SATURDAY AFTERNOONS WERE busy periods in town. Farmers, with wives and children, went in to sell produce and buy supplies. Saturday nights outstripped the afternoons; both town dwellers and country people thronged the streets, strolling up and down or chatting in groups. A few young men paraded with their best girls; others stood about ogling girls who walked in chattering little bevies. Stores remained open until midnight. Bowling alleys and other amusement centers were well patronized; cigar stores and ice cream parlors enjoyed a particularly lively business.

When they ate in town nearly all farmers went to Lynch’s. This was one of the biggest business places the town could boast: grocery, bakery, and eating place, all under one roof. Patrons of the restaurant passed through the large front room in which were stocks of grocery staples, tobacco, cigars, dry goods, notions, work garments, corn knives, husking gear, water jugs, horse collars, blankets, whips, and the like. Walking through the aisle past cases of eggs, bags of rice and potatoes, barrels of sugar, salt, crackers, molasses, vinegar and kerosene, blocks
of rock salt, nuts in bushel baskets, displays of fruits in season, kegs of salt fish, and stacks of bar soap—including "Grandpa's Wonder" tar soap—they would note long glass cases. In these were displayed in tempting array big loaves of bread, rolls, pies, cakes, cookies, and doughnuts, all fresh from the oven.

A coffee grinder with a big hand wheel was bolted to one of the counters. Not all grocers had such machines because the majority of customers preferred to buy coffee in the bean and grind it at home. A few housewives bought green coffee beans, which they roasted in their own ovens. In most homes was a small hand grinder that was used at breakfasttime daily to grind enough for the day. "Coffee essence" was stocked by grocers and used by some as a coffee supplement or substitute. It was made from chicory root, still used in the South where many enjoy it in their coffee. Among favored brands of roasted, unground coffee in one-pound packages in stores were Lion and Arbuckle. We youngsters used what influence we had in favor of the former, because accumulations of round lion heads, cut from the bags, could be exchanged for a variety of premiums, many of which appealed strongly to children.

A door at the rear of the bakery section opened to the dining room. Just inside, at a long counter, stood a clerk to take your order for fresh, warm buns, butter, bologna, maple syrup, cookies, and coffee; the menu, always the same, offered nothing more. The clerk tore a square of brown paper from a roll and placed upon it the items you had ordered, and you paid your bill. Then, using the paper as a tray, which was to serve finally as your tablecloth, he carried your order to a maple-topped table, altogether innocent of paint or varnish, and you
followed, carrying your cup of coffee. The butter, a generous pat on a small plate, was of excellent quality in summer; in winter it generally had an uninviting appearance and a pronounced cheesy smell. The syrup was genuine maple and of a quality that some years later sold at several dollars per gallon. The bologna and the baked goods were top grade.

The large dining room was decorated with wallpaper on which appeared Civil War scenes in color, the figures almost life-size. Standing out prominently were big cannons with attendant caissons; everywhere were groups of the Boys in Blue, about their tents, beside their campfires, or standing at ease, leaning upon their muskets.

Women were not excluded, but I never saw any eating at Lynch's restaurant. There were several more pretentious eating places in town serving the best of food, but farmers, in their overalls and rough working garb, felt more at home at Lynch's. Probably, also, they preferred the fare because it differed so greatly from the food they ate regularly at their own tables. Accommodations were provided for about a hundred diners; the place was generally filled almost to capacity.

Our town was not big enough to attract the biggest circuses, but one or more of the smaller ones appeared every summer. Large crowds turned out to see the free parades, at that time put on as bait to lure customers to the tent shows. In one respect the parades were better than the shows in the tents; they were in the form of striking pageants, moving slowly in a line in which the spectator had time to see everything, unconfused by a multiplicity of action such as ordinarily goes on under the big top. The men and women performers in glitter-

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ing costumes, the horses, the elephants, the big, gaudily painted wagons, some heavily barred, with numerous strange animals on display—about every important attraction the circus could boast—appeared in the parades. The clowns were there, all uproariously funny, always coming up with the bizarre and the unexpected. Somewhere along the line appeared the steam calliope, the sweating player seated at the keyboard back of the sizzling boiler, gloves on his hands for protection against the hot keys.

Every summer one or another of our railroads ran an “excursion” or two, advertising each long in advance. Around six in the morning of the appointed day, the long special train, made up of old wooden day coaches, pulled in at the depot. Often, the seats were jammed full of passengers picked up at previous stops. That didn’t discourage the waiting excursionists at all. Tickets in hand, they good-naturedly pushed their way into vestibules and aisles and somehow found places to stand or sit. All carried boxes of fried chicken and other choice food items. All were in holiday mood, determined not only to make the trip pay the greatest possible dividends in fun and excitement but to see all of the wonders promised by the road’s adman. Usually, the train got far behind its schedule—it had to be sidetracked for regular passenger trains and occasionally for some of the faster freights. Rarely did the travelers get back to the home station before midnight, several hours behind the scheduled arrival time.

