

Neighborhood Grocery

Robert Bill

In my eagerness to get out of a cold, blowing, autumnal rain, I pushed open the grocery door without first pausing to look through the rattling pane. The door swung wide, bumping into a inconveniently-placed carpenter, a carpenter so interested in getting the measurements to cut down an old board to fit the last spot in a new vegetable shelf, that he took no notice of me but, reaching for pencil and saw hurried on in an attempt to finish his almost-completed task. Stumbling against something I looked down and found baskets full of macaroni and mustard, dog-food and bird-seed scattered all over the floor. I picked my way to the meat counter and clanked two empty milk bottles on the case in a futile attempt to attract attention. As I waited, I looked curiously about the neighborhood grocery and meat market. Once again the supplies were being rearranged and the walls were taking on a new color. Mr. Tule leaned between empty shelves and smeared strong-smelling green paint over the plaster backing, while Mrs. Tule stood in the back room, arguing with the colored delivery boy. I decided to leave and return later; I picked my way back to the rainy sidestreet.

On my return trip I edged in behind a bent old man; I found a place to stand and turned to watch this aged customer. With well chosen steps, he found his way to the bread case, felt for a fresh loaf, and looking over his spectacles, glanced about for Mrs. Tule. Nodding childishly, he picked out the correct change and placed it in her hand. He then drew

his sweater more closely about him and went his way, back into the wet street.

As I watched Mrs. Tule grope in the old-fashioned icebox for my milk, I noticed a large woman standing at the meat counter. I had been attracted by her deep masculine voice. It was necessary to look closely to determine that the plump Irish grocer-butcher was not talking to himself. Instead he was listening thoughtfully and administering excellent service, something unusual for Mr. Tule.

The delivery boy chugged up to the curb in the store's dilapidated truck, as I shut some shavings in the door and splashed along the slippery sidewalk.

Oldest House In Town

Marthana McWhir

We often visited the stately and dignified "oldest house in town." Its ancient red brick was slowly crumbling; its weather-beaten window and door casings were flaking away, and its high old dormer windows stared sorrowfully on the rushing world beneath them. On the inside, one was greeted by the very large, dim hall, lighted only by the long, narrow stained glass windows. Deep lavenders and greens blended with the golden yellows to cast a cathedral-like glow over the interior. A massive, dark-grained oak staircase (which matched the other woodwork) lined one side of the hall, with "cubby corners" built in beneath it. At the end of the hall a gold-framed mirror stretched from floor to ceiling, lending to the unusual room an atmosphere of both

hospitality and majestic grandeur.

The rest of the gloomy downstairs had no particularly distinguishing features, and always reminded us of a fat, morbid old lady, clothed all in black, who would live in lonely solitude, letting her thoughts fall on her youth with all its gay parties, and grieving heavily over the changes time had brought. The upstairs, so sunny and quiet, reminded us of a tiny, frail old lady, clothed all in gray, who would also live alone, but cheerfully dreaming of her happy life, and the little ones who have left her one by one, showing the passage of time on her face, but sweetly and patiently awaiting her earthly departure.

But more than the dark downstairs, or the prim upstairs, we loved the attic. Dusty, discarded bedsteads jutted out from the walls or loomed dangerously over-head; dark corners bulged with mysterious bundles, and dingy trunks hidden under the rafters held endless stores of yellowed garments and musty papers and letters. From the tiny, cob-webbed back windows we could see the carriage house, and our visits were never complete without going out to it.

The empty stalls which had once stabled restless, spirited horses, the "twisted" stairs leading up to the coachman's quarters, and there the stuffy, silent rooms—all gave an air of emptiness and sadness. One always felt the grandeur of a departed age, a twinge of dissatisfaction for modern life.

We always left the old house—loving, it and feeling more closely in touch with by-gone times, about which we had read, but could never comprehend.

Plowing

John Crawford

It is a hot spring day. The sky is a soft bright blue, flecked with snowy white clouds. The sun shines warmly down on the black plowed earth. The air is warm and moist. The plowed ground seems moist and steaming. As the horse turns at the end of the field, the man at the plow pauses before setting the broad breaking-plow into the earth again. He gazes at the furrow just completed, swings his shoulders and clucks to the big, patient horse.

As the plow is set the horse leans against the tugs. Leather slaps against leather and the collar creaks as the horse lowers his head in effort. The man calls in a low tone and the plow starts. The horse's big feet hit the ground firmly but almost soundlessly. Muscles ripple in his neck and shoulders as he pulls. His sleek head shines in the sun.

The man leans forward between the plow handles, swinging his body powerfully to keep the plow straight and level. His faded blue shirt is patched with dark stains of sweat. He calls tensely to the horse now and then.

The dry corn-stalks rustle and crack as the huge clods of black moist earth are turned over. The gleaming plowshare, beautifully curved, turns the earth smoothly and without effort. The tug chains rattle as the horse misses his footing and lurches slightly.

When the end of the furrow is reached the horse snorts and tosses his head. The harness rattles loosely. The man rests on the plow handles, and gazes out across the fields. In the distance a crow flaps lazily across the sky. The harness rattles again as the horse shifts weight. The faint caw of the distant crow is heard, softened and sweetened by the distance.

