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# On The Old Plantation

REMINISCENCES OF HIS CHILDHOOD

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BY

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**"HOW ZACH CAME TO COLLEGE"**

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## DEDICATION

To my sister, Ellen Bates, who shared with me the joys and sorrows of my childhood, and whose unselfish life has meant so much to me, this book is affectionately dedicated.

J. G. C.

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## FOREWORD

THESE chapters are written primarily for the benefit of my own children and grandchildren, and with the hope that they may not be wholly uninteresting to many others whose parents lived through the days of which I write.

Too many of our young people know of the institution of slavery only what they've learned from "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Knowing only the negro who has grown up since the Civil War, and knowing nothing whatever of "de ole-time slav'ry nigger," they cannot have a correct idea of "a civilization that is gone."

If what Mrs. Stowe wrote was true, and only that, then our children's children must conclude that their fathers were only half-civilized and worthy of all the horrors of the Reconstruction. Slavery was not all bad. It had its evils, God knows; but, on the dark picture, there were many bright spots: our children should be allowed to see them.

J. G. C.

*Wofford College, March 30, 1916.*







# On The Old Plantation

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## CHAPTER I

### “UNC’ ESSICK,” A NOBLEMAN IN BLACK

ESSEX was his name, but to all the children on the plantation he was “Unc’ Essick.” When I first knew him, Unc’ Essick was a very important personage on my father’s plantation. I was a little late arriving, being the eleventh of a family of twelve children, and was born some years before the outbreak of the Civil War.

As far back as I can remember, Unc’ Essick was my father’s foreman, general director—“right-hand man.” On many of the Southern plantations the foreman was called “The Driver,” and he was the driver literally. He carried his heavy whip, and did not fail to lay it on the backs of his indolent or disobedient fellow-slaves. Some of these drivers were the most merciless task-masters, and some were pitilessly cruel. My father would have none of that. His foreman



was not allowed to touch one of his fellows. His business was to counsel, encourage, direct, and lead the others. Every morning he received his orders from my father, and every night he made his report. Intelligent readers know that it was against the law to teach a slave to read or write. Essex could neither read nor write, but I remember having heard my father say that the old man's reports were marvelous for accuracy and detail.

In ante-bellum days there were in the middle section of South Carolina, and particularly in the coast counties—the rice-growing section—many plantations measuring many thousands of acres. On many of these slaves were numbered by the hundred; on a few, there were more than a thousand. Some of the "large slave-owners," that is to say, the owners of more than a thousand, did not know their own negroes. In such cases, master and slave came in touch with each other only through the overseer, or driver.

In the Piedmont section of my State, now, since the decline of the rice industry, the most prosperous, there were few large plantations, and comparatively few slaves. The attachment between master and slave was, in some cases, very strong and very beautiful.

My father's plantation, "Broadway," lay between Johnson's Creek and Little River on the one side, and Penny's Creek on the other, and in Abbeville District, now Abbeville County, the home of Secession. In the entire tract there were only twelve hundred acres, and



on it only one hundred and ten slaves. Their owner knew them all by name.

The institution of slavery, such a curse to the South, so misunderstood and so abused, developed some great characters among both races. And both are rapidly passing. The number of men in the South who were slave-owners is rapidly growing smaller, and only occasionally does one meet an old negro who fixes his place among that rapidly decreasing number of citizens by doffing his hat and saying with evident pride: "Yas, suh, Boss; yas, suh, I's a ole-time slav'ry nigger."

Those of us who know the "ole-time slav'ry nigger" best and honor him most, are unwilling for the rising generation of both races to know so little of his virtues. Of one of these worthies I would tell the readers of this chapter.

## I

When I first knew Unc' Essick he was in the prime of a vigorous, powerful manhood, though more than fifty years of slave-life lay behind him. Five feet ten, he tipped the beam at one hundred and ninety pounds, and was as sinewy and as active as a Texas pony. Though unlettered, he was to us children a very prodigy: he knew so much and could do so many things. His uniform kindness to us and his unfailing patience with us very greatly endeared him to us.

From our mother and from the old negroes "at



the quarter"—among the cabins—we learned the story of Unc' Essick's early life. In his young manhood he had been a "runaway nigger." I remember that this revelation came as a distinct shock to me. I could not understand how this man, my devoted friend, this trusted servant of my father, could have been a "runaway nigger." That was the bogy with which the nurse had frightened us into silence when we were unduly noisy or impatient. How this man, my Sir Galahad, could have been a "runaway nigger," I could not understand, and I indignantly refused to believe when told so for the first time by another servant; refused to believe it, and cried about it until the story was corroborated by my own mother. After that, I loved Unc' Essick none the less, but rather had greater respect for the "runaway nigger." I would not rest, however, until mother had told me everything about my hero's checkered career.

On Southern plantations before the Civil War there was often comedy—sometimes tragedy; nor was romance always wanting. On my father's plantation two of his young men were rivals for the hand of a dusky maid: one, Essex, a common laborer who herded with twoscore of his kind, and the other, Griffin, one of my father's teamsters, a crack driver and an acknowledged aristocrat among the negroes. Nowadays one seldom sees a wagon drawn by six mules; in those days they were very common, and a plantation that could not boast of one or more such teams was looked upon by



the negroes as of inferior grade, and the owner thereof as but slightly removed from the "po' buckra" class. To be the driver of a six-mule team, well matched and well equipped, was a mark of no little distinction. Griffin, my father's second teamster (Big Tom was his chief), though young, had made himself quite a name throughout the neighborhood by holding on to a runaway team until he was dragged from his saddle and had one ear cut off by the front wheel of the wagon. This almost fatal accident occurred while Griffin was taking a load of furniture to Smyrna Camp Meeting Ground.

Today only a few scattered stones and a gnarled, dwarfed tree or two mark the old Smyrna Camp Ground, the annual meeting place of the best people on the western side of Abbeville County. The people were well-to-do, so the matter of expense was entirely negligible. Instead of the ordinary shack one sees nowadays at the few camp meetings kept up in South Carolina, the people built comfortable two-story frame dwellings, and for two weeks, sometimes longer, literally enjoyed the meeting. Every "tenter" kept open house, and not a few Georgians crossed over the Savannah to "get religion" and enjoy the meeting. Nowadays the people of my old county go to the mountains of North Carolina a few weeks in the summer for rest and recreation; then they went to the banks of the Savannah, to the Smyrna Camp Meeting. And I dare say they got about as much from that



annual meeting as their children and grandchildren get from their yearly pilgrimage to the blue hills of our sister commonwealth.

Besides being the best muleteer in the district, Griffin was a fiddler whose reputation extended far beyond the boundaries of his master's plantation. Not only did he furnish music for his own people at their annual "cake-walks," but he helped often to furnish music at the dances of the white race. That fact, together with his recognized ability as a wagoner, made him an aristocrat. He deigned to associate with men and women of his own color, but for "po' white trash" he had a contempt. When he left home with the load of furniture and provisions for the camp meeting, Griffin was in a jolly, good humor. He called back to one of his fellows: "I don't mind camp meetin', ef dey des let me play my fiddle." In two hours Griffin was picked up at the foot of Crosby's Hill on Rocky River in an unconscious condition and minus one ear. Regaining consciousness, he declared: "Dis is de judgment ob de Lord; I'll niver tech dat fiddle ag'in." And he didn't. Other things he would do—curse, fight, and drink; but play the fiddle—never.

Late one evening, about "feed time," a great commotion was heard at the barn. Father ran out to investigate. At the rear of the barn he found Essex and Griffin engaged in a fight. A dozen other slaves were enjoying the diversion. Now, these two powerful animals were fighting, not according to the rules



of the ring, but just old-fashioned "fist and skull," science to the winds. Each of these splendid animals meant that to be a fight to the finish; and it would have been but for the timely appearance of my father on the scene.

The majority of my readers can have no understanding or appreciation of the pride a slave-owner felt in the physical strength of his men-servants. Most negroes were expected to do unskilled labor; great strength of bone and muscle was therefore the *sine qua non*. When my father discovered the cause of the commotion among the negroes, he stood for just a moment admiring the unflinching fortitude with which each of the two black men took his punishment. It was a pair of powerful men, and each was "dead game."

I can say of a truth, and for that truth I am profoundly grateful, my father's slaves not only respected and obeyed him, but loved him. So when his voice rang out sharp and clear, "Stop that fighting!" the two combatants lowered their arms, stepped apart, and stood facing each other like two great wild boars ready for a death-struggle.

"What does this mean?" demanded the master.

Essex was the first to speak, while Griffin simply showed his pearly teeth.

"Dis nigger want my gal, Marster, en 'e kyah git 'er," said Essex, snapping his heavy jaws with bitter defiance.



“Dat a lie, Marster,” growled Griffin; “she, my gal.”

“Who is it you are talking about, Essex?” asked my father.

“Hit Cindy, suh, Little Cindy.”

There were two Cindys on the plantation—Big Cindy and Little Cindy.

Turning to a young girl who had been a witness to the fight, my father said: “Go tell Little Cindy to come here.”

Little Cindy was soon on hand, and was grinning as if perfectly delighted with what she had heard.

“Cindy,” said my father, “these boys have been fighting about you—now which do you want?”

The dusky damsel broadened her grin, shifted her weight from one foot to the other, dug her big toe into the soft earth, and said with a glance at the other girls now gathered for the fun: “I wants de one whut kin whup; I want de bes’ man. Dat whut I tell ’em.”

That had been her decision, and the two rivals had met to decide the matter once for all in accordance with her decree.

“You know I do not allow the folks to fight, Cindy,” said my father. “Now, Essex and Griffin shall not fight any more, but you may make choice between them: which one will you take?”

“Well den, I’ll tek Griffin,” said Cindy, twisting her fingers together and blushing a blush that was



never seen, because Little Cindy was as black as her great-grandmother, who came from the jungles of Africa.

“Now then,” said my father, “Cindy has settled this question, boys; let that decision be final—we must have no more fighting.”

Poor Essex! Resolute, game, tough, he would have fought Griffin to the death for Little Cindy, the apple of his eye, the fairest lily of the valley. Yes, he would have fought the whole world for Little Cindy; but now all was lost. In his very presence, and with those very lips that to him had been so dear, Cindy had said without a tremor of the voice, “I’ll tek Griffin.” Without a word or even a glance toward the girl in ebony who had sealed his destiny, with eyes cast down, Essex slowly made his way toward his cabin door.

What did Griffin do? Well, not exactly what one would expect to see the fortunate lover in the “movies” do. Oh, no. Stooping to roll up one leg of his pantaloons above his knee, thereby exhibiting a bunch of magnificent muscles, Griffin opened his lips a little wider, showing two rows of as fine teeth as ever stuck in a human being’s head, and said with suppressed delight: “Dat whut I tell dat nigger, Marster. Cindy love me. Dat whut make me fight Essick so hard.”

The matter settled, my father made his way back to “De Big ’Ouse,” where he related the whole affair



to my mother, who long years after that gave it to me in all of its details.

I loved Unc' Essick so that when my mother told me of Cindy's decision against him, I burst into tears. Then my loving, sympathetic mother, who had given twelve children to the world, drew the eleventh to her bosom, kissed away his tears, and said with a voice full of tenderness: "Never mind, my son; after a while you will be old enough to know that slavery has its tragedies."

## II

Essex did not respond to roll-call the next morning when the big farm bell called the "hands" to work. The foreman investigated, and, after a thorough search of the premises, reported to my father that Essex was missing and could not be found.

Never before had Essex failed to respond for duty, being of perfect health and a willing, cheerful worker. So my father was naturally puzzled by his absence, the more so as it came so soon after the incident of the evening before.

"Dat coon done run'd off," said one of his fellow-slaves with a chuckle. "Uh-huh! Dat right!" chimed in a half-dozen. And then their speculations as to his future were amusing and ridiculous.

Essex had not blown out his brains, like some rejected lovers do, but had "jined the bird gang" sure



enough, and was not seen again on the plantation for three long years—Essex was now a “runaway nigger.”

My father was worried that the incident of the evening before should have had such a sequel, but he had such confidence in the sanity of the runaway that he believed he would return to his place after a few days, or after a few weeks at most. In that, however, he was mistaken. Essex had gotten a taste of freedom, and, though it was purchased at a terrible cost, he preferred it to slavery and the regular grind of farm life.

Of course, the runaway was legally advertised and reward offered for his capture. But week after week and then month after month passed, and nothing was heard of Essex. After a year, the reward offered was doubled, for Essex had been an obedient servant and valuable slave. Still no word of the runaway came, and father concluded that his negro was dead or had been captured by some unscrupulous parties and carried to the far South, as was sometimes done. Many a South Carolina negro found a grave in the cane-fields of Louisiana.

Not so with Essex. South Carolina and Georgia were good enough for him; and the Savannah River was to him a joy forever. Essex had been by odds the best swimmer on my father's place, and with that fact Cindy was twitted after she rendered her decision against him and in favor of Griffin, the expert wagner. So when chased by the “nigger dogs,” Essex, like the shrewd old buck of the forest in which he



slept, took refuge in the Savannah. Once in the river, he was perfectly safe; for, besides having the endurance of the wild animal, he had intelligence and judgment far above the average slave. He knew the instinct and habits of the hound perfectly, and could fool him with greater ease than any buck or wildcat could.

Essex lived in the swamps and forests on both sides of the Savannah, not many miles from the City of Augusta, Georgia. He laughed at the ringing of the farm bells he heard, and, like the other wild animals of his habitat, he did most of his sleeping in daylight. Many a time he was chased by the best-trained dogs on either side of the river, but his fleetness of foot and uncommon shrewdness enabled him always to elude his pursuers and make good his escape. In the summer, he wanted no better sport than to slip into the river and kiss good-by to hound and hunter. When necessary, he could remain in the river as long as an otter. When the weather was favorable and the moon not too bright, he did his foraging for food after nightfall. The henroosts along the Savannah he knew much better than some of their owners knew them, and thought it not a crime to levy toll whenever his appetite called for fresh, fat fowl. A copper-colored woman on a Georgia plantation baked a "pone of bread" for him occasionally, and regularly washed and mended his scanty supply of clothing.

The position of the runaway was unique. His



freedom was purchased at a terrible price. With the silent stars his only sentinels, his house a hollow log or a hole in the ground, he had to be as sly as a fox and as alert as an Indian. Hunted by day and night, sometimes hungry and often cold, and with a constant dread of being betrayed by one of his own race, his life must have been a very hell. Essex stood it for three long years. He felt the pangs of cold and hunger, and many of the dogs that chased him he knew by name. These, the loud-mouthed, tireless "nigger dogs," were his most dreaded enemies. Fire-arms and poison he could not get; but, finding a bottle, he crushed it into small fragments, baked it in some bread, and fed it to the dogs, when their owners little dreamed that he was near. That meant sure death to the dogs.

Essex had a half-score of aliases. The wily, foxy, dog-killing runaway became the most notorious and best-hated negro in the two States. But the end came with Essex. Malinda, his "Georgia gal," was his Delilah. They quarreled, Malinda and Essex did, one night, and she betrayed him. In less than forty-eight hours he was behind prison bars in the City of Augusta.

Advised of the capture of his slave, my father went to Augusta, paid all costs, and brought Essex back to the home he had left three years before. Augusta was only seventy-five miles from home, so father drove through in his buggy.



Master and slave talked freely on the return trip. Essex answered with manifest sincerity all the questions my father put to him, and talked freely of his trying experiences and narrow escapes during those long years.

“Dat gal tell on me, suh; dat Malinda tell de white folks. I could fool de dogs, but when dat yaller gal tell dem white folks, dey trap me.”

Essex had been such a faithful negro, my father was curious to know just what motive prompted him to run away. He said to him: “Essex, you have told me all about the hard times you have had, how you had your toes frost-bitten and how you suffered for food at times; now I want you to tell me why you ran away. Did I not feed and clothe you well? And was I not kind to you?”

“Yas, suh, Marster; yas, suh, I nuver did get hongry at home, en you nuver did hit me narry lick. But it was dis way: I des nachily couldn’ stan’ it when Cindy say she tek Griffin an’ lef’ me. I des couldn’ stay on de same place an’ see Little Cindy livin’ wid Griffin. Marster, I sho would a kilt dat nigger—I des had to leave. Den, arter I git away, I taste how it is to be free, en I didn’ come back. Marster, is Little Cindy livin’?”

“No, Essex; Cindy is dead, and Griffin has married again.”

“Gawd, Marster! Is Little Cindy dade?”—and



the poor fellow rubbed the tears from his cheek on the rope with which his hands were tied.

“ Yes, Cindy is dead.”

“ She was a good gal, Marster ; I loved dat 'oman.”

Then the two men, master and slave, rode many miles without a word.

When the second day out from Augusta, and they were within a few miles of home, the black man said to his owner: “ Marster, you allus treat me mighty good, en I bin a mean nigger to run'd off dat er way. I got nuff sleepin' in log, en runnin' tru brier patch. Ef you'll let me off dis time en not whup me, I'll be de bes' nigger on de place, en I won't run'd off no mo'.”

My father looked the black man straight in the eye, then said deliberately: “ Essex, you never did tell me a lie ; I believe you are speaking the truth now. I'm going to trust you.”

“ Fo' Gawd, Marster, I tellin' de trufe.”

Then my father took out his knife and cut the rope with which Essex was bound.

“ Now, Essex,” said father, “ you will live in the house with Big Tom and his wife until you can find you a wife. As soon as you get married, you shall have a house of your own.”

In six weeks Essex had married Dinah, a good woman, and got a house of his own. He became the father of London, one of the two negroes that Mr. Lincoln freed for me. My father gave me London and Jack for my own.



## III

Essex redeemed his pledge. He developed into "de bes' nigger on de place"; and, after a few years of faithful service, was made the foreman. When I first knew him, though he was still in the prime of a vigorous manhood, his kinky hair was turning gray, and to all the children he was "Unc' Essick."

