

The Country Teacher

By ROSA SCHREURS JENNINGS

Almost any professional man who has reached the age of seventy-five will tell you he once took a turn at teaching in the country. The long winter term in the '80s and '90s provided opportunity for many a future doctor or lawyer to earn money and extend the piece-meal education by which he was climbing up his own ladder of learning. And looking back in retrospect to the early '90s from a lifetime of teaching public school, I recall how few were the women who taught the winter term of rural school in that period.

In Iowa, where I grew up, winter-term salaries for men teachers ran thirty-five to forty dollars a month, payable at the end of the term; board was two dollars for the school week, also payable at the end of the term; "Teacher" was a respectable and respected title. There might be as many as fifty pupils in all eight grades, ranging from five-year-olds to boys of eighteen or twenty whose help was needed in summer, but could be spared in winter.

It was no easy task to discipline these schools—in fact, the first week was spent more in an effort to establish "order" than to impart knowledge; and most directors preferred to hire a man for the winter term, though men, too, could be laughed out, smoked out, sulphured out, or even knocked out. I knew one man, a product of the New England academy, small and slight, no longer young, who ran a farm, but had taught the winter term of school in his district year after year, because he had the gift of "keeping order."

Ambitious men found in summer other and better opportunities; thus the spring and fall terms were left to women. Up to the early '90s, a country girl, perhaps the daughter of a well-to-do farmer, who wanted a life of her own, had been willing to help out in some farmer's kitchen, where, in the democratic "hired girl" tradition of those days, she ate at the family table, shared a room with

the daughter of the house, and went to parties with the son. But hired girls were losing caste, and our erstwhile domestic helper, if she had a working knowledge of the three R's, obtained a third-grade certificate to teach—no normal training was then required—and soon the woods were full of girls expecting to cede to men the privilege of teaching winter terms, but exercising in ways not always pretty the law of supply and demand in their own battle to obtain spring or fall terms of school.

As the establishment of normal schools and teachers' institutes spread westward from Massachusetts to Iowa, more education, particularly in methods of teaching, was required to obtain a certificate, and those men who intended to use teaching only as a stepping-stone to something else dropped out, leaving the field open to such persons as were willing to take teacher training in the newly-established Iowa State Normal school, at Cedar Falls. This was a two-building institution which had been used as the Soldiers' Orphans' Home for children of Iowa Civil war veterans, and was made available for this new purpose when the home was moved to Davenport. It followed that women found year-round teaching jobs open. But the problem of discipline remained to worry both teacher and school director.

I lived in Butler county. School elections were held in March, and immediately after, the parade of teacher applicants began. I set out on my first trek in the spring of 1894. Time was precious with teachers a dime a dozen. There were no rural telephones, and the March roads promised a certainty of getting stuck in the mud if we used a light rig, so father took me with team and wagon. I had had sixteen weeks of training at Iowa State Normal school, and carried with me a second-grade county certificate, which, of course, was better than the meager third-grade still issued. It bore a notation from the county superintendent of schools, "Will be valid when you are seventeen," and I had just reached that age.

It was an ordeal to knock at a director's door, and, if you were lucky enough to find him at home, tell him your errand, as if begging a favor. One gruff old farmer let his

gaze travel up and down the full five feet three inches of me, and refused my application because he thought I couldn't make the big boys mind. Two days of slushy mud and spring-seat riding on a "lumber-wagon" and I was ready to apply for the school only two miles from my home, about which I had hesitated up to then, for we were prairie farmers, and this was a district of "bushwhackers." A coolness inherited from the early settlers still existed between the two groups, but the director was willing to take a chance and hired me. If I made good he would let me have the fall and winter terms. My salary was twenty-eight dollars a month for four months of spring and fall, and thirty-two dollars for a four-month winter term.

A FIVE-YEAR-OLD BEGINNER

Came my first day of school. Six happy beginners stood at the blackboard playing "little lamb" and making the sound that the "little lambs make as they play and run in the pasture." But Greenbury shut his lips tight and gazed at me with unblinking eyes out of an adorably freckled face; he would have none of it. Brightly I asked Greenbury questions. Didn't he want to play little lamb? No answer. Didn't he want to learn to read? No answer. More questions. More silence. Was this five-year-old to provide the test as to whether I could make any pupil mind? I hoped the frozen smile on my face covered the doubts I felt. Perhaps this new Pollard's Synthetic Method of teaching reading was no better than the old ABC method? Wasn't there an easier letter to start out with than the "a"? What did you do with little boys who just wouldn't talk?

