Out Of The Black Patch

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CHAPTER THREE
Raised In A Patch Of Tobacco

And now since I've studied the problem profoundly
And searched out the sources from which we descend,
I see many whys and can guess many wherefores,
To show why our lives take some definite trend.
Our Marquess forefathers were lovers of music,
And lovers of beauty, religion and art.
And though we were raised in a patch of tobacco
These things in our beings still held a rich part.

—“Concerning Our Father And Mother”
in Backward Glances, 31

Life on the farm in Kentucky, especially in the dark tobacco district,\(^1\) was made up of so many different hardships, that we were used to them, and really didn’t mind them a great deal. I suppose those things kind of helped to strengthen our character, and also to strengthen muscles.\(^2\)

I am an old woman now, almost sixty (1944) and I find I can still stand a lot of hard labor, and it doesn’t hurt me either. We grew tough as

\(^1\) The “dark tobacco district” refers to the area of western Kentucky in which dark tobacco was grown. This dark prime-leaf, with darker leaves than regular tobacco, is grown and prepared especially for snuff or chewing tobacco rather than for smoking.

\(^2\) In 1935, Nora Miller, a home economist, described this lifestyle succinctly by stating that “The very nature of tobacco culture with its long growing seasons, detailed labor requiring many workers, short harvesting period, long hours both day and night for curing, storing, grading by the women, and long trips which the man must make to market the crop, disrupts the family life. The fact that the woman and girls devote a great deal of time to the labor on the farm keeps the family from being as well managed as it might be with a different division of labor.” Nora Miller, “The Tobacco Farm Family,” chap. 6 in The Girl in the Rural Family (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 62.
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children, and it seems to stay with us. I suppose the Lord meant some such thing as that when he said to “Count it all joy when you are called upon to suffer diverse tribulations, that the trying of our faith worketh patience, to those who are exercised thereby”—3 I suppose some folks just balk at hard things, and are not exercised by them.

I remember a lesson my mother taught me when I was a very small child. I had gone with her to pick blackberries, and she said she would show me how to be a good berry picker, how I could enjoy it, and my bucket would fill up fast. “Just take one limb at a time, pick every ripe berry on it before touching another, until you have finished that briar. Pick them clean as you go, and you will enjoy it.” If I ever started moving about, picking a few berries off of this briar, and a few off of that one, I would soon grow tired, and my bucket would not fill up fast.

One day (one summer) I went to the spring for water, and I ran down the branch to see if the berries were turning yet. There was a patch just at the edge of the woods which usually ripened early. Most of them were still red, but about one in every cluster was black, so I hurried to the house with my water, got a bucket and ran back to the berry patch. Maybe I could find enough for a pie for dinner, and surprise Mammy. By picking every ripe one I could find I got enough for a good sized cobbler. Mammy was extravagant in her praise of surprises like that.

Mammy usually put butter and sugar on top of the crust to make it brown good. She put the cobbler on the table in the pan she had cooked it in, and did it look good!

Allen Johnson was working for us that day and would be there for dinner. He was a tall, ungainly fellow, very cross eyed, and his mouth usually hung open, revealing black snaggled teeth, but he was a good worker, and Pappy often hired him.

They all sat down to the table, and I stood to one side, very proud of the pie I was responsible for, and hoping they would all enjoy it, and (of course) hoping that there would be a little of it left for me. There should be, as there was a big pan full.

Allen looked around the table, spied the pie, and without even tasting any of the good vegetables and other things Mammy had fixed for dinner he pulled that pie up, pushed his plate to one side, and didn’t stop till he had eaten every morsel of it; with a big spoon. He made lots of noise while he was eating, and John and Elmo said they were sure it was a good pie by the way Allen smacked his mouth as he devoured it.

3. Effie is paraphrasing James 1:3–4: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”
I don’t believe I cried, but I felt like it. Not that I wanted it so bad myself, but I wanted the others to have a taste. It made him look so piggish that it made us all feel bad that anyone could be so rude and ill mannered.

We didn’t go visiting very often, but one day Pappy came home from someplace and said he had seen cousin John Cannon, and had promised him that we would come to their place and spend the night the following Saturday. Cousin John was no relation to us, only by marriage. His wife, who was Victoria Gilliland, was the daughter of Eliza Jane Armstrong Gilliland, a sister of my mother’s father, Johnny Armstrong.

The Cannon family were all good looking people. They were always smiling, not forced, nature just built them that way, the corners of their mouths just naturally turned up. Everyone liked them, and liked to be with them.

I remembered something I had heard my mother tell of cousin Victoria. She was good at dramatic readings, which they all enjoyed very much, excepting one she gave called “The Progress of Madness,” it was most too real. Mammy also said that Vic was the only person she ever saw with a fever blister on her lip and it looked pretty.

Victoria had a decided way of her own that was perfectly natural. Many of the mothers watched their children so close (or pretended that they did) that they made them look silly. One day, when cousin Vic came to a quilting without her two boys, Johnnie and Adrian, the women asked in alarm, “Where are your children?” answer, “Well, they’re at home where they ought to be, they can’t quilt.” “Ain’t you afraid to leave them there alone, with that old well there by the house?” “No, I’m not, and if they haven’t got more sense than to raise that old well top and jump in that well, I say, let ‘em go!” The women shut up, shook their heads, and worried with their numerous offspring all afternoon, fighting and getting into things, while Victoria quilted in peace, with her boys at home playing.

There were also two girls in that family (younger than the boys), Lettie and Pearl, unusually pretty girls with nice dispositions. I was a very small child when we went to visit them. I think it was before I started to school. We took the music with us, and after supper there was singing and music. Cousin Victoria insisted that Johnnie and I dance for them. We danced the military Schottische. Cousin Vic asked how long I had been dancing, and cousin John said, “Why them children don’t have to learn to dance, they knew how when they was born.”

Uncle Jim Marquess, Pappy’s half brother, had fought in the Civil War, and was wounded. One leg was a little shorter than the other, and he

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was hard of hearing. I think he enlisted when he was sixteen, swore that he was eighteen. I have a picture of him when he enlisted, and he doesn’t look older than sixteen. The rough life in the army, or him joining so young, left its impression on him. He liked to play poker, and could swear like a trooper, but he was a good man, and raised a family of good boys, and we all love him.