The average black man loves authority. Not so with Unc' Essick, though he accepted the place of foreman with all its responsibilities without a protest. He was prompt, accurate, exact, and demanded first-class service from his fellows, but was always sympathetic, never arrogant. For an uncultured man—a black slave-man—he had high ideals of what constituted righteous living; and up to these ideals he tried to hold his fellow-slaves without harshness or unkindness. The negroes, with few exceptions, loved Unc' Essick and trusted him implicitly. My father, now in bad health, actually leaned on him, and counted himself fortunate in having as foreman a man of such fine judgment and one in all respects so absolutely trustworthy. Like the white people, the negroes, though slaves, had their petty jealousies. There were two or three men on the plantation who did not like Unc' Essick, and for no other reason than that he was promoted over them. They could not understand how the reformed runaway deserved more at my father's hands than they did. Through all the years



they had been faithful, they claimed; now this man who had been away for three years was freely pardoned and highly honored. History was repeating itself, but they could not understand it.

I think every man looking back over his past life can call up some event or some incident that marks his first intelligent conception of the existence of things outside of himself; or the first distinct consciousness of his own identity. I do not remember Unc' Essick farther back than the day the first Secession speech was made on Secession Hill in the town of Abbeville, South Carolina. Unc' Essick and I were there. Father was there. I was still wearing dresses. That day I can never forget. I remember the great crowd of men and boys as they surged by me and around me. I recall even the frantic gesticulation of one of the speakers—the one, I guess, who promised to drink every drop of blood spilled in the War.

That was a strange, new world to me—the crowd, the speaking, the yelling, the little old women with the ginger cakes and cider—everything. And I stood it all with wide-open eyes and attentive ears until the cannon began to boom. That was more than I could stand. So I ran screaming to Unc' Essick. The faithful guardian pressed me trembling to his great, throbbing heart, and, brushing the tears from my cheeks with his big, rough hand, said with peculiar tenderness: “Nuver min', honey, nuver min'; don'



you know if dat big gun bodder dis chile, Unc' Essick chaw it up an' spit it out on de groun'?"

Then I smiled, and I rested my head on his great, broad shoulder and pressed my cheek against the rough face of the black man. I felt safe now, perfectly safe. And I was. That man would have died for me. Did not my mother say to him when we left home that morning, "Now, Essex, take care of the baby?" Yes; Unc' Essick would have died that day for Missus's baby. And the baby knew it, and Missus knew it.

That evening, when the day's excitement was over and we were nearing home, Unc' Essick said to my father: "Marster, who gwine fight? I hear dem ge'men talk 'bout war, en fight, en blood—whut dey mean? Do dey shoot one nudder?" He really understood but little more of what he heard than the child that sat upon his knee.

My father explained the situation as fully as he could to Unc' Essick, and made him understand that war was terrible.

"Does dey stan' up en shoot one nu'er, Marster?"

"Oh, yes; and thousands are killed in war, Essex."

"Gawd, Marster, how kin dey stan' up en let men shoot at 'em bedout runnin'? Why, dat night when dem paterrollers down in Georgia shoot at me en nip off a little piece of my year, I des quit runnin' en flewd. Yas, suh, I flewd."

I looked up into my father's face in time to catch



a broad smile. "Yes," he said, "I guess you came as near flying as a man ever did."

"Yas, suh, I sho flewd. A man kin fly when 'e git skeered 'nuff. All 'e got to do is to guide 'e foots—dey take 'im whar 'e gwine."

The next day a half-dozen neighbors called to discuss the political situation with my father, and with my mother, for she was a great reader and took as lively interest in public affairs as my father did. I was too young to understand much of what they said. But this much I caught: My father, shaking his head emphatically, said more than once: "Gentlemen, it's a mistake—a terrible mistake—and the South will regret the day she brings on war."

But the South did secede; and though my father opposed the step, he seceded with his State. More than that, he invested his money in Confederate bonds.

The baby that heard the first speech on Secession Hill grew and grew rapidly, and, I am sure, was no better than the average boy with Irish blood in his veins. To me life was very real. The great out-of-doors appealed to me strongly, as it does to this good day. Constantly exposed to the danger of being kicked or thrown by the mules, gored by the bulls, or butted by the billy goats, I was an object of special concern to my mother. In her solicitude for my safety, she appealed to Unc' Essick. She couldn't keep me in. Being courageous herself, she did not desire to do so. So she said: "Essex, do watch him



as closely as you can; he is so imprudent, so reckless, that I do not know when I may see him brought in mangled and torn."

Unc' Essick promised, and I want to bear testimony to the fact that the old man never forgot that promise. The morning I rolled off old Bill and broke my arm, he picked me up tenderly, and carrying me in his arms to my mother, said: "Missus, dis chile sholy will git kilt ef he don't stop foolin' wid dat hoss." And the day I slipped off the pole while "skinning the cat" at Dinah's house and split my scalp on the corner of a brick, Unc' Essick was distressed because I bled so freely, and when he carried me all bloody to my mother, he said: "Fo' Gawd, Missus, whut I'm gwine do wid dis chile? De debil heself kyah keep up wid him."

My father's plantation stretched for a mile along Martin's millpond on Little River. Unc' Essick and I had many a good time fishing along that river bank. The water was so deep that mother would not allow me to go there without Unc' Essick. He was an expert fisherman as well as a great swimmer. When the rain caught us fishing, we found shelter in Fox's Den. This was a large sheltering rock at the big bend of the river beneath which a dozen persons could find shelter from the severest rainstorm. Tradition had it that in the early days of the history of our country Tom Fox, a white man, stole a negro in Virginia and sold him in South Carolina. Few crimes were more



heinous in the South in those days than “nigger stealing”; and, if caught, the thief paid the penalty with his life, like the horse thief in the West. Closely pursued, Tom Fox took refuge under this rock and there lived for many months. But Fox was finally caught and executed. Since then his hiding place has been called “Fox’s Den.”

One day, while sitting beneath the protecting rock, watching the patter of the raindrops on the millpond as it stretched out before us, I said to my guardian: “Unc’ Essick, who made this rock?”

“Lawdy, chile, whut you bodder ’bout dis rock fur? Gawd mek de rock, honey; He mek everthing; He mek de water out dar; He mek dis tree; He mek me en you; He mek me black en you white.”

“Unc’ Essick,” I persisted, “where is God?”

“Good Gawd, honey, whut matter’d you? Dey tell me Gawd live eb’rywhar. Miss Marthy tell me Gawd inside you.”

Miss Martha Crosby, one of the sweetest old ladies I ever knew, boarded in my home, taught the Little Mountain school, and every Sunday afternoon taught my father’s slaves the Bible.

“Miss Marthy,” he continued, “say Gawd inside you. I ’spec He is. He in your ma en pa, en Miss Marthy, en Dinah. But, honey, Gawd des couldn’ stay in some folks—dey too mean. Now, dar’s Kizzy; does you t’ink Gawd could stay in Kizzy? Uh-uh! dat nigger too mean—dat nigger cuss, en steal, en



fight. No, no, honey, de debil stay in dat kine. He mean; he love folks whut cuss, en steal, en fight.”

“Unc’ Essick, I wish I could see Jesus.”

“Wal, honey, when we git home you look at yo’ ma; I t’ink she look lak Jesus—she so good en kind to uverboddy.”

My mother has been in heaven forty years. Her picture hangs above my desk. When I see that smile that never passes, and those loving eyes that follow me into every corner of the room; when I think of how she gave her life a willing sacrifice for the good of humanity, white and black, I am fully persuaded that the old man was right. I see reflected in her life more and more the character of my Lord and Master.

The old, old question of God and heaven, that must come to every normal child, came to me in Fox’s Den. The man-child, so full of animal life, was struggling for light—spiritual light. What philosopher, what theologian could have served him better than Unc’ Essick did—Unc’ Essick, the reformed runaway?

The war cloud had burst in all its fury. We were not disturbed by the roar of musketry or the booming of cannon, but that our country was passing through a baptism of fire and blood there could be no doubt. The weekly paper brought the mournful, saddening list of wounded and dead, and a dozen neighbor boys had been brought to the graveyard at old Shiloh Church. There were sighing and sorrow everywhere.



My brother, my only brother, was with Lee in Virginia. My father's health was bad, so the plantation was left to mother and Unc' Essick. Besides looking after the varied interests of the farm, Unc' Essick found time to teach me to ride and shoot. He had little patience with carelessness in handling either horse or gun. The old man thought it was a disgrace for a "ge'man" to be unable to shoot accurately, ride well, and swim with ease.

My father died in the spring of 1864. I stood for the first time in the presence of death. I was staggered by the pale face and intense suffering of my father. I couldn't understand the subdued agony of my mother. Now I know, and have known these many years, what it meant.

Father called for Unc' Essick. "Essex," he said, "I am going to die. I can't last much longer. It's hard for me to leave Missus and the children. These are terrible times, Essex. William is in Virginia, and may never come back. You have been honest and faithful, Essex, and I want to leave Missus and the children in your care. Will you take care of them, Essex?"

The big-hearted, broad-shouldered slave had stood by the bed trembling like a leaf and sobbing like a wounded child. Dropping on his knees, he took my father's emaciated hand in both of his, and then pressing it to his lips, said between his sobs: "Gawd bless



you, Marster; ef Gawd spar me, I'll tek kere Missus an' dese chillun. Gawd knows I will."

And no man of any color was ever truer to his promise. Many a night he slept on the piazza, and there I really believe he would have died before any man, black or white, could have entered that door uninvited.

#### IV

When Sherman's army was passing through Georgia, there were all sorts of rumors as to the desolation and ruin left in its path. When, leaving Savannah, that army turned toward Columbia, all the lonely women of South Carolina thought they would be robbed of all property and left to starve. Sharing the apprehension with thousands of others, my mother took counsel with Unc' Essick, her only adviser.

"Essex," she said, "I'm afraid Sherman's army will take everything we've got. What shall we do?"

"Gawd knows, Missus, but one t'ing sho: ef you gi' me yo' silver en eb'ryt'ing you want hide, I'll put it whar no Yankee kyah git it. An', Missus, ef you let me, I hide some dat meat. Dat meat too good fur dem Yankee to eat."

"Do you think you can hide my silver so they can't find it?"

"Yas'm, I kin put it whar nobody kin git it; but dar's one t'ing, Missus: ef dey kill me, den you won't see yo' silver no mo'—hit'll stay right whar I put it."



When assured by mother that they would not kill him, but that they would take him off with them if he would go, the old man said with a troubled look: "Why, Missus, didn't I promise Marster I would tek kere you en de chillun?"

"Yes, you did, Essex, and I know you'll do it; when do you want the silver?"

"You put it right here on dis top step tonight, des soon ez all de chillun go to bed. Don't let nobuddy see it."

The box of silver was placed just where Unc' Essick wanted it, and the next day we ate with pewter spoons and two-pronged forks. Seeing these things, we children concluded that Sherman's army had actually come during the night and stolen away the silver while we slept. Some of us began to ask questions, but a shake of the head and a well-known look from mother reassured us. Somehow, we knew Unc' Essick had a hand in the business.

That was an unusually busy week for Unc' Essick. Whatever mother prized, either for its intrinsic value or for its association, was turned over to him without a question as to what disposition would be made of it.

"Missus," Unc' Essick said to mother, "dem 'lasses in de bar'l—I kin fill all dem jugs an' hide 'em so Marse Sherman kyah niver find 'em."

"All right, Essex; hide just what you please—molasses, meat, everything."

"Marse Sherman" had no chance at "dem



'lasses"; but I am sure Unc Essick was right, for he hid the jugs in the river swamp two miles from home, and no being with less shrewdness than a fox could have followed his own trail through that tangle of long grass and underbrush. A thousands pounds of bacon he buried in another section of the plantation in a pine wood thickly carpeted with springy, spongy needles, over which he could roll the barrels (for he had packed it in barrels) without leaving any evidence by which he could be tracked.

During that week Unc' Essick seemed to be on the alert day and night. I couldn't catch him in his cabin after supper, and didn't understand when I did find him in daylight why he didn't have time to take me on his knee and answer my questions. They were but the questions of a child, yet throbbing with worlds of interest to that child. With Unc' Essick constantly on the go and my mother so often on her knees in the little shed-room, I felt sure something was about to happen.

One day a squad of Federal soldiers came by and asked for something to eat. Mother had dinner prepared for them. They were not as polite nor as gentlemanly as they might have been in the presence of a widow whose hospitality they were receiving. They were ruffians. One of them caught me by the ear and twisted it until I cried. I caught my mother's skirt and, sobbing, buried my face in her apron.

Pointing her finger at the man, the courageous lit-



the woman said with considerable feeling: "You are no gentleman, sir; you are a disgrace to the uniform you wear."

"You go to hell!" was the insolent retort.

Unc' Essick saw and heard what happened. "Missus," he said, when they were gone, "dem's no ge'men; dat man whut pull my baby year ain' nuttun but po' buckra—he po' white trash. Ef Marster wuz here, he'd sho mek dat man look down de bar'l o' he shotgun."

But Sherman's army never came. Only a few stragglers or camp-followers came within a mile of my home.

When the smoke from the smoldering embers of our once beautiful capital city had cleared away, and all fear of Sherman's army was gone, mother told Unc' Essick he might bring in the silver and other buried treasure. To my inexpressible delight, Unc' Essick said I might go with him to gather up all the things he had so cleverly hidden. I had a picnic.

First, we went for the silver. The faithful old man took me to the river swamp. At the mouth of Spur Creek, a small tributary to the river, he rolled up his pantaloons above his knees, took me on his back, saying, "Now, baby, you hole tight 'round my neck," and stepping into the stream, he waded up it three hundred yards or more and then stepped out into a jungle that was fit only for the habitat of wild animals and runaways. Slipping his hand under some



long fallen grass, he drew out a short-handled spade. Examining very minutely the bark on a willow tree, on which he had made some mark intelligible to him only, he got his direction, and, taking me on his back again, he crawled, climbed, and walked a hundred yards into the heart of the swamp. Seating me on a bending tree, so that I could see all that was done, he pulled away some trash almost underneath me, and, driving the spade into the soft, loamy soil, soon brought up the box of silver and placed it on the tree beside me.

I was lost; was as helpless as a baby sure enough, but knew the man in whom I had placed my trust.

After so long a time, we got home. Unc' Essick made other trips to the swamps and fields that day, but I had enough for one day. After a few days everything was brought in; not one thing was lost. Unc' Essick had been true to "Missus an' de chillun."

## V

The War closed, and the negroes were freed. After two or three years of trying experiences in the management of the farm, mother rented the plantation to a white man and moved to a little village in another county in search of educational facilities for her children. The negroes, like those of other plantations, were scattered "to the four winds." Some of them I kept up with for a few years, Unc' Essick in par-



ticular. After a while, however, I lost sight of all—even of Unc' Essick.

A dozen years ago I met Mack, who was but a child when he was set free. All these years Mack had lived in the neighborhood of his birthplace. I tried to learn from him the whereabouts of at least a few of the other freedmen; but he could tell me of only two or three.

“Dey dade, suh,” he said; “en dem whut ain't dade, dun scattered.”

“And Unc' Essick, Mack; can you tell me what became of Unc' Essick?”

“Unc' Essick dade, suh, long ago; he git drowneded.”

“What, Unc' Essick drowned, and he the best swimmer in the county?”

“Yas, suh, he git drowneded; I seed him; I he'p git 'im out. He tuk de cramp.”

Need I blush to confess that I brushed the tears from my cheek when I heard of the tragic death of Unc' Essick? No, reader; if you knew slavery at its best—if you knew the close relationship and the tender feeling existing between master and slave on some plantations—then I need not blush. If true worth consists of “fidelity in one's lot” wherever duty calls, then this colored man—this slave man—was a man of true worth indeed—he was one of the noblemen of the world. He taught the wayward white child to love the truth, to tell the truth; he taught me the names and habits of the birds; he taught me to swim, shoot,



and ride. He taught me nothing of books, but much of life. Of all my teachers, from the first to the most cultured at the university, very few impressed my life more profoundly than did this uncultured child of nature.

In an unmarked grave sleep the ashes of Unc' Essick, the faithful slave, the patient teacher, the colored gentleman. Lovingly, reverently, would I lay this little tribute on the grave of one of the best and truest and noblest men I ever knew—white or black.





## CHAPTER II

### DICK, THE SLAVE BOY

“WHAT is your name, young man?”

“Richard Harris, suh, but dey calls me Dick,” was the prompt, intelligent reply that came from a bright-eyed little copper-colored negro, as he stood in line with a dozen others while their owner, a slave dealer, was discoursing earnestly on the excellence of the group and the particularly fine points of several individuals.

“Yas, suh, dey calls me Dick,” continued the boy; “he say”—nodding his head toward the “drover” now at the other end of the line—“he say Richard too long name fur a nigger.”

My father was pleased with the intelligence of the child, and, when the owner approached Dick’s end of the line, asked him how much he wanted for the boy. The price was named, a check was written, and Dick stepped out of line. When my father said, “Come with me, my boy,” the little fellow spread a smile all over his bright face and waved a farewell to his companions still standing in line uncertain as to their destiny—silently, submissively wondering whether they, too, would be bought and kept in South Carolina, or



be allowed to go further South, to that region which to them meant sickness and chains and death. They were not all children, and some of them had heard exaggerated stories of the horrors of the Louisiana cane fields. Thus far they had come from the tobacco fields of Virginia.

It was rather singular that the little darkey, going he knew not where, and with a white man he had never seen before, was disposed to be rather talkative. Nor did the new master restrain him.

“Where did you come from, Dick?” he was asked.

“Furginny, suh; us come fum Furginny,” was the prompt reply.

“What was your owner’s name?”

“Who dat, suh?”

“Your master, what was his name?”

“O yas, suh, he name Marse John Harris; dat whut he name.”

“What was your daddy’s name?”

“Me ain’ had no daddy, suh; mammy say me ain’ gut no daddy—she say she des find me.”

“What made your master sell you?”

“My mammy die, suh, en Marse John say ’e doan need me no mo’; en ’e sell me.”

My father was sorry for the little fellow, and said to him:



“ Well, Dick, I’m taking you to a good home ; if you will be good, you will never be sold again.”

“ Yas, suh, I’ll be good ; I’ll be smart, suh.”

Just a few days before this momentous event in the life of Dick, the twelve-year-old slave boy, my father heard my mother express the wish that she could have a bright, quick boy whom she could train up to suit herself. The butler she had was so stupid she feared she could never develop him into a satisfactory servant. So father purchased Dick for the purpose of presenting him to mother as a boy he felt sure would “ fill the bill.”