Suddenly it came to me that this was no clash of wills—poor baby, he was frightened and lonely, and had taken refuge within himself from the strangeness of everything. A perfectly stupid question of mine unlocked his lips and set him free. "Why did you come to school?" Before he thought he flashed out, "Because my ma made me." It was enough; he had left his inner refuge of silence and come out again into the world of speech. Soon a piece of chalk was squeaking in Greenbury's tight little fist and he, too, was playing lamb. In no time his allotted space at the

blackboard was covered with s's that wore pouches and a's that wore tails—who cared? Greenbury and I were on our way.

Often since then Greenbury's eyes have looked out at me from some boy's face perhaps several times five years old, and I've known he wasn't just being stubborn. Even some inanity, if it grows out of the wisdom of understanding, may save the situation; so are schools and lives made or broken.

A long recitation bench with no back stood in the front of the room against the wall. On its far end was a wash basin full of water put there because there was no other place for it. Water splashed out of it if a pupil jiggled too much, but that seemingly offered no occasion for comment. And then ten-year-old George, whom I already recognized as the brightest child in the school, inadvertently sat down in it. I joined in the hearty laughter, which soon included George's wry grin, leaving him not too embarrassed at exposing his wet behind.

No program had been left by the former teacher, nor any indication of what work had been done. I held forty classes that day. Almost before I knew it came four o'clock and dismissal, with the first chance to rest or think since my near-debacle of the morning. Thirty-five pupils in eight different grades! On the board wall was a motto inscribed in colored chalk by some former wielder of spelling-book and ruler, "Order is Heaven's first law." How could the starry heavens parallel any order I could keep in a group of growing, wriggling, earthy children? Already I knew my idea of order did not include the total silence which the discipline of the '90s demanded, or permission to talk only in response to a raised hand. What was order anyway? I tabled the question for the nonce; I had two miles to walk home. But as I turned the key in the schoolhouse door I knew I had found a job I loved and could do. About making the big boys mind? That could wait until winter when they came; in the meantime, tomorrow was another day.

The county superintendency of schools was then an elective job, and a county with a good superintendent was

fortunate, for politics put some strange incumbents in that office. Active road work was an important factor. I recall a clatter of horses' hoofs and rattle of "road-cart" one night long after dark, when honest folk were getting ready for bed. One of the family looked out of the window to smile and quote from his favorite Will Carleton:

"Who is it travels these roads so late?
Hush, my dears, 'tis the candidate."

Our county superintendent, when I began teaching, was a capable man, and an early visit from him straightened out a number of problems for me. He insisted that I must never have more than twenty-four classes a day, and achieved such a program with what seemed abracadabra to me, but was simply the superior knowledge of a real administrator.

In my desk were all the registers of the school's existence with records of age, attendance and punctuality, but none of achievement; report cards were not then given out. There was, too, a dusty, ragged course of study, which had not been followed. Teaching helps were scanty—a few old maps, no globe, a reading chart for beginners, also a chart to teach effects of the use of alcohol and tobacco to satisfy Women's Christian Temperance Union sponsored legislation, a dog-eared dictionary. Because there was so little blackboard, I painted sections of the wall black to help out.

VALUED PLEASANT SURROUNDINGS

We did what we could to pretty things up, with sash curtains at the windows, pictures—blessed be Perry prints—on the wall, painted gourds, strings of bright "calico" corn, colored leaves, abandoned birds' nests, in their season. In spring and fall, bouquets of wild-flowers adorned my desk, but the freezing nights of winter and lack of water on week-ends made plants, so common in every farm woman's kitchen, too burdensome to keep.

Time dragged for beginners in country school. They came to the front of the room to recite at the first of each quarter-day session; then they worked at the board for awhile. At their seats they outlined with corn, shoepegs, or toothpicks words I wrote with chalk on their desks,

copied printed words with alphabet cards, or put together simple cut-outs. In good weather they went out to play for as long a time as they could safely be left alone. At best, from nine o'clock until four o'clock was a long time, without the play equipment children now have. However, by the end of the year, they could read easy material, and write, which was the reason for our being there. Little Annie summed it up, "I had a hard time learning to read, but I kept on learning to read, didn't I? And bimeby I rode."

It was long before my day that the teacher of reading gave directions, "Read up loud enough for me to hear you in the back of the room. Count one for comma, two for semi-colon, three for colon, and four for period." But our reading instruction still consisted mostly of oral reading. Emphasis on silent reading was for the purpose of testing preparation of the lesson assigned. The practice now has swung so much the other way, I almost wish for those days when a child read loud enough to be heard, and stopped at his periods.

The rural school in its half-acre setting was an outstanding feature of the Iowa landscape of the 1880's and 90's. Some grounds were bare of grass and bare of trees; all were bare of play equipment. My schoolyard had trees and grass, thick bluegrass, wonderful for bare feet. The schoolhouses were all alike—long, narrow, frame buildings. Traditionally they should have been red; all I ever saw were white. Part of the length of the schoolhouse was occasionally cut off for an entry, with room for wraps, dinner buckets, and water pail. Mine had no such entry, and George's experience was no single incident. Windows were spaced regularly on two sides, and on the front.