Uncle Jim had a hobby of getting fine fruit trees and cultivating them. Consequently, they always had enough peaches for everyone in the neighborhood. When they were ripe he always invited my mother to come and dry all she wanted, so we would dry enough for ourselves, and them
too. The drying racks reached almost across the yard. We would choose the soft peaches that were freestone, and not too large. We would cut till we had a tub full, and then place them on the racks, cut side up.

As soon as there was a lull in the peach business, Jimmie, and Charlie and I would be off riding calves, horses, or throwing at something. Jimmie was a sure shot with a rock.

Uncle Jim used the windfall apples to make cider, and cider wine, so they always had plenty of company of Sundays. He was a great reader, and liked to read stories, even after he was an old man. If the children were studying around the family lamp of evenings he would get the old coal oil lantern, hold it up in front of his book where the light would shine on it and read that way. I have wondered if so much reading at night by a poor light was not partly responsible for him losing his eyesight in his old age.

He could play the fiddle, and liked to play the bugle calls that were used during the Civil War. I think he could play all of them. They had a big family of boys, and one little girl who died when she was small. It seems to me that some old doctor gave her the wrong medicine, which caused her death.

Aunt Helen was bitten by a black widow spider when I was a small child, and it made her very sick. She's the only one I ever knew personally who was bitten by one of these much talked of spiders. Aunt Helen was a sister of Cousin Victoria Gilliland Cannon. She has told me lots of things about my Armstrong ancestors, that I would not have known if she had not had such a good memory.

Birchfield and Otho were the older boys of that family, about Lelia's and Etta's age. Willie and John were about the ages of Sadie and my brother John. Jimmie and Charlie were nearer my age. We always enjoyed them coming to visit us.

One time, when Willie had been to town, and had taken a little too much to drink, he came back to our place instead of going home. He had bought fifty cents worth of penny lead pencils, and he gave them to me. I felt rich. If I could have had one wish granted me, it would probably have been for all the smooth white paper I wanted, and just such a bunch of pencils.

My pencil wish was granted, and not long after that the paper wish also came true. Pappy went to town and hitched his team in the vacant lot back of the New Era office, where the County paper was published. There in a waste paper box was loads of paper strips, nice and white and smooth, from three to five inches wide, and two or three feet long. My

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5. This refers to the Kentucky New Era, the newspaper serving Christian County, published in Hopkinsville.
father, being a very understanding man, and knowing our love for paper and pencils, threw a quantity of it in the wagon box. My happiness was just about as nearly perfect then as at any time in my life, that I can remember. For a while I drew and wrote all I wanted to. I made story books, sketch books, all kinds of them.

Sadie was a would be story writer. I think she and Lelia both wrote books at different times. All I can remember of them is that Lelia's characters always ejaculated, and that Sadie's hero's name was Ben Stale. That always caused a lot of laughter, if you tried to say the name real fast. There was nothing in mine outstanding enough to even remember.

Sadie's diaries were the things that really captured my interest, but that was one thing she didn't intend for me to see. She had written her very deepest secrets in it, nothing was held back. Where to put it, so that I wouldn't find it, was the puzzle. I had the gift of the probable places. Once she had it in the bottom of the quilt piece box, where it was handy to get to when she wanted to write in it, while I was outside playing. But I discovered that hiding place, and she had to change it. Then she had me baffled for quite a while. There didn't seem to be any clue as to its whereabouts.

One day John and I were fighting wasps, an old and favorite pastime. They had several nests in the top of the upstairs. Some of the nests were as big as your two hands, with dozens of wasps in them. We got an old quilt that had been used to cover sweet potatoes, that had a hole in it we could peep out through long enough to poke the nest with fishing poles. When the wasps started swarming down at us we would close the hole till things cleared up a bit. During one of these raids, as I was looking through my port hole, I saw a thick roll of paper tucked behind a rafter right against the boards of the roof.

There, that's it! Sadie's diary. Why hadn't I thought to look there before. I ought to have known it would be there, for I had looked everywhere else. I didn't say anything about it them, but waited till everything was clear, and Sadie was away from home, so I could read in peace, and without any fear of disturbance.

I really found out a lot of things I had wanted to know for a long time. Yes, she really liked Ed Cornelius better than most of the others. I did too, as far as that was concerned. I fell madly in love with most of her beaus, especially the above mentioned Ed.

There was also Herschel Woolsey, Frank Wright, and Will Eades. I wasn't any too fond of John Causler [Cansler], another of Sadie's beaux, but I liked to tease him. He always spoke to my mother in just the same way, "Howty Mis Marcus," in a crisp quick way, cutting his words off short. I think he was an awful good boy, and a perfect gentleman. His clothes were faultless, and his shoes were trim and shiny. He had a beautiful, squeaky, shiny buggy. A nice fat horse, and a buggy whip that could cut
the hide when he popped me with it, which he persisted in doing only on very rare occasions. Just as he and Sadie would be getting real serious I would stick my head around a door facing and say, "Howty Mis Marcus," in just the same tone of voice he used. Then I knew I'd better look out, if the buggy whip was near. He was merciless.

I got another thing on him too. There were big walnut trees along the road in front of Mr. Morris' house, and it was a favorite place for the cows to lie and chew their cuds. One pale moonlight night, when the cows had been lying there, but had wandered down the lane to the creek, Sadie and John passed by on horseback. John rode too close under the walnut trees and a limb knocked his hat off. Sadie was sorry, and she wondered if he would be able to find it. He assured her that he saw where it had fallen, hopped off, went straight for a big warm cow pile, and reached right down into it with his hand spread out. Sadie said he quietly slung it off the best he could and finished cleaning it on his nice linen handkerchief, then threw it over by the fence.

The next time he came I waited till the opportune minute, then poked my head in and told him that I had found his handkerchief for him. the one he lost under the walnut trees where the limb knocked his hat off. I really had to fly that time, as he was coming right after me with red in his eyes.

When Herschel or Ed came I would slip in with my Arithmetic and slate and pretend I was awful busy working problems. Sadie would cast frowny looks at me, but I was hard to move. I liked to look at Ed. His hair was so curly and he had such a nice low laugh, and his dancing was divine. I had seen him dance, and once, when there was no one else he could get for a partner, he had asked me to dance with him.

