

STORIES OF THE OLDEN TIME.

Glimpse of Life in Kentucky in the Early Days.

BY W. W.

In giving sketches of primitive times in Kentucky and Tennessee, the clerical profession and their gatherings appear to figure rather conspicuously. The reader must bear in mind that, at that period, so limited, comparatively, were the means of traveling—a good deal of it being, as is well known, good carriage roads, that very few outsiders in the way of lecturers or other speakers ever found their way there. Consequently, in the remote or wilder districts, where, indeed, the inevitable postmaster was constrained to find his way, the chief source of entertainment—I mean it in no invidious sense—was the pulpit, however rude its surroundings or however marked the oddities of those who occupied it; for many of the preachers really pitied themselves on eccentric roads or somewhat affected, which gave them a wider field and larger audiences.

In illustration of the difficulty of penetrating Tennessee in ante-railroad times, even the central portion of it, and especially in the winter when the rivers were sometimes very low, and perhaps partially frozen, a long stage route across Kentucky being the other alternative, fancy—which, however, was the fact—our musical celebrity, M. Strakosch, which overcame it in a single day, from the Cumberland, on his way up the river in a small steamer, and stranded, too, for several days, short of both of provisions and fire; and then fancy the greater leader of opera, feelingly describing his troubles on that occasion, the hardships undergone and the "cold taken," until he could express it more emphatically or plaintively than to affirm that he was then and there, as a consequence, troubled "with swindling (swimming) in mine head."

Of course, that was long ago; and "old" "Strakosch" better English now, and is indeed no necessity of making precautions jaunts into the interior all off the lines of railroads—and good luck to him—for he is remembered as an affable and pleasant gentleman; but the hardships he underwent were not singular, and it is my purpose to deal with some of the incidents and conditions which grew out of such disabilities.

On a horseback jaunt then upon one occasion to look after some land titles up on Big Sandy, being detained for a few days while the surveys were being looked into, I was provided with an induction of "old" "Strakosch," under the supervision of Elder some-body, whose name—for he was a local celebrity—I have forgotten. Setting out on horseback in company with my entertainer and his wife, half a day's ride brought us to the place, a large double log-house with an L attached, a mansion so much above the average of the section that it was the very aristocracy of log-cabinry.

We were very emphatically welcomed to the place by a remarkably gentle man in Kentucky jeans, a man of herculean build, about 5 feet 11 inches in height, about 60 years of age, with iron-gray hair in short vigorous curls, which, a crowning a massive, bullet-shaped head, didn't need a marked expression of bulldog-like courage, qualified by kindly expression, however, to stamp him as indeed a peculiar specimen of Kentucky growth and sturdiness, such a stranger would look at twice before concluding to needlessly arouse or provoke.

Calling one of his sons—for his bands were hardly known in that portion of Kentucky—he directed him to "take our horses" and then, leading the way, we quickly found ourselves in a large room which, opening into others, contained the rustic congregation, constituting a camp-meeting on a small scale—for the "Squire" had undertaken the charge of finding quarters on his own account for as many as chose to stay through so several days the meeting was to be had.

On glancing around upon the company I found, not a little to my annoyance, for I hated to be picked out, if it were, from the crowd, that, excepting the presiding elder, I was the only marked outsider—marked as such by a suit of "store clothes" (broadcloth), instead of wearing the inevitable Kentucky jeans. The first pronounced result to my taste was, that, when the tin horn was soon blaring in the ample log chimney, and with my horse blanketed and consigned to a fence corner in the yard with a good supply of corn and "fodder"—(dried leaves of the corn)—I had nothing to do but to look on at the preparations for something to eat.

There was no flour or meal in the cabin—as already intimated—but with a wide-awake activity which reminded one of the feats of a gymnast, the young girl, with a large quantity of corn and all turned to in shelling it, and she knelt on the floor beside a couple of millstones about a foot in diameter, and with a horizontal motion whirled two or three quarts of corn meal with a deftness pleasant to look upon. Speedily consigned it to a kettle over the fire, the result was a dish of "mush" and "milk" for anybody; and I retired to my rough couch made of sticks driven into the logs of the cabin, and covered with a plaid, and a clean straw mat, and a quilt, improved my rest, while the "Squire" was at his rousing fire.

At the quarterly meeting over the hospitality of these really kind people earnestly and warmly acknowledged a trip further south and still somewhat parallel with the Big Sandy river gave me the chance of further experiences in observing the simple habits, and noting the limited resources of the people. Overtaken by the darkness one evening, as I was making my way on horseback, as a customer, down a deep and narrow valley, I was overtaken by a lone woman, who had been walking all day, and had seemed to be in a systole.

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