A row of double seats, fastened tight to the floor, ran along each side of the schoolroom, leaving an open passage down the center. Those double seats! Each was a small apartment house in itself, requiring endless adjustment for the occupants to live happily together. Each desk had a round cut-out to hold an ink well, and, since ink could never be used in freezing weather, the hole was a constant temptation for idle stuffing of this and that. A

shelf under the top, open at the front, held schoolbooks, other supplies, and the contraband articles children always have.

Occupying the front of the center passage was a cast-iron stove in shape not unlike the schoolhouse itself, built to hold the four-foot length into which cord wood was cut. A long over-head pipe, supported at intervals by wire, extended to the back of the room. One bitter winter day the unwieldy pipe came down, scattering soot, ashes, and confusion everywhere. Children moved up to or away from the stove as they became too hot or too cold. Always there was some attention-getter who made the temperature a matter of personal grievance, expressing his discomfort noisily and indignantly as he made the change.

Water had to be carried from a neighboring farmer's well, though sometimes a district provided a well with pump whose stale water could be used for purposes other than drinking. With the dropping of the water table, shallow wells disappeared, and farmers had to sink deep wells, which required windmills. It behooved me to be careful which children I allowed to go for water, for a careless child might leave the windmill in gear, and meddlesome or destructive children were a nuisance.

Time out of school was given to get water, a favor eagerly sought; in bad weather, however, older boys went at recess time. With a fresh supply, some pupil was allowed to "pass the water" for drinking and slate washing. Out came the glass bottles in which the provident citizens of our little republic kept water for slate washing, and slate rags to be wet. The common drinking dipper wasn't then a cause for concern; germs were only just coming into public notice.

There were schools where pupils willingly did the sweeping and built fires; it was not generally the custom, and I preferred sweeping after school when dust could settle, and building fires early enough to have the room warm when school opened. I once threw kerosene on ashes containing live coals, and suffered no harm from the explosion which followed! The fuel shed had no inside

door; in below-zero weather I "could have written a book" about that shed door open only on the outside.

Country schoolrooms were scrubbed once a year, later, as public consciousness of health developed, twice a year. Often the toilets were neglected, and I more than once scrubbed them after school. The taboo-ridden boys shamefacedly brought the water at my request, but they were too self-conscious to offer to do the scrubbing.

RURAL SCENES AFFORDED RELAXATION

My walk to school took me up and down four steep hills along a clay road bordered with woods of oak, walnut, hickory, maple, and others of our native trees. Sumach and elder grew inside the fences. Along the roadside were great patches of violets; farther in the woods, in their season, grew hepaticas, anemones, adder-tongues, the reclusive lady-slipper, Dutchman's breeches, and l-e-e-k-s! The children's breaths reeked of leeks! There were ferns as tall as I, and delicate maiden-hair. Sometimes I stayed late after school preparing work for the next day. Then on my homeward way there came from newly-plowed fields the dewy, earthy smell of early evening, with fire-flies flashing their lamps above the long, reedy grass in the sloughs. Are diamonds any prettier?

I went over that road recently in an automobile—no-body walks or drives a horse any more. The hills had been leveled, the road graveled, the trees cut down and the ground planted to corn. There were signs of an inevitable erosion taking place, though here and there could be seen contour plowing, which corrects that.

Always the scream of a bluejay or the caw of a crow sounded in the woods nearby; a flying squirrel flew in our window one day. A neighboring cat came in often to stay awhile. At recess the children lugged countless pails of water from the farmhouse nearby to drown out gophers in the pasture just over the fence. They carried a lot of water, but a gopher hole absorbs a lot of water, and only occasionally did one come out, wet and bedraggled, to streak across the pasture, chased by relentless, screaming boys. It would have been idle to preach mercy; there was a bounty on the rodents, two cents for the streaked and

five cents for pocket and gray gophers. Besides, their fathers had had many a fine "stand" of corn ruined by them. Pocket gophers have pouches along their cheeks which they fill as they follow a newly-planted row of corn. I always hoped the streaked ones, which did less damage, could make their escape; undisturbed, they would stick a head out of a hole and whistle into a world of spring and sunshine and beauty, but a country boy after a gopher has no poetry in his soul. I did make a real effort to save garter and bull snakes, a futile gesture; a snake was a snake and deserved to die.

