attained the advanced age of twelve years, I was placidly contemplating starting back to the country school, where I knew I could move along about as fast as I wanted to in reading and spelling, meanwhile merely skirting the edges of arithmetic, geography and history, especially arithmetic, which as far as I was concerned could just as

well have been left out of the curriculum. But my father and mother had other plans for me. They had observed, without my knowing it of course, that in school I did what was easy for me and slid over the other stuff.

So to my considerable surprise, and somewhat to my dismay, I was told that I was to leave the country school and start going to what we farm people always called "the town school." It is apparent to me now that this must have taken a good deal of arranging, for no doubt my father had to see the County Superintendent, the Principal of the Washington School in Mason City where I was to start, and perhaps others too. There was the problem, too, of negotiating the 7-mile round trip every school day, and this was solved by the purchase of a rather elderly Indian pony for me to ride. A stable had to be rented near the school so the pony could be safely and securely tied there in all kinds of weather and a small supply of feed kept for him. All these things were done for me and must have taken a good deal of time.

It was a rather terrifying experience for a youngster as painfully shy and bashful as I was to be taken out of the quiet, easygoing security of a little country school and dropped suddenly into an institution where I knew no one among the hundred and fifty or so scholars who gathered each day. I had tried to talk my father and mother out of this new idea. . . . I was afraid I couldn't do the school work. . . . I hated being stared at and I didn't like to get up and recite before

a lot of other youngsters. I was really afraid, too, of what the "town kids" might do to me, for I had somehow acquired the notion that they were a rough, tough lot and would just as soon scalp a country boy as not or skin him alive if they got their hands on him. Fortunately for me, of course, my father and mother firmly overruled all my objections and did what they could to minimize my fears.

It was a bright, sunny morning in September, when, wearing a new, rather scratchy suit of clothes, and with my shiny leather lunch box slung from my shoulder, I climbed aboard the Indian pony, took a last look around the barnyard, for who could tell but what I might return a beaten and hunted thing, and started down the road westward to town. My father drove on ahead of me that first morning for I didn't yet know where the school building was, and I think he wanted to make sure that I didn't weaken and turn for home. Off across the fields a mile to the northwest I could see the white painted gable of the little school to which I was never going back, and I felt sad, very sad indeed.

It is said that there is no despair like the despair of youth, and it was while I was meditating, if a twelve-year-old can be said to meditate, upon the good times that were to be no more for me at District Number Seven, that my pony and I started down one of the two long, clay hills on the road to town. With other, heavier thoughts, on my mind I had neglected to keep a tight rein on the animal so he would hold his head

up and pick up his front feet as he should. Suddenly the pony fell flat on his nose, and I did a swan dive over his head into the dust. My beautiful new lunch box flew open and the sandwiches and pie my mother had packed so carefully were scattered in the dirt and gravel of the roadway. I picked the things up and dusted them off as best I could, but if you have ever tried eating a lunch that has been through treatment like that you know it can be an extremely gritty mess. What happened to my new clothes I am unable to recall, though it could not have been anything good, and I am rather inclined to think there was an embarrassing tear in the knee of one black stocking. All in all, it was not an encouraging start on what you might call the second phase of my early education. I was pretty much in favor of calling off the expedition to the town school and starting over in, say, a year or so. There was no need of hurrying this education business, was there? But my father, who had turned around and come back to help me, expressed himself as being quite definitely opposed to any thought of turning back, and presently we went on, arriving finally at the Washington School without further mishap. The pony was stabled in a small barn directly across the street from the school building. I braved the stares of the youngsters who had already arrived, and by the time the opening bell rang, found myself assigned to the fifth grade, taught, I believe, by Miss Gibson.

To my surprise, I found the work in grade 5A quite

easy. The kids were not too hard to get acquainted with, and I began to enjoy life after all. I was just getting used to the place when Miss Gibson came to my desk one day and told me I belonged in a higher grade. She could see, I suppose, that I could just as well be working harder. I rather objected to the idea for I liked being in her classes, but I was promptly moved to the sixth grade, where Miss McDermott was the teacher. Again I had to go through the mental torment of getting acquainted with a new group of kids, new surroundings and new books, but I lived through it, and in a few more weeks Miss McDermott moved me into 6A from 6B, or half a grade higher. This change was not hard to make, for the new class was just on the other side of the room, and by that time I knew most of them anyway. I was not extra smart or anything of the kind, but the Superintendent of Schools had started me in the 5th grade because I was woefully behind in the subjects at which the country school teachers had not made me work — thus my rapid advancement. I had some catching up to do at the Washington School. I have often wondered what I said or did in class that convinced Miss Gibson and Miss McDermott that I should be pushed along faster. They could just as well have ignored me, but they didn't, thereby saving me half a year of wasted time. For this I am grateful, but since I have lost track of them, I haven't been able to tell them so. There was no more skipping grades for me after that, and when we finally moved into 7B, I was lucky to keep up with the rest of the class.

What a cold winter that was — that first one of riding horseback three and a half miles to school. There is no such thing as comfort aboard a slow old pony as you head into the teeth of a bitter northwest wind with the snow whirling and whipping at your face, nor even if it's what we called "an open winter," meaning little or no snow, is there any comfort in the progress over the frozen, rutty road. That pony stumbled and fell on his nose again and again, but I learned by grasping a handful of mane along with the reins I could brace myself against leaving the saddle abruptly. My family laughed at this precaution and chided me about my horsemanship, and I wished I might ride in free and easy cowboy style as did one or two of the other country boys who rode to school on lively ponies that were surefooted anywhere, neck-reined instantly, and could turn on a dime. There was a boy named Wayne Turnure who lived on the road half a mile south of us, who often pulled up beside me on the way to town — he was a dashing rider and bold spirit, and I admired him greatly. As he slowed down his gaily dancing pony for a moment, he would look rather disdainfully at my plodding animal, pat his own pony's neck and say, "Just the kind I like," and ride off again in a flurry of snow or a spatter of mud. I was ashamed of my handful of mane when he came along, and tried to cover up by pretending I was only stroking my pony's shoulder.

If I had had the thick flannel or wool shirts and the sheepskin lined coats with their big fur collars we have now, that daily ride might not have been so bad. But

I did have fleece-lined, fur-backed gauntlet mittens that came half way to my elbows, and were wonderful for holding up in front of one's face to break a sharp wind, keep off stinging snowflakes or wipe a dripping nose. Later on when my saddle pony had given out and I was driving a horse hitched to a buggy or a cutter I learned a trick for keeping my mittens warm all day and ready for the trip home. I stuck them between the two straps of the back band on the horse's harness and then threw a blanket over the horse. This was a good stunt except when one or both of the mittens worked out of the back band as the horse stamped about trying to keep himself warm. Then I found my precious mittens on the floor of the stall, usually trampled into some particularly fragrant horse manure, a situation which called for strong and colorful language. It isn't nice to start out on a cold ride with a mitten or two in that condition. It's no help at all to a fellow's disposition or his appetite.

A boy who lived at the edge of town sometimes caught a ride to school with me. He would help me unhitch and put my horse in the barn, and he evidently observed me stow those mittens under the horse blanket. One late afternoon when I pulled the blanket from the horse and got ready to hitch up for the trip home I discovered the mittens were gone. I recalled grimly that this lad had admired them. To add a further bit of circumstantial evidence, he caught no more rides with me. But I had no proof. Odd, though, that I should remember his name through all these years.

As I recall the days when I was riding the old pony,

an incident which rankled at the time comes to mind. In order for me to carry books back and forth to school my mother had made me a sort of knapsack out of gunnysacking, figuring no doubt that this tough material wouldn't be harmed by dust and dirt, or the smell of horses. Some of the kids had nice waterproof leather or rubber book sacks, but our family had no money for that sort of extravagance. Often I was several minutes late to school due to the severe weather and horrible roads. One morning I dashed madly to the school building after putting the pony in his stall. I kept my homemade book sack over my arm for I didn't want to stop to take the books out of it. Throwing my coat and cap at a hook in the hall, I scurried for my seat as the last bell rang, and, still shivering, with my fingers so stiff from cold that I had to blow on them or sit on them for several minutes before I could pick up a pen or pencil, I started to get my books out. A seat or two behind me I heard, all too distinctly, a girl's suppressed giggle and her scornful whisper to someone next to her, "Gunnysack!" I really did freeze then, and never again did I bring that bag into the schoolhouse. Today, if something like that happened to me I would likely exclaim, "You're damn right it's a gunnysack! Wanta make something of it?"

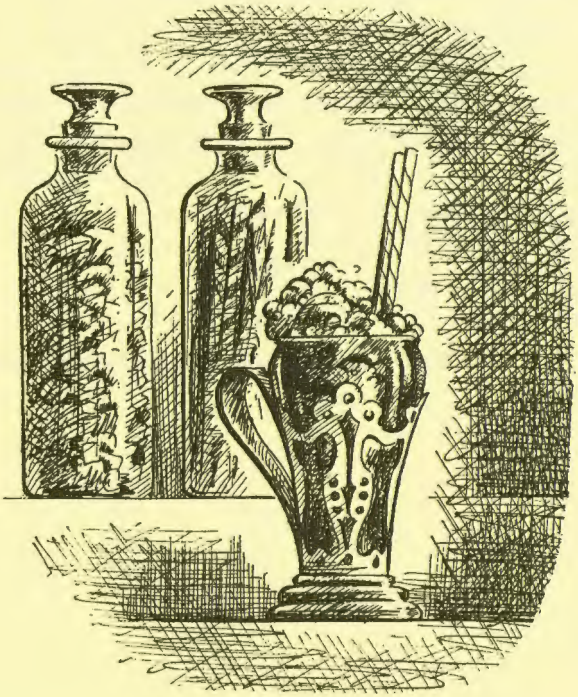
Though I had been dubious about starting to the "town school" it seems never to have occurred to me to quit no matter how tough the going or how much the not unfriendly, though sometimes cruel jibes of the other kids pricked my tender skin. In this I was cer-

tainly no different than many other country youngsters who fought storms and bad roads and ate cold lunches for years in order to keep up with their classes. I think it did something for us all, and when graduation time finally came we could say, as the English would, "We've had it." Once, many years later, when I had to fight a desperate illness for two or three years, I could never quite give up. Maybe those tough days from 1904 to 1911 had nothing to do with it, but I like to think that somehow they did.

THE FIRST SNOW

Starlight, and then the dawn –
We'd seen the gray, drab earth the night before –
Treetop and meadow bare
Had guessed what Mother Nature had in store.
Dawning and then the sun!
No Broadway brilliance ever equalled this.
Artists, your work is done
When you can paint a sunbeam, snowdrop kiss.
Sunshine, and frosty air –
We ought to find some rabbit tracks today –
Woodland and snowy hill,
The temptresses that call to come and play.
Moonlight, and while we watch,
A silver carpet on the world descends;
God must be very near –
In peace and beauty now the fair day ends.

Courtesy the CHICAGO DAILY DROVERS' JOURNAL



smooth-mouthed dick and others

I suppose it isn't at all strange that out of the many youngsters I knew at the Washington School the personalities of only a few stand out clearly against the background of time. The rest seem to have receded into something like an indistinct blur, a fog that you peer into but cannot quite penetrate. This, of course, is as much my own fault as any thing else for if I had made

a greater effort to become acquainted with everyone in my classes I should find it much easier to remember them today.

But there were some I shall never forget. There was Albert Bryant, perhaps my best friend, a splendid athlete and a top student, who was to die tragically of heart disease a few years later when we were in High School. He was a younger brother of Attorney Harvey Bryant. There was Walter Patton, a handsome young fellow who awed the rest of us by learning to chew tobacco; Orrin Bryant, an awkward gangling youth with a gift for clowning; the two Haynes boys, nicknamed Biddy and Teddy, a couple of hardy little fellows whom I admired greatly because they could play football without ever seeming to get hurt; Millard Swift, as rugged and tough as they come, but friendly to me nevertheless; John Lytle, a stout, amiable boy who could read music, so I always tried to sit with him when we had singing sessions; an unfortunate kid named Lyle, whose last name I have forgotten, and who wore a perpetually mournful look, due, so I heard, to the fact that his folks were poor and often did not have enough to eat; a girl whom we will call Agnes, for that was not her name, who was probably extra sexy for her age, for the boys said she went swimming with them, "bare-naked." Please understand this was only hearsay on my part, though I *was* curious. And there were two girls, Helen Winter and Gladys Merrill, on each of whom I had a terrific crush, though neither ever knew of it. I was so horribly bash-

ful in the presence of young ladies that I hardly had nerve enough to speak to them. To me they were gorgeous creatures, and I am sure they must have grown up to be as handsome women as they were beautiful girls.

The seventh and eighth grade classrooms at the Washington School were both on the second floor, close to the Principal's office, a terrifying place where you were sent if you had displeased your grade teacher. The rubber hose as an instrument of punishment was still in use then, and we often heard its dull thud as some poor unfortunate or stubborn youngster had it wielded over his rear. Our crack baseball catcher, Adam Herbener, was ordered to the office for "treatment" one day. He moved rather deliberately as he left our seventh grade room, so our teacher, Miss Davis, got behind him and pushed, like you would a stalled car. We speculated on whether she could maintain power enough to get him all the way, but apparently she did for the familiar sound of the hose soon echoed through the classroom. Adam was back in a few minutes, looking a bit red-eyed.

In the springtime, like the words in the song, "the livin' was easy." The sandwiches, apples and Nelson cake in my lunch no longer froze if I happened to forget and leave them at the stable beside my pony's saddle. By the way, do you know what Nelson cake is? It's a sort of pie, made with two crusts and a center of currants or raisins, a solid, substantial dessert with no foolishness about it that stood horseback riding well and tasted wonderful. My mother made some Nelson cake

every week, but nobody seems to know anything about it now — or else it's masquerading under another name. I haven't had any for 40 years.

At the noon recess we gulped our lunches as fast as we could, those of us who didn't live in town, so we could start playing "Duck-On-A-Rock," "Jump-Fer-Down" or baseball. I have completely forgotten how that first game was played, but the second one was a combination of hop, skip and jump, and leapfrog. Neither one seems to be played by the kids any more. Baseball was my dish, and I could never get enough of it. At home I was forever trying to get my brother, Roger, or my sister, Florence, to play catch, but Roger was then too small and Florence was much too busy with music lessons and practicing on the new Mehlin piano that had cost us the tremendous sum of $400. Before settling on the Mehlin we had tried out a new player piano on which we gaily played over and over again "The Whistler and His Dog." I am inclined to think that my father and mother decided Florence was far more likely to do a consistent job of practicing if there were no player rolls about. I am certain piano lessons did Florence a lot more good than playing catch could have, for she developed great talent on the instrument.

My enthusiasm for baseball was suddenly cooled, for a few days at least, after I was beaned by a wild pitch in a game of "workup" during the noon hour, and for a time I wondered if maybe I hadn't better try the piano as Florence was doing. It looked far less dangerous. But this was in the spring of 1906, and presently I was fol-

lowing, through the old Chicago *Record-Herald,* which got the red-hot news to us out on the rural routes within — just imagine — 48 hours after it happened, the inspiring fortunes of the Chicago Cubs and the Chicago White Sox. Both of these teams were to go on and win their respective league pennants that season and finally engage in a never-to-be-forgotten World Series. In more recent years I have watched on television the pitching feats of Allie Reynolds and Joe Black, and thought how in 1906 I would almost have given my right arm to have seen Big Ed Walsh or Doc White or Three-fingered Brown as they strode to the mound and mowed down opposing batters. What a pity that we cannot somehow roll back time for nearly half a century and throw on a screen "The Peerless Leader," Frank Chance of the Cubs, as he moved gracefully about first base, or Fielder Jones of the White Sox, whose name actually was Fielder, and who played center field for the club he managed, or Johnny Evers and Joe Tinker, the great double-play pair for the Cubs who played second base and shortstop respectively and were said to be not on speaking terms off the field, or Jimmy Scheckard, Johnny Kling or George Rohe. Once started I'm liable to name the whole batting order for each team, and after all that was 45 years ago, and I was telling you about playing ball at the Washington School, wasn't I?

As we youngsters who loved baseball slowly calmed down in the fall of 1906 after the White Sox, known to one and all as "The Hitless Wonders," defeated the supposedly invincible Cubs in the World Series, and the tag

end of the year gave way to the beginning of 1907, our class at the Washington School found itself transferred downtown to the red-brick building that stood just east of the old gray-stone structure known for many years as the Central School. Meredith Willson's "And There I Stood With My Piccolo" mentions this ancient institution and also the fact that the boys' toilets for both buildings were located in the heating plant that stood directly north of them. We got a nice long walk in the open air whenever we were able to persuade the teacher that we simply "had to go." If we stopped to gossip with the fireman, who was usually sitting tilted back in an old chair watching his boilers, could you blame us? After all, there was only school work to do when we got back, and it could wait.

Many new faces now appeared among us for our class was merging with the eighth graders from the Central School before going on to High School. Now it may be that some of these were at the Washington Street school. It is a risky thing to try to go back 45 years and say that this one, or that one, appeared on the scene at just such and such a time, and if, perchance, you who may be reading this know for a certainty that my memory has been faulty, please forgive me. How nice it would be to be able to name every one of them and tell the little interesting things about each that we knew so well so long ago. But that, I am afraid, is a job for someone far better equipped with recollections than I. If, however, I may name a few of those who gathered at the red-brick school, there were Raymond

Weston, Charlie Barlow, Ralston Potter, Ed Hodgkinson, Glen McEachran, George Barrett and Willard Thrams. These boys went on to become physicians, bankers, grocers, farmers and insurance men. And among the girls were such beauties as Irene Reynolds, Evelyn Marston, Ruth Storer, Dorothy McAuley, Marjorie Kuppinger and Fay Mack. Two boys who became my special friends were Leroy Shields and Leroy Calkins. Each was a rather unusual fellow. Leroy Shields was a good trombone player and first baseman, and I appreciated those useful talents of course, but what impressed me far more was his expert knowledge of judo. His father had been a professional boxer and wrestler and had taught the boy a lot of tricks. Leroy had no difficulty in depositing me on my back with his knee on my chest whenever he felt like it, but he was a nice guy and hardly ever threw me without warning. I tried hard to learn some of the judo holds but, being built somewhat on the lines of a greyhound, never made much headway at it.

