I Remember Childhood

By: EARL HARRIS

Early life is forgotten or becomes merged into more complex life as a child grows older. Most of us reminisce of childhood days.

Vividly, I recall windy October afternoons, munching sweet red apples and playing tag and follow-the-leader with my playmates, until we were ready to drop. Later in front of the fire, we dozed as we tried to study tomorrow's geography, history, spelling, and arithmetic lessons.

November afternoons found us in the woods. Hickory nuts and walnuts covered the ground waiting to be packed into pockets bulging with tops, marbles, string, and heaven knows what else. Hillsides were covered with acorns — valleys stretched away from them with golden rod. Leaves turned into a glory now remembered vaguely. The ruddy feeling on the cheeks, the smarting crack in the lips and the rough feeling of chapped hands are all remembered.

Chasing each other tirelessly as Indians and cowboys made us hot and tired. On extremely sultry days my playmates and I would gather for the refreshment of the crystal waters. When "trunks" weren't handy, some would shift to the "raw," sinking deep into the water at the sound of an oncoming automobile.

In the late evenings, we would chase about the lawn barefoot after lightning bugs.

The memory of my childhood is associated with the dusk, the sizzling of the hose playing upon the lawn, and the feel of the damp grass under my feet. Lightning bugs flashed here-now-there. In the background, the bedtime songs of the July fly could be heard, dropping away gradually, then sounding far away.

Sleeping in the yard was always a glorious thing. The wind blew the covers of the trees gently. Overhead a white moon rode, and the stars let themselves down, bright and close, like fireflies.

Occasionally, on one of those golden days, we would go fishing. Carelessly we listened with one ear to the chatter of the frogs, not minding whether anything picked at the bait or not.

Religion was an accepted part of our lives. Our family was Baptist. My sister and I accompanied our parents to church. I remember the long summer hours of service. A big solid woman sat in front of us. Her fan moved mechanically, as if attached to an electric motor. I squirmed on the hard pew. The air was close, though all the windows were open. The sound of cars would come in from outside, to drown out the preacher's voice.

There was a retired preacher who was often called on to pray. At great length, he implored the Lord. As he was called to pray, the congregation would move restlessly, smile at one another, and collectively bow heads for the ordeal.

Near our porch stood a massive beech tree. Its rugged arms spread over the house and yard protectively. I remember the beech lovingly as a refuge. The mossy carpet underneath the spreading branches was our home, from which we set out on all sorts of adventures. During a gentle summer rain, we would huddle together under its protection and assure my mother, as she called us to come in, that we were not getting wet. It gave us a feeling of independence, and aroused a proud feeling that we were out on our own. We didn't need the protection of a house. We had our own house. As the rain became more insistent —on occasions—the porch began to look far away. Often we would feel a desire to dash for its shelter, but none of us could admit that. So we laughed bravely and boasted about how hard it was raining. Presently it would stop and we would smile at our fears, but sometimes the rain would come down harder and harder. When Mom called a second time, someone would weaken; then all would scramble madly to the porch.

To me, these things are lovely dreams. To me, these things are childhood.

A Review of John Pendleton Kennedy's Horseshoe Robinson

The Gardner-Webb area—west-central North Carolina and upper South Carolina—is rich in historical lore. One of those who capitalized on this colorful history was John Pendleton Kennedy (1795-1870), American novelist, in his **Horseshoe Robinson: A Tale of the Tory Ascendency in South Carolina, in 1780.**

Sergeant Horseshoe Robinson — the shrewd, homespun, illiterate scout and "sodger" and title-hero of Kennedy's novel—is in the best tradition of American heroes of romantic and historical fiction. Kennedy, however, insisted that Horseshoe was a real person; and there is little reason to doubt that Kennedy had met and had taken a keen delight in the reminiscences of the prototype of his hero, though, on the other hand, no one would doubt that Kennedy threw about his hero a romantic glow which one could hardly expect to find in the original backwoodsman.

Horseshoe, in the prime of vigorous manhood, was endowed with phenomenal physical strength which inured him both to fatigue and privation. There was that in his make-up which caused him to take a sincere delight in the rough and tumble aspects of personal combat and military skirmish. Keen observation and an understanding of human nature left him with an unusual insight into the working of the human mind. But nothing was so characteristic of the Sergeant as his unwavering sense of loyalty to his cause and to his friends.

The action of the novel is not confined to any locale. Rather the characters are shifted here and there, at times as fast as the fastest courser could travel, over much of North Carolina, South Carolina, and part of Virginia—wherever the exigencies o fthe military situation and the interests and welfare of Major Arthur Butler, Horseshoe's special charge, demanded that the hero and the other characters betake themselves. Major Butler had been sent by General Gates on a secret mission to Georgia. Horseshoe was sent along with Butler as guide, companion, and aide. Before reaching their destination, however, Butler and Horseshoe were captured by the Tories. Horseshoe later escaped, but Butler remained in the hands of the enemy throughout most of the tale, being finally rescued during the Battle of Kings Mountain by the daring of the faithful Horseshoe.

The plot of the novel is not a well-knit one. It might rather be described as a series of episodes having to do, in one way or another, with the efforts to secure the release or well-being of Major Butler. This looseness of structure is generally regarded as the chief fault of the story.

The novel, however, is enhanced and, to a degree, held together, by two tender stories of sacrificial and unselfish love—that of Major Butler and Mildred Lindsay and that of John Ramsey and Mary Musgrove. These fictitious characters are made to love and hate, rejoice and suffer, live and die amid the actual campagins of the Revolutionary War and in the presence of actual characters—Lord Cornwallis, General Marion, Colonel Davie, Colonel Cleveland (for whom the county is named), Colonel M'Dowell, and Colonel Sevier, to name a few. To some, this interspersing of fact and fiction without an actual blending of the two seems a fault. However, from this fault—if indeed it be one—perhaps a good deal of the popularity of the story comes. There is something exciting and appealing about the interview between the fictitious Mildred Lindsay and the historical Colonel Tarleton or in the rescue of Major Butler while an actual battle raged. Kennedy handled both fact and fiction admirably, and the modern reader follows the exploits and escapades of the reboubtable Horseshoe with interest.

The novel is not without touches of stark realism. Many of the atrocities and brutalities connected with warfare—such as the gruesome details of hanging and personal combat—are vividly delineated. Perhaps no more gory and repulsive scene is recorded in the annals of Am erican literature than that of the fiendish Wat Adair's skinning alive of the sheep-killing she-wolf as she stood with her head in a trap. Kennedy's novel in spots is not fare for weak stomachs.

Like his contemporaries, Cooper and Simms, Kennedy seems most adept at portraying characters from an humble station in life. Horseshoe, Mary Musgrove, the lovable miller's daughter and John Ramsey, the courageous partisan, are more impressive and life-like than are his characters of education and station like Major Butler and Mildred Lindsay, though one would hardly say that Kennedy has not in these drawn characters of charm and appeal.

The novel is brought to an end by the Battle of Kings Mountain. The victory here over the British and Tories evidently meant to Kennedy the end of the story which Kennedy set out to tell, a story "unspoiled by flag waving sentimentality," yet a vivid portrayal of the feelings and loyalties which divided a people.

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