



Whether Common or Not

By WILL M. MAUPIN.

WHEN YOU ARE A BOY AGAIN

Last week you slipped a quarter of a century from your shoulders, and instead of being a busy man with grave cares upon you, you were just a care-free boy again—in your mind. These little jaunts upon memory's train back into the blossom time of life are most enjoyable excursions, are they not? Just before this particular jaunt you were worried and flustered, your eyes were lack-lustre, your appetite was poor and your digestion worse. Everything seemed to be going wrong. You were just about to give up in despair when you happened to doze a little bit, and those long unused brain cells got to work—and lo, in less than no time at all you were away back yonder in the old days, with nothing of weight on your mind except the work of keeping the woodbox full of wood and the chores done around the house.

Presto change.

Remember the time Lin Thompson shot himself? That was the funniest thing. Lin boarded at your house, you remember, and you wanted to frame up a scheme to get Em and Ina over for an evening of hilarity under pretense that they were visiting your sister, Kittie. But the mothers of Em and Ina thought they ought to be studying their lessons and refused their consent. So Lin wrapped up his hand in a heavy bandage and you produced a little blood to stain it. That ability to produce a little blood got you out of school more than once, if you remember. Then word was sent to Em and Ina that Lin had shot himself. But their mothers were suspicious and Em's little brother, Frank, was sent over to investigate. What you did to Frank was a plenty. He returned home with his eyes popping out and reported that Lin was awfully shot up. So Em and Ina came over. Then you and Lin and Em and Ina and Kittie had a high old time for an hour, popping corn in the kitchen while mother rocked in the sitting room and warned you not to make so much noise on account of the neighbors. The two girls did think for a little bit that Lin was shot, for he did look pale and pained as he lay there propped up in bed with his hand wrapped up in a pillow case.

But it took a lot of argument and persuasion and promises to fix matters with the mothers of Em and Ina, didn't it?

Say, remember how we boys and girls solved the sidewalk problem and the hog problem? That was too good. The old wooden walks were in horrible shape, and the hogs roamed the streets without let or hindrance. There were too many unprogressive people to make a sidewalk crusade effective, and too many people owning hogs and letting them run free. It was hallowe'en night if you remember. There was a party over at Ann's house that night, and after tearing the roof off the house—almost—you all set out to play a few pranks. You filled your pockets with shelled corn, then beginning at the middle of the street you scattered that corn up to and under those dilapidated old sidewalks, repeating the process all over town. My, my! But weren't those sidewalks in a fix the next morning? Those old Missouri hogs had rooted them past all fixing in order to get at that corn. There must have been more than a mile of new sidewalk laid inside of the next month, and at

the next meeting of the city trustees—they have councilmen now—a hog and cow ordinance was adopted.

But you never could frame up any scheme to do away with those old rock street crossings, could you? They are there yet, and just as slippery and treacherous as ever.

"Ol' George Seeman?" Of course you remember him. He wasn't so old, but he was town marshal, and it was his duty to chase all under seventeen off the streets when Ben Harris rang the old school bell at 9 o'clock p. m. That's why you called "Ol' George Seeman." By the way, perhaps if you strain your ears a little you can hear that old study bell again. No? Well, it would be worth all the grand operas in the world just to hear it again, wouldn't it?

It was on another hallowe'en night, wasn't it, that the whole crowd of you met at May's—or was it at Em's—and had great times until long after everybody else was in bed, and then started out? Will climbed through a window into the old school house and by means of a key that took months to make and surreptitiously fit got up into the bell tower. Then he tied a string to the old clapper and let the free end down on the outside of the tower. Then he and Zeke and "two others" remained while the rest of you went over to the old Methodist church and the old Christian church and performed similar feats of legerdemain with their bells. And when the old Christian church bell gave the signal what an awful jangle of bells there was!

And "Ol' George Seeman" came awful near catching the whole crowd, too. Remember how he came stumbling along with that old cane, and how the whole crowd had to sneak down behind the fence because you were afraid to go into the house, knowing that "Ol' George" was watching? It was awful cold that night, and if "Ol' George" had waited just a little bit longer he'd have captured the crowd, for you nearly frozen to death hugging the frozen ground. But he had to hunt for a fire, so you got away.

Yes that's "Ol' George's" tombstone; that one over there on the mound where the tattered little flag waves. They put it there last Memorial day, for "Ol' George" was a soldier, and he never wholly recovered from the wound he received at Wilson's Creek, when he fought under Lyons.

Gee, how you used to love to coast down the long hill just west of town! That was the finest coasting hill in the country, wasn't it? And what great crowds you used to have out there. You'd start at the top, and wizz!! Swish!! There you were at the bottom a good three-quarters of a mile away. It was a long walk back, but you didn't mind it providing the right party had accompanied you down the hill. But you rather looked on Grant and Frank as public benefactors when they "borrowed" one of Molter's old horses one night and used it to drag all the sleds back up the hill. It's been a long time since you coasted down that hill, and the boys and girls of today do not seem to take much fancy to that grand old sport. The last time you went flying down that hill was the night Ann got hurt. She was coming up the hill with Fred and saw a sled strike her brother, John, and thinking he was badly hurt she started across the road to help him.

