

# sketches in retrospect

by

robert putt

"Earle, Glenn, where are you?"

No answer. Another call. Then, hearing two boyish voices emerging from among the trees along the river bank, the mother rushed down the steep slope. Thoughts of wet feet, colds, pneumonia, and doctor's bills occupied her mind in rapid succession. She has forbidden these young rascals time and time again to play near the edge of the river. Well, she would teach them to obey her this time.

The shouts and the laughter increased as did the indignation and concern of the mother.

When she arrived at the bottom of the bank and rounded the bend of the stream, she caught her breath, struggling to keep back her words of reproach, for there with the two boys was a slim figure of medium height, a man having a most happy frolic. He was their father. Attired in overalls, and wearing a pair of hip boots, he was standing in the middle of a makeshift raft that threatened imminent disintegration, and was paddling feverishly with a piece of board in a vain effort to get the home-made craft out into mid-stream. The teetering of the raft repeatedly forced the leader of his expedition to grope grotesquely for his balance in such a way as to call

forth the admiring shouts which had led the mother to the scene of action.

Alongside the raft waded the two little boys, miniature Robinson Crusoes, each shoving, lifting, and tugging at the boards to help along the cause of navigation.

What could a mere woman do in such a situation? The harrassed little lady did what she could—nothing. Silently, shaking with laughter, she returned to the house and discreetly forgot the incident.

Through experiences like this one the author's father entered deeply into the lives and affections of his boys. His sense of humor and love of play saved many a day when his otherwise uncontrollable temper often would have inflicted a warm feeling upon us all—at the SEAT of the difficulty.

## southland

Deems Taylor says, "American popular songs are written by people who want to be someplace other than where they are."

It does seem that most people have a longing to travel. The author has had this longing fulfilled in part, although with each new experience, there comes a desire for further adventure.

When he was six years old his grandmother took him to Florida. What a delight that trip was! The long train ride through new and different country, citrus fruits to eat every day (he had hardly tasted them before), strange trees, and the ocean made every moment one of discovery, and each second one of thrills and excitement for the little boy from an

Ohio farm.

That experience in the South did something to Bob. It stirred something to life within him, a mystical feeling that has never been explained, a sense of belonging to a land far away. The remainder of the family shared the same emotion when it entered the Southland a few years later. Somewhere in the blood of the Marshall family must run a strain of "blue-blood," that of the Virginia aristocracy or the ancient Louisiana nobility.

## changes

When Robert was twelve years of age, he and his grandmother moved from the big farmhouse to the little cottage where Robert had been born, just a half-mile away. This event greatly shaped his life.

An orphan in a home with several other children is not apt to secure an opportunity to express himself. It was so in this boy's case. When he, his grandmother, aunt, uncle, and cousins were living all in one house, friction was bound to occur; it did.

The aunt developed a hatred for her nephew. He was not an easy child to love, anyhow. He was often selfish and possessed a temper which no one would curb. The grandmother "wouldn't hurt the little fellow", and no one else dared to do so. So the aunt saw in Bob all the problems which were caused by the old mother-in-law problem. She had to express her indignation upon some one, and he afforded the line of least resistance.

To this day the boy can remember sitting on one side of the old kitchen range with his aunt on the other side. When the grandmother's back was turned aunt and nephew would make faces at each other until the boy would become frightened or angry enough to cry out. The old lady wondered what was happening, but she never found out.

In this new home new interests were found. There was a garden for flowers and vegetables. There was an attractive yard to keep up. All these things of beauty the author adored. The yard was the prettiest for miles around as a result of his labors upon it, so the people who passed by frequently declared.

The boy's love of beauty expressed itself in another way also. He learned to play simple hymn tunes upon the old reed organ. A neighbor girl showed him the mechanics of the keyboard. The notes of the scale he knew already, for he had taken six lessons on a French horn from an elderly band master whose gruff manners and sharp temper soon forced the embryo musician to abandon the instrument.

This new interest in music served to put him in contact with church again. Religious services were now more enjoyable, for the boy could sing the hymns and read the responses with some sort of meaning. Easter Sunday, 1926, saw him baptized into the Columbia Baptist church, the church of his forefathers.

About this time Robert began to know his father. He had had no desire to know him, for neighbors' prejudices and relatives' jealousies had done their best to separate father and son forever. But an event occurred which changed things. It was the death of little Norma, Robert's half-sister, whom he had never seen. As the family decreed that he should go to the funeral to keep up appearances, much against his own inclinations, he went—on his bicycle.

Trembling with nervousness, he alighted at his destination, wondering what he should do next. His father was in the backyard. Calmly he greeted his oldest son and slipped his arm about his shoulders. That act saved the day. It was the first demonstration of affection that the boy had ever received. Together they went into the house to see the beautiful baby and to

greet the heart-broken mother. Father and son have been close together ever since.

## the lord's day

"No, you can't go out to the barn to play today."

"Why not?"

"Because it's Sunday, that's why. Sunday is the Lord's day. We should rest and read the Bible on Sunday. Work and play on the Lord's day are sinful."

"But isn't every day the Lord's day? And why is it sinful to play on Sunday? What makes Sunday more sacred than the other days?"

This last question was never answered, even though the above conversation occurred every Sunday for some ten years. It was Robert Putt and his grandmother speaking. The poor old lady's Baptist doctrines caused her many a worry when it came to dealing with this grandson whose generation was so different from any of the others before it.

In the first place, all of Mrs. Baker's children had liked to go to church when they were young, but it took a weekly battle of wits and a little armed force thrown in to get this young imp of Satan off to Sunday school. Then, too, he showed no fear or special reverence for the Lord. He was always asking such disconcerting questions.

Robert Louis Stevenson told this story about himself. He had been prevailed upon by a friend to teach a church school class of boys in Samoa. He taught one lesson.

During this first and only lesson he ever taught, everything went well until the teacher ran out of teaching material. Then both R. L. S. and the class sat in stolid silence, each waiting for the other to say something. Finally, with the hope of securing some re-

sponse, Stevenson promised a shilling to the pupil who would ask a question. Still no response. The amount of the prize money was raised. No one said anything. At last, in desperation, Stevenson offered a half crown. A moment of silence elapsed; then a small boy in the corner raised his hand and timidly asked, "Please, Sir, Who made God?" Stevenson never did tell what happened after that.

It was this kind of thing that perplexed the grandmother in this story. Eventually she gave up trying to give her grandson theological instruction and decided that if she could get him to practice the Golden Rule, perhaps he would be saved anyhow. Thus ended the first lessons in Sunday school.

## our ★ finale the puritans

by

mary stierwalt

"Gee whiz, Muth, ain't we ever gonna get anything to eat?" Bud's voice floating up the stairs rudely awakens me. I groan and pull the covers high over my head, but the raucous shouting continues to disturb the peace of the Sabbath morning.

"I'm goin' golfing with Jim, and I'm hungry." Bud draws out the last word plaintively.

"Be quiet, Bud," comes mother's penetrating whisper. "This is Sunday morning."

"I know it is, and I gotta date with Jim at seven o'clock, and, Muth, I'm hun—gry." This last is a wail.

I grind my teeth and dig down deeper into the pillow. But there is no escaping father's booming voice which now is added to the others.

"Bud, you aren't going golfing.