

Matrimony and Mulality

And then we were married.

There were several reasons why we didn't take a honeymoon trip after the ceremony. On our wedding night the temperature was seven degrees above zero. Two or three nights later it dropped to thirteen below. That seemed reason enough for staying at home, especially as our only mode of traveling was by horse and buggy.

Another reason we did not make the trip was money, or the lack of it. After we bought our wedding clothes and furniture, and made a down payment on a farm, which we called Knoxdale, we scarcely had enough left for garden seeds—and garden seeds were very important.

There were other reasons, of course: a house to furnish, a farm to plow, not to mention a family to start; and, of course, there might possibly have been at the back of my mind an idea that I didn't relish getting too far away from home with "that strange man."

We started housekeeping during the worst winter our part of the country had known in years. Snow was nearly a foot deep, and that was unusual for Tennessee, especially if it stayed on

the ground for more than a day or so. And this snow did. It was plenty cold and our “new” old farmhouse was not built for sub-zero spells.

A big, bleak house it was: a thirteen-room colonial, nearly a hundred years old, with rooms eighteen feet square, high ceilings, big windows, wide doors with plenty of air coming in all around, six hungry black-throated fireplaces, rough floors with a creak in every joint, and oh, so full of vacancy!

Lucky we were that during that January honeymoon we had accumulated nine quilts; and I also felt very fortunate in the fact that the bridegroom was a good wood-cutter. We had four to eight inches of snow over everything most of that winter and all our wood had to be dug out from under it and dried before burning. Don't ask me how we started the first fire to dry the first wood—probably with wedding-present wrappings and corncobs from the ramshackle old barn, bless it.

My farmer-husband had bought the farm because the land was good. The house just happened to be thrown in as an after thought. It was an old plantation manor house built during slavery days and seemed designed to keep slave labor continually employed. I thought many times as I wrestled with the dirt in the cracks and reached for the cobwebs on the ceilings that if Abe Lincoln had ever tried to clean up that house, he might have been tempted to join the Rebels.



A Stove, A Bed, A Hopechest

During some cozy pre-honeymoon evenings, poring over the mail-order catalog, we had selected and ordered all the furniture our budget would bear after the farm's down-payment had been made. And we had been expecting that furniture to arrive weeks, or at least days, before the wedding. But because of the unusually bad weather, shipments had been delayed, and we were obliged to set up housekeeping with a few pieces bought on credit locally or handed down from relatives. We had barest necessities, and not many of those.

Those necessities, however, became the mother of numerous inventions. We did have, fortunately, a cookstove, bed and blankets, a few pots and pans, and several wedding presents, which included four sugar spoons, six butter knives, three pairs of salt and pepper shakers, some linen dinner napkins, four cut glass vases, and a set of silver.

However, we found ourselves woefully lacking a table on which to use the linen and silver, and chairs to use around said table, or anywhere else. Worse, we had no biscuit cutter! And my new husband was one of the kind who must have biscuits three times a day, especially at breakfast. Even if he had toast (or even a hoecake) for breakfast, he wanted a biscuit to eat with it, so I pressed the smallest cut glass vase into service as a biscuit cutter.

The cedar hope chest, which Grandpa Ussery had made for me in teen-age days, was placed in the middle of the big

kitchen and used for a table. For chairs the bridegroom used an up-ended soapbox, and the bride sat lightly on a decrepit lardstand.

Necessity mothered around until she helped us find a use for most of our wedding presents except the butter knives and sugar spoons. We carefully wrapped three sugar spoons and five knives in Irish linen napkins, and stored them away in the hope chest as surplus assets.

The house seemed so big and so empty I felt obliged to fill in some of the spaciousness while we waited for the delayed furniture. And a hope chest table with soapbox and lardstand chairs contributed little to artistic meals. So I began rummaging around in basement, barn, and buggy-shed.

The families who had lived there before had obviously done a thorough job of moving. I did, however, find a pair of broken-down carpenter's "horses"—one a little taller than the other—and some old boards that had been used for shelves in the basement; and with a brick for a hammer—almost like a woman of the stone age—I fashioned a table. Rickety though it was, it would display our bridal linens and silver—although there was no one to see them but ourselves. Weather was still too bad for visiting.

Meanwhile my husband had taken ax in hand and gone to the woods to rustle up fuel for the hungry fireplaces and the omnivorous cookstove. That was the meanest cookstove that a woman ever wanted to put her foot under and kick out the

door. Before the second meal was cooked we admitted that we had probably been victims of super-salesmanship. Besides, stovewood dug out from under the snow wasn't conducive to the baking of light biscuits.

I had believed before I was married that I really could make good biscuits, but that stove soon taught me otherwise. It sputtered and sobbed and remained sadly cold for an exasperatingly long time after the fire was kindled. Rarely in less than an hour could I get it hot enough to raise the biscuits; and rarely indeed, and then only if the wind was in the right direction, would it condescend to give them a tint of brown.

How I ever did it I don't know, but for a long fifteen years I worried with that old stove. Just because we had paid \$42.40 for it, we thought we had to use it. (We really were that "scotch.")



A Town Girl Copes

"Well, they say Alex married a town girl!"

That, I suppose, is the way our wedding was announced among his rural friends and kin.

What the town-bred kinfolds on my side of the house said was probably something like this, "I reckon she's done right well; he seems to be a good sort of fellow, practical, sturdy, steady, and a Christian gentleman."

What his family really thought of the marriage I am not sure, but would suspect that the consensus (with a sigh of relief) was, “He’s the one who’ll have to live with her.”

One thing, at least, I knew quite well when I said, “I do,” and went to the farm. I knew I didn’t know anything about farming. My farmer-husband fortunately knew a great deal and he delighted in teaching me.

Nevertheless, there seemed a stigma attached to my ignorance. I imagined that the entire neighborhood, and especially the in-laws, were pitying the poor farmer who had married a town girl. “She doesn’t know how to do a thing,” I imagined they were saying when I was barely out of earshot. So I thought I’d show them. I’d make them say, “What a smart woman! What an industrious housewife! She can do anything! She works all the time! Isn’t he fortunate!”



