

The Imitated

William Phelps

THE town was very small. Houses were located on two opposing hillsides separated by a valley which contained a single track railroad running the length of the valley and disappearing at either end into a tunnel. On either side of the railroad track was a gravel street, giving the town two main streets, each dwarfed in importance by the railroad. Scattered haphazardly along the two streets was the town's business section which consisted of two general

stores, a barber shop, a gasoline filling station, a post office, and a depot, all of which faced the railroad track, regardless of which street they were on. Atop one of the hills were the two-room grade school, and the gymnasium which housed the two-year high school. The story that circulated around the town was that the school had been built on top of the hill to emphasize the fact that when the student completed the prescribed number of years in the school, he had attained the top in what the town had to offer in the way of public education. We who occupied the school knew that it was built on top of the hill so that we would have the long climb to get there and so that our parents could always see when school was out.

I moved to this town as a grade school student. I met Jim Howerton the first evening that I was returning home from school late because of basketball practice. Early fall it was, and the valley was quiet and seemingly deserted except for the howl of an occasional lonesome dog and the answering howl of another from somewhere in the distance. The smoke of the first fires of fall curled upward in lazy, gentle spirals from the chimneys as though they were arms lifted toward the sky in supplication for their owners. I paused to look at the quiet, calm serenity of the valley and heard a voice say, "Beautiful, isn't it, Son?" Turning, I saw the figure of a white-thatched elderly man sitting in a straight-backed rocking chair on the porch, smoking a pipe in little puffs as though he were sending Indian smoke signals. Little did I realize the friendship that would develop between the two of us. In the years that followed we became the best of friends. He was the quiet spoken, thoughtful, clear-eyed, straight-backed man, and I was the boy with the eager face and ears.

And I think of him and of the many hours that we spent talking of the various things of life which Jim had met and passed, leaving him a broadened, wizened man of integrity and character, and of the time that I first realized that I, too, would go through many of the same experiences. I think of the many nights that I went with Jim to the post office to pick up the one pouch of mail, take it to the train, and return to the post office with the in-coming mail. Usually the incoming mail consisted of one pouch, but always on the week preceding Christmas there were at least two pouches. I remember thinking that it must be nice to know that the United States trusted you with the mail and with a key to the back door of the post office, and I knew that it was nice that Jim trusted me and would let me go along with him, and that he enjoyed my company, as I did his. I felt as though I was trusted too when I would go into the back of the post office with Jim, a place where I had never been before, a place I had seen only from the front through barred windows.

Jim knew and numbered among his friends many of the people of yesterday and today who were and are considered to be the successful, influential people. I recall how some of those people thought

of Jim Howerton, and I was awed. I thought that here was a man of seemingly naught but good friends and wonderful memories of a life well lived, a man with malice in his heart toward no one, a man who sought for, deserved, and attained the respect and love of many. I realized that life for us all is a continual imitation. Our walk, our talk, our actions, our words, and our deeds are all patterned after someone in our lives with whom we have come into contact. Consciously or subconsciously, we imitate. Here then, was a man who could be imitated; here was the first man to turn my thoughts and actions from those of a child to those of a man.

Jim no longer is alive to pass on his experiences, thoughts, and philosophy. His memory is alive, not only in my mind, but in the minds of many; for Jim passed through life ever pausing to give a helping hand, continuing his journey with a smile and leaving behind him on the faces of those with whom he had paused, a pleasant smile. He left with me this bit of his wisdom: "Keep your aim in life high; it pays, for you pass this way but once."

Square Root to Nowhere

Jo Ann Niehaus

I COULD sympathize with Mr. Thurber when he wrote of his troubles in school, although his difficulty was botany and mine was, and is, math. It was a struggle for me to learn that two and two are four, and I never mastered the multiplication tables. I had no interest in interest, and ratios captured my attention only when used in reference to Purdue—the ratio there is five to one.

This aversion to all things mathematical began in grade school. My fourth grade teacher had a favorite method of passing time which almost failed to pass me. She had several cards on which simple problems were printed. One by one each child would be called upon to answer. I mentally answered each one, 4×8 equals 32; $15 \div 3$ equals 5 until it was my turn to recite. Then my mind went completely blank; one plus one did not even equal two. After giving several wrong answers, I occasionally gave the right one, and with a sigh the teacher flipped over a new card and called on someone else.

In the seventh and eighth grades, the arithmetic teacher was one of those who delighted in giving tests. This in itself would not have been bad if she had not reminded us everyday for a week that we were to have a test. I dreaded arithmetic tests almost as much as I