

CHAPTER II

WHAT WE DID HAVE

Perhaps, you ask, what did we have? Well, we had kind parents, plenty of good food, warm clothing, a warm place to sleep and lots of time to play. After all, what does any child need more than that? In the summer we could play all day and all evening out-of-doors at games which we organized for ourselves - "hi spy", ante ante over", "pum pum pullaway", "hide and seek", "duck on the rock" and other games which were a lot of fun.

In the long winter evenings, we had plenty of time to read and play games. The teachers did not expect us to do home work - that is a later improvement in education - so we could read good books. Each family in the village had some good books and swapped them about with other families. Grandfather received a gift of money from his grandfather one Christmas and with the money he bought a whole set of Washington Irving's books and read them all! Quite literally, all of them. They are written in beautiful English and it was of great value to Grandfather later in public extemporary speaking to have read so much good English. Grandfather thought the story of Ichabod Crane very funny and even funnier he thought was "Knickerbocker's History of New York."

Many years later he thought one evening he would interest his own children in reading this book and started to read out loud to them the description of one of the Dutch Governors. To the rest of the family the description did not seem so funny as it did to Grandfather, but Grandfather got to laughing - then the children got to laughing to see

Grandfather read and laugh - and finally all became so hysterical with laughter he had to put the book away without finishing the chapter. All were convinced that Grandfather thought the description humorous.

Later Grandfather bought a set of J. Fenimore Cooper's novels and read all of them - again quite literally all thirty-two of the novels. Part of that time could have been better employed, yet they were for the most part interesting stories of early American life in forest and on the sea. One of Grandfather's favorite books was Dicken's "Pickwick Papers" which he reread several times and always got a good laugh out of the Fat Boy and Sam Weller and Mr. Pickwick and Sargent Buzfuz. One of the boys had a copy of "Hoyle" and from this book we learned to play chess and backgammon and nearly all the games which were described in the book.

You see, in those days we were not in a hurry. We had plenty of time to do a lot of interesting things. One of the winter games we especially enjoyed was authors which, in addition to being fun, taught us the names of leading authors and their books and often made us wish to read these books and find out what they were about. Many of these books could be bought very cheaply in paper covers and Grandfather frequently spent his pennies for some of these instead of buying candy. We did not have any Saturday Evening Post or Ladies' Home Journal, but we did have "The Youth's Companion" and "Saint Nicholas" and used to look longingly ahead for the next issue with another installment of the "continued" story.

We had no furnaces or fireplaces, but we did have a big coal stove and it was fun to watch the fire through the little isinglass windows and also fun to "shake the fire down" and "dig out the klinkers", and every

night we had to put on a heavy coat and get a bucket of coal from the coal bin in the woodshed and fill up the "magazine" above the stove.

In the winter, when one little boy went to play with another, he usually was invited to remain for meals and to spend the day. One forenoon Grandfather went to play with another little boy with whom he was not accustomed to play, and a big blizzard came up; so Grandfather stayed for dinner, which was always at noon, and the games being very interesting, also stayed for supper. As he trudged homeward over the big drifts after dark, he met a man who told him that the town was out looking for him. You see, there were no telephones and, Grandfather's mother becoming worried about him, had sent someone to find Grandfather at the places he usually went to play, and when he was not there, had concluded that he was lost in the blizzard and asked the neighbors to help find him. All of which shows how important it is when you go to call on your friends, to tell your mother where you are going.

But the greatest fun was in the summer. Then we could go barefooted - and what fun we thought that was. Just now we should not think that would be so much fun, for we got our feet cut and bruised, and around Brodhead there grew a small bur with very sharp, needle-like spines which would run right through the tough sole of a dog's foot, and we used to get these in our feet. If in running you ran into a patch of "Kinney Burs", as we called them, it was sad indeed, for you got your feet full of burs and how could you get out of the patch without getting more burs in your feet, and every bur felt like two or three needles imbedded in your foot. Still we all greatly enjoyed to go barefooted and felt like weeping when school

started and parents compelled us to wear shoes and stockings. My! how the shoes did hurt after our feet had run wild all Summer.

The two great Summer sports were fishing and swimming. To be sure, we had a garden with strawberries and raspberries and currants and gooseberries - and cherries and crabapples and sweet corn and peas and beans and turnips - and asparagus and potatoes, as well as radishes and lettuce and sometimes we raised watermelons and canteloupes. You would have expected Grandfather to have been crazy about that garden and to want to spend all his time there helping all those fruits and vegetables to grow, but truthfulness - and the aim of this little book is to tell the truth, however embarrassing it may be - compels Grandfather reluctantly to admit that as a matter of fact he preferred to go fishing or swimming.