Tom Vaughn was another of Sadie's flames that I had an awful case on. He was my ideal as to what constituted a perfect gentleman. I liked George, his brother, too, but he was a monkey. It was like going to a show, to go to a dance where he was. He could beat any nigger stepdancing, and danced with all his might through every tune. He seemed to never tire, and it was punctuated with lots of appropriate gab, that no one but a professional could have thought of.

Lewis Moore, who was about my age, usually came with George to the dances. He was a sort of a small edition of George. He always danced with me, and I liked to dance with him. He always asked me if he could go home with me too, but I always said no. I knew that Sadie and the others would tease me, as I was too small to have beaus. Besides, I didn't want him to walk home with me, or ride, whichever it happened to be. I liked to dance with him fine, but that was all.

Then Lewis Moore went away, and I didn't see him for about ten years, till after I was married and had several children. Then one day I saw
him again. He looked just like he had when he was a little boy, and we used to dance together. He asked me if I remembered what good times we used to have at the dances. Of course I did. Then he said that there was one question he would like to ask me. Why was it that I would never let him go with me. I didn’t know what to say. I couldn’t just say I didn’t want to.

He and George Vaughn used to batch together and do their own cooking. It was said that when they wanted to know if the skillet was hot enough for the hoe cake they would spit in it, and if it fried spit it was hot enough.

When I was very small we went somewhere, I can’t remember where, but a little girl had a big rag doll, and I was crazy about it. I must have made a good sized fuss about it, for Mammy borrowed it to cut one by, and I hung onto it so tenaciously that she was afraid I would get it so dirty it would not be fit to take home.

Mammy finally hid that doll in the bottom of the trunk. She searched everywhere, in the quilt piece box, and in the rag bag, and couldn’t find a piece of new white muslin, but she did find a piece of pale blue material. Thinking it would make no difference, she made it of that, but I wouldn’t touch it, it was not like the other one.

I must have been only a baby, but I remember it. I didn’t like the blue doll at all. Mammy finally cut up a new pillow case and made me a doll of it.

I don’t believe that this streak of contrariness was very serious, as I really do not think I was a very contrary child in the years that followed. If the streak did live for a while, I believe it was burned out long ago, through years of work, sacrifice and hardships, for which I am truly thankful.

There was so much work, of so many different kinds, to be done on the farm, that even the children didn’t escape it. We carried water, went for the cows, churned, fed pigs and chickens, dropped corn in springtime, dropped tobacco plants, pulled weeds, cut sassafras sprouts, shelled beans and peas, and helped shell the corn for the grinding, as we ate lots of cornbread.  

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6. According to Suzanne M. Hall, 
Throughout the year as the tobacco grew to maturity, family members also worked at putting up vegetables, drying fruits, hoeing corn, threshing wheat, caring for the farm stock, and attending to the hundreds of chores required to maintain a farm. Men further supplemented the larder with meat from hunting and fish from the streams and rivers. Children fished and gathered wild fruits, nuts, greens, and ginseng. Depending on gender, class, and race, people worked in separate areas on the farm during the day. Men toiled in the fields and barnyard; women labored in the house, yard, chicken coop, kitchen, and garden, and milked cows.
In the wintertime everyone helped strip tobacco. There were two tobacco *seasons* that depended on the rain, one was in spring when we waited for a rain before we set the tobacco plants out. The other was after it was cut, in the fall. After the firing was done, and it was *cured*, we had to wait for a rain to soften it, so we could strip it. If we had undertaken to do anything with it when it was dry it would have crumbled and been wasted. When it rained it *came in order*, and was limp like a rag.

Everything connected with raising tobacco is grueling, back breaking labor, and it is nasty also. In summer, when it is green, everything that comes in contact with it is covered with a loathsome, sticky, strong smelling gum, that gets all over the clothing, hands, and everything. When suckering and worming, in which we had to bend down to reach the lower leaves, even our hair would get gummy.\(^7\) The tobacco flies laid eggs all over the leaves, that hatched out into green worms that grew and thrived remarkably. If we failed to see one, when it was small, and left it till next worming time, it would have a good portion of the plant eaten. Only the stems would be left standing. It was a tedious, back breaking job to look on every leaf for worms, and to pull the suckers out that sprouted at the base of each leaf after the plant was topped. I don’t believe that there is any other crop that requires more labor to raise than tobacco.\(^8\) Often the men started burning plant beds in late winter before the crop for the past year was all stripped.

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7. Kate Strand, the wife of a Muhlenberg County farmer, once remembered: “I don’t suppose the Lord ever permitted a harder, hotter, dirtier, filthier, or more nauseating work than that of worming tobacco. . . . I have seen my husband at the close of the day take off his overalls and stand them alone, so stiff they would be with tobacco juice. Worming tobacco is bad enough for men, but when women and children have to engage in it human torture reaches its climax. My children have toddled along through the tobacco rows at my side crying with pain as their eyes were filled with tobacco juice shot into them by tobacco worms” (Kate Strand interview in *Appeal to Reason*, Oct. 1, 1910, quoted in Campbell, *Politics of Despair*, 16). The lore of tobacco cultivation is wonderfully treated in Charles S. Guthrie, “Tobacco: Cash Crop of the Cumberland Valley,” *Kentucky Folklore Record* 14 (April–June 1968): 38–43, and Hall, “Working the Black Patch,” 266–86.

8. In 1922, the Children’s Bureau surveyed children in five representative tobacco-growing states—Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia—to determine child labor patterns in tobacco harvest operations. Of the 278 child workers studied in Christian County, Kentucky, 186 were boys and 92 were girls. Sixty-seven (36 percent) of the boys aged seven through fifteen reported working more than four months a year in the tobacco fields. Of the 272 children who worked cultivating, 131 (48.2 percent) reported a typical work day of ten hours or more. See Harriet A. Byrne, “Child Labor in Representative Tobacco-Growing Areas,” 2–16.
Hauling green tobacco in Kentucky. From Scherffius, “Tobacco,” plate XI.

“Cutting Tobacco and Putting it on Sticks,” near Hopkinsville, Kentucky. From Sauer, *Geography of the Pennyroyal*, fig. 109.
I don't suppose there is another crop that does the human family so little actual good as does tobacco, in fact it does them more harm than most people realize. When we think of the amount of labor expended for something that there is no good in, but actual harm, it is appalling. We wonder if we are as smart as we ought to be.

