



Whether Common or Not

By WILL M. MAUPIN.

Letters From Far-Away Friends

The Little Red Shawl

Idaho City, Ida.—Editor Whether Common or Not: I noted with much interest and deep feeling, your article of the 17th ult., in "Whether Common or Not," on the subject of "The Little Red Shawl" and other matters.

Yes, the little red shawl is almost inseparably linked with the memory of my mother. Well do I remember how, when I was a little tot and was expecting the return of my mother, I kept looking through the interstices of the apple trees for the little red shawl. I remember how, when I was second from the youngest and under five, she would mount Old Charley, take the youngest on her lap and place number two behind, where he would ride, holding to the little red shawl. I remember how we thus rode about that time, to grand-mother's, eight miles away, an almost interminable distance to me, and saw grandmother, Uncle John, Aunt Lou and the others; and that I had for several days had a thorn in my foot, and that John Bishop (I called him John Billop) extracted it. It seems to me now that it was an inch long, and for a fact it was fully half that length.

Yes, the men in the rural districts made their shawl pins of wire, which they got out of the rims of tinware, which all had a wire in the rim in those days. They made a coil near the middle of the piece of wire, bent it, ground one end to a point and bent a hook in the other end to secure it. But when Uncle John was discharged for disability and came home from the war, he brought a "store" shawl pin. It was made of brass wire and was merely a large safety pin. Mr. Architect, if your Uncle John was in the war you were too young to remember when he came home. I knew Uncle John needed the pretty shawl pin and so didn't ask him to give it to me, but I wanted it almost as bad as I wanted a Barlow knife. (Why have they quit making Barlow knives?) I remember when I got my first one. Father had bought a knife for my big brother, more than eight years my senior, and the family all had to examine it. After I examined it I remarked, "If he loses it an' I find it I'm a goin' to keep it." They were engaged and failed to notice this remark, but I was unwilling to be thus ignored, so I tried to convey my intentions in words edgewise, in this manner: "Well, if he—if he loses—if he—if he loses it—if he loses it an' I find it I'm a goin' to keep it." Like William Lloyd Garrison, I was finally heard. But father persuaded me that a knife like that as too heavy for me, and promised that he would get me one more suitable to my size. And he did. He always meant to comply with promises made to his children. When he came from town again he brought me a Barlow knife. I slept well the latter half of that night, and kept the knife a long time—perhaps a week—before I lost it.

Yes, mention of the little red shawl sent my mind in retrospect, and brought many of the scenes of childhood vividly before me—thoughts of father as well as mother. And I remember when we were walking alone in the depths of the forest, unobserved by any but the All-Seeing-Eye, how he stopped and said:

"Let us pray." Then we knelt and he implored all manner of blessings upon his family and all humanity; and finally said, "will the Lord bless my little boy? Lead him away from temptation to evil and into Thy kingdom." If that prayer has not been granted, I can assure it was not for lack of sincerity on the part of the petitioners, nor of fervency of the supplication. And now, though it has been near half a century, and that petitioner has long gone to his reward, the brain cells that were formed by such scenes, have remained intact, and will so remain until the subject of that petition shall stand before the great White Throne. But that mother that wore the little red shawl has, for ten years been supplied with a spotless robe to wear throughout a happy eternity, and does not need the little red shawl.

W. H. CABLE.

Must Be a Preacher's Boy

Phoenix, Ariz.—Editor Whether Common or Not: In response to your request for best songs and funniest stories, I would say I have several "best" songs, such as "All hail the power of Jesus' name," "Jesus Lover of my Soul," "Nearer My God to Thee," "Am I a Soldier of the Cross," and "How Firm a Foundation." I think some of our newer religious songs are equally fine, such as "My Saviour First of All" and "The King's Business." In my opinion no secular song can be as sweet as the religious songs.

I think "ridiculous" and "disgusting" are more nearly applicable to the parties mentioned by R. L. Smith of Santa Ana, Cal., than "funny" and how to get such people to act with common sense and reason is one of the problems before us today. On a par with the above is the "funny" statement which I, like you, have heard so many times, "A preacher's boy is the worst boy in the world." But for fear I make my letter too long I'll reserve my real funny story for some later time.