One Monday morning, twelve-year-old Jack, who already had a neighborhood record as a "bad boy," brought me a great bouquet of Dutchman's breeches, exquisite blossoms of snowy wax. He must have spent all Sunday afternoon gathering them. Jack hated school—I wish I could say such love of beauty as he had evidenced in the tiresome picking of the fragile Dutchman's breeches saved him from going to the bad, but it didn't. Grown-up Jack spent more days inside jail than out.

Teachers then had to ask for their schools; directors never seemed to want to relieve them of that worry by offering to rehire them, and insecure tenure has always been one of the hardest things to accept in the teacher's profession. Shortly before the end of the term I walked one day after school to the director's home to find out whether or not I could have the school again, and was happy, indeed, when he told me yes. We closed the spring term with a picnic in the shady yard. The children's mothers came and told me they were glad I was coming back. That afternoon I locked the door with the same feeling I'd had at the end of my first day—I had a job I liked and could do.

In the fall, tall stacks of grain were a part of the landscape. To make a well-shaped, water-tight stack was an art; already, good stackers were growing scarce because farmers were beginning to thresh out of the field after a week or ten days to give the grain time to "sweat." Stacking protected grain from the weather, but required a much longer wait for threshing, because a second sweat-

ing took place. Grain interrupted in sweating wouldn't thresh out, but grain improperly stacked molded and became a dead loss, even the straw. In school, we could hear the drone of a threshing machine, and see the thin wisp of smoke it cast against the sky.

One morning Tommy handed me a note from his mother asking me to come to their house after school the next day. If it didn't rain (how dependent farmers are on weather!) they were going to thresh. Tommy's twelve-year-old brother was absent next day. He ran errands, picked up spilled grain at the threshing spout, helped push back grain in wagon or bin, and was useful generally. Happiest job of all, sitting at the threshing table with the men to fill himself full up. They washed in the tin basin on the back stoop and dried themselves on a huge roller towel in the summer kitchen. My hostess and I, with several helpers, were kept busy filling up the dishes those hungry men emptied. If you've been there yourself, or seen Grant Wood's "Dinner for Threshers," you know what I'm trying to tell you.

When the men were through we ate, and, like our twelve-year-old, I filled myself "to the full"—what tables those women used to set! No man dared to come home from threshing unable to tell his wife what he'd had to eat, for, gourmet that he was—whatever else of this world's goods he lacked, our early farmer had good and abundant food; he could damn with faint praise or raise a housewife's spirits to the skies when she heard by grapevine telegraph what kind of dinner she had served. How could a woman out-do her neighbor unless her husband told her what that neighbor had served?

"Teacher" wasn't allowed to help with the dishes, and I sat down to visit with Tommy's grandfather. The old man boasted that as a boy he had "kept up his station" behind the newly-invented McCormick reaper as they bound the bundles of cut grain. This required twisting two wisps of straw together at their heads, wrapping a bundle with it like string, and securing it, then carrying the bundles together for shocking. If one got behind that delayed everybody until things were caught up. Keeping

up with one's station was something to be proud of. Later, he said, after long trial and error, the needle with knoter using balls of twine was invented, also the bundle carrier. Horses had furnished power for the threshing machine; in this progressive age, threshers used steam. I wonder, does grandpa, from some other planet, now see the motor-drawn thresher-combine which reaps, threshes, and sacks the grain in one operation?

ZEST OF THE WINTER TERM

Winter's landscape offered sculptured forms of cameo beauty which the wind left in snowbanks, with tree, shrub, and weed carrying each its burden of snow. When the moon was full, the effect of whiteness and silence and shadow was sublime. Clearing it? That was another story. Farmers got out team and bob-sled, put in a scoop to open roads the horses couldn't make, and an ax to cut down a fence for passage in case the shovel couldn't do enough. Children came late to school in the morning; fathers came early after them in the afternoon. I used many a handful of snow to relieve frost-bitten hands and ears and noses; yet sliding down those steep hills was still the favorite recreation for noon and recess.

On the first day of the winter term four "big boys," two of them older than I, came to school. Poor Ben, fifteen-year-old, self-effacing, simple Ben. He had a new third reader, and didn't even know "it" and "the." But I let him keep his self-respect. What mattered primer or third reader. Something was wrong with Ben; he couldn't learn to read. We went through the motions though, and his father happily told me that Ben had never learned so fast!

Modern homogeneous classes miss some definite character and citizenship values that the ungraded school gave. There were no restrictions placed on the entry of subnormal children in school. Freddy, ten years old, whom I taught in another school, tore up his books into tiny scraps as fast as his mother bought them. Proudly he spelled what the "hired man" had taught him, t-o-m- cat. That seemed to be his limit. Dan presented another problem—he began at one end of his desk and chewed along the whole front edge. In their association with these chil-

dren, the others accepted them matter-of-factly, letting them join in their play, laughing, of course, at some of the things they did. But the laughter was kindly laughter, not contemptuous. Seldom did the brighter ones tease these others, often they helped.

