

The Old Field School

By FRANK M. VANCEL

Here, "old nature's wild and rugged scenes,

With no inviting prospects to adorn,

The latest spark of genius brightened forth—

The greatest lives in history were born.

Backward, far backward, in the dim vistas of bygone years, there is no dearer or more revered spot in memory than that of our early school days. To most of those of advanced years these scenes were enacted amid the primeval shades of the Old Field School House. This pioneer landmark was conveniently situated upon some country thoroughfare within a grove of natural forest trees, and, if possible, in proximity to a spring of water. The district, of which this rural temple of learning was the nucleus, included an irregular area of twenty or thirty square miles in extent, and embraced an isolated population of from forty to sixty children of school age.

The present system of free schools was unknown in those days. All terms of school were organized and conducted upon the subscription plan, that is, the patrons subscribed to an article of agreement with a teacher for a certain number of pupils at a stated rate of tuition per scholar, and paid therefor out of their own pockets at the close of the term. Board for the teacher was generally included, whereby it became necessary for him to "board round," visiting each patron with a frequency proportionate to the number of pupils sent by him to school. These perambulating sojourns were often very onerous to the schoolmaster, as they frequently took him miles away from the seat of his labors, where, in exceedingly cold weather, his early presence was necessary to have the room comfortable. They were, also, not conducive to preparatory study, nor always rewarded by that quality of diet satisfactory to one engaged in sedentary occupation.

The school building, erected by the volunteer labor of the citizens of the district, was made of logs from the adjacent forest, or hand-made brick, and seldom exceeded in dimension twenty-five or thirty feet square. The furnishings of the room were wholly the handwork of the amateur mechanics of the neighborhood, and consisted of two or three stout wall-tables some three feet wide and ten feet long, used for writing, and upon which were placed the diverse larch buckets and baskets, and a motley array of sundry wearing apparel not convenient to hang upon the wooden pegs that ornamented all the vacant spaces between the one door and the four little windows of the building.

The seats for the pupils were rough benches of various heights and lengths, made from slabs, and placed parallel to the sides of the room—the lower ones for the smaller pupils on the interior—leaving a central rectangle, at one end of which was the wide-open fireplace and at the other, the ink-beat-strepped desk of the teacher. There was not a semblance of a blackboard or wall map, and the only decoration, aside from the gauzy network of the geometrical spider in the corners of the ceiling, were the hieroglyphics of "keel" and charcoal on the walls, made by spectacular arches.

School was called by the loud rappings of the teacher upon the window sash, and the entrance of the mixed throng of knowledge seekers into the room was characterized by an indiscriminate rush for the more desirable seats. It was strictly a case of "first come, first serve," and everywhere there might be observed animated bejays of both sexes in promiscuous and hilarious enjoyment. Nothing but the most flagrant violation of decorum was noticed by the instructor, and the rod and ferule were the panacea for all severe offenses. Pupils came into the school at all hours of the day and no questions asked, and seldom did a teacher rebuke the social communications and sly mischievousness of the young tyro. But willful misdemeanors and serious disturbances were common, and the severest chastishments were promptly inflicted. There was no schoolboard to which to appeal for assistance in subduing the unruly, and the tutor was truly a monarch of all he surveyed, and governed and controlled the infant republic or seditious realm. The contest for supremacy between the teacher and the combined forces of disorderly boys was often spirited and sometimes tragical.

"Licken and larnen" were considered indissolubly allied in the Old Field School of antebellum days, and corporal punishment was an every-day occurrence. A bunch of strong switches was always kept in store, and it was one of the funniest of tricks of the bad boy to discover these instruments of torture, and encircle them with a sharp knife, which while unseen, caused the m to fly into numerous pieces when applied. Another lesser punishment was to stand upon the floor, which was sometimes intensified by being required to hold out a book until the arm became semi-paralyzed. A very frequent and most reprehensible correction was the cruel application of the ferule

or ruler to the inside of the hand.

