



Whether Common or Not

By WILL M. MAUPIN.

Another "Nature Story"

Several months ago this department had a story from W. H. VanHorn concerning a fish hawk's nest and a snake. Another friend of this department, W. F. Cable, was reminded of another "nature story," and he is gladly given permission to tell it in his own words:

Idaho City, Ida.—To the Architect: Reading Mr. VanHorn's account of his adventure with the fish hawk and the snake reminded me of an experience on a possum and coon hunt. Some might write it "opossum" and "raccoon," but a Kentuckian doesn't know what those words mean. At the time of this adventure I was a small boy, and my father had passed the half-century milestone—or rather yearpost. But although no longer young he liked occasionally to have a time hunting with the boys. Of course The Architect understands that the possum and the coon are hunted only at night. On this particular occasion it was only father and myself. It being a moonlight night we departed from the usual practice and carried no torch. We had met with no success and were beginning to beat towards home when we heard the dogs bay. We hurried to them and found them scratching at a hollow log. That meant either a possum or a rabbit, for no coon dog that has gone through the grammar department of coon hunting will chase a rabbit. We should have inferred that it was a possum if the entrance had been larger, but in this instance it was so small that we concluded the dogs had disgraced themselves by treeing a cottontail. Determined not to go home without a trophy of the chase father cut a long, slim pole, and telling me to guard a knot hole at the further end of the log he thrust in the pole and poked. Knowing that a rabbit will not bite I thrust my hands into the knot hole and—zip! my finger was nipped by a set of mighty sharp teeth. I yelled and jerked out my hands and they were followed by a baby possum. Although a baby it knew enough to feign death as soon as the dogs grabbed for it. Father drove the dogs away and picked up the little animal. "Wow!" he shouted; "I picked it up by the wrong end!" That he was correct in his surmise was evidenced by a bleeding finger. Father lived many years after that, but I believe that was his last possum hunt. Some forty-five years have elapsed since that time and "We hunt no more for the possum and the coon on the meadow, the hill and the shore," and the father who hunted with me then has gone to where, I trust, his enjoyment is much more perfect than hunting the possum and coon. But down to the time when I shall be called to follow him and cross the dark river to the other shore, every time I think of father's shout, "Wow, I got hold of the wrong end!" I'll lean back and enjoy a hearty laugh.

A Mislaid Letter

The following letter was received more than seven months ago, but was mislaid. The facts are, much as you may doubt them, the letter worked through a hole in a coat pocket and got down into the lining. The coat, having served The Architect's purpose, was cast aside. The thrifty Little Woman rescued it and laid it away against the time when it might be utilized in making carpet rags or

a diminutive pair of knickerbockers for the Smallest Boy. She dug the coat out just a few days ago and here's the long lost letter:

Santa Ana, Cal., Feb. 20.—To The Architect: I do not claim eligibility to the class of "gray hairs and easy chairs," but when you speak of "reminiscent moods," I beg to plead guilty. Our winter evenings in California are just as long as they are east of the Rockies, but not so winterish, as even now we have green oaks headed out. We spend our evenings here in gathering around the landlady's cottage organ and singing such old time songs as "The Model Church," "When You and I Were Young, Maggie," and various other hymns, sacred, sentimental, patriotic and plantation. We have various stringed instruments and we indulge in old-time games and old-time refreshments. The fact that we do not have a foot or two of snow on the ground does not detract one iota from "the pleasure of the chase." Sometimes we go to some neighbor's house and actually pull off some such stunt as you folks did on that pile of railroad iron down on the Mexican border. Honestly, friend Maupin, when I read your account of that grand old "break down" it sent a thrill through me. Why, talk of reminiscent moods! I actually imagined I could see you folks cutting the "figger eight," with "the lady in the lead," and "down the center and cast off six," etc., etc. And yet this vision was all the result of merely reading your account of your impromptu dance. I enjoy many leisure hours reading history and The Commoner and various newspapers, and by no means my least enjoyment the reading of "Whether Common or Not."

An Explanation—Not an Apology

Now comes a young friend of this department who registers a protest. His name is George Merrill, he lives at Goble, Oregon, and he is only eighty-six years of age. It is very easy to see by the tone of his letter that he is old only in the matter of years, and years count for but little if one's heart remains young. Mr. Merrill protests against The Architect referring to his children as "kids" or "kiddies." I deny ever referring to them as "kids," but I insist that the term "kiddies" is sanctioned by centuries of usage as a term of affection and endearment. As "bairnies" is to the Scot, so "kiddies" is to the Briton. It is neither slang nor "baby talk," as friend Merrill asserts, begging his pardon for the contradiction. "In your department of The Commoner," writes Friend Merrill, "you seem to have got the idea into your head that you are an old man." Wrong again! I'm as young as any of the kiddies, for I take no account of passing years. They only mark time, not life. Why, Friend Merrill is only thirty-six years older than I am, and he is still a young man. I am not old, nor will I permit myself to grow old. I'll admit a growing disinclination to cut pigeonwings and run races, or to actively engage in baseball and other athletic sports, but not because I am growing old. Far be it from so! It is merely because I get more enjoyment out of watching others doing it.

The Penalty

When a man who has approached the half-century mark in age without ever wearing any other facial

adornment than a mustache, and then changes his system by starting to grow a full beard, he is subject to many annoyances other than the almost intolerable itching that accompanies the first two weeks of the effort.

"What's the matter, old man—can't you raise the price of a shave?"

That's one of them, and of course you are expected to laugh at the joke if you are the one growing the whiskers.

"Come out from behind that brush pile and let me see who you are!" joyously shouts another friend who imagines that he has sprung a new one, and who is deeply hurt if a laugh does not follow the witty sally.

"I'd raise a full beard, too, if I had a face like yours!" shouts a smooth-faced friend. Then you smother a desire to commit homicide and smile feebly. But you have to smile, just the same.

"Ha, trying to disguise yourself so the police won't nab you, eh!" shrieks the witty gentleman whose office is just across the hall. Then he doubles up with laughter, after which he goes cackling on his way,

fondly hugging the delusion that he has embarrassed you.

The only solace in the whole matter is that about two-thirds of these wits could shave themselves with a bar of soap, and are merely jealous of your ability to grow a beard that can be neatly trimmed down to a "Van Dyke" or parted in the middle like a pair of Nottingham curtains.

And then, just about the time that beard begins to show some disposition to respond to kindly training, you are invited out to some swell social function that demands a "boiled shirt" and a clawhammer coat. You hesitate for a time, debating whether to accept the invitation and remove the whiskers, or send regrets and cling to them. Finally, in about nine cases out of ten, you grab at the excuse and hike for a barber shop.

Old Adage Verified

George F. Baer now denies that he ever gave utterance to that famous "divine right" sentiment. But that's all right. Maybe he did not say it, but actions speak louder than words.

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