

# The Autobiography of An Old House

## POIGNANT MEMORIES OF THE PAST

Through the allegorical authorship of "The Old House," a pioneer structure located upon the Francis farm that skirts the banks of East Okoboji lake, near the town of Spirit Lake, is revealed the autobiography of Senator Leslie E. Francis, who passed away early in 1957, and the colorful incidents and events of his life are thus preserved for his family.

In 1952, Senator Francis wrote an article published in the ANNALS, entitled "The Last Legislative Election of an Iowa United States Senator." It was a classic! Later, he was importuned to write another article in similar vein to be drawn, like the first, from his rich store of experiences and observations in Iowa official and political life.

There was some interest though hesitation on his part. He really wanted to comply with the request. After being urged he finally said he "would consider it," and thought that possibly he "had another worthwhile story" in him yet "that might be written should the mood be right." And he did it before his summons came from the Eternal One.

The result of his effort really is a book, and rightly should be published as such, for it is unique in method of approach and treatment of historical events, too long for the page limitations of the ANNALS; the salient portions at least deserve presentation. This will be done, and thereby the progress and life achievements of this able, cultured and experienced citizen are included herein. An additional portion may be printed in a subsequent number of the ANNALS.—Editor

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## A Tale of the Frontier

BY LESLIE EVERETT FRANCIS

To the Man and the Woman, my Father and my Mother,  
and to all the Host who carved a Nation from a  
Wilderness, this book is dedicated.

### FOREWORD

My father came from Wales of Welsh-English stock; my Mother was a New England Yankee. At first, they lived in the Finger Lake District of New York, then near Oshkosh, Wis., and finally in the early spring of 1860 they moved to a farm near Spirit Lake, Iowa.

As a small boy of the story listening period I was regaled with frontier lore until it seemed almost that I had lived through all my parents experienced. Youthful impressions are strong and out of them come the pages that follow. Frontier life contained so much of real moment it has seemed to me right that someone should tell the story and from the depths of memory of things both told and experienced I have written this Autobiography of an old House.

And certainly that old house, could it but really speak, would unfold a tale far surpassing anything I have been able to say, for within its walls and around it, the pioneers of our great west fought and won against the forces of militant nature. To them we owe a debt that Remembrance and Gratitude only will repay.

#### THE OLD HOUSE SPEAKS

I am an old, old house. I belong to an age that has ended, to a day that is no more.

My windows rattle when the winds sway the branches of my beautiful oaks—trees that were old the day I was born and, now when age overcomes me, are still young.

The shingles that cover the nakedness of my sloping roof have rotted and, like dead leaves at the approach of winter, one by one, loosen their hold and fall gently to the ground.

The rain drops find easy entrance to my rooms, they trickle through joint and crevice, they stain my walls. My plaster crumbles, my very foundation has weakened with the years until now I can no longer stand upright and firm against the winter's heavy blast. Age has crept upon me until the end is near.

But in the long years since that glorious day when my roof tree was raised by friendly hands, I have lived. I have seen great things. Within my walls events of great moment have happened. In my yard, under my trees, along the banks of my beautiful lake, men and women and little children have made me glad with their own joy.

Standing beneath those great oaks I have seen a wilderness blossom, within my vision the prairie has become

a field, and civilization reigns where once untrammelled nature held full sway.

An old, old house, like an old, old man, looks no more forward, spurred by hope and ambition, but backward along the flowery paths of memory to the time so long before when youth planned and dreamed and saw mirages. To such in memory the past is re-enacted. In memory the old man and the old house live again.

Memory, blessed Memory, is today my only possession. Out of the years comes nothing save memory. All else has crumbled into dust.

Besides memories, houses have souls. Their souls are the souls of those who for a day or a year or perhaps for a long lifetime made their four walls home. And what a blessed thing is home, be it mansion or hut. How sweet the little voices, how wet the tears, how heavenly the smiles. How wonderful when happiness and love are there to make heavy burdens light as downy feathers; how terrible the long days and the dark nights when strife or death comes within our walls.

How well do I remember the day when the Man of Great Faith dug my cellar and, gathering stones from the field and along the lake shore, laid my cellar walls and squared my foundation. How proud was I that day when I saw the last stone of my beautiful walls placed in its white mortar, there to rest, as I then believed, forever.

Mine was the first frame house built upon a farm in all that country. Mine was the largest house for a hundred miles. The Man, with slow horses and screaming wagon, hauled my lumber across weary miles of unbroken prairie, load by load. His pride was my pride, for I was I, and would live forever. No thought then of age— no, not for half a century did I so much as once think that the heavy timbers of my foundation could rot, or nails rust, or masonry crumble. But now I know I am old. I tremble with the storm, I shiver when the cold of winter comes. I dread the snow. The ice chills my blood and fills me with terror. I give but poor shelter, yet

people live within my swaying walls, glad to have even their meager protection. But old and weak and worn as I am, I still have Memory and my Memory and my soul are mine.

Houses see and hear and know of many things far away in distance and in time. We see with others' eyes and hear with others' ears. Those who journey far away, return, and we listen to all they tell of adventure on land and on sea. In the night when the same stars that saw my first stone laid look down upon me and in the quiet hours of dawn, the past marshals its events before me like a dream of reality, and I laugh softly or weep blindly as memory grips me. Tonight the moon sails high in its heaven, lighting the earth; my soul cries out and memory gives command that I give voice to The Autobiography of an old House. And so you who wish may read my life, told as thoughts come, rambling, disconnected, pieced together as children play with blocks, telling what I saw, what I heard, and what I thought in the days when youth was mine.

The Man who built me had long lived upon the farm where I was born. All of his children were brought into life and lived in log houses. One day the Woman learned that another baby would soon be added to an already large pioneer family.

That night the Man and the Woman talked into the growing hours of the morning. This last child should not be born in the old log house—he should begin life in a real home made of wood, with paint upon its walls. And so it was that I came into being to give this child of their old age a fitting home. There this child lived until hardship forced the sale of my farm, when I was abandoned by those to whom my walls had given protection.

That sad day is far away in the events of my life but its grim shadow oppresses me after all the passing years. Even houses become lonely and long deeply for those loved ones of long ago, but they are all gone from me, all save the little Boy for whose coming I was built.

Even him I seldom see but sometimes I hear those who seek my shelter speak of him, and then I know that we two, who were so strongly linked in youth, still struggle against tempest and storm.

#### THE PIONEERS

A great covered wagon, its canvas sides lifted, exposing the interior, crept slowly over an unending prairie heading ever westward. Upon the front seat, driving a team of black horses, sat a man, by his side a woman, while within were four boys and girls from three to nine years of age.

As far as the eye could see was illimitable prairie, with waving blue grass, little hills and broad valleys, sloughs and creeks, and lakes and rivers. In all that broad expanse no tree lifted its head—only prairie, beautiful, enticing, but wanting something vital to this family from a region where trees were mingled with prairie, lake and stream.

It was early spring, the flowers of the prairie just blooming. The ground was soft with the early rains and the horses were weary, for roads there were none and the narrow rimmed wagon wheels often cut through the sod, sometimes miring so deeply that even the smallest child was placed upon the ground to lighten the load. At such times all pushed to the limit of their strength and by their aid the panting horses managed to extricate the wagon.

When sloughs or lakes were encountered, a way around them was sought, but when a river rose in the line of travel, it was necessary to search up and down stream until a safe ford was found, or days of delay followed while the heavy load, piece by piece, was carried across the water and then reloaded.

Once while fording a stream swollen by heavy rains, the water rose to the wagon floor. At the deepest spot a front wheel struck a rock with such violence as to throw the woman from her seat into the swift stream. She could not swim and the current was so strong she could not keep upon her feet, although she could touch

bottom and was in no great danger of drowning. The man quickly decided to drive his children, his precious household goods and farm machinery to the nearby shore and then return to mid-stream where the woman was struggling against the rushing waters. Encouraged by her screams, he presently reached her and pulled her ashore.

Everywhere, in every slough, upon every creek and river and lake, ducks and geese covered the waters in unbelievable numbers. Long legged blue cranes watched scornfully as these pioneers drove slowly past them scarcely deigning to stalk to one side; while swift winged prairie chickens rose with a frightening whir and roared away to safety. The two small boys often ran ahead and with stone or sling shot sought to provide the evening meal. Suddenly a great mallard would spring from the grass a few feet before them and go rolling and tumbling and quacking loudly, almost within their grasp but always just out of their reach. For a dozen rods the wild chase would continue, when with a contemptuous quack the wise old duck would sail away.

Occasionally a small herd of deer or antelope could be seen in the distance, quietly feeding upon the abundant grass. They always kept a look-out who stood upon a nearby hill and who watched as faithfully as any army sentry. When he saw the wagon from afar, he instantly gave signal and the entire herd would run to him and watch the approaching vehicle with apparent interest and curiosity. If the wagon were passing to one side, they would stand and stare until it was opposite or a little ahead, then suddenly with one accord, they would start running toward the wagon, apparently determined to keep in front to get to the other side. The man carried a rifle and as the deer passed in long swift jumps only a few rods away, he would raise his gun, and that night and for several days the tedium of ducks and prairie chickens was altered by fresh deer meat.