Leroy Calkins was what today's youngsters would call a "brain." The toughest arithmetic problems were duck soup for him, and this, to my mind with its definite aversion to mathematics, immediately classed him as a superior personality. I hope he became an engineer or an accountant, for he certainly started out with the mental equipment for either of those professions. Of course he was somewhat more than slightly aware of his own unusual capacities, but he was not too obnoxious about it. For a time he lived on a farm west of

Mason City, on the Clear Lake road, and occasionally I went home with him to stay overnight. Once when I went to visit, the Calkins' had two rather simple-looking hired men working for them, characters whom I watched uneasily while we ate supper. After the dishes had been cleared away Leroy's father and the men sat around the table and smoked and kidded about politics, the weather, and what they would have to do the next day. Every little while Mr. Calkins pointed suddenly at one of the men or spoke sharply to him, whereupon the poor hired man would throw up his hands and nearly jump out of his chair. I was alarmed at this and whispered to Leroy, "What's the matter with him?" Leroy just laughed and said "Aw, he's goosey, that's all." Mr. Calkins thought it extremely funny when he could make the fellow jump and laughed uproariously each time. I didn't care much for the idea and got out of the room rather than watch what seemed to me a gruesome bit of entertainment.

During this season and the years that followed there were a good many of us driving in from the country to attend classes in the town school. There were the Potters, Fulton, Ralston, Ruby and Anita; Ralph and Sarah Dunn; Marshall Palmer and his older sister, Blanche; Ruth Avery and her younger brothers and sisters; Art Sweet, who drove clear from Portland, and whom we called, in a reversal of his two names, "Sweet'art." We were stunned when Marshall Palmer, a rugged youngster, became a tragic victim of what we now know as polio but which then was a terrifying

monster we didn't know how to identify. And we marvelled at the courage and unselfishness of his sister, Blanche, who watched over and cared for him for many years. The Potter boys, Ralph Dunn and Art Sweet were all good football players, and I admired their ability to take the pounding of scrimmage in practice and in high school games without getting badly hurt. When I tried football, which wasn't often, and got roughed up, I seemed to hurt badly in the worst places. As Ralph Dunn once said to me, "You're too light in the rear end!" At least I think that's what he said, though he may have used slightly different words.

Two of the prettiest girls in school were the McAuley sisters, Dorothy and Mildred. They were real charmers, popular with everyone, but like the two girls I mentioned a while ago, I simply admired them "from afar off." As it happened, their home was across the alley from the barn where the Potters, the Dunns and I kept our horses. The two girls often sat after school in a large bay window that looked out on the alley where they could watch us hitching up to go home. When we saw them there, and, of course, we never failed to see them the minute they arrived at the window, we clowned for them as hard as we knew how. The girls pantomimed their appreciation, clapping their hands and smiling their approval if what we did pleased them, or holding their noses in pretended disgust if our performances were too hammy. Sometimes it took us quite a while to get hitched up. After all, there were just chores to do when we got

home, and that was not nearly as exciting as putting on an act for two girls we were anxious to please.

After the old Indian pony gave out I drove a number of other horses. For one season at least I rode behind a decrepit old candidate for the boneyard called Dick. My Dad had picked him up from some horse trader, and he was a sorry specimen of horseflesh indeed. His age was most indefinite. He was what horsemen call "smooth-mouthed," for want of a better term to indicate that the animal is no longer young. When a horse is young his teeth have little cups or depressions on their wearing surfaces, and as he ages the teeth wear down until the cups are no longer there. Hence the term. Dick must have been smooth-mouthed for a long time before we acquired him.

Somewhere along the line in this horse's no doubt mottled past he had lost the proper locomotive powers of his hind quarters, and the flesh on his rump and upper hind legs had become shrunken. From the front Dick didn't look so bad, but viewed from the rear he made a sad, sad picture. This wasn't the worst of it. As long as he stayed on his feet he got along fairly well, but when he laid down he couldn't get up again by himself. Whenever I went out to the barn in the morning to feed, curry and harness him and found him lying down, I knew we were in for a rough time. Beating him did no good as he struggled vainly to get to his feet, for he was simply partially paralyzed. Usually we got a block and tackle on him somehow and boosted him to a standing position. Once when he

was running out on pasture in the summertime he had the poor judgment to lie down right at the edge of a little creek, and as he flopped about trying to get up, his whole rear end slid into the water. I thought he would surely drown before we could get him out of there, but my Dad quickly harnessed one of our good teams while I ran for a log chain. We threw one end of the chain around Dick's neck, hitched the team to the other end, and though I was fearful that Dick's head might part company with the rest of him, we snaked him out of the creek like you would bring a log out of the timber. The poor old horse scrambled to his tottering legs as he came up the bank and another emergency was over. Dick wasn't with us long after that.

My driving horse the following year was a much different animal. He was young, long-legged, strongly-built, and "high-lifed," which meant he was unusually nervous. He was always dancing when he should be walking, and he was scared of his own shadow, and most certainly scared of such things as locomotives, streetcars, and the occassional automobile that came along the road. To make matters worse, he was a "tongue-loller." This is a disagreeable habit often indulged in by high-strung horses. Instead of keeping his long pink tongue in his mouth where it belonged, this horse permitted it to flop madly out of one side of his mouth as we drove along. It seems when a horse does this it means he has taken an intense dislike to his bit. He constantly tries to get rid of it by working it over with his tongue. As the bit is steel and securely

fastened in his mouth, the tongue flops around in its attempts to pry the bit loose, with no success whatever. It gives a horse a messy appearance. I believe there are bits on the market now that are supposed to prevent or cure this distressing habit, but we didn't have any then. This colt would gladly have run away with me any day of the week, so I always kept a tight hold on the lines and had my feet firmly braced against the dashboard. Later on we sold him to a horse dealer who liked his rather explosive disposition, and then I got to drive the good black horse, Romeo, of which I have spoken before. He and I got along fine, and I was proud of his well-fed, snappy appearance.

Once in a while during the years in High School that followed I was permitted to stay in town for supper and for a basketball game or a school entertainment in the evening. These were momentous occasions for me, and I proceeded to enjoy them to the utmost for I knew that I was not expected home until late and someone else was taking care of bedding down the horses, throwing down hay from the dim and shadowy corners of the cavernous haymow and milking the two or three cows that seemed determined to step in the pail or to kick viciously. There were four entrancing places in town to be visited after school was out, not hurriedly you understand, but rather savored slowly and made to last, as you would with a measure of mellow old wine. There was Miss Remley's book store to be looked into first, where one could browse leisurely among a musty collection of books, some new,

some old; where you could peer into a page here and a page there of a book and speculate upon what the entire story was about. Sometimes Miss Remley, a kindly old lady who had a funny little chin whisker, came to wait on you at once and sometimes she let you look for a long time for she often seemed to be cooking or eating something in the tiny little apartment at the back of the store. It was hard to leave a spot like that, but there were other wonderful places to be visited and time went swiftly in the late winter afternoon.

The public library was only about a block from Miss Remley's store, and with one's appetite just nicely whetted for reading, it was a matter of only a moment or two to skip down the sidewalk past the Central School and up the flight of cement steps to the quiet and subdued place where a hoarse whisper was like a shout and the endless bookshelves reached far into enticing distances. It was like sitting down to a feast then — one hardly knew what to enjoy first. To be sure, there was always the prim librarian to help but it was far more fun to explore alone the dim corridors of learning, picking up a volume here or a worn edition there before finally settling down with the main course which might be any one of so many different things. An hour or two with Henty, Horatio Alger, or Hamlin Garland, or even Homer as he sang of the adventures of Ulysses, and the sun had been long gone below the western horizon, the street lights had winked on and it was time to tramp over to Main Street and see what Mr. Vermilya had for supper.

It didn't make much difference to me what specials were offered the customers at this delightful cafe for I knew long beforehand just what I was going to eat — a hot roast beef sandwich with potatoes and gravy, and coffee. I couldn't have coffee at home, you may remember, and besides there was the little matter of finances. The whole business cost me twenty cents. The coffee would be golden and steaming in its thick white mug, the bread and meat would be swimming in rich brown gravy, and nobody cared if you wanted to order an extra slice of bread to dunk in your coffee — and I was young and it had been a long time since that cold sandwich at noon. There were enticing desserts to be had at Vermilya's after the last of the gravy had been carefully sopped up, but there was still another stop to be made before it was time to go back to the school for the evening's entertainment.

If you were around Mason City at all during the early years of this century you will remember Skondras' Olympia Candy Kitchen, a never-never land to a rather lonely kid from Lime Creek Township, and which, to steal a phrase from the famous Guy Lombardo's Royal Canadians, might have been called "The sweetest spot this side of heaven." It was to this place of soft lights and sparkling glass I repaired for a leisurely contemplation of the double chocolate sundae or the more elaborate eye-filling and palate-tantalizing banana split. Sometimes Mr. Skondras himself, tall, dark, distinguished-looking, and immaculate in his white coat, came to take my order. I dawdled here as long as I dared, and often

it was no trouble at all to put away two banana splits at one sitting, for they were wonderful. A few weeks ago I ordered one just to see if they still tasted as they did at the Candy Kitchen. I couldn't even finish the thing. Have they forgotten how to make 'em? Or was it me?

There was just time enough then to rush back to the school gymnasium for the noise and excitement of the basketball game, often an exciting contest involving Mason City High School and perhaps Charles City, or Hampton, or Algona or Blue Earth, Minnesota. It was hard indeed to hold in check the intense envy I felt for the lucky fellows who got to play on the High School or even the class teams. I felt like a sissy because I wasn't out on the floor, but the little matter of chores on the farm seemed always to interfere with the practice sessions necessary to make the squad. I was to get my thrills many years later when my two sons were on both the High School football and basketball teams, with Dean captain of the basketball team.

After the game, or whatever event for which I had stayed in town, came the lonely drive home. As I have said before, the roads were often bad. In the winter drifts piled high in many places on the regular roadway, and this meant driving out through the fields. Farmers thought nothing of taking down a neighbor's barbwire fence and driving over it if it was the only way to get to town. Our road had originally been laid out along a particularly bad sidehill, and this stretch never failed to drift full of snow. Another part of our road ran across low, swampy ground where clumps of willows

grew close to the road, even overhanging it in some places, and here there were dark, menacing shadows that were especially disagreeable to drive through at night. Sometimes my horse would jump, startled by a rabbit or some other small animal whose midnight nap we had disturbed. Of course I would jump too, and with a sharp prickling up and down my spine, urge the horse to clear out of there, always with the fear that my cutter or buggy might be upset on the spot, leaving me to cope alone with the unidentified terrors of the night.

In another dark hollow there was an old wooden bridge that spanned the creek which came wandering down through our pasture, and here too the swaying branches of the roadside trees reached out overhead like the tentacles of some shadowy monster. Many a dark night Dick or Romeo and I thundered over that bridge at a fast trot, with the loose planks clattering under the horse's feet as we made a dash for the clay hill just beyond that led to open country again. After I had read Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," with its shuddery tale of the headless horseman, I could not help sneaking a look over my shoulder now and then on a particularly gloomy night — just to be on the safe side you understand. I am a little bit sorry now that I cannot honestly report that I was ever chased by a mysterious rider or by a wolf pack. I knew just what to do though if the wolves ever did chase me. I would lash the horse into a gallop. Then I would throw out my fur robe for the wolves to worry over while we drew away from them; then my fur mittens and my over-

coat, and by that time my horse and I would be nearing the friendly shelter of a lonely farmhouse where we would be saved just as the furious pack nipped at my shoulder blades. Oh, I was quite sure I could handle a pack of wolves.

In a few minutes we were swinging in through the gate to our barnyard, with my horse finding his way unerringly even though it might be so dark that I could scarcely see where the gateposts were. The horse had to be unhitched, unharnessed and tied in his stall, always in the dark. Even with no light I knew just where the barn doors were and how many steps it took to get to the right stall. I would speak quietly to the other horses so they would not be startled. Usually one or two of them nickered softly in reply. In a minute or two the harness was hanging on its peg, and my horse was eating his belated supper of hay. My cutter or buggy always had to be pulled into its shed for my father was particular about not leaving these vehicles out overnight. Then a quick run to the house, the kerosene lamp lighted, the stairs climbed, "and so to bed."

IMAGINATION

Can you feature dusty hoboes
Playing saxophones and oboes
As they plod along a lonesome country pike,
Scaring farmers and their spouses
Till they hide within their houses
And declare they never hope to see the like?

Can you picture cows and piglets
Doing solemn, stately jiglets
While the windmill tries to whistle "Mary Lou?"
When the colts and horses canter
Has their silly neighing banter
Ever meant a single bit of sense to you?

When the Leghorns and their cousins
Lay their countless daily dozens
In the henhouse down beyond the pile of wood,
Have you ever heard them mutter
As they scratch and fuss and flutter
"We would fly away to Egypt if we could?"

Have you seen your late potatoes
Wink their eyes at the tomatoes
In the garden of an early Sunday morn?
Do your radishes and lettuce
Seem to say "Please come and pet us,"
To the pumpkin vines that hide beneath the corn?

If you suffer these delusions,
These distortions, these confusions,
If you have them oftener than once a day,
Then I fear imagination
Has become hallucination,
And you'd better see a doctor right away!

Courtesy THE CEDAR RAPIDS GAZETTE

gypsy rover and the alumni banquet

I suppose every sincere teacher wonders now and then whether the work he or she is doing with young people is accomplishing much. All too often, I am afraid, teachers have to absorb complaints, while receiving few compliments. Some way should be devised for imparting the former student's thanks and appreciation to those teachers whose instruction he can now

see — from the viewpoint of maturity — was invaluable to his development. I am sorry to say I don't know where a single one of my High School teachers is now living or working.

We had several unusual personalities among the instructors at Mason City High during the time that I spent there from 1907 to 1911. There was Mr. Meade, the principal. A slightly stooped, balding little man, he wore a perpetually sad expression. I don't know why, but perhaps he had troubles we kids knew nothing about. I think he noticed I wasn't getting much attention during my senior year and that I was too painfully self-conscious for my own good. One day he took me aside and said he wanted to see me get a little recognition from my class and the rest of the school. He suggested that I take some part — I have forgetten what it was — in the class day exercises in the school assembly room, which meant speaking from the raised platform at the front of the big room, the same platform on which William Jennings Bryan stood for a few moments one day as he shook back his great mane and told us he "just wanted to leave us a few thoughts." I was terrified at the idea, and told him so. Somebody else had to do the job, whatever it was, but I always appreciated Mr. Meade's thoughtfulness and his kindly effort to give me some little bit of prominence.

There was Mr. E. N. Jory, who came from Iowa State College to coach athletics and teach algebra and geometry. I have never forgotten what he told us at the beginning of one of our classes with him on the first day of school. He said, "I'm not going to lay down

a bunch of rules of conduct for you to follow, saying 'Thou shalt, and thou shalt not,' but I'm asking you simply to be ladies and gentlemen." I think we always were too, when we were in his classroom. He taught geometry so I could understand it, no mean accomplishment in itself. Before Mr. Jory came, I am ashamed to say that I flunked geometry sadly and completely under another teacher whose name I have forgotten. I simply didn't try to learn the stuff, and Glen McEachran and I decided "to hell with it" for that fatal semester. I was always careful not to let my own boys learn of this stupid episode.

Mr. Williams was from Grinnell College and taught history. We loved him for he was witty and good-looking, and held the state record for the broad jump. In a class on Roman history one day he was questioning one of the girls about some ancient character of considerable prominence. The girl was pretty vague but said she thought this personage kind of looked after the Colosseum. Mr. Williams cracked, "Maybe he was the janitor!" Discipline was never a problem in this classroom for we all knew that the discussions would be lively and the class periods often all too short. I felt that it would be nice indeed to be just about like Mr. Williams when I got older. We kids thought Miss McMahon, who taught German, had a crush on Mr. Williams.

Now that I have brought Miss McMahon into the record, I must tell you something about her. She was a swell-looking gal, with snapping brown eyes, glistening black hair and a well-corseted figure, though one hip was just slightly larger than the other. Don't ask me how

I happen to remember such things. She was a stickler for good classroom deportment, and despised excessive noise and horseplay when classes were moving through the halls between periods. She especially did not like the hilarity that often went on in the boys' washroom at the end of the hall, and sometimes she threatened to barge right in and call us down. We were always afraid she would do it too, but she never did.

Miss McMahon knew how to teach German. Whole class periods would be conducted with scarcely a word of English. She would say as we entered, "Guten Morgen, Herr Wilkinson. Wie geht's diesen Morgen? Machen Sie die Bücher zu, bitte. Haben Sie eine Grossmutter?" And so on. I wish I had studied harder then.

For a Latin teacher I had Miss Anna Stanbery, a member of an old and distinguished Mason City family. She was, shall we say, amply built, and undulated rather than walked, but she had a wonderful smile. Not as dramatic as Miss McMahon, she insisted however, on our knowing thoroughly all about "Amo, amas, amat; amamus, amatis, amant." Meaning, "I love, you love, he loves, etc." Under her supervision we learned that, "Omnia Gallia in tres partes divisa est." I still like to rattle off, provided I have an audience, of course, "Magister dimisit liberos a schola." This sounds impressive when spoken rapidly but all it means is, "The teacher dismissed the students from school." Miss Stanbery became irritated with Albert Bryant, a great pal of mine, and me one day when we appeared in class without having studied the assigned lesson. She sent us forth-

with out of the room with instructions to report at once to the assembly room, where we presently arrived, grinning sheepishly, and were greeted by the sly winks of those already in the room who knew well enough that we had been booted out of class.

I can't say that Latin has been overly useful to me, considering the two years I spent at it, but it often makes a bit of reading or a technical term of greater interest. For instance, if I say to you that I have just been planting "salix Babylonica," you might think I had been doing something pretty important, when, as a matter of fact, all I had been up to was sticking some weeping willow switches in along the creek banks.