The tobacco stripping was done in winter in an old open barn that let the cold wind in. The women and children helped with the stripping, too. There was a fire in the center of the group, but it never warmed the backs of the workers. There was always plenty of dust to be breathed. That, with the cold and other things, resulted in severe colds and coughs. I can remember coughing all night long, night after night. Consumption was a common disease at that time, and if the cause of death had been put on every tombstone it would have registered far in the majority.

We managed to have a good time, even when stripping tobacco in a cold barn. We raced, sang, told stories, and passed the time pleasantly.

At that time, in the early 90's, the farmers prized their own tobacco. That is, they packed it down in hogsheads (monstrous barrels) and then prized it down with a big jackscrew, and hauled it to town packed and nailed up in the hogsheads. Later the loose floors were opened, the buyers didn't buy the crop at the barn, but would bid on it at the loose floors.

The tobacco buyers were organized, and the farmers were not. The buyers had squeezed the price down so low that it became almost a form of slavery to raise tobacco. Often the tobacco crop would not bring enough to pay the grocery bill that had gone behind while the crop was being raised. Year after year this same condition continued.

I can remember several cases where, after a year of hard, killing labor, the crop actually did not bring enough to pay for the commercial fertilizer they had bought to put under it. At the same time the big tobacco companies were amassing huge fortunes. Everyone knew it, but knew no way to change it.

The foolish thing was to keep on raising it, when they were not getting anything for it. It would have been far more intelligent to have raised food for the winter months. The farmers said, "But tobacco is our cash money crop." They couldn't seem to realize that it had ceased to be a money crop. They had gotten into the habit of raising it, and couldn't quit.

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9. Effie is referring to the American Tobacco Company (or Trust) which monopolized the tobacco market in virtually all of the major tobacco-producing states and countries.
10. The land in northern Christian County is not as easily cultivated as those in the southern half of the county. Due to the sandstone table of this "clifty" coal field region, farmers must take extra measures to develop the smaller, less fertile parcels. Regarding the
It was probably some such silly bunch the ancient prophet was referring to when he said, "The days of this ignorance God winked at."¹¹

Pappy was always bringing home some kind of herbs or roots from the creek bottoms or the hillsides. Blackroot and white walnut bark as a purgative. Sarsaparilla root as a blood purifier. Yellow percoon for sore mouths (Golden Seal). May Apple root (called Mandrake), Angelico, and Ginseng, which brought a fabulous price when it was dried. Mullein and hoarhound for coughs and colds. Catnip for the babies.¹²

I guess Pappy got his knowledge of herbs, and his interest in them from his mother. At one time she had an herb garden in a little rich, loamy, valley down near the creek. She had many kinds of wild flowers and wild herbs in it. Mainly Ginseng. It was very interesting.

tobacco growers of the Hopkinsville area, a comment made by Carl Ortwin Sauer is applicable here:

Tobacco makes extraordinary demands on labor, ten acres being sufficient to keep a family busily engaged. Such lesser sections have discovered that tobacco brings to them greater returns than other crops, even though it does not yield so well as in the major districts. . . . Thus the farmer of the sandstone table-lands north of Hopkinsville has forsaken the older economy and is now primarily a producer of dark tobacco which is taken down to the Hopkinsville market. He grows dark tobacco because he has available a dark tobacco market. With his tobacco money he buys corn, hay, perhaps even beans and potatoes, for he is too busy with his tobacco patch to raise much other "truck."

See Carl Ortwin Sauer, Geography of the Pennyroyal, 199.

Rick Gregory has concluded that "Few growers had the power to break the bonds of culture and tradition that bound them to the staple. Until the New Deal, most Black Patch farmers would maintain their loyalty to dark-fired tobacco—a loyalty for which they would pay a high cost." See his "Look To Yourselves," 290.

¹¹. Acts 17:30: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at."
¹². Blackroot (Chaenolobus undulatus) is a perennial plant of the South, having large tuber-like rootstocks, sometimes used medicinally. White bark is any of several American trees having pale or whitish bark, such as the white poplar or white-bark pine. In addition to its narcotic properties, golden seal (Hydrastis Canadensis, L.), known for its brilliant yellow color, was used as a die in coloring silks, wool, and linen. May apple or Mandrake (Podophyllum peltatum, L.) was used as a cathartic. The root was used as a purge and sometimes as a dressing for ulcers. Angelica, of the genus Angelica, was used in spasmodic vomiting, flatulent colics, and nervous headaches. The root was known to possess more aroma than any of southern indigenous plants. Ginseng (Panax quinquefolium, L.), an herb with an aromatic root, has long been a valued medicinal plant. It was first used by the Chinese and is of widespread use in North America. Mullein (Verbascum thapsus, L.) has corse or woolly leaves and a yellow 5-petaled flower appearing in a long dense terminal spike. Mullein is used medicinally in treating sore throats, rheumatism and headaches. Horehound (Marrubium vulgare, L.) is an aromatic mint and is very bitter to the taste. It was used as a stomach tonic and as a remedy for coughs and colds. Catnip (Nepeta cataria, L.) is a very well known strong-scented herb used as a domestic remedy in amenorrhea, chlorosis, and flatulent colic of infants.
There was a steep bank to go down just before reaching the garden, and one time as she was going down this bank she slipped, fell, and dislocated her shoulder. She was old, and it was quite serious, and very painful.

When the doctor came he said it would just have to be pulled back into place. It was hard to do, and hurt her terribly. Every time the doctor would pull, to get it back in place, Uncle Curg (feeling so sorry for her, and hating so terribly to see him hurting her) would hold the shoulder so they couldn’t get it back in place. Finally the doctor winked at Aunt Ada and asked her if they thought one of the neighbors might have some camphor. She thought probably they did, so they sent Uncle Curg for it. As soon as he left the doctor pulled the shoulder back into place without a great deal of trouble.

