

# The Autobiography of an Old House

By LESLIE E. FRANCIS

[Memories of the Francis family occupancy of the old pioneer home on the shores of East Okoboji lake in Dickinson county, Iowa, as depicted by the late Sen. Leslie E. Francis through the allegorical authorship by the "Old House," are continued. The first group of these sketches appeared in the January issue of the ANNALS, though written by the author in fact a year prior to his death in February, 1956.

Through the personality of "The Boy" so often spoken of by "The Old House," Senator Francis wrote of his own youthful days spent upon the prairies and about the lakes of northern Iowa. Likewise, events depicted are those coming under his personal observation, and often are really chapters in the life of the Francis household, the family friends and neighbors, all having historical value as relating to that area of the state, typifying current happenings of the era so vividly described.

As composite chapters from the Francis book not yet published, the manuscript being kindly loaned to the ANNALS, represents the last literary and historical effort of an able man written during days of declining physical strength and activity, now privileged to be published through courtesy of the family.—The Editor.]

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## The Old House Speaks

They placed me upon a hill overlooking everything about me. Although I stood among tall trees that covered the land between me and the lake, a road was cut down to the lake, wide enough to enable me to see the water, and in the winter when the leaves had fallen, I could see up and down the lake for many miles. Even when the leaves filled every branch I could see part of the lake because of the deep ravine, for there was a broad space where the trees were low and I could see over their tops. And of course the prairie was an open book for a long distance. So with the open prairie before me and the lake shore behind me, I could see

almost everything that happened in the entire neighborhood.

I was always greatly impressed by the weather. If we had long dry spells, my shingles warped and then when it did rain, the water came through upon my inner walls. This was disturbing to the family and it did not please me, but I was helpless—I could do nothing. Then rain, freezing as it fell, which was not at all uncommon, would loosen the putty that held my windows in their places, so that the next storm might force a whole window out. As I have said before, in winter the drifting snow would come through every crack and crevice. It was amazing how snow drifted into buildings. A wall or roof that would keep out rain often lets snow in. As a consequence, the people suffered much from the extreme cold. At night everything would freeze solid. There were times when men who wore whiskers found them frozen to the bed covers in the morning.

A person's breath would look like steam and the windows would be covered over with a heavy frost. I remember how much the children loved to stand by a frosted window and draw pictures on it. Almost always someone would tell them to stop — that bothered me for I could see no good reason why they should not have that little pleasure, but to the older folks there seemed to be something wrong about it so most of the writing and drawing were done when no one was looking.

The children dearly loved to scrape the frost from a place large enough to peak through at the weather outside. I have seen them thaw off such a place with their hands or even by blowing their hot breath against the glass long enough to melt away the frost. There were so few things in those days a child could do to have fun and it was amazing what little things gave pleasure.

I have seen the Boy work for hours at a time getting a button to whirl on a double string. He had seen the older children do it, so he felt he could do it too. He finally got the idea and the button revolved very swiftly

with a buzzing sound he greatly enjoyed. But again, when this little thing was so entertaining, he was told to stop that "racket."

As I said, I was greatly affected by the weather. I was located where I could see for great distances. In the fall of the year, I would notice the first cold "snap," as it was called. It made my very rafters shiver, for I could not forget that in a very short time, winter would be upon me again with all its cold and wind. The first warning of approaching fall was the frost that covered the ground during the night, only to melt away before noon. A little later the water would begin to freeze and the men had to use an ax in chopping holes in the lake so the animals could drink. Two men went along to water the cows and their calves—one to keep them in place while the other chopped holes through the ice. The cows would touch their noses to the cold water, hump their backs, shiver, and turn back to the barns without drinking a drop. But after two or three days without water, even the shivering calves would drink and then run swiftly back to the protection of the barn.

But one of the most interesting things to see in the fall was to watch the water freeze along the lake shore. The lake did not freeze over at once but gradually and usually during a very still night. In the morning it was like a broad piece of glistening silver. Sometimes when the lake did freeze suddenly when a cold winter wind was blowing, it looked like the Woman's ironing board—all creased with ridges and extremely rough. When this happened the boys and girls almost wept for it spoiled their skating. However, this sudden freezing seldom happened, only once that I can remember.

As the weather grew colder in the fall the wind usually blew so strongly that the waves dashed high upon the sand and rocks. If there were trees or stumps or rocks along the shore within reach of the waves, they quickly became covered with ice. Coat after coat of ice would be added until the most grotesque and amazing forms were created. Some-

times one could see what appeared to be a great bear, frozen stiff, or a horse or a cow or even a man. These images were so real at a distance that anyone seeing them for the first time was certain that he actually saw a frozen animal.

Because the water was always warmer than the air when the lake began to freeze, great clouds of steam rose from the lake and floated away like real clouds. I have seen the open lake giving off steam in the form of clouds to such an extent as to cover every tree along the banks with a heavy coating of ice.

There are few sights given to man so wonderful as to see a great lake in the actual process of freezing; to see the steam rise and float landward; to see the steam settle upon the ground, covering it like a white blanket; to see the steam settle upon the trees until every branch hung to the ground with the heavy load of ice. Then if the snow came and fell upon these trees, they became an object of beauty no artist has ever been able to paint as nature painted. When the sun burst forth, these trees shone and glistened with a radiance unbelievable to one who has not seen; and as the wind came up and the warmth of the sun loosened the silver load, the ice upon every limb began to crackle and snap and fall in great clusters upon the ground below, in a perfect cascade of glittering silver.

But when the steam from the lake ceased to rise and ice took its place, then came the snows of winter and I shivered in my fresh blanket of snow, fearing and dreading the storms which I knew were not far away. Long before I felt it could be safe, the boys and girls were upon their skates, dashing with the swiftness of fleeting birds over the smooth ice. How they did enjoy the sport! During the day they gathered huge piles of logs for the night's bonfire and when the evening chores were finished, down to the lake they ran and for hours skated here and there. The huge bonfire was lighted and in its glare I could see the swift movements as skilled skaters vied with each other. A girl and boy, hand in

hand, and in rhythmic unison, weaved in and out among the other skaters, gliding far out upon the lake where I could see them only by the light of the moon just rising over the trees. How beautiful were those scenes; how charming those swiftly passing evenings; how great the joy of those who came. But unhappily there were too few of these beautiful evenings, because when winter once clamped its fierce and unyielding fangs upon us, storms came and none were so hardy as to brave the blasts just for pleasure.

Storm after storm lashed its way across our country, leaving its burden of snow to block every road and making travel impossible. I have seen men drive to town only three miles away, taking their shovels with them to open the roads, be gone only a short time and upon returning, be compelled to shovel as much snow as when going. A few short minutes were sufficient to fill every path digged. This was true, even out upon the lake. Men would drive carefully over the exact road and in a very short time the tracks made by their sleighs would be filled. The next men to pass would trod down the drifted snow. Let this continue all winter, and in the spring, when the snow began to melt upon the lake, a very peculiar sight became evident—the snow on each side of the traveled road would settle and melt but the packed snow, where the sleighs had been driven, did not melt so quickly, with the result that this roadway would often stand as much as three feet above the ice and melted snow on either side. Then it became a matter of skilled driving to remain upon the high snow, and it seemed necessary to stay there, for the melted snow on top of the ice often was a foot or more deep before its weight and warmth melted holes in the ice, allowing the water to seep through. When that happened, the wise drivers kept off the lake, for it was easy to break through with certain disaster to follow. Indeed, many did drive upon the lake after the water had seeped through and many with team and sleigh went down, never to be seen again until the lake had cleared of ice,

and the warmer waters of spring caused the poor bodies to rise to the surface.

I remember when once two young couples drove into what was termed an "air hole," and all perished. In later years, and just beyond my vision, two brothers of the sisters who perished in the air holes were also drowned. Lakes are beautiful and lovely, but dark and gruesome tragedy often hovers to entrap the careless and unwary.

There was another warning that many failed to heed and yet, almost in words, it spoke to all who would listen—the changing colors of the ice. When ice first freezes, if there is no wind, it is so clear and bright that a diamond seems but a feeble competitor. Then as time passes, it seems to age, as persons age, for it loses its luster and its beautiful brightness merges into drabness. Later as the snow melts in spring and finds its way through the yielding ice, its color again changes. It becomes as blue as turquoise and you see it in a charm not noticed before. Then this blue turns to white and the whiteness is that of a human face from which life has flown—a pallor that is white, but more than white. Then the whiteness changes into a darkness greater than before, and we who have watched the lake in all of its moods know that the ice is about to break up. We know that it will not bear even the weight of a child and that only a slight wind is necessary to end its day of triumph over the waves. At night, usually, the wind comes and in the morning the lake is free of the bonds of winter, for the ice has gone as quickly as it came.