English was taught by Miss Miles, who was tall, slender, a bit stern-looking it seemed to me, with beautiful red hair, and quite a few freckles. I think it must have been under her direction that I first began to take an interest in writing. About that time I became a sports writer for *Ink Spots,* our High School paper which appeared about once a month. I recall reporting in great detail the Mason City-Blue Earth football game one cold autumn afternoon. I saved some copies of *Ink Spots* for a long time, but I can't find them now, so the record of my first efforts at news reporting is gone forever — no great loss however.

I wonder if the gay and tuneful operetta, "The Gypsy Rover," is ever produced any more. Our class of 1911 had its final fling at theatricals when we presented this sprightly show on the stage of the old Wilson Theatre. The title role was played by the man who,

in collaboration with his wife, had written the words and music of the show, and had come to the school to supervise its production. He had a good voice, and the lyrics were catchy. One scene, in which he took the leading lady in his arms and sang to her, "Though I must say adieu, I'll come back to you. Sorrow fills my heart, that from you I must part," had us all winking back the tears. But Ed Hodgkinson, playing the part of a bold Robin Hood sort of fellow made us feel better when he sang about what good bandits he and his Gypsy pals were — "And our system, you'll agree, is just as good as it can be; for we leave the poor alone — but the rich we rob out of house and home." And when the robbers demanded of Lawrence Watts that he turn over his watch to them, he protested that he was "just passing the time away." Ruby Potter and I did some kind of a dance in one scene, pretending to gaze into each others eyes while we sang "Glances meeting, set two young hearts a-beating." Ruby wore glasses and the footlights shone on them so I was never sure whether she was looking at me or not.

Many years later, my wife, Mary, and I saw the same show staged by another high school class in Lyons, Iowa. The tunes were just as tuneful, but I felt sure that our own graduating class did much better with them. I may have been a bit prejudiced. George White's Scandals and The Ziegfeld Follies were all right of course, but The Gypsy Rover was definitely big time stuff in 1911.

I must tell you about our Junior-Senior banquet. This was a high spot in my high school career. And

for good reason. You may not believe this — I'm sure my own boys won't — but I had never had a date with a high school girl during the nearly four years that had elapsed up to the time of the banquet. Now it was simply out of the question to go to this affair, the really big social event of the season, without a girl. But the thought of asking one terrified me, though there were several I thought attractive. One of the prettiest girls in my class was Katharine Farrer. She had a nice low voice, lovely brown eyes, and once in a while she had smiled at me. I thought there might be a chance that she would go to the banquet with me. How to ask her was a tough problem. Finally I observed that she nearly always came a little early in the morning and took her seat near the rear of the big assembly room to study for a while before the others came.

So I came early too one morning, and sure enough, Katharine was in her seat, with nobody else near by. I must have stammered out some kind of an invitation. She looked up kind of surprised and said, with just a shade of disappointment, I thought, she was awfully sorry but she already had a date for the occasion. This was a situation that I had not foreseen, and I retreated to my own seat in some confusion. Perhaps I was even a little bit relieved. I had tried, hadn't I? And the girl had other plans.

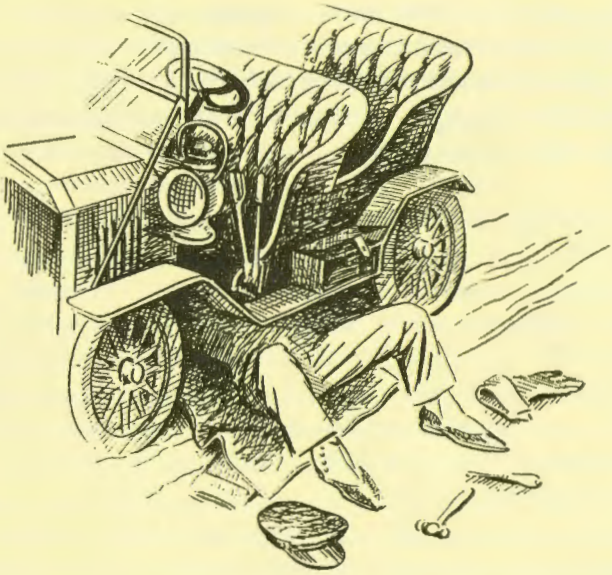
But this wasn't the end of the affair. About the middle of that same morning, as Katharine passed my desk to go to some classroom, she dropped a neatly folded note on my desk. Probably my fingers trembled

a bit as I opened it behind my history book. Here is what it said, for oddly enough I still remember the words, "I have closed up the other deal — I hope. And I will be glad to go to the banquet with you — if you still want me to." Well of course I still did want her to and managed to convey this information to her somehow before the day was over. I never did ask her how she got out of the first date.

The banquet was a highly successful affair, held in the main downstairs hall of the old High School building. Howard O'Leary, who became a banker at Mason City in later years, made a clever and witty speech, and on the menu were strawberries "au naturel." After the dinner and the program were over, I knew the thing to do was to offer to take Katharine for a buggy ride. She was agreeable so we strolled over to where I stabled my horse three or four blocks away. As we walked along I wondered what I should do with the young lady while I hitched up the horse. Should I have her walk down the dark alley and sit in the buggy while I got Romeo out of his stall, or should I have left her at the schoolhouse and picked her up there? Katharine solved this situation neatly for me by saying she would wait on the sidewalk at the entrance to the alley until I drove up.

I don't recall where we went or much of what we talked about, except that Katharine told me how she planned to go to a physical culture school after graduation, and then hoped to come back to the old school and teach physical education. I suppose the reason I remember this is that she did exactly that. A few years

later, after I was out of college, had married, and was living on the old homestead in Lime Creek Township, I happened to meet Katharine one day in town. She was, indeed, director of athletics and physical education for girls at Mason City High School. I thought this was a striking example of how to plan one's career, and then make it come true.



village on the shell rock

The days at Mason City High School following the banquet were soon over. There was the hilarious reading of the class wills and prophecies one evening in the assembly room. Hilarious, that is, for everyone but me. For in some unaccountable fashion the committee in charge of the affair had left me out. It was just one of those things, and it had to happen to me. I was so

hungry for even the tiny bit of recognition in a class prophecy that I had counted on it for days before. When it seemed to me that I had been ignored, or worse still, completely forgotten, I escaped somehow from the crowded assembly room and stumbled through the darkness to the stable where Romeo consoled me with his soft nickering and a gentle rub with his muzzle as he waited for me to untie him. There were some pretty bitter tears shed on the way home that night, and more than once Romeo cocked a sympathetic ear back at me as we jogged along the lonely country road. The next morning the chairman apologized profusely, but it didn't help much.

There was the baccalaureate sermon one Sunday night in the Congregational Church, and then came the final event, graduation, with all of us seated in the old Wilson Theatre while Mr. Meade introduced the speakers and then handed us our diplomas. I wonder where mine is now; haven't seen it in years. Like all graduations it meant the breaking up of a class that had been together for a good while — a happy time and yet a sad one. As we shook hands with Mr. Meade and said bantering good-byes to our classmates to cover up the real emotion we felt, we knew it was the last time we'd ever all be together. I have seen only a few of those who sat on that stage since that lovely May night in 1911. To me the faces of those youngsters are still smooth and untroubled, and their eyes still shine with anticipation of the great adventure that lay ahead. For some, no doubt, the class prophecies came true. For others, per-

haps, only sorrow and disappointment has been the lot. And for a few, as it must always be, has come the journey to a far land eternal.

The next fifteen months, which I spent at home on the farm, were, I think, the most carefree of my life. I had no studies to be concerned about, no great amount of responsibility, I felt good, as indeed a fellow should feel at 18 and 19, and, to make things still more interesting, we had just bought our first automobile. This purchase was something that had come about only after long and extremely serious family discussions of the various makes of cars then popular. We considered whether we should buy a Lambert, such as the one owned by Uncle Rufus Pickford, but we were a little dubious about it for it had friction drive. Once when my uncle drove it into his garage the drive wouldn't release, and the front end of the car crashed right on through the end of the building in spite of Uncle Rufus' frantic cries of "Whoa!"

We talked of buying an Overland like Uncle Cal Bitterman's, but we had heard vaguely that these cars took a good mechanic to keep them running. That was all right of course for Uncle Cal who was an expert with a machine of any kind, but there had never been a Wilkinson, to our knowledge, who knew a spark plug from an exhaust pipe. We considered a Velie for a time because the manufacturer had quite a reputation as a builder of fine buggies and wagons. But we didn't like the looks of the Velie — it was too big and cumbersome. We thought the Franklin was nice. It was an air-cooled

job, and we wouldn't have to worry about a radiator freeze-up in the winter time — but everybody we asked about it said the thing wouldn't cool properly in the heat of summer. We liked the name of the Apperson Jack-Rabbit, which would, we thought, bounce us gaily and with a certain abandon over the rough and rutty roads. We were entranced with the glamorous appearance of the Locomobile, but when we cautiously asked the price of it, we backed away hurriedly.

However, we were presently to find just the car we were looking for, one that had a certain distinction about it for the reason that no one we knew had one like it, and for its unusual hyphenated name, the Abbott-Detroit, which gave it an air of, shall we say, auto aristocracy. My sister, Florence, and my brother, Roger, will well remember just how this car looked, with its shining black finish, its leather upholstery, its dashboard of varnished wood and its touring-car top with rakish brown-leather straps that ran from the front corners of the top down to metal rings on each side of the radiator. It cost $1,450, a tremendous sum for those days, and it ran faithfully for I don't know how many years, until one day a wheel fell off due to old age.

I bought some black leather driving gloves with huge gauntlets that came halfway to my elbows in order to look the part of a real automobile driver. Nearly everyone wore gloves like these while at the wheels of their cars, and of course, they came in handy as there were often tires to change, adjustments to be made in the motor, or gas and oil to be added from one's

own supply barrels, for there were yet no filling stations.

It was a rare occasion when I was permitted to take the car out by myself of an evening. The thing was just too precious and had cost too many hogs, bushels of corn and gallons of cream to be driven about the countryside in a frolicsome spirit. A trip in the Abbott-Detroit had to be approached only after meditation and a certain amount of family consultation. Many years later when my own sons were using the family car a wee bit too much to suit me, I protested mildly, starting my remarks with the usual "Now when I was a boy." They only grinned at me with a rather pitying expression and winked at each other as if to say "Where does the old boy get that stuff!"

But now and then, if I could catch my father in the right mood, I did get permission to take the new automobile. When I did you could be fairly certain I would head for the Charles Kiser farm a few miles northwest of our own, where I would pick up Charlie's son and daughter, Roy and Elsie, as gay and blithesome a pair as I ever hope to meet. We would proceed then to Mason City to add Roy's current girl friend to the party, and after that we thought nothing of venturing as far as Clear Lake or Nora Springs, each fully ten miles away. A trip of this distance, with a stop for a soda and a bag of popcorn, was considered a large night indeed. We were especially hilarious one night in a drug store in Nora Springs, where we were observed by my cousin, Arlyn Pickford, who, it seemed to me, was a bit cool toward us. Later he told me that the drug store pro-

prietor had asked him who those noisy kids were. "I didn't tell him you were my cousin," said Arlyn.

But we had the world by the tail on those starlit nights as we cruised along at as much as thirty miles an hour, singing "On Moonlight Bay" or "Oh, You Beautiful Doll" at the top of our voices. Twenty years or so later my brother, Roger, came across an antiquated phonograph record that extolled scratchily the merits of "The Abbott-Detroit Car." We delighted in playing it, for it brought back the days of the linen dusters, the gloves and the goggles we wore as we toured the dusty roads of Cerro Gordo County.

There were other things to do too during that delightful year after high school was over. If you have ever been a farmer you will know without my telling you that the round of farm auction sales every winter in each neighborhood is almost like the social season in a city. Farmers, at least a large percentage of them, love to go to these sales, where they can stamp about in the snow, look over the stuff being put up at auction, perhaps bid on some of it, joke with their neighbors, eat a somewhat sketchy lunch — which they now have to pay for but which used to be advertised as a "big free lunch at noon," though it usually consisted only of a couple of doughnuts, a hamburger, a pickle, and coffee out of a ten-gallon milk can — and listen to the ribald repartee between auctioneer and bidders. As the auction progresses little groups of men gather here and there to nod in agreement that one of them bought something "worth the money," or that Bill over there "paid too

goddam much." It's an intense, rapid-fire business, where the slightest inclination of the head or a wink seen only by the auctioneer can mean that you've spent a dollar, or perhaps a couple of thousand.

I loved all this back in 1911 and 1912, and still do, though I don't get to go much any more. I'll not soon forget the wintry day I nodded at the auctioneer once too often and found that for the sum of $185 I had become the owner of a second-hand four-cylinder King automobile. There's another old make that is as extinct as the dodo. Now I needed this car about as much as I needed two heads, though perhaps two heads would have been better than one in this instance. Neither did I have as much as $185 in the bank, so I had to give a note for the thing. I still have the cancelled note and once in a while I get it out and look at it just to confirm my wife's frequent assertion that while I may be able to do some things reasonably well, dealing in second-hand cars is not one of them.

The King was a touring car model, and the top was neatly folded down in its imitation leather cover at the back of the rear seat when I bought it. After quite a struggle I got the automobile home through the snow drifts and parked it in a corner of the machine shed until spring. There would be time then to tune up the motor, wash the grime off the body and shine up the top with black polish. April came, and the roads firmed at last. The old King, upon being cranked, sputtered a few times and then purred steadily and smoothly. We were elated. Perhaps that $185 hadn't been such

a bad investment after all. Someone suggested that we put the top up; there was always the chance of an April shower you know. After several moments my brother, Roger, who was inside the car to help get the top in place, suddenly said, "There's something wrong here. I could see the sun before we put the top up, and I can still see it." It was true enough. The top was so full of holes we sadly and hurriedly put the thing down again and covered it up, never to touch it thereafter. You might say we had a convertible that wouldn't convert, and ever afterward we had always to watch the weather carefully lest we get caught in the rain. Once or twice we did get caught and drenched, but when our friends warned us of an impending shower and suggested that we put the top up, we merely cocked a casual eye at the sky and said we guessed it would only be a little sprinkle, and proceeded to get under cover as fast as possible.

Most farmers who are selling out use display advertising in their local newspapers now, but 50 years ago an auction was commonly announced by sale bills posted in such likely spots as livery stables and on roadside trees or fenceposts about the countryside. But nearly every time the same opening phrase is still used, "Having decided to quit farming," an apologetic, sometimes almost tragic expression, for it may mean the owner's health is gone, his sons want to do some other kind of work, or he is just plain tired. Of course he may have made a potful of money, and wants to relax for the rest of his days. But those five words at the top

of the sale bill sound so final, as if the farmer was disgusted with the whole business and wanted to wash his hands of it once and for all. Why can't they say, "Having enjoyed this free and independent life on the old homestead for forty years I've decided to let my neighbors come for a holiday and divide up the equipment I have at their own price, and then I'm going to run down and soak up some Arizona sunshine for a while." I don't think this suggestion is going to accomplish anything, but I had to get it out of my system.

One of the best auctioneers in Cerro Gordo County was Jack Dorsey, of Plymouth. I liked to stand at the edge of the crowd and watch him work. He knew crowd psychology, and he talked the farmers' language and had the nimble mind that put bidders in good humor, which is essential for a successful auction. Once he was selling a harness, a heavy, strongly-built work harness with big, brass-mounted hames, wide reinforced breeching straps, and big, rugged tugs and trace chains. Jack played up all these desirable qualities at some length and sold the harness for a good big price. The next article was a light-weight driving harness, suitable for use with a span of trotters and a canopy top surrey. Jack reversed his selling arguments in a hurry. "Who wants a great, big, heavy, unhandy harness like that one I just sold. Here's what you really want, boys — who'll give me fifty bucks to start it?" A guffaw burst from the crowd, and this harness, too, sold for all it was worth. Another time Jack was selling a well-matched team of young horses. The bidding was slowing down at around three hundred

dollars for the pair, but the auctioneer's rhythmic sing-song call went on, "I've-got-three-hunderd, three-hunderd-who'll-make-it-a-quarter, gimme-a-quarter, I-want-a-quarter." Just then the owner of the team, thinking they were not selling high enough, interposed with "I was offered four hundred for 'em two weeks ago!" Without ever missing a breath or a beat, Jack went steadily on, "I've-got-three-hundred-who'll-make-it-a-quarter-why-in-hell-didn't-you-take-it, gimme-a-quarter, I-want-a-quarter!" Needless to say the crowd was delighted, and the bidding spurted at once.

A personage nearly as important as the auctioneer at a farm sale was the clerk, whose job it was to see that the buyers' names were all listed correctly, with the amounts they had paid for each item. Nine times out of ten the clerk was Carl Parker of the First National Bank. A genial, alert, clean-looking man, he was immensely popular with the farmers. In winter cap, high overshoes and a big coonskin coat he looked a bit different than he did seated at the cashier's desk at the bank, but he seemed to enjoy the cold winter days and engaged in lively banter with his many acquaintances as the sale went on. On one occasion he was not so cordial. A certain young farmer in the crowd whom we all knew did not enjoy too good a reputation persisted in bidding rather recklessly on a good many articles, several of which were knocked down to him. Mr. Parker observed this and figured, quite correctly, that the fellow was bidding with little intention of ever paying for the stuff. Mr. Parker didn't hesitate. He marched quickly

over to the irresponsible bidder and told him in no uncertain terms to keep his mouth shut. "You've bought enough," said Mr. Parker, and that was the end of it.