One day as the sun was sinking behind a pillar of fire in the golden west, the Man saw something in the dis-

tance that aroused his interest, for he swerved to the left and drove to the crest of the hill near by and, by shading his eyes, looked earnestly into the west. Then he spoke to the woman at his side telling her he saw tall trees a few miles away and would drive to them for shelter that night. At dusk they reached the trees, great massive oaks, their leaves just budding, only to find other people there before them. They were welcomed in true pioneer fashion, and pitching their tent beneath one of those wide spreading oaks, spent the night.

Almost before it was light the following morning the two little boys were up, running here and there among the trees, presently returning in great excitement to tell their parents that there was a large lake only a few rods away through the trees.

The boys were very anxious to stay there in the grove upon the banks of the lake, so anxious, that the Man and the Woman decided to buy the place. After long discussions with the man in possession, he was induced to sell his rights for the team of horses driven by the Man.

It is hard to say whether the boys' joy that their long ride was over and they were to live among the trees on the lake was greater than their sorrow at parting with that faithful team. Hot tears fell as the loyal horses that had drawn them over prairie and across streams were driven away, but youth is resilient, and soon memory of departed horses was lost in the joy of trees and water and home.

There upon that very spot where stood the tent that night so many years ago, was I built, and there I stood for more than thirty years until in a day of evil, as I shall tell you, I was taken away from the spot I loved so well and carried to the despised prairie, away from my lovely trees, to the forlorn place where I now sit and suffer in mind and in soul.

But now I shall think and speak only of happier days when I stood beneath the shade of those tall trees that

from afar had led the Man and the Woman to their destiny.

How I loved those trees! The birds came to them for shade, there to build their nests and rear their young. Sweet music from myriad throats each morning roused those who lived within my walls; each night the little ones were lulled to slumber by music no orchestra, however great, could equal. It was a lovely, charming spot and there for a third of a century I sat facing the east—the first to catch the rays of the morning sun as it swept above the eastern hills.

Before me all was prairie; behind me, fifty acres of oak and elm and basswood, and then the lake. From where I stood I could see many miles into the east, and in the winter, when the leaves had loosened their hold upon the branches and came fluttering down to earth, I could see the lake and far down its long beaches.

I could see the wild game passing high above in great flocks and hear their night cries in the distance. I could see them as they soared low above the prairie, seeking food. I watched them alight in slough and pond and saw them breed and nest.

Nature was supreme in her majesty and beauty. The hand of man had not touched nor destroyed her wonders. The sky was green or black or blue or golden as caprice or shifting cloud or sunset shadows painted the picture.

I loved those trees; I loved my place there upon the bank of the lake; I suffered as only you who have suffered can understand when men lifted me up and carried me from the hallowed spot where I was born out to the open prairie. There I could not see my lovely trees, save the tallest branches when tossed by the south wind. I was homesick, lonely, unhappy, but I had not the power to change unkind fortune, and here I sit today in solitude, by the roadside.

But when I lived beneath those glorious trees, I saw and lived and took my just part in events that I alone of all houses in all the world am privileged to tell to you. Who knows but that the ability to write this autobiogra-

phy is not given in some degree to compensate my present loneliness.

#### THE WILDERNESS

The Man led his family into the wilderness as had many before him. As man came, the cruel Indian departed, leaving in his trail the blood of massacre. The Man's team gone, he was forced to use the slow but patient ox in all of his work. Tools and implements were few, and those fashioned by unskilled hands. There were no swift trains to carry his product to distant markets or return to him the bare necessities upon which pioneer life depended. These he must carry from afar, over trackless prairies, threatened always by wild beast and savage red man. As he walked in field and wood, his gun was ever close at hand, ready for instant use. Once the savage returned and burned and murdered in a nearby community. The Man was away, serving his country as a soldier, leaving the home and the children to the care and management of the Woman. This was long before I came into being, but I have heard the tale so often that to me it is as real as though it was I rather than the old log house that gave them shelter.

The Woman and the boys managed the farm with the help of a hired man who lived in a small tent pitched beneath the trees. The log house was small, scarcely large enough to give room for the Woman and her four small children. The boys often asked permission to sleep in the tent and were there when the alarm was given that the Indians were coming. The sun was just rising over the hills to the east when the pounding of hoofs was heard approaching, and into the yard a man swiftly dashed, shouting that the Indians were coming and to rush to the fort for protection. Almost before anyone could speak, away the rider sped, repeating his warning from home to home.

Breakfast was on the table but no one gave food a moment's thought. In that very community only a few short years before, every resident, save two women who were taken captive, fell beneath the deadly crash of

tomahawk and scalping knife—Spirit Lake Massacre—1857. With this knowledge in the mind of even the youngest child, no time was spent in leaving.

A little fort had been raised in the nearby town and to its safety the family fled. It was haying time and the rack was on the wagon but no one stopped to remove it. Breakfast was left uneaten, a few necessities thrown into the wagon, and away to the fort. The old ox team had been replaced by horses and by aid of whip and lash they raced up the road, along the lake shore, over the narrow bridge and into town.

As they neared the causeway across the lake, other settlers who had been warned by the panting rider came wildly down the trail leading to safety. Their wagons were filled with bedding and food and crying children.

You will find it difficult, I am sure, in this day and in your comfortable homes to realize even a little of the excitement and clamor among the people as they rushed pell-mell into the little stockade called a fort.

A trench about three feet deep and a hundred feet square had been dug and into this heavy timbers from the lake shore had been set closely together. The trench was then filled with earth firmly tramped down, leaving a solid row of logs standing some twelve feet above the ground. Within this protection the people came and there they lived until the soldiers, a hundred miles away, arrived.

All able bodied men had gone to war, leaving only old men and boys to guard the people. Every boy large enough to lift and aim a gun had one of his own. Early he learned the art of shooting straight and never forgot, however old. Hence, though few in number, not only the old men but the boys as well were dangerous when armed, and even the women and little children were brave under such heroic protection.

The greatest difficulty, while waiting for the soldiers, was to keep the small boys within the fort. Not one but felt himself the equal of any red man, and longed

to slip away to visit vengeance upon the pioneers' greatest enemy. The oldest boy, then about ten, escaped from the watchful eye of the Woman and was a mile away, dragging a heavy musket, before he was caught and brought back.

Another day the sentinel shouted that the Indians were again coming. Every person rushed to the stockade door, and there, about five miles away, a single file was coming over the hill to the northeast. Every man and boy took his place, prepared to defend the fort with his life. The look-out reported the approach of the long line—now near the home of one pioneer, now at another's. Every moment they expected to see the smoke of burning cabins rise, but none appeared. A scout was sent to a hill half a mile away to watch the advance. Presently he returned to the fort running rapidly. All expected to see him pursued by swift runners but he came on alone. When he neared the fort, the defenders were surprised to see that he was laughing. There were no Indians, only a herd of cattle wending their way slowly homeward.

Unless you have lived where men and women and little children have been massacred; unless, but a few miles away, you have huddled with a hundred other frightened people, protected only by logs standing upright around you; unless, by a miracle, Indians, red with the blood of neighbor and friend, were turned suddenly into a herd of peaceful cows homeward bound, chewing the cud of contentment, you cannot realize or understand the wild joy that followed. Faces which a moment before were pale with fear flushed with relief. Mothers who had gathered their little ones by their sides as though a mother's love could protect them from savage fury, danced and sang in glad happiness. And to make the day complete there appeared through the trees a mile away to the south a band of quick stepping men, holding aloft the dearest, the most beautiful flag of all the world. No further need for caution, for sentinels, for night watchmen; for the soldiers, by forced marches,

had returned almost as rapidly as the messenger sent by the worried and fearful people.

Many of the pioneers thus hurriedly rushed from their homes never returned to them but drove "back east" to friends and safety. The Woman was one of those to abandon her home by the lake shore. With her boys to aid her, she drove more than five hundred long weary miles, back along the trail traveled only two years before. But she did not forget her home among the trees and when the Indians had been driven far away, she returned.

The boys were a year older and large enough to drive the team and help in time of trouble. At last they were once more beneath the great oaks around the log house, left so hurriedly that early August morning. They entered to find the table just as it had been left a year before; not one thing destroyed, not one thing taken. If others had entered that home, they had respected the absent owner.

When in later years I have seen men prowl around my doors, pry open my windows, enter and destroy and steal, I have often wondered what splendid moral fibre is today lacking that men possessed in the days when our country was young.

The forward advance of civilization could not be stemmed; more and more hardy men and earnest women made the long westward trek until finally a county was organized and a reign of law and order banished the gun and knife. Those who had braved the wilderness wrote glowing letters to friend and relative, telling of the new land by the lakes—its beauty, the fertility of its soil, the joy of life upon the broad prairie and along the winding rivers, and those letters brought more families to share in the virgin wealth of forest and plain.