But gaze along the shores of the lake and see with what travail the ice loosened its clutch. See where it swept shoreward, carrying with it great dunes of sand. See where it has pushed an immense ledge of rocks far inland. See those buildings, foolishly placed too near the water, torn and twisted by a power that can pick up a great tree, tear it loose from its stronghold in the earth and lift it high above sand dune and rock and ridge. It is a fearsome sight to see the ice crunch its

way up a bank, see it grasp everything in its path, see stone walls give way almost as readily as trees and buildings and loose rock.

After the wind that drove the ice and piled it high upon the shore, there comes a day of peaceful quiet, and little waves roll upon the sand, and warm and balmy breezes blow. Then you know that winter has loosened its grip and that soon the delights of spring will be realized by those who have suffered and longed. And how I did delight with every recurring spring! I almost shouted with glee when the light of morning enabled me to see the lake once again free of ice.

I looked into the little streams that flowed through the timber between me and the lake and could see the muddy water flowing rapidly, increased with the warmth of noontide, almost stopped during the cold of night. I saw the snow, day by day, melting until much of the ground was bare. A little later I heard the honk, honk of geese and saw them flying northward in V form, just as I had seen them go southward the previous fall. They were always the first of the larger game birds. An occasional robin would hop, hop across my yard while the snow was still upon the ground, but I did not look upon them as sure signs of spring; but when the large geese flew above, followed by fat mallards, I knew that spring was almost there. And when the great trees in my yard began to bud, there could be no further question about it.

How glad I was to be rid of winter! I never did like winter and always rejoiced when the first warm breeze came from the south. With the first rains, the grass sprang up fresh and green, the buds on the trees turned to lovely leaves, and the flowers bloomed everywhere. Then it was the men went into the fields to plow and plant.

The first seeds to be sown were usually wheat and oats. This was usually done in fields that had grown corn. The corn stalks were broken down and then harrowed; oftentimes they were raked into rows and then

burned. It was an interesting sight at night to watch these fires as the rows of corn stalks were burned. Then just as the grass was about to come out from its long winter hiding, men set fire to the broad prairies. The dead grass burned with a dazzling flame. When sloughs were met by the rushing flames, the smoke would rise high and the flames would leap faster than the swiftest horse could run.

I remember seeing such a fire once. It proved to be a terrible thing, for the man was burned to death before my very eyes. He was coming to our new country, driving a covered wagon. His family and all his worldly goods were packed beneath its canvas cover. He walked by the side or rode one of the horses that pulled the heavy wagon. As he neared the lake, a prairie fire swept down upon them. It was fanned by a strong wind and rolled over the hills in great leaps. The man saw it coming and, as was the manner of protection against such fires, set out a counter fire, and as it left an open space of black cinders, he drove his team far enough into the burned area to be safe from the fire that was coming swiftly with the wind.

In this inclosure he waited for some time and as the fire did not reach him as soon as he thought it should, he felt perhaps it had died out, making it safe for him to go on. He walked to the nearby hill toward the fire. Just as he reached the top of the hill, the fire came like the wind from the valley below.

The man turned and ran with all his might toward the safety of the burned area where his family awaited him. It was only a short distance and he ran as one who knew that death was reaching out for him. In the very sight of his wife and children he ran, and had almost reached them when the rolling flames overtook him. In an instant his hair and his clothing were burning. He continued running and in a moment staggered toward his wife and family who reached him almost as soon as he entered the place of safety. He threw himself upon the ground, they fought the flames and



soon his clothing ceased to burn, but it was too late, for he had breathed the flames and his lungs were burned. He died in a very short time.

It seemed utterly terrible to me. He had driven many miles, seeking a new home. That new home was but a few miles away—almost in sight—when disaster struck and the father was no more. I saw all this, but was helpless; I saw him turn at the top of the hill; I saw him run as one who loved life and knew it was in great danger; I saw the flames overtake him and I saw him fall at the feet of his loved ones; I saw the great gathering of people who attended the funeral.

In later years his children often were within my walls. They seemed to have forgotten their loss, but I never looked over those eastern hills to the spot where he was burned to death before me without a shock as memory brought back that terrible scene. Pioneer life was bad at its best—so hard that I marvel men and women endured it—but they were made of strong purpose and rose to meet and overcome every hardship and crowding obstacle; and so a nation grew and grimly fixed its foundations upon the men and women who fought a greater fight than ever soldier fought.

I have said that they placed me in the tall timber on the bank of a beautiful lake so far from the water that when the trees were covered with heavy leaves, I could scarcely see through except at one place where a deep ravine ran down to the water, making a hollow along which I always could see the lake over the tops of the trees. There were also some open places where I could peek through, as it were, and see the lake and some of the shore.

Of all that I was able to see of things around me, I felt that the most fascinating was the water, with waves sometimes high, and at other times smooth as glass.

The next most interesting thing was the sky above with its ever changing colors—its clouds that sometimes were so high in the heavens and at other times floating

along so near the ground that my chimney almost disappeared in their denseness.

The lake was to the west and there were evenings when I could scarcely convince myself, even after years, that its water had not caught fire or turned to gold. Then as the sun sank below my vision and its rays were cast upward against the clouds that stood immovable above the shore line opposite me, the heavens were aflame, glowing and glistening with a beauty that no artist could duplicate nor writer describe. The rising sun had its charm, too, but never did its morning rays paint the sky as the rays of the departing sun.

There were no trees east of me to obstruct my view, save the two great oaks that stood at each corner, but they were so close that I could see through their bending branches and see the east light up with a glorious glow. I have seen the darkness go with the speed of light and have seen it leave so slowly as to make one wonder if ever day would come.

First there was a little break in the darkness to the eastward and then a streak of light would point upward and then the gloom of darkness would change to a deep brown, then a moment later the brown would disappear and in its place would be gray. Then the gray would dissolve and a confusion of colors would cover the face of the east, and then suddenly the disc of the deep red sun would peep over the hills, and the shades and shadows would go and light would come and day would be upon the hilltops and the tallest trees.

Another thing that deeply fascinated me was the way the birds in the trees welcomed the dawn. They would sit upon the branches of the trees before me, silent, apparently asleep. Then as the darkness changed to gray and gray to light, they would lift their heads and, no sooner awake, than songs burst forth from every tree around me. I do not know very much about music, but young people have often gathered within my walls and I have heard them singing sweet songs, and one of the boys of my family learned to play the violin and one

of the girls played something they called an organ, but never did they bring out music such as came from my trees every morning.

As night came on, it was interesting to watch the birds in my trees. They welcomed the coming day with song and they speeded the parting day with song. In the morning one little bird would sound the first note, another would join, and then another and another until the trees seemed alive with singing birds. At night it was different. All would sing as though they must send out just so many notes before the day was gone and that they were a little late. Then as the shadows fell, a bird here, another one there, would fold its wings, tuck its little head beneath them, and its song for that day was ended. Presently, only a single voice remained to usher out the dying day, and at last that lone voice was stilled, and all was quiet in the trees.

Sometimes the moon would rise over the eastern hills with almost the glow, and often with more than the beauty, of the sun itself. I have seen the skies so clear, as the moon sailed high, as to make its brightness greater than that of a day when the clouds hung low around me. I have seen its glow so bright that birds awaken and begin their morning devotions in glad songs of happiness, feeling that another day had come.

At such times I heard not alone the voices of those who had music in their hearts, but many sounds. Sometimes a donkey would raise its head and sound forth its hideous bray; a cow would moo for its little one, removed to be fed by hand; a great rooster would mount the highest fence post and awaken those who slept with its strident voice; a horse would whinny for its food; the watch dog would fancy it had heard a hostile sound and bark defiantly, giving notice to all the world to keep away; from far down among the trees would come the voice of the guinea hen, the most piercing, penetrating voice that has ever met my ears; then somewhere within my walls footsteps would fall and soon smoke would pour out my chimney, dishes would rattle, and

the enticing smell of bacon and eggs and hot coffee would float heavenward, and all who were old enough to know and share in the duties of the farm were made to realize that another day with its work and its play was before them.

It was amazing to see how little the children were who felt themselves big enough to begin a man's or woman's work. When the littlest girl was six or seven, she often asked to help with the meals, and great was her joy when she was permitted to stir the gravy. She swelled with pride when her father praised her as she wielded the big spoon; I could scarcely avoid smiling, if houses can smile, as I saw this little girl trying so hard to be a woman before her time.

In those days the grain came out of a spout into sacks that would hold about two bushels. If the grain were oats, it was not so very heavy, but if it were wheat, the weight was more than a hundred and twenty pounds. The men would pick up one of those sacks, take hold of the open end, twist it so that the grain would not leak out, lift it to their shoulders, and then carry it to the wagon.