So I Thought I'd Show Them

So, like the woman in Proverbs, I arose while it was yet night to give meat (and biscuits and gravy and hoecakes and hot coffee) to my household. I always took pains to look at the clock so I could tell people what time I got up that morning. I always put a lighted lamp in the front window (not under a bushel), so the neighbors could see I wasn't lazy, not early in the morning, anyway.



Mail Order Education

This may or may not have been the reason I planned to make my garden on the side of the house nearest the road. As soon as the snow had melted enough for the mail carrier to travel our country lane, I sent off a batch of penny postcards ordering seed catalogs and government bulletins. They were to help with my agricultural education.

I got bulletins telling how to raise poultry, cucumbers, tomatoes in greenhouses, treat diseases of fruit trees, make cows give more milk, build iceless refrigerators, remodel kitchens, cure sick calves, make pickles, use tankage for hogs, smoke meat, bake bread, and grow corn. As I remember, there were seventy-one bulletins in that first package. Others followed.

I read and studied those bulletins carefully. Much of the time while Alex was out cutting wood, feeding stock, turning land, fixing fences, and doing other jobs an old farm must have

done, I was reading and re-reading how cucumbers ought to be trained, how poultry ought to be fed, how pigs ought to be nurtured. I accumulated such a store of information that soon it was my turn to do some telling, and my time to be laughed at for the impractical things I had found in books. “Book farmer,” he called me, also “Book cook,” “Book housekeeper,” and later I became a “Book mother.”



The Most For My Money

One of the first projects that the government bulletins and I tried to carry out was a crop of cabbage. The seed catalogues too were partly responsible for this idea. Is there anything that will fan the flames of early spring garden fever faster than a stack of seed catalogs? These I had; and then, too, I had a skeptical audience.

In the catalogues we got that year the tomatoes were magnificently red; the beans preponderously long, the peas exceedingly fat. But, ah! the cabbages! Such heads I have never seen before or since—except in later catalogues. One head was so large (in the picture) that the gardener, who was admittedly a small man, had to use a ladder to climb on top of it.

So I decided that would be my major crop. Alex laughed at me as much as a Scotsman can laugh. “A man couldn’t work on a diet of cabbage!” Then I explained that my cabbages would

go to market. He wouldn't have to eat a single head unless he specially wanted to, and even then he'd have to get tolerably cabbage-hungry before I'd put any on the family table. My cabbage growing was to be a business proposition. I intended the cabbages to help raise the mortgage.

Well, who did I think would buy the cabbages, he scoffed. Anyone who wanted cabbage to eat could grow his own, and folks in town who couldn't didn't care about the stuff anyway. There wasn't any need to try growing anything on a farm to sell except corn, mules, and hogs, and perhaps a few potatoes.

But I thought differently. The government and I had ideas about cabbage growing and I had ideas about cabbage marketing, and the seed catalogue bore out both. The plea I made to him was that if he and the mules would plow up that little patch of ground adjoining the garden I would take care of growing the cabbage, and the merchants in town would sell them. I had already investigated that and had a promise of \$1 a dozen heads for what they could sell of the earliest crop.

He plowed the ground and I ordered the seeds, three attractive packages of highly recommended varieties: early, mid-season, and late. Then I made a seedbed in a sunny spot under the kitchen window, covered it over with one of my hope chest sheets. And thus the cabbage project began.

Meanwhile there was the home garden to start. The seed catalogue and the government bulletins helped with that. I studied carefully everything that each booklet said and tried

to follow directions. Alex did the plowing and enjoyed the fresh vegetables, but there his interest stopped. Gardening, to him, was a sissy business.

We had a full garden that first year. I planted vegetables I had never before heard of, vegetables that appeared only in the seed catalogs. They were so new to me I didn't recognize them when they came up, or couldn't distinguish them from weeds, many of which were as new to me as the vegetables. This lack of intelligent discrimination undoubtedly brought about the destruction of most of my rhubarb, chives, chard, endive, and other rarities. But even then we did have a very good garden.

And the cabbage patch, be it noted, was very productive indeed. All told, the market took enough heads to give me \$75, most of which went for door and window screens, for furniture, and for fruit jars. The fruit jars were filled, according to government directions, with blackberries, wild plums, seedling peaches from the fence rows; beans, pickles, tomatoes, and sauerkraut from the cabbage I couldn't sell. Those three packages of cabbage seed spread themselves out very well even though I never did have to use a ladder to climb up and sprinkle on the bug dust.

And it all was so much more fun than teaching school!



Mulality

Before, during, and for some time after World War I our home county, the limestone-bluegrass band of Middle Tennessee, was noted for its donkeys—or more accurately, its sons and daughters of donkeys: mule-colts. For a long time, it seems, the farmers didn't know, until the mules showed them, these little brown pebbles and slabs of phosphate mingled among the bits of hay and pasture were building an uncommonly good strong “bone” in young mules.

The same nourishment that builds “bone” in young mules also builds “bottom” for maturity, and “bottom” in mule men's lingo means sturdiness, stamina, and endurance—in other words, mule power and will power to pull a heavy load to the end of a row and back again, or to the end of the road.

We were married in the midst of a mule boom. Mules made a deep and lasting impression on me in my early years of matrimony. For one thing, they made it possible for my husband to take a wife. For another, they were the backbone of our farming, and our main cash crop.

To me, mule men rated next to preachers and doctors. Preachers saved souls, doctors saved bodies, and mulemen were the saviors of our pocketbook. The trick was to buy weaning mule colts in September, hold them for a couple of years, then sell them back to the traders for enough to buy twice as many. Alex started with a little money from his corn crop, which he invested in a single mule colt. From there he built up his mule

capital to 23 at one point (although the arithmetic does not quite figure), and sold most of these for the down payment on the farm.

Our early years of near poverty were like the bit in the mule's mouth. We were held in check by it and guided along a narrow path. Everything we had was tied up in the young mules. We could not buy furniture, clothes, farm equipment, or anything else except by selling mules. They existed for us, but it seemed that we also existed for them.

