

## WOMEN OF NORTH TAMA

Histories have, for the most part, been written by men about the activities of men. This was only natural when history consisted largely of political and military events and women were excluded from these fields of activity. Cultural and social history must, however, include something of the distaff side of community life. Indeed the status of women is, in general, an index of the social standards of a people.

The story of the *Lairds of North Tama* which was published in THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS for July, 1942, gave short sketches of some of the men who came to Iowa from Scotland just before the Civil War and brief descriptions of their activities. But women came with these men, leaving their comfortable homes in Scotland to accompany fathers, husbands, and brothers to the new land where opportunities were greater but work was harder, where there was more freedom and fewer servants. The following sketches of home activities among the Scotch settlers in Tama County have been prepared in an effort to portray some aspects of the life of these women in a new land and a new way of life.

### ALL IN ONE WOMAN'S LIFE

Only a few months after John Wilson got his cabin built in the Scotch community in north Tama County, he welcomed his brother West (known as the Squire) and his family from Connecticut. One afternoon a thunderstorm came up. The grown-ups got all the children, so they thought, into the cave which the Wilsons had dug when they heard of the terrible Iowa tornadoes. It was dark in the



cave and the women found difficulty in checking the numerous children.

"Where's wee Aggie?", cried Mrs. West Wilson. There was a lull in the general hub-bub. "Whaur can tha wean be?", Uncle John exclaimed. "Here, children!", commanded strong-featured Jean McCosh Wilson, John's wife, holding aloft a tallow candle, "all of ye stan' up so we can count heids." There were nearly a dozen and a half at that time but wee Aggie was missing. James and Peter, older sons in the John Wilson family, rushed back to the cabin and found the child sleeping peacefully. By this time the storm was over.

There is another story of wee Aggie in the midst of a big storm, this time a blizzard. It had snowed steadily through the 30th of December, 1863, and stormed furiously all the next day. The houses of the pioneers were bitterly cold. There was not room for all the family around the stove in the West Wilson home so the little ones, Aggie, Billie, and Henry had to stay in bed all day, but they had a good time. The next day, New Year's, was clear and cold. Several oxen belonging to a neighbor got away from their shed and gathered in the opposite corner of the yard, their tails to the storm. There they were found frozen stiff, still standing on their feet.

But life was not all storms for little Agnes Wilson. She herded the cattle on the prairies with her brothers, Billie and Henry; then as she grew up, she worked hard, like her older sisters, in the house and out. She lost her mother and the Squire married Barbara Kennedy. Ordinarily during the evening, Barbara and the Squire sat in "ben" (the parlor). The Squire was always reading. The children and young people might go in if they were quiet, but they usually preferred the fun going on in the big kitchen.

Agnes was full of mischief. A hired man, waiting for his



dinner, dropped asleep on the kitchen couch. Instead of calling him, Agnes held a bottle of strong-smelling liniment under his nose. When a newly arrived Scotchman filled his cup with sorghum, thinking it was coffee, Agnes winked at her brother Henry and let the guest try to drink the sticky syrup. When she was older she slipped out and tied the horse of an unwanted suitor out of sight behind the barn, then watched while he fought another young man whom he accused of letting the horse go home.

Agnes Wilson was one of six Tranquillity girls taken forty miles in a lumber wagon for a winter term at Grinnell College. In a little packet of letters on fine embossed stationery in an old chest, is one written by Agnes Wilson from Grinnell on October 14, 1871.

"The great Horace Greeley lectured the other night at the college. We had to pay 50¢ each. They had a brass band from Marshall [Marshalltown] and I liked the band better than the lecture.

"I will give you a list of the fashions. Hoops and great bustles are all the rage, also dresses with basques. Almost every girl wears curls or frizzes. One day I was walking behind a very gay young lady when her curls fell off among her feet. Hats are mostly turbans and are worn on top of the crown. Susan Sloss [George Sloss's daughter] got a new turban; it is white straw trimmed with black velvet and a little red feather. She has also bought a new suit; it is a black alpaca.

"I have got nothing new since I came here. It costs us \$5.50 each for tuition, about \$5.00 for room rent, \$12.00 for my music lessons; I can't afford to spend much for dress."

Agnes asked about the various boys and girls who were going together in Tranquillity and added, "There is not a good looking young man in Grinnell. They are all nose or legs or something else." There may have been a reason for



her indifference to the Grinnell men. John Galloway, who had come to Tranquillity some two years before this, was tall, dark-eyed, and good-looking. He was quiet and capable, with ten years business experience in England before coming to the United States. On February 26, 1874, he and Agnes Wilson were married and started their new home on an eighty-acre farm, bought for ten dollars an acre, where John had put up a building sixteen by twenty-four feet, half used as granary and half as a house.

This farm was some eleven miles northwest of the Tranquillity settlement. A new church, an offshoot from Tranquillity, was organized on February 27, 1875, the same day the Galloways' first child was born. The building was not far from their farm, and John Galloway had the honor of naming the new church, Amity. Certainly it has lived up to its name.

In spite of pioneer conditions Agnes Wilson had enjoyed some cultural advantages. Her father, Squire Wilson, had bought a melodeon for her and she had walked to Old Buckingham for music lessons and had taken music at Grinnell. One day in the early eighties when Agnes Galloway was visiting in her old home and old friends were gathered in the parlor with its bought carpet, white marble top bureau and center table, and the black walnut haircloth parlor suite which Barbara Kennedy had brought with her from Scotland, some one asked Agnes to play the old melodeon. "I have no organ at home, and my fingers are stiff", she said, holding out her hands which had been roughened by toil, but she gave her baby to Susan Sloss (Mrs. Hugh Dougan), seated herself at the quaint old instrument, and sang "Highland Laddie" and other familiar tunes with her old time spirit. Later, however, she had an organ and after that a piano.

As the years passed acres were added to the Galloway



farm and a new house was built. The best breeds of Poland China hogs and Durham cattle were raised. Every year two carloads of feeders were shipped to Chicago. The farm buildings were modernized. The Galloways had a fine and attractive homestead.