The three R's—Reading, Riting and Rithmetic—were the chief studies, of no practical importance, and were pursued only by an occasional student of mature years. Outside of spelling and reading there were no regular classes, owing to the great disparity in attainments and diversity of text books. Nearly every publication extant was represented by the students of reading, from the backless Testament to the last year's almanac. Most every one had a copy of Webster's, blue-backed, speller, which was also used for a reader in the more elementary grades. Others more advanced read from Bible, the Columbian Speaker, and the lives of Washington and Jackson. Fragments of the Revised Statutes were also to be seen. The copies of arithmetic most in evidence were those of Deboe, Pike and Ray. Slates of elaborate dimensions were exclusively used, and many ciphered out the intricate problems in "Tare and Tret," with bits of soapstone for pencils, gathered from the banks of neighboring streams.

As there is supposed to be a time to or for all things, so there was a time in the Old Field School set apart exclusively for writing. The copy book was a home product, made from the blue fool's cap paper, and the pens were fashioned from goose quills, under the skillful hand of the teacher. Copies were set suitable to the various capacities of the pupils, and ranged in character all the way from the initiatory step of "Pot-hooks," to that of "Many men of many minds." The writing class sat before the ponderous table facing the wall, and the only time of the day's session in school in which there was an approximation to quietness in the room was the half hour devoted to writing broken only by the musical squeak of two dozen goose quill pens.

The study of spelling was made very prominent and the recitations were always oral. The classes lined up in a long row, and the words of the lesson were pronounced to each pupil in turn. When a word was misspelled, the pupil below who spelled it correctly took his place above the one who missed it, and the pupil standing at the head of the class at the close of the recitation was given a head mark, and took his place next day at the foot of the class. The pupil obtaining the greatest number of head marks during the term of school was given a premium at the close. Then there were spelling matches in the evening—a season of unbridled fun and frolic. Two captains were designated, who "chose up," and the house was divided, as nearly every one spelt, and a battle royal raged for supremacy. The most exciting time came when both sides stood up and "spelled down"—each contestant sitting down on missing a word. This contest was often prolonged, for there were good spellers at that time, and it frequently happened that some diminutive pupil—most generally a little girl—would hold a half-dozen stalwart opponents in check, and oftentimes come off victorious.

A prominent incident, ever connected with a winter term of school, and one which was looked forward to as a red-letter day, was the "Christmas Treat." It was an unwritten law, sanctioned by universal custom, that the teacher must give to the pupils of the school not only a holiday on Christmas, but also a bountiful repast of apples, or cakes and candy. Very often this demand was positively refused, and then came the dangerous sport of "turning the teacher out and making him treat." To accomplish this, the schoolroom, in his temporary absence, was securely barricaded, so as to prevent ingress, while a force of the largest boys remained on the outside to guard against the possibility of entrance or the escape of the teacher from the premises. The penalty of a non-compliance was a ducking in some nearby stream or pond of water, the icy nature of which usually enforced a tardy and sullen compliance.

The recreative sports and amusements of the old country schools were many and varied in character. The boys mostly engaged in what were termed "Town ball," "Mumble peg," and "Roly poly," while the girls played "Puss wants her corner," "Jumping the rope," "Ante over," "Ring round rosy," and other more quiet games. Jumping, foot racing and "blackman" were also favorite pastimes of the boys; and skating, coasting and snow balling were highly enjoyed in midwinter. Attending all these were innumerable little joyous pleasures of youthful associations that have passed with the age of the olden times. "The grape vine swing is ruined," and bright-eyed boys and girls no longer, as of yore, troop the sylvan shades in nutting parties, search for wild strawberries in the meadows, or ramble beside the icy-factored brook in early springtime, bedecked with nature's earliest floral offerings of "Johnny jump ups," and pendent blue bells. The cherished, halcyon scenes come back to us, but only upon the silent, mystic wings of memory.

Women Run Many Hotels. Many of the hotels of the country towns of England are managed by women, and it is claimed that they do it far better than men in the same position. The moderation of fortunate people comes from the calm which good fortune gives to their temper.

Moderation.

The moderation of fortunate people comes from the calm which good fortune gives to their temper.

John Floyd's Fishing Trip

Floyd often stopped a week at Hurstmont. It was a rest from town, where there is no rest, and it was a bit difficult to get to, which was one of its charms, and the fishing was good.