Just then the "bob" guided by Charley came dashing along and it struck Ann. Well, you hauled her home on a sled piled high with wraps and overcoats, and for a month she hovered between life and death. But she came out all right. Ann is now the mother of a girl as big as she was the night she was hurt, and her son is almost as big as Fred.

But somehow or other there wasn't any more fun coasting that winter or the next, and by the next you were gone—out into the world to hustle for a living.

"Will DeBaugh's overshoes?" Of course you remember them. There are some things so gigantic that once seen are never forgotten. He used to always bring them inside of the school room. He wouldn't leave them outside like the rest of you did yours. And one day when Prof. Hill was out of the room somebody got hold of them and there was a grand overshoe throwing match. Finally Lou hung them on the chandelier and got back into his seat just as Prof. Hill returned. The most innocent face in the whole room was that of Lou's. My, how innocent that boy could look just after the perpetration of some particularly big bit of mischief! Of course you remember who it was that was charged with the heinous offense. He took his books in hand and went home at the request of Prof. Hill. And all the time Lou sat there and looked as innocent as a babe. A couple of days later he went back, because Lou "fessed up" to his father that night. Somehow or other Lou's posture at his desk seemed rather strained for a week or two.

All of you thought Prof. Hill was cross and crabbed, and you used to say harsh things about him. But it's different now. Every day you realize what a benefit his counsel and his example have been to you. And you never think of him without regret for his departure, and never fail to pay a tribute to his memory when you meet one of those old schoolmates. If you ever go through Hiawatha, Kans., you'll be sure to stop off and pay a tribute of tears and flowers above the grave where lies the dust of one of God's noblemen—Osmer C. Hill, Gentleman.

Right over there, where all those big trees are growing used to be a pond. Brodbeck's pond, it was; and it was the only skating place for miles around. The rains have washed in the dirt until it is good land now, and those trees merely showed how long ago it was that you skated there. You never got credit for it, but you and the rest of 'em cleared all the brush in the timber building fires on the banks of that pond in the winter time. Let's see, there was you, and Minnie, and Bonnie, and Em, and Ina, and May, and Code, and Kittie, and Cora, and Joe, and Zeke, and Lin, and Grant, and Fred, and Clare—O, the list is too long. But you used to walk a mile and a half to that pond and skate until Jake Foster's hack on the way back from the 11:17 train warned you that you would have to hustle if you got home before midnight. There wasn't any danger skating on that pond, because it would be frozen to the bottom when the ice was three or four inches thick. It was different after you got to skating on Kunkel's pond. That was a mill pond, and it was awful deep. The water was cold, too. Most of you learned that by experience, for you would try the ice early in the winter and late, too.

My, how time does fly. Only a little more than a year ago Fred took his son, Corbin, down to Kunkel's pond to show the boy how the "old man" could skate when he was a boy. Alas, Fred forgot to test the ice properly, and he only succeeded in

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showing the boy how frantically he could break ice in an effort to get to shore. And just think—Corbin is as big now as Fred was when all of you used to go out to Brodbeck's pond or over to Kunkel's on those delightful old winter evenings.

Yes, sir; the old Sentinel hand press used to sit right over there by that door. That cylinder press doesn't look natural now. In those old days you used to manipulate the roller while John Marshall Croley swung back on the lever and impressed upon the white paper the items that "Deacon" had jotted down for you and John and Tom to put into type. That tall young fellow bending over the imposing stone there is the baby brother of the old days when you took your first lesson in the printing business in the old Sentinel office. About the only familiar sight is that of "Deacon," who still hustles the locals. He is just as young, just as jolly and just as companionable as he was a quarter of a century ago. But that colored boy, John Marshall Croley, sleeps over in the little old cemetery, and Tom, although he is now half-owner of the paper, seldom goes there because he has to look after the mails. When you see the pile of Sentinels turned out by that cylinder press how you

A HARD QUESTION "What's Coal Worth?"

A harder question is, "How can I get a few tons?" But the latter query would be easily answered if I could sell some more of my books.

"WHETHER COMMON OR NOT"

Is a book of nearly 300 pages, containing the verses and sketches I have contributed to The Commoner and other publications. Mr. Bryan, in the foreword, says of the book: "I contribute this foreword in the belief that the book will benefit those who are led to peruse it." I have a few books left, but no coal. The book contains many "burning words" but they won't take the chill off the rooms, although they will warm your heart. Anthracite sells in Lincoln at \$10 a ton. My book sells for enough to buy 200 pounds—\$1.00. Send me a dollar and I'll send you the book and throw in my song, "A Picture of My Mother When a Girl," music by Will O'Shea, full sheet music, illuminated title page. Book is clothbound and handsomely printed.

WILL M. MAUPIN,
1216 G Street, Lincoln, Neb.

P. S.—My landlord is putting a new roof on the coal house. I'd like to see how four tons of Trustee Baer's product looks beneath it. Store's ready to put up, too.