I think it was a year or so before the acquisition of the car with the too well ventilated top that I made up my mind I was going to have to consult with Mr. Parker regarding my need for approximately $150. I've forgotten what I wanted the money for. Perhaps it was to buy a Holstein cow, or it may have been the time when I had a chance to trade my stripped-down Ford with the bucket seats for a light delivery truck that fascinated me. This, however, was a serious undertaking, one to be approached with caution and after great deliberation. Mr. Parker, I was quite sure, did not know me from a bale of hay. What if he asked me a lot of embarrassing questions, or demanded a chattel mortgage on everything else I owned, or, worse still, what if he simply turned his back on me and told me his bank did not fool with little deals? I walked back and forth before the entrance of the First National several times before I worked up courage to go inside. Mr. Parker sat as usual at his desk just inside the rail, working at some papers which seemed to absorb his entire attention. I approached him cautiously, for it was best, I thought, not to upset a busy bank official with a too sudden proposal of the kind I had in mind. Upon my arrival at his side he looked up and with one glance seemed to take in my entire general appearance. I cleared my throat with some difficulty and told him my name, adding the

information that W. W. Wilkinson was my father, and that I wished to borrow $150. Mr. Parker smiled briefly and said just two words, "How long?" I told him, though the length of time for which I wanted the money escapes me now. He reached for a note and filled it out and I signed it, took my deposit slip and walked out, a bit dizzy from the speed of the transaction. These big financial deals were not so difficult after all, I told myself, and resolved at once that henceforth the First National should be favored with all my business. Mr. Parker, I am sure, promptly forgot the episode as he turned back to his papers, but I remember it well.

You may have noticed, perhaps, that every now and then the name of the little town of Rock Falls has crept into this narrative. I should like to tell you something more about the place, a quiet, unhurried village that rests contentedly on the steep north bank of the Shell Rock River not far from the northeast corner of Cerro Gordo County. Not quite all of the town has withdrawn to the north bank, for there are scattered dwellings on the other side, and off to the south nearly a quarter of a mile are the lumberyard and the depot. If you were approaching the town from a southerly direction, you might wonder why the railroad and the main part of the village didn't get together in more cooperative fashion, but it was, after all, a matter of topography — the railroad builders laid out their right-of-way on fairly high, level ground well back from the river, and the stores, the hotel, the mill and the cooper shop were well

satisfied, after what happened before dawn on the terrifying day of April 18, 1888, to remain where they were. I'll come back to that presently.

You may wonder why I speak especially of Rock Falls, rather than of Plymouth or of Burchinal, or of Manly, just over the line in Worth County. Well, it's kind of a personal matter. To me, Rock Falls has always been pretty important for the simple reason that a good many persons who have lived there at some time — or still do today — are pretty important people so far as I am concerned. You will remember that Grandmother Wilkinson went to live there when her days were over on the little farm she had selected at the edge of the timber. With her came Aunt Jessie and Uncle Thee. And a few steps away, across the garden with its brilliant borders of pinks, lived Aunt Mabel and Uncle Leonard Bliem. Their daughters, Mary Jane and Jessie, now young women, knew that garden far better than I, when as little girls, they played about the lovely shaded yard. And down close to the river bank only a few steps from where the gentle ripples of the Shell Rock play their quiet, never-ending song stands the snug bungalow of Uncle Rufus and Aunt Edith Wilkinson, where their children, my cousins, Jerome, John and Carolyn, grew up and have long since left for homes of their own.

For more than 50 years this little town, originally called Shell Rock Falls by Elijah Wiltfong who arrived there with two ox teams in August, 1853, has been a fascinating place for me to visit. During that carefree year after high school, as well as for many years be-

fore and after that time, I managed, sometimes by horseback, sometimes by cutter, bobsled or surrey, and later by automobile, to see the Rock Falls people and places I knew so well. You might have hardly noticed the village had you dashed through in your car, intent on going somewhere else, but when I had an uncle running the lumberyard, another one managing the bank, still another operating the general store for more years than even he could remember, and a grandmother and aunts there who were all good cooks, you can see, I am sure, why Rock Falls was the end of the line for me and the other little towns around were mere faraway places.

When I was quite young my father often took me on trips "over to the Falls," as we called it. There was a load of oats, perhaps, to be delivered to the elevator, with a supply of firewood to be brought back from the timber on the return trip. Or a few head of cattle to be driven to the stock-yards along the tracks of the Rock Island railroad, known for some years as the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern after it first came through in 1871. We seldom failed to stop for a while, after the business of the day was well in hand, at Bliem's general store which was run by my Uncle Leonard and his brother, Val. Here, gathered around the high, round-bellied stove we were almost sure to find such happy spirits as George Duff, Oscar Morse, Tim Maher and Tom Perrett.

Of George Duff I have already told you something, that he was an expert stone mason and plasterer. But

I have not told you that in addition to those most useful talents, he ran a barber-shop, played the fiddle and called for square dances, and for several years was section-boss for the railroad. An agile mind and a gift for saying the unexpected endeared him to one and all.

Oscar Morse had been "out West," and liked nothing better than to regale the rest of us with tales, embellished a bit perhaps by his own imagination, of prospectin', herdin' sheep, ridin' th' rods and Indian tradin'. I didn't see this happen, but they told me of the time Oscar, newly returned from the West, was going to show the rest of the boys how to ride the rods when the B.C.R. and N. pulled away from the depot. Something went wrong — Oscar's timing was off or the train moved too quickly, and he landed on the right-of-way with a dislocated shoulder and had to be carted off to the doctor. Of Oscar's Indian trading I heard only that at one time there was a little matter of some whisky involved, which somewhat irritated the United States government. They tell, too, of the time he missed the bridge on the way home from the depot after a convivial session with some of the boys, and forded the Shell Rock on his hands and knees, scaring the wits out of Tim Maher, who rushed up to the store to tell the boys "There's a man down in the river trying to drowned hisself!"

If Tim Maher was not at Bliem's store when we arrived we knew he soon would be for he carried the mail on his back from the depot to the post office in

the front part of the store. A cheerful Irishman indeed, he invariably greeted you no matter what the weather with "It's a foine day, sir!" And if you chanced to meet him on the sidewalk as he toted the mail, you had to give him the entire walk for he was employed by Uncle Sam himself, and there could be no interference by the common ordinary pedestrian. A great-uncle of mine, Silas S. Lewis, a delightful raconteur, a rotund man with a laugh that seemed to bubble up from somewhere way down in his ample insides, ran a drugstore for a few years in Rock Falls. He used to tell his favorite story about Tim Maher. It seems that the mailman and his wife, Nora, once lived in a tiny house that was little more than a shack. Tim thought they could do better for themselves on a piece of land in Daugherty Township, twenty miles away, which he had bargained for without taking the trouble to see. All land in Iowa was good land he figured. There was no house on the new place so he had his own little shanty transported overland to the spot where he and Nora expected to spend the rest of their days. But the land he had so blithely and trustingly bought turned out to be nothing more nor less than a frog pond, a place of reeds, rushes and lily pads instead of the deep, black corn ground he expected to find. This was something more than even a cheerful Irishman could face. Saddened and chagrined he had his house brought back to Rock Falls again and set down some two feet away from where it had rested before. Ever

after Nora used to say in recounting the episode, "Oh, it's a smart man I have for a husband. Carted 'is house forty miles to move it two feet!"

If my father and I had driven cattle to the stockyards, we found Tom Perrett there waiting for us, for he bought livestock in the surrounding country for years. Many were the verbal sparring matches he and my father had when he drove in our farmyard to see what we had for sale. They never agreed at once on the price of anything but nearly always got together eventually. If we had come to Rock Falls with grain and Tom was not down at the yards we could find him, as I have said, near the stove at Bliem's store. He had a vigorous, staccato-like manner of talking that used to frighten me. This, together with his usual bulk of about three hundred pounds, was impressive indeed, though he was a kindly man. He never failed to bark at me, "How are you, boy?" as we came upon him in the store, and then he would turn on my father with "Wendell, when you gonna sell me them damn cattle?" My Dad would come back with "Haven't got a thing I'd sell *you,*" and the bristling badinage was on, though Dad, with his slower and more deliberate mind, was scarcely a match for Tom.

It was some years after I had left Cerro Gordo County that I was stunned and greatly saddened to learn that my old friend, Tom, the big, genial, rapid-fire talking man whom I so greatly admired had taken his own life one quiet July afternoon. And to this day no one can tell you exactly why he did. A summer

or two ago I asked Charlie Calvert, the sexton, as we strolled about the well-kept paths of the little burying ground north of the village, if he could tell me what had happened. He put it this way, "All I know is that Tom was always a great feller to whistle. One day he stopped whistling, and in a few weeks he was dead." It will be a long time before another such as Tom Perrett comes along to take his place in the hearts of those who knew him.

Sometimes if the banter and gossip at the store didn't seem to hold as much promise as usual I wandered up the street to DeLos Stickney's little shop, where he fixed watches and bicycles and most anything else. Here there was the strong smell of the glue-like cement he used for sticking the old-fashioned bicycle tires to the wheel rims. Here also could be seen the knick-knacks he displayed in their dusty showcases, the little stock of groceries he carried for a time, and the littered counter where he bent over the tiny wheels and springs of the watches that folks brought to him from miles around. Sometimes Mr. Stickney was not at the shop, and on such days you could be quite sure he was in the country somewhere struggling with his automobile, the first one in the neighborhood. No one seems able to recall what make it was, but like all the early cars, it ran only when it felt like it. Often Mr. Stickney was found on some country road, lying on his back under the vehicle, with gears, pins and bits of chain strewn about on the grass. One night his car stalled on the bridge in Rock

Falls, and Uncle Thee helped push it off so frightened teams could go through. It was no wonder the boys used to call Mr. Stickney "Barney Oldfield."

If Mr. Stickney was not at the shop, I liked to go on farther north to walk about the quiet churchyard where the old vine-covered stone house of worship had stood against the winter storms and the jagged wrath of lightning since 1867. Always more impressive, I thought, than even the famed Little Brown Church in the Vale, it had been built of gray native stone quarried near by, and when Mr. B. A. Brown, who laid the foundation and the walls, received a quarter section of land for his work it was not enough to pay the total cost of the labor. This 160-acre farm had been a donation from Mr. N. W. Culter, a United States Congressman in faraway Constitution, Ohio, and nobody could tell me how it came about that he helped finance the building that took so much hard work, self-denial, prayer and supplication.

I was to learn in later years from my aunts something of the Ladies Sociable of Shell Rock Falls which had been organized on the fifth day of August, 1869, to "aid in furnishing the Congregational Church of this place." The ladies proceeded immediately to raise money by serving suppers, holding sales and even by taking in sewing as proved by a record in 1870 which stated "Took order for two pairs of trousers and 2 fine shirts for B. A. Brown and a pair of overalls for Martin Ericksen." When the ladies had finished the work and had received the sum of fifty cents for

each pair of trousers, a dollar and a half for the two shirts and twenty-five cents for the overalls, they viewed the needs of the church with practical eyes and bought first "One broom, one oil can, one pound calico, one-half gallon oil and six lamp wicks."

Nor was there to be any idle chatter, frills or foolishness when they were in meeting assembled, for with these by-laws they set forth certain rules of conduct for themselves:

"*Article first*: It shall be the duty of the society to transact all of the business of the day as soon as practicable after the officers are present.

"*Article second*: No slanderous, immoral or unchaste conversation will for a moment be tolerated in the society.

"*Article third*: The refreshments must be simple and plain; consisting of bread or biscuit, butter, one kind of cake or pie, sauce, cold meat, pickles or cheese if convenient. A fine of one dollar will be imposed if this rule is violated.

"*Article fourth*: There should be prayer offered before tea at each meeting.

"*Article fifth*: When tea is announced there is to be no hanging back, but whoever is invited to be seated at the table will be expected to move forward immediately."

We may smile a bit now at some of these rules, but those good women, as was right and proper, took the work of the Lord seriously.

On other trips to the Falls, especially in the sum-

mertime, and if there was no great hurry about getting home, I liked to go down to the steel arch bridge over the Shell Rock and lean on the rail where I could look off to the west and the southwest and try to imagine what a scene of destruction there must have been on that fateful morning of April 18, 1888. On that morning the sudden rush of a heavy rainstorm in the night had broken a tremendous ice jam on the millpond a quarter of a mile up the river and swept down the valley and over the low south bank, crashing into several houses and barns in the darkness, and even carrying far downriver the steel bridge that had preceded the one where I stood. My father and my uncles had told me of the gigantic blocks of ice that came along like battering rams, snapping off trees and posts like mere splinters and finally, as the water receded, blocking the road west from the village for days. It was no wonder the town clung more determinedly than ever to the safety of the north bank.

From the rail of the bridge it was pleasant to speculate too on how the town must have looked in those lively years from 1856 until the early eighties. Only a few feet off to my right and rising abruptly from the river's edge stood, in the days long since gone by, the great three-storied, gray-stone flour mill of R. M. Todd, a rugged Scotsman who had settled on Rock Falls as the best place in the state for the industry he was to develop and manage for many years. Here, he had found, was a never failing water supply, timber for the manufacture of flour barrels, and some of the best farm land available

for wheat raising. One could not lose, he figured, with such a perfect combination of resources.

From the millpond upstream, formed by adding a dam of logs, earth and planking to the natural rock formation over which the river water poured, ran a flume six or seven feet in diameter built of two-inch plank held in place by iron hoops about three feet apart. Here was power to spare, as the rushing water came down to activate the giant mill machinery. I tried to picture again the busy scene on a day in the early seventies as the wheat harvest reached its golden climax and the wagons of grain rolled in from the farms for miles around, and waited their turn to unload at the crowded platform alongside the dusty, humming mill. Meanwhile beyond the towering stone structure, from the cooper shop to the west, came the whine of saws and the ring of hammers making new, clean flour barrels. Before me, along a sloping runway at the side of the bridge, rumbled the heavy barrels of flour crossing the river to a platform on the south bank where railroad cars waited on either side of the platform to be loaded with "Todd's High Toned" and then moved off over the spur to the main line of the B. C. R. and N., whence they went sometimes as far away as Boston and the other great cities of the East.

All this I tried to piece together, and sometimes my uncles stood beside me and pointed out a landmark here, a pile of stone there, or told me of the days when as barefoot boys they delighted in running along the top of the flume from the mill to the dam while the rushing

water spurted through the cracks in the planking and splashed them from head to foot.

But the day came when chinch bugs, rust and drouth combined to ruin the wheat crops in Falls Township and the surrounding country, and disaster stalked farms and mill alike. The daily production of flour dropped from as much as two hundred barrels to almost nothing. But Todd, a resourceful man, and not easily discouraged, built an elevator beside the spur on the south side of the river and shipped in wheat from Minnesota, and once again the millstones turned steadily. Todd must have been an ingenious man too, for the machinery in the elevator was run by a cable belt that ran from the mill clear across the Shell Rock, so that water power was extended far beyond its usual limits. And instead of the impatient line of waiting wagons from nearby farms there was then the steady rumble of the great horse-drawn contrivance that everyone called "the mill wagon," as it shuttled back and forth across the steel bridge moving the shipped-in wheat from the elevator to the bins in the flour mill. It had a spout in its side so the big box could be quickly unloaded, and after the days of shipping flour in barrels was over and the mill started putting its product in cloth sacks the mill wagon was loaded with these for the return trips across the river to the waiting freight cars.

Don't try to tell me it's not true that there was a telephone line running from the mill office to the depot back there in the days long before the end of the 19th century, for there is more than one old-timer who was

there when the thing was in use, and they'll tell you it worked too. As I said, Todd was an ingenious man.

It was not hard to picture again, as I stood watching the quiet pools of the Shell Rock far below, the bustle of activity that went on in those busy days up in the village only a few short steps away. On Mill Street, which bordered the flour mill on the north, there was the high, bald-faced hotel known as "The Massey House," and next to it the saloon where a weary teamster or a dry-throated mill-hand could tilt a sociable glass; and Uncle Sile's drug store where you could with almost no effort at all get the genial proprietor to tell you tall tales of the pioneer days; and the store of B. A. Brown, who had laid the walls of the old stone church; and next the Bliems' little store leaning a bit tiredly to the east, which was to outlast them all; and across the street the well-known "Morse House" with its huge wooden sign atop the highest ridge, where you could eat enormous meals at a trifling cost. There were people coming and going, and there was work for everyone. Saturday nights folks came to town in their lumber wagons and hitched their teams along Mill Street; the stores prospered and everyone said that Rock Falls was sure to be one of the biggest towns in Cerro Gordo County some day.

Then disaster struck. Even as the chinch bugs, the drouth and the rust were beginning to ruin the wheat crops and force the farmers to turn to milking cows and raising hogs, misfortune overtook the great mill itself. Some say it was in 1882, while others declare the year

was 1884 when fire raced through the dry framework of the mill as the village slept, and the angry flames burst out of the roof to throw a red glow in the sky that Uncle Thee watched fearfully from his bedroom window two miles away. Only parts of the heavy stone walls were left standing. It was a sad day for the town and the only cheerful note about the whole affair was the classic remark of Mr. Todd, which he is said to have made as he surveyed the ruins, and which has been gleefully handed down by word of mouth to this day, "Well, I have a dam left by a mill site, but no mill by a dam site!"

I wish I could tell you that the mill was quickly rebuilt, that the blue water from the sparkling millpond soon rushed again down the wooden flume to turn the giant wheels, and that, as in years long gone, the wheat grew rank and golden on the rich prairie lands near by. But for quite a while the blackened walls stood gauntly, and it was only after seven or eight long years that the fire damage was repaired and new machinery brought in, this time to be run by steam power, for the ice jam that had burst through the old log dam in April, 1888, had left only a quiet ripple that is still there today. The farmers around had turned to raising corn, oats and barley, and the waving wheat fields were no more. That left only prosaic oatmeal to be made, and it didn't sell like "Todd's High Toned."

Some say that the only reason the mill was ever rebuilt at all was because some eastern city slickers came along, saw a chance to revive for a time the good old days, got some hard-earned local capital to go in on the

thing, ran it for a couple of years and got out. Nobody knows just what went wrong — and it still looks like kind of a shady deal to those whose memories go back over sixty years — but the mill was closed down one day. Soon the machinery was dismantled and shipped away — no one knows just exactly where — "out west." Gradually, after long neglect, the old stone walls fell into decay, and the winds sighed sadly through the deserted corridors of the place, until, at last, men gathered there with sledges and dynamite, and the mill, once so proud and sturdy, slipped slowly to the river's edge.