And what of Agnes — the lively, warm-hearted girl? She was ambitious, strong, and efficient, always ahead with her work. One of her interests was raising bees. The Galloways had traded two sheep to "Tama Jim" for two hives of bees. Hugh Galloway, then a little boy, went with his father to deliver the sheep. While driving up "Pike's Peak",<sup>1</sup> the bolt worked out under the reach and the two hind wheels came off and rolled down the hill. Hugh long remembered being left to keep the sheep in the wagon while his father recovered the wheels.

It was Agnes' nature to keep everyone on the farm cheerful but she was sorely tried by an especially stubborn Scotch hired man. One evening she asked him to bring in a pail of water before going to town. "I'm no goin' by the pump", he replied and hurried away. Yet this man was reliable and worked for the Galloways for several years.

With no music and only a little Psalm book with the verses, Agnes Galloway led the singing for the Amity congregation for a number of years. She taught the women's Bible class many years and being able to speak her mind was asked to make speeches on important public occasions, such as the dedication of the new Amity church in 1914 when she pointed out some of the advantages the church had brought to the community.

She grew with the years and her children. Having had no chance for educational advantages in his youth, John Galloway wanted them for the eight children — four boys

<sup>1</sup> This Pike's Peak was the highest hill in the vicinity some two miles north of Four Mile Grove.



and four girls — who survived (one boy died in infancy) and Agnes was equally committed to their education. Six of the children attended Monmouth College in Illinois, one, Oberlin, Ohio, while one had a business course. All the children married, the girls into positions of responsibility and social influence where they rendered fine community service. Hugh K., a minister, has held pastorates in the East, in Akron, Ohio, and in the Grande Avenue United Presbyterian Church of Cedar Rapids. Dalton went out as a missionary to Egypt. James and William were businessmen in Cedar Falls and Waterloo. Of the twenty-eight Galloway grandchildren, nearly all have attended college and at least half have already taken graduate and professional courses.

In 1909, Agnes Galloway visited Washington, D. C., with her son William and his wife. They called on her cousin, James Wilson (Tama Jim), at the Agricultural Department. He said Agnes was the first relative who had come to see him in Washington and sent her a handsome bouquet of roses that afternoon.

William Galloway, the third son of Agnes and John, is known throughout the country and his career would provide material for a book in itself. "Bill" Galloway had a way. When he attended Amity Church one Sunday in the nineties, in his new straw hat and natty blue striped suit, he looked more like a prosperous young businessman than a college sophomore, just returned from Monmouth College. Indeed, he was going out on the road that week, at \$100 a month and expenses, while college graduates with several years' experience were teaching for \$40 a month if they could get positions. He sold windmill springs to the farmers; became a jobber in implements; then incorporated the William Galloway Company in Waterloo within twenty-five miles of his birthplace, officered largely by relatives from



North Tama and employing the inventive genius of his Uncle Dalton, youngest son of the Squire.

Bill had not liked to walk behind the drag when he was a boy on the farm and he had fixed up a contrivance of his own so that he could ride. Some of the farmers laughed at him but he made these little harrow carts and sold them in a small way in Dinsdale. He later improved on his patent, moved to Waterloo, and began to manufacture harrow carts and a few other specialties. The William Galloway Company soon came to be large producers of manure spreaders, gasoline engines, and cream separators and handled an endless number of other articles.

It is a far cry from wee Aggie forgotten in the pioneer cabin in the midst of a tornado to the Galloway plant and her daughter Grace's beautiful home in Waterloo where she died in 1933. From where that pioneer cabin stood, you can on a clear day see the smoke of the great chimneys of the agricultural implement plants in Waterloo. All this growth from the cabin on the endless Iowa prairies to the modern city with acres of factories came in the short period of eighty years — in the lifetime of Agnes, daughter of the Scotch immigrant who settled in Tama County.

#### A WOMAN'S DAY

Among the writer's memories is one of a visit to a Scotch home in Tama County. The housewife led her guests into her kitchen, where boiling water had just been poured on a bran mash for a newly calved cow. The sweet, dusty smell of ground grain still hung in the air. The high hearth of the cookstove was swung open and the woman was lifting ashes with a hand shovel into an empty pail. She wore a small grey shawl over her shoulders, crossed in front, the ends tucked under the band of her apron.

This young woman's housekeeping equipment was mea-



ger. It was a great advantage when the range came with the long ash pan to be pulled out and emptied. These ranges also had a big reservoir attached to heat soft water. Town people had "base burners" for hard coal in their sitting rooms; but farmers had low round heating stoves with a large end door, taking in big chunks of wood, even ungainly stumps or roots.

The housewife was lucky who had a pump at the door; all water had to be carried in and out. Homemade sinks lined with zinc, with a cistern pump in the kitchen, were considered "modern". A family with a sink in the kitchen washed in a tin basin, luxuriously poured the water into the sink, and tried to forget that the pail under the pipe, behind closed doors, might be running over. Dishes were washed on the kitchen table or in the pantry — with no running water. The porridge kettles were scraped with knives or spoons.

In the eighties women began getting washing machines. These were turned by hand like barrel churns, but this was better than stooping over a washboard. Agents tempted fagged housewives with newly invented carpet sweepers and irons heated with charcoal, but the women soon went back to the ordinary broom and flat irons, although the detachable handle proved a standby. In spite of wet paper and damp tea leaves, the weekly cleaning was an orgy of dust with the woman and everything else swathed in coverings.

Cooking was simple but on a large scale. There were no salads except coleslaw, cucumber pickles, and pickled beets, but many cakes, cookies, and pies were baked. Some women claimed they baked every day. There were no measuring cups. Most cooks used too much soda, making biscuits and cakes yellow and coarse. Baking powder was a great boon. When the directions were a "pinch" and a "handful", not



all were born cooks. But most Scotch women could make soup.