The next morning Dick was installed as house-boy, general utility servant. And though so young, the little negro was so bright and quick and “ smart,” he soon won the confidence and admiration of the entire household and proved to be one of the most satisfactory servants my mother ever owned.

Dick grew rapidly, and, being all the time about the house, soon learned to talk as correctly as the average white child.

When he was fifteen years old, Dick’s uncommon intelligence made him quite notorious throughout the neighborhood. He felt the importance of his position, picked up, and could use words that were utterly meaningless to his fellows. Indeed, he looked with a kind of contempt upon the ordinary “ field-hand.”

Some gentleman from Georgia tried to buy the



precocious lad. Five of them were guests in our home for a week. They had come from beyond the Savannah to attend the sale of a large estate just three miles from home. One of the wealthiest men in the county had died, and to sell his property, including lands, stock of all kinds, and 350 negroes, required more than a week. These gentlemen, wealthy Georgia planters, had come over to attend the sale.

One of them was so struck with the intelligence of the boy that "waited on" them, he determined to take him back to Georgia if money could buy him. So he asked my father to put a price on Dick.

"Dick belongs to my wife, and I know you can't get him," was the reply he got.

Not satisfied, however, with that, he tried my mother, who laughed at the idea of selling Dick.

"Why, that boy," she said, "is worth more to me than half the negroes on the plantation. You can't buy Dick, sir."

Even that did not satisfy him. He made one offer after another, until the figure reached was twice as much as the market value of a full-grown man. Finally, the morning they were to start on the return trip to Georgia, he said, "I'll give you three thousand dollars for Dick."

My mother looked at him in amazement, and, with considerable feeling, said: "Sir, I told you you could



not get Dick; now I want to tell you there is not enough money in Georgia to buy that boy!"

When the guests had gone, Dick slipped out into the back yard and danced a jig, cut the pigeon wing, and walked on his hands, all to the delight of a group of pickaninnies, who looked upon him as a kind of wonder. Dick was in fact a pet on the plantation. Every white person from the oldest to the youngest trusted him implicitly, and every negro either admired him or looked upon him with a kind of suspicious awe.

Six months after the Georgian had made the large offer for Dick, the boy was stricken with typhoid fever. Despite everything that could be done by the best physicians in the county, the fever left Dick with drawn limbs, and he never walked again. Ever after, he was a cripple. He could use his hands and arms a little, but had no control over his legs and feet, and sat on the floor with his knees drawn up to his chest.

Dick's body grew, his head grew, and his mind grew, but the power of locomotion he lost completely. Now, he could do nothing but sit wherever placed, look about him, and talk to any one who came within reach of him.

Though Dick's body was a wreck, his mind seemed to be brighter than ever. His unfailing good humor and ready wit won for him many kindnesses from his fellow slaves. The men carried him from place to place on their backs. Though the poor fellow had



but little use of his hands and arms, and none whatever of his legs, by persistent effort, he learned after a while to move himself about over the house and over the yard when the ground was dry and hard. By lifting his feet with his hands as far out in front of his body as he could, and then raising his body just a little by pressing his knuckles down on the ground, he would move himself forward. The process was slow and tedious at first, and not without pain, but after some months the rapidity and ease with which he could get across the yard was amazing. Dick was a slave, but in that condition he could do no work, of course. His owners, my parents, were glad to make life for the poor fellow as happy as possible.

Somebody was needed to have general oversight of the little negroes, half a hundred of them. Dick's intelligence and enforced confinement to the yard seemed to point to him as the proper one for that task. So he was duly commissioned "boss of the pickaninnies." And right well did he discharge the duties of his office. The little negroes from ten to fourteen years of age, left by their mothers in charge of the babies, needed some one of keen eye and ear to see that they did not neglect their charges. The little ones of all ages from infants of a few weeks to those of nine or ten summers needed pretty constant attention. Some one was needed to keep the larger ones out of mischief and the helpless ones from suffering for lack of food



and water. Dick was by common consent made commander-in-chief of the entire kingdom of little darkies.

Though constantly on the alert till the mammies came in the evening to relieve him of their little ones, Dick had plenty of leisure, and became anxious to get a peep into that other world that seemed to be locked up in the words on the scraps of paper that occasionally blew across the yard, and on the printed page of the books he saw in the hands of the white children.

It was against the law in our State to teach a slave to read or write, and Dick knew it. He had heard it from the lips of the white folks. That very fact possibly increased his curiosity to taste of the forbidden fruit.

Sitting one warm day in the shade of a large tree in the yard, with a dozen little darkies sleeping around him, Dick noticed on a wagon body that hung under a shed the names, Gower and Markley. Brushing the dust from the hard ground before him, he began making the letters with a sharpened stick. Persistently he worked away at the self-appointed task until thoroughly tired out. The next day he repeated his work, and kept it up day after day until he succeeded in making on the ground a creditable copy of the names, though he knew not the sound of a single letter.

To one of my sisters passing near him, Dick said:



“ Miss Sallie, please ma'm, will you tell me whut them marks is on the wagon body? ”

“ Why, Dick, those are the names of the men who made the wagon. Gower and Markley are waggon and buggy makers. Their shop is in Greenville, South Carolina.”

“ Yas, ma'm, thanky, ma'm; I dun make 'em on de groun'.”

The astonished girl looked on the ground in front of the cripple and saw a perfectly legible copy of the names. Using her riding whip as a pointer, she gave him the name of each letter and the sound of each according to the rules in Webster's Blue Back Speller, the book used possibly in every school in America at that time.

Unwittingly, she gave Dick the very key he so much needed. Over and over he repeated the words, *Gower and Markley*, and again and again he sounded each letter. Neither the name nor the sound of a single letter in those three words escaped him.

Toward evening, a gust of wind blew a newspaper across the yard. Dick had one of the negro children to bring it to him, and that proved to be a veritable store house of good things for him. There he found the friends whose acquaintance he had made on the wagon body, and with them some strangers that were to him no less interesting. To make their acquaintance, to learn their names and sounds, was the problem



before him. So all the next day he patiently, laboriously, picked out on that paper all the letters found in the names on the wagon body, and assiduously studied and made others whose names and sounds he did not know.

The third day, another young lady of the house crossing the yard gave him the opportunity for which he had been watching. Lifting his cap, he said:

“ Miss Jennie, will you please ma'm tell we whut this is? ”

My sisters were old enough to know that there was a State law against teaching a slave to read. They knew it, but somehow not a member of the family regarded Dick as a slave, and neither of the girls thought of the law, or cared for it, when the helpless cripple asked for assistance.

So “ Miss Jennie ” sat down by Dick, and for an hour taught him the letters, the words, and their meaning. And that hour meant emancipation for Dick—emancipation from the bondage of ignorance and superstition. Every sentence on that paper he spelled out and repeated until it became literally a part of him.

But Dick's greatest joy was to come yet. About the time his precious sheet of paper was worn to shreds, Ida, the youngest of my six sisters in school, was laying aside her Blue Back Speller to begin McGuffie's series of readers. Hearing of Dick's unre-



mitting efforts to learn to read, she determined to make him a present of the book that had given her so much trouble. The book was "dog-eared" and torn, but to Dick it was a treasure indeed. The columns of words to be spelled and the passages to be read were to him a delight, but the pictures and stories in the back of it were a "joy forever."

When my mother learned that Dick could read, she said: "Poor fellow! I do not know how he learned to read, but now he shall have access to the best books in the library." And that very night Dick became the proud possessor of a New Testament, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, and a Methodist Hymnal. She knew that Dick had a good voice, was fond of singing, and would appreciate the hymnal as much as any other book. Dick spent the long winter evenings reading to the other slaves. Sometimes a score or more of them would assemble in his cabin to hear him. And many of those grand old hymns written by Watts and the Wesleys were sung, if not with professional skill, at least with unction. Dick, the leader, "lined out" the hymns, and then all sang with genuine pleasure.

After some months, when Dick had learned to read well, my mother put into his hands a copy of Robert Burns' Poems, and one of Tennyson's. These were her favorites, and very naturally the first she would hand to Dick. Tennyson became to him a perennial well-spring of happiness. The Charge of the Light



Brigade he committed to memory, and never tired of repeating it. Many passages of Enoch Arden, too, he knew by heart, but he could never do a great deal with Burns. The dialect puzzled him, though he persevered until he thoroughly mastered and appreciated "The Cotter's Saturday Night." Tales of adventure appealed very strongly to him, and Cooper's novels he read over and over again.

I was younger than my sisters who inadvertently taught Dick to read. So when I began to wrestle with the difficulties in Webster, I found in the cripple slave a most willing helper. Over many hard places he helped me in the afternoon when I returned discouraged from the school room. And he was so patient, so gentle, so sympathetic that my love for him grew with every victory over the long, hard words.

Dick had never studied or even heard of English Grammar, of course; so when I reached that point in the school curriculum, he and I studied together. Dick learned the thirty-four rules in half the time that I required. I didn't like that. I didn't see why a negro should beat me learning grammar. But he did, and I was sore over the fact for a long time, though I didn't let Dick know it. Many a sentence we parsed together. Sometimes we disagreed in our analysis of a sentence, and, consequently, in the parsing of it. And that's what piqued me—Dick usually got the best of me in our argument over a disputed point. I



failed to make allowance for the fact that he was a full-grown man in years; I, but a child.

We studied Smith's Grammar, and, despite its many shortcomings as viewed by present-day grammarians, we both learned to speak with passable correctness.

I remember the fun we had trying to parse John's cap. "John's is a proper noun, masculine gender, third person, singular number, possessive case, and governed by cap, according to Rule First: 'The possessive case is governed by the following noun.'"

I said: "Dick, I don't understand that. I don't see how John is governed by his cap—I'm not governed by mine."

With a tantalizing chuckle, Dick replied: "I understand it; you are all the time losing your cap and spend half your time looking for it. Yes, you are governed by your cap."

I could not deny the allegation, but was an unwilling witness, and didn't at all like the smile that played over Dick's face.

In further illustration of the meaning of case, Mr. Smith said: "If we say of a horse, he is fat, he is in a good case; if lean, he is in a bad case." This we both accepted without protest; we knew horses, and thought we understood perfectly.

One Friday afternoon, the teacher said to my class: "Now, I want each of you to bring me Monday



morning a composition. Write on the subject of *Perseverance*." That seemed to me the culmination of all my troubles. I knew nothing of perseverance, and had no idea what she meant by "composition." But to my friend who never failed me I went as soon as I got home.

Dick assured me that we two could manage the difficulty, and very soon with slate and pencil we were settled down to business. One sentence after another was dictated to me till nearly the whole of one side of my slate was filled. I amused the composer very much, I remember, by saying: "Hold on, Dick; you are making it too good. Don't do that; if you do, Miss Pendle will know I didn't write it."

The big-hearted fellow laughed heartily at the thought of its being too good. However, with the expenditure of much energy on my part, the work was continued until both sides of my slate were filled. Then said my co-laborer in a manner that I can never forget: "Now, Bubber, don't you think it would be wrong to take that to your teacher? Miss Pendle might not know I helped you, but, anyhow, would it be right to fool her? I think you better rub out everything on your slate and go over yonder under that tree and write it yourself. You'll feel better about it, and you won't be afraid to look your teacher right in the eye."

Child as I was, I felt the force of his plea and did



as he suggested. Candor compells me to confess, however, that down to this good day, after fifty years, I have a distinct recollection of trying to reproduce Dick's sentences as he had framed them. But the lesson was a good one, and did credit to the head and heart of my colored teacher,—Richard Harris was my teacher in the best and truest sense.

After the Civil War, the negroes were scattered "to the four winds." They had to change homes in order to realize that they were really and truly free. My mother moved to a neighboring town to get school facilities. Dick found a home with Pleasant Watts, a kind-hearted colored man who had a large family and needed some one to look after his younger children.

After I had finished my college course, it became necessary for me to spend one winter on the plantation. Learning that Dick was in the home of Watts, just seven miles away, I sent for him. My object was to make him perfectly comfortable and to have the benefit of his company in the long winter evenings I was shut up in my bachelor quarters. Dick read to me papers, magazines, and books, and the evenings passed most pleasantly. He had a mellifluous voice and perfectly modulated. How the crippled, unassisted country negro could so perfectly modulate his voice and so beautifully and clearly express the meaning of the sentences he read, I could never understand. His sense



of humor was very fine and his power of interpretation was simply marvelous.

Though the unfortunate fellow could get his hands on but few books and papers, he read these few so thoroughly that he kept pretty well posted and knew much more than the average white man of questions of public interest.

Unlike most men of his race, Dick had decided views on all questions that concerned the conduct, character, and possibilities of the negro, and did not hesitate to express them freely.

Richard Harris died at the age of fifty, and was buried in a box specially constructed for him,—his legs were never straightened. He had a brown skin, but a golden heart, and, I believe, sleeps the sleep of the righteous.



## CHAPTER III

### CHRISTMAS AND THE MOVING PICTURE

I AM thinking of a time in the long ago, when to me Santa Claus was a great reality. The bells, the reindeer, the sled were no dream. My faith in their existence was as intense as my childish nature could make it. And now at the hour of midnight—for this is Christmas Eve—when everything is quiet save the occasional roar of a cannon cracker thrown by some boy who has grown beyond the age of watchful waiting for Santa Claus, now while millions of precious eyes are hard to keep closed and as many millions more are closing despite all efforts to keep them open, now I wish to register a protest against the cruelty of any man or woman who would, purposely or inadvertently, tear this precious idol from the heart of an innocent, happy child.

Yes, I am thinking of the long ago, when I slept in the trundlebed from which I could see so well in the glow of the dying embers of the spacious fireplace, and could see so plainly the horns and the hoofs of the reindeer as they came cautiously down the chimney. O, the imagination of little children when deeply, vitally interested! And the joy of anticipation that can never be equalled in maturer years.



I am thinking, too, of the partner of my childish joys. My little sister Ellen—I called her “Rat,” but to all the others she was “the baby”—was as anxious to see “Old Sandy” as I was, but those dear, loving eyes, two years younger than mine, could not stand the strain so long, and closed in sleep, a smiling sleep, provokingly soon, and, notwithstanding her oft-repeated promise, “I’ll stay wake wid oo’ Bud-John, and watch for Old Sandy,” she left me to do the watching all by myself.

I am thinking of her tonight, and see her not as she is, a thoughtful, sympathetic grandmother, and at this very moment, perhaps, playing the role of Santa Claus, but as the precious, gentle, clinging, loving little sister whose gentleness and sweetness meant so much in its restraining influence over the rough, boyish, sometimes brutal, nature of her brother. O what a flood of precious memories! They stir my soul while the clock strikes twelve and the cannon crackers on the street cease firing one by one.

Yes, thank God for these memories that make life worth living and the past, the buried past, a part of our very selves. I see my little sister now with both hands raised and hear the very intonations of her baby-voice when she pleaded, “O, Bud-John, don’t do that!” I can see now her little lips quiver and the big tear steal out on her long eyelashes. She was pleading for the kittens. I was tying their tails to-



gether to make them fight. She didn't say, "I'll tell mama." Oh, no; she knew what that meant. It would bring to her brother an unpleasant association with mother's slipper. More than once, she had shed tears because of the music produced by that association, and she would not by a word jeopardize the pantaloons of her cruel brother. But, like others of her sex of maturer years, she resorted to tears and to gentle pleading:

"O, please, Bud-John, don't do that; don't hurt my kitty."

And, like many another bigger boy, her brother, yielding to the pressure, loosed the cats, kissed away the sister's tears, and said: "Now, run along, like a sweet girl." Did she go? Not on your life. Not until the cats were out of reach. And they lost no time, you may be sure.

When they were safe beyond the barn or hid away in the woodhouse and no longer in immediate danger of Bud-John and his dog, she slyly tapped her brother on the cheek and said coquettishly, "Oo bad old boy."

But these were war times, and Santa Claus is wonderfully handicapped in war times, as the children of Belgium so well know. But mother said he'd come, and he did. He never failed us. The Yankees bothered him, mother said, and he couldn't get rich, fine candy and beautiful dolls as he wished to do. So he did the next best thing: he brought us candy made of



sorghum syrup and rag dolls that were as beautiful as deft, loving fingers could make them. The wagon painted red and with iron wheels he could not bring. Mother said he tried very hard, but couldn't.

My disappointment was very great. I wanted to hitch Jack and Peter, two negro boys to the wagon and have them pull it, while little sister did the riding and I did the driving. Mother assured me that Old Santa would do better in the future, but that for the present I must be content with the wagon she would have Unc' Essick make for me. I promised. The wagon was made, and right well did it serve its purpose.

Around the faithful black man I danced in perfect glee while he made and ironed the body. And when we went off to the "river bottom" to get the wheels, I was happiness personified. Unc' Essick carried me on his back, and, with my childish fingers run into his kinky hair to make my position more secure, I plied him with many a question until we reached the river swamp.

There in that body of splendid timber on Little River, just above the Premium bottom, we selected the black gum tree from which were to be sawed the wheels for my wagon. In the one-horse wagon Tony had brought the long, cross-cut saw with which he and Unc' Essick soon cut off the wheels from the black gum after it had been felled. From this round tree blocks two inches thick were sawed. In the



centre holes were bored, and we had wheels as nearly perfect as untrained, unskilled hands could make them. And the joy and happiness I got out of that wagon only the country boy who has had one of his own can ever know.

I didn't care for the painted wagon any more. "Old Sandy" might keep his old red puny wagon so far as I was concerned. I loved the heavy, hard timber that was in the running-gear of my own, and the solid, round wheels that made it to me "a thing of beauty and a joy forever." I hitched Jack and Pete to it for a fact, drove them with cotton lines my mother made for me—the softest and prettiest I ever saw. I cracked over the backs, and sometimes *on* the backs, of my two-legged horses a whip that Uncle Griffin, the wagoner, platted for me, while they kicked and reared and snorted like real horses, giving infinite delight to "de baby," the little queen who rode in the luxurious chariot.

The Christmas holidays were gone before I got my wagon completed, but, though the candy was all gone and the rag dolls were considerably the worse for wear, when that wagon was finished it brought with it joy unspeakable. We had Christmas all the time.

But little children, like larger people, want a change. So my two horses, Jack and Peter, suggested that we hitch two calves to the wagon. We did it, selecting two strong, burly fellows we had already been accustomed to riding to and from the pasture.