Maybe you've never seen the village of Rock Falls and never expect to, but if you should some day find yourself near the place with an hour to spare, you might like to stop on the graceful concrete bridge that now spans the Shell Rock and lean for a bit on the rail as I did forty years ago. If you inquired around a bit, I wouldn't be surprised if you'd soon find an uncle or two of mine to come lean on the rail beside you and tell again of the great days in the seventies and eighties. Perhaps these relatives of mine could be persuaded to drive with you along the quiet, shaded road that borders the old millpond and tell you of that winter some sixty years ago when an ice company from Cedar Rapids came and built a skidway from the pond to the railroad and loaded half a hundred cars a day with 500-pound cakes of ice to be shipped as far away as St. Louis.

They could show you, too, the spot which everyone says is the still unmarked grave of Mr. and Mrs. Rolf, on the Morse farm just west of town. And if you prod-

ded them a bit to tell you how that grave came to be there, they would relate the story of how in December, 1855, this almost forgotten couple were on their way home from Nora Springs where they had gone for a supply of provisions. They were riding in a sled drawn by two yokes of oxen, and the weather was fine and mild as they passed through Shell Rock Falls on their way home. Some of the old settlers had warned them that the warm sun and the melting snow were only weather breeders. But the Rolfs were young and confident, and they wanted to get on. Before nightfall the wind had shifted and the stinging, whirling snow was biting into their faces and making the oxen swing downwind. When, after many hours the storm eased and a yoke of the oxen appeared at a farmhouse with no sled, two men, William Redington and Charles Johnson, set out to hunt for the Rolfs. They finally found them, frozen to death, the man's body still in the sled and wrapped in his wife's shawl. Mrs. Rolf's body was found about three miles farther on. She had turned the oxen loose to drift with the storm, and started for help. She was without shoes, and had walked that distance in her stocking feet.

You would drive back to town then, past Mr. Todd's sturdy old home which has been remodeled now but which used to have wide, inviting porches and a many-sided tower room with high arched windows where the rugged mill owner who had left Perthshire, Scotland, in 1852, could sit and look contentedly out

over his domain. Even the flood of '88 had somehow left this house pretty much untouched.

As you crossed the river again my uncles might tell you, almost casually, how one of the earliest settlers of Shell Rock Falls, one George Daney, a soldier of fortune, once tried to enlist in the famed Light Brigade that was immortalized in the deathless poem about the charge at Balaklava. Daney, however, was just one-quarter inch too short or he might have been one of the "noble six hundred."

Then presently you will be back again on quiet Mill Street, where today the bank, the barber-shop, the garage and the general store look out placidly over the Shell Rock and the valley beyond. A bright new bungalow stands where the wagons used to unload endless sacks of wheat, and if you look for the Morse House you will have to peer around a modern filling station, and over DeLos Stickney's little shop is a sign that reads "U. S. Post-office." They'll be glad to have you stay awhile in the village, but if you have to get on they will smile, say good-bye, and wish you good luck.

Some pages back I spoke of the carefree months on the farm after the last exciting week of high school was over. It was during this time that my father and mother were again thinking about my future. My Dad's favorite time for discussing things with me was while we were milking. I could always tell when he had something on his mind. He would start to breathe rather heavily and somewhat faster than usual — a sort of warm-

ing-up process seemed to be going on inside him. Pretty soon he would begin to talk to me. One evening I was dawdling away at the job, not being much interested in this method of extracting milk from a cow that seemed possessed to switch her manure-laden tail into my eyes, ears and mouth, when my father said, "What do you think you want to do, now that high school is over?" I didn't have a satisfactory answer, being unsure on this subject myself. "Well," said Dad, "we've been hoping you would want to go on to college. We want you to *be somebody.*"

Those words started me thinking more seriously. I had, indeed, been all enthused for a time over the possibilities of going to West Point, but this feeling, I knew, had come mostly from reading a thrilling serial in *The American Boy,* entitled "My Four Years at West Point," which had me doing the manual of arms with a pitchfork and herding the cattle before me while I pretended they were squads of infantrymen. It was probably time I got over this nonsense.

In the summer of 1912 I had, upon two or three occasions, as I waited for my father to transact some business at the First National Bank in Mason City, observed an extremely handsome and healthy-looking young man pull up to the curb before the bank in a long, rakish roadster, jump from his seat almost before the car stopped, and dash inside the bank building. Bare-headed, tanned, and dressed in striking sport clothes, he impressed me considerably. I wondered who he was. He appeared to be quite at home around the

bank. I asked my father about him. "Why, that's Hanford MacNider, Charlie MacNider's son," said Dad, "and Charlie was just telling me today that he's sending him to Harvard and it costs him a thousand dollars a year to do it." I was more impressed than ever. My father and the elder MacNider were old acquaintances and had, it seemed, often visited about many things, including what they thought their sons might eventually become.

Charles H. MacNider, I should like to observe here, looked exactly as I thought a bank president ought to look — neatly clipped short gray moustache, glasses, trim sturdy build, immaculate tailoring — with an air about him that made you feel instinctively that the financial foundation of the organization he headed was very, very solid. Some bank presidents do not look the part. Mr. MacNider did.

Upon learning who the good-looking young man was — he became General MacNider after going through a couple of wars, but most people still call him Jack MacNider — I pondered the subject of college at some length. Harvard, I knew vaguely, was a long, long way somewhere back East and everybody who went there was supposed to despise another place they called Yale. As for a thousand dollars a year, well, I tried to figure about how many hogs or how many bushels of corn we would have to sell to acquire that much money. It didn't look too encouraging. I would probably have to settle for some school a little nearer home if I went away at all. It would be rather nice too if I could manage

somehow to whirl a roadster of my own around the park corner, though I should have to swing in to the curb down the street a piece rather than in front of the bank. The roadster did eventually materialize as a stripped-down Ford with bucket seats and a huge cowl behind which I crouched, gloved and goggled, as we shot over the dusty highways at forty-five miles an hour. If the General ever reads this it will be his first inkling, I am sure, that he had anything to do with my ultimate decision about college.

My cousin, Harold Pickford, had been a freshman that year at the college at Ames, which we now call Iowa State. He wrote me now and then about what a great school it was. When the spring term of 1912 was over he came, full of enthusiasm about the place, and told me what they did there and what he had been studying. I was still lukewarm. I was having a pretty good time at home on the farm; I had a girl friend; my folks had a new car. Why should I tie myself down to books and classwork?

But the college germ had been planted in me, and I sort of nursed it along all summer. September drew closer, but my folks said nothing more to me about school. Most of my friends were farm boys who had not even bothered much with high school — "What did you need more education for if you were going to farm?"

Suddenly my mind was made up. One evening I said to my father and mother, "I think I'll go to Ames." This was only a week before school would open there. The morning after I came to this decision I helped

Elmer Hersey thresh, for he had a setting or two of grain stacks that were ready. At breakfast that day it had been decided that in the afternoon my mother and I would go to Mason City to get me some clothes suitable for going away. At noon my father relieved me at Hersey's. I had hesitated to tell any member of the threshing crew what I proposed doing. I was almost ashamed to be leaving for college when none of the other boys was going, and at the last moment I found it hard to leave the gang around the threshing machine. I was a little sad, a little scared and a little homesick as I waved good-bye to the boys on the grain stacks and to Art Gildner on top of the separator. I wondered what they were thinking. I was going off to a brand new life, and I almost didn't want to go. If my father had said, "You might as well stay here, I'll go on back home," I would have given up the whole business. What a slender thread of decision it is that sometimes swings us down a road that we might have missed.

Mother and I went to town that afternoon, and I suppose I was fitted out with a new suit and the various other necessary things that went with it. I do remember the little trunk we bought. It was, of course, the first one I had ever owned, and it cost ten dollars. It couldn't have been much of a trunk at that price, but it lasted me all through four and a half years of college, surviving the not so gentle handling of the railway express people, the draymen at Ames, and clumsy storage in the basement of the fraternity house during the school year.

By the next evening I was ready to go. My mother,

always a swift and efficient housekeeper, had washed, ironed, mended and sewed on buttons here and there, and the little trunk bulged with just about all I had in the way of clothes. I had made the rounds of the old home place, given a last pat to the horses, Prince, Major, Romeo and Frisco, held a confidential conversation with the calves I had taught to drink from a bucket, and wandered out past the grove of willows, walnut trees and evergreens to look out over the long, pleasant fields I was going to leave for a while. I knew a solitary cottonwood, far off to the northwest, would stand guard for me over the slanting hills and the winding little creek in the pasture.

I was to leave at midnight on the old Iowa Central, which later became the Minneapolis and St. Louis railroad. Before taking me to the train my father had to drive to the little crossroads village of Freeman, six miles northwest of us, to attend a school meeting. It was a lousy night. Rain fell steadily and it was as dark as a stack of black cats. The roads were, as usual, atrocious. The car could not be used at all for it would have mired down before it reached our front gate. So Dad hitched a team of horses to the old surrey and left for Freeman soon after supper. My mother and I, especially mother, were in a fine state of anxiety all evening for fear he would not get back in time from that twelve-mile drive through the rain and mud to get me to the depot to catch my train. We spent most of the time wandering from window to window trying to see as far as the road through the blackness and the rain that slashed steadily against the panes.

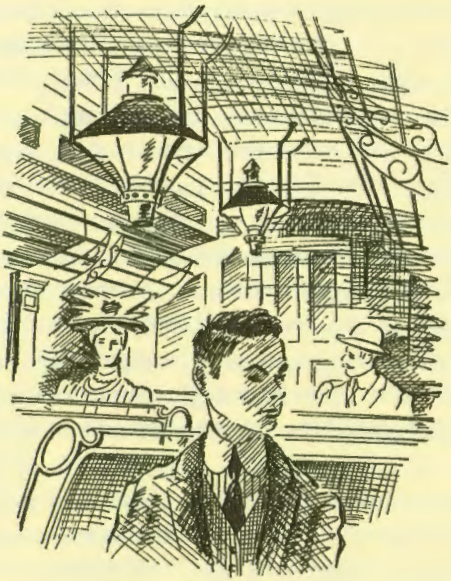
About eleven o'clock he was back. My new trunk went quickly into the back seat of the surrey, and I embraced my mother and kissed her good-bye by the light of the old kerosene wall lamp in the kitchen. Tears filled her eyes as she told me, "Now be a good boy," and a great lump gathered in my throat as I dashed through the downpour for the surrey where my Dad sat ready to start on his second muddy trip of the night.

The tired horses had to be strongly urged to start out again. I glanced back at the kitchen, where, framed under the yellow glow of the lamp, I could see my mother peering out into the night, her fingers to her lips in an anxious gesture I knew so well. I waved as we splashed out of the gateway, but of course she could not see me. The home ties that had bound me so closely, so gently, for nearly twenty years were beginning to break.

My father and I had little to say to each other as the horses, forced now and then into a labored trot through the mud, plodded on toward the station. The rain fell constantly. Nobody else was out on such a night. The road was completely deserted. Everybody who had any sense was home snugly in bed. I wished I was there too, but there was no turning back now. I had a *trunk* and that meant I had to keep going. As we neared the depot my father said, "Well now, remember we're all at home working for you." Tears smarted in my eyes at this, but I fought them back. I had no answer.

In a few more minutes we were at the little station, where one dim light glowed in the ticket office. My trunk was unloaded and my ticket bought. Soon there

was a quick handshake as the train roared in, and my trunk and I were quickly aboard and southbound through the stormy night. The ties were broken now. It was the beginning of a new life for me.



a suit of pajamas

The magic of the word "college" and the glamor of going away to school seemed to have worn thin, if, indeed, they had not departed altogether, on that wet, black night my little trunk and I started over the route that I was to take many times during the next four and a half years. Scattered a few miles apart along the railroad line between Mason City and Marshalltown were

the towns, some good-sized, some tiny, that I soon would be able to name long before we came to them — Rockwell, Sheffield, Hampton, Geneva, Faulkner, Ackley, Abbott-Crossing, Steamboat Rock, Eldora, Union and Albion. On that first lonely ride, as well as countless times later on, I was entranced by our brakeman, a pink-cheeked, round-faced, plump little man who bustled through the cars carrying a short, hardwood board which he laid across the aisle from one seat arm to the other and upon which he clambered from time to time to adjust the kerosene lamps that hung from the ceiling of the car. As we approached each station he sang out its name to us in a high, penetrating voice that carried the length of the car and seemed to bounce back at him.

There was never any doubt about the name of the town as there is when some brakemen tell you that you are coming to "Blurphsveg" or "Schlemblog." How that brakie loved to roll "Geneva" off his tongue — he could make you feel that surely Switzerland and the Alps must be just ahead. He also was fond of Faulkner, which he announced as "Falconer," as if the word had three syllables; and Abbott-Crossing, which was "Abbott-Kerrossing," but I think his favorite was Steamboat Rock, for he could start the name with a long-drawn, hissing sound as if he was on a direct connection from the locomotive, and when he got through with it you felt that if you only peered hard enough into the night you would certainly see a high, rock-bound landing with the Robert E. Lee nosing in.

In the small hours before dawn we were in Marshalltown, where it was necessary to change to the Northwestern railroad to make the short run to Ames. The rain had stopped at last, and already there were hints along the eastern horizon where the first pink streamers of the coming sunrise were reaching up to scatter the tattered remnants of the rain clouds, that the new day would be clear and fine. In later years I drove many times across the overhead bridge that looked down on the depot where I waited that morning, and each time it was all too easy to feel again a touch of the loneliness and the wondering over what might lie ahead in the different life I was undertaking.

Presently I was aboard the westbound train; State Center, Colo and Nevada clicked by, and we were in Ames. Here there was noise, bustle and what seemed to me utter confusion, caused by the high-spirited arrival of many students back from the summer vacation — there was no summer quarter then — and the excited squeals of reunion as the girls and boys who bounced off the trains discovered acquaintances waiting for them on the station platform. Everybody seemed to know everybody else, and everybody seemed to know just where to go, except me. Finally, after several timid inquiries, I learned the campus was a couple of miles west of town and that it was advisable to take the streetcar to the place and get off at what they told me was "Farm Station." This was reassuring — the name of the station had a friendly sound; I should probably find a place adjacent to a barnyard where cows grazed and where

there were familiar sounds and smells that would help to waft away some of the homesick feeling that was already beginning to take hold.

It didn't turn out quite that way. Farm Station, as I soon saw, was the first stop on the car line at the eastern edge of the campus. There appeared to be no barnyard near by; I couldn't even smell one. Again there was a crowd of students, gathered on the broad cement platform that was sheltered by a shedlike affair with a roof of corrugated iron. As I stepped down from the car with my little satchel in my hand — I had checked my trunk at the railroad station — I caught my first glimpse of the broad, sweeping beauty of the Ames College campus. It was an impressive sight in 1912, and has grown even more beautiful through the years. I had not the slightest idea of what to do next, but presently I summoned courage enough to ask a sunburned young man in a turtle-necked sweater, who lounged casually against one of the posts of the shed, where the new students were supposed to go. He jerked his head in a general westerly direction, indicating a large, gray, stone building some distance away and said, "Go on over to Central where everybody has to register." This, you must remember, was before the name of that building was changed to Beardshear Hall.

I felt that the sweatered young man knew what he was talking about so I started out. I didn't know I could have ridden the streetcar to another station much closer to Central Hall. The day had turned extremely warm, and in addition to a coat and vest, I had on a

fairly heavy sweater under my coat. There had not been room for everything in my trunk, so the best solution for transporting extra clothing, I had decided the night before, was to wear it. I began to feel a melting sensation, and by the time I reached the long flight of steps at the east entrance of Central I wondered if a light cloud of steam might not be hovering about me. I hadn't gotten up a sweat like that even on that last day I helped Elmer Hersey thresh.

Inside Central there was bedlam. The great hall you came upon as you passed through the east doors was jammed with young men and women, all apparently talking at once, all intent upon greeting what seemed to be long-lost friends, and wanting to know if each "had a good summer." I felt very much alone, though I need not have, for as a matter of fact, there were over four hundred of us just arriving, as I had, at the College for the first time. There was no way that day of knowing that in the years we would spend around that beautiful campus I would become acquainted with such outstanding personalities as Harold McKinley, "Duke" Arthur, Nile Kinnick, Ed Uhl, James Wallace, Gene Hayward, J. P. Eves, Pat Kerrigan and many others. And I haven't even mentioned the girls, for it would be best, perhaps, that I do not get started telling you of the beauty and brains with which the feminine contingent of this class was endowed.

At one point in the crowded hall that morning a line seemed to have formed which wound its length about the circular rotunda in the center and moved at a

deliberate pace toward one of the large offices at one side. I got into this line for it seemed to be the thing to do, and as we slowly edged forward I fell into conversation with a short, alert, good-looking boy just ahead of me. I was considerably impressed when he told me he had come clear from the state of Alabama to go to school at Ames. After a time we introduced ourselves. His name was Edwin Stillwell, and, as luck would have it, we were to become great friends within a few months when we both became pledges at the same fraternity house. Many were the verbal sparring matches we engaged in then as good friends always do. We developed some lovely names for each other. There was the time "Stilly" started calling me "The Hitless Wonder," after an inter-fraternity baseball game in which I futilely fanned the air during my times at bat, but I retaliated, after seeing him miss several ground balls at shortstop, by christening him "The Human Sieve."

After an hour or so of inching forward in the line I finally reached the inner office where credentials and high school credits were being examined. I handed mine over a bit dubiously, hoping that the College would permit me to stay now that I had gotten this far, and requested that I be allowed to enter upon the course in Agricultural Engineering. This, I was to discover later, was a slight error of judgment on my part, for any engineering course involved a considerable study of mathematics, and you may remember that in high school I had thought abolition of all forms of that subject would have been a desirable move on the part

of the board of education. However, the official who looked over my credits decided, after some pursing of lips, to let me have a go at Ag Engineering, as we called it, provided I enrolled in a special six-day-a-week refresher course in algebra. I was inclined to demur at this, having no love whatsoever for algebra in any of its forms, but as it turned out, this ruling was to be most fortunate for me.

