



Whether Common or Not

By WILL M. MAUPIN.

VAGRANT THOUGHTS ON A VARIETY OF THINGS

The season of year is at hand when people begin wondering what they will do to pass away the long winter evenings. And this reminds us that we have lost a whole lot while gaining a few things by reason of modern conveniences and "improvements." City people are enervated by steam and furnace heat. They are bored to death with operas and dramas and dinners and receptions. They go to bed in warm rooms, get up in the morning and dress in warm rooms, force themselves to eat a few bites and then ride down town to work in stuffy street cars wherein the air is poisoned by the breath of scores of other "equally fagged out fellow mortals. And that is what we call "modern conveniences."

In the evening the city man goes home, eats a little dinner and then begins dressing for some social function where he stands around doing nothing for four or five hours, winding up with a four course lunch that he doesn't want and which gives him a fit of indigestion and a headache all next day. That is what we call "society."

Talk about "social functions!" How would you like to get back to the old days before the advent of steam heat and incandescent lights and enjoy one of those old-fashioned "corn shuckin's" or "taffy pulls" like we used to have in the country? There was no danger of indigestion in those days. No danger of being bored to death. Instead of looking forward to the "corn shuckin'" with dread you lost sleep thinking about the good time you were going to have. And instead of giving it to pay "social obligations" Mr. and Mrs. Farmer were giving it because they wanted to have a good time with their neighbors.

Having determined to give a "shuckin'" Mr. and Mrs. Farmer began their preparations. Mr. Farmer and his boys and hired men went out into the corn fields and "jerked" eight or ten wagon loads of corn. The corn, shucks and all, was thrown in on the barn floor and divided into two equal piles. In the meanwhile Mrs. Farmer was baking up a stock of golden pumpkin and rich mince pies. A genuine country ham was boiled. The finest jars of home made fruit were selected and put within easy reach. The whole house was renovated from top to bottom, and the carpet was taken up in the big dining room. Everybody in the neighborhood was invited. When the guests arrived there was laughing and shouting and merrymaking until the two captains were selected. Then the captains chose up sides and the "shuckin'" began.

Of course every time you found a red ear of corn you could kiss the girl nearest to you. Far be it from us to insinuate that any girl ever surreptitiously smuggled red ears of corn into the barn and put them where "he" could find them. Who could think of such a thing? Wouldn't the girl fight like a wild cat when "he" did find a red ear and claimed a kiss as his reward? And wouldn't she emerge from the scuffle with disheveled hair and a rosy face and exclaim: "You mean thing?"

Lower and lower grows the pile of

"jerked" corn, and higher and higher grows the pile of glistening ears. The barn rings with happy shouts, and when the winning side shucks the last ear of corn and it is held triumphantly aloft, what a glorious moment it is!

Talk about good management! That last ear is shucked just in time for the announcement:

"Come in folks an' have a bite to eat!"

A bite to eat, indeed! There is enough on that table to feed a regiment. None of your French fixings and things made out of sweetened wind. Not much, Mary Ann! The grub on that table is the kind that puts fat on your ribs and makes your blood run richer.

Wait just a minute. All be quiet now, please.

"Brother Simmons, will you please ask the blessing?"

And as the good old preacher bows his head above the banquet board every head is bowed in unison, while the preacher voices the thanks of every one for the bounties afforded by the Almighty. It is a full minute after he says "amen" before there is anything doing. And then the fun begins again. Mrs. Farmer and two or three neighbors who have volunteered fly hither and thither in an effort to keep up with the appetites of a score of hungry people who never knew what dyspepsia meant. It is really wonderful what a lot of food a fellow can stow away on an occasion of that kind.

When the "bite to eat" is over the men folks walk around and smoke and talk politics while the women are "redding up the dinin' room," and washing the dishes. In half an hour everything is ready and the men are called back in.

"Clap in and clap out," "forfeits," "tableaux," "take home what you borrowed," "postoffice"—O, yum! yum! Talk about your progressive euchre and crokinole and duplicate whist! They are not to be mentioned in the same day with those old country games.

Dance! Not a bit of it—that is, not very often. Once in a while there would be dancing, but as a rule it was rather frowned upon. But they would play "Weevily wheat," and that was about as good. And then there was "Ol' Dan Tucker." Without straining your conscience a bit you could all join in singing that old song and marching through what would be a regular cotillion if only a violin was furnishing the music. But as long as it wasn't a fiddle or an organ it wasn't dancing. Even the good old preacher admitted that much.