That first year of matrimony, I was not unaware of the economics of all this, but I had too many things to learn about the farm and setting up a household. Even so, there was not all that much to do since there were just the two of us to cook and wash for and we had little furniture to dust. While Alex worked in the fields, I found time to ramble about the farm, to look for wild flowers, or sometimes just to sit quietly in the shade crocheting or tatting lace for sheets to match our pillowslips.

On one of those quiet lazy afternoons, Alex was plowing Old Kate, Blue, and Brownie just out of sight on the other side of a hill. I had taken him some water and was sitting under a tree at the far end of the field. All of a sudden I heard a loud cry from a place just out of sight around the bend of the furrow. It meant, "Come quick!" Frightened, I dropped what I was doing and ran along the furrow as fast as I could.

What a spectacle! Man, mules, harness, and plow were so mixed and tangled that I could hardly tell where one left off

and the other began. It seemed that somehow in the process of turning a corner, a lever had hung, a harness strap had broken, or something had happened that made the mules fall backward over one another, and the big heavy plow had been upset on top of them. How the man escaped I don't know, but when I got there, he was trying to hold the mules down to keep them from struggling and cutting themselves on the plow.

What he wanted me to do was to hold those three floundering mules quiet while he got the harness loose and turned the plow over and off them. It seems that as long as a mule's head is down, the mule must stay down, too. So all I had to do was to sit on the heads of three frightened, struggling animals while harness and plow could be removed. Nothing in my government bulletins had prepared me for this.

When we finally got them untangled, we found that two of the mules were not badly hurt, but Brownie, our lead mule, who had been on top of the other two and immediately under the plow, was badly injured. The disc of the plow had sliced into her flank in several places, and the two levers of the plow had gouged deeply into her hip and side. She was trembling in pain and fright.

Alex ran across the field to a neighbor's house to telephone a veterinarian. I led Brownie and trailed the other mules to the barn as best I could.



My First Degree

The doctor did not believe—and Alex and I hardly dared hope—that she could live. The vet suggested a treatment that *might* save her. Alex believed that it would be better to shoot her. If I'd had any sense or known my condition (somewhat pregnant, if it's possible to be “somewhat” when there are no signs you are yet), I would not have pleaded her cause. But I didn't, so I did. I argued my dubious husband into letting me care for her since obviously no one else could do it. He gave in with the understanding that he was not to be bothered with her, no matter what.

Nothing in my past experience prepared me for the role of mule nurse. But with the courage of fools who rush in ahead of angels and a naïve will to succeed, I took on a new chore. It turned out to be a long, painful convalescence both for her and me. But I think that we each learned something.

Although the vet had prescribed the treatment, the technique of restoring her to health was left strictly up to me. And on this I had no person or reference book to fall back on. So I improvised, calling upon the best of motherly instincts, and happy in a sense that it was a mule instead of a person who had been so wounded in the accident. Brownie seemed to understand I was trying to help her and put up with me even when I was awkward and clumsy.

What I did was to go first to the stable next to hers. Then through the cracks I would feed her a few ears of corn to quiet

her down. After that, as my husband had left the bridle on her, I could lead her gently into the enclosed hall of the barn. She liked to have her nose rubbed and at the same time I would talk to her. When we reached the right spot, I tied her head up high to the corn crib door.

While she was eating, I had mixed a solution of Creolin disinfectant and water, according to the vet's instructions. It made a milky solution which I set in a nearby feed trough. Then I took a big syringe with a long pipe on one end and filled it. I needed one hand to pat her and two to operate the syringes. I always needed a third hand.

She had blinders on her bridle and could not see what I was doing. But she felt in her bones what I was up to. Her side was so torn that I had to put the syringe way up into the wound to do any good. She flinched, but never once kicked or dodged despite the pain. She just stood there and shivered. I started with the worst place and went on to four or five others. This happened three times a day—after breakfast, dinner, and supper. It went on for several months before her side was healed.

During that long, hot, anxious summer, Brownie and I did a lot of thinking together. I guess that was when we had the best chance to study each other, and concluded which had the “person-ality” and which had the “mul-ality.” Observing the way she met her misfortunes and endured my crude treatments, I became certain that she must have more than human personality. And I rather believe that from the way she

observed my determination that she should get well, especially when both my husband and the vet were so doubtful...well, I imagine she suspected I had a certain degree of mulality; at least she seemed to respect me as a fellow creature. Witness that never during all that time did she ever twitch an ear or lift a heel.

Now I believe that you will have to admit that in a mule—a sick, suffering, and bewildered one—that is something. At least, when our “Graduation Day” came, when I laid the syringe of Creolin solution forever in the feed trough, patted the patches of white hair that would cover the scars and mark her for the rest of her days as a blemished mule—when I patted her nose declaring her recovered and awarded myself a degree of “Mule Doctor”—she lightly, ever so slightly, switched her tail. As it was December, there were no flies around, either, and if you know mules, you must admit, “That is something.”

I thought Brownie’s mulality was beyond bravery and courage. She had been so critically cut, slashed, gouged, and sliced on her side and hip by the overturned hillside disc plow that she must have gone through terrible pain. My treatments with the huge syringe of Creolin shot into and around the raw flesh three times a day must have hurt even more. But I was sure that more than all the rest, she was hurt by being kept in the dark stable alone while the rest of the mules were in the field working. A mule is a sociable animal who wants to be with her kind. How slighted she must have felt when all the

other mules were taken out of the barn each day and she was left alone. Brownie could not tell her troubles to anyone, and she suffered in silence, patient, alone, uncomplaining for all those long months.

Anyhow, it was our considered opinion, mine and Brownie's (which had developed during that eventful summer), that neither mulality nor personality are a sudden something. It must begin with ancestors and be a long time agrowing—nurtured by man, nature, and a lot of other things we don't or didn't understand.

Some man, I believe it was, perhaps trying to be poetic, made a much quoted statement that a mule is "without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity." As to Brownie's ancestry, we both believe he was wrong. Although neither of us ever knew her father, he must surely have been one of the finest of imported Spanish jackasses. Only a jackass can become the father of a mule, and breeders know well enough that the best can be imported only from Spain. George Washington's own account books are said to prove that! He spent a great deal of money for Spanish donkeys, it is said. Others have done the same, many breeders' bank accounts agree.