By this time the day was wearing on well into early afternoon, and another pressing problem had to be solved, and quickly, for I had as yet no place to live. But the College had thought of this possibility before I did, and at an information desk in Central Hall I was directed to a rooming and boarding club — to be known as the Mohawk Club — that was just being formed at 218 Welch Avenue. I hurried down there as fast as I could — I've forgotten whether I still had my sweater on — and knocked timidly on the front door. Someone inside bellowed "Come in!" and when I did I found myself in a fairly large, clublike room with a sturdy library table in its center, upon which sat in an easy and relaxed manner a stockily built, red-faced, good-looking young man, dressed in the studiedly careless fashion I was beginning to associate with upper classmen. I asked about a room and whether there was to be a place to eat in the building. He replied that there would be both. After asking me a question or two and looking me over pretty thoroughly without bothering to get off the table, he apparently decided I would do, and led me up two steep flights of stairs to a small

room on the third floor, which, he explained, I could make myself at home in but that I would have to expect to have a roommate as soon as an applicant came along. He left me then, after divulging that his name was Ralph Edwards — not the one of radio fame — and that he was from Belle Plaine, Iowa. He too, was to become one of my good friends as the weeks went by.

I had time then to look about me in the room I was to call home. It was not an enticing place. There was a folding bed against one wall, two battered study tables with a chair for each, a dresser that had definitely seen better days, and a well-worn rug of an indefinite color on the floor. The outer walls sloped sharply in from a point about four feet above the baseboards so that you could stand upright in only a portion of the room. There was a place or two where the wallpaper was well tattered. I began examining the dresser drawers for space to put the few belongings I had in my little satchel, and it was while I was doing this that Ralph Edwards again appeared at the door with a rather sharp-featured boy whom he introduced as Russell Engberg, of Kiron, Iowa, and whom he stated was to be my new roommate.

Ralph withdrew, and the two of us eyed each other speculatively. Engberg spoke one word abruptly and questioningly, "Prep?" I took it he was asking if I was a freshman, for the word, "prep," was new to me. When I answered in the affirmative it seemed to reassure him, and he relaxed somewhat, having found that we were both in the same boat. As he looked about the room and began fumbling with his suitcase to get his things

out, I studied him more closely. My heart sank a little for he was not prepossessing in appearance. He wore his hair in a bristling butch cut, and his eyes were sort of a cold steely gray, which, together with his rather thin face and sharply pointed nose and chin, combined to give him a grimly stern look that scarcely seemed right for one no older than I was myself. To add further to his generally unfavorable first impression, he was then suffering from a severe case of barber's itch, which he was attempting to control with some white salve he had smeared here and there on his jaws.

"This is a hell of a room," my new acquaintance commented upon completing his inspection of it. I was inclined to agree with him, thinking privately that the bureau which had directed me to the place had not done much of a job of it. However, neither of us could do much about the situation as it was getting on toward evening and we had no place else to go. We learned that we had to make our own bed, and the experience of each of us had been extremely sketchy along that line. We went out for supper. I don't remember where, but it was likely to a place we soon learned to call "The Dirty Door-knob," for the Mohawk was not quite ready to begin serving meals.

Russell and I began to find out more about each other as we ate and then walked back to the club-house. He had, it seemed, made as sudden a decision as I had to come to Ames, where he intended to study agronomy. His home town of Kiron was a tiny one. "You'd have a hard time finding the damn thing on the map," he

told me, so that I felt he was almost a country boy like myself. Quite a few more boys had arrived at the house when we got back, many of them from Belle Plaine, and we soon found it was best, as the weeks went by, not to speak slightingly of that city. There were just too many defenders of the place.

My roommate and I were not long in climbing up to our place in the garret, as we called it, for neither of us had had much sleep the night before. After considerable tugging and plenty of freehand swearing we found how to get the folding bed down and made it up after a fashion. Russ finished unpacking his suitcase and tossed casually on the bed a garment at which I stole a furtive look when his back was turned. I had never seen a pair of pajamas before. For sleeping purposes I had brought a nightshirt. I considered what I should do. Should I leave my old-fashioned garment in the dresser drawer where I had stowed it before Russ arrived, and sleep in my underwear? Or should I do as one of my friends once put it, "revert to type," and sleep raw? Or would it be better to just brazen it out and pretend that everyone in Cerro Gordo County used nightshirts all the time? I decided on the last named course, carefully avoiding Russell's eyes as I did so. He was kind enough to say nothing.

I lay for a long time that night wondering why I had ever left Hersey's and the threshing crew that pleasant September afternoon only a few short hours before, though it seemed as if I had been gone for many days. The next morning I was not long in getting down town

to see that my trunk was brought out. I had an important errand at Tilden's Store too, where I bought — you guessed it — a suit of pajamas.

As Russ and I became better acquainted and got used to our new surroundings, I began to find him an interesting and pleasant companion. I completely forgot that first unfortunate impression, and though he might have strained my good nature when he asked to borrow my razor once or twice before the barber's itch disappeared, we got along wonderfully well. We even managed after a month or so to get ourselves transferred to a better room on the ground floor by squawking loudly to Ralph Edwards and the other boys who were running the club. My roommate was far more articulate than I in getting something like this done. Eventually Russ and I became members of different fraternities so that we met only occasionally on the campus, but I followed his career with a great deal of interest as we went on to become upper classmen. He was to become an outstanding student, an intercollegiate debater, a member of Alpha Zeta, of the glee club, of the YMCA cabinet, and he eventually won the distinction of becoming editor-in-chief of the college annual, the 1916 *Bomb*. After graduation I lost track of him for a while, but after some years I was to read in the papers that the chief of the Division of Economic and Credit Research, Farm Credit Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, was none other than the boy from Kiron.

One of the wonderful things about being young and full of vinegar is, of course, the ability to quickly adapt

oneself to new conditions and situations. I used to think about that old copybook expression we had in our writing books at the country school, "Every beginning is hard." For some reason or other, I suppose mainly to impress it still more upon us, they even had it printed in German in some of the books, and if I remember my German correctly it read, "Aller Anfang ist schwer." Thus it was not long before we who were freshmen at Ames in the fall of 1912 felt quite at home and could hardly wait until the next year arrived so that we could survey the incoming class with that calm and superior detachment that comes to those who know the ropes.

A while back I told you of the six-day-a-week refresher course in algebra I was going to have to take, somewhat to my disgust. There were a good many, I found, who, like myself, needed "refreshing," and about thirty of us gathered each day from Monday until Saturday in a class taught by Miss Agnes Mosher, a splendid teacher who commanded our complete respect and who made algebraic intricacies look easy. Another group similar to ours met at the same time with another teacher, Miss Ann Fleming, who, because of her flaming red hair, was known as "Red Annie." We heard delightful tales about her from some of the students in her classes. How in her enthusiasm over the mysteries of "x" and "y" and such matters she sometimes forgot to put problems on the blackboard to illustrate a point she wanted to make, but instead inscribed them in thin air with a waving forefinger, even going so far as to rub out a mistake in that same air before the blinking

eyes of the class. We used a textbook that had been written by E. W. Stanton, Dean of the Junior College, and Professor of Mathematics. This book was known irreverently to one and all as "Stantie's Jokes."

In my algebra class I soon made many new friends. Many of the boys were from farms so that we had a common background. One of these was a well-dressed, handsome youngster from Clinton County, Iowa. We often fell into step as we walked to and from class and talked about what we did at home and what we hoped to do when we got through college. This was all interesting of course, but perhaps I was influenced somewhat by the fact that this boy, whose name was Frank Harrington, had a good-looking, brown-eyed, curly-haired sister who was also a freshman at that time. When brother and sister happened to meet on the campus, and I just happened to be along, well, there wasn't much to do but introduce me. And if I just happened to ask the sister for a date, and if she just happened not to have one already, well, that's the way college romances start in the story books — and one thing led to another, and the curly-haired girl has been my wife for quite a good many years now.

I think I was just a little disappointed now and then in those first weeks at college when it developed that we were going to have to study not only mathematics but English and chemistry as well. We were getting background for what was to come later but I had sort of expected that we would be immediately put to handling machinery, taking care of livestock and building barns

and silos. The young are always impatient and in a hurry. It was hard for us to see then that if you wanted to figure out the horse-power of a gasoline engine you must know something of mathematics; and that in order to write an intelligent report about what the engine would do you must be able to set it down in concise English; and that if you were going to feed livestock properly you had to have some idea of the intricate and mysterious chemical processes that went on in an animal's digestive apparatus.

The time flew by and soon it was Thanksgiving and our first chance to go home. Now there is something about that first vacation after starting college that you never experience again. You simply can't wait to get back and show the home folks that you are now just a little bit different than you ever were before. You've made the grade, you've learned to live away from home, and you've made a lot of new friends from faraway places. You even dress just a little different. I know I did, but to describe it now makes me shudder. Those were the days of the high button shoes, preferably a brilliant tan in color. I had them on when I arrived in Mason City for that first vacation. I wore also wide, floppy trousers with three-inch cuffs carelessly turned up at the bottom, a sort of a Scotch cap, and a long, flowing, bright-plaid overcoat that came just about to my shoe-tops. Thank goodness there are no photographs in circulation of me in an outfit like that. I wonder if my folks speculated at times as to whether it had been such a good idea to encourage me to go to college.

Christmas vacation in 1912 was a bit different than it is now, in that it lasted for about a month. This was because of the short-course system then in vogue at the college. Hundreds of farmers descended on the institution right after the holidays and attended classes and demonstrations for two or three weeks, taking a good share of the teaching staff's time and using much of the classroom space. We who were taking the regular four-year courses didn't mind the extra vacation time at all, but the fact we stayed around home for so long in mid-winter led to a certain amount of whispering among the neighbors that very likely we had been kicked out of school. When we attempted to explain that the "shorthorns," as we called them, were getting a concentrated bit of college during the month of January, we were not at all sure the neighbors believed us.

In what seemed no time at all spring was crowding on the retreating footsteps of winter, and the campus bloomed under the magic of warm rains and sun-filled days. Though the breath-taking beauty of the place was to reach its climax many years later, we were beginning to love, as all Iowa Staters do, the graceful archways of the stately Campanile from which we heard, "The chime of bells that sinks and swells." And through the long green vistas that lay before us as we stood now and again on the broad eastern steps of Central Hall we caught glimpses of distant halls where the ivy was just beginning to climb over an ancient wall or a newer edifice of dignified Bedford stone. Or we saw an enticing, winding pathway leading to a rustic

bridge where, "Broad shadows spread the glimmering glade, and dark ravines are hid in shade." Even the towering smokestack of the heating plant became, "A tall and stately pillar in the sun." It was pleasant to stroll idly across the brilliant green carpeting of the campus of a balmy May afternoon, especially if a girl you liked was with you, or if classes were over for the week, and there was a baseball game with Missouri, Nebraska or Kansas scheduled to start about three o'clock. Even the thoughts of the twice-a-week military drill, "prep drill," as we called it, and which not many students liked, receded into the background. The tight, scratchy, uncomfortable uniforms we had to wear were forgotten, and even the loud, indignant trumpetings of General J. R. Lincoln, as he rode his beautiful, sorrel horse over the greensward and bawled out a hapless company commander for some inept order, seemed to no longer linger in the treetops.

You have heard of the War of 1812 of course. But you may not know that one hundred years later, on October 3, 1912, to be exact, war very nearly broke out on the Ames campus. In the evening of the preceding day a wild rumor reached the college. It was so wild, indeed, that scarcely any one believed it. The State Board of Education had held a meeting at Cedar Rapids, so the story went, and in a great burst of economy and a highhanded drive for efficiency had recommended to the State Legislature that the engineering courses of both the State University at Iowa City and Iowa State College be combined under one department

at Ames. But that wasn't the worst of it. The Board had gone further and recommended that the Home Economics Department at Ames be discontinued forthwith and moved in its entirety to Iowa City. You can imagine the storm that broke out then. Now there were only about 400 girls at Ames at that time and the boys outnumbered them something like five to one; if you wanted a date you had to arrange for it weeks in advance, but we did not propose to be denied even this pleasure.

Throughout the night of October 2 the news of the State Board's action spread around the college. We still hoped it wasn't true. Long before chapel time at 7:45 the next morning, the girls of the school stood silently at the doors of Morrill Hall waiting for Chaplain O. H. Cessna and President Raymond A. Pearson to appear and either confirm or deny the report. Hundreds of the boys waited hopefully in the background. Worship that morning was especially solemn. When the President finally rose and announced that the Board had indeed recommended moving the women to Iowa City many of the girls wept, while the boys ground their teeth and said things under their breath that were hardly appropriate in a chapel hall.

Things began to happen at once. By nightfall four mass meetings had been arranged, one by the women students, one by the boys in the engineering department, another by the agricultural students, and a fourth by the Commercial Club of the City of Ames. From the three students' meetings a "Keep The Girls At

Ames" committee of thirty persons was formed. The members of the State Board were denounced individually and severally in bursts of heated oratory. A set of resolutions was drawn up demanding that the Board immediately rescind its action. The resolutions were ignored by that body. The committee, a resourceful group, then organized the students by counties, with a chairman for each county, and proceeded to distribute literature incorporating the arguments for keeping the girls at Ames all over the state, and brought pressure to bear on candidates for seats in the State Legislature. The Alumni Association contributed both time and some money to the campaign. A tag day to help with expenses brought in $200. The boys swore never to shave again until they graduated if the girls were taken away. Not that any of us had much to shave anyway, but still it was a threat.

When tempers had cooled somewhat along in the winter and the State Board came to visit the campus they were treated with great courtesy, and the Home Economics girls even put on a luncheon for them. But the battle was not over. A big fight was brewing over this touchy question on the floor of the House and Senate at the State House. We had some great champions there, and they stood off all attempts to turn what was sometimes called a cow college into a stag college. On April 19, 1913, the Board of Education admitted defeat. The war was over. We turned happily to our date books, certain at last that when our

turns came weeks and weeks ahead the girls would still be there.

The month of June overtook us almost before we were ready for it. We felt like saying, "What, so soon?" It had been a wonderful year and now it was time to go home for the long summer vacation. There was no question now about whether we would be back in the fall; no wondering if the Abbott-Detroit and those moonlight trips to Clear Lake might overshadow life on the campus; no nostalgic yearning even for the autumn threshing crews. The enchantment of the new life that had looked so foreboding one dark and stormy night a few short months ago had now cast its spell and was like a magnet drawing one back from the quiet farm in Cerro Gordo County.

I had left the Mohawk Club by this time and been pledged to and initiated into a local fraternity which later became a chapter in a national organization. This was a great experience for me. Not only did the older men in the fraternity see that we youngsters studied hard and made good grades but they helped us if we got stuck on a knotty problem. They pushed us out and made us take part in other activities, taught us good manners, showed us how to dance, how to dress for dinner if we had company, how to ask for dates and even sometimes got them for us. I have a great respect and admiration for fraternity life. My roommate for a few short weeks in the spring of 1913 was a senior named Everett Watts, from Hedrick, Iowa. He looked

and acted just the way I thought a senior ought to, handsome, relaxed, wonderfully good-natured. The boys said he could have made the Varsity baseball team if he had wanted to, but he couldn't be bothered. We called him "Babe," and if a freshman can be said to have worshipped a senior, then that's how I felt about him, though I was always careful not to show it. I learned just how far I could go with mild insults before he grabbed me and shoved my head under the bureau or whatever other piece of furniture was handy, while he growled dire things about a "dam' fresh prep!" Long after we were both out of college and were scratching for a living I sat one evening in the lobby of a hotel quietly reading a magazine. Someone jostled me roughly as he sat down beside me and shook out his evening paper. I looked up angrily to see my old roommate grinning happily at me. Another time I was driving down a one-way track on a highway in southeastern Iowa following a blizzard when a car approached from the opposite direction. I figured I could bluff the driver into backing up a quarter of a mile or so to a place where we could pass, an idea which also seemed to possess the other driver. We came to a halt with our front bumpers inches apart as we climbed grimly out to argue the right of way. Sure enough, it was the "Babe," and as we joyfully pounded each other on the back it was like the old days again. I've forgotten which one of us backed up.

The summer flew by and we were back again at college, old hands now at riding trains, arguing with

baggage men, registering for classes and taking up fraternity life where we had so blithely left off. It was marvelous being a sophomore, no prep cap to wear. no fear of being "stretched," no shoes to shine or errands to run for upper classmen. But in a month or so a shadow began to appear on my horizon. I was well into my course in Agricultural Engineering, and the mathematics required. Algebra had gone well enough under Miss Mosher's pleasant and able direction. Even trigonometry and analytical geometry had not been too bad, but now calculus reared its ugly head. I struggled with the subject futilely for a while, but it was a losing battle. Other brains might grasp its mysteries, but not mine. Even the older engineers at the fraternity house gave up on me. I became extremely discouraged. I yearned for the smell of the cattle barns, that indescribable combination of the pungent odors of silage, oil meal, alfalfa and good rich manure that every farmer knows so well. The engineer's life, I began to see, was not for me.

The question was, what to do about it? Finally I approached a lady in the registrar's office whom I thought might help me. She was Miss Myra Whitehead — I hope I have set down her name correctly, for it was a long time ago — an understanding person if I ever saw one. She seemed to know at once what was bothering me, and she went into action. Inside of a week I was transferred, to my great delight, to the Animal Husbandry department, and there I knew I belonged. Under men like Pew, Wentworth, Kildee,

Shearer, Vaughn, and others I felt I was learning at last the things I wanted to know about livestock. And in Agronomy there was the great Professor Stevenson to inspire one with the desire to penetrate further the fascinating study of soils. In Farm Crops there was Hughes, famous for his work with seeds and grains and growing things. In Dairying beloved Mortensen told us in his delightful Danish accent that if we wanted to keep a milk product sweet and fresh, "You yus' take it and put it in the rewhierator." There were carpentry, blacksmithing, botany, zoology, horticulture and forestry, each to be savored in its proper turn and delved into further if one wished. It was a pleasant prospect, and I surveyed the future confidently.