All of those who thus came were forced to suffer hardship that even the bravest of today would hesitate to face. Mail came only by pony express or lumbering stage coach. To leave a comfortable home in the east to take up living under such conditions required stern

manhood. Courage, unfaltering and firm, was absolutely necessary; tenacity of purpose, imperative; willingness to face privation by day and by night, as essential as the urge to live. Mental torture is said to be the surest road to destruction, more potent even than physical torture. These men and women fought both and conquered. They braved the storm and won; they dared loneliness and won.

In the evenings they sat before blazing logs and planned the spring work. As winter prepared to loosen its hold upon stream and lake, they cut enough wood for another year. Great trees were hauled from the timber. Sharp axes cut them into the required lengths for the stoves, and willing hands split and piled enough wood to last until spring should come again.

There were horses to feed and curry, cattle to drive to the lake for water, pigs, whose squealing demanded attention, occasional trips to town for sugar and coffee, wood to pile into the big woodbox back of the kitchen stove; something always to do so that even winter, when storms drove everyone indoors, time did not hang heavily but passed so quickly that day merged into night and night became day almost too rapidly. In fall and in spring great flights of ducks and geese filled the sky. Northward they flew in the warm spring days; southward as the chill of approaching winter came down upon them.

In their endless flights they brought to mind the irresistible advance of time—relentless, dispassionate, implacable. The young look forward and would hasten its passing; the old look backward and would restrain its crushing advance.

And so the years followed in unending procession until the Man and the Woman decided to build for them and their children a new house beneath the oaks. There I was born in thought and then in being—I became a house, a home, a part of the new land so rapidly advancing with the march of time and progress.

## THE HOUSE

I have told you how the Man and the Woman decided to build a new home as the birthplace for the last child, the child of their old age. They selected a spot beneath the tallest trees. There was digged a cellar as large as the main part of the house—ten feet deep, twenty feet wide, thirty feet long—and walled with stone set in masonry. Above this foundation I stood almost two stories high. I faced the east. Before me was the open prairie; back of me, the forest and the lake.

The main building had two rooms below and three rooms above. On the north of this were built the kitchen, the pantry, and a bedroom. On the west, a large room thirty feet long, known as the "back room," which was never lathed nor plastered.

Pioneers in the days when I was young gave little thought to the cold, they accepted it as a part of their lives, so I was not built warmly. My sides were two by four, covered by siding without, lath and plaster, within. There were neither storm doors nor storm windows. I was heated by a kitchen stove, but on occasions of great importance, a fire was kindled in the tall heater in the "front room." At night the fires were allowed to go out, with the result that everything froze solid. My walls were thin, my windows did not fit closely, my doors were loose, leaving wide cracks.

When the terrible blizzards came, as I shall tell you later, the snow came in through every tiny crevice. It sometimes would drift entirely across the floor in little windrows, as far apart as the cracks and crevices, through which the flakes had made entrance. The windows became frosted from human breath or the singing of the teakettle. Men with beards awakened mornings to find their whiskers frozen to the bed covers.

Life was hard in those days and it took hardy men and women to endure and survive. Yet as I look back upon those days of endless hardship and privation, I fain would return to them, if only in returning, could come also those whom I so much loved—those who for so

long a time lived with me—those who so often came to visit and who lingered to the music of the homely “fiddle,” or enjoyed the simple food and neighborly cheer. But alas, with one exception, all that family have been called to a newer, finer Home than ever I afforded and I shall see them no more.

#### THE HOUSE RAISING

By now the Man was a farmer of means. He planted and harvested a thousand acres of wheat—a real job in days of primitive machinery. His braking plows, drawn by six fine horses, turned more and more sod on more and more land. The golden wheat upon hill and in valley waved in the sunshine. As the Man drove weary miles for material with which to raise my walls and cover my floors, he took with him a great load of wheat from the bins where was stored last year’s crop, exchanging this, which he did not need, for lumber which he did need. Gradually the pile of lumber grew until dimension timbers, siding, lath, shingles, and door and window frames, seemingly enough to build a dozen houses filled my yard.

In those days of few but close friends, no home nor barn was erected without inviting neighbors, however distant, to aid in the raising; a day was set and in came the neighbors and friends for a score of miles around. Not men alone but their wives and their children, all ready to make a holiday, when vastly more attention was given to food and drink and dancing than to the actual work.

Raising of my walls was not begun until after all had eaten the picnic dinner served beneath the great oaks. For hours women had hustled about emptying baskets, filling dishes with preserves which every good housewife so proudly made in those days, arranging plates upon long tables, until after what seemed to the small boys hovering about an interminable delay, the alluring odor of coffee and roasted meats floated over the gathering. And when the coffee was just right, the meats browned “to a turn,” and the potatoes sizzled in the hot frying

pans, the cry of "Come and get it" brought instant results. Men, however old, and children, however young, required no urging and almost instantly both sides of the long tables were filled and the real business of the day was on.

How the very trees rang with joke and shout and laughter as food was passed and hungry appetites were assuaged. I doubt if ever people assembled under such happy circumstances as in the days when our country was young and they were so carefree and hopeful.

Even pioneer tables must sometimes become empty and pioneer stomachs become filled, so in time these friends and neighbors rose and attention was turned from food to the great thrill of raising my walls.

There were no real carpenters to shape my timbers and fit my windows and doors, but every man was a carpenter and mechanic and blacksmith in his own right. It may be that my frame was not planned with exactness but it was put together and fitted nearly enough for the time and place.

The timbers were laid upon the ground and then nailed together—a whole side in one piece. Then with many a "ho, heave ho" and shout and laughter, up went the side into place. Instantly a dozen hammers drove home the nails that held my walls. While one side was thus constructed, the other three sides were being built, each gang of workmen making every effort to place its side in position before the others. As quickly almost as I now tell it, my four sides were raised and nailed together. Then came the rafters, and I stood ready for floor and siding.

The evening shadows fell across my walls. The great trees projected their form and shape eastward as the sun sank beyond the lake's farther shore. The women again prepared food, and as the men laid aside hammer and saw, I knew that my raising was finished—though only a skeleton I was a house with promise of greatness and beauty to be always my own.

Nightfall only added to the merriment. All night long

the fiddle droned out the merry tunes of Money Musk, Pop Goes The Weazel, and Turkey In The Straw, while the call to "Swing your partners, one and all" brought extra applause from those sitting on the side. Finally dawn came over the hills, breakfast was served and the guests began preparations for the homeward drive. Not one but gave a last admiring glance toward me and I know that each within his heart wished that he might be returning to a home as splendid as I was to be. I watched them disappear over the hills and when the last could no longer be seen, I felt that I was truly born.

#### I AM FINISHED

Day after day men worked on me until at last my window frames were set, my doors in place, my siding nailed to the studding, and my roof boards ready for the shingles. Then one day the neighbors came back to see the new house, completed and ready for occupancy. What a day was that! How proud were the Man and Woman! How filled with pride and joy was I, for I was a House, a Home, the finest and largest in all that country.

That night my floors echoed to the whine of the violin and the stamping of many feet. The old fashioned square dance with an occasional turn to the Virginia Reel prevailed. The fiddler occupied a chair set upon the kitchen stove which had been turned around against the wall to make room for two sets of dancers. All doors were open and two more "sets" danced in the "parlor," two in the "front room" and three in the large "back room." The men seemed to feel that the highest jumper was the best dancer, and back and forth they went, swinging their partners on the corner and "balancing all" with an energy that few today could endure.

I was speechless with consuming pride. My clean white walls, my shining floors, my spotless windows, were my joy. It was my day of greatness and that night I lived. I saw only happiness for the future, but alas, while in all the years the Man and the Woman lived within my walls, only one soul was called to its Maker,

I could not, happily, vision the hardships, the want, the trouble, that Time would bring to so many of the joyous throng who have met here.

At midnight the guests were told to prepare for supper. The kitchen was cleared, tables were set, and great loads of steaming food—fried chicken, roast beef, mashed potatoes, gravy, hot breads, gallons of steaming coffee—were carried from the old house to the new. What a shout as children and young people gathered around the groaning tables! On such great occasions children were permitted to stay up as long as Nature consented, and how those rosy cheeked little folks ate and laughed until, exhausted, they would find an overcoat or blanket and sleep until they were awakened for the homeward journey.

Midnight did not end the celebration, for far into the morning hours the dance continued until the sun's rays gave notice that another day's work called men and women alike. Such were the parties of my youth. The pioneers made a business of their fun—always all night, and sometimes on special occasions, all day and all night. No one was in a hurry. There was no place to go, nothing to do in the winter except the daily "chores." So why hurry? They were carefree, happy, generous, kindly, loving, forgetting faults, forgiving offense. I would give much, had I much to give, to see the men and women who honored me at my birth, gathered once more within my walls. But that may not be and in common with all upon whom age presses heavily, I must, if I would be happy, see only the joys and dwell little upon the evils that come into every life.