All who went on an excursion were likely to have a day more trying, physically, than a day of hard work, what with the crowded coaches, heat, noise, cinders, smoke, dust, and hours of standing and tramping about; yet all enjoyed going. The trips had for us much educational
value, for they introduced us (on a very limited scale, to be sure) to the outside world, and they brought us face to face with places and things we had studied about in school.

One summer a big tent was set up in town, and for a whole week the community enjoyed Chautauqua programs, one each afternoon and one each evening. The offerings, in considerable variety, were excellent on the whole. We were afforded opportunities to see and hear many notable figures—men and women prominent in the fields of politics, journalism, religion, drama, literature, and music. The Chautauqua was continued for several years, until motion pictures became strongly competitive and the automobile expanded so widely the field for entertainment and diversion.

Grange halls for housing meetings of the farmers' association or lodge, the "National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry," were maintained at numerous points in the region. Locally, interest in the organization appeared to be at a low ebb; few of the farmers we knew were members. Farmers' alliances and co-operative associations had no known local members.

Each year a "Farmers' Institute," designed to present instruction in improved techniques of farm management and operation, was held during a period of several days in Van Wert. Meetings were well attended until a farmer in the area, regarded by his neighbors as a lazy theorist, more proficient as a smooth talker than as a practical farmer, was signed on as a lecturer to address Institute meetings well outside his own bailiwick. That seemed to reduce confidence in speakers generally, so that interest in local programs fell off.
The Van Wert Bulletin came twice each week to give us the news of the world, including our own little corner. Much of the time, there was also a city daily, mainly for market reports. In addition to these there were farmers' publications, religious journals, household magazines, and the Youth's Companion. Among books in the home library were Uncle Tom's Cabin, Swiss Family Robinson, Robinson Crusoe, Wood's Natural History, Kidnapped, Treasure Island, and Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea. Some of these books were given repeated readings. A special favorite was a large volume entitled Conquering the Wilderness. It contained stories of frontier days and related exploits of such men as Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Simon Kenton, Colonel Crawford, Peter Cartwright, Buffalo Bill, and Kit Carson.

Thanks to the game of "Authors," which we played frequently, we learned about some of the important works of literature, coming thus to know and enjoy the writings of such masters as Dickens, Scott, Irving, Hawthorne, Stevenson, and Cooper, obtained from the public library established about 1900 and said to have been the first county library in the United States.

One day, we found about the house a Sears & Roebuck catalogue. It was only a quarter as large as catalogues issued in later years, but for us and some of our friends it was an extraordinarily interesting volume. From its pages one could gain a practical knowledge of the construction and comparative advantages of hundreds of items of merchandise (some of which, up to that time, we had known nothing about). One could study and compare prospective purchases over and over to an extent not possible in any retail store. Thus the book brought no
small amount of pleasure, for anticipation is often more exciting and gratifying than actual attainment.

At an early age I was bitten by the camera bug, and mailed a dollar for a camera and a dozen dry plates, with a complete developing and finishing outfit, which I found advertised in a magazine. The camera, though nothing more than a light-tight cardboard box with simple lens and shutter, was capable of taking real pictures; the chemicals and the apparatus that came with them doubtless would have functioned as they were intended to do; but I didn’t get a single picture with that outfit. Before reading the instructions, I had hastened to unwrap everything, including the dry plates. That of course ruined the light-sensitive plates, and without them no picture was possible. The outcome was very disappointing, but it did teach me one of the basic principles that every photographer must keep in mind.

Later I bought another photo outfit. This time I read all the instructions before any wrappings were removed. I loaded the camera, posed my brother and our dog, and pressed the button. Then, excitedly, I prepared chemical solutions and developed the plate in an improvised dark-room. Strange to relate, the exposure and development proved to be about right, and I turned out a picture that, if more attention had been given to the pose, would have been passably good; I had made the mistake of seating my subject with his legs extended toward the camera, so that in the picture he appeared to be nearly all feet.

The number of churches in the area was almost as great as the number of schools. Nearly all country churches were equipped with bells. In most cases they had only
one entrance. Men and women might go in together, but
women customarily sat at the right of the main aisle, men
at the left. Usually there were two stoves, one on the
women's side, one on the men's.

Two white-painted churches stood half a mile apart in
our school district, one, the Methodist, the other, the
Friends (commonly called the Quaker). Roughly, two-
thirds of the churchgoers in the district were Methodists.
The other third went to the Quaker church, about half
of whose membership lived in adjoining districts. Outside
the churches themselves, cleavages along religious lines
were not sharply defined, although they were noticeable.
Methodists at times attended services in the Quaker church
and vice versa. Now and then, a preacher in one church
would inject in a sermon a jab at fundamental doctrines
of the other; but for the most part, these were passed
over lightly by listeners and soon forgotten.

Most ministers were good men, laboring as best they
knew how to promote in every way the cause of righteous-
ness. The work they had to do was often difficult, and at
times they faced hardships that, by standards of later
times, were rigorous. The Methodist minister, for instance,
served four rural churches. Remuneration for all tended
to be pretty meager. In the parlance of the region, most
of them were long-winded, sermons generally averaging
a full hour in length.