"It's a soup bone from the butchering with the barley", said Grandmother Stevenson when we went in one forenoon. "I've been down cellar for the vegetables. We'll have onions, carrots, potatoes, and cabbage intilt." "Man! but this hits the right spot after a cold ride", exclaimed her eldest son, John, when we sat down to the plates of soup. He had just come down on the train from Goldfield in Wright County. "This is like you made in Scotland. It sticks to a man's ribs." Flushing with pleasure, Grandmother passed the platter with the generous slices of meat cut from the soup bone, for in those days even soup bones had meat on them.

Bread-making was the great task. A woman felt fortified with a new baking on hand. Still, if one were caught out of bread, she could stir up pancakes, mix biscuits, or make a Johnny cake.

For baking bread, potato water and some mashed potatoes were saved the noon before; then sponge was set in the evening with yeast, sugar, and flour. The next morning, the bread pan or the dish pan was lined with flour and the bread was set by adding the required water, lard, and salt to the sponge. After this dough had been kneaded stiff, it was set in a warm place to rise, kneaded again and left to rise, then molded into loaves, and again set aside to rise. Usually there were two ovenfuls and the bread was not all baked until on in the afternoon.

Grandmother Young grew hops and prepared her own yeast. The hop vine is perennial and was planted in hills about six feet apart. Three long poles were tied together at the top, tepee fashion, at each hill. Rows of these poles covered with fairy-like blossoming vines festooning off at the top were a lovely sight. The hop pods were picked when



ripe and dried carefully. These were soaked in water. This was drained off, mixed with cornmeal, patted into a loaflike cake, and cut into slices which curled up when dried in the sun. They were then packed in a cloth bag to keep dry and a slice or so was used for each baking. Hop leaves were often boiled for a poultice.

Cooking the meals was not such hard work as growing and preparing the food. The farmer's part in the garden often ended with the plowing and harrowing, though he might come to the rescue in planting and hoeing. Weeding and picking the vegetables — even digging potatoes every morning — fell to the women. To hull the peas or "scrape" the potatoes was a real rest on a summer morning.

Then there was picking of berries — in an earlier day, wild strawberries — and the canning. This began early in June with currants, gooseberries, and cherries, and lasted until the last ground cherries, watermelon sweet pickle, and catsup were put away in September. Tomatoes were sealed with red wax in tin cans — "they would not keep in glass". Cucumbers were salted down in big crocks, although fancier methods were later introduced. The housewife prided herself on her jellies, jams, and apple butter.

A hot, dry August day was ideal for drying sweet corn. After the ears were husked they were scalded and the kernels were cut off and spread on pans or trays, which were covered by a mosquito net and placed on the roof. If corn was not out early, it might sour over night. When it rained, corn was dried in the oven. Thinly sliced apples put out in the sun in a hot wind would dry a light yellow. Dried apples were a staple article of food; stewed with raisins they were even more appreciated. One of the housewife's tasks, before putting out the cat at night, was often putting the dried apples to soak for boiling the next morning. Pumpkin was cooked and mashed, then spread in thin layers



on trays. This dried in sheets and was stored in bags. Soaked in water or milk before using, the mixture made tasty pies.

Vegetables were kept in root or house cellars. The root cellars and most of the house cellars had earthen floors and no heat. Unused carrots, beets, squash, and potatoes were fed to the hogs. Sauerkraut was made in big barrels by the Yankee neighbors but the Scotch preferred their cabbage in soup or boiled dinners.

In those days, hatching chickens was left to the hens. Usually two settings of chicks were given to one hen, and the other was popped into a broody cage for a week or two until she decided to go back to laying. It seemed unfair to deprive one hen of the chicks she had hatched but after watching the hens three weeks, a woman usually felt that one had a better disposition than the other. Cleaning the henhouse was miserable work, especially when there were mites. The men often helped with this job on a rainy day. It was never a task to gather the eggs. About 4 o'clock a woman would put on her sunbonnet and sally forth with her basket and all the available children. Egg gathering was not, however, left to the children — they never got all the eggs. Even the farm wife was outwitted once in a while and then an especially smart hen appeared with a straggling bunch of unseasonable chickens.

Dressing a chicken was not so bad if the fowl was caught the night before and killed by one of the men before they went to the field. But when unexpected company arrived, the children and the dog hailed the chance to run down a chicken or two. Some women boasted they could have a chicken killed, skinned, and in the frying pan before a chance visitor got his team unhitched and fed.

But chickens were not the only sacrifices to chance visitors. Once in very early days, a minister who stopped at



the home of a parishioner was invited to stay for supper and accepted. The woman put on a boiler and several kettles of water but nothing else. The minister finally asked why this water was being heated. "To butcher a hog", his hostess replied. Knowing he "was in for it", the minister fell to with a right good will. With pork steak, corn bread, and sorghum, they had quite a feast.

Ordinarily, however, butchering was a man's job and, in case of a hog, soon over. The hams and side meat were put in a brine for several weeks and then hung in a smoke house; the sausage was ground (several families usually owned a grinder); the hocks were pickled; headcheese was made by boiling the head, chopping the meat, and putting it back in the liquor to cool for slicing. Relatives and neighbors traded fresh loin roasts and spare ribs. The leaves of fat were cut into small squares which were put in a kettle over a slow fire. Rendering this lard was important. If it scorched that lard could not be used for making pie crust.

A farmer who butchered a heifer usually sold part to a neighbor. The round part of the hindquarters and parts of the shoulders were cut into small "hams" and put with the corned beef into a curing solution of salt, saltpeter, and sugar for a time, then taken out, rubbed with ground allspice and pepper, and hung up to dry. This made the popular so-called dried beef. Of course part of the meat was kept frozen during the winter. Families often divided the liver and heart. Some even prepared tripe.

In the spring, after the butchering was over, the women made soap, cleaning up the winter's accumulation of fats at the same time. Pure tallow, rendered from the beef fat and molded in milk pans, made a white soap for fine clothes and dishes, even for hands; while the cracklings and scraps produced fats for a darker laundry soap.

One neighbor leached lye from wood ashes kept in a bar-



rel. This was perforated in the bottom and set on an inclined board. A circle was chiseled out on the board outside the bottom of the barrel with a groove at the lower edge to let the seeping water run into a wooden pail. This yellow water was the lye. The barrel was kept full of ashes and every once in awhile more water was poured over them. It was a dangerous spot for children in spite of the fact that they had been told about the child who drank lye and had his windpipe destroyed so he could not swallow.