Her mother must have been one of the best of mares, probably a Morgan, or a "dowager" Tennessee walking horse. Now ancestors like those, in my book, are not to be sneered at or sniffed at either.

As for posterity, the men who wrote the dictionary took care of that when they put it down in writing that “mules are usually sterile.”

Now about my own ancestors and what they might have to do with such qualities as stickability—which must be a quality of both mulality and personality—I can only suspect that it took a great deal of something to get great Grandpa Adam through his “recovery program.” And I still believe that the only reason Mother Eve reached up and pulled down that apple was that she got tired of waiting for Adam to do it. I doubt also whether she ever got more than the peeling and the core for her trouble.



Not So Dumb

Once I earned my self-awarded M.D. degree in mule doctoring, I found that I could not stop there but would have to go on for an advanced degree. For this period of my life, during the First World War, the Government kept men traveling in our part of the country just to buy up mules. Prices rose by leaps and bounds, until one mule might bring as much or more than two fine horses, or a matched team, up to \$1000.

We started matrimony with three mules and increased them to nearly the number Alex had before he made the down-payment on our farm. When the war ended and the mule

market broke, we lost what was our main, and for a while, our only cash crop. But in the meantime, I earned enough more about mules and mulality to award myself an A.M. degree—Admirer of Mules.

My favorite mule was Kate, our “cotton” mule.¹ She was a lady. She reminded me of my dainty Aunt Daisy who made the hoecakes. Kate was precious and understanding. Whenever there was anything tedious to do, we called on her and she could be counted on. When it came to drawing a harrow, she was our lead mule. Once off in the right direction, all one had to do was follow her along. She could hold a perfectly straight line across the field and knew just when and where to turn. She led the others and as long as she was leading, there was rarely any trouble. I thought of Kate as the mule whose hand would always have gone up first in the grade school classroom if she had been a little girl instead of a mule.

Old Tobe was the opposite of Kate in every way. He was a big “sugar” mule with a tremendous amount of brawn (bottom) and consecrated listlessness. He hated to leave the barn and was

¹ Mules vary greatly in size depending on their breed. There were five mule types based on size, which dictated the use the mule would be employed at. The smallest was the pack or mining mule, as little as 500 pounds. Cotton mules were the next size up, sired by a burro on a pony, then the farm mule. Sugar and draft mules were the same height, about eighteen hands; the sugar mule was lighter in weight, about 1,150 pounds, and the draft mule weighed in at about 1,300 pounds—they were the largest and heaviest mule breed.

always ready to come back. It was a battle of wits on how to use him to suit his mood (mulality). If you put him on the inside of a four-mule team drawing a disc harrow, he would draw the three other mules, me, and the disc harrow out of the ground and dash back to the barn. If he got hitched up on the outside, I found that I could never turn in the opposite direction.

It was a struggle to get him out to the field, to put his strength to work in any helpful way, and then to get him back without having him run off or upset the others. From him I think I caught some of my most remembered glimpses of mulality and what it could result in.

I found the best way to handle Tobe when he wouldn't work was to tie him up at the far end of the field and put Maude, our buggy mare, in his place. She wasn't very strong and was annually in foal, so she could not be worked much. But Old Tobe, who hated work, hated being alone even more. He wanted to be with the bunch. So he would complain: "Hee, Haw, Hee Haw!" until I would gingerly unleash him and put him in Maude's place. You never could get more than a half day's work out of Old Tobe.

One way to deal with mulality, I learned, was to put it off by itself and ignore it. Eventually, it would find its own cure.

Blue had a kind of nondescript muleness. She got along reasonably well with everyone. Mostly she kept her mulality hidden, but it would appear in fits of sulking and pouting. She was really just a third mule with no outstanding characteristics.

She was not likely to get into trouble; neither was she likely to do anything that would set her apart as something special. I remember her as I recall faces in a crowd—just one of many.

There were mules I adjusted to first in our early years of marriage. They were succeeded by countless others, some of which I remember clearly, others of which have faded into a vast formless image of the species mule.

I guess I would have preferred not to have “gotten involved” with mules if I had given the matter sufficient thought. But that was a luxury for “liberated” women of a later era, not a farm woman of my time. I had to take my husband’s place when he went to town or had other work to do. So I learned to cope with them, substituting brain for brawn sometimes and outclassing them in mulality at others.

When Alex was with the mules, I usually stayed out of the way. Except perhaps in “breaking” a young mule, two at once were almost always one too many. My husband really got his dander up a few times when he was in the barn with the mules and I came suddenly upon them. This might be just enough to cause one or more of them to start kicking in diverse reverse directions. Since he was closest, he was sometimes known to be a little upset in my direction.

If no one interfered, he and the mules seemed so much alike that they got along well together. He didn’t have to talk to them, coax and cajole them as I did. However, I developed a psychology for dealing with them when it was my turn that made up for the

lack of rapport with them that my husband had. As a matter of fact, I soon found that the same sort of psychology that would work with him would work with the mules!

I noticed that if Alex was “on the outs” with me or anybody else, he would take it out on the mules. If he got angry with me, he might whip all his mules. Maybe that was why I always had more trouble than he did in handling them. They could have blamed me for making him angry enough to whip them, so they got back at me by being balky when I ordered them about. Or so I thought sometimes.



Getting Up the Mules

I’m in a quandary about whether to tell you this shaggy little dog story and let the pros and cons fall where they may. (We could call the story “Getting the Mules Up,” or “Getting Up The Mules;” I never could decide which was better.)

It was a sort of ceremony or drama which was likely to take place after a long wet spell, when the mules had been out running loose in the back pasture and the weather looked like the ground might be ready to plow in the afternoon. Getting the mules up always seemed so easy for Alex.

To start with, we had realized that while somebody ought to get the mules up, somebody ought to go to town (we needed perhaps a little flour or sugar or salt or coffee, perhaps). We

might have been keeping the buggy mare in the barn during this bad weather because she might not have been able to take the rough weather like the mules could. I might have thought things out a little better if I had really tried, but during that first year on the farm I was dumb enough and game enough to try almost everything Alex suggested.