The calves were unruly and protested against such treatment, but Unc' Griffin made us a little yoke and bows (he was just enough of a blacksmith to do the ironing also), and we continued the fight until we broke them in and could drive them anywhere.

Mother had no objection to our working the calves, but it certainly did spoil baby's fun. For mother said: "Mark you, young man, don't put little sister in that wagon while you have the calves hitched to it." I said "yas 'um," and the baby looked sad. The children didn't know the danger, but wise, prudent mother did.

When mother meant to be quite positive, she sometimes addressed me as "young man." So, I looked into her eye and saw that that bill had passed its third reading and was as unchangeable as the law of the Medes and Persians. And "the baby" got to ride no more, except when Jack and Pete put their own necks under the yoke and gave her a dash or two across the yard. Their jumping and kicking were just as amusing as the antics of Charley Chaplin are to the city child today.

But, while the baby could not ride now, there was one thing we could do—we could ride ourselves, taking turn about. A neighbor boy, too, and kinsman, was frequently with us, entering heartily into our sports. There were so many calves in that pasture that when one pair was so well broken that they ceased to be exciting, we brought out another. One



morning after a rain, when we had in harness a pair of specially frisky little bulls, we offered the seat of honor to our visitor from the neighboring plantation.

George seated himself with that deliberate, determined air that has characterized him ever since, and gave the signal to proceed. We did. When I came down on the backs of the cattle with that platted whip, those little bulls thought a cyclone had struck them. Their heads were turned down a long red hill. What they did in the way of running, bawling, and kicking was a plenty. And what our guest did in the way of flying was also a plenty. When I see the Judge now, presiding over a court in all his dignity, I see two pictures, the one before me and that other fifty years ago—I see a head in the mud, two heels in the air, two arms and hands clutching at anything and everything, and I smell sulphur.

Did he cuss? Well now, reader, that's been more than fifty years ago; don't ask me to strain my memory. Did he want to fight? Now, I left about that time. I was peeping from behind the barn, and down to this good day I can't think of the incident without a good, hearty laugh. The city boy of today has his moving picture show. I had mine fifty years ago and more.



## CHAPTER IV

### FIRST TRADING EXPEDITION

FIRST and last, every calf in that pasture was "tried out." Some of them were found to be tame and lifeless; others were full of spirit, and tried our mettle as we tried theirs.

Finally, we settled down on two that were well matched in size, strength, and gait, and with spirit enough to keep us constantly on the *qui vive*. More than once they ran away with us and tore things to pieces, but that just whetted our appetite for other tests of strength.

When we had finally chosen among the little steers, we found great pleasure in raking the ticks off the pair selected and in giving them extra food, so that they might grow more rapidly. In this we were not disappointed. The fact that we curried them so persistently and fed them so regularly, gave them a start which ended in their developing into a pair of magnificent animals.

One was white with red spots, and the other was black with white spots. We named them Buck and Dick. Buck was our leader, and as game an ox as ever responded to the crack of a whip. When full



grown, what a splendid picture he made. And what a powerful animal. Many a time I saw him pulled to his knees, and occasionally saw him overloaded, but never did I see him fail to respond to a call for business. The very persistence of that calf was an object lesson to the proud boy who called him his own.

The calves grew rapidly, much more rapidly, of course, than did their drivers. The little yoke that Uncle Griffin first made for us was scarcely larger than our legs at the ankle, and, one day, to our great discomfort, broke at the centre. At first we were badly upset, but our old friend, the wagoner-blacksmith, came to our rescue in this our time of dire need, and very soon had us a larger, stronger, and prettier one.

This one lasted six months, but yielding, at last, to the increasing strength of the steers, parted in the middle as the other had done. But for this emergency we were prepared. Exploring one day in a lumber house, Jack and I ran across a splendid yoke my father had thrown in there a few years before, when he had discarded the use of oxen on the plantation.

Buck and Dick, now well grown, were no longer amusing, but became to us a source of no little pleasure and pride. We found that they and we were getting to be considerable factors in the promotion of farm work. When the mules were busy with the plowing,



we did the "milling," hauled the wood—well, the oximobile was constantly on the go.

Searching among the abandoned and broken farm implements in the lumber house that yielded us the yoke, Jack and I found the front part of a two-horse wagon, axle, wheels, hounds, bolster, and tongue. That was a great find. It was speedily rigged up and greased, and then we saw there was but one thing lacking—there was no body for the cart.

For a time this new problem was somewhat perplexing, but we had so often been forced to rely upon our own resources that we determined to find a way out of this trouble. We had both learned the use of carpenters' tools. So we set to work determined to make a frame for our cart. With hammer and chisel and saw, we made the frame with standards of regulation size and height. It was no fine piece of work. There was nothing beautiful about it. Indeed, it was rough and uneven, but the making of it brought out the best that was in the boys, and therein lay its worth.

It represented sweat, mashed and bleeding fingers, tears, and—some ugly words; ugly words when Jack's hammer flew off the handle and hit me on the nose, bringing the blood. But the work done was a triumph. We had won. We could now haul wood, rails, or anything that did not require a body or "bed."

My mother was not a little gratified when she saw the persistency with which I worked at that job.



Anxious always to encourage her children in earnest, honest effort, she said to me:

“ My son, you have done well; you shall have a body for your cart. Go up to Cunningham’s shop and ascertain what they will charge to make you one.”

Within a week we had a nice, neat, poplar body for our cart, and were ready to haul anything. The steers were fat and strong and docile, and the boys were as happy as a Kentuckian driving his thoroughbreds.

One lovely day in the spring, Mother asked if I thought Jack and I could take some peas to “ town ” and sell them.

I assured her that we could and was anxious to make the trip.

“ We need some salt,” she said; “ and I would like so much to get some coffee.”

My mother, like thousands of other Southern gentlewomen, had been drinking coffee made of parched wheat, dried potatoes, and acorns. No wonder she wanted to taste once more the genuine article. The reader may laugh at the idea of using such things as substitutes for pure Java. Ask your father about it; if born in the South and living on a plantation in those dark days, he knows the trials through which we passed.

That was in 1866. My father had died in '64. The war had ceased. The Confederate soldiers, those that survived that fearful cataclysm, had returned, some



of them maimed but magnificent, to their broken, desolated homes. They were freed from the dust and danger of mortal combat to be shrouded by the darkness of the Reconstruction period. Only those who lived through that period can have any proper conception of it. And only those who lived through the last days of the great Civil War can ever know the self-denial and personal sacrifices many were called upon to make.

We made the trip to "town," Abbeville—Jack and I—and carried five bushels of peas to trade for salt and coffee. Accustomed to go with us to the mill, Dick, the cripple, asked Mother's permission to accompany us on our first trading expedition. Jack and I, a little doubtful as to our ability to pull off the trading stunt just right, were glad to have Dick with us. Though he could not walk, he was unusually clear-headed, and could advise us in case of emergency.

Things went well, however. We had no trouble in swapping our peas for salt and coffee.

When we left home, Mother placed in the cart a few dozen eggs, three pounds of butter, and two bottles of pepper pickles. She had grown the pepper, and made the vinegar from apple cider, and, like most boys when they think of their mother's good things, I'm sure I have seldom since then tasted pickles half so fine. "Sell all these things if you can," she said, "and after you get the salt and coffee, you may buy a dime's worth of candy."



I hadn't seen or tasted real "store candy" since the War began. The very thought of it made me supremely happy.

We found ready sale for everything but the pickles. For these there seemed to be no market. After I had tramped about considerably, trying to persuade somebody that the pickles were fine, one of the merchants said to me:

"Bub, I don't think I can handle your pickles, but you bought the salt and coffee from me, so I'll give you ten cent's worth of stick candy for one bottle. What do you say?"

I struck that bargain instanter.

On the way to town, I had walked much of the way in order to throw stones at the birds. I am sorry that I was not less cruel than the average boy. The road was dusty, I was barefooted, and, when we reached Abbeville, my bare feet were by no means as clean as they might have been.

Dick remained in the cart while Jack and I did the shopping. When our last purchases were made, the pretty candy was stored away in my pants pocket, the boy's receptacle for everything, and our faces were turned homeward.

As we went from the store to the cart, a well-dressed boy, about my size, with a smile of derision, called the attention of three or four companions to my feet, and possibly to my coarse clothes and jeans cap my mother had made for me. I was stung to the



quick. I clenched my fist and felt like lighting on that fellow then and there, but had heard of policemen and a calaboose, and concluded it were better to leave the settlement of that affair to another day. Besides, I reasoned it would not be prudent to tackle him on his own ground when he was backed by so many of his friends. So I bit my lips and got into the cart, resolving that if ever I met that boy again I would spoil that pretty coat for him. If ever I've seen him since then, I didn't recognize him.

We were hungry as wolves, and, when well out of town, turned our attention to the lunch Mother had prepared for us, and never did food taste sweeter to hungry boys.

I gave each of the negroes a stick of candy, took one myself, and carefully wrapped the remaining pieces for Mother and the sisters. The delicious fried chicken, the bottle of pepper pickles, and the candy gave us a feast royal, while the cattle had their way.

The return trip was uneventful until we reached Little's Hill, just three miles from home. That was a noted hill, on which many a team had stalled and many an ugly oath been sworn. It was not long, but very steep and very rough.

When we reached the foot of the hill, Jack and I got out, not because it was necessary, but that the load might be somewhat lighter and the pull easier for the steers. Jack cracked his whip, and the oxen started up the hill with a rush.



We had not noticed that the chain which fastened the front end of the body to the tongue of the cart had worked loose. When about half the way up the hill, the front end of the body flew up, the rear end went down, and the sack of salt, the coffee, and Dick all tumbled out in a heap among the rocks.

With no little difficulty, Jack and I succeeded in extricating Dick from beneath the sack of salt. The good-natured fellow was laughing, and though considerably skinned and bruised, was not seriously hurt.

But this was an emergency for which we were not wholly prepared. Two ten-year-old boys could not easily handle a sack of salt, nor could we lift Dick into the cart.

We waited a half-hour, hoping that some man might come along and help us reload. Finally, I proposed that Jack and I should go home with the coffee, and let one of the "hands" come back with the one-horse wagon for Dick and the salt. Dick demurred. He suggested that we roll the salt down to the foot of the hill, said he would crawl down himself, and by fastening the body securely in front and putting the ends of three or four rails on the rear end of the cart, we might be able to roll the sack of salt up to its place, and, with some assistance from us, he thought he could crawl and roll up himself.

Something had to be done. The sun was sinking behind the hill, and to us it appeared to be later than it really was. So we made the attempt, and, after



much tugging and rolling and pulling and sweating, we won out.

We drove in home just as the sun was setting. I think I must have been as proud of my possessions and as proud of my day's work as Mr. Carnegie was of his first million. I made a detailed report of the business transactions and counted out the change to Mother. When I finished, she kissed me on the cheek and said: "Mama's little man; God bless you, my son."

And I was happy.

During supper and after supper the entire day was lived over again. I could scarcely eat for talking. When we left the dining room, my sisters asked questions, and I continued to talk. I told them everything except that I killed a bluebird with a rock. They loved birds, and I remembered that I had been licked once upon a time for throwing at them.

Mother listened calmly, thoughtfully, and, it seemed to me, seriously, to everything I said. When I reached the episode at Little's Hill, she broke into a hearty laugh. Then I told about the boy with the fluffy shirt front, pretty red cravat, and nice hat making sport of my bare feet and jeans cap.

My sisters were indignant. One of them stood up and stamped her foot and said: "If I had that rascal, I'd—" Mother stopped her. The baby cried. The dear child could not understand why any boy



could be mean enough to make fun of her "Bud-John."

"Mama, I'll kill that boy some day," I said.

"My son, my son, you must not say that; you must not have such wicked thoughts. That's wrong, it's ugly, it's sinful. That boy didn't hurt you, my son; he only hurt himself. You forget it just as soon as you can. You may have misjudged him. Don't think of it any more."

That night my mother shook me. When I awoke, I was in a tremble.

"What's the matter, son?" she said.

"Mama, that boy called me a liar, and I busted his nose."

"Oh, no, my son, he didn't; it's only a dream, a bad dream. I'm glad it's just a dream—go to sleep." And she put her head on my pillow until I slept and smiled and dreamed of Dick and the incident at Little's Hill.

The next day Dick and Jack and I were planning for another trip to "town" pretty soon. When we had agreed upon the plan to be submitted by me to Mother, Jack brought out the steers to curry them.

I wanted some real good fun that morning. So when Jack rode up on Buck, urging him along with his cloth cap, I said banteringly:

"I bet you can't ride Buck with a spur."

"I bet I kin," he said.

I ran into the house and brought out a rusty old



spur I had found in the "lumber room." The wheel was so clogged with rust that it would not turn. All the long teeth but two or three had broken out, and one of these stood straight out an eighth of an inch. It was long and sharp and ugly.

"You jess buckle dat on my foot, en I'll show you I kin ride 'im wid a spur."

The patient ox was very still and quiet while I buckled the spur on Jack's bare foot.

"Now, Jack, you will have to put it in him good and strong if you want to wake him up."

"Oh, I'll wake 'im up."

I stepped back, and by way of encouragement, pulled the foot away from the side of the ox. Freeing it, with a shove, I said, "Put it to him!"

He did.

Buck's head and tail went up, there was a bawl and a twist, the steer's body bent into a bow, he went up into the air and then came down with all four feet together. The rider went over the fence clear light and came down on his head, while Buck went out through the gate with a snort and a kick, and, with tail in the air, tore down toward the pasture where the other cattle were.

This sudden commotion—Buck's bucking and snorting—startled his yoke-fellow, and he tore off through another gate, while two mules lazily biting at the lot fence ran snorting around the barn. Buck ran over an old sow and pigs in the lane, the pigs squealed,



the sow grunted, startled chickens cackled and flew in every direction, while picaninnies screamed, some in fright, others with pure delight. Oh, that was a circus! But it didn't last long enough.

I fell over on the ground to laugh. I just couldn't do justice to that show while standing up. When I got up, after laughing till my side hurt, I saw Jack turning round and apparently looking for something at his feet.

"What's the matter, Jack?" I asked.

"Nuttin'; I des lookin' fur dat toof what drap out my mout—'fo' Gawd, dat cow laken kill me."

Mother heard the commotion, and naturally came to the door to investigate. As soon as her voice could be heard, she said:

"My son, what in the world does all this mean?"

I told her, told her the truth, the whole truth, and, after fifty years, I am persuaded, nothing but the truth.

Mother was Irish, and her son knew it. She just couldn't help laughing. Controlling herself with a powerful effort, she said:

"My son, my son, my son!"

But I saw that smile and knew I was safe.

In the pasture was a beautiful Durham bull, just the size of our steers. The animal was not vicious, but became very mischievous. With his horns he threw down the fences, and, now and then, led the cattle into the crops.

The negroes reported that they could not keep the



cows out of the corn, and Lindsay proposed that we break the bull to the yoke, and thus keep him out of mischief.

I thought that promised more fun, and persuaded Mother to let us try the experiment, two of the negro men having promised to help us handle the bull. We had considerable trouble in catching the animal, but succeeded finally in drawing his head up to a tree, to which we tied him hard and fast. Then we drove Buck up to his side and yoked them together. Lindsay suggested that we tie their tails together to keep them from "turning the yoke." Now let the youthful reader ask his father what "turning the yoke" means.

When their tails were platted and tied together securely, the word was given and the bull's head freed from the tree. He was a very powerful animal and now thoroughly mad.

Freed from the tree, he made one vicious lunge and burst his end of the yoke into splinters.

Buck, not accustomed to that kind of procedure, must have concluded that we meant to try the spur on him again. Badly frightened, he made for the gate, while the bull started in the other direction. But there was a temporary halt. Their tails were securely tied, and it became a question as to whose tail would prove the stronger.

The infuriated bull was disposed to wreak vengeance on Buck and fight the thing to a finish, but for this old Buck was wholly unwilling; indeed, he seemed



determined to keep as far from him as possible the end of the bull that carried horns on it.

For a very short interval there was a straining and stretching of hair, a cracking of tail joints, and then a parting of the beasts. When the dust had cleared away and the wild animals rounded up again, we found that Buck's tail was broken in three places and the bull's was minus hair.



## CHAPTER V

### THE EEL AND THE SKELETON

I THINK it was old Ben Johnson who said: "When you see three boys together, get you a stick: they need flogging for what they have done, for what they are doing, or for what they are planning to do."

A boy just my age, living on an adjoining plantation, was frequently with Jack and me in our escapades, and often when I think of the fun we had, I think of Dr. Johnson's remark.

One day after a rain, we concluded that we would go fishing in a creek about a mile from home. It was a tributary to Little River, and was well stocked with cat-fish and eels. We found the creek somewhat swollen, and against a large tree which had fallen across the stream and was only partially submerged was banked a considerable quantity of foam and trash. Our experience had taught us that if fish would bite anywhere, we would find them there. Baiting our hooks well and stuffing the remaining worms into our pants pockets, we walked out on that tree, Jack first, I next, and George after me.

George's hook was immediately taken by an eel eighteen inches long. At first, it looked as if George



would be jerked over into the water, but he pulled manfully, and at last succeeded in bringing the eel to the top of the water and on the log. He grasped the slick, slimy thing with both hands and started toward the bank of the creek with it. But the eel slipped through his hands as fast as he could catch fresh hold on him, and in the tussle freed his mouth from the hook. Seeing that he would lose his snake-like fish before he could reach the land, George quickly nailed it with his teeth, carried it, wriggling and twisting about his head and face, fifty feet out in the bottom, then stamped it to death in the plowed ground. George had all the fish he wanted now, and he spent the balance of the evening trying to clean his mouth.

Monday at school I had fun telling the boys about George's frolic with the eel—about the new "tooth hold" and how it worked, and how he spent the remainder of the day trying to clean his teeth. I had carried an old tooth-brush to school in my pocket, and tried to present that to him in behalf of the entire school to be preserved for special use on fishing excursions. More than once that day I had to dodge behind the school house to keep out of the way of George's fist.

George was a splendid fellow—every inch a man. He would scrap with us any time and on short notice, but was never much on a foot race. Only once was he ever accused of exceeding the speed limit. And that came about in this way:



In 1864, a negro was hanged about six miles from the Little Mountain school. He was not lynched, but legally executed. Just why he was hanged way out there so far from the county seat, I have never known. In the neighborhood lived a quaint, queer old doctor.