When the guests, assembled to raise my walls, departed for their homes, I was incomplete—when they returned the second time, they saw a finished house. And now I tell you the things that I, myself saw and heard and felt. My Autobiography in truth now begins.

#### THE LITTLE GUEST ARRIVES

I have told you that the Man and the Woman built me that their last child might have a better home than

the rude log hut in which the older children were born and had lived.

The very day following my completion the family moved from the old cabin into my spacious walls, filled with pride and happiness, and that very night the doctor came and presently I heard a faint cry from baby lips and knew the visitor whom we had been expecting had arrived to bless the declining years of a Man and a Woman who had braved privation and suffered in cold and hunger that a house should be assured for their children.

The little guest who came to live within my new walls was a boy and there he lived for eighteen years, until the farm was sold and the family moved to a nearby town. I had had many moments of sorrow as one after another of this large family left for homes of their own, but the deepest grief of all was when these who remained, loaded the household goods into wagons and left without a word of goodbye to me.

I was left empty and alone. My walls were without ornament, places where pictures had hung showed white and clean, while elsewhere was discoloration; my floors were robbed of even the rag rugs sewed by the Woman; every piece of furniture was gone. I saw myself forsaken; those whom I had sheltered so many years had deserted me, and I was like an old man whose children, in their own homes, had forgotten the love that once bound them together. I am not ashamed to tell you that the eyes of my soul shed tears, lonely, bitter tears that cold winter morning when everything I loved was taken from me. But I am telling you of the Boy and must not intrude my sorrows here.

For many years I lived with them and they, with me. I knew their faults, and sympathized; their virtues, and rejoiced. Perhaps it is because I am old, my vision is not clear, my judgement warped, but look as I may, I cannot find in the men and women of today the depth of soul and strength of character I saw and loved in the men and women of my youth.

But I am an old house, already sunk in my dotage and should not think of such things, much less express my thoughts in word or writing. So now I go forward with this tale of little things.

#### DIGGING THE WELL .

One of the first things done after my last shingle was laid and my walls plastered and my woodwork painted was to dig a well in the alcove formed by the L shape between my main part and the big back room extending thirty feet westward. To dig a well in those days was not like it came to be in later years when men came with machinery and with a great huge auger bored a hole in the ground deep enough to reach a vein of water. No such machinery was available then, and men had to dig, remove the dirt and wall up the well, all by hard hand labor.

I watched with interest when they started digging. I heard them talking about the work before they began. They told of digging the old well down toward the ravine. One man had done all the work and he had gone down almost forty feet alone. He had no one to operate the windlass and haul up the dirt. He started the well and dug down about eight feet before he had any trouble throwing out the dirt.

At that point he could not throw any higher and it was necessary to find some way to remove the dirt. He built a platform half way across the opening of the well and threw the dirt upon this platform until it could hold no more. Then he climbed upon the platform and threw the dirt out onto the ground. Then he climbed out of the well and threw the dirt far enough away so that he would have enough room for the rest of the dirt as he dug it out.

When he had gone down another six or eight feet, he built another platform covering half the opening of the well and filled that with dirt. This platform was built on the opposite side of the well so that the dirt could be thrown from one platform to the other. And so he

worked himself down, step by step, as it were, until he found water. By the time he was down forty feet he had built at least six platforms and every shovel full of dirt had to be handled once for each platform and then finally out upon the ground at the top of the well. Anyone thinking of just what this meant can see how much hard work was involved and how much time was required in digging a well. It was backbreaking work. Day after day after day for weeks continued the endless work of shoveling dirt up six feet, then another, and another and the final clearing away at the mouth of the well. When all of this was done, came even the harder work of laying the inner wall of stone.

All land in that part of the country was more or less covered with round heads as they were called, stones from six inches to a foot in diameter. Along the lake shore were many more of these stones. When the time came to dig the well and make the wall, it was necessary to haul these stones from the field or lake shore. Because these stones were so heavy, there were built affairs called "stone boats"—boats that were dragged along upon the ground much as a sleigh runs upon snow in the deep snows of winter. The heavy stones were rolled upon a stone boat by one man, whereas two or more men would have been needed to lift the stones into a wagon. Most of the work in pioneer days was a one man job anyway, and so clearing the farm of stone was a one man job by using a stone boat.

It was necessary of course to begin the wall at the bottom of the well. The water had to be drawn out by a bucket and the stone let down to the bottom by that bucket. When enough stone had been lowered, down went the man and soon he had the first layer of stone built around the wall. Then day after day and week after week the work continued. It was necessary to keep the water out until the wall had risen above water level and all the time a platform upon which to work was required. These platforms were used until the wall was built up to one of them, when it was removed so the walls

could be laid, and another platform built upon which to work in laying the stone.

At last the wall was finished to the top of the well and then a platform was built over the mouth of the well, with an opening in the center for the bucket to enter, and a wooden wall built around the well upon this platform, so that animals and children could not fall into the well. Sometimes a "sweep" was used in drawing the water. This was a long pole balanced over the well upon two arms six or eight feet long. At one end was a bucket and at the other a heavy weight to balance the bucket. This sweep could be used only in shallow wells, however, and the well dug at my step was far too deep for a sweep, so a wooden affair called a windlass was rigged across the frame around the well and a large bucket tied to a strong rope attached to the windlass was let down to the water by unwinding the rope, and the bucket, filled, was pulled up by winding up the rope. This seemed a wonderful way of getting water from a deep well and was the only means used for many long years.

A little later a peculiar affair was invented to get water—many little iron buckets, holding only about a tea cup of water, were attached to a continuous chain that kept revolving so that as soon as a bucket was emptied, it was carried down into the well for more water. This new way fascinated me and I watched every time anyone went out to draw water.

After many more years I saw them bring to our farm a long piece of hollow iron pipe. The little iron buckets were taken out and this long pipe put down into the well. A kind of handle was fastened to this pipe and when the handle was pumped up and down, water came out of this pipe. I never did understand just how it worked, but I could see that the water really did come when the handle was pumped. I thought this surely must be the perfect way of getting water, and so it was for a long time.

Before I go on I must tell of a little thing that happened one day in the cold winter. The boys were out pumping

water when one of them said to the little Boy, "Stick out your tongue to this handle and see what happens." The Boy did as he was told and stuck his tongue against the cold iron. In an instant he pulled it away with a scream, and I could see that the iron had taken away a part of the skin from his tongue and it was bleeding a great deal. The little Boy ran to his mother crying bitterly. His tongue was sore for many days; I could not and do not yet understand why older boys think it smart or funny to do such cruel things.

I thought the pump was the best thing they ever would have to raise water, but one day some men came out with another very peculiar looking thing. I watched them as they worked. Soon a tall tower was erected right over the well, and at the top of the tower was installed a thing called a "windmill." Presently the wind blew, and to my astonishment, this wheel began to turn, and as it turned, water began running from the iron pipe and soon the big trough was filled and overrunning.

When I saw this, I thought that surely this is the best man can do. First the water was drawn up in buckets, then in little buckets on a pulley, next a hand pump, and last a windmill. But I was mistaken, for one day men came with a small machine in a box. The big windmill was taken down and hauled away, and from the box was taken something that was fastened to the pump handle. I almost jumped from my foundation when suddenly with a roar and a snort, the little machine which had been fastened to the handle began to pump water much more swiftly than ever the windmill could. The big trough was filled before I could realize what was going on, and I heard one of the men say that the Man would not have to wait for the wind to blow when he wanted water. Thus one advance after another has lifted farming from drudgery to a comparative ease and comfort.

#### THE THRESHING MACHINE

Born while blocks, shingles, short boards and other fragments of my being lingered about, the Boy quickly

became an expert in building block houses. As he grew in years, his mind turned to machinery and many a curious affair blossomed in my big back room or out under the trees.

The most intriguing of all machinery was the big J. I. Case threshing machine. It was the largest type made, equipped with a 36 inch cylinder, operated by horse power, and a wonderful machine for its day. It was called a separator because it separated the grain from the straw. It was run by a peculiar machine called the horse power which lay flat on the ground. It had no wheels and when it was moved, it was carried on a low wagon. In later years wheels were placed under the horse power and it was hauled around by horses.

This separator had six long arms, or sweeps, extending from the center outward. To these, six teams were hitched. As the horses went around and around, they turned the horse power which in turn turned a long iron rod that extended from it to the separator. This rod was attached in such a manner as to set the machinery going when the horses began their journey around the power.

To keep the six teams going evenly a man stood at the center of the horse power with a long whip that made more noise when snapped than a pistol shot. When he saw a team loafing, he touched them up by a cutting snap of his long whip.

The separator made a soft humming noise when in operation. When this big cylinder began to revolve, this humming noise could be heard for miles. With the wind or breeze in the right direction, it was easy to tell whether the machine was being run at full speed and if the grain was being fed evenly into the cylinder. Feeding, as it was called, was very important. If fed too fast, much grain was lost, whereas, by regular, even feeding the kernels were loosened and fell into the hopper; and if too much went in at one time, it would stop the cylinder and no more could be fed until the proper speed had been acquired. When thus

overfed, a resounding "chug" resulted that could be heard all over the farm. A good feeder never overfed his machine and of course threshed more grain than a careless feeder.