John, working for his board, insisted he would have nothing but arithmetic. We compromised in that he took reading and history, too, though it meant for him mostly coming to class. He spent all day at his arithmetic. Grown to manhood, John worked for many years as foreman on bridge-building jobs. Pete was bright, and raised no problems. He should have been in high school. Roy went through the motions of a stolid, uninterested pupil—I wondered why he came. We should have had lessons in safety; it might have saved his life, for Roy pulled a loaded gun, muzzle toward him, out of his buggy one day while hunting. You can't do that and live!

And here is how the dreaded discipline problem resolved itself. The boys had a sort of older-brother tolerance toward my five feet three inches; they accepted things that must be endured for discipline's sake, and they respected my "book larnin." On both sides we made adjustments, and no major discipline problem came up. Something of the same sort arose with veterans of the second world war who went back into high school—they couldn't be treated as adolescents, and concessions were made to them, though some tiresome school regulations had to be observed.

It was a great event in the lives of country children when the teacher came to "stay all night." It was unthinkable for one to refuse an invitation to do so; if no invitation was extended it was clear that the family didn't like the teacher. The homes of my children of the woods were small and crowded, but the kitchen floor, so hard to keep clean before the advent of linoleum, would be spotless when I came. The sitting-room, which had in it the spare bed in which I slept, had a rag carpet underlaid with straw. Because the room wasn't used much and windows weren't often opened, it had a musty smell. I slept, however, under quilts of exquisite needlework, pat-

terns called Twin Sisters, Martha's Choice, West Wind, Wedding Ring, Indian Trail, and others. The food was always delicious, possibly even a blue-ribbon prize winner at the county fair.

Many memories came back to me of those visits I made—of seeing much "getting along without" with a pride that refused to whine; of lively political arguments with the head of the house—who ever thought that in fifty years we'd be spending billions of our tax money to preserve the right to such argument; of choice, heirloom cooking "receipts" given me by the mother. Those visits were good for all of us, levelers both ways. Having once eaten salt and broken bread in these homes, I could not, had I wanted to, be indifferent to the children's progress at school; on the other hand, the parents cooperated even to threatening to "lick the kids" at home if they got a lickin' at school.

Perhaps once a term, nearby schools exchanged visits, sometimes by surprise, sometimes by prearrangement. In spring or fall when the distance fell within three miles or so, we walked; in winter older boys provided rigs to carry us. Regular lessons were carried on for a while, then there were contests in spelling down, ciphering down, geographying down, or even debates. Every child, small as he might be, was given a chance to show what he could do.

It is of interest to note here the difference in economic circumstances between settlers of the woods like those whose children I was teaching that year, and the farmers who occupied the prairies. Iowa's tree growth was along the rivers. Between creeks and rivers lay open prairie, unoccupied until a new type of revolving blade, the colter, had made it possible to reduce the tough sod. Easier reduction of the soil brought easier living conditions than those of the bushwhacker who still stuck to his timber because he loved it.

CONTRASTS IN ECONOMIC STATUS

But all farmers of the early '90s saw a series of poor crops, hog cholera epidemics, and bank failures culminate into very hard times; and farm children of that time had

the "inestimable privilege of being born poor," if you hold with that philosophy. They did have a solid sense of responsibility hard to inculcate in a child who has no chores to do and gets what he wants for the mere asking.

In striking contrast, the depression of the 1930s brought out in city children I was teaching an appalling lack of responsibility. It was, to be sure, a generation later, and times had changed—to them, the village blacksmith who "earns whate'er he can" existed only in the "corny poetry of Longfellow." Work around school at twenty-five cents an hour, yielding roughly six dollars a month, for school purposes, was available to needy pupils of sixteen, through the federal National Youth Administration project. The attitude generally of those on the NYA payroll was bitterly contemptuous of supervision, and their work was slipshod and indifferent.

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County teachers' institute was held in July or August at the county seat, and lasted three weeks. We met in the town high school, occupying assigned places in double seats like those in our own schools, prepared and recited lessons, and, at the close of the institute, took the county examinations for certificate of which each superintendent was then in almost complete control. I was fortunate to secure a certificate at eighteen years of age.

I taught in my home district that year; then with the first-grade certificate was soon able to secure a school in an independent district. Not being under township control, the board members could pay what wages they pleased, and buy such equipment as they wanted or a clever salesman could foist on them. My wages were thirty-five and forty dollars, and the school year was nine months long. There were abundant maps and charts, a globe, a "big" Webster's dictionary, and a reed organ. This was prairie country, and the farmers were well-to-do.