In making soap the fat was weighed and then heated with the lye; the mixture foamed up and had to be stirred carefully, then emptied into crocks or wooden boxes lined with cloth. Next day it was cut into long bars and piled lattice fashion on the cellar shelves.

Candles, handy to carry upstairs or down cellar, were also made out of tallow. Pieces of candlewick, cut in proper length, were laid over the sticks across the top of the mold, shaken down, pulled through the small holes at the bottom and tied tightly. The molds were then filled with melted tallow and set outdoors to cool. After heating a moment in the morning, the cream-colored candles could be lifted out.

Filling and cleaning the kerosene lamps was a real chore. The forehanded woman did it in the morning. She set the lamps on a newspaper on the kitchen table, filled them from the kerosene can in the shed, turned up the burned wick, clipped it straight across with a snip at each end, washed the chimneys in hot, soapy water, polished them until there was no lint, wiped the bowls, and set the shining lamps on the clock shelf.

A few women made cheese for their own use; selling it did not pay. Grandmother Stevenson brought her cheese ring, press, and knives from Canada and neighbors sometimes borrowed them. A woman who made cheese warmed the milk in kettles on the stoves, testing it with her fore-



finger. Later thermometers came into use. When it was warm enough the milk was taken off the stove and mixed thoroughly with water in which rennet had been soaked. This rennet had, perhaps, been made the fall before when a sucking calf had been butchered. The inner stomach lining had been scraped clean, salted, and stretched out to dry. Half an hour after the rennet water had been added the clabbered milk was stirred to separate the curd from the whey. The liquid was dipped off and the curd was tied in big cheesecloth squares and these sacks of curd were hung over a pole between two chairs to drain. After awhile the curd might be cut into smaller pieces and again tied up to drain.

If this work had been done in the morning the cheese was ready for the press by afternoon. A square of thin cloth was laid over the cheese ring, a band a few inches wide perforated to permit the escape of the whey. The ring was placed on a board which formed the bottom and the ring was filled with curds which had been chopped into small pieces in the butterbowl. The overlapping edges of the cloth were then doubled over the top of the ring and a round piece of board was fitted into the top. Then the cheese ring was slipped into the press. This consisted of a pole which was hinged to a base at one end and weighted at the other, perhaps with a pail filled with stones. The cheese ring was placed under the pole near the hinged end, the pressure depending upon the relative length of the two arms of the lever and the weight attached to the free end. Some women merely put one end of the pole under a board or rail of a fence and hung a weight on the other.

Spring housecleaning was an upheaval. Curtains and woolen blankets were laundered; bed ticks were washed and refilled with fresh straw or the soft inner corn husks. Woodwork was repainted, or grained, if done by an expert;



the walls were whitewashed or, later, calcimined with a mixture of clear glue, whiting, or zinc white, and water. The farmer's wife papered and calcimined with such help as she could get. Lovely shades were guaranteed not to streak but they always did and the wallpaper was sure to wrinkle.

One room was enough to clean in a day. The pictures were taken down, the furniture was set out, the carpet was untacked and laid on the grass for pounding. Later it was aired on the line. The dusty straw and newspapers under the carpet were burned, the floor was scrubbed. In the afternoon, when the floor was dry, new papers and straw were laid on the floor and the carpet was retacked. A few had expensive Brussels carpet but most people had ordinary flowered ingrain.

These carpets had to be stretched to make a good-looking job and stretching a carpet was hard work, even for a man, and tempers were stretched as well as the carpet. One tired man on his knees tacking a carpet asked his fourteen-year-old son to do the stretching. The lad, with book in hand, persisted in shoving and pushing the carpet with his foot, never taking his eyes off the book. At this point the usually long-suffering father got up and the boy had right then and there what he always said was the last and the biggest threshing of his life. A woman remarked that their family never suffered such utter exhaustion and fatigue as when they gave the parlor its annual spring cleaning.

One morning early in May a woman might announce that she was cleaning the cellar that day. One of the sons or a hired man would be assigned to carry the extra potatoes and vegetables to the hogs. The ones the housewife wanted for use had been sprouted the day before. The studding above and the stone side walls were swept and every bit of mold and refuse was cleared from the dirt floor. Then the ceiling



and sides would be whitewashed. The hanging shelves and the inside and outside cellar stairs were scrubbed, the small windows were washed, and the screens were put on. Then the cellar was ready for the summer and soon big, flat pans of milk were lined up on the hanging shelves.

Skimming these pans of milk required skill and experience. Resting a pan on the big cream crock on the table in front of the shelves a woman deftly loosened the cream around the edge with her skimmer, then tipping the pan, gently pushed the top scum of cream into the jar, running off as little milk as possible. There was usually another long, bench-like table just outside the cellar way. Here the milk pails and pans were washed and scalded. Most of the cows were dry in the winter so this was a summer's job. At the end of the day when a housewife had spread these utensils out to air, she might drop down on this bench for a few minutes rest.

If not too tired this pioneer woman was sure to feel concerned over the neglected front yard and the half-hearted attempt at flowers. There were two rows of flowers in the childhood home of the writer, one on each side of the path leading from the gate to the unused front door (the side door from the farmyard was more direct), two snowball trees, bushes of flowering almond, yellow roses, clumps of ribbon grass, tiger and orange lilies, pink phlox, and down by the gate, Sweet Mary and Bouncing Betty, all needed pruning or were spread out wild in the grass. But how could a pioneer housewife do any more work?

#### FEATHERS AND FURBELOWS

One Saturday afternoon in the eighties Mrs. Stevenson was in a millinery store in Traer trying on bonnets. In those days most of the Tranquillity women over thirty wore bonnets. She tilted the hand glass, eyed the back of a black



velvet bonnet with disapproval, and asked, "Haven't you anything else?" Mrs. Antonia Peterson, the vivacious and attractive proprietor, with red cheeks, a lace collar, and long earrings, hovered about. "Ah", she replied, "I have a lovely one just from Chicago, a sample bonnet."