Uncle Lee was a tiny little fellow when my father and mother married, and he was very fond of John Susie, as he called her. It was not long before Etta (Mammy’s first baby) was born. She was at Grandma’s, and there was other company, I can’t remember who. They were all talking, and no one was paying any attention to Lee. He had found the old dutch oven, that they had cooked meat in, and had sopped it clean with a piece of bread, then he climbed into it and sat down. One leg was broken off of the old oven, and he was rocking back and forth on its uneven legs, humming to himself and nearly asleep. One of the visitors was telling of someone who was very pretty, and Lee said sleepily, as he rocked back and forth in the greasy old dutch oven, “Well, John Susy’s the purtiest thing I ever saw, and she’s as fat as my old hin.” This incident was told and retold many times, and laughed over by all the members of the family.

One thing we planned on a long ways ahead of time, was for all of us to go gathering hickernuts and grapes. As school usually started in July, this had to be done on a Saturday.

There was lots of work to be done in the fall, that the women and children had to do. Potatoes to dig, beans and peas to pick and shell. Fruit to be canned also. We didn’t have many glass fruit jars then, most of them were stone jars with stone lids, and were sealed by melting sealing wax and pouring around the lid.

With all the fall work that had to be done it was hard to find a time when we could go, but Mammy usually found a time before it got too cold. How happy we children all were as we started out with sacks and baskets.

The leaves of the hickory trees had all fallen to the ground before the nuts were ripe, and there would be nuts mixed in with the dry leaves. The boys would climb the trees and shake the nuts down with a clatter, while we picked them up. They were always trying to surprise us and
shake a limb directly over our heads. The nuts would shower down, popping us on the head and making us run.13

There was one big scaly bark tree just east of the house, on the bank of a branch (of the creek) that had a bed of smooth white limestone. It was easy to find the nuts there. We just raked back the leaves, and there they were on the smooth white rocks. There were weeds all under the tree, up on the bank, but there were usually lots of nuts on this big old tree.

There were two small trees farther east, by the big sweetgum tree, near the fence that separated our farm from Mr. Moore's, but they never yielded the abundant crop that the big one on the branch did.14

We usually stopped in the dry stream bed and shelled the big outside hull from the hickernuts before going to the house. Then they were stored where the rats could not carry them away, and saved for the long winter nights by the fire.

The walnuts were in another direction, up towards the graveyard. There was a big tree in the woods, and past the graveyard, at an old house place, were two others. It was quite a job to shell the walnuts, as the hulls stained everything that touched them. Our hands would be black after shelling walnuts, till it wore off.

I remember one fall when Mammy and I shelled the walnuts alone, hauled them to the house in a wheelbarrow, and stored them in a little old corn crib in the barn lot that was not being used. They were giant nuts, with big rich kernels. Any time I felt the least bit hungry I could go to this little old crib and crack me a pan of walnuts and was soon satisfied. Walnuts and corn bread are especially good together, and make a very satisfying meal.

When the wild geese started flying south in the fall, we would know that there was a cold spell coming. Sometimes we would hear them in the night, honking high up in the dark as they wended their way to the land of summer. Pappy would then make preparations to kill at least one hog for fresh meat. He said it usually took most of the first hog for John Susan to divide among her neighbors.

Hog killing time was not a very pleasant time for the ones who did the work. It was always done when there was a cold spell, so the meat

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13. In addition to its edible quality, the hickory nut had a number of uses in the rural south. The oil was often extracted to fuel lamps. The nut, when broken and boiled, could also be used in the manufacture of soap.

14. The sweetgum tree (*Liquidambar styraciflua, L.*) is a hardwood tree with lobed leaves and corky branches. It is sometimes passed as an imitation mahogany and Circassian walnut.
would not spoil. The hogs were heavy, and hard to handle. It was dirty, greasy, ill smelling work.\(^{15}\)

Mammy usually had a scaffold outside where the entrails were laid out while she removed the fat from them. We children were always interested in this operation, as we were anxious to get all the bladders. With a section cut from the small end of a fishing cane put into the opening of the bladder, we could then blow them up. We had lots of fun slipping up behind other members of the family and forcing the wind out in their ears, making a disgusting noise, besides the unpleasant odor.

We blew them and worked them till we were sure they could not be blown any bigger, then we put beans in them, tied them tight, and hung them up on an attic joist in a row, to save for Christmas. Then, on Christmas morning the ones who awoke first could take the bladders down, hold them to the fire till they filled up tight again, lay them on the hearth and jump on them with both feet, making a noise like a shotgun and waking the other members of the family. That was the most interesting part of the hog-killing time for the children.

Later, the grinding of the sausage meat, and stuffing the sacks to be hung up in rows. Often corn shucks were used to pack it in. Then came the rendering of the fat into lard, and straining it into lard cans to be used all winter and spring. The cracklin’s from the lard was saved to make cracklin’ bread. Later, the heads and feet were cleaned, and cooked and made into \textit{souse} (in some sections called head cheese).

The backbones, spareribs, and liver were used first. The sausage, shoulders, hams, and middlings were smoked with hickory wood in the tight little smoke house, where the barrel of salt, the barrel of soft soap, and the soap grease barrel were kept.

The salt always hardened into a solid mass, almost as hard as a rock. One of my jobs was to go get salt for the kitchen. I would get a big spoon and scrape and scrape till I could dip enough to fill the little brown stone salt jar.

The path from the back kitchen door to the smoke house was kept patted slick from frequent use. We went there many times a day for salt, soap, meat, etc. When Mammy went to the smoke house for meat she usually detoured by the chimley, and gave the knife a few rakes back and forth on one of the sandstones the chimley was built of, to sharpen it.\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\) For more on this farming practice, see Lynwood Montell, "Hog Killing Time in the Kentucky Hill Country," \textit{Kentucky Folklore Record} 18 (1972): 61–67.

\(^{16}\) As the standard spelling for "chimney" is used elsewhere, this spelling is no doubt intentional.
There were several sharpening places on that old chimley, where many others before my mother had stopped to sharpen their knives.

The old house was burned long ago, with its wealth of old relics in the attic; the flax reel, the old red corded bedstid, the candle moulds; articles that had been used in slave days, long before the Civil War. Stones do not burn easily, or decay, and somewhere I'll bet those old places where the knives were sharpened are still just as they were when I was a child.

I mentioned the old red corded bedstid. It is possible that some of my grandchildren, or great grandchildren anyway, would not know what it was. I guess this type of bed was a step forward from the old hard wooden slats. There was a certain manufacturer who put out this special type of bed, and they must have been popular, as every family had at least one, or more.