LIMITATIONS IN SOCIAL LIFE

It was hard to find a place to board. Farmers' wives now have electric equipment of every sort, modern floors, and water in the house, but in those days a woman's work really was never done. Unless cash was badly needed, the

teacher was refused board. A visiting pastor's remark once presented a new view point to a group of mothers. "I would think," he said, "with little children, you'd be glad to have a teacher in the house. Like good music and good reading, her presence could be that of much more help in the rearing of your children." I think most teachers are worthy of such a tribute.

There was, indeed little opportunity to go wrong. Teachers were surrounded with prohibitions, some by contract, others by custom—no drinking, no dancing or card-playing where the community attitude was against it, no "gallivantin' around," no slang. The sweater a girl wears today would have marked her then as wanton, "no better than she should be"; we wore ruffled thing-a-mabobs to conceal our maidenly forms. Neither did we show our legs—high-button shoes and three petticoats, one short and two floor-length, under a dress five yards around the bottom, took care of that.

I finally secured board, and once accepted, was a member of the family. Aunt Minnie, my landlady, fed her family sulphur and molasses every spring, and insisted that I join them in the practice, which I did. We took a dose every day for nine days, then interrupted the treatment for nine days, and repeated it for another nine. She was a marvelous cook, had cooked in her father's half-way house in Illinois, as a girl, in stage-coach days. A soft, ginger-molasses cooky of hers was a steady blue-ribbon prize winner at the county fair. Her breakfast consisted of graham pancakes, light, thick, fluffy, served hot from a wood range; oatmeal, cooked an hour, served with cream; and one of those ginger cookies. For special, there was sausage or steak in butchering season, and fried chicken in the fall. She cured her own meat, and her care of that meat in the pickling fluid was a ritual—how she would have scorned the commercial tenderized ham of today.

My bed was a cord bed, brought from "York State," whose ropes were taken, out, cleaned, and shrunk once a year. The ropes were soaked in hot water; thus becoming swollen to a diameter greater than the holes in the

rails. Thread was wound around the ends to help get the ropes back into the holes. While her husband was doing that chore, Aunt Minnie had no choice but to ignore Uncle Lew's strong language which, otherwise, she would not tolerate. It fell to Uncle Lew, too, to provide new straw for the tick; that took hours of sorting, and shaking, and sifting out the chaff to get enough clean, bright straw to fill a tick.

There were two other occasions that required Uncle Lew's reluctant help, putting up stovepipe and stretching the carpet. Carpets, rag and ingrain, laid wall to wall, were taken up once a year and vigorously pounded. Fresh newspaper and straw were laid down; then came the task of putting the carpet back tight. A good stretcher helped. One of the best was a contraption to be nailed to the floor next to the wall for each twelve or fifteen inches of carpet to be tightened. It had a twelve-inch strip of wood with teeth on the under side to hold the carpet, and a short cord with crank to take up the slack. Two persons were needed. Down on their knees one pushed behind the stretcher while the other pulled from where it was anchored to the floor. Push, grunt; pull, groan. Sometimes the stretcher pulled out of the floor; sometimes the carpet pulled out of the teeth. Push, grunt; pull, groan. Sometimes the carton of tacks spilled all over, sometimes the tackhammer disappeared under the carpet.

Aunt Minnie had an ingrain carpet in her living room, and rag carpets in her bedrooms. She was willing to accept from me my mother's way of winding rags for a bright, smooth carpet. Mother turned all raw edges in, with bright colors out, then doubled the rag strip flat and wound the ball tight. Even so, a carpet wasn't good unless the weaver "beat the rags up tight." There were three common patterns—hit-or-miss, plain stripe, or twist stripe which cost two cents a yard more for weaving.

AN UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTER

Uncle Lew was a character in himself. He had been a railroad conductor in Illinois, had carried Lincoln on his freight train in disguise. Now, on the farm, he kept a team of fast horses for his daily drive to town. That trip

to town gave us a daily paper to read, an unusual treat in those pre-rural-free-delivery days. Eight o'clock was his bedtime. Before he retired he made things ready for starting fires in the morning. He'd whittle a piece of soft pine for kindling, then take from its place of concealment in a kitchen cupboard, a potato-stoppered kerosene can, pour out some kerosene into a small can he kept for the purpose, and add three corncobs to soak it up. He wound the clock and locked the door. From the same cupboard he took his bootjack, inserted a foot into its V, pulled off a boot, and repeated the motion. His last chore was to set the lantern out where it would be handy in an emergency.

