

“HIS YEAR’S WORK AND SOLE INCOME.”



## COTTON-PICKING TIME IN THE SOUTH.

BY ANNE HOBSON.

ILLUSTRATED BY A. B. FROST.



“WHIN DE POSSUM HANG  
HISSEF BY DE TAIL.”

OCTOBER and cotton-pick-  
in’ time in the South;  
the time of the year  
when scarlet Christmas  
berries hang themselves  
in graceful festoons all  
about the fields and  
bushes, when muscadines  
and fox grapes fill the  
woods with fragrance,  
and golden rod and  
black-eyed Susans throw  
their yellow-coated ar-  
mies against each other  
for the supremacy of  
the fields, and look with haughty disdain  
upon the humble little daisies and asters  
that grow in clusters around their feet;  
the time when “little niggers” skirt the  
fields and hunt along the fences and  
ditches for may-pops, now yellow and  
luscious, and little boys love to go  
deep into the woods for the ripening  
chinquapins and chestnuts.

Summer is loath to depart, and amuses

herself with playing hide-and-  
seek with Autumn, who has already  
turned the corner and come in sight  
with his gay heraldries, though only  
fleeting glimpses of his red and  
yellow coat can be caught in and  
out among the gums and maples  
as we see him approaching with  
his gaudy train. Nearer and nearer  
he comes, and already we feel his  
breath upon our cheek. We see the  
leaves fall down and spread a  
carpet for his feet. The tall  
yellowing hickories send down  
their brown-clad messengers to  
make obeisance, as if imploring  
gentle treatment at his hands.  
From the fields and woods the  
note of dove and whirr of  
partridge sound forth in welcome,  
while many merry-throated  
songsters flutter and chirp about  
as if to prove their loyalty, and  
cover up the disgrace of their  
faint-hearted companions who  
have quailed at the first chilling  
touch and flown away. There is  
an uncanny feeling in the air.  
Signs of change on all nature;  
a subtle uncertainty and elu-  
siveness hangs over everything.

At twilight we sit without and listen to the sounds of the evening. There are crickets chirping under the step; we hear the milkman calling up the cows from the pasture; the barking of a lonely dog in the distance, then the dull thud of wood as it is brought in and heaped up for the fires of the evening.

A whip-poor-will calls in deep distress from the woods, and saucy Bob White answers back in gay derision. Far away in the still distance some one is calling to the pigs, and the weird echo comes to us, "Whoo-o-o-p pig, whoo-o-o-p pig, pig, pig!" It has a lonely, far-away sound in the evening air. Then the winding of the hunter's

horn is heard through the woods, the yelp of hounds, and the echo of galloping horses, as they round the hill and are off.

Then all is quiet. We sit very still, and a gentle melancholy creeps over us. Then we shudder in the frosty air, and say, "Fall is here." But lo! the next morning we rub our eyes and search for him, but he is gone—he has slipped away in the night. We look without and there lies Summer napping in the lazy October sunshine on the leafy couch which she has beguiled from Autumn by her soft smiles and caresses.

The fields are white with the opening cotton that fearlessly spreads its riches out beneath the open sky; and the pines skirting the fields in the distance stand proudly like sentinels guarding this great wealth of the Southland.

From far and near come snatches of "fiel' songs" from the cotton pickers bending low over the fleece-laden stalks, picking for "fifty cents er hunderd"; the ambitious doing their utmost to pass the hundred mark "'fo' dark," and the free-and-easy, happy-go-lucky ones taking time every now and then to sit in the shade and rest, or go down to the branch for a drink of water, hoping to make up for lost time by throwing in a boll every now and then with the cotton, or sprinkling that in the bottom of the basket with water to increase the weight. Thus from "first light" till dark they pick on, only stopping when the sweep sounds twelve o'clock for "han's" to stop off for dinner.

As "ole Unk Asberry" said, "Cotton pickin' sho duz 'gree wid er nigger. Jis seems lak it cum nachul, 'tain' no trouble 'tall. Er nigger jis seems ter tek ter cotton pickin' lak er 'possum duz ter 'simmons arter fros' fall.

"Jis yer show me er nigger whut doan lub ter chop cotton, en pick cotton, en I gwine be 'spichus er dat rascal sho es yer bawn. Laws er massy! how I rolls outen de baid en rubs mah eyes whin I hears de sweep knock in de mawnin' 'fo' day fer de han's ter go ter de fiel'.

"Everything looks right quare at fus, sorter lonesum lak. Dem blame roosters wid dey impertent crowin', en de jew all ober everything, en de mockin' buds jis 'ginnin' ter wake up in de trees, en de cows all er stannin' 'roun' shibberin', en ole Si's yaller dog er barkin' down ter de cabbin in de bottom. Er nigger sorter feel lak he's



"THE MILKMAN CALLING UP THE COWS."



