RECOLLECTIONS OF A STREET CORNER PUMP AND THE PROGRESS OF SIXTY YEARS

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These recollections center about an old pump on a street corner and some of the boys who used it: particularly one of the boys, Simon Flexner by name. The pump was on the southeast corner of Chestnut and Sixth Streets; the time was about sixty years ago, when I was nine or ten years old, and Simon Flexner just ten years older. Any city of our Midwest or South would do as well; but in fact the place was Louisville, Kentucky. This pump was merely the trunk of a tree—virtually a piece of telegraph pole with its center bored-out—stood up in a well. A long curved metal arm with a knob on the end stuck out to the side and was worked up and down, first merely sucking air and then causing a flow of clear, cool and rather pleasant-tasting water. Hanging by a chain was a large metal dipper; it was so green with mold that in drinking from it I preferred to apply my lips to the edge close to the long handle. We children liked the pump and the water and the dipper, for in warm weather we could not only drink copiously but also dabble our bare feet in the splash and stream as the water ran off into the gutter or drained back into the well. There is no analysis of this water on record; nor were any bacterial cultures ever made from the dipper. But the following will give an idea of what might have been found if such an examination had been made and what Simon Flexner survived—for the good of humanity.