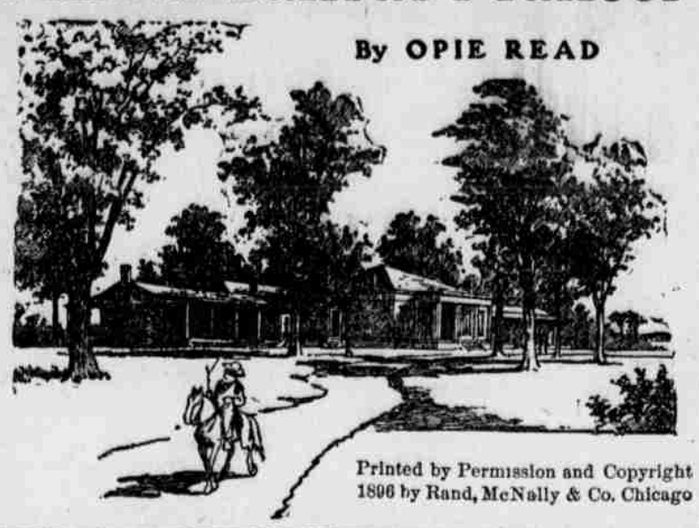
An Arkansas Planter

By OPIE READ



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CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

Tom had come out upon the porch. For a time he stood, listening, then quickly stepping down into the yard, he gazed toward the dairy house, into which, accompanied by a negro woman, had gone a slim girl, wearing a gingham sun-bonnet. The girl came out, carrying a jug, and hastened toward the yard gate. Tom heard the gate-latch click and then stepped quickly to the corner of the house; and when out of sight he almost ran to overtake the girl. She had reached the road, and she pretended to walk faster when she heard his footsteps. She did not raise her eyes as he came up beside her.

"Let me carry the jug, Sallie."

"No, I can carry it."

"Give it to me."

He took the jug and she looked up at him with a smile.

"How's your uncle, Sallie?"

"He ain't any better."

Her uncle was Wash Sanders. Twenty years had passed since he had first issued a bulletin that he was dying. He had liver trouble and a strong combination of other ailments, but he kept on living. At first the neighbors had confidence in him, and believed that he was about to pass away, but as the weeks were stretched into years, as men who had been strong and hearty were one by one borne to the grave, they began to lose faith in Wash Sanders. All day long he would sit on his shaky verandah, built high off the ground, and in answer to questions concerning his health would answer: "Can't keep up much longer; didn't sleep a wink last night. Don't eat enough to keep a chicken alive." His cows appeared always to be dry, and every day he would send his niece, Sallie Pruitt, for a jug of buttermilk. He had but one industry, the tending and scraping of a long nail on the little finger of his left hand. He had a wife, but no children. His niece had recently come from the pine woods of Georgia. Her hair looked like hackled flax and her eyes were large and gray.

"I didn't think you could see me," said the girl, taking off her bonnet and swinging it as she walked, keeping a sort of time with it.

"Why, you couldn't possibly come and get away without my seeing you."

"Yes, I could if it was night."

"Not much. I could see you in the dark, you are so bright."

"I'm not anything of the sort. Give me the jug and let me go on by myself if you are goin' to make fun of me."

She reached for the jug and he caught her hand, and walking along, held it.

"I wouldn't want to hold anybody's hand that I'd made fun of," she said, striving, though gently, to pull it away.

"I didn't make fun of you. I said you were bright and you are. To me you are the brightest thing in the world. Whenever I dream of you I awake with my eyes dazzled."

"Oh, you don't, no such of a thing."

They saw a wagon coming, and he dropped her hand. He stepped to the right, she to the left, and the wagon passed between them. She looked at him in alarm. "That's bad luck," she said.

"What is?"

"To let anything pass between us."

"Oh, it doesn't make any difference."

"Yes, it does," she insisted. "No, you musn't take my hand again—you've let something pass between us."

He awkwardly grabbed after her hand. She held it behind her, and about her waist he pressed his arm. "Oh, don't do that. Somebody might see us."

"I don't care if the whole world sees us."

"You say that now, but after awhile you'll care."

"Never as long as I live. You know I love you."