The boys tried this. They would seize the open end, twist the end as they had seen the men do, put that end on the ground, tug and pull until the sack was over their shoulder and then would try to get up. It took both hands to hold the sack, one to hold the open end, the other to keep the sack in place, and it was some work to get to their feet; but in time they could and they would stagger over to the wagon, drop the sack inside the box, empty it, and then go back for another sack that was by that time filled.

It was a shame that someone did not stop them from such hard lifting, but they all did it and in time were able to grasp the open sack, tilt the sack up and swing it to their shoulders with what looked to be very little effort. When they could do this, they felt themselves to be men, ready for any work around the machine,

save feeding, which I have explained, was too dangerous for boys.

But I must take no more of your time in telling of the things I saw and knew in my youth. When you began reading of me, you no doubt felt me entitled to sympathy. To you I was an old house standing in a lonely place, almost forgotten. Yes, I am an old house, but I am filled with memories—filled to overflowing. You ask how an old house can have memories? As well as if an old house has a soul. We live and see and hear all that those who make their home within our walls live and hear and see. We are part of them. We share their joys and sympathize in their sorrows. Their souls become a part of our lives—of us.

My life beneath those great oaks was not the lonely, dreary life you perhaps imagine. It is true that I could not speak in words to those who in the passing years became so dear to me, but I could see them—could hear them speak—could share with them their joys and their sorrows. And who of all the children of men saw more than I, heard more than I, or lived a fuller, happier life than I?

Hence I rejoice in the good that came to my doors and I forget the sorrows, as sorrows must always be forgotten. The sun and moon and stars were in the heavens to light the pathway to my door; the falling rains came to bring beauty to my flowers and my lofty trees; the gatherings of friend and family came to me to cheer and gladden. I was set upon my high place that no lovely thing in nature or in life should pass unseen.

In the way of a house, I lived. I rejoiced and was glad. No one may justly ask more.

#### OLD SOLDIERS

I have spoken of the Old Soldier who moved to the farm next to mine and lived there many years. His name was John and he was a very unusual man. He volunteered at the very opening of the war with the south and was still fighting when Lee surrendered at

Appomattox. In fact, he was with Sherman's army in its march to the sea.

The Man had been a soldier, too, not in the south, but along the Missouri river among the Indians. The two men had much in common, although they had fought under different generals and in different parts of the country.

John usually came to visit my family and I well remember his tale of what he called the Battle Above the Clouds. Sherman's army had not yet reached the sea but was fighting its way toward a place called Atlanta. The rebels had climbed to the top of a high mountain called Lookout, and John and many other men had been sent to drive them away. Whenever John began telling of this fight, he simply could not sit still—he would stand up and walk around, jump high in the air, and sometimes even crawl on the ground to show how they had fought. It all was very interesting to me and I listened attentively to all he said. Of course, the enemy was driven from the mountain and the battle won.

There were many other battles on the way to Atlanta and a big fight was made to enter the city, but at last the northerners won and held the city, and then began the famous march to the sea. John told how the negroes came from the plantations to welcome them and how they fed the half-starved wives and children of the very men they were trying to defeat. I had the impression that the March to the Sea was chiefly for the purpose of giving food to the poor people, but in later years I was surprised to hear it said that the March was not such a pleasant thing, nor were the wives and children of the enemy treated so kindly. But war is war, and is terrible at its best so perhaps what was done could not be helped after all.

The Man had little to say of his service in the war. I never heard him mention it unless someone first brought up the subject. But the moment the Grand Army of the Republic was organized he became a member and

never failed to attend every meeting and march in every parade as long as his failing strength permitted him to do so. I often heard him say that the greatest hardship in his days in the army was not the Indians but the extreme cold. Oftentimes they would be sent out to capture Indians who had left the reservation. It was difficult to find them and frequently the soldiers had to struggle through deep snow and in weather far below zero. There was little fun and much work all the time. Sometimes the Indians would put up a short fight and then run; they would hide behind rocks and trees, shoot and then dodge and hide again. It was never safe to stray away from the main army, for if one did, it was almost certain he would be shot down or captured and tortured.

I knew nothing of war, but I realized that while our men who fought in the south were in greater danger of being killed, they suffered less hardship from the weather than the northern soldiers. But every "Yankee," both in the north and in the south, did his part and each was proud of his service and justly felt that he had served his country well.

I was very much interested in the services held one day in May, called Memorial Day. When I was young, there were many soldiers still living. I do not know why they were called Old Soldiers for they were still young men. Always Memorial Day was a big day in our county and for miles around. People quit their work and gathered wherever the celebration was held. It was an all day affair, from early morning until late at night.

Cannon were fired at sunrise and the resounding noises awakened everyone—if anyone was still sleeping. The noise from the cannon could be heard almost across the county. The town was almost four miles away, but on still days I could hear very clearly from across the lake.

I could hear the band playing and sometimes when all was quiet and the breeze just right, I could hear the voices of the men who gave orders to the soldiers on parade. Sometimes I could even hear the voice of the

man who gave the address, for no such celebration was complete without a speech. I could hear the voices of the men and women and little children join in the singing the old war songs.

When at last the family returned at night, tired but happy, I always listened to their talk about the big day in town. When one has never seen a thing, it is most perplexing to understand or appreciate it, but I really longed to know more about those celebrations. You can imagine my surprise and delight when I heard the family say that the next Memorial Day celebration was to be held on our farm, almost at our very door.

Toward the last of May many men and women came out to look over the entire farm. Some were desirous of holding the exercises down by the lake, others, in the front yard. I was all in a jitter about it for I knew if they were held down by the lake, I should be able to see little of what was going on because of the branches of the trees, while if held in our yard, I could see all.

The committee consulted with the soldiers who decided the yard was the place for the celebration as it offered a better space for marching. So upon my lawn, a little later, the celebration was held, much to my joy.

I watched the preparations being made and I noticed that the women were the workers of the day. The men were given special things to do and started on their way to do them, but upon meeting some comrade of the war, the errands were forgotten. Like bees, the women rushed here and there. Soon my yard was filled with long tables. A place had been prepared for drinks — real drinks, too — for in those days nearly all the men drank liquor and a celebration without it would have been tame indeed.

At last the great day arrived. I was very excited and filled with curiosity. Just before the sun came up over my hills, I saw some men carrying two heavy pieces of iron into the yard a little distance from me. These irons were placed on the ground and then some black looking stuff was poured into a hole on the top of one piece.



The second iron was then set on top of this. I wondered what it was all about and watched carefully that nothing should escape me. Then I saw one of the men light a long thing that looked like a string. It burned with a sputter, but it burned. The moment it was lighted the men ran quite a distance away, some placing their fingers in their ears. All this was done so early that few people were yet up and almost all of the family were still asleep. I alone saw these things.

After the string was lighted, the fire ran closer and closer to the two large irons and when it entered the place where the black stuff had been placed, there was a roar that fairly lifted my shingles. The ground trembled and shook and I know that shivers ran along my very rafters. Many of my windows were broken. I had never heard such a noise in all my life. I was terribly frightened, but soon the men ran back and put some more of that black stuff into the same hole. They replaced the second heavy iron, which had been thrown fully fifty feet away, lighted another string, and again ran away. I knew what to expect this time, and while the shock was as great as before, I was not frightened. The men repeated this same thing many times, but before the second black stuff had been fired, everyone within my walls was up and ready for the excitement.

The Boy was quite small, but he was the first to reach the men. They had to grab him and bring him back from the irons which I then thought were cannons. I was much surprised to learn later that these irons were not cannons at all, merely two anvils loaned by the village blacksmith, who happily bossed the job of shooting them off each time. When I found that two pieces of iron could make such a noise, I wondered what a real cannon could do.

Shortly after the shooting, people began coming from all directions. Soon my yard was full of men, and women and little children, all dressed in their Sunday "best." For hours people kept coming, some on horseback, some afoot, some in wagons, a few in carriages and a few in

ox carts. Everyone brought food. Much as in harvesting time, the women vied with each other in having the best food. Every child was excited and running here and there. They would look longingly at the long tables of food. They would gather in small groups, peeking at everything put on the tables. One would point out a pie or a cake or some special delicacy and proudly announce that his mother had brought that.

I think no one else saw what I saw, but if anyone did, nothing was said, as some of the larger boys would saunter to the table and slyly slip some appealing article of food into their pockets. Presently they would be behind me or among the trees, eating what they had purloined with every symptom of real enjoyment.