Sample bonnets were the last word in millinery. Most of the hats and bonnets were trimmed in the store. Mrs. Peterson bought her hats and trimmings from a Cedar Rapids wholesale company which sent out a trimmer, a very chic young lady, who worked for the fall or spring season. These trimmers usually took an initial training course of several months and then went twice a year to the wholesale house to study seasonal styles. Small ostrich feathers were standard trimming for older women's bonnets; well dressed young girls might wear large plumes on their hats. Patrons often brought in last year's bonnets to be made over with fresh trimming. Sometimes bonnets were duplicated. One season Mrs. Sloss and Mrs. McMillan appeared at church with new black velvet bonnets decked with gold ribbons and small black ostrich plumes.

The trimmer, who had worked for Mrs. Peterson for several seasons, brought out a plum velvet bonnet with five small reddish birds perched among the bows. She fastened the ties and handed the mirror to Mrs. Stevenson who regarded herself with evidences of satisfaction and at last succumbed. The bonnet was expensive but she would save on something else.

As the Stevensons came near their home they noticed some covered gypsy wagons ahead. "They'll be camping by Salt Creek", commented Mrs. Stevenson, "I don't like them so near." The children heralded a gypsy camp with mingled feelings of curiosity and fear, for those were the years following the disappearance of Charlie Ross and the youngsters had been warned to flee from all gypsies and



movers in fear of their lives. But what a wonderful life the young gypsies seemed to have — no baths, no school, no cobs to pick up. Farmers disliked such camps in the vicinity; both the gypsies and their numerous horses had to eat and there was usually a lot of corn husked out opposite the camp.

That day Mrs. Stevenson tried on her new bonnet as soon as she got home, but she had to skim the milk so the hired man could feed the calves, so she laid the bonnet on top of the sewing machine in her bedroom, and went to work. Soon the gypsies came, wanting to buy milk and eggs.

Next morning Mrs. Stevenson hurried through her work, planning to try on her new bonnet with her plum-colored merino dress with satin bands on the overskirt. She put on the dress and was ready for the bonnet — but where was it? It was not on the machine where she had left it. She looked in the box, but it was empty. She looked high and low and the children joined in the search, but the bonnet was nowhere to be found.

Suspicion at once fell on the gypsy women. One of them might have slipped in the door while Mrs. Stevenson went down cellar to get the milk. Perhaps the handsome pattern bonnet was on the head of a fortune-telling heathen. One of the hired men went to see if the gypsies were still in camp but he found only the dead campfire with chicken feathers scattered about. Sunday morning Mrs. Stevenson wore her old bonnet to church and in the afternoon she looked again for the lost headgear, but again without success. All that week there was speculation about the gypsies and the bonnet. But, at least, they had not taken any of the children. Friday was cleaning day — a time of upheaval. While she was sweeping the rag rug in her bedroom Mrs. Stevenson pushed out the bed and there in the farthest corner was the plum velvet bonnet in the midst of dust and



feathers. The old, three-colored cat ran away with a guilty look. Mrs Stevenson straightened the bows and wore the bonnet the next Sunday, but the perky little birds were gone.

Years later Edward Bok started a crusade to save the birds by publishing articles and pictures in the *Ladies' Home Journal*. He showed the so-called stylish bonnet trimmed with wings, even whole birds; the handsome hat with an egret and the slain mother bird beside her starving nestlings. Then Mrs. Stevenson would tell this story of her plum-colored velvet bonnet with the five small birds so chic among the bows and remark that it was a just punishment. Before these articles appeared, she said, none of the women had thought about the cruelty and wrong connected with wearing birds on their hats.

In the early days some of our grandmothers still wore Scotch caps, but Grandmother Stevenson laid hers aside and when her daughters-in-law insisted she wear it when having her picture taken she never liked the picture. Finally, when she was over ninety, she refused to put on a cap even for a fourth generation picture. She wore a new black brilliantine dress, the skirt trimmed with graduated rows of black velvet ribbon — the height of the style as was the brilliantine. The Tranquillity people all had due regard to the latest mode even if their interpretation was sensible and conservative.

Grandmother Young, on the other hand, never appeared without a cap. Her caps were all made of delicate black lace with a row of lavender flowers about the face. She had one for home wear and carried a fresh new one in a little black pasteboard box to put on when visiting or at parties when she took off her bonnet. She complained that the Yankee trimmers could never get caps just to suit her.

Dresses as well as bonnets were made by local women.



Even hoop skirts were sometimes made at home. A Miss Quinn made a petticoat of muslin for Susan Sloss which was so stitched that a kind of cane could be inserted and two or three rows of this stiffening transformed the petticoat into a hoop skirt. Bought ones were often at least three feet in diameter at the bottom and these had to be manipulated when the wearer wished to pass through a doorway or when she sat in a wagon. When such skirts were spread out on a wagon seat, there was no place for a man to sit.

Storekeepers bought dress materials by the bolt and there were limited choices, so women often got dress lengths from the same bolt. One spring Janet Dodd appeared with a black and white sprigged dimity; the next Sunday, Mrs. McEwen and Susan Dougan appeared with gowns from the same piece. Mrs. Stevenson was dismayed for she had at home dress goods off the identical bolt in Mrs. Smith's store, but she had not had time enough to get it made. Although she already had a summer bonnet of black lace and white flowers to match the black and white dimity, she felt she could not walk up the aisle in church with another dress of this same pattern, so she sent the piece to a niece in Wright County.

On Sunday the men wore their "Sabbath blacks" except in very hot weather. On hot days, the Squire was quite distinguished in a linen coat; other men wore conservative black alpaca coats and sometimes linen trousers. Masculine summer apparel was used year after year without regard to passing styles. All men, when they dressed up, wore shirts with stiff-starched fronts. Wives, daughters, and hired girls had to "do up" the men's shirts for the Chinese laundrymen had not yet arrived and commercial laundries were not yet dreamed of. One husband was the cynosure of all eyes. No other man had such a white and



shining shirt bosom. It was an art — this cold starching. Women had only flat irons heated on stoves. Sometimes there would be wrinkles, the black marks of a sticking iron on cooked starch, or the front scorched brown. Every man bore on his manly breast a public testimonial to the housewifely skill of his women folks.