In some way, the old physician got possession of the corpse. About a half-mile from the school building was a body of young pines, possibly two acres in area. The saplings ranged from two to six inches in diameter and from twelve to twenty feet in height. They were very thick, making an ideal place for hiding. One day we boys, about a dozen of us, at the noon recess (usually two hours long) went foraging for apples. We were quite successful that day. Every one of us had not only his pants pockets, but his loose blouse, stuffed with the beautiful, odoriferous, red June apples.

We knew if we carried them to the school house, we would have to give an account of ourselves—we'd have to tell where we got them. That we were not just then prepared to do. So we concluded to go into the pines, where nobody could see us, and have us one good, satisfactory, perfect and complete bait of mellow June apples.

When we were near the centre of the pine thicket, being pretty well bunched, some one cried out:

“Lawdy, boys, looker there!”

Dr. Stiefer had carried his negro into that thicket,



boiled all the flesh off his bones, and mounted the skeleton.

We were right on it before any of us saw it. When we did see it, the reader may be sure that it was not many seconds before that negro's bones had the whole field to themselves. Apples flew in every direction. There was no outcry—just a scramble among the pine needles, one thud after another, a whine or half-cry, a grunt, a fall, an occasional, "O Lawdy, wait for me!" and then, after thirty seconds, the emerging from the pines of a dozen half-clad, bruised, bleeding, sniffing, frightened boys. It was ever afterwards contended that George, who was not until then noted for his sprinting stunts, was the first to emerge from the pines.

A few years ago I met a grey-bearded gentleman who shared that thrilling experience with us. Indeed, he was a big-hearted sharer of all the joys and sorrows of our school days at Little Mountain school.

After living over much of the dear departed past, I said to him:

"Joe, do you remember our experience with the June apples and the skeleton?"

"Remember it? I can see that nigger now, and hear George grunt. Great Lord! didn't old George paw up the earth that day?"

"Now, Joe, tell me honest, what clothes did you have on when you got out of those pines?"



“ Well, John, I’ll tell you, to the best of my recollection, I had on just one sock and a collar.”

“ Ah, Joe, old boy, that won’t do—you know as well as I know that you never wore collars in your life till you were nearly grown, and they were paper collars, and you gave ten cents a box for ’em.”

The dear fellow uttered a characteristic chuckle that carried me back over a half century to a day that is gone; to a day that was full of sunshine and shadows—a day that links the glories of the ante-bellum past with the joys and sorrows of the present.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE LITTLE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

THAT was a great school—great in more respects than one. It was great in purpose, great in discipline, and great in achievement when we consider the utter absence of facilities.

The teacher was a young lady of doubtful or questionable age (I never use the words, “old maid”); and she didn’t mind lickin’ a fellow at all. Indeed, she seemed rather to enjoy it. I have seen her tip-toe while putting the timber on Gus Williams, and with every lick of the seasoned birch she brought the dust from his coat. In the winter Gus didn’t mind it; but in the summer, when he was thinly clad, she “got his goat.”

Miss Pendle had one very great weakness. She licked Gus because she didn’t like him; and she didn’t lick me because she did like me. I was just as mischievous as Gus, but somehow she didn’t see my mischief. But there was this difference, I must admit: I did study some; Gus, none at all. Gus and I were devoted friends. He knew I was as mischievous as he was, and couldn’t understand how it was that I escaped the birch when he got it every day. One day,



at recess, he said to the teacher: "Mis Pendulum, if you'll give John ten good licks like you put on me, you may give me one hundred. I want to see old John bounce one time."

The first morning of school, when we entered the door, we saw three long switches standing in the corner behind the teacher's table. That was a challenge that was promptly accepted by more than one boy among us. But "Miss Pendulum," as Gus called her, went in to win, and she did win. She was Irish to the core, and showed it without any hesitation.

How well I remember the first day I trotted off from home to school! There were five of us, I the youngest. On my back I carried a jeans satchel, made by my mother, and in it was one book—Webster's Blue Back Speller. And just here I want to doff my hat to that old speller. It's a long shot better book than some people think it is. If Noah Webster had just put those pictures in the first part of the book instead of at the close of it, he would have had the greatest speller of all the ages. (Now laugh, you blasted coxcombs who think you carry in your cocoes all the wisdom of the twentieth century! Laugh! as much as you please. The fools are not all dead yet.)

Somehow, Miss Pendle succeeded in teaching us the names of all the letters. There were four of us in class—Mollie, Annie, George, and John. Mollie was George's sister; Annie was my sweetheart. I don't know that I ever would have learned those letters had



I not seen that Annie was learning them, and I knew that I had to, in order to stay in class with her.

I had no desire to stand "head"—I only wanted to be next to Annie. If Annie was head, I was perfectly happy in second place; if Annie was next to "foot," I was more than willing to stand at the lower end of the class. A single smile from Annie was worth more to me than a thousand words of commendation from my teacher.

Somehow, we learned those letters—first, the small ones, then the capitals. That done, we were allowed to begin to spell, and this is what we had:

ab	ba
eb	ca
ib	da
ob	la

Then, cat  
rat  
mat  
fat

And then, rock  
mock  
sock  
tock

With such exercises as these, we moved along rather lively till we reached *baker*. That had been the goal toward which our faces were set. After that,



came *ambition* and long columns of words ending in *tion* and *sion*.

The succeeding pages were made more difficult, until we came to incomprehensibility. And right there, I'm free to confess, I've been ever since.

I shall never forget when the first day we were called by the teacher to "say your lesson." Standing around her, she said, pointing with her pencil to the first letter, "Johnnie, what's that?"

I said, "I don't know, m'm."

"That's *a*."

"Yas, m'm."

"But you say *a*."

I said "*a*."

And so the lesson proceeded until Miss Pendle thought she had kept us long enough. Then she said, "Now, you children sit down and study your lesson." We sat down, but she was badly off if she thought I was studying about those crooked characters. I was too busy thinking about Annie.

The rule of the teacher was that we had to have our book before our eyes all the time. I held my book in its place all right, but Annie sat diagonally across the room from me, thus enabling me to fool the teacher easily.

After a while, sitting on that backless seat, swinging my feet that could not reach the floor, I got very tired. Turning cautiously the leaves of my speller, I came to the pictures near the back.



The first appealed strongly to me. A boy stealing apples was caught in the very act—caught in the tree by the owner of the orchard. I wondered why the silly-looking fellow didn't tumble out of that tree and try a foot-race with the old gentleman. He looked as if he might be fleet enough to outrun the farmer.

The milkmaid with the spilled piggin of milk amused me greatly, though deep down in my heart I resented the unkindness of the boys who tied the long grass across the path.

When I came to the mastiffs about to fight, I was delighted beyond measure. They were splendid looking animals and, I thought, ought to make a battle royal. I forgot where I was, forgot Annie for a moment, forgot everything but the dogs, and, in my eagerness to see them fight, yelled out: "Sick 'im, Tige!"

I was startled by the sound of my own voice. The boys and girls around me looked at me in amazement, some laughing out.

"Come here to me, sir!" commanded the teacher, and her voice cracked like a whip.

I walked up with fear and trembling, like a criminal to the electric chair.

"What do you mean, sir?" asked the teacher, reaching back for one of the long, ugly switches.

I thought I was gone for a fact, and could feel the flesh quivering all up and down my back. But, mustering all the courage I had left, I showed her the



picture and frankly confessed that I was so anxious to see the dogs fight, I forgot where I was. The cold-natured teacher smiled just a little, cautioned me to be more careful in the future, and sent me back to my seat, blushing and ready to burst into tears because of my humiliation. And it was a long time before I heard the last of "Tige."

That was not the last severe trial I had during that year at school. After a week, Miss Pendle announced that on the following Friday afternoon all of us would have to "say a speech." Every one of us must "speak a piece." The next week there was a great stir among the boys and girls selecting and committing to memory their "pieces."

My piece was thoroughly committed, but all week I was very nervous. The very thought of the approaching ordeal made me weak in the knees. Friday afternoon came, and I was the first boy the teacher called on for a speech. I didn't know whether my legs would carry me out on the floor to the spot she designated or not, but, with a desperate effort, I made the attempt. I entered the ring marked on the floor by the teacher, made my bow, which was a short, sharp jerk of the head, and, instead of delivering my own speech, started off on one learned by one of the other boys. I had heard him repeat it so often out of school I knew it about as well as I knew my own.

That blunder ruined me. The boys laughed, the teacher frowned, I bit my lip, cleared my throat, stam-



mered, finally started on my own, forgot it after repeating one line, burst into tears and ran to my seat.

That was a terrible ordeal. My humiliation and suffering were something fierce. The fact is, no man can ever know the suffering that failure caused me. And I am quite sure that grown people do not, can not, fully sympathize with children in their heartaches.

Every Friday afternoon during that school year I suffered. I wanted to declaim, was anxious to, but just couldn't. I would cry in spite of everything I could do. The other boys spoke their pieces and enjoyed it. I was humiliated beyond measure because I couldn't do what the others did. I suffered. Let no man say that it was an inexcusable weakness. Weakness it was, to be sure, but one I could not possibly help. I am now quite sure that my nerves were responsible for the whole trouble. And I had no way of getting rid of the nervous affection but by growing out of it. I was seventeen years old before I could face an audience with anything like reasonable composure.

I am sure that my mother loved me as tenderly and devotedly as ever a mother loved her son. I am equally sure that my recklessness during those years caused her many a heartache, for which I have many a time asked forgiveness.

Mother was ambitious for her son. She wanted me to speak and speak well; she wanted me to do well everything the teacher demanded of me. Mother



did not understand me. She thought I did not make the proper effort to overcome the weakness. She switched me regularly every Friday afternoon for several weeks when, returning from school, my sisters reported that I would not speak, or that I spoke but cried the whole time I was on the floor.

My devoted mother made a mistake, as I have done in the management of my own children. It was not whipping that I needed, but pity. One of my sisters understood me better than anybody else. She begged for me, and, when mother whipped me, seemed to feel the punishment as keenly as I did.

Early in his school life, my first-born son manifested the same weakness. I went at once to his teacher, told her of my own trying experience, and asked that the child be excused from that exercise.

Some parent whose son has the same trouble may read these lines. If so, I beg for the child. Don't scold or switch him. Encourage him to fight the battle to a finish. Help him to believe he can and will win in the end.

## II

THE children of today may be surprised to know that with us the school began in January and ran ten months, with a vacation of two weeks in July. Now, it is too hot to study in the summer, but not too hot to play ball almost incessantly during the long summer months; then, we were glad enough to get to go to



school in the summer, and many of the pupils walked three miles every morning.

When I think of the crowded school room, of the rough seats, of the writing desk, which was a single plank fastened to wooden pegs driven into the wall, of the one fireplace, of the poor accommodations generally, of the one teacher for fifty pupils, ranging in age from six to eighteen years—when I think of all these things and the scarcity of books and the impossibility of getting more, for that was war times, I sometimes wonder whether, after all, it was worth while. Maybe it was, for it is extremely doubtful whether the well-equipped city schools of today turn out better spellers or better readers than did those old schools of long ago.

In the Little Mountain School, our pens were made of goose quills and our ink of balls from the oak tree. The last lesson every afternoon was a spelling lesson, and the book used was Webster's School Dictionary. Nearly the whole school was in that class, and right royal times we had. The lesson assigned was one page of the dictionary, and woe betide the fellow that missed three words! In that class were some splendid spellers. We were required to pronounce each syllable as we spelled it, and when finished pronounce distinctly the word.

The good spellers were ambitious to stand "head"; and sometimes when one got that position, he or she, oftener she, held it for weeks, those below her watch-



ing eagerly for the least slip that they might trip her. My recollection is that I was "most ingenerally" near the other end of the class.

During the winter months, we had great times, at the noon recess, warming our lunch—we called it dinner—at the spacious fireplace. Some of us had long sticks sharpened at the end on which we stuck our biscuits and meat and pies. Holding them before the red-hot coals, they were soon warmed and browned to a crisp. I can see the bacon now as the two ends bent and twisted and came together. And those pies! Were there ever better ones made? No connoisseur ever enjoyed viands more.

Speaking of the dinner hour reminds me of an unique experience I had. With us at school was Homer, the son of the quaint old physician who mounted the skeleton in the pines. The old doctor was looked upon as a freak, a law unto himself, and seemed to relish that peculiar distinction. He ate rats whenever he could get them, and never failed to take home in his buggy the snake that dared to show himself. He claimed that few kinds of meat were half so good as snake steak. And Homer, the son, professed to be as fond of those rare dishes as his father was. We tried to shame the boy out of it, but not so; he stood by his guns. "Rat meat is just as good," said he, "as squirrel; and if you ate a piece of rat believing it squirrel, you could never detect a difference, except that the flavor of the rat is finer."



In those days, it was a custom among us to exchange courtesies. We invited one another to lunch with us, sometimes, by way of inducement, venturing to make known what particular article of food we had brought for that day. A piece of wild turkey, or 'possum, or a plate of fish, was considered delicacy enough to tempt the appetite of the most fastidious boy or girl in school.

One day Homer invited me to dine with him. I declined at first, but he was very insistent, declaring that he had in his basket a part of the finest, fattest young squirrel he had ever tasted.

I accepted the invitation, and enjoyed my dinner greatly. Finishing, I assured my host of the great pleasure afforded me and that, in all my life, I had never tasted better flavored squirrel.

When we had reassembled on the ball ground, Homer gathered us all around him and said very calmly: "Now, boys, I want to prove by John that rat meat is just as good as squirrel. He's had a dinner of rat."

Well, I was caught. I realized that fully, but for a minute my emotions were very conflicting. My first impulse was to light right into Homer and blacken his eye good, but very quickly I remembered that Homer had never been licked by any boy in school, though he had had several scraps. There were among us some who were stronger than Homer—some who had bruised and blackened him considerably, but not one



had ever made him say "nuff." With us, a fellow was fairly licked when he said "nuff." Homer never had said "nuff." That fact was a considerable deterrent, to be sure, and had not a little to do with determining my course.

I knew it was "up to me" to say something, or do something. I wanted to lick Homer, of course, but doubted my ability to do that just as I thought it ought to be done; so I concluded it were better to say something than do something—better to use my tongue than my fists.

I acknowledged that I was caught, and declared boldly that it was a mean trick in Homer, but, notwithstanding that, I was sure the rat I had eaten for a young squirrel was as fine as any squirrel I ever tasted. And it was. I have never changed my mind, but have never hankered after rat meat since then.

A school is a world within itself. In it the inhabitants learn to give and take as they must do in the larger world after school-days are over. Among all the boys, I had perhaps been the most persistent in teasing Homer about his rat-eating proclivities. Now the tables were completely turned. I took my medicine.

I do not think the boys of today enjoy the school sports as much as we did. They don't get as much out of their games. All one seems to care for is a bat and a mit. To become a ball player is the height of his ambition, and he has no further use for the morn-



ing's paper after he sees the previous day's record of his favorite among the pitchers in the big leagues.

In our day, we had no baseball, but town-ball, bullpen, antney-over, and roly-hole galore. And we had marbles, jumping, wrestling—we called it "raslin"—foot-races, something for every kind of weather. With us, the game of marbles was a fine art; today, *non est*.

A while ago I saw some boys playing marbles. The exhibition was positively pitiable. They played like babies, or rather like the girls used to play.

What fine fun it was in our day to drive at the "middle man" from "taw," and how large John Black looked when he knocked it clear of the ring seven times in succession. And that day Dave McCullough "busted" his "taw" into two pieces he hit the middler so hard. Dave was the hero that day sure.

Our teacher was an advertiser of the first water. At the close of the first half-year, we had what she called an Exhibition. Nowadays, when a school, whatever its size, gives a public entertainment, the "function" is called the Commencement, and spelled always with a big C. Our Exhibition lasted two days. On the first day, all the classes were examined publicly on the studies pursued during the term. More than five hundred people, mostly women and children, witnessed that exercise.

We had been thoroughly drilled for a month, and knew what questions to expect. Our parents must



have thought their children were prodigies. The way those large girls parsed "Mary had a little lamb" was an eye-opener to them.

The second day was given to declamations and compositions. The boys and girls under fifteen years of age, from a platform erected in the large church near the "academy," spoke their pieces, ranging all the way from "My bird is dead" and "The boy stood on the burning deck" to "Sparticus to the Gladiators."

The young ladies read high-sounding compositions, some of them written by other people. O that was a red-letter day in the history of the Little Mountain School, and people came "from far and near."

Now the school commencements close with a game of baseball, usually with a neighboring school; our Exhibitions closed with a game of town-ball, or "sting-a-miree." The boys who read this may ask their fathers or grandfathers to explain that last game to them. It was great.

The balls we used were made of thread wrapped around a piece of cork. There were only two or three with rubber in the center. One of these was mine, sent to me from Virginia by my brother. He found a piece of rubber and trimmed it down to the size of a walnut. When mother put the thread round that rubber, I had a ball that money couldn't buy. What I could do for a fellow with that ball in "sting-a-



miree" was a plenty. That was one game which the girls took no part in.

Now, school children use scratch-pads; then, we used slates and pieces of slates, and pencils made of broken bits of slates that were gathered up from old desks and from under the house—slates that had done service before the war. If a boy found a piece of real slate pencil an inch long, he was considered extremely fortunate. By sticking that bit of pencil in the end of a quill or a small cane, he could have a pencil as long as he desired it. I had one—kept it a whole day—then "kissed it good-bye," as I did most of my other possessions.

### III

When the war ended in 1865, there came to the neighborhood of Diamond Hill, just four miles from Little Mountain, a Confederate soldier, a Scotchman. He was a very handsome man and a scholar. He graduated from Edinburgh University, and came to the United States and to South Carolina in 1859. In Beaufort, South Carolina, he taught school a year before the war began. Enlisting as a soldier in the Confederate army at the beginning of the war, this young Scotchman fought through the four years, and, at its close, came to Diamond Hill with two of his messmates.

His two comrades in arms loved the gallant scholar, and invited him to come with them to their impoverished homes and take his chances with them. He



came, and after a few weeks the people of that community asked him to teach their children.

