



Stories of Yesteryear: Horse & Buggy Days

Harry H. Brown

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Stories of Yesteryear is an appealing collection of stories about small-town New England life.

Harry H. Brown's *Stories of Yesteryear* provides a textured narrative of Halifax, its residents, and its surroundings. Each story concerns one of those residents, and as the sometimes amusing, sometimes heartbreaking narratives unfold, together they provide an impression of the storyteller himself, with all his warmth and wit.

Stories are brief, averaging a page in length. Some are implausible tall tales, like one about Uncle Gus fending off a bear attack by catching and feeding fish to the bear. Others are brief illustrations of Halifax life, such as an account of the town raising money in the nineteenth century to install fire alarm bells. Accompanying many of the stories are drawings by the author.

The stories are full of levity, consistently making light of the institution of marriage, with husbands doing baffling things and their wives being appropriately baffled by them. This amusement works well thanks in part to the brevity of the tales, which begin and end at just the right moments.

Beyond amusing moments, remarkable stories are introduced in which heartbreak makes its way in; this variation in tone works to the collection's advantage. "The Chamberlains" tells the story of an eccentric, aging family, whose matriarch posts a series of personal ads; respondents come and go, but no one stays, and the sentences are full of resignation and melancholy.

In a book full of characters, it is the narrator/author who emerges as the most colorful of them all as he fleshes out the inhabitants of his small New England town and offers details of his life there, such as the horse and buggy he rode to school as a boy.

The stories are collected without much attention to organization, but then again, organization is rather beside the point; these are occasional stories, and they proceed as if they were just being remembered, one after another, as the storyteller's mind ranges.

The stories move quickly, and their speed is helpful to the book's task. The tales are plainly meant to come across as if they were related in passing or overheard during brief stops at a small-town general store. The collection's attention to minutiae also serves its overall purpose, in that together the details accrue to illustrate life in Halifax.

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ROBERT FOREMAN (April 25, 2017)

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