"No, I don't."

"Yes, you do."

"You might say you do, but you don't. But even if you do love me now you won't always."

"Yes, as long as I live."

She looked up at him, and her eyes were full of beauty and tenderness. "Your mother——"

"None of that," he broke in. "I am my own master. To me you are the most beautiful creature in the world, and——"

"Somebody's comin'," she said.

A horseman came round a bend in the road, and he stepped off from her, but they did not permit the horseman to pass between them. He did not put his arm about her again, for now

WASH SANDERS

they were in sight of her uncle's desolate house. They saw Wash Sanders sitting on the verandah. Tom carried the jug as far as the yard gate.

"Won't you come in?" Sanders called.

"I ought to be getting back, I guess."

"Might come in and rest awhile."

Tom hesitated a moment and then passed through the gate. The girl had run into the house.

"How are you getting along?" the young man asked as he began slowly to tramp up the steps.

"Porely, mighty porely. Thought I was gone last night—didn't sleep a wink. And I don't eat enough to keep a chicken alive."

"Wouldn't you like a mess of young squirrels?" Tom asked, as he sat down in a hickory rocking chair. Of late he had become interested in Wash Sanders, and had resented the neighbors' loss of confidence in him.

"Well, you might bring 'em if it ain't too much trouble, but I don't believe I could eat 'em. Don't eat enough to keep a chicken alive."

He lifted his pale hand, and with his long finger nail scratched his chin.

"What's the doctor's opinion?" Tom asked, not knowing what else to say and feeling that at that moment some expression was justly demanded of him.

"The doctors don't say anything now; they've given me up. From the first time they saw that I was a dead man. Last doctor that gave me medicine was a fellow from over here at Gum Springs, and I wish I may die dead if he didn't come in one of finishin' me right there on the spot."

There came a tap at a window that opened out upon the verandah, and the young fellow, looking around, saw the girl sitting in the "best room." She tried to put on the appearance of having accidentally attracted his attention. He moved his chair closer to the window.

"How did you know I was in here?" she asked, looping back the white curtain.

"I can always tell where you are without looking."

"Are you goin' to make fun of me again?"

"If I could even eat enough to keep a chicken alive I think I'd feel better," said Wash Sanders, looking far down the road.

"I never did make fun of you," the young fellow declared in a whisper, leaning close to the window. "And I wish you wouldn't keep on saying that I do."

"I won't say it any more if you don't want me to."

"But I cant' eat and can't sleep, and that settles it," said Wash Sanders.

"Of course I don't want you to say it. It makes me think that you are looking for an excuse not to like me."

"Would you care very much if I didn't like you?"

"If I had taken another slug of that Gum Springs doctor's stuff I couldn't have lived ten minutes longer," said Wash Sanders.

And thus they talked until the sun was sinking into the tops of the trees, far down below the bend in the river.

CHAPTER VII.

At the Major's house the argument was still warm and vigorous. But the evening was come, and the bell-cow, home from her browsing, was ringing for admittance at the barn-yard gate. The priest arose to go. At that moment there was a heavy step at the end of the porch, the slow and ponderous tread of Jim Taylor. He strode in the shadow and in the gathering dusk recognition of him would not have been easy, but by his bulk and height they knew him. But he appeared to have lost a part of his great strength, and he drooped as he walked.

"Where is the Major?" he asked, and his voice was hoarse.

"Here, my boy. Why, what's the trouble?"

"Let me see you a moment," he said, halting.

The Major arose, and the giant, with one stride forward, caught him by the arm and led him away amid the black shadows under the trees. Mrs. Cranceford came out upon the porch and stood looking with cool disapproval upon the priest. At a window she had sat and heard him enunciate his views. Out in the yard Jim Taylor said something in a broken voice, and the Major, madly bellowing, came bounding toward the house.

"Margaret," he cried, "Louise is married!"

The woman started, uttered not a sound, but hastened to meet him, took him by the hand. Jim Taylor came ponderously walking from amid the black shadows. The Englishman and old Gid stole away. The priest stood calmly looking upon the old man and his wife.