I taught seven years in rural one-room schools, and always had a pleasant place to board. Aunt Emma was a widow, versed in good literature which she and her husband had read together through many years. She recited from memory line after line from Shakespeare, Tennyson, Scott, Byron, and our own poets of the Concord group. She had lived in Ontario, Canada, and in Wisconsin as a girl, and could tell stories of earlier pioneer days than Iowa knew. Those of smallpox were shuddering. Can you take it if I tell you of a beautiful girl whose hands were tied down tight so she couldn't scratch the scabs, until the solid scab on her face had maggots under it? The scab came off in one piece, leaving the skin clean and smooth. Since then a world war has taught medical science to use maggots (under more sterile conditions) for treatment of chronic sores.

Of another woman with whom I boarded I have a lasting impression of a beautiful patience with a doddering old father-in-law, who insisted on puttering about the kitchen, where it took him forever to do a mess of dishes. But when he at last was through, he snapped the tea towel and hung it up to dry with the satisfaction only a still useful member of society can have. Breakfast there followed a family custom of johnny cake baked no thicker than one-fourth of an inch, so it was all crunchy, crispy crust. My landlady was relieved that I liked the dish, for she could not have given it up, and my fondness for it simplified the cooking for her.

On winter nights we piled into the bob-sleds, loaded with straw, blankets, and hot soap-stones, and went to box socials, spelling bees, parties, Billy Sunday's revival meetings, literary societies. Though all kinds of fun and nonsense went on at literary society meetings, the officers were serious in their treatment of parliamentary practice, and more than one future lawyer received there valuable parliamentary and forensic skills. No subject was too trifling for debate. "Ladies and gentlemen of this society," the chairman announced one evening, "The question for debate tonight is 'Resolved that the horse is of more value to man than the cow!'" After four debators had given argument and rebuttal with final summation by the first affirmative, the judges conferred and announced the decision in favor of the affirmative. My colleague and I had lost. One argument worth noting, said the critic, was that had the French peasant had a horse, it would have been easy for him to get to Carcassonne. In other words, Iowa farmers, who all had horses, need never be dull peasants. And if the horse could not take care of such distances as lay between us and our Carcassonnes, the locomotive, a larger, stronger, iron horse could carry us to our far-away places.

Speedy days, those of the '90s. Then in the first decade of the new century the automobile became practical, and one could cover the roads at twenty-five miles an hour. County superintendents were among the first to make use of the horseless carriage. Those teachers boarding at home, too, who had jogged six or seven miles in a two-wheeled road-cart soon had a Model T Ford. The candidate? Yes. and the doctor; then all of us rolled along in gasoline buggies. I haven't heard the jingle of sleigh bells for years. But the man I married used to complain, half-laughingly, half-nostalgically, many years after he had wrapped his buffalo robe around me one winter night for a sleigh-ride in his new cutter, about his thumb, still tender from frost-bite received on that way-below-zero drive.

THE HUMBLENESS OF THE GREAT

Before farmers had telephones, some one had to be routed out of bed to go for the doctor. I was at home one

week-end when our mother became ill in the night. My brother had been gone an hour, and it would be still another hour before he could be back. So it was we peered anxiously into the dark, watching for the gleam of the lamp on the doctor's buggy. At last we saw it, and heard the crunch of horses' feet in the light snow outside the door. Quickly we admitted him, sorry that we had had to call him out for an eight-mile ride in the bitter cold of an Iowa winter's night, but thankful that he had found smooth driving and had been able to come so soon.

Then the doctor took charge of an urgent situation. With his own hands he made and applied compresses; he took medicines from the orderly rows of vials in his square, black case; and when, at last, our suffering mother fell asleep, he sat long and watched her. Satisfied that he might safely leave, the doctor made preparation to go out again into the cold. As he ate the food and drank the hot coffee we set out for him, he told us that not everyone thought to ask him whether he needed food and drink.

I sat in the presence of the man, humble and ashamed. He was a graduate of a great university; he had accompanied Stanley's expedition in Africa; he was no mean authority in his profession. Yet he was grateful for a cup of coffee, though he had left his own warm bed to drive in the cold. How the road-weary doctor would have appreciated the automobile, but that was just coming into use when he closed his black case for the last time to wait for tuberculosis to take its final toll of those many night rides. Before he was fifty, he died.

CIVIL WAR LEFT IT'S MARKS

The early days of my teaching saw the beginning of the end of the bitterness engendered by the Civil War and its attendant problems, before and after. In 1898 North and South fought side by side under Fitzhugh Lee and Joseph Wheeler, ex-Confederate generals, who bore a conspicuous part in the Spanish-American War. That long estrangement was thus over, and the generation which grew up between 1885 and 1915 had as background in their lives a feeling of security against war that, I fear, we shall never see again.