Alex well knew (and I knew how well he knew) how much I hated to go to town. It would almost always take me a whole day. I was still trying to make folks in town think he had married well, so it took a long time for me to dress accordingly. First I took a long and thorough bath, dried off; then drew on my long lisle stockings, straightened seams, and supporters. Then I put on those beautiful high-topped gray suede wedding shoes, laced and tightened them, then that pesky, misery-making straight-laced size 22 corset and tightened that down to twenty-four inches—I still didn't want people to know how married I really was. Well, I didn't want to go to town, especially when Alex volunteered to go and he could hitch up Maude and be there and back in a couple of hours.

So that was the way we worked it out: he struck out for town and the dog and I started out for the back pasture. As I said, getting the mules up always seemed so easy for Alex, but then, as I conjectured later, when he got them up it was usually when Maude was with them.

He would merely toss a few ears of corn in the feed trough, stick a couple of ears in his back pocket, pick up Maude's bridle,

jangle it a bit and walk back to the first little hilltop from which he could see and be seen all over the farm. Once there, he'd give a shrill whistle, jangle the bridle a little more, hold out an ear of corn, and corrupt the English language a bit with a "Co'up Maude, co'up Maude."

Maude, as expected, would lift her head, nicker in his direction, walk slowly up to him to accept bit and bridle, and travel toward the barn and more corn. Exactly what Maude did, except for the bit and bridle, the mules all did likewise. So easy ...

So easy for him. But not for me. First of all, the pockets in my stylish, well-fitted Hoover wrap-around apron would not hold ears of corn. Second, I didn't want to bother with jangling an old bridle when I went for a walk. I would never dare try to put a bridle on a mule unless she was in the barn and I could stand up in the feed trough. Ears on a 16-hands mule are rather high, especially when she chooses to hold up her head. Besides, I'd been warned many times that a mule may be a "fool about her ears." I was a grown-up woman, but only a little over five feet high, so I would not try bridling a mule in the pasture.

Besides that, we had visiting mules in the pasture, and they might be difficult. The reason for visiting mules was because of the weather and the lay of the land. In the spring, and especially after a long wet spell, our high sunny south hillside of phosphatic-limestone loam would dry out and warm up early and put forth a lush growth of pasturage.

But our neighbors down the creek bottom who had a heavy, rich, but boggy soil could not turn out to pasturage. So we swapped spring pasturage for late summer pasturage. Therefore strange mules.

Undoubtedly the worst handicap I had in “getting up the mules” was that they were without Maude. Both they were, and I was. When a mare, or spotted pony, or white filly stays with a bunch of mules for a few days, they form a sort of mother image of her. They will go anywhere or do anything she does. So if you lead, drive, or ride the mare, you’ve instantly got all the mules in hand.

I didn’t think I would miss Maude so much for I had our dog Queen. And what Maude couldn’t lead, Queen could drive. At least I thought so, and Queen thought so, too.

Queen had come to us a rolly polly collie shepherd pup at that cute age just under three months. She had been given to me by Gertie Bennet, who didn’t like me too much because she thought I sort of had the Big Head over my five years of Latin. But she had too many pups and she thought every farm ought to have a dog. Why Alex named the dog Queen I don’t remember. But inevitably she grew up to earn that name.

At about this time we had a neighbor in the nearby village of Bigbyville whose name was Mister Charley Thomas—known as Mister Charley.

When he went to town he traveled as he thought a gentleman should—always on horseback and usually across country.

As our farm lay in his “as a crow flies” route, he frequently crossed our farm twice a day, always being careful to leave the gates as he found them, either open or shut.

Mister Charley developed quite an admiration for Queen, and he told me many things about dogs and mules and men and horses and neighbors that I had never known or suspected. Many times, he’d stop and watch Queen about her maneuvers, and he frequently told me, and the neighbors, that that shaggy collie shepherd can “read, write, and recollect.” I always admitted that at least as far as he was concerned, she could recollect. So much so that when she had enough pups to replace herself and had been kicked in the head a few times, we let her go live with Mister Charley. And so far as I know, they lived happily ever after.

But, goodness gracious, Miss Agnes! Alex and Maude would be back from town before Queen and I could get up the mules from the back pasture if we didn’t get a move on. We walked back through the growing rye to the first little hill from which we could see and be seen. Queen trotted along in front to stir up snakes and I carried a stout stick in case she succeeded.

When we arrived at what I thought might be the proper place, I took my stand, drew a deep breath, and emitted my shrillest whistle. But I guess my teeth were too close together or I’d not had much practice. At any rate, not a mule’s head was lifted and not an ear twitched. I took another deep breath

and coaxed “Go’up mules! Go’up mules!” Not a budge from the low ground.

Then Queen took over, or as the ’coon hunters would say, she “opened up!” All heads jerked up at once, and all heels took to the air. In one fast-action move they took off toward the top of our highest hill and the big rock fence next to Stone’s high wood.

There they took one backward look, turned all faces to the wall, turned all heels toward us, and formed a most animated and impenetrable barrier.

So much for me—and Queen—getting the mules up!



My Degree in Philosophy

When the First World War ended the mule market collapsed. A mule that during the war could be sold for \$350 was worth only \$25 once the war was over. After the mule had helped win the war, no matter how much “bottom” he had, the bottom dropped out of the market. Texans came up and bought the Jacks imported from Spain. They were uneconomical to keep in Tennessee. It was a period when most of the asses went to Texas.

We still kept Maude for a buggy mare and saddle horse. We did not always breed her because she would work like a mule. We did not want any more mules or Jacks then because they

were not worth their feed and keep. There is nothing more ornery and useless than a Jackass if you are not going to breed him to a mare.

Thereafter the market never did come back from the peak years of World War I. For a while in the Thirties, the Chamber of Commerce tried to revive the mule boom as an anti-Depression measure. This was when Maury County Mule Day celebration again made the scene.

But with the coming of tractors in the Thirties mules could not compete, particularly for the youngsters. Our son insisted on a tractor when he was old enough to plough the fields and we had to give in.