The posts were round and tall, with a ball on top of each post. The side rails were also round with big iron screws about four inches apart all down the sides, and also across the head board and foot board. A small rope was stretched across both ways and hooked over the ends of the screws that were left sticking up an inch or two. This made a soft springy area for the straw bed to lay on. When the ropes stretched, and the bed became saggy, they were tightened. All of these beds were painted a light orange red. They were comfortable to sleep on.

There was one of these beds in the upstairs room of the old house that had been my grandfather's. I suppose it was there when we moved in, and had been there since slave days, and before. By my time these beds were considered old fashioned and clumsy, and a cheaper, much flimsier type had taken its place, with slats and no springs.

I remember the first bed springs we owned. An agent came along selling them. They were in pairs, and were built to hook over the bed slats. They were quite strong, and it seems to me that they stood a foot high. I remember how high the bed looked after we put them on.

Uncle Lawrence and Aunt Fannie knew that we had ordered them, and they said that when we got them they were coming over to stay all night and see how they liked them. In all the years I knew them that is the only time I can remember of them ever sleeping away from home.

We saw them coming up the path by the orchard. Aunt Fannie with two clean sheets over her arm, one to go under them and one over them. Mammie resented that a little, she usually had clean sheets, even if we did have a big family.

Aunt Fannie was quite finicky. She usually washed the dipper in hot water before she drank out of it. That wasn't a bad idea, but we felt a little insulted, as if she thought we were dirty people. Didn't every family in the neighborhood all drink from the same dipper? We wondered if she
washed the dippers everyplace she went. Anyway we were glad to see them whenever they came.

Uncle Lawrence was a sweet old soul, jolly and good natured; well up on all the news, as he read his newspapers thoroughly. There was just one little thing that was a fly in the ointment. He was a Republican. He had fought in the Civil War on the Northern side, and my father was a Democrat. Most people were strong in their politics in those days, so that was one question that was left undiscussed when Uncle Lawrence was at our place.¹⁷

Mammie knew they were coming and had fixed a good supper. Aunt Fannie’s teeth were bad from being salivated with calomel, so Mammy usually fixed chicken and dumplin’s for her, and she liked puddings with sauce to go over them. She usually let it be known what she liked, so it would be forthcoming.

Pappy got the fiddle out and they made some music after supper. Uncle Lawrence kept time with his feet. I often wondered if life wasn’t awfully dull for them, with no children and no music, but I suppose they liked it that way.

They were used to going to bed early, so it was not long till they were yawning. They were anxious to try the springs. We had an awful laugh when they were getting into bed. Those springs were really springy, and Uncle Lawrence said that he sank in over his ears. When Aunt Fannie got in he yelled, “Hey, go easy there, I’m about to fall off.” He said that if he should have to cough in the night, and started bouncing, it would be disastrous. Aunt Fannie squealed, and said he was right in the middle, and he said, how could he help where he landed, he was at the mercy of them springs.

I think it was in 1896 when Pappy decided he was going to make it a little more convenient around the place by digging a cellar for the milk, canned fruit, etc., and by having a well drilled right by the kitchen door,

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¹⁷. After the Civil War, party politics became a divisive issue in Kentucky. According to Merton Coulter, “Kentuckians fundamentally were conservative,” but those with slave interests had attached themselves to the Democratic Party after the breakup of the Radicals and the Whigs. Generally, people of wealth and those with tobacco interests gravitated to the Democratic Party for largely economic reasons. The Republicans became a political force during John M. Harlan’s 1871 gubernatorial campaign and after anti-slavery supporters from eastern Kentucky gained a foothold in party politics. Evidently, Lawrence Armstrong held to strong Union sentiments. See E. Merton Coulter, The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), esp. 433–40. See also Lawrence Thompson, “Politics is a Major Sport,” chap. 2, in Kentucky Tradition (Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1956), 9–21.
saving so many steps going to and from the old well that was almost to the creek. Somehow both these projects were failures. The cellar filled with water and the well didn’t, at least what did raise in it was not fit to drink.

Three boys, viz: Luther Hayes, Will Eades, and Archie Lee were operating the drilling machine. Pappy agreed to pay them one dollar per foot, and give them board and room while they were drilling. It was like a picnic for we children. They were nice boys, all good looking and very pleasant. Sadie was nineteen, and very pretty. I was in the ugly stage of eleven, but I enjoyed them anyway.

Mr. Eades took care of the engine, and I became interested in it, so he taught me how to operate it. I would run it for hours at a time while he went with Sadie to the well for water, or helped her with some of the work, or just sat on the edge of the porch and talked.

Mr. Hayes, the one who operated the drill, was also interested in Sadie, but I could not operate the drill, so he had to stick to his drill, and Eades got in a lot of talk ahead of him. But Mr. Hayes had a horse and a cart, and the horse was a good trotter. That made it bad for Eades after work hours.

Archie Lee was a slim quiet fellow who had a very interesting and unusual life story. He and his sister were left orphans when the sister was a baby, and when he was a very small child. They were both adopted, and neither of them knew where the other one was. During the year they came to our place he was working in Hopkinsville, where he met the daughter of Mr. Meriwether. They fell in love almost at first sight, and were very happy in each other’s company. One day something was said about his folks. He told her that he was left an orphan when very small. She said she was also, and that Dr. Meriwether and wife had adopted her. A little further investigation and they found that they were brother and sister. They were to have been married soon, but decided they had better not.

It is funny how time is magnified in childhood. As I remember it it seems to me that these well drillers were at our place for months, but when I called my sister and asked her how long they stayed she said three weeks. It seems to me it was much longer. I imagine it seemed quite a while to my mother, who had to fix three meals for our big family, and for these three men besides.

I can’t remember just how deep they sank the well, but I think it was 80 feet at one time. When they had drilled through a layer of blue clay there was a loud smell of oil in each bucket full they brought up. The oil

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19. Probably Dr. Charles H. Meriwether, whose vital dates are not found in general county histories or census returns.
spread out on the ground where they emptied the mud. We thought maybe we were going to have an oil well instead of a well of water.

The morning they set the drill up (and when they had the steam up in the engine) Mr. Eades blew the whistle and every old cow on the place curled their tails over their backs and with frightened bellows they disappeared over the hill. For a while it was with great difficulty that we extracted any milk from them. We couldn’t get them near the house.