Prof. Hugh Train took charge of the Diamond Hill School and taught the remainder of the year. For that work he got but little pay, for there was next to no money in the country; but he did a monumental work and made a reputation for teaching thoroughly and extensively, and almost without books.

The following January, Professor Train took charge of the Little Mountain School. A few books could be bought then and as many slates as we needed.

The new teacher was a thorough disciplinarian, and it was well that he was. He had in that school all kinds and grades of pupils. Some of the young men had been in the army, and felt that they were men indeed. They soon found that an ex-soldier sat behind that desk, and that in that school there was but one master. The teacher was six feet two inches tall, weighed about one hundred and ninety pounds, and had not a pound of surplus flesh. I saw him one day bend a young man across a bench, hold him with one hand, and whip him until he begged like a child. We soon learned that when he assigned a lesson he meant that we get it. Notwithstanding his rigid, uncompromising discipline, he was not cruel or unreasonable. He simply meant to be master of the school, and we were to "do business."

One of his soldier friends, James Latimer, with whom Professor Train came South, entered the school



in January and began the study of Latin, Greek, and mathematics. I said he entered school. He came every day at noon and spent the whole of what we called "big recess" reading Greek and Latin and demonstrating propositions in geometry. Mr. Latimer had a brilliant mind, and afterwards took the doctor's degree at Leipsic. Returning to America, the maimed Confederate soldier, the Rev. James F. Latimer, D. D., Ph. D., was called to the chair of Greek in Davidson College, North Carolina. The country boy who became the profound theologian and scholar carried in his body to his grave a bullet fired from a Yankee rifle.

Mr. Train was one of the most energetic teachers I ever knew. He had to be. With forty pupils of all sizes and ranging in age from seven to twenty-five years, with few books and fewer blackboards, there was no time for loafing. From morning till night he was astir.

We boys used to think he had eyes in the back of his head. Though busy teaching a class, he seemed to be able to detect instantly any pranks we tried to play. I have known him to stop a class reading Cæsar, lick a boy for some infraction of the rules, and then go on with the lesson as if nothing had happened.

Even while we played at recess, he seemed to have his eyes constantly on us. One day, two little fellows, eight years old, quarreled. We encouraged them to fight. They didn't need much encouragement, but we



supplied it in abundance, and the little chaps went at it in dead earnest. They were both game and well matched. Never did two bantam roosters fight with greater persistency. It was great sport for us who were a little larger, but, for once, we forgot and became too hilarious. The bell rang, and then there was consternation in the camp. We knew that another fight was on.

There is much in the influence of a crowd. It is "the mind of the mob." We walked into the school house with considerable boldness. Surely, the teacher wouldn't whip all of us just for laughing. That's the way we felt about it, but not for long.

The two young pugilists were not punished, but were told that if they fought again they would be. All the spectators were ordered to come out in front of the desk. Did he flog us? The reader will please allow me to forget that if I can. We took our medicine, and Gus Williams declared it was a "dost."

Mr. Train did not require us to declaim, and for that one thing I loved him. Every Wednesday afternoon, however, he devoted to mental arithmetic—not thirty minutes or sixty minutes, but two solid hours. That was a great exercise, and one for which I shall ever be grateful. I am teaching mathematics today because maybe of the drilling and grilling he gave me in arithmetic.

We used Smith's English Grammar. We had no other—could get no other. Those numerous rules were



committed to memory and many hundred sentences parsed "to a finish." Not only that: we were required to write on our slates from memory the whole of the verb "To Love" in all of its voices, moods, tenses, numbers, and persons. I repeated and wrote the words "might, could, would or should" so often that they fairly racked my brain at night. The little I know of my own language, I learned from Hugh Train during that one year at Little Mountain. At college, very little attention was paid to the study of English.

But the Little Mountain School could not hold a man with Mr. Train's attainments and worth. He was loved by pupils and patrons, but seemed to have a longing for the seashore. At the end of the school year, he went to Beaufort and then to Savannah, Georgia, where he taught successfully until his death about three years ago.

I owe much to the sturdy Scotchman whom the fortunes of war threw across my path early in my life. His inborn fidelity to trust and habit of doing things "to a finish" had great influence over me.

Among all my teachers, from Little Mountain through high school and college to university, not one of them impressed my life more profoundly than did the virile Scotchman, Hugh Train. Like the peerless Carlisle, his love of truth and fidelity to it was all-pervasive. "Tell the truth if it costs your life," he used to say; and, though Dr. Carlisle did not put it



just that way, there was never any mistaking his attitude toward that cardinal virtue.

Indeed, in looking back over my student life, I have often compared these two men. They were both cast in large mold. They were, in many respects, alike; and, yet, were very unlike. The one, Dr. Carlisle, was Scotch-Irish; the other, a Scotchman thoroughbred. Each tried to give his pupils high ideals.

The Scotchman was gruff and brusque at times, uncompromising in his demands upon his pupils, and very aggressive; the Scotch-Irishman was as faithful always to his trust, but in his intercourse with students had much more of the *suaviter in modo*.

When any man that ever sat at Dr. Carlisle's feet thinks of his college and university instructors, the venerable Doctor stands out like a mountain peak in its solemn and isolated grandeur. I see him always as Hawthorne's "Great Stone Face," and near him Hugh Train, a little smaller, but, withal, magnificent. *Par nobile fratrum*.

Each of these great teachers has gone to his reward. Each left the world better and richer for having lived in it; and each left behind him a host of men to bless his memory.

Such men pass away; they never die.

"Cold in the dust the perished heart may lie,  
But that which warmed it once can never die."



## CHAPTER VII

### “DE BABY”

My thoughts are wandering far afield tonight. They take me back to the time beyond that when Jack and Pete and I broke the steers, annoyed the cats, and fought pitched battles with green apples and molly-pops. And, in the pictures I see, the principal figure is “the baby,” the bundle of sunshine that came into the home with its softening, mellowing, saving influence.

I was just out of my dresses, and was glorying in my first pair of pantaloons and red-top boots. I was as restless and reckless as a boy could well be, and where I was there was something doing, and—not always the right thing. “De baby,” as the negroes called her—“Rat,” I called her—was my shadow, and her innocence and perfect confidence made her follow me at times when it had been better for both of us if she had declined my leadership.

After a while, when I realized that her quiet influence was interfering with the full play of my mischievous instincts or inclinations, or, to be more charitable to myself, my love of fun, I began to dodge her. When I did, she called me in a plaintive, tearful



voice that echoes and re-echoes through the chambers of my heart down to this good day.

Failing to find her brother, the dear child went to her mother, as we all did with our troubles—as I did with every pain from a “stumped toe” to a broken collar-bone.

With troubled face and tear-dimmed eyes, she said, “Mama, w’ere Bud-John?” Then came mother’s time to soothe and comfort. How often she did it, and how lovingly, only God and the angels know.

“Never mind, darling,” said mother, kissing back the tears, “never mind; Bubber is a bad boy to run away from little sister. Mama ’ll have to whip Bubber.”

“No, no, Mama; oo musn’t w’ip Bud-John—he good boy.”

Precious child! In her distress because of my absence, she was loving and forgiving still. And every good thing that fell into her hands, every apple, every cooky that Aunt Charlotte, the cook, gave her (and the best of everything had to go to “dat baby”)—everything that fell into those precious hands had to be put away and shared with the ungrateful brother who had run away from her.

But there was one amusement, or exercise, from which the little sister was never absent. We needed her and had to have her. She had a sweet voice, and was fond of singing. So, on funeral occasions her



presence was indispensable. And in the spring-time these occasions were right frequent.

Our cemetery was in the rear of the garden. When a little chicken was found dead, a grave was dug according to my own directions. This done, a funeral procession consisting of half a hundred pickaninnies was formed. Led by my sister and me, following close upon the heels of the four pallbearers, we proceeded to the grave.

There, mounted upon a pulpit consisting of box or barrel, I delivered the funeral oration, outlining the peculiar virtues of the dead and bemoaning the great loss entailed upon humanity by the sudden demise of our departed friend, and wound up by assuring the mourners of a better day beyond, where every chicken would be allowed to live until he was ready for the frying pan.

And we didn't fail to have music. A song and a prayer preceded the oration. How wonderfully imitative are children!

Our songs were selected with no particular regard for the fitness of things. Sometimes it was "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?" Sometimes, "Abide with Me," and sometimes "Dixie," or "'Way Down upon the Suwanee River." From my sisters we had caught Dixie and the Suwanee River; and from the grown-up negroes, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?"

Young as I was, I knew that what we were doing would not meet the approval of my mother, so the little



sister was pledged to secrecy. Our fun went on, therefore, till one day one of my grown sisters discovered us—caught us in the very act—and kept perfectly quiet until the benediction was pronounced and orders issued to look for another corpse.

The matter was duly reported to mother, and the leading culprit was ordered to “come into court.” There was no use denying the charge—we had been “caught with the goods on.” I pleaded guilty. Then the Judge—God bless her memory!—drew me to her and kissed my forehead; then she told me of death and of the resurrection, and of what it means to bury the dead. After she saw that I had caught somewhat of the meaning of that solemn rite, she showed me the wrong of what we were doing and asked me to promise that I would do it no more.

I was full of remorse. Mother told me of how they had buried my sister Mary three years before, and, as she talked, I noticed that her eyes were filled with tears, and a lump came into my throat. I promised. And I kept that promise. Mother kissed me again, and I ran out, a more thoughtful, and, I trust, a better boy.

Thank God for the wise and prudent mothers who know how to talk to wayward boys in such a way as to bring them “up standing on their feet!”

## II

It was a beautiful afternoon in the late spring. I heard a jolly, contagious laugh. I knew that laugh,



there was no mistaking it, and ran around the house to see Sister Barbara, who had just returned from the postoffice. She had dismounted from her pony, Sancho, and thrown the reins to Henry, whose duty it was to attend to any horse that came to that gate. Henry was a negro lad of fourteen summers.

On Southern plantations, before and during the Civil War, many of the young ladies could ride as well as their brothers, and not a few of them could handle firearms with great accuracy and skill. The long "riding skirt," the "upping block," and the "horse rack"—hitching rack, really—were familiar objects in front of most Southern homes.

Sister Barbara had thrown her riding-skirt across her arm and was going toward the house, when Henry said: "Miss Barbry, dar dat ole sow whut been eatin' Missus' chickens."

A long-nosed sow, whose habitat was the river swamp, made occasional excursions into the barnyard and carried off a whole brood of little chickens. An ant-eater is not more destructive of ants, nor a shark of little turtles than is an old sow of biddies when her taste runs in that direction.

"All right, Henry; we'll attend to her."

Running into the house, the vivacious girl brought out my father's muzzle-loading shotgun, and, placing it to her shoulder, emptied a load of bird-shot into the anatomy of the notorious chicken-eater.

The old rogue left precipitately, and in a manner



not at all dignified, but to my very great delight. When, some months after, she reappeared upon the scene, she brought with her nine beautiful pigs, and was dubbed by the negroes "de ole nine sow."

My father was a martyr to sick-headache. Just why it was called "sick-headache" I do not know. Indeed, I do not know that there is any other kind, but this I do know: he suffered excruciatingly. I did not know then, of course, but now sometimes I think that overwork and great anxiety for his wife and children and native Southland caused his collapse. He died at the age of fifty-two.

He was from early morning till late afternoon constantly in the saddle or in his buggy. Besides his own plantations with varied interests, he had four others to supervise. Their owners were following the Confederate flag. My mother knew when father turned the bend in the road as he neared the house whether he was suffering with the terrible headache.

About an hour after Sister Barbara had returned from the postoffice and sent the chicken-eater back to the swamp in such a hurry, father drove up from Abbeville. Mother saw him coming, and said to Henry: "Run to the gate; your master is very sick."

The sufferer was assisted up the steps, put to bed, and ministered to by the same loving hands that had done it so often before. Ah, I can see now the pale face as it lay on the pillow, and see my mother as she rubbed his forehead and temples so gently, while Aunt



Charlotte and Henry were bathing his feet in water as hot as he could bear it. And I can hear again that low groan that came from the lips of the patient sufferer.

An hour passed, and mother was still pressing the brow of my father, who had fallen into a fitful, uneasy sleep. Dear Aunt Charlotte knew, when master was suffering, not to ring the bell. So she came in as silently as a cat and whispered:

“Missus, supper ready.”

### III

WHEN mother, after a few moments, slipped away to the dining room, she found the high chair at her elbow vacant.

“Where is baby?” she inquired.

“Rachel has gone to look for her,” one of the sisters replied.

In another minute, Rachel, one of the house-girls, came in, saying, “Missus, I can’t fine de baby.”

“What! Rachel, you can’t find her? Run upstairs—she may be asleep; Sooky, run up to Dinah’s house; go to every house at The Quarter and ask all the women if they’ve seen the baby.”

Sooky, Rachel’s companion, made off to The Quarter as fast as she could go, and Rachel, a nimble-footed girl of sixteen, darted up the stairs. Directly she ran down with:

“She not up dar, Missus. I look in uver room.”



Then mother, with her tea untouched, pushed back her chair and went to the back portico. And we all followed.

“Run, Rachel,” she said, “run to all the houses in The Quarter, and then go to the gin-house and the barn—the little thing may be asleep there.”

Two of my sisters started to the barn, and two to the cotton-house. We children were accustomed to playing in both houses, and they, too, thought perhaps little sister had fallen asleep in one.

I was standing by my mother, holding to her skirt. Putting her trembling hand on my head, she said: “Johnnie, my son, have you not seen little sister since dinner?”

“No, mama,” I sobbed; and I felt guilty, for in the early afternoon I had slipped away from the baby because Jack and I had planned to go fishing for minnows with our pin-hooks in the spring branch. I didn’t tell mother that.

The “hands” were now coming in from the fields. They came from several directions, and were singing one of those mellow plantation songs, one squad on one road answering another on another road, and singing as only negroes could sing—a song that the boys and girls of today can never know and never hear in all its sweetness. Compared with it, the miserable, effervescent ragtime of today is as sounding brass.

Uncle Griffin, the wagoner, had already driven his wagon under the shed, and was putting the mules in



their stalls. Aunt Charlotte, his wife, the cook, was astir in the yard, looking here and there for "de baby," running over a little darky here and jolting a grown-up one yonder, and all the time threatening dire punishment upon any "nigger dat would dar hu't dat chile."

Seeing her spouse in the lot, she yelled out: "Griffin! You, Griff!!"

"W'ut you want, nigger?"

"Does you see nuttin' dat chile down dar? De baby dun loss."

"Naw, me doan see her; you crazy lunatic, doan you know dese mules kill dat chile ef she come een dis lot? Dat chile not here."

Mother sent a runner to tell Aunt Charlotte she would wake her master, but the messenger was too late. Father had heard the words, "de baby dun loss," and was sitting up in bed when mother ran into the room.

"What is it, my dear? What is it?" he asked, all the time pressing his hand to his temple.

Poor mother! That was a trying time for her.

"Do lie down," she said, in her sweetest tones; "it will not do for you to get excited. The baby is asleep somewhere; we'll find her directly. Lie down now, won't you, please?"

Father threw his head back on his pillow, and said with a groan: "My baby lost?" He seemed to be dazed.

Rachel and Sooky had made a thorough search of



the cabins. And now, bursting into the room, Rachel blurted out:

“ Missus, dat chile ain’t nowhar up dar, en Tempy’s Hannah en Aunt Susan’s Anaky missin’—all two uv ’em missin’.”

Father got out of bed, despite the pleadings of my mother.

“ I can’t remain in bed, Eliza, with my baby lost,” he said. “ I must get up. I must.”

Mother knew him. We all knew him. Mother knew that he would be in his boots till the baby was found, or until he fell from exhaustion. She got his clothes as quickly as possible.

Turning to Rachel, he said: “ Tell Essex to come to me.”

Unc’ Essick was at that very moment directing the negroes in searching every nook and corner of the premises. When he came to the door, hat in hand, father was sitting in his large chair and mother was standing behind him bathing his throbbing head. I noticed that mother was careful to stand where father couldn’t see her face, and then I saw her now and then brush a tear from her cheek and saw her lips moving. I knew too well what that meant, and slipped away to a corner of the room to cry.

“ Come in, Essex; come close to me, it hurts my head to raise my voice. Now, listen: Three of the children are missing—the baby, Hannah, and Anaky. We must make a thorough search for them. First, we



must inform the neighbors and find out whether they've seen or heard of them.

"Now, you call the men, Alex, Monday, Harvey, Mose, and Tom; put each one on a mule and send one to Joel Cunningham's, one to Boss', one to Cox's, one to Martin's, and one to Ben Williams'. Tell them not to spare the mules."

Two of my sisters, Sallie and Barbara, who had been leading searching parties about the place, came in just in time to hear father's directions to Unc' Essick.

"Let us go to Cunningham's and to Boss', father," Barbara said. "I'm afraid the negroes won't go fast enough. Let us go."

"Very well then; maybe that's best. Essex, have the horses brought for the girls."

The faithful black man bowed himself out, and in a few minutes could be heard giving commands with the sharpness and precision of a major-general.

The two young ladies were soon in their saddles, and, leaning against a post on the piazza, I listened to the clatter of their horses' hoofs on the hard road leading to Cunningham's till it died away in the distance. At the same time, four mules were racing in other directions just as fast as big, strong men could make them go.

With his accustomed thoughtfulness, Unc' Essick had made them mount the very best, fleetest mules in the barn.

It was not long before all the riders returned, none



bringing news of the lost children. In the meantime, Unc' Essick had interviewed every "mammy" at The Quarter, and Aunt Lucinda, the oldest woman on the place, said to him: "'Bout two hours ber sun, I see dem chillun gwine toads de huckleberry patch." This he reported to father just as my sisters rode up to the gate.

"O God!" father exclaimed, and then was silent.

My mother was still behind him, and I saw her sink into a chair and bury her face in her hands. I leaned against her and slipped my hand into hers. She was shaking with emotion, but there was no outcry; not a sound escaped her lips.

After a moment, which seemed an hour, father spoke again.