"John, come and sit down," she said. "Raving won't do any good. We must be seemly, whatever we are." She felt the eye of the priest. "Who told you, Mr. Taylor?"

"The justice of the peace. They were married about an hour ago, less than half a mile from here."

She led the Major to a chair, and he sat down heavily. "She shall never darken my door again," he declared, striving to stiffen his shoulders, but they drooped under his effort.

"Don't say that, dear."

"But I do say it—ungrateful little wretch."

The priest stepped forward and raised his hand. "May the blessings of our heavenly father rest upon this household," he said. The woman looked a defiance at him. He bowed and was gone. Jim Taylor stood with his head hung low. Slowly he began to speak. "Major, you and your wife are humiliated, but I am heartbroken. You are afflicted with sorrow, but I am struck down with grief. But I beg of you not to say that she shan't come home again. Her marriage doesn't alter the fact that she is your daughter. Her relationship toward you may not be so much changed, but to me she is lost. I beg you not to say she shan't come home again."

Mrs. Cranceford tenderly placed her hand on the giant's arm. He shook under her touch.

"I will say it and I mean it. She has put her feet on our love and has thrown herself away, and I don't want to see her again. I do think she is the completest fool I ever saw in my life. Yes, and we loved her so. And Tom—it will break his heart."

In the dusk the wife's white hand was gleaming—putting back the gray hair from her husband's eyes. "And we still love her so, dear," she said.

"What!" he cried, and now his shoulders stiffened, "What! do you uphold her?"

"Oh, no, but I am sorry for her, and I am not going to turn against her simply because she has made a mistake. She has acted unwisely, but she has not disgraced herself."

"Yes, she has disgraced herself and the rest of us along with her. She has married the dying son of a convict. I didn't want to tell her this—I told her——"

This was like a slap in the face, and for a moment she was bereft of the cool dignity that had been so pronounced a characteristic of her quiet life.

"If you didn't tell me before why do you tell me now?" was her reply. She stood back from him, regathering her scattered reserve, striving to be calm. "But it can't be helped now, John." Her gentle dignity reasserted itself. "Let time and the something that brightens hopes and softens fears gradually soothe our affliction."

She had taken up the Major's manner of speech. "Mr. Taylor, I have never intimated such a thing to you before," she added, "but it was my hope that she might become your wife. There, my dear man, don't let it tear you so."

The giant was shaken, appearing to be gnarled and twisted by her words, like a tree in a fierce wind. "I talked to her about you," she continued, "and it was my hope—but now let us be kind to her memory, if indeed we are to regard her simply as a memory."

"Margaret," said the Major, getting up and throwing back his leonine head, "you are enough to inspire me with strength—you always have. But while you may teach me to bear a trouble, you can't influence me to turn counter to the demands of a just resentment. She shan t put her foot in this house again. Jim, you can find a more suitable woman, sir. Did you hear what became of them after that scoundrel married them? Who performed the ceremony? Morris? He must never put his foot in my yard again. I'll set the dogs on him. What became of them, Jim?"

"I didn't hear, but I think that they must have driven to town in a buggy."

"Well, it really makes no difference what became of them. Are you going, Jim?"

"Yes, sir."

"Won't you stay with us tonight?"

"No, I thank you. It's better for me to be alone." He hesitated. "If you want me to I'll find out tonight where they've gone."

"Oh, no, do nothing of the sort, for I assure you that it makes no difference. Let them go to the devil."

"John, don't say that, please," his wife pleaded.

"But I have said it. Well, if you are determined to go, good-night."

"Good-night." Jim strode off into the darkness, but halted and turned about. "Major, if I can forgive her you ought to," he said. "You've got common sense to help you, but common sense was never known to help a man that's in my fix."

They heard the gate open, heard the latch click behind him as he passed out into the road. Toward his lonely home he trod his heavy way, in the sand, in the rank weeds, picking not his course, stumbling, falling once to his knees. The air was full of the pungent scent of the walnut, turning yellow, and in it was a memory of Louise. Often had he seen her with her apron full of nuts that had fallen from the trees under which he now was passing. He halted and looked about him. The moon was rising and he saw someone sitting on a fence close by the road side. "Is that you, Jim?" a voice called.