There were other troubles aplenty—bank failures, depressions, and labor uprisings among them; but our foreign difficulties were so successfully compromised that our thoughts of war were mostly nostalgic memories of the War of the Rebellion. The observance of Decoration day had been established in most states; public speakers recited "The Blue and the Gray"; old soldiers were glad to talk to us on patriotic occasions. Iowa's Col. David B. Henderson was speaker of the house, and William B. Allison was nestor of the senate—Iowa was proud of her place in the nation's life.

For one Decoration day observance the children had gathered huge armfuls of wild flowers, sweet-williams, adder-tongues, and late-flowering violets, which all grew in the meadows behind the school house. Wild roses grew everywhere, but couldn't be used; they withered too soon. We arranged a campfire setting in the schoolyard for the singing of old Civil war songs, and had as guest speaker a neighboring farmer who had served as lieutenant under Sherman in the siege of Vicksburg. That talk by the G.A.R. veteran, so proud of Sherman, brought the first doubt to my mind—I might be wrong in thinking that Grant had won the war. Thus do youth's unreasoning loyalties give way as understanding broadens, but there is a bit of heartache in the yielding. We see it in veterans now, so proud of their particular leaders and special branch of service.

As we all sang "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground," first-graders, older children, teacher, visitors, and the lieutenant, in that peaceful schoolyard, accompanied by song of bob-o-link and meadow-lark, more than a few had tears in their eyes. No one dreamed of two world wars yet to come, or of a day when a serviceman in uniform was to be a regular part of any street scene in village or city.

RENAISSANCE OF RURAL SCHOOLS

By the end of the century, educators were giving closer attention to rural schools. The rapid textbooks with which publishing houses had managed to displace Ray's arithmetic and McGuffy's readers were improved. Teacher requirements were made higher. New schoolhouses,

better planned, were built, with single seats. Some were furnace-heated; others had jacketed stoves giving better circulation of air than did the old rectangular stove. Then rapid changes after the turn of the century completely altered the farm picture. There are no hayseeds and bush-whackers any more. Most influential were the rural telephone, daily free delivery of mail which emphasized the need of better roads, and the automobile which added to that need. Those farmers whose schools had become old and dilapidated became open to argument on the advantages of the consolidated school and found it expedient to consolidate. In these consolidated schools, men are again teaching in the classroom, and finding it worth while.

While I was in country school I acquired some three years of piece-meal normal training, but, as was often then the case with irregular attendance, the work had not been directed toward a degree. I took those courses I felt the need of most in school, or in which I had special interest. Iowa State Normal school is now Iowa State Teachers college whose students are puzzled at mention of "The Normal" which we attended.

I have since taken two degrees in education in another state, where I continued my teaching. At the risk of being called old-fashioned I question whether the sum-total of present day results is an improvement on that of fifty years ago. Different—yes. But better? We encouraged our pupils then to

"Bite off more than you can chew, then chew it;
Tackle more than you can do, then do it;
Hitch your wagon to a star; take your seat
And there you are!"

Today, the desire for security obscures a young man's vision, and he's afraid to take his own risk. Modern psychology doesn't want children frustrated, but many of us who don't today present any special psychiatric problems underwent plenty of suppressed desires, and were oftener than not made to do things we didn't want to do, "If you don't like it, lump it" was a healthy philosophy which kept us from being cry babies when we later had to face hard facts. It was too bad if Johnny didn't know on which

of the great lakes of Chicago was situated, not that Lake Michigan in itself was important to him, but Johnny had fallen down on his geography lesson. There is, of course, a happy medium between the possible needs of the future and the immediate needs of the here and now. But a few facts and money in the bank are still useful reserves for a rainy day.

As I write this in 1950, with another war on, I have before me a drawing by Oliver Herford which appeared in a January 1926 issue of a popular monthly magazine. Father Time is standing on a nebulous cloud, pointing out the planet Earth to the infant New Year. Lost in the realms of space, amid all those stars, 1926 couldn't see where he was to go and asked the question which is the caption of the picture, "Father, which one is the Earth?"

God forgive us for what we have done to this planet in the quarter century since that drawing appeared. We seem determined to destroy it, to make it only an insignificant, barren star in the Universe. Pray that before too long we regain our sanity. I can think of no better way than to go back to the country. Would that I could be again a Country Teacher.

Ballad of Hardin Town *

By KATHLEEN M. HEMPEL, ELKADER

I'll tell you a tale of Ioway
 That only the old folks know
 About a crime in Hardin town
 One hundred years ago.

The Indians roamed our forests then
 The wily Fox and Sac
 And lived in peace and harmony
 Upon the Neutral Tract.

And there the white men built the town
 Right smack against the border
 In all the West and wickedest
 With neither law or order.

And there they built two grand saloons
 Called Sodom and Gomorrah
 That lived up to their evil names
 And caused a world of sorrow.

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