W. C. HEDGPETH.

Vandervort, Ark.—Dear Friendly Editor: Your allusions of late to the "good old days" calls to memory many pleasant things. I am only forty-four. My mother is seventy-four, and as I watch her now fast growing old my recollections still linger round the home of my childhood—a double log house, open fireplace, big feather beds, with homespun and hove-woven coverlets and counterpanes. And, by the way, she has one now—and it looks as good as new—which was spun and woven by her grandmother, over one hundred years ago. And such blankets as she used to make! I wore demety and jeans clothes of her make at my first school, thirty-nine years ago. I wore a suit of Humbolt jeans of her make to see my first girl. She knew nothing of menus and French table terms, but no words can portray the deliciousness of her fig and peach preserves, mince pies, apple dumplings, chicken pie, sliced potato pie, potato pudding, waffles and old time corn light bread. Now, really, could we tell how sweet that plain corn bread tasted baked in an oven that just chambered three ponies? Can you truthfully say now that, as a boy, you ate all the mush and milk

you wanted? I am not a pessimist—not a bit. This is an age of progress, of science—a glorious era. The opportunity now for boys is ten to our one, but you can't improve on perfection. You asked for my favorite song and funniest story. My favorites really range into the hundreds, but to select the oldest song best suited to our condition we name "Jesus, Lover of my Soul," (Martyn). Here is a story that may strike us in several phases of life—an allegory of our administration:

An old negro went every Sunday morning under an apple tree to pray and always wound up by saying, "Oh, Lawd, if I'se done anything bad dis pas' week, you may drop a big rock on dis nigger's head an' bus' it wide open." But this time he failed to see his master hid in the tree, and just as he was closing his prayer in his usual, "Lawd, if you cotched me doin' anything mean dis pas' week I hope you may drop a big rock on my head an' bus' it wide open"—Biff, a rock took him on the top of the head. Then, in his agony, he concluded: "Oh, Lawd, a poor ole nigger can't joke a little wid you widout you takin' it in col' yearnes'."

A. F. HAMITER.

Gashland, Mo.—Editor Whether Common or Not: You ask for funny stories and favorite songs. I'm not a fun-maker, but here is a little Sunday school fact of fifty years ago: A dear maiden lady had a class of nice girls and one asked her: "How old are you, Miss Nancy?" "Older than good," was her prompt reply, and she never gave any other answer. Isn't that about the way with all of us?

This is told of her:
On a calm, still night
When the moon shone bright
In the shade of a sycamore tree
That dear old maid
Kneeled down and prayed
A husband dear Lord send unto me
High up sat an owl
On his face was a scowl
Hoo, hoo, called he out twice,
And then the old maid
Most earnestly said,
Any one, Lord, except Joe Rice.

Through that old bird
Her prayer was sure heard,
And soon were the neighbors all merry
As the preacher then said
To the dear old maid
"I pronounce you Mrs. Little-berry."

At nearly ninety she passed to the reward of the faithful.
Among the old parlor songs is
"Twenty Years Ago;"

I wandered to the village, Tom,
And sat beneath the tree
Upon the schoolhouse playing ground
That sheltered you and me.
But none were there to greet me,
Tom,
And few were left to know
Who played with us upon the grass
Just twenty years ago.

Another that carries us back fifty years is "Ben Bolt."

At the last service in the old church the Sunday before we moved from the old home on the beautiful Ohio river to the then far west, this was the farewell song as we shook hands the last time "with friends:"

Farewell, dear friends, farewell,
I have no home, nor stay with you;
I'll take my staff and travel on
Till I a better world do view.

The first and best known of religious hymns, learned at the age of twelve was "Rock of Ages." None is sung oftener today. Christians love those old hymns, "Amazing Grace," and "Alas and did my Saviour Bleed." Among the old ones none is more uplifting than "How firm a

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