A large part of our social as well as economic life circled around First Monday. If a young man lived south of town and his young lady lived north of town, there was an inconvenience. But it was sure to resolve itself on First Monday. They could meet at the drug store and drink ice cream sodas or lean against the counters at Woolworths, or share a hot dog on the street. Two or three girls walked arm-in-arm down the street dressed in better than Easter clothes. Boys stood on the corner watching the girls go by or whistled after them.

During First Monday in September, when the young men had saved their money to buy a couple of mule colts, they could spend what they had left on their girls. Once they bought their pair of colts (preferably matched ones) they would tie the animals to a hitching pole in the jockey yard. Then they

would go to the ice cream parlor or walk hand-in-hand until it was time to take the new colts back to the farm. Of course, they could not start out too late because they wanted to get the mules home before dark.

Springtime was a slightly better time for courting. A young man could sell his work mules early and then with the money for his crop of young mules, he could spend the rest of the day and evening courting his best girl if he so desired and she desired and could get permission.

The tractor proved to be no bed of roses, however. With mules you could blame your own mistakes on them, but there was no way a tractor would take this sort of abuse. We got deeper and deeper in debt for various reasons after we got the tractor and were not at all sure for a long while whether it was working for us or we were working for it. Actually, we did not begin to get out of the Depression until our cows became more profitable. By then we were selling milk and cream.

But before we left the era of mules, I climaxed my studies with a Ph.M. It came from the traders I knew and from what I saw in the mule's eyes. It took me into the philosophy of mules and made me a philosopher of mulality. To one much in contact with mulality the significance can be readily overlooked. (Many farmers I knew paid no attention to it philosophically, although they dealt with it pretty often.) However, to me it spoke a many-faceted tongue and invariably had something to say worth listening to. To wit:

I have always believed that there is extra-sensory perception between man and mule. That is, the mule has it, if not the man. A mule knows if a man is nervous or afraid of her. She knows if the man is her friend or her enemy. She can foresee what the man is going to do and how he is going to do it, sometimes before the man knows himself. Thus, the mule acts accordingly. So if a man blames a mule for a negative attitude or bad behavior, usually the fault lies not in the mule but in the man himself.

To my way of thinking, the mule is the world's greatest creature for tilling the soil. Although tractors are a little more predictable, I rather admire the adventure of working a mule. The trouble with a tractor is that it breaks down more often. It also uses gas and oil and smokes up the atmosphere while a mule's pollution has fertilizing value and enriches the soil.

Mules are just as good as ever in the past, but the energy of men is less. They are no longer satisfied to get out behind a mule. A tractor depreciates when it is not being used. But a mule appreciates until it is eight years old. An eight-year-old tractor is ready for the junk heap, but an eight-year-old mule is still in her prime.

You need a special temperament to handle mules. You need to like what you are doing, working with the underrated mule, and have more sense than mules do.

Mules are not sociable in the same way that dogs are. When a mule tries to express pleasure to her master she might be awkward, even dangerous. Her very bulk might be a handicap to that expression.

I never knew storied Nip and Tuck, and I do not know their color or conformation. But from their reported behavior I guess they had that most desirable way of socializing—that of a matched team, a unity much to be desired in mules and married folk.

A balky mule elicits interest and often respect. When a mule balks, the whole neighborhood gathers. Then she gets attention. Everybody comes off his porch to twist the mule's tail. A last resort is to build a fire under her. She will move just enough to get away from the fire, but no further. Her balkiness is bound to continue until she is ready to end it. After human endeavors fail, after pondering a bit, the mule in her own sweet time will move on. She will know in her bones when that time has come. She should be ignored and treated with tender neglect until she is ready.

Now a mule, because she is “without pride of ancestry,” should not be accused of inheriting anything other than her ears. Most of her traits are learned from man, or from other mules that learned them from man. An old mule trader I knew insisted that there was no such thing as a mean mule—there were only mean masters. I agree with him, of course, for I can walk up to a mule and tell you in a minute what kind of master she has had. If I raise my hand and she flinches, I know her master's personality.

So whatever they are, personality and mulality are to some extent interchangeable. I believe that people who have never

known mules may have mulality. Properly recognized this may include wisdom, humility, and other positive virtues (as in the case of Balaam's ass in the Bible). Mules, for instance, are often sensitive, hardworking animals and good with children. Usually they are much quieter and more placid than men. However, the form of mulality known as Jackassery is dangerous.

It was not the mood or disposition of my husband to try to cultivate that harmonious mulality among his mules. He wanted them, I think, to grow fat, work, and go to market. They were allowed to run together or apart in the pasture. He did not work them in any particular order. He had no sentimentality for mules, or other animals, I thought. The togetherness that made a team worth more than its individual members was not something he sought to cultivate. He sought to cultivate the willingness to pull a load. Perhaps if I had handled them it would have been different, but then my mulality was different from his.

I considered personality an indescribable, indefinable something, usually found in a person. Some people were chuck full of it, as others seemed to lack it. The ones that made the biggest impression on me seemed to have the most of it. The ones who left me feeling cold, indifferent, or unaffected were deficient in it, as I saw it. Those were the fish-eyed "bureaucrats," no matter what their profession.

"Mulality" then is something of the same amorphous substance usually found in mules. While some people might

think of it in terms of stubbornness and blind bull-headedness, it carries a connotation of other ingredients like “grit” and “guts.” Mulality may even include a tendency to be generous and broadminded until crossed. It is sometimes confused with balkiness, which means to be pushed so far and no farther.



Old Peck and Scratch

Along with gardening a country woman must learn poultry raising, of course; so during that first year came some memorable experiences with chickens.

Mother Knox had given us, among other household and farm necessities, a dozen assorted hens that had been roosting in her barn and making raids on her corncrib and garden. They were vari-colored and as self-sustaining as any dozen old hens could be. And they gave abundant promise of supplying us with eggs, fryers, and pullets for the next year’s laying.

Enthusiastically, we cleaned out the old hen-house, put in new roost poles, nest boxes (old orange crates filled with straw), and shut the hens inside until they could get acquainted with their new apartment. They paid well for what they ate that spring, but not for what they scratched. Nevertheless, we enjoyed them and had high hopes.

