

The Old Field School

By FRANK M. VANCEL

Here, "old nature's wild and rugged scene, 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 clearer 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.

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.

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.

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-beatificated desk of the teacher.

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 served," and everywhere there might be observed animated bejays of both sexes in promiscuous and hilarious enjoyment.

"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 victim to feel numerous pieces when applied.

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.

As there is supposed to be a time to do 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 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.

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.

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.

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. 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.

Miss Charteris interested him extremely, but why she took to boarders puzzled him. "You must be rather lonely, here," he said. "No," she answered, "there is plenty to interest me."

"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."

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.

There was something hard in his left boot 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.

"What place?" she asked quickly. "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.

"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," she cried indignantly. "I dare," he retorted. "It is abominable!" "Well, it's no use at present." "No use! I—I—" she said no 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 Rheinstetten rays, and he lit a cigar. "I like spirit." He did not wait for the post on the following morning, but slipped 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 senselessly into the kitchen, where the cat rose, yawned, and looked at him, then at the head 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—blackening. Clean my own boots? Of course! Well—brush, rab, brush—" "I wouldn't at the Cartons; but I don't like to have jeweled knobs in my boots. Costward Mr. R. hurta. Hullo, puss!" he went on, as he saw the cat sitting on the threshold gazing at him. Bang went down one boot, and he picked up the other.

"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 Annette—" "There isn't any Annette," 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. "I want—" "Dear Sir—" he answered 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.

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