"Sakes alive! Why it's nearly 12 o'clock!" exclaims Mrs. Brown.

"O, don't be in a hurry; that clock always was fast," says Mrs. Farmer.

But midnight is awfully late in the country. Just think of that, you city folk who don't get started until 10:30 and are only fairly awake at midnight.

Then there is the scurrying for wraps and hats. Amidst laughter and shoutings the young folks manage to gravitate towards one door, while the old folks gravitate towards another.

"Where is Betty?" queries Mr. Jones.

"O, never mind me, pa. I'll get home," cries Betty, blushing furiously. And as Betty blushes Dan Bowman grins sheepishly. Somehow or other

it takes the young folks longer to get started than it does the old folks. Funny, isn't it?

And then the drive home in the crisp winter air and beneath the brilliance of the stars. None of your "what a dreadful bore," like it so often happens in the city. You never yawn on the way home from a "corn shuckin'." Not much!

And then to bed in a cold room. Ugh! Gee, ain't it cold! But inside of ten minutes you are sound asleep, and it seems only a brief minute ere you hear the call to breakfast.

And breakfast! None of your mushy "breakfast foods," I tell you. Well, I guess not! Fried ham and eggs, hot biscuits and honey, coffee that would float a wedge—and plenty of all of them.

Now where are your "society functions?" Wouldn't you give a whole winter of them, you city man, if you could hark back about thirty years and spend just one more night in the old time and take in a "corn shuckin'" in the old country neighborhood where you lived when a boy?

And then there was the old "taffy pull." Don't think about it when you crawl into your swallowtail coat and prepare to go over to Mr. and Mrs. De Mons' "progressive card party." If you do you'll be bored worse than ever. Why, one of those old-fashioned "taffy pulls" was better than a whole season of receptions and routs and operas and balls. The finest chocolates ever compounded by skilled confectioners never tasted one-half so good as the yellow candy they used to make out of home made sorghum molasses. Honest now; isn't that right?

Remember the time Sarah Smiley put the taffy in Riley Wilson's chair? Gee, but wasn't Riley mad! It came mighty near breaking off the engagement, too. But they made up the next week when they had the "corn shuckin'" over at Dumphies place, and the wedding Christmas week was the biggest affair ever known in the neighborhood.

My, how that taffy used to stick to your hands. It took all the butter and flour Mrs. Meeks had to make it behave. It's easy enough to pull taffy when your hands are white and smooth, but when they are cracked all up with corn shucking or dish-washing it's a different thing.

"Hi, Sue Harris; I'll bet my taffy is whiter'n yours!"

"I just bet it ain't John Hicks!"

And then they compare. Somehow the light isn't good in that section of the room, so they look around for a better vantage ground. Before the comparison is successfully made they are outside the kitchen door, and a minute later when they re-enter Sue's face is as red as peony and John knows who is going to ride on the left side of his buggy seat when the company breaks up.

We never yet saw the young man who could pull his taffy as white as the girls could theirs.

"Mrs. Gotrox going to hold her swell reception this evening? O, confound the luck! Just as I was getting the old pipe to going good and dreaming about the old days, too!"

And what you think about receptions and balls and all that sort of city business just at that moment wouldn't look well in print, would it?

And Sunday, too, in the country. Going to church in the country is a whole lot different from going to church in the city, isn't it? You city people go in a perfunctory manner. You sit in a cushioned pew and you listen to a paid quartet singing an anthem you don't understand while the pipe organist is cutting more shines than a circus acrobat.

It wasn't that way in the old coun-

try days. Molly Delph played the little organ and everybody sang. What wouldn't you give to hear "Coronation" or "Antioch" or "Shall we gather at the river" sung like they used to sing 'em in that little country church about thirty or thirty-five years ago?

And the sermon, too. None of your polished essays on sociology. Well, I guess not! One of those genuine old "Christ and Him crucified" sermons that convicted the sinner of sin and convinced him of the great love of the Father who gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believed on Him might have life eternal.

Now we think that the preacher who talks over thirty minutes is an awful bore. Then we thought the preacher wasn't doing his duty if he didn't talk an hour and a half.

"Father, are you going to use the buggy tonight?"

"I don't know, John; why?"

"Well, I was just thinkin' that if you could use the wagon I'd like to use the buggy myself this evening."

"I guess we can fix it all right, John."

And then father winked at mother and John blushed and hurried out to dust off the worn old cushion and put fresh grease on the old wheels. "Bill" and "Buck" never got such a curry.

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