As I sit today in my lonely place upon the prairie, I listen in threshing time for the low growl as the cylinder begins to revolve, its whine, as speed increases, and then its calm, even movement as the grain goes in the feeder.

Times have changed since my youth. No longer are horse powers used; no longer do horses bear the load; no more the interesting sound of the "chug"; for today great engines give the power; no bandcutters work with knife and blade; no feeder spreads the sheaves, for men in hayracks, using forks, throw the bundles into a long trough through which they are carried to the cylinder, and in an instant later the golden kernels come pouring out.

In my youth threshing days were great days. Housewives vied with each other in having the best food to set before the threshers. The men were always hungry and every woman felt her reputation at stake as the half famished men gathered around her table. If they ate all in sight, she felt honored; if they left food uneaten, she was humiliated. She hovered around the table like a mother chicken over her young. Would this one have more white meat, another more potatoes, more hot biscuit, more gravy, more steaming coffee? Thus she did urge her food upon her willing victims, and as each took a second or third helping, her pleasure was unbounded.

Men had great appetites in those pioneer days and women enjoyed nothing more than to satisfy the hunger of all who came—stranger and friend alike. No one was ever turned away. The door was ever open. Generous, kindly, sympathetic, ready to sacrifice for others, willing to bear burdens not their own: such were the pioneer women of my youth.

The Boy was always awake when the threshers

came, whether it was late at night or early morning, always pleading to be allowed to do some part of the work. There was no job in threshing he did not want to do. He was certain that he could work in the straw stack, sack the grain, drive the horses on the horse power, feed the grain into the great cylinder. He was a nuisance on general principles, but the Man only laughed at him, telling him he must eat more and grow more if he wanted to do a man's work at threshing time.

The threshers carried a number of men as their regular crew—a driver to stand on the horse power, cracking his long whip; a manager, who also kept the machinery oiled; and often a specially skilled feeder to spread the bundles and feed them evenly into the cylinder. Besides these, many others made up the threshing crew, but usually they were neighbors who exchanged work with each other.

I noticed that the Boy always sat with the threshers at the table, trying to eat as much as they. But little stomachs cannot hold so much, yet he ate until his eyes fairly popped in his determination to grow up and be a big man, as the Man had suggested.

One day a thresher, living nearby, made what would be called a wise crack by saying that the Boy was the "titman" of the family. To the Boy who well understood what was meant in calling him a "titman" no greater insult could have been offered, and for years he harbored an unfriendly feeling toward the man who so humiliated him in the presence of the threshing crew. But by eating substantial, health-building food and by the ample exercise afforded by farm chores, the Boy grew rapidly—ceased to be the titman—and eventually became the tallest of a family of tall men.

The Boy never outgrew his interest in and love for machinery and when he was about twelve, he built a regular threshing machine, power and all. The cylinder teeth were nails, the concave teeth were nails, and the horse power, a belt running over a wheel raised from the ground that it might be turned. The sieves

shook back and forth, throwing the grain into a trough that carried it to a bushel measure. The straw was pulled up by a carrier and dropped at the rear end of the machine. It was a very fine outfit but unhappily the Boy built it in the big back room and the doors were not large enough to get it out. He had to tear it down to remove it and then rebuild it but the machine worked and great was his pride and joy.

Of such simple things was life in those far away days—no hurry to go somewhere, no hurry to return; no worry about riches, for wealth could buy but little for the rich not equally possessed by the poor—no deep poverty, no proud riches; no injustice, no unkindness, no hardships imposed by man himself. Generous, jovial, loyal, great hearted and good hearted—such were the men and the women who crossed endless prairies to build for themselves a new country between the winding lakes.

#### THE BLIZZARD

Not very long after my completion there came what was known among the pioneers as a "blizzard." Even while the men were putting on my shingles, I heard them say it was getting almost time for some "weather," and shortly after the Man and the Woman moved into their new house, the "weather" came.

It was a beautiful winter day. The sun was shining, the snow melting, and it seemed to me that a more lovely day could scarcely be desired, but I heard the Man tell the Woman that from the smell of the air, a blizzard was on its way. Then I noticed the peculiar appearance of the sky. It was not clear and blue as it had been, and while the sun was still shining, it was a different looking sun that soared the heavens—a blurred sun, strange and hazy. Then suddenly it almost disappeared and all that one could see was the place where it had been shining—a little brighter spot than elsewhere.

Soon all the sky grew black and it was almost as dark as night. There was no wind, but a strange calmness that was so calm it attracted one's attention. These

changes took place in less time than I have taken in telling, for the different appearance of everything was almost instantaneous. Then suddenly a great wind swept out of the northwest with a roar that was deafening and fearful, and the blizzard was upon us.

Before the storm I could see far down the lake and away off on the prairie, but when it struck, all objects were blotted out save the two great oaks whose branches rubbed against my shingles.

The air was filled with whirling snowflakes, driven with such force that no man nor animal could face them. They lashed against my roof, my walls, my windows—my whole body shook and quivered in that terrible blast. At times I believed I was being moved from my foundation; my entire frame weaved and twisted; my doors and windows rattled. I wondered how long I could stand such violence and hoped it would soon be over. I was to learn that when such storms came, they seldom ended within three days and nights, and this one raged with all its force for three long days and three terrible nights.

During those three long days and nights no one thought of venturing out. The stock was in the barns and had some feed, but the Man said it would be suicide to attempt to get to them. At last the raging wind became less violent, the flakes of snow less dense, the sky not quite so dark, and the storm was over. But even then no one ventured forth until the wind ceased and the sun once more rode the heavens.

Gradually it became possible to see the lake and the prairie and things close about us. What I saw was amazing. The snow was piled in drifts, sometimes twenty feet high. Fences were completely covered, the smaller buildings did not show at all. The snow was piled against the big barns almost to the roofs, and my windows were drifted full. Before doors could be opened much shoveling was necessary. The barns were finally reached by excavating great tunnels beneath the snow drifts. I could not see, but by the noises that came from

the barns, I could imagine the joy with which the animals welcomed the arrival of food and water.

I experienced many similar storms in the days when the Man and the Woman lived beneath my roof. In many storms, unfortunate persons, caught from protection, were frozen to death; others lost their hands or feet, and in some instances lost both hands and feet. I remember one who was thus afflicted and what a piteous sight it was to see him carried about and fed like a helpless baby.

One terrible storm came up so quickly that there was no time to send the children home from school. Indeed, it was a positive rule that no one should be permitted to leave the school building under such circumstances. The teacher and pupils were marooned for three days. All fuel was burned in an attempt to keep the building warm. Finally it became necessary to burn the school desks, the pictures, anything that was loose.

I remember that the Man and the Woman were greatly worried when the storm came up so suddenly, as all their older children were in school. On the second day when there seemed no letup in the storm, the Woman baked a large sack full of doughnuts and asked the Man to carry them to the marooned children.

A stake and rider fence ran from the nearby barn to a point within a few rods of the schoolhouse, and the Man believed that by following this fence, he could reach the children. He knew the lay of the land after leaving this point and by good fortune reached the building. There was much joy among the children and teacher that day when food was brought to them. Water was obtained by melting snow, so no one really suffered while the blizzard swept over them.

I remember another blizzard that came up as the Man was driving across the prairie twenty-five miles from home. He unfastened the horses, knowing full well that they would take care of themselves, as horses, always face away from a storm and keep going until it is over. Turning the wagon box over, he crawled un-

der it. He had on an overcoat made from buffalo hide, and nothing ever was fashioned by the hand of man so certain of protection against cold and snow. The snow drifted around the wagon box, giving further protection, and when the storm had ceased, the Man emerged safe and sound.

The frontier was deluged with stories of these terrible blizzards, but I have been told enough so that anyone who reads will understand. Only recently similar storms have swept over the land, giving to the few who still remember the blizzards of my youth, renewed memories of pioneer hardships.

#### FARM WORK IN THE OLD DAYS

As the spring drew near and the days began to lengthen and the sun's rays descended more forcefully, the men began the work of chopping and piling the year's supply of wood. To have the wood convenient for use, the logs were hauled from the woods into my back yard only a few feet from me, and there cut into lengths to fit my stove.

The Man went into the timber and marked the trees that were to be cut. There were no leaves on the trees and I could see him as he slashed a mark upon the trees with an axe. It surprised me at first when I saw him always mark the poorer trees, but later I learned that by cutting out the poor ones, the other trees had a much better chance to grow.

The trees were usually cut while the snow was still on the ground, as it was easier to haul them into the yard. A team and heavy log chain were used. As soon as a tree went crashing to the ground, it was trimmed of its limbs, and the log chain fastened to the butt end, and away went the horses dragging the log to the yard.