At last the clanging of the big farm bell would ring out, which meant that the dinner was ready. From the mad rush and scramble, it looked as though that was the main reason everyone was there, but no matter how many came, it always seemed easy to find a place. Always a minister was present and before anyone was allowed to eat, he arose and gave a blessing for the food. From across the ravine I had heard this minister deliver very long sermons, but in this instance the words were few, and almost before the people were again seated, the passing of food ensued. These pioneers had no stunted appetites and it was a real joy to watch them tuck away the food. The men and women ate heartily, but it was the boys who made the food disappear. How they did eat and how they did pile the food upon their plates! Happy indeed were childhood days!

When the main food had been praised and eaten, on came the pies and cakes and huge quantities of ice cream, always made from rich cream. I always felt a little sympathy for those boys who had so slyly taken food from the tables before dinner was served, for usually at this stage they found themselves far too full to partake of any of the ice cream and cake. They would look longingly—at times tempted—at these desserts, but they were forced to pass them by. However, within a

short time, they would be back at the tables asking if any ice cream had been left. There was, and with happiness in their faces, they would again partake with great zeal.

After dinner the crowd gathered on the south side, sitting on benches and on the grass. Someone stood on my uncovered porch and brought the crowd to order. Young girls dressed in white sang several songs. I remember one was about "Grinding out the Wine" or something like that, which to me seemed very beautiful. When they had finished, several soldiers appeared with old fashioned fiddles and played music which I had heard so often played at the dances held within my walls. Many eyes had been filled with tears as the girls left the little platform, but those eyes cleared as the fiddlers played the old familiar dance music. I watched the change in their faces. Tears were wiped away and smiles took their place. I saw bodies twitch and wiggle, indicating that there were some at least who cared to change the day into a dance.

After the fiddlers bowed their way off the platform, the president of the day introduced the speaker, who was usually a lawyer. Just why lawyers or just why preachers were always chosen to give the addresses, I do not know. Perhaps it was because they were more accustomed to making long talks. The speech that afternoon was good.

After this splendid speech, boat races, potato races, jumping contests, wrestling matches, and even horse races were held. And that very day a very large man had come to the celebration, offering to race against their best horse. He asked a few rods start and offered to bet a hundred dollars that he could beat the horse. Naturally such a bet was called and the course marked off in the open road. The judges were chosen and the man and the horse placed.

At the sound of the pistol, away shot the man and the rider on the horse. The man ran like the wind — it seemed impossible that anyone so huge could run so

fast. On they ran, but the horse never overtook the man. On a longer run it might have been possible but not on that short distance marked off, and that was where the man knew exactly how much start was needed for so short a run. He made a great deal of money on races of this kind at the county fairs. Later on he came to our community to live. After many years he died. Even then he was so large that a specially prepared coffin was necessary for his body.

On this particular day no one seemed to have any desire to go home. A little before dusk the tables were reset, more food brought out, the supper bell rung, and again everyone rushed to eat. Appetites that had been fully appeased at the dinner table were again in good working order. Such was a Memorial Day—the first I had ever witnessed.

As darkness descended, many began the homeward journey, but I noticed that many young people were more than reluctant to leave, so in they came with the old fiddlers who seemed to enjoy the thought of dancing as much as the dancers themselves. Soon the rollicking tune of Money Musk rang out and the dance was on in full sway. I do not know when the dance ended, but I do know that the morning star had come above the horizon with its warning of day when the last of the dancers felt it time to leave.

I doubt if you of today appreciate the parties of my youth. I do not expect you to—conditions then and now are so utterly different. We had nothing; you have everything. We made our fun; you have your fun made for you. Little things were big in those days. Big, wonderful things are so much a part of your lives you scarcely give them thought.

But at whatever age and under whatever conditions, youth is youth and, as the elders began that great day in my yard, so the youngsters completed it to the music of the Morning Star.

#### SOME FIRST THINGS

I was often amused to note the things the Boy tackled.

He was the first to have a bicycle, the first to have a power boat, the first to have an automobile, and countless other things. I remember one night, when it was almost dark, seeing him come down the road from town. He was not walking nor was he riding, but seemed to be doing both. Part of the time he was leading a two wheeled affair and part of the time he was riding it. As he drew nearer, I saw it had two wheels built like the wheels of a light wagon—wooden spokes and iron tires. The wheels were not parallel, but one was in front of the other; the front wheel was very large and the back wheel very small. Between the two wheels was a high, hard wooden seat upon which he sat when riding.

He seemed to have trouble in keeping the machine in the road, and frequently fell off, but he would get up and go at it again. Presently he reached the house and all the family ran out to see what in the world he had. I heard him tell them it was a bicycle and how much it cost. Everyone tried to ride it, but fell off and finally gave up trying, but not so the Boy. He continued practicing on that wheel until he could ride it almost anywhere.

During the winter when the parties and dances were held at my house and the bicycle was new, the Boy entertained the guests by riding round the big room. He became such an expert in cutting circles and didoes round the floor that no one tried to compete with him. Always someone would try to ride it and always that adventurous person would fall sprawling on the floor.

A few years later the Boy came home from town one day with a really big bicycle. This one had iron spokes and soft tires. The seat was made of leather and had a spring under it, which made riding more comfortable. The front wheel was very large—so large that instead of being able to reach the ground, as on the smaller one, he could manage to just reach the pedals. With the seat built so high it put him up in the air quite a distance and it looked very dangerous, for there was nothing to

prevent the whole machine from tipping right over onto its nose. Anyone riding down hill was compelled to lean backward until it looked as if his back were broken, and if a stone or other obstruction were encountered, over went the machine and the rider. But it was a fine machine, nickel plated, and the Boy kept it beautifully polished.

Farmers dreaded meeting the Boy when he rode on the highway, as their horses were quite unaccustomed to such sights as these two bicycles. I remember one day he was riding down the road a short distance from me, when a neighbor came along with a fine prancing team hitched to a new buggy. The moment the horses saw the Boy and his bicycle, they began to rear and plunge and then galloped down the road. As they gave an especially hard lunge, the buggy tongue broke and immediately dropped to the ground into which it ran, with the result that the buggy climbed right up over the tongue, tipped over, and rolled end for end until the horses broke loose and disappeared in the dust. The man was thrown high into the air and fell with a thud on the ground where he lay for several minutes.

I was afraid he was killed, but soon he crawled to his feet and went off down the road hunting for his team. Meanwhile, the Boy ran as quickly as he could for the house, fairly trembling in his fright. I do not think he told his family about the accident, nor do I remember ever hearing of it again, so I judge that no great amount of harm was done.

The Boy heard about flying machines—the one Darius Green used—and decided to make one of his own. He did not build much of a machine, but he tried it out just the same. I saw him climb up on a high post with the machine fastened to him. Waving his wings, he gave a big jump, and landed in a heap on the ground. This did not discourage him at all for the next I knew he had built a pair of stilts. The first pair was not very high, but he continued making larger and still larger ones until he had a pair that could be climbed

onto only from my roof. He stood about sixteen feet from the ground when on these stilts and he could walk all over the place on them.

One day he went down the road in front of my yard, walking on these stilts. A man drove by, resulting in another runaway. The Boy was so frightened himself that he let go one stilt and slid down the other nearly to the ground before it fell over. After that, he kept in the yard when he saw a team coming down the road.

I could never tell what he would do next. One day he would build a threshing machine, another a boat, and still another something else. For awhile he had a yen to climb up on the high barn and, using a long stick, see how far he could swing himself before hitting the ground. He surely would have broken his neck but for the fact that around the barn had gathered a lot of soft manure to a depth of two or three feet, and he could land in this without being hurt.

Another time he read of men catching monkeys in the trees, and he decided to learn to swing through the trees like the monkeys did in the stories he had read. He would climb up a small tree—one about five or six inches in diameter—until it tipped over against another one, when he would let go his tree and grab the next tree as he fell. I was always afraid when he did this stunt, for he could have been severely injured had he fallen. But somehow he always caught another limb, and not once did he fall to the ground.

One day when the Boy was about fourteen, he came home greatly excited, and I heard him tell his mother that he had a printing press and that he was going to write a book and print it. You may believe that I watched this with great interest, but it did not prove to be much of a printing press. His press consisted of all the letters of the alphabet in small type and in capitals, and a bottle of ink.

He made a flat table about a foot square and drew twenty-six small squares on it. He marked the letter

A on one and then the rest of the letters on other squares until he had all twenty-six marked. Then he put the letters in type on the squares and was ready to begin his printing. He made a little square of wood upon which he fastened a thick cloth, poured some ink on that, and spread it around. Then dipping these squares in the ink and pressing them onto some paper, he formed words. It was a tedious task, but he enjoyed it. Hour after hour he picked up letter after letter, printing pages of his story. He had a period and a comma and he used these so frequently that his printed page looked as though someone had shot bird shot into it. This printing idea lasted for some time, but was eventually superceded by another.