“THE FIELDS ARE WHITE WITH THE OPENING COTTON.”

cummin' throu' er graveyard on er rainy night. But 'fo' yer knows it, hyar cum de sun er peepin' throu' de clouds kinder shy lak at fus, en I say, 'Ork-or, Mr. Sun, yo cyan fool dis nigger, I'se dun hed too much sperunce wid yer en yo shy ways. I 'lows yer gwine ter git mighty bole en impertent 'bout twelb erclock.' En sho 'nuff, ef I ain' dun spuk de gorspul, 'tain' nebber been preached frum de pulpit. Bless yo sole, I ain' mo'n got started ter pickin' 'fo' I feels mysef gittin' all het up, en I look up en dar's de ole gintmun in er broad grin,

en keepin' pretty familyus comp'ny wid me, gibben me so much 'tention, you'd er tho't I wuz de onliest nigger in dat fiel'.

“Well, de cotton luk so white en shiny wid de jew all over'n hit, en hit feel so saf ter ma fingers, dat 'fo' I knows 't I wuz er pickin' cotton right erlong ter de time uv er brekdown, en singin' jis es fas' ez I cud,

“ ‘New coon in town, new coon in town,  
Doan danc'er me down, ma darlin',  
Doan danc'er me down.  
Fly roun' ladies, so Mr. Brown,  
Fly roun' ladies, so Mr. Brown,

Doan danc'er me down, ma darlin',  
Doan danc'er me down.'

"Den all on er suddint I koch masef; Lawd hab mussy on my sole! I so 'stonished at masef I didn't know what ter do, en me er alder in de church. I luk 'roun' ter see if anybody'd hyeard me, but ever' one er dem fool niggers wuz er singin' so loud deysebes dey ain' got no time ter lis'en ter dey nabors. 'Wal, sah,' I say ter masef, 'dat woan' nebber do,' en I kinder tun hit off inter 'Sweet Bime-by'; en den I got ter pickin' so fas', an feelin' so Hallalujah lak, dat I lose sight er whut I wuz er singin' altergedder, en whin I wuz just 'bout de een er de row en cum ter er stop, bless dis nigger! ef 'Sweet Bime-by' ain' dun tun inter 'Hop light, ladies. Oh, Miss Lou,' en me not knowin' nuthin' 'tall 'bout 't. But dat's jis de way wid cotton pick-



"EN FEELS 'EM ALL GETTIN' 'QUAINTED WID ONE 'NUDDER."

in', hit jis seems ter keep time mo' better ter reel chunes dan ter himes.

"Arter erwhile I 'gins ter feel er sorter lonesum feelin' down 'bout ma stummick, but I ain' paid no 'tention ter hit, er humerin' er de flesh; en den hit 'gins ter 'sert itself purty strong, en I luk up at de sun en sez ter masef, 'Hit's 'bout twelb er'clock,

I specs,' en I ain' mor'n got de wuds out'n ma mouf 'fo' I hears de sweep knock fer dinner.

"Laws er massy, whin I gits ter eatin' dem yaller yams with fresh buttermilk whut ma ole woman done fixed up fer me, en dem cole hoecakes wid de fat meat greese er runnin' out'n 'em, en dat punkin pie ter een up on, I 'low ter masef, 'Unk-unk, dis mos' ez good ez settin' under er shade tree eatin' watermillions in de summer time.' But I allers did say dat de fall er de year beats de yuthers all to holler. Ain' dat de time whin de 'possum hang hissef by de tail ter er 'simmon tree, jis spechully fer ter fatten sum po' nigger? Ain' dat de time whin de cooshaws en punkins is er runnin' wile all ober creashun, en almos' er makin' deysebes inter pies? En cawnfiel' peas is er cummin' in, en yer kin jis hyar de shotes er crackin' hickernuts en akins, en puttin' on fat ter grease de skillet wid. En chinky-pins en chestnuts plentiful en free ter all, en evywhar yer tun yer c'n smell de sorgum juice er stuin' inter lasses. Yasser ree, Bob! gimme de fall er de year evytime.

"I hyar 'em talk 'bout de glories uv de springtime. Uuh! De mos' glories dat I meets wid in de springtime am de eberlastin' mawnin'-glories er sneakin' en spreadin' deysebes eround, worl' widout end, en ruinatin' ma young cawn and cotton. Naw, sah, dem am argimints whut yer can't git eround. En ter squench de whole business, I lak ter ax, 'Whin duz circusses cum?' Haw-haw-haw, I got cher dar, sho. Yer 'bleege ter answer, in de fall er de year.

"Clar ter goodness! Hyar I bin er layin' out in de sun er argifyin' ter masef, tell I doan fergot all 'bout dem two hunderd poun's dat I 'lowed ter pick 'fo' dark. En evy one uv dem black niggers is done gone back ter de cotton patch. De Lawd knows ef I koches one uv 'em er pickin' in ma part er de fiel', I gwine ter ring 'im out ter dry, sho ez yo bawn. Howsumnever, dey is got hit wrong if dey thinks dey gwine mek ennything by hurryin' off right arter dinner en not gibbin' deysebes time fer dey grub ter settle. A nigger ain' good fer nuthin' right arter dinner till his vittles is dun settlin' en mixin' wid one ernudder. En I gwine een up wid mo' cotton dis day den enny han' in the fiel'.

