

School Days Fifty Years Ago

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Not long ago I had a very interesting conversation with a friend of my grandfather. While discussing my graduation from high school and the coming year at Butler, I was amazed to discover that he had taught school in a rural district some fifty years ago. Naturally I wanted to know all about it because, although I've read much about the strict old schoolmasters who "didn't spare the rod," I had never seen or talked to one. As I listened to his tales, I felt almost as if I were reading the "Hoosier Schoolmaster."

His school was located in a woodsy section some five or ten miles outside of a small town in southern Indiana. It was a one room red brick building and had (I believe he said) two or three windows and just one door. It was heated by a medium-sized coal stove, and the only fixtures were a blackboard, a desk of a sort for the teacher, and desks ranging from very small to fairly large for the pupils. The pupils ranged from little girls with fat, shiny pigtales to tall, lanky boys of fifteen or sixteen. There were only about thirty in the entire school and just two or three in each class. In the morning he would play

his violin, and they would all sing; and then the younger ones would draw while he taught the older ones their "reading, writing, and 'rithmetic."

Every Christmas it was customary that the schoolmaster should bring candy for all the children. Now, one Christmas, the teacher decided to fool the pupils — he decided to wait until time to leave to give them their candy. As the day before Christmas vacation passed, the children grew more restless, and near the end of the day when the teacher went out to the old well to get some water, the older boys slipped the inside bolt and locked him out. When they wouldn't let him in, he just locked the door with the big brass key he always carried in his pocket and decided to go to a neighboring house for a short time to punish them. When he returned thirty minutes later, he opened the door to find that the school house was empty. The prisoners had knocked out a window and crawled out. The only thing that still puzzles this friend of my grandfather is this — the windows were very small and he is sure that one of the girls in the class was larger than the window.