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CHESTERTOWN, MD.
—o—
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R. H. COLLINS, T. D. BOWERS
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JUST FIFTY YEARS AGO.

Dealing With the Manners and Customs of the People in Ye-Olden Times.

MESSRS. EDITORS.—Sunday morning, Feb. 9th, I was awakened by the ringing of the bell of St. John's Church. Hastily arising, I ran to the window and looked out; the ground was covered with snow, and dwellings met my view in every direction. Among the latter stood one of more prominence than the others surrounded by a lawn and cemetry. It was just seven o'clock, several teams were standing in front of the church, the occupants of which were inside engaged in worship. The thermometer stood 8° above zero. The owner of one of the teams was a farmer residing more than six miles from the church. I could imagine no reason for such a sacrifice other than a genuine desire to worship the true God in sincerety; (this was Richard Willson I afterward learned.) Turning from the window I began to dress and while so engaged I was busy with my thoughts, and wondered how long I had slept. When I sought my bed, around me in every direction were forests of heavy timber and but one house in view, now owned by the widow of the late Dominick Ayres, now more than one hundred houses were presented to my view.

Stepping outside of my room, the scenes which confronted me were so different from those with which I was accustomed. I was bewildered and thought surely I am in an inchanted land. From this condition I was aroused by the jingling of small bells. As it approached, I saw that it was a span of horses attached to a beautiful vehicle on runners. Hearing voices in an adjoining room I opened the door to inquire the name of this curious turnout, and every one in the room jumped to their feet and seemed startled at my appearance; some screamed, others were convulsed in laughter, however I was informed that what I had seen was a sleigh. A sleigh! What I knew of a sleigh was two dog-wood sapplings upon which were two benches, resembling a carpenter's trestle, on this was securely fastened a goods-box. We called these Jumpers, in which the lads and lassies merrily rode over the snow and the more frequent they were overturned the greater the enjoyment. The greeting I received, the humorous expressions of the occupants of the room as they gazed upon me, convinced me that I was among a strange people in a strange land. In this perplexity, I began to examine my surroundings, the room, the furniture, the walls and manner in which the room was heated; all so different from what I had been accustomed. In my glimpse around the room, I saw the reflection of a peculiar being, in a large looking glass, (which I was later taught to call a mirror), in it I saw an old man with long unkempt hair and beard, mixed with gray, woolen clothes filled with dirt, trousers reaching to the knees, coat tattered and torn, the sleeves through which his arms protruded, extended to the elbows. As I moved so did this aparition. Upon a close scrutiny I discovered that this figure was none other than myself, and like my surroundings changed, so changed. I began to compare my present surroundings with that before I went to bed, just fifty years ago.

I only knew the old fashioned fireplace in which a log 4ft long could be placed or a ten-plate stove which would hold wood of like dimensions. Around these the family would gather at evenings and tell of the events of the Revolutionary War, or relate ghost stories which made the younger portion of the family afraid to retire. For lamps we had the top of a bucket in which grease was placed and a rag one end of which extended into the air, the other in the grease, those who were able to purchase the tallow used candles, and the manufacturing was done at nights by the family. Another pastime around these fires, was the spinning, carding and cleaning of wool, the knitting of stockings and (hose), boys as well as girls took part in this. Boys were kept at home and not allowed to go out after supper and girls had beaux only when they had arrived at twenty. Some had carpets, but these were confined to the parlor as the shoes worn were filled with nails which were destructful to carpets. Few persons smoked tobacco, and this by pipe, chewing exclusively by men and the rubbing of snuff by women.

One of the most common pieces of furniture was a large side-board upon which was a decanter containing strong drink. The youthful part of the family were permitted to use this and seldom was it abused. When a visitor was announced, as soon as he divested himself of his wrappings, was invited to drink, but seldom was it to excess.

Of course I am trying to adapt myself to these circumstances and find that I enjoy the present methods of warming the rooms, papering the walls, carpeting the floor, all of which is a grand improvement and adds comfort, but I find it difficult to keep in touch with the habits and customs as now practised. We, if we smoked would not think of such a thing as indulging while in the house in company with a lady, in fact a lady would have been insulted at such a liberty, and to inhale the breath of a young man which was polluted with the fumes of strong drink was considered a sufficient cause for his abrupt dismissal. Most every country store sold whiskey, but this was purchased by the slaves principally. Sometimes a few white people would congregate and imbibe but seldom to excess. Speak-easies, walking bars, and floats were like pear cider, they did not exist and no dictionary contained such terms.

Another feature to which I find it difficult to accustom myself is the new manner of casting votes. We used a narrow strip of paper upon which were the names of those to be voted, but your way requires a sheet of paper about the size of the Kent News then, and I find that it requires one to be proficient in Sweden Sloid work to enable him to properly fold it. In buying of votes I find no improvement only there are a few more now than there were then. The county was divided into three districts and in 1854 about 80 were purchaseable; now I am told there are but 700.

In farming rapid progress has been made both in cultivation and in implements. I have spent days treading out wheat by riding horses over it until it was threshed out. I have also used the flail, cut the wheat with a scythe, shelled corn by the hand and covered wheat with a plow. Your way is far better than fifty years ago. The next articles will deal with schools and churches of ye olden times.

JUST FIFTY YEARS AGO.

OYSTER LAW CHANGES.

The Shellfish Commissioners have held several conferences as to changes in the Haman Oyster Culture law suggested by their experience in administering it. They have had the assistance of the counsel, ex-Senator Thomas H. Robinson, of Harford county, in drafting the proposed amendments, which are now ready for the consideration of the Legislature.

Mr. Walter J. Mitchell, the president of the commission, says that in preparing the amendments the object in view has been to quicken revenue results from the law and to augment the industrial opportunities it offers to the people of Maryland. Under the law as it stands there are delays in regard to the leasing of lots that do not seem necessary, now that the purpose of the law is well understood.

"For example," said Mr. Mitchell, "Anne Arundel county, the first county surveyed, was opened for leasing on April 2, 1907. The law provides that for a period of four months after the filing of the official charts an appeal may be taken from the finding of the commission. Four a period of four months ripaian owners have the exclusive right to rent lots in adjacent waters, and then for an additional period of six months working oystermen have the exclusive right of leasing. Hence, it is only after the expiration of 10 months after the completion of the survey of the waters of any county that leasing is open to all residents of Maryland. So great a delay in securing for the State the full revenue benefits of the law seems unreasonable, in view of the fact that all interests have now had ample notice. The practical work of the commission during the last two summers demonstrates that the great revenue plan contemplated by the Oyster Culture law cannot be extended throughout the tidewater section until two more years have elapsed.

One of the amendments proposed shortens to two months the period in which riparian owners have the exclusive right to take up water lots adjacent to their lands, and then the working oystermen are to have a similar period. The effect will be to open to the general public areas for leasing four months after the filing of the survey charts in any county, instead of 10 months, as at present. "The expenditures of the survey," said Mr. Mitchell, "represent a permanent investment on the part of the State, and the revenue possibilities will not be fairly displayed until leasing privileges are open to all citizens of Maryland."

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