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From Out the Distant Past
At odd times during the past few years the architect of this department has fallen into a reminiscent mood and written about his boyhood days. Several times he has mentioned the name of Doug Freeman. And now comes added proof of the truth of the old saying that this is a pretty small world, after all. It has been nearly forty years since the architect has heard of Doug Freeman, and somehow or other he had fallen into the habit of thinking that Doug had passed to his reward. But in the mail the other day was a letter postmarked Davenport, Oklahoma, and it was signed "Douglas Freeman"—the Doug of boyhood days away back yonder in Macon county, Illinois. Commoner readers who have read of Doug in this department may be interested in hearing a little more about him, and from himself. This is what he writes:

Davenport, Okla., February 10.—Dear Maupin: I received a clipping from sister Rose today which was published in a Warrensburg, Ill., paper and entitled, "A Reminiscent Letter from Will M. Maupin." I read it with much interest, for it recalled to memory many incidents of our long-ago boyhood days, when Doug Freeman was the "town terror." I remember you well; also Aunt Sally and Uncle Taylor, your estimable parents. Vividly I recall that fine, large watermelon dear old Aunt Sally had been saving with so much care until Uncle Taylor came home to share in its lusciousness. To my hungry eyes it was the largest, juiciest looking melon that ever grew in her well kept garden. She had plucked it and covered it all over with weeds and grass, and no doubt thought of the pleasure it would give Uncle Taylor to carve it when he came home from his arduous preaching circuit. Doug Freeman was also watching that melon. My conscience smote me a little to steal from Uncle Taylor, but I reasoned that a preacher had all the chickens, watermelons and things that he needed, anyway, and that the melon would make a good meal for Bob Masters and myself. So we went after it. I crawled into the garden and out again, pushing that melon in front of me. My, but it was a long ways to Masters' barn, but we got it there. Such a feast! Well, you know how good melons used to taste forty years ago. In due time Uncle Taylor came home, but the melon was gone. Aunt Sally came over to our house and told my mother that some bad boys had stolen her melon, and then looked straight at me. I can remember this minute how I felt; also how good it seemed to make my escape out of the back door. It was my pleasure to visit the old town (Harristown) several years ago. A lot of the old landmarks remain, but the people have changed. Daniel Stockey, John Holmes and Jimmy and Biddy Ryan were the only old-timers remaining. After I made myself known to Uncle Dan Stockey he remarked as he shook hands: "It's no use for you to come back, Doug; I've quit raising watermelons." Jimmy Ryan was the section foreman, and Johnny was the freckled-faced boy you referred to recently. Uncle Jimmy was once walling a well with brick, and Johnny was letting the brick down to him with a windlass and bucket. The windlass

slipped out of Johnny's hands and the bucket fell and hit Uncle Jimmy on the head. It stunned, but did not hurt him much. As usual I was on the spot and helped get him out. The first thing he asked for was whisky and I ran over to Dr. Connelley's office and got a teacupful. Uncle Jimmy drank it all. Dr. Connelley came shortly after and asked Uncle Jimmy, "Are you hurt?" Uncle Jimmy replied: "I thought Oi was kilt entirely, but bliss God I'm all right now."
Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Biddy were very old and feeble when last I saw them, but such welcome I never had before, or since, when I called on them. Bless Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Biddy! They were poor and humble, but two better friends a boy never had. They were my advisors in all my boyhood troubles, and were always loyal and true. I presume that both of them have passed away. You recall the time Dr. Ferguson was hurt while ditching. It was Jim Hamilton's machine that was making the blind ditch, using windlass power, and I was driving the oxen. Dr. Ferguson came out to look over the work, and the chain broke, letting the lever, or sweep, come back around the circle. I ducked it, but it caught the doctor in the back. I can see it as plainly as if it were only yesterday, instead of forty years ago. I never can forget George and Will Waters, our old teachers. Will was a very large man, very tall and with unusually large hands, huge feet all corned and calloused, and with a fiery temper. He also had a well-selected stock of hickory withes, principally for my benefit—which I received daily. Doubtless I deserved all I got, and then some. I often think of Harristown and the people. I have not kept track of them, but I often wonder what kind of men and women our playfellows turned out to be.

DOUG FREEMAN.

Now that letter may not interest Commoner readers a great deal, but it was better than a novel to the architect. It just set memory's wheel to whirling until he was about forty years in the past. It was in that little old frame school house in Harristown that George Waters gave the then tow-headed architect his first introduction to a hickory switch. It was Doctor Ferguson who gave the architect the first remembered dose of sulphur and molasses, the first remembered dose of calomel and the first remembered teacupful—or was it quartcupful—of castor oil. It was Jim Hamilton who dug the famous "Preacher Maupin well" in 1869, the year of the big drouth in Illinois, and that well was the only one for miles around that didn't go dry that awful summer. It was Uncle Jimmy Ryan's handcar that carried the first doctor to the scene of the awful Wabash wreck near Niantic in 1869, and it was Aunt Biddy who played angel to a half-score of dying passengers and trainmen at that terrible scene. It was Johnny Ryan, bless his honest Irish heart, who fought the architect's first battle for him—after the architect had made a failure of it.
Honestly, Doug Freeman's letter recalls enough to fill a dozen issues of The Commoner. As the architect read it he could count every knot-hole in the old depot platform, see every crack in the plastering on the old Christian church, hear Uncle Jim Eyman laugh, taste the grapes in Dr.

Ferguson's big vineyard, see Ben, the big Scotchman, grooming Uncle Henry Pickrell's fine shorthorns, and fairly feel the sting of George Waters' hickory switch as it wrapped around the thin shanks of a mischievous lad who thought he had covered his tracks well.
As we remarked before, this may not be so very interesting to the readers, but perhaps it will serve to set their memory works to going, and if it does they will have a lot of enjoyment out of it.

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