But the Crusaders Arms was the strong point—an undeveloped inn with a rustic garden and veranda, to say nothing of excellent cooking and a quiet, far-away touch about it which was balm like and soothing after the fever and hurry of the city.

But when Floyd arrived, announced, in June, the landlord threw up his hands in dismay. "No room!" exclaimed Floyd. "Very sorry, sir," said the landlord. "If you had only written! But they might put you up at the Sheaves kept by a lady—Miss Charteris."

"Ah, I will try there," and John Floyd drove, away down the village street and into the country again, for the flyman to pull up at a pretty rose and clematis covered cottage.

"The Sheaves is not an inn, sir," said the flyman, as he got down, "but I believe it's all right."

And then, a few minutes later, the visitor found himself inside the house, he realized that the driver spoke the truth.

Miss Charteris interested him extremely, but why she took in boarders puzzled him. "You must be rather lonely, here," he said.

"No," she answered, "there is plenty to interest me."

He nodded shortly. "No doubt. But is there anything archaeological? We Americans are that way, you know."

"There is the abbey," she said. "May one go there?"

The girl hesitated. "I mean with permission, of course. It is not inhabited."

"No—o, it is not inhabited," she said, slowly.

"You take a great interest in it?" he said.

"Yes, and I fear the Goths and Vandals."

"You see, the abbey is all I have," she said wistfully. "It used to belong to my family all this part, and it is the only bit left."

"And it's a ruin," he put in thoughtfully, and at that minute as he looked at her he unconsciously felt glad that he liked fishing, and that the providence had led his steps to that "out-of-the-way" corner of the world.

"Yes," she murmured, "it is a ruin, but a very beautiful ruin. If you like I could show you it; they would let me."

The young man wondered who the mythical "they" might be as he accompanied her into the silent pathways of the ancient stronghold, monastic in its solemnity now.

"The staircase is very old and worn," he said.

"Yes," she answered, "the Crusaders did chip the steps a good deal in tramping up and down."

He looked up at her, but said not a word.

He could not sleep that night. He rose at last and dressed; and then, just as he opened the door, he saw in the dusky corridor a figure—a phantom of the night. There was a movement below and he descended to follow her into the silent country lane, out into the woodland clearing, thence into the forest, finally into the courtyard of the old chateau, which just then looked more dream-like still.

He lost sight of her in that mass of moss covered, ivy wreathed arches, where the moonlight fell in silver patches, and he stopped to think before pursuing his way, so content now principally by insight and admiration for what he saw, and realizing that he stood very little chance of finding his involuntary guide, familiar as she seemed to be with the intricacies of the place. He mounted stairway after stairway, at length coming to a wing of the edifice where ruin was not so plainly marked.

Here music came faintly to the ear, and he stopped to listen before pursuing his way, hesitating finally on the threshold of a large chamber whose walls were still partially draped with torn tapestry; and at the far end he saw the girl who was his hostess at The Sheaves, sitting before an old-time musical instrument playing a forgotten air.

There was something hard in his left foot on the following morning, and he took it off and shook it, finding inside what was evidently the head of a hatpin—a little jewel with a tiny coat of arms. "Strange!" he muttered; and after breakfast, when he saw her at the entrance to the garden, he spoke to her about it.

"Is this yours?" he said. She took the jewel and examined it attentively and then blushed to the roots of her hair.

"Yes," she said, "yes, it's mine. Annetto, the maid, must have dropped it."

"Why Harriet Abbey?" "But it is not for sale."

"Oh, any place is for sale if enough is offered."

"But—" she began. "Don't worry about it," he interrupted her; "I have written to the lawyers. By the way, you don't know who owns it?"

"I—guess to have heard," she said, "once; but," she went on, as if trying to remember, "I am afraid I can't tell you the name. But why do you want to buy it?"

"Make it useful," he said shortly. "But how?" "Pull it down."

"Oh!" "Turn it into a sugar refinery."

"You dare not!" she cried indignantly. "I dare," he retorted. "It is abominable!"

"Well, it's no use at present."

"No use! I—I—" she said as more, but whisked out of the room and shut the door with a bang.