There was one complication which arose out of switching courses. I had to study for four and a half years to get a bachelor's degree instead of the usual four years. This has led my wife, upon I don't know how many occasions, to remark slyly that while she was able to graduate in four years it took me half a year longer. She neglects to state the full and complete circumstances surrounding my case, especially if we are with others, and the net effect is that I immediately feel called upon to explain at some length just why it did take me longer. I think my voice gets just a bit shrill at times as I tell everyone present that I am just as goddam smart as anybody else and that besides I always wanted to graduate with the Seventeens instead of the Sixteens anyway. I used to have a little trouble explaining this to two elderly lady friends of mine in Rock

Falls, Elizabeth and Harriet Perrett, who had been graduated from Ames in 1882 and were extremely proud of it. If they had been able to complete their courses in four years they couldn't quite understand why I had not done likewise. I liked to ask them what year they graduated, pretending I had forgotten it from the time I had visited them previously. They never failed to respond quickly and in unison, "Eighty-two!" Whereupon Lizzie and Hattie, as they were better known, went on to tell me of the great days around "Old Main," as the first Central Building was called, and how the bordering fields crept almost to the walls of the few buildings there were then with their old-fashioned mansard roofs and high-arched windows. Hattie was especially proud, and rightly so, of the fact she had taught in the Mason City High School when Carrie Lane — later famous throughout America as Carrie Chapman Catt, and herself a member of the class of '81 — was the principal there.

As I got fully into the swing of the Animal Husbandry department curriculum and the disagreeable thoughts of calculus faded into the background, I became interested in the course in dairy cattle judging, feeding and management which was taught by Professor H. H. Kildee. The personality of this remarkable man had a good deal to do with this. I never failed to be greatly set up, since our first names were the same, when he sometimes greeted me with "Hello there, namesake." It was fascinating to watch him work a ring of cattle, placing them in what he considered their order

of merit after his classes had struggled through the job in their amateurish way, and his never-failing courtesy and good humor in explaining where some of us had been wrong in our estimates of the cattle left us feeling that next time we would surely do better. He was even courteous to the cows and the bulls. Once when he backed slowly away from a Holstein cow, the better to survey her general appearance, and happened to step on another cow's foot, he turned with a gracious "Oh, pardon me," before he realized what he had run into. The animal did not seem to mind at all, and the class was delighted.

It began to dawn on me as the year went swiftly by that if I was to learn more about dairy cattle in general and Holstein cattle in particular I would have to get some practical experience with a well-known herd. Many Animal Husbandry students did this during their summer vacations, and I had heard them tell interesting tales, slightly exaggerated I sometimes thought, of travelling to the fairs with show herds, feeding for winning milk production records, and taking care of fabulously priced animals in deluxe barns. If I did something like this it would mean being away from the Lime Creek Township farm for at least part of the summer, and I didn't know whether I could manage that.

When June came and college was over until fall I had things lined up. Professor Kildee had gotten me a job at Cedarside Farm, near Waverly, Iowa, and my father and mother had not objected seriously to my taking it. I was to get $30 a month, and when one of our

neighbors heard of it he said, "Why you could get $35 right around near home." He didn't know that I was seeing spots before my eyes, and these spots had to be the black and white ones on Holstein cattle.

Cedarside, I must explain, was owned by an extraordinary man named Charlie Nelson. When Charlie was well past 50 years of age, after working extremely hard on his small farm for the best years of his life, he found himself slowly growing deaf — from overwork his doctor told him — and with not too much to show for his labors. Somewhere he read of the success another man had made with purebred Holstein cattle. He told his wife, "If that feller could do it, I can too," and proceeded at once to sell every head of cattle he then owned, all of them being of quite indefinite ancestry. Then he invested in several head of Holsteins. He did not know one pedigree from another at first, but he learned fast. He became a skillful feeder and fitter, not only of show cattle but of cows which made unusual records in milk production. He became almost an evangelist for his breed of cattle when he saw what they could do for him. His neighbors thought he was a bit touched in the head for bringing in those black and white cattle — "skunks" they called them at first. But he went on, in the space of a few short years, to become even nationally famous. Requests came from far and wide for him to speak and to tell the story of the success he had achieved at an age when most men were content to retire. While he was no orator he captivated his audiences by his earnestness and his enthusiasm. He had

no use for the ordinary barnyard run of cattle by that time, especially those which had been bred and developed to produce both meat and milk, and I remember he used to loudly berate a bunch of calves that persisted in going through the wrong gate now and then, telling them right to their black and white faces that they were acting "like a dang lot of dual-purpose calves."

It was at Charlie's farm that I arrived one Sunday afternoon in June of 1915. He had met me at the depot with a huge Cadillac touring car. Naturally I was quite impressed. Farmers, as a general rule, were not driving Cadillacs in those days. There was quite a story back of that car, and Charlie told me some of it on the way out to the farm. There had developed, it seemed, a matter of some two or three years back, a fairly insistent demand on the part of his family that a new car be purchased. Charlie had demurred at first, but finally said, "All right, we'll take one of our best cows and keep track of the milk she produces and the calves she raises, and as soon as we've sold enough from her to pay for a car we'll buy one." Perhaps he had thought he was safe enough on a deal of that kind, but the cow proceeded to perform so sensationally, not only at the milk-pail but in her outstanding offspring, there was soon enough money to pay spot cash for the big car. Charlie, a natural showman, capitalized on this stunt by having a photograph made showing himself seated at ease in the front seat of the Cadillac, holding the halter rope of the cow, which stood placidly by as if to say "Shucks, folks, it was nothing." The picture then was printed on the

Cedarside Farm letterheads, and "the automobile cow" became famous throughout the Midwest.

Professor Kildee had told me a little about Charlie and about kindly Mrs. Nelson before I went there. "You'll have to work hard," he said, "but they'll treat you right." He had overlooked telling me that living with the Nelsons was their daughter, Elizabeth McHenry, a charming, vivacious young woman about my own age, and already a widow. Here, I thought, as I unpacked my suitcase in the hired man's room that had been assigned to me, was a situation that was going to have to be handled with considerable tact. I was pretty sure by this time that I was gaining the inside track with the brown-eyed, curly-haired girl down in Clinton County, though the competition had been tough. It would hardly do to mention, except very casually, in my letters to her, the proximity of young Mrs. McHenry. Nor would it be altogether diplomatic to talk in too glowing terms around Cedarside of the classmate's sister whom I had met at Ames. I was going to have to watch my step.

I soon learned that I was, indeed, going to have to work hard. Our days on the farm began at 4:15 A.M., when Charlie shouted "'Erb, 'Erb!" up the stairway. He was a bit English too, like Grandfather Wilkinson. On account of his deafness, I had some difficulty in making Charlie hear that his call had wakened me, but I found that a high-pitched "Yah!" usually did the trick. We milked those black and white cows three times a day, always by hand, at four in the morning, again at

eleven o'clock, and the third time at seven in the evening, and how they did produce under Charlie's expert handling. "Don't never step in the feed trough," he told me, for he had the not unreasonable notion that cows were just about as particular as human beings when it came to eating. I never forgot this, and even today I cannot bring myself to step in a feed bunk. If I see someone else doing it I cringe slightly and hasten to tell them what Charlie told me thirty-five years ago.

He had some definite ideas about what sort of feed Holsteins liked. For instance there were cowpeas, a sort of giant version of ordinary garden peas. These he had sowed broadcast in several small fields, and by midsummer they stood from two to three feet high. About seven in the morning we went out with a mower, a rake and a hayrack and picked up a wagon load of freshly-cut peas, pitching the green forage on by hand. As the dew clung to every stem and leaf we were soon soaked almost to our waists. Once in what I thought was a flash of brilliance I asked my boss why we didn't wait and cut the stuff just before noon when the dew was off. "The cows likes it better with the dew on," he said, and we went on doing it the same way all summer.

When we put up alfalfa hay we cocked it by hand into little piles just as I suppose Maud Muller must have done in her day, and then we draped over each haycock a white canvas cover weighted at each corner with a piece of brick so the wind would not blow them off. If you stood at dusk and surveyed a field of curing hay fixed up in this manner it was like looking at a

miniature tent city. The hay did come out in wonderful shape, but I have often thought, while watching our own modern forage harvester pull into a field of alfalfa and eat up the windrows at a speed as fast as a man can walk, and blow the lush, green feed into a ton-and-a-half truck rumbling along side, how we can now produce more and better feed in an hour than we used to in a long day of back-breaking work.

Elizabeth was nice to me. We sometimes played tennis in the evening on a rather rough, gravelly court across the driveway from the wide veranda that extended almost the entire length of the south side of the house. But by that time of day I didn't have much steam left. I felt greatly complimented when she invited me to go with her to the alumni banquet of Waverly High School one pleasant summer evening. We took the Cadillac of course. Elizabeth was toastmistress that night, which meant that I too sat at the head table with the big shots of Waverly High. I could fairly feel the curious stares of the assemblage boring into me. You could almost hear them whispering to each other, "Who's that new man with Elizabeth?" "Somebody from out of town I guess." "College man too, I hear." I tried to look as blasé and as collegiate as I could. On the way home Elizabeth was at the wheel of the big car, but she was afraid to try to drive it in the garage for the building was scarcely large enough and it was easy to scrape a fender getting in and out. Charlie, she said, had warned her not to try it. However, she seemed to be confident that I could manage the machine, so at

her suggestion we started to change places in the seat as the Cadillac rolled along the highway. We both moved at once and managed to get stuck for a few seconds under the steering wheel with her sitting sort of on my lap. This struck Elizabeth as being funny, and she hooted as we got ourselves straightened out and I pulled the veering car back in the road. I coaxed the automobile carefully into the garage with a certain amount of relief. A young widow on one's lap, even accidentally, was upsetting.

The next morning at the breakfast table Elizabeth told Mr. and Mrs. Nelson all about the banquet and went on to explain hilariously how we had changed seats in the Cadillac and "were stuck for a while under the steering wheel." I felt my face turning very warm and very red as I tried to concentrate on my oatmeal, but I could feel my boss peering a bit curiously at me under his heavy eyebrows. I don't believe I reported this incident to the curly-haired girl in Clinton County. Undoubtedly the toastmistress of that alumni banquet has long ago forgotten our evening with the elite of Waverly for she has been Mrs. Ernest F. Cramer, of Galva, Illinois, for many years.

While I am on the subject of summer vacations perhaps I had just as well recount the expedition I undertook in the year following the one at Cedarside. Again Professor Kildee lined up a place for me. I call him "Professor" because that's what he was then — the title of "Dean" was to come later. I still had not had enough of working away from home. I wanted to see new places,

meet new people, find out how things were done in other parts of the country. My father and mother, I am quite sure now, had hoped that one summer away from home would be enough. This time a job developed on a ranch in the extreme northeast corner of North Dakota, near the town of Hamilton, in Pembina County. The manager of the outfit wanted, so his letter said, someone to feed and fit a string of Holstein cattle for the fall shows. The pay was magnificent, $40 a month, and I felt that my summer with Charlie Nelson had made me just the boy the ranch needed.

Once more my folks agreed to my leaving soon after I arrived home in June after the spring term had ended. My father took me to the train to start the 700-mile trip to Hamilton, and tears stood in his eyes as he shook hands with me and told me good-bye. This was something I couldn't understand at the time, nor was I to understand it until I watched my sons leave for faraway places many years later. Homesickness really overtook me this time as the train rolled on through Minneapolis, Tintah, St. Cloud and Fargo, but there could be no turning back.

I awoke the next morning to peer from the window of my berth at one of the most gorgeous sights I have ever seen, hundreds and hundreds of acres of flax in full bloom, stretching off to the far horizons of the flat lands of the Red River Valley like bright blue lakes stirring under a gentle breeze and catching the full brilliance of the rising sun. It was breath-taking. I didn't know then flax was one of the oldest known plants cultivated by

man, that Egyptian mummies were enveloped in its fibers, and that its use among the ancient Jews was common even in the days of the Old Testament.

I knew it would be mid-afternoon before the train reached Hamilton, and I hoped someone from the ranch would meet me there for I knew not a soul in the whole state of North Dakota and had only two dollars in my pocket. I considered uneasily how long one might exist on such a trifling sum. But I need not have worried. As I stepped down on the wooden platform in front of the tiny station where the Great Northern train halted a moment before steaming on toward the Canadian border and thence to Winnipeg, a tall, rather handsome man with a pipe in his mouth approached me. "You the man from Iowa?" he inquired briefly. I said that I was. He introduced himself as the manager of the ranch where I was to work, but for the life of me I cannot recall his name. Then, indicating a team and surrey which stood at the end of the platform, he said "Sandy'll show you the road to the ranch. I'll be out later." Sandy, I found, was the manager's ten-year-old son, and after tossing my suitcase in the back seat of the rig we started out. It was about six miles to the ranch, the team was slow, and Sandy and I took over an hour making the trip. He was a talkative kid and full of questions — some of the first things he wanted to know were where I was going to spend the Fourth of July, then only about two weeks away, and whether I was going to stay until "freeze-up," meaning until cold weather. I couldn't give him very satisfactory answers.

The ranch was disappointing. As we drove into the dreary, wind-swept yard where odd pieces of machinery were strewn about, and I surveyed the bleakness and the barrenness of the place where not a single tree or line fence broke the monotony of the landscape, I wished fervently that I was back in Cerro Gordo County. Far off to the west hung what appeared to be a low thin line of haze, which Sandy told me was "the Pembina Mountains." They didn't look like mountains to me.

I retrieved my suitcase from the back seat of the surrey and followed Sandy to the house, where I met his mother, Sandy of course forgetting to introduce me. She was a small, blond, friendly woman, and I liked her at once. We talked for a while and presently discovered that some cousins of mine in Cannon Falls, Minnesota, were classmates of hers at school. This was reassuring and I began to feel better. By this time Sandy's brother and two sisters had appeared to stare at me. Their ages ran, I guessed, from about nine to twelve, and there was also a baby only a few months old in the family. This, I thought, is going to be quite different from Cedarside Farm.

I went outside then to have a look around before supper. Some distance from the house a new dairy barn was being built, and I was eager to inspect it. This appeared to be the one redeeming feature of the general layout of ranch buildings, which were, generally speaking, not in good condition. I found the new structure to be a huge thing, one hundred and fourteen feet long and wide enough to allow for two parallel rows of

stanchions with feed alleys for each, and a driveway through the center. This looked encouraging, though the construction of the interior seemed to have come to a halt. Overhead there was a great haymow, where in a few weeks we would hold a barn dance to which people would come from 50 miles around.

As I strolled around the barn I came upon a pleasant-looking young man about my own age busily applying red paint to the outside of the building. We engaged in casual conversation for a few minutes, then introduced ourselves, and I found he was named Jack King and that he was from Red Wing, Minnesota. A half-dozen men were building a long cattle shed some distance away, and Jack told me they were lumberjacks down from the north for the summer. "Pretty tough cookies, too," he said. Jack had arrived at the ranch only a few days before I did.

In a short time a bell clanged noisily from where it hung on a pole near the house, indicating that supper was ready. The manager had come home now, and he nodded curtly to Jack and me as we came in to sit at the long table in the kitchen. The lumberjacks were, indeed, a hard-looking lot, and said nothing at all as they wolfed their food. The wife of the manager had nothing to do with the cooking. This job, I soon saw, was taken care of by one of the most unattractive hired girls I have ever seen, and her training in the preparation of food had been sadly neglected somewhere along the line. At all times of the day she wore an extremely grimy dust-cap on her head. Jack once de-

clared she wore the same cap at night too, though neither of us had the slightest intention of finding out for sure.

Evenings in June in that part of the country are long. It doesn't get really dark until nearly ten o'clock, and by three in the morning the first hint of the sun is appearing in the east. We sat about on the back steps of the house after supper wondering how to put in the time until sundown. The four young children played noisily about us, engaging in sharp, minor quarrels every few minutes. The lumberjacks relaxed as they got their pipes well stoked and drawing easily, and talked profanely of orgies up in the timber country that would turn your stomach. I noticed they seemed to sort of pair off. Jack explained to me that this was common in the ranch country as well as in the northern woods. Most everyone had a "pardner," he said. As bedtime approached and the men rose and stretched and said they guessed they might as well turn in, Jack winked at me to follow him. We went upstairs to a hot, stuffy room, which, it appeared, was the spare room — they didn't call them guest rooms then. "They stuck Sandy in here with me when I first came," said Jack, "but if you're here first he'll have to sleep somewhere else." I glanced at the bed. There were no sheets on it, only a pair of horse blankets. Now if you ever tried sleeping between these in June you will know that they are a bit warmer than most people like. You will know too that they have one side that is extremely rough and scratchy while the other is fairly smooth, but if you are young and tired you will not mind too much and the

smooth side will feel almost like the finest percale. As we crawled into the blankets and adjusted ourselves to the sagging, squeaking springs Jack yawned deeply and said "I think you and me better be pardners while we're here." I agreed that perhaps we had.

The next morning I asked the manager where the Holsteins were that I was to start work on — I had seen none about the place. "They're off in a back pasture somewhere," he told me. "We'll get 'em up after a while, but I'll show you what to do first." I followed him to a small lot beyond the new cattle shed, and here we came upon some livestock that I had not seen the night before, a band of about 200 sheep. "Got to get 'em sheared before the real hot weather comes," said the boss. This was an operation that I had never even watched, and while it did not promise to be as interesting as working on the cattle, still I had wanted to learn new things, hadn't I, and it would be kind of fun to see how the boss did it. Probably all I would have to do would be to sort the sheep and get them ready for him to shear, and I guessed I could stand it for a day or two. Besides with only two dollars in my pocket, I was not in a position to argue.