"Essex," he said, "I was afraid of that. They have gone toward Penny's Creek. You know, the streams have been full several days. The children may try to cross it; if they do"—here his voice failed him and his hand dropped to his side. My mother sprang to her feet and ran to him. But, by that sheer force of will for which he was always noted, he recovered his poise, and, taking my mother's hand in both his, said very calmly:

"But we mustn't get excited; there is work to be done. Essex, gather all the hands together, men and women. Leave five or six of the oldest women to take care of the children in the cabins. Divide them into squads of six or eight. Give Griffin one squad,



Big Lon another, Tom another, and then pick out the other best men for leaders. Tell them where to go—not too close together—tell them to search that side of the plantation first next to Penny's Creek." (My father's plantation was divided into pretty nearly equal parts by the main thoroughfare running from Abbeville to Anderson.)

"Get every horn on the place and give one to each of the leaders. And tell them not to let a horn be blown until the children are found. Tell them to search that side of the plantation first and do it thoroughly, some going as far down as the bridge over the creek at the Prince place and others as far up the creek as the Williams place. If the children are found, let the horns be blown loud and long. And tell Henry to saddle Sam and bring him to the door."

Then my mother pleaded: "Oh, you must not go; you must not go—it will kill you." Pressing her hand to his lips, he turned his pale face to hers and said:

"My darling, don't you know I'd rather die in the effort to save my baby than live and die later of remorse if she should be drowned? I must go."

Child as I was, I was struck by the grim determination that shone in his eyes.

"Marster, you kyah stan' it—you stay and let me go," begged the faithful black man. But a wave of the master's hand sent Unc' Essick out to his task.

Unc' Essick was not long in executing his orders. A half-dozen horns of various sizes were found and



placed in the hands of the leaders. My father was fond of the chase, kept a pack of trained fox hounds, and, before the Civil War, often enjoyed the sport. Hence the horns.

Five of my sisters fell in with the searchers, and soon they were all off toward the west and toward Penny's Creek, some of the women weeping as they went.

#### IV

WHEN mother saw that father was determined to go, she made one request. "Let Lindsay go with you," she said. "He can ride Fan, and bring you back if anything happens."

"Yes, he may go."

Lindsay was one of the shrewdest negroes on the place, and possibly the strongest of the bunch. Mother knew that if father fell from his horse, Lindsay could literally carry him home in his arms. Fan was a little, round-bodied mule, fleet of foot and active as a kitten.

"Little Sam," as the negroes called him, was a Kentucky thoroughbred. He weighed about a thousand and fifty pounds, was as clean of limb as a fawn, and as agile as a Texas pony. Nobody but the master was allowed to ride or drive him. The little sorrel knew every whim of the master, and the master knew his horse.

Unc' Essick wanted to lead one of the searching parties, but father ordered him to remain on the



premises, take care of those of us left behind, and give directions to the searchers as they returned.

“If any of the folks come back before daylight, send some to the river, at Fox’s Den; send some to the Wesley place, but we must search thoroughly the Penny’s Creek side of the plantation before we go to the other side. I shall remain on that side all night, if the children are not found, and, after daylight, I shall examine the creek banks for tracks from the Prince bridge up as far as the Williams crossing. But the moon is so bright we may be able to see tracks to-night.”

Fortunately, it was a bright, moonlit night, not cold, but the atmosphere was crisp and sharp.

While father was giving final directions to Unc’ Essick, mother was talking to Lindsay aside.

“Lindsay,” she said, “I am depending upon you. Your master is very sick and weak. I want you to promise me that you will stay with him tonight. No matter where he goes, nor how fast, will you stay with him and bring him back to me if he falls?”

“Yas, mam, Missus; yas, mam, I’ll stay wid ’im en fetch ’im back, ef Gawd spar me. You know ole Fan kin go whar Little Sam go; ’fo’ Gawd, Missus, dat ole mule kin mos’ clam a tree en kin run lak a rabbit.”

Then master and man started on their long ride—longer than either of them dreamed it would be.

Left in the home besides my mother and me were my sister Ida and old Mrs. Cobb. Mrs. Cobb was a



neighbor, a very old lady, and lived three miles up Penny's Creek. The old soul was a privileged character. Everybody knew her and respected her and humored her. When she felt like it, she came to our home and remained as long as she pleased, sometimes several days.

That night she was a veritable Job's comforter. Soon after my father had gone, while mother was walking the floor and wringing her hands, the old lady refilled her pipe, raked it in the ashes, and said:

"Yes, that thar Penny's Crick is a mighty dangerous crick; ef the baby goes in thar, she'll sholy git drowned. You know, 'Liza, Joe Spence's little gal was drowned in that same crick three years ago. Hit was up, and the little gal tried to walk a foot-log and hit turned with her. Yes, hit's a dangerous crick, hit is."

Mother made no reply, but continued to pace the floor; Sister Ida, a ten-year-old girl, slipped into an adjoining room and sobbed herself to sleep.

After the old visitor had smoked her pipe of tobacco, she knocked out the ashes and said: "Well, 'Liza, I'll lay down; I can't do no good a-settin' here."

She did lie down, and in two minutes was snoring quite lustily.

I sat in my little chair, and had one hand on my little sister's, now vacant. But keep a healthy boy perfectly quiet a little while and he'll go to sleep. It



was not long before I began to nod. Mother saw it, and said, very tenderly:

“My son, you must go to bed now; you are sleepy.”

I protested, and said: “I want to sit up with you, mother.”

Then she knelt down by me, put her arms around my neck, and prayed. I shall not attempt to write that prayer. Verily, I believe it is written on high. Then mother kissed my forehead and said: “Darling, go to bed now, mother’s little man must sleep; Jesus will take care of mama and bring little sister back to us.”

Then I did go to bed, perfectly satisfied that Jesus would take care of Mama, and that, somehow, some time, He would bring little sister back to us.

Only my mother and her Lord ever knew her agony of soul during that long, terrible night. When I fell asleep, she was walking the floor, and when, at two o’clock, I awoke, she was standing in the door talking to Unc’ Essick, who sat on the steps. The kind-hearted slave, unlike Mrs. Cobb, was trying to comfort the distressed mother.

“Missus,” I heard him say, “you needn’t be a-skeerdt dat chile gwine git drowned. Dem chillun ain’t gwine een de water—dey skeerdt o’ water. ’Sides, little chillun git sleepy when dey walk long time, speshly when night come. Dey lay down en go



to sleep. Dem chillun sleep right now somewhar een de leaves."

Again the old man was right. At that very moment the little ones were sleeping soundly by a log in the leaves. More than once, searching parties had passed very near them, but failed to disturb their slumbers.

"Missus, I think Marster mek a mistake. He sick. He oughter stay here en let me go. I know de woods better'n he do, en I know 'em better'n dem yudder niggers. When I wuz a runaway, I sleep menny night in de leaves. Now, I think dem chillun, when dey fine dey loss, jis keep walkin', en keep walkin', tel night ketch 'em, den dey lay right down en sleep. Ef dey fine dey loss 'fo' night, dey turn eder down tru de Prince plantation to de Martin place, else dey turn de yudder way tru de Cox place to de Pratt's. After daylight, I kin fine der tracks—I wish Marster let me go."

Then mother put her handkerchief to her face and said, with tears in her voice: "You shall go, Essex, and I believe you'll bring my baby back to me."

"Yas'm, I'll fetch her back, en don't you be oneasy 'bout dat chile, Missus. Dat chile got sense; she ain't gwine een no ribber ner crick. Yas'm, I'll fetch dat baby back; she shan't sleep anudder night in de woods."

About daylight, the hunters began to straggle in, one by one, and then by twos and threes, but they brought no tidings of the lost children.



“ Did you see your master? ” mother asked.

“ Yas’m, we seed him two or t’ree time. He wuz er ridin’ Little Sam, en Lindsay right terhin’ ’im on ole Fan. Dem hosses wuz gwine ober fences en ditches same ez deer.”

Very soon my sisters came, tired and worn and hungry. Their skirts were bedraggled and torn, and their hands bleeding from brier scratches.

Aunt Charlotte had breakfast ready, and the five sisters, discouraged but still hopeful, went at once to the dining room.

Unc’ Essick came out of his cabin, blowing the ashes from his hot ashcake and shifting it from one hand to the other. He was ready to redeem his promise to “ Missus.” He went through the kitchen into the dining room and outlined his plan to my sisters. To the eldest he said:

“ Miss Sallie, you git on old Bill; he sho-footed en fast, en you go straight toads Fox’s Den en sweep round toads Martin’s Mill en de Martin Quarter. En, Miss Sallie, you let Henry ride behine you to pull down fences. Miss Cassie, you en Miss Jennie an Miss Julia ride Dick en Sancho en Mollie. Miss Barbry, you ride ole Blaze. Now, you mind, Miss Barbry, dat ole fool is tricky en ain’t got no sense, but kin go lak de wind, en I b’lieve you kin ride de debil ef you could git your saddle on ’im.”

Despite their depression, the young ladies had to



smile at Unc' Essick's opinion of Barbara's horsemanship.

"You chilluns is all tired out now, en must ride—you musn't walk no more."

To Unc' Essick, the young ladies were just "Mars-ter's chillun."

"One uv you better go ter de Premium bottom, one ter de Wesley Key place, en one ez fur down ez de Miller place. Let de folks down dar know de chillun loss. We must look good down dis a-way fust, en den we must beat up toads de Cox place ez fur ez de Little Mountain."

Assured that they would carry out his directions, Unc' Essick went out into the yard and ordered a half-dozen negro boys to saddle the horses for "de young Misses." Then turning his face southward and munching his ashcake as he went, he began his long tramp looking for "dat blessed chile."

By eight o'clock nearly all the searchers had returned, breakfasted, and gone again to the east and south side of the plantation. Father and Lindsay were still absent, and mother's anxiety for father increased. At nine o'clock they were still out. A few moments later one of the men straggled in and told mother he had seen father after sun up. "He tole me to tell you," said Starling, "not to worry 'bout him, en tell Unc' Essick send de folks down on tudder side de plantation. He say he gwine up toads de Bob Bell place."



This somewhat relieved mother's anxiety. She surmised then that father believed the children had gone farther and farther from home. He had, in reality, determined to make a long swing around a semi-circle of many miles north of home to enlist the sympathies and aid of the people.

"Missus, Marster gwine kill Little Sam; dat hoss didn't had a dry hair on him," said Starling.

The people were kind and sympathetic and by midday there were a thousand people, mostly colored, looking for the lost children.

## V

By two o'clock, Unc' Essick had satisfied himself that the children were not south of home, and had pretty well rounded up his forces ready for a start in another direction.

He would eat no dinner himself, for he had promised Missus to fetch her "de baby" before sundown, and now the sun had turned toward the west. Standing in front of the house, he gave directions with an air that inspired confidence and hope.

"Miss Sallie," he said, "you go right up de road tel you come to de gin-house at Marse William Black place, den turn round de cornder of de gin-house en ride straight toads Spur Crick, en when you git dar, come right down de crick en watch fur little tracks een de san'. Ef you fine tracks, mek Henry git down en follow 'em same ez a houn'. I'll go tru de woods



en fields. Miss Sallie, ride Bill hard tel you git to de crick, den tek it slow en watch fur de tracks."

Old Bill was not accustomed to the saddle, being one of the carriage horses, but that day he had a new experience, and made the two miles to Black's gin-house in shorter time than he had ever done it before. Turning towards the creek, he was allowed to take it more leisurely. Reaching the stream, my sister turned the horse's head down the bottom and rode very slowly, while she and Henry looked closely in the sand or plowed ground for children's tracks. Three-quarters of a mile down, they came to Cox's bridge and crossed it, as Unc' Essick had suggested. That near its source, Spur Creek was but little more than a spring branch, and they knew that the children would not hesitate to cross it.

A few minutes after my sister crossed the bridge, Unc' Essick crossed. She kept the road, but he turned sharply up stream and kept to the soft, alluvial soil, in which little bare feet could easily make tracks.

A half-mile from the creek, my sister met Dr. John Cunningham, a neighbor. He had been for two days several miles away with a desperately ill patient, and was returning home. She told him of our distress.

"Any little negroes with the baby, Miss Sallie?" he asked.

"Yes, two—one just her size, and the other larger."

"Why, bless your life! those were the children I saw just about a mile back—the very children."



“ Oh, Doctor! ”

“ Yes, they were about a hundred yards from the road, and the little ones were crying and the largest one was quarreling at them for not keeping up with her.”

My sister brushed a tear from her cheek.

“ I thought they were Cox’s children, and told that girl that if she didn’t wait for the little ones, I’d get down and thrash her with my buggy whip. They were on that side of the road and going toward Cox’s. You go up the road till you come to a gate—it’s nearly a mile—turn in there. About two hundred yards from that gate and one hundred from the fence, I think you’ll find their tracks, for they were crossing a bare, red spot. I’ll drive over to the house beyond the creek, get a saddle, and hurry back to help you, Miss Sallie. It will require but a few minutes.”

In the meantime, Unc’ Essick had found the children’s tracks in the bottom, and no hound ever followed his quarry with keener eye or better judgment. They zigzagged across the bottom and then to the edge of the sedge field, where he found they had peeled the bark from a sassafras bush and had sat down to chew it.

To say that my sister was overjoyed would be to express it very mildly. Old Bill made that mile to the gate in short order, and in a manner somewhat hazardous to the riders. They turned in through the gate,



and at the bare, red spot found the tracks for which they had so long looked. They got the direction the children were going.

“Now, Henry,” my sister said, “we must ride slowly and listen for their voices.” After going a few hundred yards through an old pine field, they fell into an old, unused farm road, and there found the tracks again.

Another hundred yards, the horse walking very slowly and making but little noise, Henry whispered: “Stop, Miss Sallie, I hear ’em.” They both listened intently, and sure enough they heard the children talking. They were some fifty yards from the road, and above some underbrush my sister saw the top of Anaky’s head.

“Now, Henry,” said she, “you see where they are; run back down the road a piece and go around on the other side of the children, and when I call Ellen, if they start to run away you catch Ellen.”

“Yas’m, I sho ketch dat baby dis time,” and Henry was off like a rabbit.

When he had had time to get beyond the children, my sister called:

“Ellen! Ellen! Come here, darling; here’s sister.”

To her great delight, the long-lost child recognized her voice, and, instead of running from her in fright, ran to her.

Henry was so excited he didn’t wait to see if the children would take fright and run away, but just as



soon as he heard the first call he made for the baby, and by the time she reached the road Henry was there lifting her to the arms of her sister.

The little thing ran with both hands up and tears streaming down her face.

“Come to sister, darling, we’ve been looking so long for the precious baby.”

“Mama, I want mama,” the little one sobbed, as she nestled on her sister’s bosom. “I want my mama.”

Ah! during all these many years, I’ve noticed that the cry of the troubled child is, “I want my mama.” Others may soothe and calm the shattered nerves, but only the touch of mother’s hands and mother’s lips can cure the aching heart.

“You shall go to mama, darling; you shall go to mama right now,” said Sister Sallie, covering the baby with kisses.

“Henry,” she called, “jump up on that log and blow the horn just as loud as you can.”

Henry had blown that horn many a time to call the hands from field to dinner. He mounted a large log near the road, and leaped from that to the tall stump from which it had been cut. Putting the horn to his lips, he blew first two short and then one long blast—*toot! toot! to-o-o-ot!* Filling his lungs, he repeated, but before the second blast could be blown, another horn a mile away rang out over the hills, then another farther on, and another, and another, until the hills



and valleys for miles around were reverberating with the joyous, mellow sound, mingled with the spontaneous shouts from a thousand throats.

Then everybody made for home.

Unc' Essick had just found where the children had stopped to chew the sassafras bark, when his sharp ear caught the first blast from Henry's horn. He didn't wait for the second—he knew what it meant. "T'ank Gawd!" he said, and, reaching up for his old hat, he made a bee line for home, regardless of fences, ditches, briars, or creek. He cleared the creek at a bound, and like a frightened buck went over logs and bushes in the body of the woods through which he passed. He knew that Sister Sallie would test Bill's wind before she got home with the baby, but knew she'd have to ride three miles around, and determined to beat the old horse if possible. As he ran, he soliloquized:

"I tole Missus I gwine put dat chile een her arms before sundown, en, 'fo' Gawd, I'm gwine do it."

It was a close race, but the old man, who hadn't forgotten all his runaway stunts, had just slung the perspiration from his brow and put on his hat when old Bill, flecked with foam and bearing his precious burden, dashed up to the gate.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when mother and I, walking the piazza, heard the first blast from Henry's horn. "Listen, mama!" I cried.

Ah! those ears that had listened so long and so



eagerly for that sound did not need to be told that it had blown.

Instantly she dropped to her knees, and, with hands clasped, cried out: "Blessed Jesus!" I leaned my head against her heaving bosom, and felt the warm tears falling on my face.

When Henry had blown his horn and others had taken it up, my sister commanded him to bring the two little negroes home, and cautioned him not to walk too fast, as they were very tired. Then she turned the horse's head towards home.

The old horse seemed to realize that something was up, but didn't catch its full meaning until they had passed through the gate and out into the road. With one keen cut across his flank with her cowhide, the rider said:

"Now, Bill, to mama with the baby!"

That the old carriage horse made full proof of his mettle was often declared by those who saw him coming down the last half-mile stretch of the long three-mile run.

There were many black men and women at that front gate anxious to get their hands on "de baby" and place her in Missus' arms; but Unc' Essick knew just where to stand, and, grasping the rein of the bridle, he said: "Gimme de baby, Miss Sallie, gimme de baby, chile, en you jump down."

Out of the arms of my sister he lifted the baby and ran toward the piazza, where my mother sat with



her arms outstretched. I am not surprised that she could not stand on her feet at that moment.

Running up the steps with a half hundred colored women at his heels, Unc' Essick said: "Here, Missus, here de baby—I tole you I'd fetch de baby," and he laid the little one in her mother's arms.

I did not need a kodak to take that picture for me. Oh, no. I have it in my heart, and the lines are growing sharper and sharper as the years are going by. It is fadeless—as fadeless as the memory of my mother's love.

Mother's eyes were radiant, even through her tears, and, clasping to her bosom the little one that Jesus promised to bring back to her and me, she said softly: "Thank God! thank God!" And the baby murmured, "Mama," and slipped her little arms around her mother's neck.

## VI

By half-past four o'clock, my father had swung around the long semi-circle as he had planned in the early morning, and he and Lindsay were making their way back to the plantations lying northeast of our own—the very territory into which Unc' Essick and Sister Sallie had gone.