Another thing interested me. They never split the logs unless it had frozen the night before. I wondered about this, too, and why they waited until a certain time in the spring before beginning this work. I learned that as the warmer days came, the sap rose in the trees, filling the wood, so dry in the winter, with moisture.

When this moisture froze at night, it would expand and by expanding would in itself, put quite a strain on the log. On such a morning the logs would fairly pop when hit with an ax, making splitting very easy. You thus see that to do this work best it was necessary to cut the trees after the warmth of spring had caused the sap to rise, and yet while it was cold enough to freeze at night. My people knew all about this and made light work out of their cutting and splitting the logs.

I often heard them speak of a man called the Great Rail Splitter, and the reason he could split so many rails was because he knew when to cut logs and when to split them.

After a great many logs had been hauled within my yard, they were split and cut, sometimes with an ax and sometimes with what was called a crosscut saw, pulled back and forth by a man or boy on each end. If the wood were too full of sap, the saw would "bind," making it necessary to drive a wedge into the opening made by the saw so it might have more room without being crowded by the two walls of the log.

The cut and split wood was thrown into one big pile, often as large as a haystack. The green wood would soon dry and by summer gave a quick hot fire. As a consequence, my kitchen in hot weather became a literal furnace, a terrible place for any woman to work. The heat seemed to attract flies in great swarms. Mosquito netting was tacked over my windows and rough screen doors were installed, but these did little to keep out either flies or mosquitos.

Very heavy vegetation grew around my doors and from the grass and weeds and undergrowth around me, these insects rose in clouds. At meal time someone always stood at the table waving a green branch back and forth, striving to keep away these pests while the family ate. It seems to me now that one of the really terrible hardships of my earlier days was that constant battle with insects.

The cut wood was piled at my very door to save dis-

tance in carrying to the wood box which was placed back of the kitchen stove, and it was the duty of the smallest boy in the family to keep that wood box full. Nearly all of the time that the family lived with me, it was the Boy's work; he did not like this chore, but it had to be done and he was the one who had to do it. He would come in, staggering under a tremendous load, trying to fill the box in one trip; but however much he carried, several loads were required and it was scarcely filled before someone told him it was empty again.

It seemed necessary to rest between loads and I have seen him sit on the edge of the box for a long time looking at a painting hanging on the wall back of the stove and above the wood box. This picture was four or five feet square and was divided into a large number of small pictures, all relating to the Bible.

The first picture showed the world as dark and fearsome, lightning flashing, a storm raging; then came the light, the stars high in the heavens, the rim of a new sun just at the horizon; then rain was falling and grass and trees covered the earth; then Adam came and he was alone; then Eve and the Garden of Eden; the Serpent and the Tree of Life; the Flood; the Dove returning no more to the safety of the Ark; the Flight from Egypt; the Parting of the Red Sea, the return of the waters and the destruction of the pursuers; the Wise Men, the Shepherds and the Star; the Birth of Christ, His Life and Death and Resurrection; the Ascent to Heaven—these and other events telling of the rise of man. The whole Bible story had been painted upon that bit of canvas, the most moving, the most vital story in all ages, for there in that little space back of the humble kitchen stove, was set forth events that changed the world's history and lifted mankind higher than ever prince or potentate dreamed or dared.

And between those back breaking loads of heavy wood the Boy rested, examining each of those pictures, seeking to know and understand what they meant. He learned

their source and as soon as he could read, turned to the big family Bible.

Other pictures hung upon my walls but none ever approached this one in interest, save possibly one. This one showed a little boy dressed in black velvet, with a clean white tie, sitting on the doorstep of a big house, holding in his hand a partially eaten piece of bread made more palatable by butter and jam. By the boy was a fine white dog, sitting upright, its head about as high as that of the boy's; eyes, bright and glistening, fixed upon the bread, apparently sure that presently some would be given to him. My special interest in this picture came from the fact that someone had told the Boy this was a picture of him and Keno, and this he always believed until manhood gave him reason to question some of the simple beliefs of youth.

The year's supply of wood ready, the next step was the sowing of the small grain. Crops were rotated, even in those days; corn was raised one year upon a tract of ground, which was followed by wheat or oats or barley the next year. The ground for small grain was never plowed as the grain was sowed in with the corn stalks. But before the sowing, the stalks were broken down, the ground fully harrowed, and perhaps pulverized, then the grain sowed, and the ground harrowed.

Sometimes stalks were especially heavy; then it was necessary to gather them in "windrows" to be burned, but usually they were left scattered over the field to rot and become fertilizer. Once sowed, there was nothing more to do with the grain until it was ready for harvest. Sometimes milkweeds grew in large patches and then it was necessary to go into the field and remove them by hand pulling or cutting. Also occasionally large weeds called artichokes grew in the field and these were more trouble than milkweeds.

However, the situation was different with the corn; from the day it was planted it was a fight to keep out the weeds that seemed fairly to jump out of the ground, trying to keep ahead of the corn. It was the farmer's

business to go in the field with cultivators, plow the corn and thus destroy the weeds. The plowing of the weeds was only a part of the purpose, the other being to keep the top of the soil loose to break what was called capillary action, some mysterious thing by which the water was sucked from the ground by the moving wind, and the corn left with insufficient moisture.

In July or August the small grain was cut. In my day I have seen many changes in the ways of cutting grain. In my first days the grain was cut by hand with what were called scythes. Men would swing a long stick upon one end of which was fastened a sharp knife. With this the grain was cut, and then the men came along and piled it into small bundles which were tied and then set into shocks until they were thoroughly dried.

A little later, there was brought onto the farm something that attracted the neighbors for miles around. It was a reaper. All wanted to see this machine work. It had a sickle that moved swiftly back and forth, cutting the grain which fell upon a sort of platform and was then carried along with the machine until there was quite a pile. A man following the machine would reach over and drag the pile to the ground. There, another man bound the pile into a bundle and a number of such bundles were put in shocks to dry.

Then still later there came a machine that made everyone wild with excitement. It was called the Marsh Harvester. It cut the grain much the same as the reaper, but no one needed to drag the piles from the platform as with the reaper. On the contrary, the grain was left on the platform and two men, who rode along the machine, reached over, seized an armful and bound it into a bundle right there on the machine, and then dropped it off on the ground. This was so amazing that men could not believe it possible until they saw it.

This way of gathering the grain continued for a number of years and then one day another and still more wonderful machine was brought out to the farm for harvesting. It was called a self binder. I could not imagine what

was meant by that name; I knew they bound the grain into bundles, and took it for granted that this machine in some way did the job of binding, but how? No one knew and everyone was anxious to know.

The machine was pulled out to the field and started down the outside near the fence. It was only a short distance away, and I watched with almost as much excitement as the men and boys who ran along by the machine. I saw neat looking bundles of grain dropped off regularly. I watched closely but could not see what was doing it. Some moving arms seemed to seize the grain from time to time and then off would drop a bundle. Soon I could see that the bundles were being tied together by a wire—very fine wire. Later on, twine was used, but whatever they used, the work was being done by one man driving horses hitched to this machine.

It is possible they have still better ways of cutting grain today, but I have never seen anything better. However, I have heard there is a machine that not only cuts the grain but threshes it right there on the ground and delivers it into wagons. Some may believe this, but I do not. All my life I have watched the progress of grain cutting machines and I feel certain that no one could improve the self-binder, and until I see one of those machines that cut and thresh all at once, I prefer to feel that someone has been fooling someone else. It simply is not reasonable.

I was always interested in husking corn. It was such a clean job, but a hard one. The Boy and his older brother had to husk all the corn before they could go to school. The Boy wanted to be in school on the first day; his brother welcomed an excuse to be a little late, so they divided the field into halves and each would husk his half.

The Boy would be out husking long before sunrise and keep at it until after dusk. The wagons held about thirty-five bushels and each tried to fill his box twice a day. The ears were neither so large nor so good a quality as is grown now, and it was a good day's work to

husk and bring in those two loads, which also must be shoveled into the crib. Often I have heard the ears of corn bumping against the wagon box long before daylight and have heard the Boy and his brother unloading in the darkness.

After all this was done, there were the horses to feed and bed, cows to milk, and countless other things. Farming in those days when everything was done by hard hand labor was no easy job. It required strong backs, strong hands, and a strong will to work.

Haying time was interesting. The country was new and wild hay was the general thing. By wild hay, I mean cut on land that had never been farmed. There were several kinds of wild hay—blue grass, slough hay, and upland hay. About four loads of hay were cut to the acre. A mower was used and grass was left lying on the ground until cured, when it was hauled in and stacked near where the stock was kept during the winter. Some people had barns for storing their hay, but usually it was stacked outside.

At this time of year the countryside was filled with fragrance of new mown hay. I loved this season on the farm.

A day or two after the hay was cut, it was raked up into windrows by a machine called a horse rake, and then men piled the hay into tumbles. There it was left until the tumbles settled down to half their original size; then these tumbles were loaded onto wagons and hauled to the stacks.

