

A PREACHER ON SLOW TIME

Some Other Interesting Episodes in Mountain Life

By Col. Fred A. Olds

The gentle reader has been told of the fact that in some parts of mountain North Carolina the folks kept three kinds of time—slow, common and fast. At one point on the writer's tramp we ran into a glorious result of this tangle. One of the very prettiest mountain girls was to marry a gentleman from elsewhere; the house was wept and garnished, made lovely and fragrant with the brilliant flowers of that dear high world. The preacher, who lived some miles away, had been chartered for the occasion and booked to appear at a certain minute. All the outfit gathered, the family, the friends and people who go whether they know you or not if there is a wedding, or perhaps even a funeral. When the psychological moment arrived the preacher was conspicuous by his absence. The folks did not have rice to throw at the happy couple, but flowers instead; a delightful exchange, by the way. Thirty minutes passed, each seeming an hour at least, and then the groom and bride-to-be climbed into an auto, which, with glad honks, took to its heels and fled to the nearest railroad station. There a good "Squire" was on hand and tied the knot with neatness and dispatch. Thirty minutes more passed and then there came into view on the one street of the village the preacher, dressed in a Prince Albert coat as long as a lady's old-fashioned riding skirt and an antiquated high hat, commonly called a "beaver" atop of his head. With legs and arms flapping like a wheat reaper he drew up, almost fell from his mule and started to rush into the house. He almost died when he was informed he was an hour late. Poor thing! He was running on slow time and missed ten dollars by exactly sixty minutes. He did not sleep any that night but sat in the porch hand groaning, refusing to be comforted, an dnow has left the neighborhood and migrated into Tennessee. Before he departed he told the folks he had set up his watch and was running on fast time.

Saying good-bye to our good Scotch friend, Mr. Alexander McRae, high up on old Grandfather mountain, the writer tramped merrily away to Linville Falls, stopping at Pineola long enough to make some talk with Uncle Jimmy Stuart, who, in civil war days, "fought" in the 58th North Carolina regiment. Pineola is the southern end of the narrow gauge railroad into Tennessee, and at it are the Kelsey nurseries, which used to be very attractive. From Pineola we went to Crossnore, where there is an excellent Presbyterian school in charge of Dr. and Mrs. Sloop, this good lady being a doctor also. The folks round about call them "missionary doctors." Children were as thick as huckleberries at the school and seemed to come out of the ground like lizards. In that school district there are 183 children between the school ages and 144 were present, an uncommonly fine record. The teachers from various parts of the State have a pleasant building all their own, known as the teacherage, an dthere they served lunch daintily prepared by their dietitian. As soon as we had consumed all of it, this bit of work being thoroughly done, stories were told to the children, who all looked the picture of health.

There are some people with odd notions in the mountains, as elsewhere, and some drunken fellows "of the baser sort," as St. Paul would say, have amused themselves by fir-

ing their guns and pistols at the teacherage. It was plainly stated that the men who do this sort of thing are the sons or grandsons of deserters, of whom there were a good many in that region during the civil war, as it was a sort of no-man's land. Anyway, some of the shooters were captured and sent to prison.

It is declared to be difficult to get teachers in the mountains, this being a big problem in all parts of the State and causing many a county superintendent to sit up at night and groan. It used to be the case that teachers would take four months in the mountain schools, which begin the first of August generally, and then hike down the State and teach another four months, but under the new school law this is thoroughly blocked, for six months school is required.

From Crossnore, where a handsome main building of brick is under construction, well placed upon a hill, the road led by one of the finest farms in all the region, and about this farm there is a story which the reader can verify if he pleases by reference to the official county records. A soldier of the Revolution, returning home after the victory at King's Mountain, saw this farm land, in the valley of the Linville river, and was so delighted that he took it up—in other words, got a State grant for it, raising the money by selling his horse and rifle. Thus he entered or took up 640 acres, one mile, or splendid land, at 12 1/2 cents an acre. Some years passed and a man who had run away from Kentucky with another man's wife entered the neighborhood, having lost his way, and turned up at this very place. He, too, was charmed with it and struck a bargain with the owner by which he traded the stolen wife for the farm. All these facts are duly set out in the papers in the transfer of the land. Those were surely easy times. It is not recorded what the lady in the case thought of the transaction, but she surely stuck to husband No. 3, if he can be given that title, and they located nearby. What became of husband No. 1 does not appear.

Not a great many years ago preachers and magistrates were not extremely plentiful in some parts of the mountains, and into that region, for summer evangelistic work, went a dozen or more students of a theological college in this State. A good many people would rather have a preacher, or a near-preacher, than a squire perform the marriage ceremony in their cases, so the students, not licensed at all, fired away and performed the ceremony a number of times. Then the legislature had to step in and put through an act making these marriages, really no marriages at all, lawful and binding. And this was not fifty years ago, either.