He conceived the idea of binding books, and as he had saved the copies of a weekly story paper for years, he proceeded to bind them into a book. He made a press to hold the sheets together and then with infinite pains sewed the sheets into a book. I cannot say that it looked very much like a book, but he was very proud of it and he certainly enjoyed working at the job.

One time when about fifteen years of age, he read about Robinson Crusoe. He became greatly excited and I knew that something new was about to be tried. He went to the big woodpile, rolled logs around, measured them, and looked them over. Finally he found a log that suited him and he rolled it out from the others and then began cutting a trough down through the middle, almost the entire length of the log. He kept at this day after day, until I finally knew what he was doing—he was building a canoe like Crusoe had.

He rounded off the ends and worked and worked hollowing out the inside until the log did begin to look like a real canoe. One day an accident happened that stopped all work on the canoe for some time. In fact, I think he never did finish the thing at all. He was working away with a big ax, digging out the inside



of the log. His older brother came along and wanted the Boy to go with him and do something else. When the Boy refused to go, the brother began rolling the log back and forth. To stop the rocking the Boy held the side of the log and continued his cutting. In a moment the log was rolled just as the ax came down. The Boy's hand was almost cut off. I heard a scream and saw blood fairly spurting from the wound and saw both boys running toward me, loudly calling for help.

As always, the Woman was nearby and shortly she had the hand wrapped so that there was no further loss of blood. No particular harm came from the cut, but it did keep the Boy from finishing the canoe, for by the time he was able to work again, he had forgotten about it, or the log had been burned.

This incident reminds me of another in which the same two boys took part. The Boy was less than two years old when it happened. He was playing out in the back yard when in some manner not understood for several years, his big toe was neatly severed by a sharp ax, all save a little skin at the under part. He screamed lustily and started running for his mother; his cut toe bent back under his foot so that he stumbled over it and fell as he tried to run. The Woman drew a pail of cold water and put the toe, foot and all into it, and when the toe was thoroughly cleansed and had stopped bleeding, she put salve on it, placed the toe back in place, and wrapped it in cloth. No doctor was called and what I have related was all that was done, but she had cleansed the cut so thoroughly that it healed quickly, and in a few weeks the foot was as good as ever, save a peculiar looking toe, resembling the head of a turtle peeking out from its shell.

The things I am telling you may seem trivial to you, but to me they were most important. They happened right before my eyes, giving me food for thought in the quiet hours of the night with only the stars above me and darkness around me. Whatever

befell them—happiness or sorrow—befell me, too. I was a part of them. Their lot was my lot.

#### GRASSHOPPERS AND MORE GRASSHOPPERS

One day during the middle of the summer the sky, which a few minutes before had been blue and clear, was covered suddenly with what I at first thought were clouds, but presently I knew it was something I had never before seen. A slight wind was blowing and from above me came a peculiar sound that was quite unlike the wind, a sound different from anything I had ever heard before. While wondering what caused the heavens to darken and the strange roar, I noticed that several members of the family were looking upward. As they talked, I listened, and I heard them say it was grasshoppers, and that if the wind went down they would light. I never had heard of grasshoppers and did not know what the family meant, but I was soon to learn, for the wind did go down with the sun and there was perfect calm for hours.

Almost instantly after the wind ceased, peculiar objects began falling upon the ground all around me. Many such objects also fell upon my shingles and rolled off, so that in the growing darkness I could not tell what they were. I could see that they were alive for they moved and crawled about, although they seemed to have wings with which they could fly. The noise which had been far above me now was all about me. It did not sound like the machinery I had heard on the farm, but rather more like crunching or grinding of teeth together. All through the night I heard this peculiar noise without one moment's stopping. This noise was not in the air any more, but upon the ground and from the trees. With some anxiety and much curiosity, I waited for morning, and as the sun approached the horizon and its bright rays came leaping over the hills east of me, I saw what had happened.

The sinking sun had set upon a land of green and gold. My beautiful oaks were lovely and green, with

birds singing happily among the branches; the corn, fully grown, stood high in stately rows; the grass under the trees and out over the broad prairie was ready for cutting; the grain ready for harvest; a countryside as beautiful as could be found in any place in all the world. The rising sun disclosed utter desolation—for every green thing upon the trees, in the fields, and upon the prairies was gone—the completeness of it was awful.

When a great fire sweeps over the broad prairie, it leaves blackness in its path, but this was a new kind of blackness, a greasy blackness, a sticky blackness, that made one shiver to see and almost sick at one's stomach to touch. And this awful blackness was not alone, in it and seemingly a part of it was an infinite number of squirming, crawling, crunching creatures—creatures with wings which they did not use; mouths that bit at every object and were insatiable; mouths that drooled slime and a black liquid that stuck to everything and made the whole mess most nauseating. Never before nor since have I seen anything to equal this destruction.

I looked upon the ground and saw no grass. I looked into my trees and saw no leaves. I looked into the cornfield and saw no corn. I looked out upon the broad prairie beyond and saw no waving grass. Instead, as far as I was able to see, there was the same black, squirming, crawling, sticky mass of little creatures which I now knew to be grasshoppers. They were everywhere. They crawled up my sides and sat upon my window sills. They climbed to my roof and sat upon my shingles. They tried to eat my very roof. They hopped here and there, seeking anything that could be devoured.

Someone had once thrown a homemade ball upon the roof where it had fallen behind a projection and had stuck. Its cover was made from a piece of calf hide, its contents wound twine. With my own eyes I saw those creepy, crunching creatures attack this ball

as if it were the finest food in the world, and sooner than it has taken me to tell of this, the outside had been eaten and they were trying to eat the twine. It was amazing, almost unbelievable.

As far as I could see, there was nothing but blackness. My sweet birds that every morning in summer had awakened the family with their songs were gone. I never knew where they went, but I did not see them again until the next spring. They seemed to sense at once that they could not live among those terrible creatures. At dawn the chickens came from their roosts. They seemed to stop to look things over as they left the protection of their coops. They saw those wriggling, crawling things and fell upon them for breakfast. All day long I saw them eating, snatching at the crawling mass. They alone of all living things seemed to delight in the abundance of food brought to their very doors. Gorged to the full, they at last retired from the conflict, and stood around as I had never before seen them do. Their wings drooped, their heads hung low, they seemed overcome with unhappiness. But the next morning, out they came to resume the battle. For several days this continued and then the chickens refused to touch a grasshopper, but waited for their regular food.

I have said nothing of the Man and the Woman. They, too, saw the grasshoppers light, saw them devour every green thing. I shall never forget the look upon their weatherworn faces as they gazed upon the ruin all about them. They saw their crops wiped away in a few hours time; saw the feed for their stock gone with no chance of replacement; their happiness turned to want and despair. There was no way to turn; no relief within their reach; no one to encourage and cheer, for the country for miles around had been swept clean. But the Man's bins were still filled with the previous year's crop. He would not perish from lack of food. His barns were filled with hay gathered early and yet scarcely dried. He could weather

the storm, it would require close figuring and a tightening of the belt.

A few days later the wind rose and with it went the vast host of millions upon millions that had invaded and destroyed. Soon only a few stragglers remained. During the height of the invasion, one of the larger boys built a machine to catch the grasshoppers, believing they could be destroyed that way. The machine was about four feet wide and held about five bushels. The experiment was tried on one of the streets in the nearby town. In one short block, the machine was filled with the creatures. He trod this same block several times, and each time the machine was full. He reasoned that if the grasshoppers were so thick as to be gathered in such large quantities on a bare street in a village, it was useless to try to exterminate them by any such means out on the prairie.

When the little creatures rose and winged themselves away, everyone thought they were well rid of them, but they were bitterly mistaken, for eggs in innumerable millions had been laid in the ground and these were to hatch with the coming spring. So for the following year and for the third year the country was alive with these crawling, crunching pests, and for three successive years no crops were saved. Cattle died by the thousands from blackleg and starvation; horses perished from the same causes; settler after settler was starved out and returned to the state from which he had come, or went onward to the western coast.

Sod houses and sometimes frame houses were left standing here and there over the prairies, their owners gone to start anew another home elsewhere. A few remained and one of those who refused to be discouraged was the family who lived within my walls. They met hardships in plenty. The mills had closed because there was no grain to grind. In all that country the Man alone had wheat but no mill to grind it into flour. The oldtime method of grinding between

stones was sometimes used. The family had a small coffee grinder and for awhile the children took great pleasure in grinding the flour that way, but as usually is the way, the sport later became a task when the novelty of it wore off and the grinding was then considered a part of the day's regular work.

The Man and the Woman managed to live through these three terrible years and on the fourth year were rewarded with a plentiful crop of wheat and corn and green grass and living cattle. Thus the plague of grasshoppers was ended.