The first cool Sabbath brought out some of the best silk gowns which had been wrapped in sheets and hung in the guest room. All the women had black silk dresses for church, weddings, anniversaries, and such high occasions. The silk was heavy and rich and the dresses were made with so much lining, crinoline, and boning that they almost stood alone. Made over about every five years, they lasted almost a lifetime.

These dresses, which appear in the old daguerreotypes, were all made either at home or in a local shop. There were no commercial patterns. Dressmakers made their own patterns. A seamstress did not make patterns but confined herself to plain sewing and children's clothes. Making patterns was a mystery to most women. A dressmaker took measurements here and there, wrote down figures, made designs on brown paper with ruler, square, and circle and then produced a plain waist pattern with front, underarm piece, back, and sleeves. The lining was cut from this, fitted, and then ripped apart. The dress material was tucked or shirred as desired and then basted on the lining. There was more or less guessing about cutting the skirt.

Dresses were trimmed very elaborately. The sewing machines had attachments for tucking, gathering, and shirring, and at the Traer fair, the sewing machine salesmen — there were a number of makes then — vied with each other quilting and embroidering. They even sewed names on ribbon book marks. Somehow the women could never use the attachments on their machines as well as those men did.



Women with a real aptitude for designing and making gowns made a business of it until people began buying ready-made dresses. Then some of these dressmakers, even first class ones, drifted into the alteration departments of big city stores.

Weddings, of course, attracted attention to clothes. What the bride wore was news. A letter written by Janette Whannel the winter of 1873 told of a double wedding at Squire Wilson's when Janet Wilson was married to Edward Dodd, and Jane to Robert Whannel. "The brides were dressed alike in buff alpaca made with basque waists and overskirts trimmed, puffed, frilled, and draped. White flowers were lovely in their hair — especially since the girls had a profusion of natural jet black ringlets."

The church was also a vantage point for both styles and news. One day when the sermon was long, the Stevenson children looked enviously across the aisle at two little girls with gold earrings. In those days, the ear lobes had to be actually pierced if a girl wished to wear earrings and cowardice kept many from displaying these ornaments. The girls looked like dolls in their blue cashmere dresses trimmed with small gold buttons and plaited frills. Plaiting was all the style. Mrs. Stevenson had a plaiting board which her husband had made for her by nailing along the sides of a nine-inch board narrow strips of tin which on one side were wider than the board. In the part of the tin strips above the board he made a row of spaced holes. Long, hemmed bands of cloth were folded back and forth on what looked like steel knitting needles stuck through the holes. When the board was full, a damp cloth was laid on the plaits and ironed dry. In a little while the needles could be pulled out and the board filled again.

Miss Teanie (Christina) Wilson, daughter of the Squire, who sat in the pew ahead had a new winter hat with a large



plume festooned around the hat and hanging down over the brim behind. Across the aisle was a prospective bride. Visitors in her home had seen her pillow cases, sheets, and towels by the dozen, her table cloths and napkins, her ruffled petticoats with tucks, insertion, and lace edging, fine muslin underwear, nightgowns princess style, buttoned all the way down the front with tucks and embroidery on each side, pillows filled with goose feathers, quilts, and blankets — great trunkfuls of household furnishings. The wedding would be soon. But eyes wandered from the bride-to-be to a guest in church, a widow all in black. Her bonnet had folds of crepe turned back from her face, the ends hanging down to her waist behind. Her dress was heavily banded with crepe. She was young and fair and made a striking appearance.

#### THE "BUT" AND "BEN" IN TRANQUILLITY HOMES

"Come on ben the hoose", said Mrs. James Taylor, leading the way to the parlor, where the red plush sofa and chairs were carefully protected with tidies and these in turn, by newspapers which Mrs. Taylor unpinned and removed. The words "but" and "ben" had been carried over from the life in Scotland, where houses had two main rooms, the "but" or kitchen and the "ben" or parlor.

When red-cheeked Lizzie Sloss had been persuaded to come to James Taylor's wee white house, there was only a "but" to these bachelor quarters, so a new two-story addition was built. Opening off the parlor was a hall quite usual in a city home but not so common on Iowa farms in the eighties. It had an open stairway with a landing and elaborately carved railing, a hall rack with elegant mirror, and a front door with glass panels. But the door opened out on an impassable ravine between the house and the road. No front steps had ever been built — indeed, there was no



need. Everyone came up the hillside through the pasture, alighting at the back door where they were greeted by the "guid" wife.

But these unused company rooms satisfied the Scotch mistress. Even in the midst of pioneer hardships, the people of Tranquillity all built a "ben" or best room onto their cabins. In Scotland they had all been accustomed to best things, every man his Sabbath blacks and every woman her best silk gown.

So the several generations of children in this Scotch community grew up spending most of their time "but the hoose" in the big kitchens, working, eating, and playing; yet the things that happened "ben the room" touched their imagination and made lasting impressions. It may have been the signing of the farm mortgage, a wedding dinner when the roast pig had cloves stuck along its back and an apple in its mouth, an infare, an anniversary celebration, a meeting of the session to administer the communion sacrament, a baptism, or a funeral — whatever it was, the big events of the family life were sure to be enacted "ben the hoose".

Grandmother Stevenson usually sat by the sunny window in her kitchen. Our road to school passed her door. We waved in the morning but stopped for a rest at night. She often sent us "in ben" to fetch things. We had a wholesome respect for everything there, especially the tall mahogany clock with its slow, bell-like "chapping" of the hours. There were colorful pictures about its face, a woman, her outer skirts pinned up behind, making butter with a dasher churn; a farmer casting seed from a cloth bag tied sling-fashion over his shoulder; a plowman urging on a yoke of oxen; the reapers cutting the swaths of grain with cradles.