"Yes. Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Batts?"

"Yep, just about. Hopped up here

MAY THE BLESSING OF GOD REST UPON THIS HOUSEHOLD.

to smell the walnuts. Takes me away back. They took it pretty hard, didn't they?"

"Yes, particularly the Major. His wife has more control over herself."

(To be continued).

Man born of woman is of few days and full of bullets.

FARM Orchard and Garden Notes

By J. S. TRIGG

Rockford, Iowa

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Living Obtained on the Farm

THE living secured by the man of the farm is often entirely overlooked when summing up the disadvantages connected with farm life, and what such living is worth is proper to investigate. The man in town who has to buy everything which enters into his daily living knows well enough that a good part of his earnings goes for this purpose. The farmer has no house rent to pay, no water tax, and he is almost entirely exempt from the hundred and one calls on benevolent, charitable and public account, a species of municipal tribute from which it is utterly impossible for the town resident to escape. On any well managed farm all the breadstuffs needed for family use are obtained, also the milk, butter, cream, eggs, poultry, vegetables and fruits, and all of these of the very best are found on the farm. The bill of fare at the farm home is always good, quite often more varied and of much more costly things than would be found on the table of the average town resident. Now, assuming that there seven persons in the average farm home—the man, his wife, four children and a hired man—is it supposable that they could live as they do for less than $700 per year if they lived as well in town? Now, this $700 should in all fairness be credited, with house rent—say $150 more—to the advantage of living on the farm, when the fact is that very little account is made of it by the majority of people.

The Penalty of Ignorance.

HE was one of those rare and queer specimens who in some manner had dodged and neglected all the splendid educational advantages which American offers its young people and at the age of forty-five could neither read nor write, save that he had learned to write his name in a sort of crow's foot fashion. He was a worker and, having inherited some property from his father, knew how to successfully raise hogs and corn and had made himself quite well off. One day a gang of tree peddlers got after him and loaded him up with an order for almost $1,000 worth of stuff—trees and plants which could not possibly survive a single northern winter—he in his ignorance actually not knowing what he had obligated himself to pay. When he did find out there was blood on the moon, but the agents were gone, and his order, an ironclad one so far as he was concerned, was in the hands of a company which will pick him clean if they can. If we were in his place we would quit raising hogs and corn for a couple of years, attend the country school and meanwhile apply for the appointment of an administrator to look after the business. While it is true that a sucker is born every minute it is not often that one of this kind is hatched.

The American is a great fellow to hang on, but many a man would have either saved or made a fortune if he had known enough to let go at the right time. We know of a case where a man hung on to a 5,000 bushel crib of corn then four years old when he was offered 75 cents a bushel for it and was forced to sell it later at 40 cents; we recall a case where a farmer was offered $500 for a well matched draft team and, refusing, was busy digging a hole to put the best horse in inside of ten days; we have knotwn scores of men to hang on to some public office from which they might have gracefully retired with credit and honor until they were ignominiously kicked out by an irrittated constituency. "Hang on" is a good motto sometimes, and often "Let go" is a better one.

There is this season a volunteer crop of winter wheat up in Minnesota which is a curiosity. A field of spring wheat last year for some reason or other was not harvested, and, the fall being very favorable, the wheat grew and covered the field with a thick mat of volunteer wheat. Ordinarily this wheat would have been killed out by the severe winters of that latitude, but a heavy snow covered the field early in the winter and remained on until spring, and the field now gives promise of yielding twenty-five or thirty bushels per acre of No. 1 winter-spring wheat.

A reader of these notes writes us that he has a dead sure cure for hog cholera. If he has he can wear a plug hat, own an automobile and a yacht, endow a college and take summer trips to Europe just as soon as the public get on to the fact. But, then, he is like a hundred others—hasn't got any sure cure; only thinks he has. His theory may seem all right and work in some cases, but the first thing he knows he will find it knocked into smithereens, just as all the rest of the so-called cures have been. Hog cholera is like original sin—can't be cured.