In the spring of the summer when the grasshoppers first came to invade our rich lands, the Man had brought a new Case threshing machine, already referred to. When the plague came, they could not pay for it and gave a mortgage upon the land. The second and third year they could not pay and when finally the grasshoppers did leave, the mortgage took the farm, leaving the Man only the home place where I stood. Even then he found it necessary to mortgage that farm, but with the return of good crops and with unbelievably hard work, he managed to keep the old homestead, but he emerged with debt and taxes that made living most difficult, and coupled with the absence of anything but the most primitive of comforts, the years ahead seemed anything but welcome.

When the Man came to this land, the country was a wilderness, barely abandoned by the red man; he conquered this wilderness, but from the sky came an enemy no man could overcome. For three long terrible years the plague of grasshoppers continued and when they left, naught but ruin surrounded him on every side. He never recovered, but from the first fought the good fight, often discouraged but never willing to admit defeat.

Of such men was our nation made; upon their shoulders the future rested. To them, men of today owe much. Cold and snow and storm they could conquer; the plague from the sky they could not conquer, no

more than when along the Nile, the heavens spewed venom upon the fertile fields of the Great Kings.

#### THE DESPERADO

One day when the Boy was about eleven years old, I noticed him reading a large book. He was always reading, but in this instance he could scarcely take his eyes from the book long enough to eat, and I have always felt that when a boy was reluctant to stop to eat, he was greatly interested in something. I peeped over his shoulder and saw the title of the book. It was the "Life and Adventures of Frank and Jesse James and the Younger Brothers," or something like that. There was a picture showing two men riding horses around a pole and shooting at marks on the pole. I wondered how they managed to hit the pole and still miss each other, but it seemed to work all right. I do not remember any other pictures in the book, but I do remember this one for a little later I saw the Boy with a small revolver running around a small pole placed back of the barn and shooting at the pole. I did not know he had a revolver and do not know where he got it.

One day I was surprised to see that he had another revolver, a very large one. I heard him say that the little one was a daisy and that he would use the big one to shoot bear. I was so interested in what he was doing and saying that I remember very clearly what happened. He loaded the small revolver by putting five little round things into holes, which I later learned were cylinders, and the large one by putting gun powder into the six short barrels of the cylinder and then pushing in a round ball of what looked like lead. He forced the round ball into the cylinder and then he put a cap on the small end of each of the six barrels where he had put the powder and the balls. Then he put both revolvers in his pants pockets and started off into the woods.

He seemed to be hunting Indians, for he was sneaking along among the trees and hiding in the bushes.

Sometimes he got down on his knees and crawled almost on his stomach, and then when he saw an Indian, he would whisk out both guns and raise them both at once at an enemy that was plain to him but not to me. The guns would bang, bang, and away he ran to the fallen enemy, pulling out a big knife I had not known him to have, and off would go the enemy's scalp. He was so earnest about it and scalped the fallen victim so realistically that I had to look twice to be sure that he was only acting.

The Boy would hunt for wolves and bears, and sometimes squirrels. He always kept the guns in his pockets and when he imagined he saw a wolf or bear, out would come the guns, both at once, and off they would go. The smaller gun made a little quick sound, the larger one quite a roar.

One day he set up a mark in the back yard. It had circles and a round dot in the center. He would stand a hundred feet or so from the mark and shoot rapidly, using both guns at the same time. Sometimes he would miss the mark altogether, but usually struck somewhere in the circle. Occasionally he would hit the dot in the center, and when he did this, he would go up close and examine the bullet holes. He was greatly pleased when a bullet hit the Bull's Eye, as he called it, and I myself thought that he was becoming a pretty good shot.

In the fall when he started to school, I was amused to see that he took his guns with him. I couldn't imagine why he was doing that, but at recess time I saw him take some of the boys with him into the wood back of the schoolhouse and show them how he could hit the mark almost every time. One little boy ran back and told the teacher about the revolvers. When school closed that night, the teacher asked the Boy to stay, and when all the other children had gone, the teacher said he understood that the Boy had a gun. The Boy proudly pulled out not only one gun but two, much to the surprise of the teacher. He was



an old man, quite a little over eighty years of age, and perhaps he sympathized with the little boy, for he finally asked him to leave the large revolver at home, and to be very careful about using the little one around the school.

When this revolver craze wore itself out, as it did after awhile, the Boy became interested in archery. He made a big bow from a fine limb cut from a hickory tree and bent it in shape as directed in a story paper the Boy took and read earnestly every week. The stick was thoroughly wet and while soaked, it was bent to the desired shape and left in that shape until it was dry. Then a heavy string was put from one end to the other and drawn very tightly. The bow was then ready for use. While the bow was drying, the Boy made a great many arrows, again following the instructions given in his paper. He added something not given, however, that certainly made those arrows very effective. He found some nails, cut off the heads, sharpened the small end, and then drove the large end into the arrow, leaving the sharpened end to penetrate whatever it might hit.

Soon after he had completed the bow and arrow, he was practicing in the yard, and he happened to see a young calf tied to a hayrack some distance away, and without stopping to think, he bent his bow and let fly the arrow at the unoffending little calf. Unfortunately, his aim was perfect and the arrow hit the calf between the shoulders. The sharp nail, which stuck out about two inches, was buried in the calf's flesh. It had been sleepily nipping at some fresh grass, but came quickly to life and with a terrified bawl started running without waiting to see what had happened to it. The calf ran with such vigor that when it reached the end of the rope, it broke and away went the little animal, free, jumping up and down and sideways and bawling at the top of its little voice.

The Boy stood for a minute in amazed silence, then

struck out after the calf—whether to save the arrow before it was broken off by the wild caperings of the calf or to pull it out before someone discovered it, I do not know, but to get the arrow became for a moment the sole object of the Boy. The calf seemed to attribute its plight to the Boy, for it would not let him come near but ducked and dodged him with much success. At last the Boy was able to grasp the arrow and pull it out. Immediately the calf relaxed its vocal efforts, but kept warily away from the Boy, who went back to where he had dropped his bow and resumed his practice. I never saw him aim at a living thing after that unless it was at some wild game or animals. I have seen him throw a tin can high in the air and shoot at it with his arrow. After much practice he could hit the can almost every time.

Presently he outgrew these weapons and longed for a real gun, such as men use in hunting. In some manner he became the happy possessor of a gun called a Zulu Musket. It shot a full sized shell, which was inserted into the breech of the gun by lifting a slide that hung on hinges. This left an open space leading into the barrel and the shell was pushed into the barrel through this opening, then the slide was pushed back and the gun was ready for use.

Before he secured this gun, he often took his father's gun. It was a muzzle loader, so called because the powder was first put into the gun at the muzzle and then paper was rammed down on top of the powder by the use of a ramrod. Then small round shot was poured down the barrel and another paper was placed in the gun and rammed down. A cap was placed on the nipple and the gun was ready for shooting.

Anyone going out with this gun carried two horns. In one was powder and in the other was shot. These were strapped over the shoulders, one on each side. The caps were carried in a tin box, usually kept in the hunter's pocket. Only one shot could be fired without reloading, and it took quite a long time to

reload, perhaps five minutes. It was certain, therefore, that any game shot at once would be far away before a second shot could be fired. Hence it was highly necessary that the first shot be sure.

Many times I have watched the Boy take this single barrel gun into the field immediately east of me. I could see the wild game in the ponds or meadow, and it was interesting to notice his approach. He would lie flat on his stomach while still some distance away, and wiggle along on the ground a few inches at a time. Occasionally he would raise his head above the weeds and grass to see if the ducks or geese were still there, then he would go on, his care becoming greater as he neared his quarry. Sometimes the geese became suspicious, then they would raise their heads and peer around, one would flap his wings as though about to fly. Then they seemed to feel that all was right and would go on with their feeding.

Although the Boy had crawled near enough to shoot safely, he wanted to get even closer. Then with trigger ready to shoot and his body in position to jump to his feet quickly, he would be up and away toward the geese as fast as his legs could take him. Instantly the birds made an awful squawk, and heading away from the Boy, tried to fly. No bird as heavy as a goose can rise from the ground or water instantly. If on the ground, it must run a few feet before rising, and if on the water, it must taxi. This the Boy seemed to know for when the geese finally left the water, the Boy was only a few rods away. When they were about six feet above, he fired at the flock. He never stopped to pick out any special bird. Birds cluster together when starting to fly and it was at this juncture that the Boy let the gun go. He always got one bird and sometimes several. I have seen him kill as many as thirty blackbirds with one single shot, fired just as the birds rose and bunched for real flight.

One time when the Boy raised his gun to shoot and

pulled the trigger, it did not explode and he discovered that he had lost the cap while crawling, so there was nothing to do but watch the big birds soar away.