Grandmother set great store by this clock, brought with



the family to Canada and again to Iowa in 1865; she told how on her wedding afternoon in Scotland, she and grandfather had walked across the fields to their farm and he surprised her with this new clock already in the house.

On New Year's Day when the family gathered at Grandmother Stevenson's (grandfather died in 1875) we all had our dinner "in ben", also when relatives visited from Wright County, or the minister and his wife came for tea. At these times the mahogany table, also brought from Canada, covered with the finest homespun linen, was set out with the silver spoons, white handled knives and forks, and the beautiful china with the conventional clover leaf design in gold that had belonged to great grandmother Weir. Those who wiped the dishes were admonished to be careful of "tha' thin cheeny cups". On these occasions grandmother always put on her gold watch with the long heavy chain.

Although there were ordinary kerosene lamps, the brass candlesticks were polished for these gala occasions. Grandmother used them with tallow candles made every winter. She had a brass snuffer. A hanging lamp with flowered shade and rows of pendant glass prisms would have been in much better style, but the candlesticks continued to stand on the self with the green velvet lambrequin, covered with sprays of wild roses painted with a pen by an ambitious granddaughter. Although grandmother tolerated other knickknacks of fancy work, she probably realized they looked cheap and tawdry beside her fine things — really beautiful because they were made for use.

Our Scotch grandmothers who came to the Wolf Creek settlement in the fifties and sixties guarded their treasures "ben the hoose"; our American mothers kept theirs in parlors; we of the next generation, scorning the mid-Victorian parlors, packed old treasures in the attics and prided



ourselves on our comfortable living rooms; our daughters, having dispensed with both attics and treasures, live in city apartments with disappearing beds, de luxe bathrooms, and electrically equipped kitchenettes.

The Stevenson family had also brought from Canada a picture of Queen Victoria and her consort, Prince Albert. He was a gallant figure in his crimson and blue uniform, standing beside the Queen who was seated serenely in the midst of great spreading ruffles of ivory satin. The blue sash across her ample breast was filled with medals. There was also a picture of the Queen's popular son, the Prince of Wales, afterward Edward VII, much in the limelight in the eighties, and his bride, Princess Alexandra of Denmark.

Instead of being "in ben" these hung "but the hoose" by the cooking stove. Evidently the family had taken on a new allegiance but could not quite throw off the old. These pictures suggested romance. We plied matter-of-fact grandmother with questions but to no purpose. Perhaps, if our jovial grandfather, who had a twinkle in his eye and had taught singing school in his youth, had been living our curiosity about the English royal family might have been better satisfied.

Although the sitting room in one friend's house was always warm, we often slipped into the cold parlor to see a large handsomely framed picture of a man caught in a storm. He wore white breeches and a brocaded vest but his red cloak was flying out behind him, his cocked hat was blowing away, and a slipper was falling off. He was carrying a basket with the cover blown off, a roll of butter almost over the edge, and the eggs spilling out. At the same time he was trying to hold on to an umbrella turned inside out and, to cap the climax, manage a pig that was pulling frantically on the rope which held it. This man, dressed so fine, was yet burdened with all these things. Probably he was a



footman. The picture must have come from the family's merchant days in Glasgow; perhaps it was one that did not sell.

When the fire was lighted in the James Stevenson parlor, the first thing visiting children did was to get a dissected map of the United States out on the floor. It was cut on State lines and fitting the pieces together was a real delight. This game was never taken to the kitchen. In this parlor, as in most parlors of that day, there was a shelf between the two front windows. Here stood a clock and beside it a child's bank in the form of a house with a green Mansard roof. If a small crank at the side was turned, the dog, Fido, came out with a plate in his mouth. If a penny was laid in the plate and the crank was turned, the dog moved off in state, deposited the money in the vault, and reappeared in triumph ready for more. But pennies were scarce. There was more interest in robbing the vault.

In the parlor of the writer's home there hung a framed photograph of the farmstead after the tornado struck on a Saturday afternoon in 1888. On Monday morning an enterprising photographer had appeared and father let him photograph the wrecked buildings. That picture was a godsend. When strangers came or people dropped in for all day visits, there were often awkward, even boring moments when no one knew what to say or how to get out of that room. Someone would call attention to this picture. Everyone got up. The company shifted, some studied its details. There were barn doors nailed over front windows, steps perched on the gate post at the road, a hay rake straddling the roof pole of the "shop", the men's wash bench hung over a forlorn uncovered horse stall. The picture was good for a half-hour of spontaneous talk and laughter, for the guests always had their own stories of tornadoes.

On the wall of a neighbor's parlor hung a deep frame



enclosing a large hairwreath. We always connected the burnished gold flower with a countryside belle and we knew the hair of the black one at the top had belonged to a lovely daughter who died of "consumption" a few months after her marriage. We were greatly moved by stories of her young husband's devotion and sorrow. The fact that he remained through all the years a handsome widower, added to the tragic fascination of the black flower in the hairwreath.

The parlor in the Peter Wilson home was dominated by a large and fine portrait of the husband and father who had died in his prime. A great deal went on in this front room, parties for young people, church socials, meetings of missionary societies and literary clubs, business and religious conferences; but we were always conscious of the portrait. It was said that when Tama Jim came in he always instinctively saluted his brother's picture.

In all these parlors, there was a marble-topped table in the center of the room. This held a big family Bible such as we find on church pulpits today, the photograph album, and a stereoscope with its double picture cards. In the Bible, between the Old and New Testaments, there were a number of pages devoted to family history. There was a marriage certificate, but no provision for divorce; indeed, there was no need. The certificate was followed by a page devoted to the births of children, one for marriages, and one for deaths. The families of the first generation usually required the whole page for births, in fact they often had to paste in extra sheets, for it was not possible to list a dozen or sixteen children on one page.

Children were most interested in the pictures found in these big Bibles — Isaac bound to the altar and the ram caught in the bush; David killing the giant, Goliath; Samson pulling down the pillars of the temple; and Solomon



ready to cut in twain the infant claimed by the two women. But they were only permitted to touch this cherished book on Sabbath evenings under the guarding eye of father or mother.