"Sprits!" muttered Floyd, as he looked at the door as though his eyes were Rheingarn rays, and he lit a cigar. "I like spirits."

He did not wait for the post on the following morning, but swept early into the silent sunbeam-haunted house, where the air seemed to be in luminous strata.

"Ought to be somewhere here," he said quietly, and he walked solemnly into the kitchen, where the cat rose, yawned, and looked at him, then at the beefs he held in his hand.

"Ah, here we are!" he exclaimed at last, as he descended a step into a little brick-floored room. The bump his head made in the white washed ceiling is there to this day.

"Brush—blacken. Clean my own boots? Of course! Well—brush, rab, brush—" I wouldn't at the Court; but I don't like to have jeweled knobs in my boots. Costward in I hurts. Hullo, puss!" he went on, as he saw the cat sitting on the threshold gazing at him.

Rang went down one boot, and he picked up the other.

"Mr. Floyd!" "Madam!" And he bowed to her profoundly, foot in hand.

"What are you doing?" "Dirty work makes clean boots."

"But I won't have it." "Oh, yes, you will, Miss Charteris, till Annetto—"

"There isn't any Annetto," she said excitedly, and she took a step forward.

"Thought as much," he said grimly. "But—" she began, and then she turned away sharply for there came a rat-tat at the outer door.

"Postman," he said, "small I go." "No, of course not!" And she darted off, to return in a minute bearing a letter in her hand.

"You don't trust me," he said as he took it.

"Why should I?" she exclaimed. "Oh—just because you should."

He read that letter, and then read it again. "It begins, 'Dear Sir—'"

"It answers to you—" and evidently it was not quite satisfactory, since soon after breakfast he started off for the country town whence it came, to return only at nightfall.

"They tell me—" he said. "Who tell you?"

He looked at her quite calmly. "The lawyers who have charge of the abbey. They say that it is not to be sold."

"No more it is."

"But—" he continued, "There, please sit down, because I have a job I want to say." And she obeyed him, subsiding into the lounge chair in the corner of the veranda.

"What do you wish to say?" "I want—" he cried, "I want to buy that place."

"To make it a sugar refinery?" she asked, and there was a suspicious smile at the corners of her mouth.

"No, no; I want to hear you play the spinet again. I want you, and the place would be yours, and the land which used to belong, don't you see? And you could repair where you chose and leave the rest. What have I made all my money for sitting there, where everything is so confoundedly new, if I can't do this—for just Miss Charteris—Ethel—I am only a rough 'un; but could you not take me—for the sake of the abbey?"

She turned her head sideways a little and looked at him.

"Perhaps," she said softly, "perhaps I could."

And though the splint of the sides days was far away, he felt that there was music just then which made its cadence dull.

Indelible Ink Required. By the laws of England and of France, legal documents are required to be written in ink made from galls, such ink having proved to be practically indelible. The mixture is of bruised galls with sulphate of iron and gum arabic. This legal ink, as once the best and oldest in existence, entirely depends on a disease, to which is caused by a fly known as the gall-fly. The gall-fly belongs in the same order as the bee and wasp, and when it is ready to lay its egg, it cuts away the outer bark of an oak tree twig and deposits its eggs in the hole. From some unknown cause the tree immediately begins to enlarge about the egg, and a gall, or oak-apple, as it is usually called, is formed.

When You Feel "Blue," Determine not to be "blue" and make it a rule to go to see a friend and to cheer him up every day. Incidentally you will cheer yourself up.

Gas is the Ideal

for all Domestic Cooking Appliances

Insuring

Easily Controlled Temperature

The acme of cleanliness in use

The maximum of comfort

the user.

It Saves

Time—Money—Tempo

Got A Gas Range



ROCHESTER RANGE

We desire to call attention to the fact that a number of Superior quality gas ranges are now on hand and will be given to your country at a special price.

Four Per Cent. Interest

EVERY FULL

98+ SOLID OAK BENCH

JOHN F. MOYER

German American Bank

134 Portland Ave.

Lewis & Clark

JOHN H. MERRILL

JOHN M. REDDING

Lehigh Valley

Send us your...