The road passed by Altamont, once the grand home of Col. John B. Palmer, 58th regiment, N. C. State troops, C. S. A. Its grove was one of the finest in the State, with great trees and blue grass, the Linville river running directly through the rich valley. During the war Col. Palmer and his regiment were always at the front, but the deserters, known as buffalos, bushwhackers, etc., burned his house while he was in service. His regiment was the only one in the Confederate service which was allowed after surrender, which occurred near Greensboro, to take its rifles and equipment home, the Federal general who received the surrender saying those weapons would be needed. One of these rifles, a long Enfield, English-made, is now in the Hall of History in Raleigh. W. F. Harper of Lenoir, "L. W. Harper of Lenoir," where it was placed by Maj.



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[When the members of this regiment were discharged the only pay they received was one dollar each in Mexican money. After paying the one dollar around enough money was left to divide one dollar among each seven men. Since all the money was in one-dollar silver pieces the men got together in bunches and drew straws for the dollar. Maj. Harper has the dollar which was given him. Several years ago he had it engraved, showing the date on which he entered the service and the date of his discharge.—Editor.]

Altamont was sold years after the war to a retired naval officer, who built the present home and outfitted it with superb mahogany furniture hauled on wagons from Morganton, installing also objects of art which

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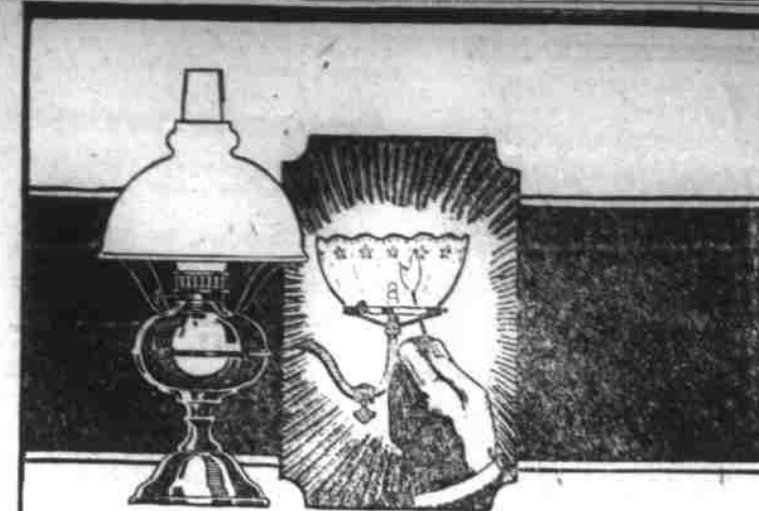
he had gathered in cruises all about in the world. He hauled the lumber from Morganton for his dwelling. Now the house is in other hands, and the place is but poorly kept compared to its former grandeur.

Next on the journey came Linville Falls, easily one of the most delightful places in all the mountain region, though known to but few outsiders. As the writer approached his good friend, the hotel keeper there, Mr. Stokes Penland, ran up with a two-hand welcome. He is a cousin of the late Gov. Vance and has a wonderful knowledge of the mountains.

THEN AND NOW
(Yorkville Enquirer)

Discussion in front of the People's Bank and Trust Company the other morning ran to the high cost of living, and there was a little cussing and discussion. "Of course it costs like everything to live now, but it does not cost near as much as it did during the war between the States," was the argument of a Confederate veteran who was among the party. He took from his pocket a list of some prices that were in effect then. Here is the list as he read it to his little audience: Corn, \$5.85 per bushel; meal, 3.65 per bushel; bacon, \$1 per pound; pork, 60 cents per pound; lard, \$1 per pound; wheat, \$5.50 per bushel; flour \$27 per barrel; sweet potatoes, \$4 per bushel; Irish potatoes, \$2.50 per bushel; onions, \$6 per bushel; salt, \$4.40 per pound; sugar, \$1.75 per pound; molasses, \$8.50 per gallon; rice, 40 cents per pound; coffee, \$3.50 per pound, and tea, \$10 per pound.

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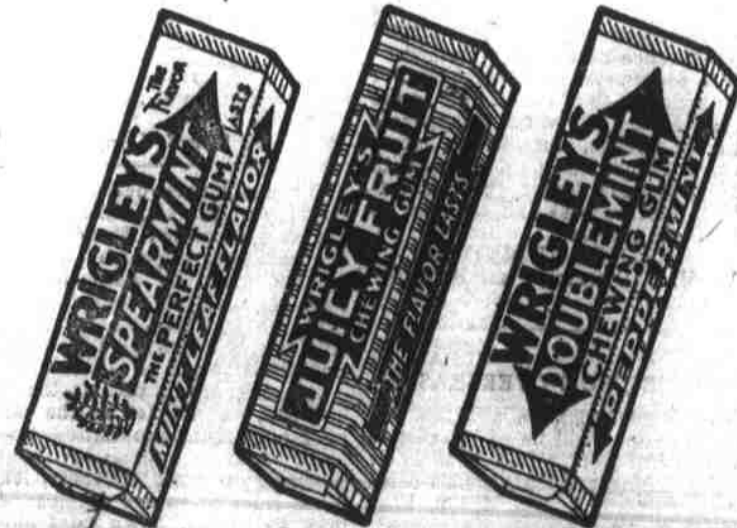
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