When the minister called he used this Bible for worship. It was the custom, no matter what time of day he called, to assemble the family in the parlor for this service. The good mothers were, however, often embarrassed by the things he found in the book, bank notes, prescriptions, letters, even samples of dress goods. It seemed as if everything had been slipped into the Bible for safe-keeping. "Lokens me!", exclaimed a pious auntie when the minister opened up to a pair of glasses, "I've been lookin' for tha' specs for a twalmonth."

#### AUNT SALIE

Sarah Milroy Wilson was a typical middle-aged Scotch woman when Andrew Wilson gallantly ushered her up the aisle in Tranquillity church that Sunday in 1884. The people, all agog over the new bride and groom, gathered around them after the services; it was a royal welcome. Sarah's round "sonsie" face beamed with good cheer, human interest, and humor. Her plump, matronly figure radiated health and energy. In the years that followed Sarah was seldom seen except with her husband. She did not drive away by herself in a single buggy, she rode with Andrew when he went. She looked out for him, took good care of her man.

Youngest of the eleven children of Jane Lusk and James Wilson of "Big Pinmore" in Ayrshire, Scotland, Andrew had been much favored in his youth. Left a bachelor in "Little Pinmore", he found it easy to sit by the fire and read or talk with friends. Nothing pleased him as much as Scotch ballads and the violin. Clever at checkers, he played with experts.



But Andrew lost money on the farm in Scotland, so he gave up "Little Pinmore" and came out to his relatives in Iowa. He was a laird all right — this long-faced Scotchman with the sideburns and smooth upper lip, always gallant, a real ladies' man. He had left several sweethearts in the old country, one belonging to a fine, well-to-do family. He talked a good deal about her but finally decided that Sarah Milroy suited him better. She must have been discouraged with Andrew's long years of divided courting, for immediately after his departure for America, she began preparations to marry another man. But these lagged. "I couldna' da it", she confessed afterwards, "for that man, Andrew Wilson, was ay in my heart."

The newly married couple kept house a short time for Peter McEwen, a young bachelor on a farm near McMillan's and Four Mile Grove, but Sarah had some money and was anxious to buy a farm in this neighborhood. Andrew had never done hard work, and was not physically fitted for it, but Sarah was hale and hearty — fine and fit — so they bought one hundred and sixty acres a mile up and across Wolf Creek from the church. And Sarah would have the farm in Andrew's name. They called it "Pinmore". There was a house warming of relatives with many presents, the practical things they needed. Sarah had brought beautiful china, silver, fine Irish linen, sheets, pillow cases, and Scotch woolen blankets.

Since Sarah was instrumental in buying the farm, was a strong woman, and could work outdoors, she naturally helped Andrew and the hired man in the fields. When they took sheep to market she went a ways to "kep the gaps". One hot August evening when the flies were bad, a neighbor found Sarah milking and Andrew on a stool beside her holding the cow's tail to keep it from getting in the milk pail or brushing Sarah's face.



Although Aunt Salie worked hard, she could turn from the "byre" (cow barn), put on her black silk gown, her watch and grand chain, and her velvet bonnet just done over in a new shape in Mrs. Peterson's millinery store, and be at once the well set-up, prosperous farm mistress. But she wore the gold chain with discrimination; when going to town or a neighbor's, she used a round woven chain of black beads.

Sarah's speech was always broad Scotch, original, pungent, pithy, coached in neat similes. "Oh, Andrew, there's a black!" Sarah exclaimed when they met a negro. She did not see many in Scotland. On hearing of a well-to-do person who would not pay for the essentials of decent living, Aunt Salie commented, "It's a great pity to baith hae (have) and want." "Salie, ye hae some fine ducks this year", said a visiting relative who was out in the barnyard with Mrs. Wilson. "I'll hae na mair deuks", said Sarah, shaking her head with conviction, "They wid eat a horse frae under the saddle."

She used homely imagery. Friends listened with delight to her characterizations of people — especially ministerial candidates. In those days when a new minister was to be chosen, we had plenty of candidates. Since community life revolved about the church services, everyone was on hand to hear the new man and there was much discussion of his good and bad points during the week.

Jams, jellies, and marmalades vied with each other on her table. She learned to bake bread but at the church dinners there were a few scones, a plate of short bread, or a bit of oat cake, brought by Aunt Salie. These delicacies were greatly prized by the older generation.

Andrew continued his interest in checkers and on winter days, his board was always set up by the fire, but he was no financier; Sarah was the business head of the farm and did



the trading. Naturally thrifty, she was able to drive a good bargain. But in spite of this they had hard times. Andrew was not a cattleman like his brothers, John and West. He raised sheep and grain, but there is no money in small grain except as it rotates with corn, and the sheep fell a prey to disease and the neighbors' dogs.

To add to their difficulties, their house was burned to the ground. They were in another part of the farm and saved nothing. All the fine silver, china, linens, shawls, and blankets were lost. They had to start all over again.

Sarah could always see the cheerful side of troubles, even when suffering from rheumatism. When a kindly visitor sympathized with her, Sarah replied, with a twinkle in her eye, "It's been awfu' bad in this shoulder for two or three weeks, but I'm thankfu' that now it's shifted to the other."

After twenty years Sarah and Andrew became too old to work the farm, so in 1904, they built a little house near their kin folk on "Presbyterian Hill", in Traer. Financially comfortable, they looked ahead to happy, quiet years, but less than three years after they retired, Mrs. Wilson, always so strong and fit, fell ill and in a short time she was gone, at the age of sixty-eight.

Sarah had always yearned to visit her old home and relatives in Scotland and Andrew had urged her to go but she could never bring herself to leave him and take the voyage alone. After her death Andrew found no value in his little home or his farm. A trip to Scotland was arranged with a grand niece. He brought her back to Iowa, sold his home and farm, closed up his affairs, and returned to live in the old country. He is buried in Barhill, Scotland; Sarah lies alone in Buckingham cemetery, just out of Traer. But she is surrounded by the Wilson kin — they all loved her.

JANETTE STEVENSON MURRAY

CEDAR RAPIDS IOWA