At last one old hen went broody, and a worse tempered old hussy never sat on straw. I was sickeningly afraid of setting-

hens anyway, and she was certainly vicious. I was determined, however, that we should grow some chicks that year, and that old hen seemed the most promising medium. So I filled my lap with eggs and gingerly approached the old hyena with a stick of stovewood in hand to ward off her pecks.

It was no good. With one hand to hold the lap and one the stovewood, there was no hand left to place the eggs where they ought to be. I went back to the house, put the eggs in a basket, gathered up a heavy bath towel for a shield, and tried again. Once more, no luck. The hen was nervous, and I was more so. It was night, finally, before I got that hen muffled enough with that bath towel (a wedding present) so I could slip under her breast those fifteen pencil-marked eggs intended for hatching.



A Twenty-one Day Battle

There followed a twenty-one day battle between me and that vicious black hen. We used mostly beak and bath towel

as weapons. My most effective strategy, I learned, was to completely envelop her in the thick towel, and lift her off the nest with both hands. That gave me an opportunity to count the eggs and see if she had broken any (or if the other hens were laying with her).

When the chicks began to hatch the war began in earnest. That old fanatic seemed to have an idea that hers was a superior race, and that no chick but black should survive. Every white or yellow chick, or even pale gray one, was henpecked to death as soon as it allowed itself to emerge from the black feathers. What could I do with the old cannibal?

Of course, I removed the off-color chicks as rapidly as I could and put them with a bottle of warm water in a box behind the stove. But that did not permanently solve the problem. That night, after excitement of new motherhood had subsided in her bosom, I thought that the hen would relent. But not she. Next morning she was pecking chicks again as hard as her beak would thrust—and well I knew how hard that could be.

I took the vari-colored chicks out of the nest again, spoke harshly to the old buzzard of a perverted mother, then sat down on the henhouse doorstep, and cried. But that didn't help matters either.

I took the little orphans to their nursery again, put in another bottle of warm water, and set out to the nearest neighbors to ask what to do with a hen that pecks. Mammy Stone did not laugh at me, but neither could she advise. All her chicks were of one

color and all her hens sweet-tempered and motherly. She did say, however, that she had read how some poultry raisers trim the beaks of chicken-fighting hens; just cut off the outer tip of the upper beak enough that the hen couldn't nip the two parts together. I went home to try trimming.

Again with my bath towel armor, I managed to get the old hen well in hand, her body between my knees and her crow-like head tight in my left fist. I tried scissors first, but no go. Then I reached for my best and sharpest kitchen paring knife, but that also was too dull. Next I "borrowed" my husband's razor. With that I proceeded to work, but her tough old beak wouldn't trim. It had to be cut, and cut hard.

I don't know how it happened, but it seems that down toward the outer edge the beak was not so tough after all. At any rate, the razor slipped. It went through quickly and on into the ball of my thumb. It was a mean gash, made with main strength and a sharp edge. And the sight and feel of it didn't help my regard for the old black hen, especially since she began again to lambaste those poor little off-color chicks as soon as I turned her loose.

That operation was anything but a success. The hen could still peck but she couldn't eat! I felt remorseful, sure enough. The poor old idiot would starve to death. She could not even drink water, it seemed. And there I'd be left to bring up a whole crop of orphans, black, white, and multicolored.

Repenting, I removed the unwanted chicks from the coop and decided to let the intolerable old sufferer die as unworried

as possible. She didn't. She managed to eat and drink somehow and to bring up her own black babies according to her standards of chick culture, while I clucked ineffectually over the whites, speckles, and yellows. And, if I must confess it, she did a better job of raising her chicks than I did mine. Maybe hers was, after all, a superior race. Or maybe she just knew where the best grubworms grew. She helped considerably with my poultry education, but it was a painful process to have to take lessons from a fighting old hen and nurse a sore finger and a hurt pride at the same time.

A few years later I had learned enough, or little enough, to buy an incubator, a couple of brooders, and some reputedly high-bred birds. I had a terrific case of chicken fever, one of the worst you can imagine. I took chickens to shows and won prizes, sold hatching eggs at fancy prices (a few), advertised in the poultry journals, and read and wrote for those journals. But for all that and even more I never did learn to do a better job of raising husky, frisky chicks than the hen mothers themselves.

At last, after roasting an incubator full of hatching babies and letting the brooder catch fire a couple of times, I decided that after all the hens knew best; at least they can do better in their own particular vocation. So within a year or so, I managed to turn the business of chicken raising back to the old broodies and I put more time, thought, and effort into bringing up my own babies. The hens continued to teach me, however, and kept me marveling.

I am reminded of what that wise old writer of proverbs declared, “There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the sky; the way of a serpent on a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the say of a man with a maid.”

And if Solomon had been a farm woman, he might well have added the fifth mystery—the way of a hen in the grass. Now, an old dominicker hen is not a mysterious looking creature, but she does have some methods and accomplishments that mystify.

She’ll saunter out into the crab grass in the cornfield, fence-row or thicket, scratch around, snuggle down, flop a little, whirl and flutter until she has swished the grass and leaves and trash into a dish-shaped nest such as human hands cannot duplicate; and then she will lay an egg.

Next day another egg; and next, another. And what is an egg? Just a yolk and a white with a shell round it, we’d say. A little water, lime, protein, albumen, the scientist will tell you. A handy bit of custard-thickening and a potential omelet, the cook will say. But the old hen knows better than scientist, cook, or casual observer.

When the time is right she will settle down and put her heart on those eggs; there she will stay through day and night, rain or shine, cold or heat, for exactly twenty-one days.

Then comes forth life. That is what is really in an egg; and the old hen knew it all the time. But how did the old hen know?

Indeed, the ways of the eagle, the serpent, the ship, and the man are all wonderful; but the way of a hen, warming eggs into life? That is wonderful, too.



Investigated

One evening, just at the edge of dusk, Alex and I were poking in from the dairy barn, he with a pail of milk and I with a tobacco stick walking-cane to help my tired self along. Alex was walking along in front, farmer-fashion; and Eve-like, I was tagging along after him, when all of a sudden he stopped and exclaimed, "Look at those pretty polecats!"

Well, I didn't look for cats at all. My first thought was to take cover and I made a quick shift to reverse. I don't know yet what became of the tobacco stick. That man just kept standing there exclaiming how pretty they were, and he was not usually the exclaiming kind.