With the Zulu Musket there was no such trouble and often the gun could be reloaded quickly and a second shot fired before the game was too far away. In later years the Boy owned many kinds of guns, but I am sure that no gun so thrilled him as the little twenty-two and the big Colt Six shooter of his youth.

#### SALOONS

I have observed much in my long life and have had much time for serious thought, with the result that sometimes I almost admire myself for my unbiased philosophical conclusions. Human nature has interested me more than anything else. The thing that will allure one person may drive another away. Sitting on my firm foundation with almost nothing to do for half a century or more, I have had ample time and opportunity to notice things that moved men for or against the various questions confronting them. With some, hatred clouded all opinions. With others, love inspired all thought. And it always seemed a battle between the two forces, one winning today, the other tomorrow.

Another thing that has amazed me is how greatly very trivial things have worked an influence all out of proportion to its importance. The weather, the sunshine, the storm, the wind, the eaten food, the sleepless hours—all these seem factors of consequence.

These thoughts bring me to others and to make what I have in mind clear, I must relate things I saw in part and heard in part, and from what I now tell may be seen just how fully the little things of life have their great effect.

One day the Boy rode to town with an older neighbor boy. It was a fine afternoon and the Boy was very happy to visit the city. He did not return

until the following day and I was greatly worried as were the family. But when he did return, he had an unusual story to relate, which in substance was this:

When they reached town, the Boy was told to be ready to return at eight o'clock and to be at the wagon to meet the neighbor. At the appointed hour the Boy returned to the wagon and waited a long time. Finally he went to sleep. How long he slept he did not know, but it was dark when he awakened. He heard voices coming from the basement of the hotel; the streets were dark, but by the light in the room he was able to see two men on the steps leading up from the basement. They were struggling over a bottle. One of them lost his hold on the bottle and fell backward down the steps. The other came on up the steps and out to the wagon—it was the neighbor. Before untying the team, he drained the bottle and then tried to get into the wagon but was unable to make it. The Boy got out and helped him in and up on the driver's seat. He gathered up the lines and started the team down the street toward home.

He drove about a hundred feet, stopped the team, climbed off the wagon, told the Boy to hold the horses and disappeared into another lighted room that was on the street level. After waiting a very long time, the Boy decided to go into the place where his friend had gone to see what had detained him. The moment he entered the place he saw what kind of place it was. The room was large, filled with men. They were smoking and drinking and talking and swearing. Some were so drunk they could not stand; others were standing at the bar drinking. On the floor and dead drunk was the neighbor the Boy was seeking.

As soon as the Boy saw what he had gotten into, he started to go out, but some of the men had seen him come and thought they could have some fun with him, so one of the men seized him by the arm and

dragged him up to the bar. The Boy tried to get away, but the man held him and tried to force him to drink. Another man came up and shoved the first man away and, standing before the Boy and leaning upon him to keep on his own feet, then proceeded to give the Boy a mock temperance lecture which the Boy never forgot. This man told of the evils of drink; that it made drunkards and animals of men; that drink took their money and their souls; that if the Boy were ever to drink, he surely would be just like the crowd then in the saloon, and many other things of a like nature.

The men in the room laughed and applauded the orator and enjoyed the farce, but to the Boy it all was true and he felt that every word was sincere and meant for his benefit. Finally the man let him go and told him never to enter a place like that again. The Boy left, promising faithfully, and I am sure that he has kept his promise through all these years.

The scene in that saloon never passed from his memory and had an immense influence upon his later life. Nothing could induce him to drink any kind of liquor. In later years he had much to do with driving the saloon from that very community.

Many years later a new type of saloon was set up. It was operated under what was known as the "mulct law." For many years it continued in the very place where the first saloon was run. The Boy, now grown, watched that saloon, watched its effect upon those who became its patrons. He saw friends cut down in youth, health destroyed, property gone, homes sorrowed, delirium tremens reaped as the man sowed, widows and orphans dependent upon charity, until finally he was determined that no longer should such a fester be permitted to exist. Through his efforts the saloon was driven from that county and many other counties, and he was partly instrumental in driving them from his state.

Then the bootlegger, with evil in his wake, entered

the picture and finally a new form of saloon was permitted under the law.

Sometimes I think the present method of meeting the liquor problem is best, again I doubt its wisdom. I do not know. Age and observation and experience seem unable to furnish ground for final conclusions. But I do know that vastly more liquor is being drunk today than ever before, and that being true, is it not certain that its evil effects are greater?

I will not attempt to answer my own questions—I simply invite your attention to the facts and leave the judgment to you. But this much I can say, based upon ample observation: there is no temptation against which man struggles equal in its urge and in its terrible effects as the wine when it is so red, the fumes of whisky, the breath of gin, the foam of the brew that is malt.

#### HUNTING

In the days of my youth, wild game was most abundant. The many lakes and sloughs, before the desire to drain everything and make farms of sloughs and lake beds seized the people, afforded shelter and food, with the result that in the spring and fall the air was filled with ducks, brandt, and geese, as well as prairie chicken and grouse. Hunters came from long distances to enjoy the wonderful hunting, and poor indeed was the hunter who could not bag about all the game he wanted.

Most of those who came knew but little about hunting and they always felt it was necessary to hire a guide, although I could not see any good reason for a guide in view of the vast number of birds in plain sight from my windows. But guides they had, and often, even before earliest dawn, I would hear the creek of wagons or buggies and the voices of hunters and guides as they went down the road.

One of the best guides of all was a chap named Dude. Just why he was called that I never knew. He was reared on a farm south of us, and I had seen

him from the time he was a little boy. He started hunting before he could lift a gun and kept at it until he became the greatest hunter of them all. In fact, he once was the champion shot of the world. He was a great talker and talked to be heard, with the result that I knew when he and his hunters were going out our way long before they reached our farm. On still mornings, voices carried a long way, especially Dude's, and he did most of the talking. However, when he came near the wild game, he shut up like a clam, and no more did his voice ring out over the hills.

In those early days no one had very good guns. The very best were double barreled breech loaders. A swift operator could shoot both barrels and load again before the game was far enough away to be out of range. I learned to know Dude's gun. I could hear "bang bang," just like that—no interval at all seemingly between those two shots—and then in what seemed only a second, another double shot and I knew that Dude had reloaded and taken his second toll.

The hunters who accompanied him were not so good and often missed easy shots, but they always showed up at night with plenty of game in their bags. I wondered for awhile how they shot so much game, but one day when they were ready to go home, I saw Dude split his bag with them. Then I knew why he was so popular as a guide—his hunters never failed to come back with ample proof as evidence of their ability as game killers.

I remember with amusement an incident that occurred one afternoon in the hunting season. A party of four men, all togged out in fine hunting raiment, returned from their day's hunting with each having one prairie chicken. They drove up to our door and stopped. When the Woman answered the man's rap, he told her that the four of them had been out all day without food, and asked her if she would cook the



four prairie chickens. The pioneer spirit still prevailed and the Woman said she would. So, while the men made themselves comfortable, the Woman cleaned and dressed and cooked the chickens. In a very short time the table was set, the four birds placed thereon, a dish of steaming cream gravy, mashed potatoes, freshly baked bread, and other things that housewives in those days "preserved."

The four hungry men sat down before the four fat prairie chickens and began operations. Each took a plateful of chicken, potatoes, gravy and bread, and for the time being, conversations ceased. When they rose from the table, not even a crumb remained.

One of the men asked the Woman, who had hovered around the table while they ate urging them to have more of this and that, what they owed her. She responded in the language of those far away days that she would not think of taking anything for so little a thing. She insisted that it was worth all her trouble to see them eat so heartily, and they insisted upon paying her. Finally one of the men threw a silver dollar upon the table and refused to take it back. That is the only time as long as the Woman lived here that any person ever paid one single cent for anything within my walls.

As I think of those potatoes, the bread and butter and preserves, and gravy and other good things, I really feel that those men did receive a full dollar's worth that day.

#### FISHING WHEN FISH WERE FISH

One of the real sports during the days of my youth was fishing. Fish were very plentiful, in both lake and stream.

There were two small streams nearby, running into the same lake. In the spring the water was about three feet deep, and sometimes much deeper if there had been heavy rains. In the spring of the year certain fish would run up these streams for the purpose of spawning. First came the pickerel, next the pike, and last the buffalo.

The pickerel were long, fierce looking things, very active and quick as a flash. The pike were considered better eating fish. Their movements were slow and heavy. The buffalo were slow and clumsy, but could get up considerable speed when frightened.

When these fish went up stream to spawn, they moved slowly and spent some time in finding the right spot in which to lay their eggs. The most desirable spot was clean sand, and here their slimy looking eggs would be dropped. Almost immediately the male fish came along, covering the eggs to fertilize them.