The first hayracks used in hauling the hay had no sides, and it was difficult to keep the hay on the wagons, especially if the hay were slough grass which was very slippery. I recall that to hold the loads on the wagon a post, built of two pieces of wood which came together at the top and wide apart at the foot, was placed at the front of the rack. A long pole cut from the timber was dragged behind the wagon and when it was full, one of the men would climb onto the load and pull the pole after him. The large end was shoved into the V-shaped

post at the front of the rack. The pole was then pulled down over the hay and the smaller end tied to the rack in the rear.

The pressure of this pole was supposed to hold the hay in place; if the hay were from the blue grass section, the pole worked most satisfactorily, but if it were slough grass, it was likely to slip out on the way home. I once saw a load being thus hauled simply part in two pieces, half going on one side and half on the other side, leaving scarcely a forkful on the wagon. Then later on the farmers learned to build sides to their hay racks.

In all things there has been constant improvement during my days. There has been no standing still, but always forward movement. Of some things I am doubtful, but of most I speak in praise. In those days every piece of work was accomplished by hard licks, as they were called. Today, machinery takes the place of hard work in many respects. For example, I understand there is a corn husker that can go down a row faster than a horse can walk and pick and husk every ear of corn as it goes. This seems impossible to me, but so have seemed hundreds of other things that have come about in my day.

I was born before the telephone and yet have lived to see it everywhere. The first one used in our part of the country on the farm was installed by the Boy himself, so that he could talk from town to those on the farm any time he wished. He bought the material in a far away city, cut and set out slim trees along the road leading to town, and then strung wires upon them. Some sort of machine was placed in my kitchen, another in his town home, and I fairly jumped when I heard a voice come over those wires, go through my walls and out of that contraption on my wall, and could understand what was said and recognized it as the voice of the Boy talking from town.

Another thing that surprised me greatly were the electric lights. For many years the people living with me used kerosene lamps. One day some men came along

the road and ran some wires through my walls. That night I could scarcely close my eyes so astonished was I—it was as light in my rooms after dark as in the day time.

As I sit and think tonight, I feel that I am justified in saying that I have surely lived, for I could go on telling of wonderful things that have happened before my very eyes. In my day have come the radio, phonograph, automobile, electric lights, telephone, just about everything that makes life worth living to the people of today. Yes, indeed, I have lived.

#### NEIGHBORS AND OTHER THINGS

The young people for miles around gathered about me for their good times. I never knew why my walls and my yards were always the favored spot. I sometimes thought they came to me because I was a fine, big house, set among great trees and near a lake, with its beach for swimming in summer and its glimmering ice for skating in winter. At other times I have felt that it was not I alone that drew them around me in such numbers. At such times I have thought that some came because so many girls and boys lived within my shelter and oftentimes I have imagined the Woman's known ability as a cook and her willingness to feed everyone within calling distance may have been the inducing cause with at least a few who enjoyed farm food done to a turn and served with pioneer liberality.

Whatever the occasion for their coming, no holiday passed without visitors who came unannounced and without invitation. Indeed, in those good days invitations were seldom given or expected, everyone knowing that while the host might be surprised, the welcome would be none-the-less hearty.

I was especially interested when the yard was filled with young men. I have often seen fully thirty at one time. They all came afoot, for it was the old fashioned farmer's idea that horses that were worked six days a week were entitled to a day off when Sunday came. Hence the horses were fed and turned into the pastures

or yards to rest, and the boys walked a mile or five miles to play in my yard.

Nearly all their games were games of strength. The most powerful was the greatest among them. To lift the heaviest stone, was glory. Pulling sticks was great fun. Two boys, facing each other, sat on the ground, feet against feet, and holding a stick between them, each tried to pull the other off the ground. The two contestants occupied the center of a throng of cheering boys. One would be lifted a little from the ground and his opponent would be cheered and urged to hang on, but the other by using all his strength might get back on the ground and pull the other up. Neither had won until one or the other was pulled entirely from the ground and over on him. I watched this test of strength with interest, and presently learned that winning involved not alone strength but skill as well.

Another game seemed very simple, but it also brought out not only strength but skill. A round stick was produced and two contestants would stand facing each other a short step apart. Each would grasp the stick which was held high above their heads and at a signal they would bring the stick down, making it necessary that it be turned in one or the other pair of hands. The boy who held it from twisting in his own hands was the victor.

Another feat that greatly interested them all was when a boy would hold his arm out full length, level with his shoulder, and a weight would be placed in his hand. This weight was about four or five pounds and the game was to see who could hold his weight out the longest. At first it was easily held, but in a few minutes four pounds seemed to weigh forty, and I noticed that the short armed boys were usually the winners.

They would see who could run the fastest, jump the highest, turn the most handsprings, or walk the greatest distance on his hands, feet waving in the air. Always something new, especially after a circus had been to town. I have seen them making a big spring board and line up a few farm horses, brought in from the pasture

for the purpose, and go over them from this spring board, turning somersaults as they went, in imitation of the clowns who went whirling over a string of elephants at the last circus.

They would spend the day playing around, well aware that the Woman who knew boys and their appetites would presently come to the kitchen door and call them for food. As dinner time approached, she would "peek" out to count the number in the yard and then set the same number of plates on the long table in the back room. When all was ready in the adjoining kitchen, her call would come, and I sometimes thought that the boys made even better time to her table than in their foot races.

On the table would be great quantities of fried chicken and mashed potatoes and real farm gravy, made of cream. No hungry threshing crew ever ate more and none with such unalloyed appreciation and gusto. How I marvelled at the appetite of a growing boy! No worry, no responsibility; healthy, vigorous, and always ready to fill his stomach with anything that seemed capable of digestion!

The lake was about sixty rods away and I have seen those boys make bets as to who could reach the lake first, undressing as they ran, throwing their clothes wherever chance beckoned; and then after the swim, start back together, picking up their clothes as they went and dressing on the jump. I remember one amusing instance where a boy, dressed only with pants and shirt, could not find his shirt and had to go home with only his trousers. I am sure that he thought someone had hidden his shirt, but I knew what had happened. While he was swimming, I saw a cow deliberately swallow his missing shirt. I could hardly believe my own eyes, and watched her for several days, fully expecting her to die, but the shirt seemed to agree with her.

I have seen many races but for downright excitement and hilarious joy, none compare with these dress and undress races to the lake and back.

A strange thing often happened while the Woman lived within my walls. Boys and often girls would have trouble at their homes and would run away, making a bee line directly to me. Not long after they came, the Woman would call them into the front room, close the door and with a real sympathy that made them all love her, ask what was the trouble. None ever hesitated to tell her. One big fellow had a step-mother who was cruel. Another could not get along with his father. A girl left home because she was not permitted to go with a certain boy. Always some little thing that did not amount to much. When the Woman found why the boy or girl had left home, she would ask them to stay a few days, as she was sure that everything would be all right. Then the next day she would go over to the neighbor's whose son or daughter was at her home. I do not know what was said but in an hour or two, the father or mother of the runaway would come back with her, have a talk with the willful one, and they would go home together. The Woman seldom said very much about her visits to the parents, but I do remember that once she was really angry, and I heard her say that it would serve the father right if the boy never went home.

Once a boy in our family ran away. There had been no trouble and no one could understand why he had gone. But in a few days he returned and rather sheepishly admitted that he had thought it would be much more fun to travel with the circus than work on the farm. So he had taken a job with the circus that had been in the nearby town and that night helped to take down the big tent and load it and all imaginable things into wagons. It was about one o'clock at night when this work was finished and the boy was very sleepy.

The circus traveled overland and as he could drive horses, he was put in the driver's seat of the wagon carrying two lions and several tigers. The animals did not enjoy night riding much more than the boy, and they kept up a noisy protest. They seemed awfully close to the frightened driver, but there was nothing for him to

do but drive and drive he did. It was about daylight when the next stop was reached and at once all hands rushed to raise the big tent.

About six o'clock breakfast was ready and the threshers' rush with which he was familiar was nothing to the way those roustabouts swarmed around the table. The hungry boy could not forget his mother's breakfasts back home and made up his mind that he had about all the circus that he wanted. He tried to get away but was afraid to go and so waited for a chance to leave when no one was looking. No such opportunity presented itself and all day long he was kept busy driving stakes with a heavy maul, feeding horses, bringing hay to the elephants—one thing after another until it was time to take the big tent down after the night's show. Again the wagons were loaded and again he was told to drive the wagon of lions and tigers. He had had almost no sleep for two days and could not keep his eyes open. The horses did not require much attention as they were following the next wagon, and so he curled up on his seat and went to sleep.

Sometime during the night the front wheel dropped into a deep chuck hole and he was thrown from the wagon onto the ground at the side of the road. The instinct of self-preservation caused him to roll clear of the road and there he lay while slowly the long procession of wagons passed. Without moving further, he slept, only to be awakened by a shout. He jumped to his feet expecting to be dragged back to his job with the circus, but saw only a boy about his own age.