Now I am an admirer of beauty, but I hate the thought of holding my nose to look at it, so I continued to reverse. Then Alex said, "They're coming your way and they are the prettiest little fellows you ever saw." That word "little" gave me courage.

"Are they babies?" I asked.

"Oh, about half-grown," he said.

By that time they were right at my feet. Oh, they were pretty. I was wearing sandals and the cats were giving my toes a going-over. Then they looked me up and down thoroughly and trotted back to Alex, giving him an investigation.

Meanwhile the family dog had arrived and was evidently doing some wondering himself. When the kittens spied the dog they decided to investigate him also. He stood it until they got under his nose, then he gave them his heels and some dust besides. Can you imagine a full-grown, dignified, and sensible dog being chased by a team of baby polecats?

They kept up quite a game of it for several minutes. The dog would run, then turn to look, then run again. And the twin kittens just trotted along up and down the path after him. He made his way back to us and they followed. I was still too paralyzed and amused to climb over the fence, but I don't think a wire fence would have been much protection anyway.

When they came back from their frolic with the dog, I thought of the bucket of milk. They might have smelled that, and they might possibly take a little swig. We didn't know whether young polecats have any more understanding of milk than they did of folks and dogs, but Alex poured out a little into the top of the bucket and I set the improvised bowl before them. They weren't interested; they gave the three of us, Alex, the dog, and me, another good looking over and sauntered off together down the ditch whence they had come. We watched for them each morning and evening after that, but never another sight nor smell of them did we have. Evidently their curiosity was satisfied in that one twilight.



I Just Love A Village

Early, too, in married life I found I loved our neighboring village of Bigbyville—from the general store at the cross-roads to where the sparks flew from the blacksmith's anvil; its hominess, its neighborliness, its humanness, its foibles, its warmth, and its personalities.

Among the leaders of our village there was the clergyman. He was always looked to for comfort and guidance, especially in times of stress and trouble.

And the village doctor! Bless him! He saw our children into this world and was expected to see us all out of it. Every physical ailment beyond a growling tooth or a broken finger was taken to his office. Volumes could be written of him, except that praise embarrassed him.

The village school teacher. Dear only knows what that person had to bear. Dear also knows, as few others do, what a tremendous influence the village teacher had on the generations that come and go.

It should be a source of great satisfaction to a teacher to know that if she couldn't have her way in the present, the future was hers. She was molding the village of ten to sixty years from then.

Ranking high in importance in our village was the merchant—or let's just call him the store-keeper. He was more than that—much, much more, but I just like to call him store-

keeper. I like that word better than merchant, and I notice that most villagers did too.

His activities and his services to his people were as varied and as valuable, perhaps, as his conglomerate stock of “general merchandise.”

The term “general merchandise” is a fascinating expression; so much so to me that if Santa Claus ever started doing impossible things for undeserving people, I should like to send a postal card some Christmas and ask him to leave in my stocking just a country-store full of “general merchandise.” I believe I’d get more entertainment out of spices and hams, oilcloth and dippers, nails and calico in reality than I would out of the Spring-Summer or Fall-Winter mail order wish-a-log.

The village store-keeper was so much more than a mere merchant. He was in our nearby village the hub around which much of the everyday life of the village moved. He was the one from whom the village drunkard borrowed the price of a pint ’til Saturday night. He’s the one who might advance the dressmaker enough for her taxes until her pension came in. He frequently was the one who heard troubles that wouldn’t be “fitten” to tell the preacher. Frequently he dispensed castor oil or turpentine to cases that were not quite bad enough to take to the doctor. If the telephone messages he relayed were laid end to end they would make a unique formation.

The village dressmaker—we cannot pass her by. All kinds of garments from layettes to shrouds took shape under her busy

fingers. Trousseaus were her specialties, as well as shirts for the man whose arms were too long or whose front was too broad to be covered comfortably by ready-mades. The village dressmaker knew secrets by the score. She might tell them or not, according to the kind of person she was or what she thought of you. But don't forget this: she knew.

Ah, but there was one person in the village who knew more, much more, than the dressmaker, preacher, doctor, teacher, or merchant. You've guessed it! The telephone operator.

Why, I wonder, hasn't some intelligence specialist tested the know-it-allness of a group of village telephone operators?

She had Information deluxe. I would merely say: "Central, ring Miss Lydia."

The small voice in the telephone replied: "Why, she ain't home. She's gone over to Miss Susie's to spend the day, but I'll ring her there for you."

If you wanted a doctor, preacher, weather forecast, hog market, or wanted to know the time of day, or whose barn was burning, all that was necessary was: "Just ring Central."

Then there was the village bachelor, the "professional" one I mean, the one who made a bee line for every new girl who moved to the neighborhood or dropped in somewhere for a visit. His heart affairs were many. They were quickly on and quickly off, leaving him perennially the village bachelor.

And there was the village half-wit, or quarter-wit, or three-quarter wit. You know the type, even if you weren't always able

to specify the exact fraction. He might have been just a nit-wit whom everybody pitied or loved or tolerated. He might have been good natured and harmless, or a more tragic character.

The mechanic, the flivver-fixer, or perhaps he was considered the village blacksmith in less modern moments. The village tinker, he must not be left out, the whittler, the jockey or trader, and the squire, of course. I don't know how I let him get so far down on this list. There might also have been a constable, a Senator, a sheriff's deputy, or a representative of the law in some form. Maybe there was a banker, or a retired capitalist-fisherman. It had all kinds and sorts of folk—all interesting if you knew them. We just loved our village, and depended much on it.

I almost left out the combination furniture dealer and undertaker! He just sat there day after day waiting for people to wear out their stoves, tables, or bodies. He was a valuable asset to the community; as was also the "good old soul" who went to every distressed family to set up with the sick or lay out the dead, or the good brother with his pick and shovel whose regular neighborly tribute was to go to the graveyard and help dig the grave.

There is something very personal about living in or near a village.

I have wondered many times how in the world large cities ever get along without the kind of people who live in villages. I

suspect cities are made up of villagers too. The differences in the city and village populations are probably quantity, not quality.