In all rural Protestant churches "revival" meetings were
held nightly during a midwinter period each year. Often
they were called "protracted meetings," a fitting name,
for they ran on night after night, sometimes three or more
weeks. There was scarcely a winter week in which one
could not find one of these evangelistic campaigns in
progress somewhere thereabouts. In most instances attend-
ance was large. Most of the regular attendants were sincere believers; a few went because there was no other place to go. For some of the younger people, the meetings served mainly as social diversions; they went to meet friends and have a good time among themselves.

Both Quakers and Methodists laid down strict religious principles and rules. In consequence the community, by standards of later times, would have been considered very strait-laced. The theater, dancing, card-playing, the use of intoxicants, and laxity in observance of the Sabbath were taboo. The great majority of church members faithfully followed these teachings. Because religious leaders disapproved of them, church dinners were unknown. About once each summer month, however, one could count on a church ice-cream social not far away.

A sizable number of people in the community rarely went to church. Many of them were regular cardplayers; they worked or went hunting or fishing on Sunday without compunction; some would travel far to see a show or attend a dance, and several were pretty regular customers at saloons. Some profanity was heard, but it was generally mild and innocuous by comparison with the widespread blatant profanity of more recent times.

At Salem Methodist Church, which our family attended, Sunday school came first on regular morning programs and was well attended. Youngsters preferred it to the worship service that followed because it was much less formal and didn't last as long. If the matter had been left altogether in their hands, the majority no doubt would have ducked out and gone home before the sermon began.

No attention was given to the observance of any days on church calendars except Easter and Christmas. These were always commemorated in some way, mainly for the
benefit of the children. The Christmas program was much more elaborate than the Easter observance. Often a tall spruce or pine tree was set up inside the church, nicely decorated and bedecked with lighted candles—a very serious fire hazard, what with the quantities of cotton “snow,” paper wrappings and trimmings, and the inflammable needles of the tree itself. Oddly enough, no one seemed to think of this.

There was a Halloween party somewhere in our neighborhood every year. Usually, too, a New Year’s party. Every two or three weeks throughout the year someone sent out invitations to a social get-together, and we all went. Boys who were “going with” girls took them; those who went stag usually found a girl to escort home.

With the exception of New Year’s celebrations, at which someone got out at midnight and fired a few shotgun blasts, all of these affairs were pretty much alike. They started with some parlor games, accompanied by much giggling and, at times, boisterous laughter. Sooner or later, we engaged in “singing” games, including “Skip to My Lou,” “Captain Jinks,” “Old Dan Tucker,” and the like. No one seemed to realize it, least of all parents who disapproved of dancing, but these were all forms of old folk dances. All sang the words, sometimes to the accompaniment of a harmonica, and we stepped in time to the music, certain words in the songs being cues to swing partners, bow to partners, promenade, dos-à-dos, circulate, change partners, and the rest. Refreshments, consisting generally of big hunks of homemade cake or pie piled high with whipped cream, were finally served. This was a signal for the breakup of the party.
Now and then, some socially minded chap who wanted some extra spending money would invite a group to an oyster supper party. After guests had assembled, his emissaries would buttonhole the boys and request cash contributions to defray costs of the entertainment. Such parties might generate a lot of fun, but the type of hospitality displayed tended to stick in the craws of male guests, especially when they considered the financial profits that accrued to the host.

Husking bees were once quite popular as social affairs in rural communities, but I never knew of any in the area about us. Our nearest approach to such a thing came after a local farmer, father of several of our classmates, died. A field of shocked corn remained unhusked. As this appeared too big a job for the boys of the family to get done before winter closed in, a dozen boys of our school went one Saturday and put on a sort of all-male husking bee. There was a great deal of pranking and horseplay, but we stuck to the task until it was done and—I report it with some pride and no small degree of wonder—done well.

Farm auctions nearly always attracted large crowds because they could be counted on to provide some entertainment and opportunities for leisurely visiting, as well as for buying livestock and farm equipment. Furthermore, there was a free lunch at noon—buns, bologna, and coffee. The coffee was served in new tin cups, that would go on the block after the repast.

Political campaigns afforded some diversion, although few took politics very seriously. Several times, we heard speeches from men who later became important figures in national affairs. I happened to be in town one day when an eloquent speaker was praising the surpassing merits of
Republican candidates who sought election that fall to offices from that of President of the United States down. Though only a small boy, I was so carried away by the words of the speaker and the music of the band that I dipped into my meager hoard of cash and invested in a long-billed cap whose front bore, in large letters, the names of the Republican aspirants for the offices of President and Vice-President of the United States. Now, my father was a Republican—quite probably that was why I also was a Republican, though an immature one. But he was by no means a rabid partisan. Apparently, therefore, he didn’t care to have me advertising to all of our small world that he stood on that side of the political fence. Anyway, my prized cap mysteriously disappeared, and I saw it no more.