These fish were never satisfied to go part way up stream—they must always go to the head—just as far as the water was deep enough for them to swim. Boys and men in all the country around waited for the spawning season. Then when the fish were on the run, as it was called, the men went along the bank with a spear in hand and whenever a fish was seen, the spear was thrown. If a fish were struck or speared, it was pulled over to shore by means of a line attached to the spear. This form of fishing was considered great fun; in winter when the men had little to do, so many fish were caught and not eaten, that a law was passed to stop the spearing.

This law was most unpopular, as the farmers and the boys enjoyed the sport and wanted to keep it up, with the result that it became almost impossible to convict anyone charged with violating the law against spearing. However, people soon realized that such methods would destroy the fish, and not only their sport but their main food for a good share of the winter season would be destroyed. I saw grown men spear more fish than they were able to carry home just for the fun of doing it.

The most interesting way of spearing was to go at night; the men and boys would wind rags tightly together on the end of an iron muskrat spear, then soak them in a can of kerosene, light the torch and hold it out over the water. The light seemed to charm the fish and they lay perfectly quiet. If they noticed any movement or heard any noise, they were off like a flash.

The smallest person in the party had the job of carrying the torch, and as the Boy was the youngest, that was his job for years. I know that often he wanted to do some of the spearing himself, but always the larger boys came first.

When spring came, the thawing water cut holes in the ice in these streams, making a channel in the middle where the water ran swiftly, at the same time cutting underneath the ice on each side. Three of the boys were crossing a small stream to spear fish in the larger stream. At the place where they usually crossed, a channel about six feet wide had been washed out in the middle of the stream. The boys then decided that the only way to get across was to make a run for it. The larger boy ran as hard as he could and then jumped, landing well on the ice at the far side, but, alas, the water, running underneath, had thinned the ice for some distance from the edge, and when the boy landed upon this thin ice, he broke through with a great splash into the cold, swiftly flowing water, down entirely out of sight.

The two boys, safe on shore, fairly rolled with laughter. The second boy decided not to run and land so hard, but to jump softly, which he did, but the weight of his body was too much for the thin ice and in he went out of sight. Then it was time for the small boy safely on shore and the wet boy on the opposite shore to laugh loudly. With two wet boys now on the farther side, they waited for the Boy to fall in, but for once his being a small boy was to his advantage—the ice held on both sides and he crossed in safety.

People were able to stand hardships better, apparently, in those days than now, for the two boys, wet to the skin, kept on their way to the farther stream, speared their fish, and returned without taking cold or getting sick.

Another way of spearing fish that was decidedly interesting, to hear men talk about it, was to build a small frame house without a floor except in one corner, haul it out on the ice, place it over a hole that had been cut

through to the water, and then wait for the fish to come up to the opening. Usually a fire was built in the corner of the little house. While sitting there waiting for the fish to come up to the opening, the boys and men often made what was called a decoy—a wooden fish about six inches long, loaded with lead, and with fins and a tail. This decoy was thrown down into the opening. The weight of the lead and the angle of the fins made the decoy go around and around in circles. The fish could see this from a distance; it looked like a real minnow, a luscious one. But the fish seemed suspicious of something although the frame house was darkened and nothing could be seen save the decoy.

The handle holding the decoy was held in one hand while in the other was held the spear, ready to be hurled at the fish the moment it came far enough into the opening. You can imagine the excitement of the boy who holds the spear. First, a big fish pokes his head into sight for an instant; then backs out. Next, his head appears from the opposite side of the opening; then elsewhere. Then he comes in; and then he goes away. Again he comes in and suddenly makes a swift dash at the decoy. It is then or never, and away goes the spear. Perchance it lands, perhaps it misses, but land or miss, the excitement and fun is intense.

From what I have heard both men and boys say, spear-  
ing fish in the manner described is just about the most fun ever. Sometimes an immense fish would be caught. I remember a young chap landed a sturgeon weighing almost two hundred pounds.

Fish were easy to catch with only hook and line. One day the Boy went to the lake with only a fishhook and some line. With his jackknife he cut a small pole from the timber. He tied the end of the line to the pole and on the other end of the line he fastened the hook. For bait he picked a large basswood leaf, rolling it into a wad about as large as a marble. This he fastened to the hook and then threw the line far out into the water. Evidently the fish thought that green object was a green

frog and sprang for it with the result that in a few minutes the Boy had caught as many fish, weighing from five to ten pounds, as he could carry home.

One of the evils of springtime spawning was the desire of every fish to go up stream as long as there was water to swim in. Then when the water receded, thousands of fish were left stranded in the shallow pools and later died.

With the coming of more people and the passing of intelligent laws, waste of fish was prevented, but not in time to save the millions that swam the waters of the stream and lake in the days when my shingles were still white and clean.

#### BATS AND BEES

I suppose that all old frame houses and sometimes even new ones are troubled with rats and mice, but I had the added experience of harboring bats and bees.

When I was built, the carpenters chanced to leave some holes leading into the spaces between the ceiling and the roof of my east porch. These holes were small and hard to find, but they were there. One night something crawled through one of these holes and stayed there. I could not see what it was. Occasionally it would make a noise that frightened me, so harsh and queer it was. Whatever it was, it slept all of the next day and as soon as it was dark, it crawled away. I could not even guess what it was, but I could tell that it flew.

Before daylight it returned, bringing a similar creature with it, and after that both stayed in that open space. Presently a large family of the same kind of creatures was born or hatched within my walls. They never appeared in the daytime, but always at night, and try as I would, I could not tell what they were.

In the daytime they lay curled up, sleeping and nothing seemed to awaken them. I could see, however, that they had very sharp beaks or noses or mouths and small sharp teeth which they would snap together with a noise that made one think they could and would bite fearfully if one tried to touch them. These creatures quarreled quite

a little and when they did, they made the queerest noises I ever heard. One day for some reason one of them crawled out. I saw it plainly for the first time. It was a scary-looking creature. It had a sharp beak, little eyes, and very broad wings. It seemed unable to find its way back and flew here and there, up and down against the wall, giving out screams and cries that would frighten anyone. Some of the family heard and saw it, and I then learned that they were bats.

The family tried to kill it, but it moved around so swiftly that it was impossible to hit it, although the whole family was striking at it with brooms and sticks and other weapons. The bat flew right at them, screaming in the most blood-thirsty manner possible, and as it flew toward anyone, that person joined the bat in screaming and then would dodge and run.

I had only to look on and found myself laughing most heartily in spite of my dislike of the little furry animals, and I did so hope they could be exterminated. The Man hunted for and stopped up all the holes he could find until all openings had been closed. I saw the imprisoned bats die for want of food and water, and never again were we bothered with the nasty little creatures.

A great many years passed without any more such visitors, but one warm sunny day I saw hundreds of very strange things flying through the air. They did not fly separately, but in a big bunch. I could not see how they could fly that way or why they did, but presently I saw they were following one of their number and each one was trying to get as close to that one as possible. They flew under my porch roof into one corner where they hung in a big cluster. Someone in the house heard them and came out and I then learned they were bees and were looking for a place to store their honey. Later on I saw many swarms but never one as large as that one.

Presently one of the bees crawled through one of the holes which the Man had closed against the bats. This was the bee that all the others were determined to hang onto, so in swarmed all the other bees. I learned, too,

that this bee was called the Queen Bee and wherever she went, her faithful swarm followed.

Almost instantly these busy little creatures set to work building places to store the honey. They were up and out among the flowers the moment it was light and kept right at it until after dark. Then home buzzed the tired bees and with the dawn began their search again for honey.

The bees carried the gathered sweet juices in their mouths, would deposit them and fly back for more. It seemed that every bee had his work laid out for him; if a bee shirked or would not do his share of the work, he was thrown out, and oftentimes he was killed before being ejected.

This swarm of bees came in the late spring. They worked faithfully all summer, storing up honey for their winter food. As they slept most of the winter, there was honey left over and as the warm spring days came, the honey melted and dripped to the floor below. The family noticed this and immediately decided to have some of it. A hole was cut in the ceiling of the porch and a portion of the honey was removed. Naturally the bees did not like this and were not slow in making their objections felt and understood. After one experience, whoever took the honey used heavy gloves and wore a heavy net over the face to protect them against the bees' stings.

For several years the bees stayed there and then one day the Queen Bee seemed tired of the place and away all of them went. I was sorry to see them go, for I found it most interesting to watch the little fellows at work, and I did miss their droning while laboring. Action, action, action; honey, honey, honey, seemed to be their motto. The bees worked and moved exactly as I had seen soldiers work and move. They were just like an army. I could not but think that if humans worked like those little bees, everything anyone wanted done would soon be finished and then everyone could have a good time doing nothing.

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