"Lawd! de bestes time I eber sperunces, en de happies', too, lessen hit's whin I'se gittin' 'ligun ergin arter I dun backslided,



“WHIN DUZ CIRCUSSES CUM?”



“‘DE GLORIES UV DE SPRINGTIME.’”

is arter I dun et 'bout two quarts uv cawn-fiel' peas cooked right greasy wid er poun' er two er bac'n, en sum yaller yams ter sop in de pot licker, en fo' or fibe hot hoe-cakes wid sorgum, en plenty uv good strong buttermilk ter wash 'em all down wid, en

den lays out in de sun en feels 'em all git-tin' 'quainted wid one 'nudder. En den dey sorter quiets down, en I feel so peaceful en happy, I feel lak I gwine ter sleep. But I ain' mo'n doze off 'fo' I shakes masef ter-gedder en gits up en hustles, kase I knows

er leetle mo' en I'd be off sho; en 'twouldn't nebber do not ter pick dem two hunderd poun's 'fo' dark, en leab all dat cotton er grinnin' on de storks.

"En sides dat, I knows dissher summery wedder ain' gwine las'. L'il' Miss Summer jis playin' sum er her pranks en foolin' ole Mr. Fall. 'Fo' he know hit, she gwine ter slam de do' in 'is face en be gone fur good; lessen he kin swade her ter cum back fur 'nuff ter kiss her han' ter de rose bushes, en mek de young buds op'n up en bloom, en stay 'roun' jis er leetle while mo' till he kin go en wake ole Man Winter up en Marse Sandy Claw, en tell 'em dey better be git-in' ready, fer hit'll soon be time fer 'em ter cum erroun' ergin. En den whin he gits back all puffin' en blowin', little Miss Summer gwine ter mek her bes' bow en kiss her han' ter 'im, en he ain' gwine ter see her no mo' twell nex' cotton-pickin' time.

"En I'se gwine be right hyar masef in dis sefsame fiel' er pickin' cotton dis time nex' year, if I libs en nuttin' hap'ns. But de Lawd only knows whar I gwine ter be by nex' cotton-pickin' time. Evy time I koches masef makin' de Lawd's 'range-ments fer 'im, I stops right short en sings ter masef dat good ole hime:

"Dis time ernudder year  
I may be gone  
In sum er lonesum grabeyard.  
Who knows how long?  
O Lawd, how long?—  
Ben' low, li'l' Jesus, ben' low—  
O Lawd, how long?"

As night comes on, one by one the pickers leave off, and emptying their bags into baskets, they pile them up in the farm wagons and carry them off to be weighed.

Already along the dusty streets may be seen wagon after wagon loaded with bales of cotton on the way to the village depot to be shipped away to clothe the world.

Now it is a four-mule wagon of some thrifty farmer piled up with bale upon bale; now the small, ramshackle, rattling cart of some negro containing one under-weight bale, his year's work and sole income; now a load of baskets, piled high and overflowing with the snowy staple, breaks the monotony; and every now and then a load of cotton seed being hurried off to sell while the fight between the mills is on and the price is high. Sandwiched in between bales and baskets and crowded thickly upon the seed

wagons, with legs dangling over the sides and back, laughing and cracking jokes, are darkies of every size and color.

The load of passengers increases as the wagons go along, and every dark-skinned brother or sister going the same way feels entitled to a place, and calls out, "Lemme ride," and without waiting for permission, pulls up into the crowded wagon.

It is a happy time for the negroes in the South when the crop is gathered, and they have a little "ready money" in their pockets, and can "go to town on Saddy," and hang around and eat ginger-bread and sardines and crackers, and buy a few yards of blue jeans, or some "orzenberg," and perhaps enough "yaller buff caliky" or homespun for a dress; and then, when night comes on, to beg a ride home on some friendly wagon "gwine out our way." For in the village Saturday belongs to the negro, and it is a brave person who will venture to work his way through the crowded sidewalks on a "Saddy in cotton-pickin' time." They are there from all parts of the country, and in holiday costume. Such lavish combinations of colors would be hard to imagine, the favorites being bright yellow, scarlet, grass green, and royal purple; and the arrangements wonderfully conceived. They stand about in picturesque groups, chewing tobacco, cracking "gubbers," drinking red lemonade, jigging, laughing, playing the "juice harp," and eating everything available, from an apple to a stick of licorice.

By the time the lamps are lighted the streets are deserted, except for a few straggling "town niggers."

Thus do the happy, improvident workers who plant and gather the crops and harvests of the South spend their small earnings "goin' inter town on Saddy," and buying ginger-cake and peppermint candy.

Happy, harmless, good-natured creatures! Kind to those who do them kindness; forgiving to those who do them harm. How many a dear old mammy with gentle, refined nature turned adrift in declining years among the rough "fiel'-han' niggers," upon whom she used to look with so much scorn.

Yet a merrier, happier set of creatures than the Southern darkies singing in the fields in "cotton-pickin' time," or on the streets eating and "tradin'" on a "Saddy," would be hard to find.