Cousin Buck came on one of his periodic visits while the well drillers were there, and it was then that I found out for sure that he was coming to see Sadie. He didn’t like the well drillers, especially Mr. Eades and Luther Hayes.

He came into the kitchen where my mother was cooking supper one evening and said, “Cudden John Susan, do you know that you have a very attractive daughter.” Mammy said that she didn’t know there was anything very unusual about her. “Wy she could charm the heart of a wheelbarrow, she has both of those fellows crazy as bessy bugs, and without any effort on her part.”

They finally gave the well up as a failure, pulled up stakes and left with their drilling machine. We didn’t see much more of Mr. Hayes or Archie Lee, but Mr. Eades continued to come back so steadily that I thought I might have him for a brother-in-law. I wouldn’t have objected, he was a very lovable fellow. But finally there was a quarrel that ended it all. I think he drank some, though I never saw him drunk.

Norman was a baby then, and I remember Lelia bringing him over one day with a little blue jersey suit on. I thought he was the sweetest thing I ever saw. Vera was a cute little girl with cheeks as red as apples, always humming a tune, serious and quiet, with her little bonnet on.

About this time I got a wallop I’ll never forget. Mammy had made me a new blue sunbonnet with a ruffle around the front, and I was so proud of it. Lelia came, and Mammy said that if I would run to the spring and bring a bucket of cool water I could go home with her. Someone had let the clothes line down, and as I was running against the evening sun I failed to see it. I was running with all my might, and the wire was just right to catch me just under the chin. The wire and I didn’t stop till the slack was all taken up, and then I was thrown flat on my back on the hard rocky ground. I lay there for a few minutes, stunned, then got up painfully, picked up my new bonnet, and walked slowly to the spring. A raw streak across my throat was stinging terribly, and my head was feeling like my skull might have been fractured. But I was soon all right again, and able to run like the wind again. Children have a marvelous power of recuperation.

I think I must have had an abnormal amount of sympathy. I can remember how very sorry I was for Etta because she was crippled. Her right leg was shorter than the left, and the foot was drawn a little. Her
right arm and hand was small and drawn so that it was useless. When we
would go places where there were strangers I made it a point to stand in
front of her on that side so no one would notice her little hand.

When she and I started to the creek fishing, or to the mulberry
trees, or to the woods lot for toothbrushes, or others of our many jaunts
about the place, there was perfect freedom. Etta couldn’t run, but she
could skip, and she could make speed at it too. She would lean on me to
keep her steady, and away we would go, me running and she skipping on
her good foot.

Sometimes we would take paper and pencils and go to the big flat
rocks above the spring and draw pictures of little ferns, and flowers, and
pretty leaves. Sometimes we took pieces of keel and wrote on the flat
rocks. Sometimes we hunted for pretty colored pebbles, and petrified
vertabrae of little living things (and least they had once been living), the
joints looked like little buttons. Sometimes we hunted for rare specimens
of flowers. Anyway, we always had a good time, or at least I did. A tiny little
girl, and a big crippled girl, but we were genuine pals, and oh how I
enjoyed it.

How I appreciated Etta’s never ceasing desire to help out with the
work all she could. She pieced most of the quilts that we had. She could
knit, sweep, and keep things picked up. She could keep the place tidied and dusted, and I guess that in the long run she did more than we who had nothing whatever the matter with us. Etta was also a good singer, and learned all the new songs that came along. We made books of song ballads that we printed.  

At that time I thought nothing of it, but as I remember it now I'm sure that I have never seen anyone with such shining, golden hair as Etta had. It was a beautiful auburn in the shade, and in the sun it was just like shining gold. I loved to wash her hair and roll it up for her, just to see how it would shine when I took it down and combed it. 

Being a cripple Etta had not had many beaus, but she had one that I remember, who used to write to her. I felt very big and important when she let me read his letters. They were from Dan Simpson, a good, gentle, kind fellow. Sometimes, at dances, he would come and sit with her instead of dancing. 

Etta tried to stay loyal to her membership in the Baptist church, but it had not meant as much to her as they had thought it might. We went to church occasionally, but their big protracted meetings, and the preachers fervent pleading with the people to "give their hearts to Jesus," and the lurid pictures they painted of our awful fate if death should overtake us in our "unsaved condition" never succeeded in stirring me up very much. It didn't sound too sincere to me, and in the expression of our father, it didn't sound logical. I would look at people who belonged to the different churches who, as the preachers expressed it, were "saved," and I couldn't see that they were any better than we were who had not joined any church.

My father said that if he ever found a church that was like the one the Savior set up while He was on the earth he would join it, but so far the teachings of the preachers, and the teachings of the Savior didn't agree. In the first place the Savior told His disciples, when He set them apart and sent them out to preach, "Freely ye have received this, now see that ye freely give it to others," and one place said, "Beware of them that preach for hire, and divine for money." Paul said, "Ye know that I have

20. Printed out by hand, apparently; she kept such lists all her life. Hazel Carmack Bushman recalls a stapled, typewritten booklet of song texts compiled by her mother, no longer in Hazel Bushman's possession. (Conversation with Karen Davidson, December 4, 1994.)


22. Matthew 10:8: "Freely ye have received, freely give."

labored with my own hands (he was a tent maker) that I might have the means to support myself, and to give to them that needed."  

Paul was a preacher, one of the greatest we have any record of. "But," some of them would say, "this is a different age, and calls for different methods." Then we read in the Bible where the Savior said, "If any man teach any other gospel to you except this which we have taught unto you, let him be accursed," and for fear they didn't understand Him fully He repeated it with a little more force, saying "If any man, or even an Angel from Heaven should teach any other gospel he would be accursed."  

It was not hard to see that lots of them were teaching things that were contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. It seems that the Savior and His disciples knew that there would be false churches. The Lord said, "Many shall come in My Name saying, Lo, here is Christ, or Lo, there is Christ, and deceive many," and, "Many false teachers shall arise," and, "Not everyone that sayeth unto Me Lord Lord shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven."  

What was His Father's will? We tried to find out. The Lord said, "By this shall all men know that ye are My Disciples, if ye have love one to another," and He told His followers to treat others just as they themselves would like to be treated.  