The other boy was greatly excited because he thought he was talking to a regular circus man and wanted to go off with the circus at once, but when the homesick lad had told his own experience, his desire to go quickly faded. Our boy soon found that he was about sixty miles from home and back he started on foot.

Sixty miles is a long walk even for a healthy farm boy, but in a few days I saw a dejected and rather dirty boy coming down the road toward me and recognized him

as our lost wanderer. He came into my yard, but before he reached my door, the Woman ran out and threw her arms around him and kissed him without paying the least attention to his dirty face. Breakfast was on the table and she had quite an argument to induce him to wash up before eating. I have seen a lot of hungry people eat, but have never watched anyone who did a more complete job of it than this lad did that lovely morning.

When he had eaten all he could hold, he told his story. We all listened with interest and could not help being sorry, but I do not think the Man allowed himself to grieve very much over his son's hardships for when the tale was finished, he told the boy that he had had his good time and to hitch up Doll and Tige and cultivate corn in the back field.

My walls never echoed the music of the radio; no piano graced my best room, only an oldtime organ wheezed and groaned; no telephone jangled on my walls; no glamorous movie took my boys and girls from home—all things were very simple in those days and yet the little things of those days were bigger than the biggest things of my later years.

And now after a long life of observation, I am inclined to feel that, in some respects at least, the old days were the best days. People did not require so much to amuse them; they were more sympathetic, more tolerant and more willing to share troubles and sorrows as well as pleasures. Today excitement is happiness, tumult is joy, loud and boisterous conduct, sure proof of mirth.

But again I must not moralize. To me is given only to tell of the things I have seen and heard and in which I have taken some humble part. So on with the tale of an old house!

#### MEMORIES

There are two things an old house never forgets—death within its walls and marriages. Of these in all my years there were but four—one death and three marriages. I can still see the first of these as though it were but yes-

terday and yet it is more than half century ago. The oldest son had married and had one little girl then less than three years old. His wife became suddenly ill—so ill that a consultation of physicians was held and three grave men after careful examination told the husband his wife would live. I can still see him as this word was given. He was overcome with worry, and the assurance his wife would not leave him gave to him the joy that comes to those who love. But alas, within three hours his wife became worse and died before the doctors could return.

I remember how bitterly she wept as she felt death draw near. She called for her baby who had been put to bed and was asleep, but they wakened her and carried her in her long nightdress to her mother's side. Death was so near the mother could not see her baby as she stood beside her bed and so they lifted the little thing up and held her close to the dying mother's face to receive the last kiss in this life. The baby did not understand, but everyone else in the room did and tears swept down every face as the final goodbye kiss was given. It was many a day before I could drive away the cloud that fell upon me, but of grief there must be an end and soon the sorrow and sadness gave way to gladness as the bright sunshine of spring flooded my windows and all in that household seemed to take on new courage and hope.

I must tell you of the three weddings that came to add happiness to all beneath my broad roof. The first of these occurred many years ago while I was still very young. I had never seen anything of the kind and was deeply interested, which perhaps accounts for my clear memory of all that happened. The oldest daughter was to marry a well-known physician from an adjoining county seat, a man much older than she but handsome and of pleasing appearance. I could not any more than others present, vision the unhappiness that was to follow this seemingly brilliant marriage.

It may interest you if I relate some of the things

that preceded the marriage. The ceremony was to occur in the middle of the afternoon. It was midwinter and heavy snow covered the ground. Perhaps a hundred persons had been invited and the house was full. The entire family was present from the oldest son to the little Boy then about four years of age. The little Boy had an abundance of very long hair, sometimes kept curled and sometimes left to snarl. He had a very nice velvet suit and soon after noon they started getting him ready. All the daughters were there together with a number of young lady friends of the bride. All were anxious to aid in preparing the wedding dinner and some took an interest in the little boy and his tangled curls.

I have spoken of my kitchen but have overlooked another very important room adjoining the kitchen. I refer to the pantry. This was a room about eight feet long and six feet wide, with shelves on both sides for dishes and in one corner was an enormous flour chest. In those days they took loads of wheat to the mill to be ground into flour and when the load came back as much as possible was put in this chest. It had a cover that lifted and the top was in part flat. To keep the boy out of the way while they worked, someone set him on this flour chest and he was told to stay there. His hair had been carefully combed by a girl named Katie. She had been so very careful not to pull his hair that the Boy formed a violent attachment for Katie that never changed so long as she lived, although I do not know that he ever saw her again. Anyway his hair was arranged, his new suit was on and he was ready for the wedding. Presently everyone left the pantry and all was still. The Boy sat on the chest for what seemed to him a very long time until finally the stillness was too much for him and contrary to definite orders he slipped down and went into the kitchen. Still there was no sound, so he went on through a hall into the second front room. There on a lounge was his brother John, entirely uninterested in the wedding in the next room. The Boy went carefully to the door leading into the next room and opened it

just a wee mite. He saw a man dressed in a long black coat standing with his back to him and before this man was his sister and the doctor. The Boy did not know the doctor very well having seen him only once or twice before, but remembered for a long time how handsome both looked as they stood facing the man with the long-tailed coat. He heard this man speak first to the doctor and then to his sister and heard them answer but did not understand what it was about. Then he saw a lot of folks kissing his sister and everyone was talking and it looked to him as though someone might come into the room where he was, so he ran back into the pantry and climbed up on the flour chest and waited. Presently some woman came in and found him sitting there. How they did fuss over having forgotten him and how they praised him for being such a good boy, and almost all the women kissed him but none of their kisses seemed to amount to very much until Katie came in and hugged and kissed him. Then the Boy felt that he was a hero—not that he knew what a hero was, but anyway he felt very good and happy.

Quite a number of years later the second wedding came along. This time it was a second sister. This wedding was also held in the wintertime when the ground was covered with snow and everyone came in sleighs drawn by prancing horses. It was held in the evening and after the service they had a great wedding supper. Tables were set and at the head of one long table was the sweet bride and at the other her blushing and bashful husband. Everyone was happy and gay.

The first wedding may be called a fashionable one; this a homely family affair. I remember that chicken was the big item of food, with plates full of mashed potatoes and huge dishes of steaming gravy. Appetites were in good order and all were carefree and ready to shout or sing or speak a piece, as occasion demanded.

Just one little thing happened to mar the happiness of an otherwise perfect evening. It seems very peculiar to me that more than fifty years I should remember

that one discordant note, forgetting much that, no doubt, would be far more interesting. The next door neighbor with a family as large as our own, was present with all the children, big and little. One of the boys was called Henny. He was young but very large. Big boys are always embarrassed by their hands or freckles or something and this lad said not a word during the entire evening. As chicken was passed along the table, he was asked which part he wanted. In an effort to respond properly and interestingly, he said that he would take the part that went over the fence last. I thought that to be a very innocent remark, but his mother was scandalized and rebuked Henny so warmly for his indiscretion that everyone at the table was disturbed, and it was some time before the conversation resumed its former lively tone. But nothing in those days could long depress and soon everyone was happy again and food disappeared as if by magic.

The third and last wedding was different. It was held in the afternoon and there were no guests except the family and the business partner of the groom and two or three of the bride's closest friends. By the time this wedding was held, the Boy had become fourteen or fifteen years of age. One after another the boys and girls of the family had gone and when this last daughter left home, only the Boy and his next older brother remained.

I do not recall very much about this wedding, strange as it may seem, for I do remember all about the others held many years before, but one thing I have not forgotten and never will. When the ceremony was over, the bride and groom left at once. The groom was there with a fine horse and buggy and away they went down the old road toward town four miles away. The father and mother and the two remaining boys stood on the front porch waving them goodbye and when they passed around the first bend out of sight, the four entered the house. Very little if anything was said by any of the family, and to me the whole place seemed vacant and lonely. I found it difficult to get my breath and I seemed

to choke a little as I saw the four remaining members of what was once a very large family, go sadly back into the shelter of my roof.

In a moment I saw the Boy go quickly out into the yard. As he left, I was sure I saw tears in his eyes and so watched him. He went out through my big back room down behind the barn where he evidently thought he was out of sight. But I could see him and watched him as he lay down on the ground. I knew what was the matter with him and knew he was sobbing and felt certain the hot tears were running down his cheeks. I felt like crying with him as I thought of the past, of the boys and girls who had once lived within my walls, now all gone save these two. I was homesick for them, if one can be homesick for those who are away when you are at home.

In a little while the Boy came back. His eyes were red from weeping, but the tears had been wiped away. When he came in, his mother noticed at once and went over to him and with her arm around him told him not to feel bad for his sister was only moving to town and would be out to see them often. This made the smiles return to cheeks still damp and soon happiness came again within my walls, for almost every Sunday the boys and girls who had grown and married, came back home and again fried chicken and apple dumplings and pumpkin pies made strong tables groan with their weight.

As they came from time to time, their numbers increased until with children and grandchildren, there gathered around more than two score persons, happy, congenial, joyful, all willing to work, all ready to share the responsibilities of life. Again happy days were with me and I rejoiced as one who has suffered and lost and found again that which he deeply loved.

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