Father knew now that the children must be in that territory, as no trace of them had been found in all the other sections over which it was possible for them to travel since they were lost. They could not cross Johnson's Creek or Little River, and he felt sure that



if the Cox and Pratt plantations could be searched before sundown the children would be found.

They had reached a point four miles from home, when father said to his faithful attendant: "Lindsay, I am very sick and the horses are tired—we must stop a minute and let them rest."

He stopped his horse by a tree, and, without dismounting, leaned his head against it. Worn out, the poor brutes were perfectly willing to stand quite still in their tracks.

Not more than a minute elapsed, when Lindsay said excitedly:

"Hear dat, Marster!"

Quickly father raised his head and both listened intently. They heard in the distance, "Toot! toot! to-o-o-ot!"

'Twas Henry's horn.

Without a word, but with a significant glance at his slave, the master turned his horse's head toward the nearest farm road, leaned forward in his saddle and pressed both heels to Little Sam's throbbing flanks. The little sorrel responded without a protest, and was in an instant going over cotton rows and ditches as if fresh from his stall.

After a dash of two hundred yards over such obstacles, he leaped the fence into a cross-country road which ran nearly a mile at right angles to the direction home and then into another which was fairly good and



ran two miles before opening into Broadway, the thoroughfare on which we lived.

Sick and exhausted as my father was, he knew the danger of killing his horse. So, on the two-mile road, he steadied Little Sam to a fast gallop; but, when he turned the sharp corner at Cunningham's shop and nearly a mile down the road saw a great crowd of people and heard their shouts, he leaned forward still more and, putting both hands on the little horse's neck, said:

"Now, Sam, I want your best, your very best."

He got it.

The little sorrel, already covered with foam, laid back his ears and, with neck outstretched and nostrils distended, came down Broadway like a cyclone.

In the long, hard run, Lindsay was distanced nearly a mile. As they measured off quarter after quarter, Lindsay could hear more and more distinctly the shouts of the jubilant negroes. He tried to answer, but was too busy belaboring old Fan on one side with a stout hickory switch, and on the other with his old hat. The old mule was game, but her rider said with a grin: "Little Sam bus' ole Fan's win'."

When the splendid little sorrel reached the gate from which he had been ridden just twenty-two hours before, the master was unable to dismount. Twenty-two hours in the saddle without one mouthful of food, when relief came, he was unable to throw his leg over the horn of the saddle.



But Unc' Essick, as usual, was ready for the emergency. Calling Big Lon to his assistance, the two lifted their master off of his horse. With Unc' Essick under one arm and Big Lon under the other, he walked to the piazza.

At the top of the steps, he was able to walk unassisted. Making his way to mother and the baby, he pressed his lips to the cheek of the little one, kissed my mother tenderly, and murmuring, "Thank God!" went over to a long bench and, with a heavy groan, threw himself upon it. One of my sisters ran for a pillow and, with a deftness possible only for a woman, lovingly placed it under his head.

Mother motioned Unc' Essick to clear away the noisy crowd. This he did very quickly, and when he returned, she directed that he assist the master to his room. My sisters attended their father, and when they insisted that he eat something, he shook his head and said:

"No; sleep, give me sleep."

Aunt Charlotte and mother tried to persuade the baby to eat, but she said: "No, I want mama." The mother knew that she, too, needed sleep, and that her nerves were strained almost to the breaking point. They gave her a good warm bath, and then she fell into a dreamy, fitful sleep. All night long, mother sat with the baby in her arms, quieting her nerves and soothing her to sleep again when, now and then, she awoke with a start and a scream.



The next morning, the baby took some food. The tired mother smiled, for she knew now that the little one was safe.

I have often been amazed at my mother's power of endurance. Though tired and worn and nervous, and without sleep for forty-eight hours, she turned her attention to my father, and stood over him until her ankles were swollen and her whole body racked with pain. She found my father's condition very much more serious than that of the baby. He was in a semi-conscious condition. She had hoped that the sleep for which he had begged would calm his nerves and give him a desire for food. In this she was mistaken. Ever and anon he was giving explicit directions to Unc' Essick and speaking quieting words to Little Sam:

"Essex, tell the boys they must not spare the mules—we must find the baby before sundown. Steady, Sam, now steady; can we make that fence, my boy? Good boy, Sam—that's well done."

My mother and sisters began to fear that that long, terrible ride would prove to be his last, but, to their great delight, on the third day his mind was clear, perfectly clear, though he was distressingly weak.

I saw my mother's countenance brighten, and that day I caught a snatch of the song she was accustomed to sing when she was perfectly happy.

Then I went out in search of fun. I wanted to see two dogs or two roosters fight, or I wanted to get two cats and make the fur fly. When mother was happy, I



could enjoy any kind of sport; but if she, for any reason, was sad, and I knew it, nothing amused me.

Now, though very weak, my father's mind was clear, and he could take a little nourishment; he improved rapidly.

The third day, the baby crawled up on her father's bed, and, pressing her soft cheek against his, said: "My papa."

A grateful smile played over the father's face, the first since the terrible ordeal that came so near costing his life.

When Unc' Essick called the fourth morning at the door to inquire after his master, my father asked that he come to his bed.

"Gawd, Marster! I'm powerful glad to see you's better dis mornin'—you been mighty bad off—you sho does look spryer dis mornin'," said the old man.

"Yes, Essex, 'Missus' tells me I've been right sick; but I'll be out soon."

"You sho is been sick, Marster, and, Little Sam, you laken kilt dat hoss."

"How is my little horse?"

"Oh, he all right now, suh; he all right, en ready fur anudder ride. But when you git back here dat evenin', dat hoss sho wuz dun up. He des drap his head down en stan' dar wid de water runnin' off him. En de blood runnin' down his legs whar de brier bin scratchin' 'em."

"Did you have him rubbed well, Essex?"



“ Yas, suh, en rub uver day since.”

“ Did I break his wind? ”

“ No, suh, you kyah break Little Sam win’; you mought kill ’im, but you won’t break dat hoss win’.”

“ Take care of Little Sam, Essex; he’s the best piece of horseflesh I ever owned.”

“ Oh, yas, suh; dat hoss all right.”

“ And old Fan, is she alive? ”

“ Yas, suh; oh, yas, suh; but dat ole mule ain’t gwine do much mo’ plowin’, Marster; she so stiff she ain’t git out de stable yit.”

“ Poor old Fan! She’s game, and tried her best to keep up with Sam, but, after five or six hours, she couldn’t do it. When you get her out of the stable, Essex, turn her in the pasture, and see that she has plenty of water and is fed three times a day. Fan gave her life almost for the baby; we must take good care of her till she dies.”

Fan, though called “ ole Fan ” by the negroes, was not old in years—she was really in her prime, but father knew that the long ride of twenty-two hours had ruined the faithful animal. He determined she should have a well-earned and undisturbed rest.

“ Essex, how are things moving on since I’ve been sick? ”

“ All right, Marster, all right; de plows is all runnin’ en de hoe han’s doin’ putty wuk. All uv ’em behave good cepin Mose. Dat a triflin’ nigger, Marster, dat Mose. He give Missus some slack jaw



yistiddy, en I laken git on 'im, but Missus wouldn't let me. She say wait tel you git well. But, Marster, ef dat nigger do it agin, I'm sho gwine tan his hide."

"All right, Essex, if Mose is impudent to Missus, you put it on him."

But Mose was too sharp—he gave Unc' Essick no further opportunity to "tan his hide."

## VII

But most things have their humorous side, and all my life I've had an eye and ear for the ludicrous. This distressing episode in the life of my childhood home was no exception to the rule.

The next day after the children were found, mother was rocking her baby, and rubbing the little arms and legs where the bugs and insects had bitten her the night she slept in the woods. Aunt Charlotte came in, and, looking down at the little spotted, bitten limbs, said:

"Missus, ain't you gwine whup dat nigger? Ain't you gwine whup dat Anaky fur tekin' my baby off in de woods, whar de skeeters en yudder bugs chaw 'er up lak dat?"

"No, Charlotte, I shall not whip Anaky. I'm too glad to have my precious baby back. I'll not whip Anaky."

Anaky was the oldest of the three children lost. My little sister and Hannah were about the same age—about three and a half years—while Anaky was nine



or ten. Anaky had a flat nose, very thick lips, an ugly countenance, and a still more ugly disposition.

Aunt Charlotte held Anaky responsible for taking the two little children off into the woods, and felt that she ought to be punished. She was not at all satisfied with my mother's reply, and walked out of the room with poorly concealed disgust.

The next day, she came again, and her wrath was still more deeply stirred after holding the baby a few minutes in her arms and rubbing with her own hands the bumps on the legs of "dat blessed chile."

"Missus, ain't you gwine whup dat nigger?" she asked again.

"No, no, Charlotte, I'll not whip Anaky; she won't do it any more."

"Never min', honey, I'm gwine git dat nigger fur let de skeeters chaw my baby up dis away," and she stalked out of the room muttering vengeance upon Anaky.

It was not many minutes before we heard a wail from the orchard. Dear Aunt Charlotte had taken Anaky down there, and, stripping three or four good, strong switches from one of the trees, was "tannin' Anaky's hide," as Unc' Essick said, in fine shape.

"Run, Rachel, run; tell Charlotte not to hurt Anaky," cried mother.

Rachel went out of the house and over the fence like a bird, but she was too late. Aunt Charlotte had done the work, and done it well.



When Rachel delivered her message, the black mammy shook her head and said:

“Dat all right; you tell Missus Anaky sho won’t do it no mo’.”

That night, when Anaky’s mother came in from the field, it looked for a time as if we would have a tornado or cyclone. I had seen negro women scrap a few times, and was expecting a great time, but was disappointed. The women were not allowed to fight. But it did do me good to see Aunt Charlotte shake her fist at Susan and hear her say:

“You fool wid me, nigger, en I’ll bus’ you open. You think I gwine let dat ugly Anaky tek my baby off whar de skeeters chaw ’er up? No, nigger, I tan your hide same lak I did Anaky’s.”

Aunt Charlotte was now satisfied. She had tanned Anaky and bullied her mother, and was now ready to scrap with anybody, big or little, who would dare take her baby off in “de bushes en mek her sleep whar de skeeters en yudder bugs chaw on ’er.”

When the baby and her father had both recovered from the suffering entailed by the terrible ordeal through which we had all passed, many were the anecdotes told of the experiences had by the searchers during the long child hunt. Some were pathetic; others, quite amusing.

I want to say that the terrible episode in the life of my little sister had a softening influence upon the whole household. I am sure that it made me a more



thoughtful boy. And now, after nearly three score years, if my life has been worth anything to humanity, not a little of it is due to the refining influence of my little sister—my precious “Rat.”



## CHAPTER VIII

### “ A WHOLE PLUG O’ MANIFAC ”

AFTER fifty years of freedom, the ranks of the old slaves are growing rapidly thinner and thinner. The vast majority of them are dead, and those still living are scattered to “ the four winds.”

A few days ago, a gentleman declared that he could not locate one of his father’s negroes, though he owned more than four hundred of them. Of my father’s slaves, I know where to find only two—Jack, with whom my readers have already become acquainted, and Mack, his brother.

If by chance you meet one of your “ ole time niggers,” he expects some gift. It may be of little value, but something it must be, just to remind him that you haven’t forgotten him—a cast-off coat, or cravat, or, in the absence of these, a few pieces of silver. He seems not to care so much for the value of the gift, but the evidence it furnishes of the fact that “ Marse John ” has not forgotten him makes him smile with gladness.

Some fifteen years ago, I was invited to deliver an address at Shiloh, the old home church where my fathers are buried. My, what a flood of melancholy



memories swept over my soul when I stood before that great crowd! It's an old box church with many windows and two large brick pillars in front; in its day, a fine country church. (And how much longer "it's day" will last I cannot tell.) The old gallery, too, built for the slaves, was there, and covered with dust and dirt till it was pitiable to behold.

I looked over that audience, and was pained to find that I could recognize only three faces. The people that I knew there years ago, sleep in the large graveyard just beyond the brook, while the church they built is filled to overflowing by their children and grandchildren and the children of others.

On my right, I saw in the amen corner the seat which my father occupied, and saw myself in my first pair of pants as I sat by his side. On my left, I saw where my mother sat, and, through my tears, I saw by her side the smiling face of "Rat," my baby sister.

In a language all our own, "Rat" and I communicated to each other our thoughts till we both got sleepy. Again, I felt the pressure of my father's hand as he pulled me over on his lap and whispered with loving tenderness and sympathy, "Now, go to sleep, my son." And I know now that while he worshiped there went up from his heart a prayer for the tired, sleepy, trusting child on his lap.

That was a hot day in September. While I was speaking, I noticed through the door at the left of the pulpit a colored man standing with bare head through



the whole of my talk. I recognized him at a glance, and, I'm sure, his respectful attitude and intense earnestness were very helpful to me. He was one of my father's old slaves. As soon as the services were concluded, I stepped out of the door and took the rough, hard hand of the black man in my own. The poor fellow was thin and wrinkled, but a broad grin attested his abiding good nature and revealed his pearly teeth, as white and sound as ever. With his tattered hat in left hand and with sincerity that was unfeigned, he said, holding on to my hand:

" Bless Gawd, Marse John, I so glad to see you. I heerd you wus here yistiddy, en I walked five miles dis mornin' des to put my eyes on you one mo' time. En thang Gawd, I lived to hear you preach, en—"

" No, no, Mack; no, no, I'm no preacher."

" Well, bless Gawd, ef dat ain't preachin' whut you bin doin' een dar, whut you call it? True, I didn' hear none de white folks shout, but when you sorter flung yourself back on your hunkers, en shake your head, en begin to fling it out at 'em good en strong, bless Gawd, I wus speckin dem people to tar loose shoutin' any time, en I wus des stanin out here ready to hit a few licks all by myself. Yas, suh, dat sounded powerful lak preachin' to me."

" And you expected to hear the people shout? "

" Yas, suh."

" Do you black folks shout whenever you have preaching? " I asked.



“ Yas, suh; Lawd, yas, suh; tain't no preachin' cepin we shout some. En Parson Skinem, he say he doin' powerful po' preachin' cepin we shout.”

“ Is Parson Skinem a good preacher? ” I asked.

“ Yas, suh; oh, yas, suh; you kin hear 'im clean down to Martin's Mill—he sho is powerful. When he git warmed up good, he preach des lak he callin' hogs. Des lak you done een dar. When you git to callin' dem hogs right good dis mornin', I sho spec to hear dem white folks squeal some. Marse John, you sho would mek a good nigger preacher.”

“ But how are your wife and children, Mack? ”

“ Dey all kickin', suh, thang Gawd, but not high; my ole 'oman pestered mightly wid de rumatiz in her jints, en Sarah Ann, she got a misery in her lef' side dis mornin'. Little Joe—das Joe Rogers, you know, named arter Marse Joe—he fell down dis mornin' comin' frum de spring en skin he knee; en John, named arter you, suh, he got married las' Sunday, ole fool, en fotch his gal to my house fur me to support, but—”

Hoping to break his narrative and give him one long breath, I said:

“ And what kind of wife did John get? ”

“ She right good sort o' nigger, I spec,” he continued, “ but whut I doan lak 'bout dat gal, she ain't black en she ain't a yaller gal; but her color is des a cross betwixt a terra-cotta and ginger-cake, en din again, she talk too much wid her mouf. She bin to



school some, en she think she edicated nigger. She put up her har des lak de white womens, en she try to talk mighty proper.”

“ Well, you don’t object to her proper talk, do you? ” I asked.

“ No, suh ; oh, no, suh, not cepin she git too bigitty. Now, le’me tell you whut she say yistiddy. Settin’ dar at de table eatin’ my bakin en greens, she lowed : ‘ I’m sorry fur you, but all you peterbaptists, white en black, will be lost onless you be ’mersed.’ ”

“ Well, Marse John, dat des flewed all over me same ez pisen.”

By this time I was considerably interested in the little family quarrel, and, though my friends had dinner ready and were waiting for me, I ventured to ask :

“ And what did you say to that, Mack? ”

“ Lawd bless your soul, I des push back my cheer, I did, en look dat gal straight een de eye en say, ‘ Look here, nigger, if you wus des a man, I’d wallup you all over dis yard. Here you set, big ez Trip, eatin’ my grub en callin’ me sich names ez dat. ‘ Oh,’ she say, ‘ I didn’t mean no harm, pa ’ (call me pa lak white folks) ; ‘ I des spoke of you all as peterbaptists.’ ”

“ Den I say, ‘ I want you to understan’ right here now, Milindy, else you kin des drap dat knife en fork—I want you to ’member, my name ain’t Peter, en I ain’t no Baptist. Does you hear dat? ’ ”

“ Den dat gal look skeerdt, Marse John—she sho did ; en I kinder git sorry fur ’er.”



“Talk to me,” he continued, “’bout gwine under de water ’fo’ you git to Heaven; no, suh, I’m a sho-nuff Mephodis, I is. Didn’t ole Marster, whut sleepin’ over dar een de graveyard, go ’long to Heaven ’dout botherin’ hisself ’bout ’mersion?”

“But, Marse John, I spec ’mersion do some dees niggers good; some uv ’em look lak dey ain’t bin wash good since dey wus sot free. I spec it would do ’em good.”

And the good-natured fellow chuckled heartily.

How long he would have continued, I know not, but, handing him a few coins, I said:

“Good-by, Mack, I must go now; tell John to take care of his wife and be a good negro.”

“Tank you, Marse John, tank you, suh; I wus des gwine ax you ef you didn’t have a quarter stickin’ roun’ dar somers een your ole britches; tank you, suh, dis ’ll buy some medicine fur de ole ’oman en a whole plug o’ manufac fur me. Marse John, ain’t you got a few crumbs roun’ dar een dat lef’ hand behime pocket?”

“No, Mack, I don’t chew.”

“Well, good-by, Marse John; I wish you had time to tell me ’bout dem boys o’ yourn. Kin dey run ez fass ez you use to, en is dey ez bad ez—”

“Good-by, Mack, I must go now.”

“Good-by, Marse John, I hates to see you go,



but"—looking at his money—"I sho gwine make de yaller spit come."

I left the negro, puzzled after all, to know whether he was really glad to see me, or whether his joy was due to the delightful anticipations of a "whole plug o' manufac."

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