Sandy and his brother a year or so older were with us, and we worked the sheep into a still smaller lot adjoining a decrepit horse barn which contained the shearing machine. This consisted of a clipping head at the end of a flexible piece of tubing and was similar to the outfits commonly used today, but with one difference — the power had to be furnished by a helper oper-

ating a hand crank. The thing turned hard too, as I soon discovered. The boss grabbed the first sheep out of the runway we had constructed in the barn, set it upon its struggling fanny and proceeded to demonstrate how the clippers should be used. I manned the hand crank. "Now," said he, "you see how it's done. The boys'll crank for you." Before I could gather my wits to set up an indignant protest, I found the clippers in my hand while the manager disappeared through the barn door, not to return that day. I surveyed the band of sheep out in the lot. It looked like there were a thousand of them out there now. I was pretty grim. This was worse than cocking alfalfa by hand at Cedarside. I wondered what Kildee would do in a situation like this. The boys stood silently by, sympathetic but not very helpful. Suddenly I decided that I would learn to shear sheep or bust. Nobody was ever going to say that there was anything an Ames man could not do if he put his mind to it.

It was quite a struggle, for it takes a while to learn how to upend a sheep and balance it on its bottom while you open up its fleece along its belly like a suit of underwear, meanwhile holding the animal's back firmly against your chest, and taking care that you don't get an eye gouged out by a flailing hind foot. I was mindful of the motto of Iowa State, "Science With Practice," and was convinced that I was getting the practice but wondered where in samhill was the science. The two boys, finding the cranking monotonous, had a tendency to slow down the speed of the machine now and then,

which caused the clippers to stick and bind in the wool. The cutting knives dulled rapidly and had to be taken out and sharpened several times a day on a grinding wheel. The oil from the fleeces saturated my clothes, and I must have smelled to high heaven. But I finally got the knack of it and then I wouldn't give up until the whole flock was done. When the boss asked me how I was getting along I told him rather grimly, "Well enough." It was almost the Fourth of July before I finished that band of sheep, so you can see I was not speedy. But I'm pretty sure I could still shear a lively ewe today — if I had to.

Sandy and his brother and their two little sisters had been getting pretty excited as the Fourth of July drew near. They pestered Jack and me constantly with questions about where we would go and what we would do on the holiday. They were even more excited about it than they were the day their dad, the manager, came home with a new Ford car. It soon became clear, however, that there was not much choice of places to go for a celebration.

About 20 miles away to the northwest was the little town of Walhalla, and the news had gotten well around the countryside that this was indeed the place to go on the Fourth. Horse racing, ball games and plenty of lusty entertainment were promised in the posters that appeared well ahead of the great day. Jack and I were to have the day off of course, so we approached the manager with a request to borrow the team and surrey. To reach Walhalla we would drive about 10 miles to

a town called Cavalier, leave the team and surrey at a livery barn, and take a Great Northern train the rest of the way. We figured the boss, his wife and the kids would go in the new Ford. We felt we would have a pleasant early morning trip across the broad, flat prairie lands, where the dark fields that were being summer-fallowed checkerboarded the vast greenness of the growing wheat. The birds would chatter gaily to us as we jogged along, and the long shadows of the morning sun would lead the way far ahead of us. It was our first holiday of the summer, and we meant to enjoy it to the full. By this time we each had a few dollars in our pockets and felt quite independent. It would be nice to fling our hard-earned cash around a bit. We didn't know it, but a slight change in the plans we were contemplating so blithely was in the making.

We had no difficulty in arranging for the use of the horses and the rather battered surrey, and we arose at dawn the morning of the Fourth to get started for Cavalier. The youngsters and the boss were up too. As we hurried through the process of harnessing and hitching up, the manager came over and said that his wife did not feel equal to starting out until later on in the forenoon with the baby and the four older children. Would we mind too much if the two little boys and their two little sisters went along with us? He and his wife would meet us in Walhalla when we arrived, and he handed us train fare for the kids. Again I thought, what would Kildee do in a situation like this?

Well, there wasn't much for Jack or me to say except

to agree with something less than enthusiasm that we guessed it would be all right. Now if you can picture two young men, each around 24 years old, starting out on a bright Independence Day morning with a surrey full of chattering, excited children you can imagine how we looked and felt. Jack and I expressed ourselves vehemently to each other in pig Latin so that the kids would not understand what we were saying as we drove along. The countryside that morning did not look as enticing as we had expected.

In perhaps an hour and a half we came to Cavalier, put our rig in a livery stable, and herded our charges on the train that presently came steaming into the station. The children were frightened by it and almost balked at getting aboard for it was their first ride on one. Jack and I consoled one another by saying that it would not be too long before we would be relieved of our unsolicited responsibilities, and that it certainly would be nice to peer out the car windows and see the boss's Ford waiting at the station in Walhalla.

It was about ten-thirty in the morning when we halted jerkily at the rough board platform that was already jammed with celebrators who had come down to watch the train pull in. My "pardner" and I were interested in just one thing, finding as quickly as possible a certain couple in a certain new Ford. We had had our hands full in keeping the clamoring kids in their seats until the train stopped for they were coming at last to the place they had been dreaming about for weeks. But there was no such car in sight as we de-

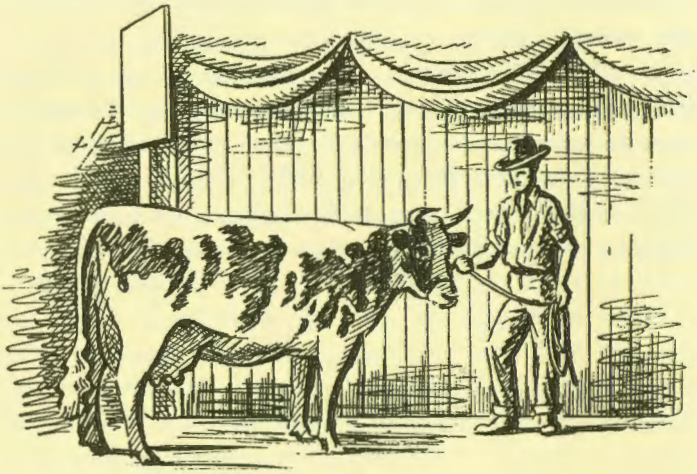
mother was to have brought a picnic lunch for everyone. Were we going to have the children on our hands all day? It began to look like a deliberate double cross. We saw that we were going to have to feed the four youngsters pretty soon for it was getting harder and harder to herd them by the refreshment stands where the mouth-watering smells of frying hamburgers and hot dogs gnawed at the emptiness of our stomachs and our dry throats yearned for huge beakers of lemonade and endless bottles of soda pop. Soon after noon we gave up what seemed to be the futile search for the manager and his wife, and lined up the two little boys and their sisters on a plank before one of the refreshment counters and told them they could have two hot dogs apiece and a bottle of pop. We could scarcely afford more, but our charges eyed us with what seemed to be great gratitude and proceeded to absorb the nourishment at astonishing speed. They could, no doubt, have eaten twice as much with no effort at all, and Jack and I observed the disappearance of the food with some alarm. We were in a bad mood anyway, and we wondered how much cash it would take to sustain life in the youngsters until we could get them home.

We had no sooner stepped away from the counter and taken up our hand-in-hand formation again and barked orders to keep in line or else, than we ran smack-dab into the people we had been looking for all morning. We could have kissed them, our relief was so great, but my pardner and I felt that we should at least preserve some appearance of irritation at their late arrival

scended to the platform. The kids wanted to know, a bit tearfully, if their folks weren't coming. Jack and I wanted to know too. Perhaps, though, the boss had decided to stop a while over on the main street of Walhalla, figuring that the train would not be in till later. We determined upon an exploratory expedition about the town, but before setting out we held a coaching session with the four children in which we explained firmly just how they should proceed. They were to join hands, with the two girls in the center, while Jack and I protected the flanks, so to speak, by each taking a boy by the hand. In this manner the six of us would walk abreast along the sidewalks and nobody would get lost. Jack barked "Now, line up, you brats," in the manner of a drill sergeant, and we started out. If we had looked funny in the surrey we looked even funnier now. People stared at us, some grinned, some laughed outright and made remarks which we could not quite catch, being considerably occupied with seeing that the kids didn't let go of each other's hands as they stared openmouthed at the window displays of firecrackers and skyrockets, and at the enticing refreshment stands along the way.

It didn't take long to make the round trip covering the business section of the town, for Walhalla had then a population of perhaps 500 persons. We marched the youngsters hopefully up one side of the main street and down the other four or five times, thinking that surely we must have missed the boss and his wife somewhere in the crowd. Jack and I were getting madder by the minute, and the kids were getting hungry. Their

so we did not greet them with too much effusion. The boss apologized for being so long in getting to the celebration, said he had trouble getting the new car started. "Must have flooded her or something," he explained. We were inclined to accept his explanation and let it go at that. The kids broke formation at once. They had been extremely well behaved, we had to admit, though perhaps we had kept them pretty well cowed by our numerous threats, growled sotto voce at them as we walked the streets of Walhalla. Jack and I were ready to start celebrating at last — and we did.



the best years

Around the first of August, Jack and I decided we had had enough of the North Dakota ranch. The food was getting worse, if that was possible, and we were developing a fairly well-founded suspicion that the cook was more interested in the boss himself than in getting good meals. There had been only about a week of actual work with the Holstein cattle, all as wild as deer when

we got them up from the pasture, and a brief showing at the Pembina County Fair was a headache because the animals were of course not trained to lead or stand quietly. The barn dance in the huge new haymow had been a great event to be sure, and we danced till the streaks of dawn slanted up in the east. In fact I danced so much with a cute little girl whom Sandy, young as he was, had fallen for, that he told me "I wish you'd stayed in Iowa."

My pardner and I as we lay in our horse blankets on steamy nights and cursed the bad luck that had brought us to a place we did not like, planned what we would do next. We settled upon the day we would tell the boss to give us our time. Jack had a bicycle, and he would ride it to Hamilton the morning we quit, while I hoped to persuade the manager to drive me there in the Ford. I would ship my suitcase home, keeping only a few necessary articles of clothing, and the remains of a box of fudge the curly-haired girl in Clinton County had sent me. These things I would tie on the handlebars of the bicycle I hoped to buy in a little shop we knew of in Hamilton, and we'd be off on the open road to explore at our leisure the broad prairies of the Dakotas. We would sleep in the shelter of friendly haystacks, working a day or two now and then when we felt like it. We might go on to Montana or swing down through Wyoming and Colorado; there was no hurry, for the days would be long and the nights mild until early September.

"I'll raise your wages to fifty dollars a month," the

boss told me when I explained rather timidly that I was going to leave. "I've taken an awful liking to you," he went on, "but I never had any use for that pardner of yours." I suspected the reason for his dislike was the fact that Jack, an outspoken lad, did not take orders too kindly sometimes. When I said that my mind was made up the manager finally agreed to drive me to Hamilton. Meanwhile Jack had pedaled rapidly away on his bicycle that morning according to our plan, but without saying anything further to me, which I thought was a bit strange. However, I felt I would soon be seeing him anyway as we started on what we both looked forward to as quite an adventure.

It was nearly noon before the boss could leave to take me to town, and I fretted over keeping Jack waiting in Hamilton so long. We had become good friends as well as pardners and would have some great times on the road. But when we arrived in the little village the manager and I hunted all over town for an hour or so. Jack and his bicycle had disappeared completely and absolutely. I was terribly disappointed. I could not understand how he could have let me down so badly. The manager was sympathetic but said little. I thought he was even thinking "Well, what could you expect of a fellow like that?"

Finally we gave up the search, and the boss said as long as he was not busy just then he would drive me to Grand Forks, about 50 miles off to the south. He must not have been kidding when he said he liked me

for that night he took me to Ringling Brothers' circus which happened to be playing in Grand Forks, found a place with some friends of his where we stayed overnight, and the next morning took me to the well-kept dairy farm of a man named Jerry Bacon, and persuaded the manager to give me a job helping show Holstein cattle at the Grand Forks Fair, then in progress.

This was better. The manager of the dairy farm, when he learned I was from Mason City, said, "Why, I used to go to Business College there," whereupon we said the usual hackneyed things about it being a small world and so on. The cattle were good. In fact one of the cows was at that time world champion for milk production over a period of one year. I looked at her with considerable awe at first, but when they told me to go ahead and milk her I found she munched her feed quietly and "gave down" much in the manner of lesser animals. She had a special stall at the Fair, and I slept in it beside her at night, feeling that I was indeed in distinguished company. The shattering blasts of rockets from the evening displays of fireworks, the raucous calls of the barkers — carnival people call them talkers — along the midway or the nearby bawling of a homesick heifer disturbed the champion not at all, and I wished that I had been blessed with an equally iron clad nervous system. In the daytime when streams of people came by to see the cattle and some of them asked how much milk this cow gave in a year's time we delighted in telling those whom we could plainly see were city

folks such exaggerated tales of the cow's production that had they stopped to figure it out they would have known us for the world's most stupendous liars.

The chief herdsman, under whom I worked, was a fairly lowbrowed character with a weakness for women and evil-smelling home brew, and, as we lounged about the barns after the evening feeding was done, he liked to regale the rest of us with tales of his considerable prowess with each. He once explained in some detail how he could tell "good" girls from "bad" girls, but we were not much impressed with his "system." One afternoon I was careless enough to stand directly in front of him as he opened one of the many bottles of beer he consumed daily. The cap of the bottle came off suddenly as he held the thing slanted toward me, and the carbonated rush of the liquid in my direction thoroughly soaked the front of my shirt. This would not have been a serious matter in itself, but in a minute or so we observed Mr. Bacon himself approaching our stalls to see how his show herd was getting along. I managed to keep busy at some little distance away from the owner of the cattle and well to the lee side of him. I felt that it was not an opportune moment to discuss Holsteins with him.

On show day, as we led out our animals, washed and brushed and oiled, with their horns glistening and the brushes of their tails carefully combed out after being braided the night before so as to give them a nice marcel wave, I was delighted to see the judge was none other then my old friend and professor, H. H. Kildee,

who, as he always does, dispatched the classes of cattle with smiling efficiency. This was more like it — the "big time" of showing that I had been yearning for ever since the days at Cedarside. When Fair Week was over at Grand Forks I was satisfied to entrain for Cerro Gordo County and home. I had had enough of knocking about for one season.

But I still wondered what had become of Jack King. Why had our carefully planned expedition across the wheat fields of the Great Plains so suddenly blown up? I found out a few weeks later. A letter from him came just as I was ready to follow the now well-beaten trail back to Ames again. In it he explained why he had not waited for me at Hamilton that day. He could not understand why I had crossed him up, he said. I bristled at this, and then became indignant as I read on, for the boss, in his dislike for Jack had plotted to keep us apart. He had told my pardner as he hopped on his bicycle to leave the ranch that morning, that I had changed my mind and was going to stay on. Jack had pedaled angrily off without further word to me, as I have already told you. Of course I wrote him at once telling him what actually happened, and we corresponded in the most friendly way for quite a while. That was 35 years ago, and I am afraid we shall never make the trip we planned so blithely, at least not by bicycle.

It had been pleasant being home again for a few weeks; the Abbott-Detroit purred smoothly now and then on a Saturday night between Mason City and

Clear Lake over the first stretch of paving in Iowa, and there were light-hearted companions to go along on such an expedition. I told my mother that her house was so spick and span by comparison with the places where I had lived most of the summer that it was like being in a hospital. I thought she and my dad seemed relieved to have me back.

I was eager to get back to college for I felt sure the years of being a junior and a senior would be even better than the earlier years had been. The curly-haired girl would be there too, and it was becoming increasingly important that I see her. I hoped she felt the same about me.

There is no experience quite like getting back to a fraternity house after a long summer's vacation. The first arrivals, in the old days when there was no summer quarter, found a rather desolate place, dusty and cobwebby, and there was a lot of work to do in making the place presentable for the rushing season. But as the boys began dropping in by ones and twos and threes, tanned and exuberant after the months away from books and classes, flinging their luggage joyfully upon the front porch or the living room floor, and rushing to embrace their comrades of the year before, the days and the nights were high-lighted by a whole series of noisy and boisterous reunions. How we loved to brag to one another about the adventures and the escapades of the summer. And if we tended to exaggerate a bit who was to know the difference?

There was the thrill of getting back once more to

the classrooms of some of the great teachers of their day, men like Dr. L. H. Pammel, to whom every class presented a box of his favorite cigars. Whereupon the benign Doctor would make a gracious acceptance speech, and botany would be pretty much forgotten for the remainder of the class period. Or like W. H. Pew, who did his best to cram livestock feeding knowledge into our heads, and who was considerably embarrassed once upon a time at a pep meeting when the cheer leader called on the assembled crowd to burst forth with "Rah! Rah! Rah!, Pew! Pew! Pew!" Or J. B. Davidson, famous for his work with farm machinery and whom we couldn't blame for becoming slightly irritated one day with a tobacco-chewing student who persisted in firing the juice at a hot radiator. Soft-voiced L. B. Spinney was another great one. He calmly performed eye-catching experiments in physics to our open-mouthed wonder. We thrilled to the great Clyde Williams, immortalized in the stadium which bears his name, when he stood before us in the gymnasium and told us to take care of the bounding health we were starting with. And there was Orange Howard Cessna, the chaplain for so many years, beloved by thousands for his kindly ways and his sound advice, and we loved him all the more when he once told us as we left for a summer vacation that he hoped we would all come back "full of veal and zigor!" He laughed harder than anyone when he realized how a twist of the tongue had tricked him. Long after lectures are forgotten and laboriously filled notebooks are yellowing with age and

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Sun has set in a glow of red,
Moon climbs up from its eastern bed.
Kingbird stirs in a tree-top nest,
Farmers stop for a bit of rest.
Barley fields send their rich perfume
Through open windows in my room.

Restless pig stirs his litter-mates,
Cattle rub on the barnyard gates.
Windrows of new alfalfa hay
Lie in wait for another day.
Rustle of corn leaves, row on row,
Listen close and you'll hear them grow.

Voice of the gentle southwest breeze
Lingering still in the maple trees
Soothes the kingbird to quiet sleep;
A child asks God his soul to keep;
Stars wink down from their firmament,
I doze and dream — and am content.

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