There is a natural affinity between children and dirt. Every mother has found this out. It is all right that it should be so. We are made of dirt to start with; have to dig our living out of it while we live and return to the bosom of old Mother Earth when we are through with our trouble. Nearly all mothers want to keep their children clean and slick when nature is working against them all the time. The best way is to let the kids have all the dirt and water they want to play with and then have a tub of water handy to throw them into when they get through. Dirt doesn't hurt children a bit if you get it off them every night.

It all depends upon the point of view. The man who has an orchard of young fruit trees and puts out poison and sets traps to destroy the rabbits which girdle and destroy his trees is looked upon as a pretty mean man by the sports who are fond of rabbit hunting, and these same sports are regarded as an unmitigated nuisance by the farmer when they raid his place, scare his stock, tear down his fences and shoot his pet squirrels and quail.

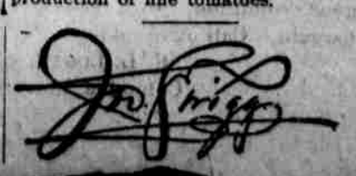
There is a type of ultra tender heartedness and sympathy for dumb animals exhibited by some people which becomes a good deal of a nuisance. These seem to entirely ignore the fact that in order that they may have meat to eat some one must take the life of the animal furnishing the meat. They go cracked over dogs and are utterly indifferent to all the horrors of a case of hydrophobia and and all the other long list of meannesses of which dogs are capable. They call the dehorning of cattle, the cutting off of the lamb's tail and the surgical treatment of all male animals cruelty to the poor dumb beasts and meet you with the most conclusive of arguments that if these several processes are right the Almighty made a mistake when he created the animals. Man was placed upon the earth to subdue it. In this work of subjugation he may do much by kindness, but not all. Some things must be done by force and harsh methods, and it is useless to ignore this fact.

The first and one of the most important of the irrigation projects undertaken by the general government under the new law will be on the Salt river about fifty miles from Phoenix, Ariz. The dam to be built at the mouth of the canyon where the river emerges from the mountains on to the plains will be 186 feet thick at the base, 830 feet long at the top, 250 feet in height and will contain 11,600,000 cubic feet of masonry. The reservoir thus created will contain 1,020,000 acre feet of water, drain over 6,000 square miles of mounttain territory and irrigate over 300,000 acres of now worthless desert land in the valley of the Salt river. When thus reclaimed the land will be easily worth $50 per acre, as the soil is wonderfully productive.

Given sufficient rain to secure the proper germination of the seed in the spring, it is entirely possible to raise almost any sort of vegetable or root crop by continuous cultivation of the surface of the soil without another drop of rain until the harvest is ready and the crop matured. We have seen this done with cabbages, turnips, tomatoes, potatoes and sweet corn by surface cultivation of the crop every three days during a fifty day midsummer drought, the crop seemingly never suffering for want of moisture.

A strike was in progress in a manufacturing town, and 500 operatives were out of work. About the first man to realize the economic effect of the strike was the town milkman, whose patrons nearly all reduced their milk orders from two quarts to one pint.

The tomato is much more easily cared for and will produce a better quality of fruit if tied to a good, stout stake four or five feet high. It can then be readily thinned and pruned, something almost indispensable in the production of fine tomatoes.



Wit, Wisdom and Philosophy

"Living issues" are issues that rise up to trip politicians.

Sometimes it is as well not to run after things, but to wait until they come along.

Young men of understanding are familiar with the word lingerie.

Men who are thinking of running for office had better go slow.

A lover who thinks most of himself sometimes kills the girl.

It is easy to speak well of the dead, for nothing more to our disadvantage can come from them.

It is not uncommon for women, compelled to stay closely at home on account of small children and household cares, to outlive their husbands.

Men who want a play spell always think of their health.

It is easy to repair a house, but a man who is broken is difficult to mend.

All lovely heads of hair are favorable to hats off in public gatherings.

The summer resort is a poor place to go for sentiment opposed to annexation.

The weather forecasts are entertaining to both sexes with new clothes.

The man who can drink or let it alone has one qualification for a successful political career.

A fruit jar is more likely to tip over if it is full.

The blackleg claims to be white.

Every man is great who is on top of his job.

A boy does not know how it is he thinks of so much mischief, but the devil does.