Well, there was one thing certain, we loved each other and we loved other people too. Pappy said that he always had to figure on one hog at least, being divided among the neighbors. We usually gave everyone around a part of it.  

Mammy came as near to being the neighborhood nurse as anyone could have, and it was always done freely too. I've often thought what a wealth of treasures she had laid up for herself, though I'm sure she never thought of herself when she was doing it. She did it for humanity's sake.

24. In Acts 20:34–35 and 1 Corinthians 4:12 Paul refers to working with his own hands, but Effie's paraphrase sounds more like the words of King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 2:14): "And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you."
25. A paraphrase of Galatians 1:9: "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." See also Galatians 1:8.
26. A paraphrase of Matthew 24:5: "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."
27. Perhaps a reference to II Peter 2:1: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you."
So, although not contented with our homespun religion, we read the Bible and waited for a time when maybe the right religion would come along.

One day the family was going to visit some of our relatives, but Sadie and I wanted to go to a picnic that was being held not far away. A neighbor who was taking his family in a wagon had promised to come by and stop for us. We had made elaborate preparations. Sadie had made us a white dress each, trimmed with lace, and stitched with rose colored silk thread. They said that they would be there by ten o’clock, so, long before ten we were sitting prim and curled with our white dresses on, and my leghorn hat with its wreath of little wild roses, and its ribbon streamers.

Ten o’clock came, and no picnickers, ten thirty, and then eleven. By this time we had given them up entirely.

Sadie says, “Well, as we’re here alone with nothing to bother us let’s clean this place from one end to the other, and change things around.” If there was one thing Sadie enjoyed, it was changing the furniture around, so, immediately, we began to shed our picnic finery and get into our work duds. Soon we were busy making things hum. We cleaned that place from top to bottom, upstairs and all. We scrubbed cupboards, made new fire-screens, swept the yards, got fresh bouquets, and really made the old place shine. We were racing to get it all finished before the folks got home. When it was all done and we sat down, tired but happy, we both agreed that we had enjoyed ourselves far better than we would have if we had gone to the picnic. We have often since thought of that busy day and the good time we had. We said that it proved the maxim true, that true happiness does not depend on having what we want, but in wanting what we have.

As a small child I had developed a sort of prejudice against all the folks that lived down the creek. Maybe from the fact that our geese came home from that direction picked several times. I didn’t realize that there were lots of different folks living in that direction. Negroes, farm hands, and many different classes.

When we grew older, and met the young folks of a family of Wrights who lived in that direction, I was surprised to find them the most charming people I had ever known. Refined, intelligent, fun loving, and witty. Miss Hallie, who had married Dr. Ramsey and was then a widow with two small boys, was one of the most lovable women I had ever seen. Nora, the girl at home, seemed good, and was very pretty. Frank, who went with Sadie for quite a while was just my ideal. I was eleven, I think, when I had

30. A hat made out of soft plaited straw, usually with a broad brim.
the joy of entertaining Frank several times while Sadie got ready to go somewhere with him.

One glorious evening when Frank came unexpectedly, and she had other company, he gave me his undivided attention. We sang duets, played club fist and slap hand, organized a two piece orchestra with a broom handle and yardstick. I can still remember how cleverly he could mimic a banjo. But, O Dear, our beautiful friendship came to a cruel and tragic end. One day cousin Leona Armstrong, and Leona Morris came to our place when Sadie was not at home. Someone came from the Post Office and brought a letter for Sadie from Frank and they pounced upon it, took it to the teakettle and steamed it till it came unglued easily. It was a nice letter, well written and interesting. There was a blank place at the bottom, below his name, so they added a P. S. and finished filling the page. I can't remember what they wrote, but it was something that made Sadie furious. The bad feature of it was that they had wheedled me into swearing that I would not tell her that they had opened it.

When Frank came, and Sadie bawled him out about it, of course it was tacked onto me. I had to just stand there in agony and see my beloved Frank, white with anger, asking me if I didn't know that it was a very serious breach of the law to tamper with the mail, and that people had been put behind bars for doing what I had done. I said that I didn't do it, but no one believed me, and I could not tell who had done it, as I had sworn I would not, and when we swore a thing it was never broken. And so, our cherished friendship came to an end, and I was sad and hurt, and felt terribly guilty for allowing them to tamper with his nice letter.

I heard of Frank at long intervals after that. He was married, and then one day news came that he had died, and without knowing that it was not I who had tampered with his letter. Well, somewhere, in the place where we go after we leave here, maybe I can see him sometime, and make things right.

When I was a little older, one of Frank's nephews (I guess he was a nephew, anyway a close relative), Claude Wright, and I had a fleeting romance. I remember an evening when a group of us went for a hay ride. Claude and I were on the back of the wagon with our feet dangling. The moon was shining in a pond of water, with willows around the sides. It was very pretty. We sang silly songs, and at last they all sang a Baptist Hymn:

Come, oh come to me, said Jesus,  
Come, and I will give you rest,  
I'll take away the burden from your heavy ladened breast,

No matter who the wanderer, Or how long he's been astray,  
Whosoever quickly cometh I will comfort him today.

I later heard that Claude and a Poindexter girl were going to be married, but on the wedding night he backed out, and didn’t go. Years after that, when Violet was a baby, Dave Wright, one of Lelia’s old flames came through our neighborhood and someone told him where I lived. He stopped and visited awhile, talked of old times, and of Lelia. He said that he had never cared for anyone else like he did Lelia. He asked me if I had heard of Claude jilting the Poindexter girl. Of course I had. He said that he went over there that night to see what was the matter with him, and he was laying across the bed crying. When Dave asked him why he wasn’t at the wedding, he said that it wouldn’t be right for him to marry her, when he thought more of Miss Effie than he did of her. I don’t suppose Dave ever married either, he was still single the last time I heard of him.

Corn planting time and barefoot time came at the same time, about the first of May. We usually all went to the field for the planting. Sadie and I usually dropped the grains in the crosses, and the men drove the horses hitched to the drags that covered it.

May was a happy time. During the long, cold winters (and early spring) with rain, snow, and sleet, and the constant freezing and thawing, often for weeks at a time we would not even see the sun. So, when the warm sunshiny weather did arrive, which it usually did about the first of May, we felt like celebrating, and did it by working from morning till night, till the crops were all planted.