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REEL TWO

Beginning with the Continuation
of FRANKLIN COUNTY narratives.

W. P. A.

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LIGE MASSEY (Red Bay)

Waldrep

Franklin Co #1

LIGE MASSEY

There are many Masseys in Red Bay, but none of the Masseys claim kin to Lige Massey. They like him, they laugh at him, but ^{there is} no claim kin.

It was after the War that Lige Massey appeared in town, much the same in appearance as he now is. He saw war-service of some kind, people think. Perhaps it was active service on the front lines, perhaps behind the lines. No one knows. No one appears to be interested. They don't gossip about Lige Massey.

Lige is easy to find when you want him; he is ^{around} there all the time. He is in the drugstore, at Dr. Waldrep's office, and at practically any other place you look for him. ^{But} you ~~wouldn't~~ wouldn't find him at church, in the pool room, for he doesn't play at either place. You will find him in the Mason's Lodge everytime it meets, and he's smart on its administration. You

has never asked for credit; he has not been known to borrow a dime.

Undoubtedly he has some income, which is probably a pension from the war. People don't mention Lige's pension, at any rate, when they are cussing veterans' pensions.

It may be because of Lige's humbleness, his lack of put-on, show, and ~~ostentatious~~ display. There is not an ounce of conceit about the fellow. He is free of envy. He is free of jealousy. He does look at a pretty girl pass, but there's ~~only~~ ^{many} one person that ever noticed that, ~~and he is~~ ~~the reason~~. Ask anybody in town: "Does Lige care about women?" And they'd laugh, and wink, knowing that Lige gets all that out of his system at intervals. When you see the boy catch the dude for Corinth, Mississippi, you know he's itching for a whore. And that means he doesn't care about women; he doesn't make any snappy remarks about the girls of the town; yet he is the worst gossip in town in other things. He'll tell you where everybody is, what everybody is doing, and why everybody is doing what he is doing.

He is not a man to talk on and on. He says his say, and that is that. His sentences are never over a dozen words in length. He speaks in a tone that is so restrained and reined you feel that he is short of wind and can't spare any air to ~~use on~~ ^{use on} for his vocal cords.

~~Lige is in town all the time~~. He doesn't stay in a boarding house; no one would expect him to ask ^{for} to board ^{and lodging} ~~with~~ ~~anyone~~. He sleeps in Dr. Waldrep's office a ^{good} great deal, ^{and} ~~used to~~ ^{used to} make ^{calls} calls with him; ^{Sometimes} Sometimes Lige sleeps in the seed house at the gin; and in the summer God only knows where

he doesn't sleep.

"That fellow has money, all right." You hear that remark, and you hear how the remark is substantiated. It seems that a few years ago Lige's brother died out in the West. Lige got a telegram saying that he'd better put up some money to bury his brother or ~~the~~ brother would be turned over to a doctor's school to be cut up by students. Lige got money, not out of the bank, but from somewhere; he sent the money. Then a few days later Lige left town, he went into the West, went to the town that his brother had died in. Lige got himself a pick and a shovel, and he went to the graveyard, he dug into the earth one night, and he lifted the lid of the coffin to make sure that it was his brother ~~he~~ ^{been} had buried. Assured he came back to town. And the town talked about the escapade for months. When Lige was ~~mentioned~~ mentioned, somebody would tell that yarn.

As for as digging graves, Lige had had some experience. Just as you go under the underpass, leading to Russellville, there is a ~~graveyard~~ graveyard on the hill by the railroad. When there is a funeral to be had, you'll find Lige in the early morning up there on the hill, with pick and shovel loosening and shovelling the damp red clay. Sometimes you'll see a boy or man squatting and watching and talking. Nobody knows whether he charges anything for this work or not, probably not; only the persons for whom he digs graves ~~for~~ knows. Yet the chances are he does charge the funeral home that put up in Red Bay a year or two ago. It would be hard to think that Lige would charge his friends.

Lige is a good man for sitting up nights with sick people. When somebody is needed for that purpose

Lige never says no. He likes it. He likes the long quite, restrained talk of long waits. Lige is never impatient, never with ants in his pants.

Lige moves up the street smoking a hand-rolled cigarette, holding the usually tiny butt between thumb and forefinger. He'll stop and talk ^{if you want to} ~~with you~~. Again he will go to a grocery store, stand around the cold-drink cooler, and eventually he will pass a nickel to the grocer walk back to the sardines, take a can with key, a handful of crackers from the box on the fat-belly counter. He will go to the rear of the store where there are sacks of feed, take a seat on the sack, removed the lid, ^{of the tin} and poke whole fish down his throat faster than he can chew. His ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ bearded cheek worked up and down like a hinge of haired leather.

He comes back to the front of the store with a remark: "I saw a cat with a funny look in its eyes, bet she's looking for a Tom." Everybody laughs, for Lige said it. His breath of sardines nearly knocks you down, as he says: "Jim, shoo the cats from following me; I'm going to the dentist." Jim says: "God help the Dentist!" and sniffs the sardine-air.

On summer days Lige is up at the iceplant with a tub and a rub-board. While the water cascades from the plant's cooling pipes and the spin whirs with sucking and pressing cotton, Lige bends over a pair of overalls and jumper, stiff with dirt of wearing. After he has scrubbed the overalls and jumper he carries his tub and rub-board in the blacksmith shop at hand, and goes to town. He will go to Dr. Waldrep's ~~office, Simon~~

office, loll ~~about~~ on the divan, listening to the doctor discuss belly-aches, child-birth, and husbands. Sometimes he will ~~crawl~~ into the Ford and dash into the county to some farmhouse to help to doctor a sick person.

Again he will be there at the drugstore, ~~leaning on~~ leaning on the ice-cream box, making remarks.

In the night, after people have gone to bed, he'll be found in the alleys, strolling around, appearing out of nowhere, disappearing into to nowhere. He'll pop up around the cotton warehouse, snoop around the depot, in the lumberyards, and about the school.

After a fire has taken place, he will be up and about next morning, telling all the details. For he will have been there as sure as shooting.

And no merchant opens his store to catch the early risers too early to beat Lige on the street. Vuin Epps may get down to the store early to meet the beauty shop girl and fool his wife, but Lige will be ambling around in the silent streets looking on.

On Sunday nights people coming from church see a light in the doctor's office, and they know that Lige is sitting there on the divan, alone, perhaps sleeping. The doctor will not be there; Lige has a key.

Lige has a hobby, caring for bees. One of the grocers at one time became interested in bees. He bought hive after hive and put them under his fruit trees. Lige dived into help, uninvited, but welcome. He would catch the bees in his bare hands. He glories in his immunity from sting. No one need ask him to help with the bees; some days he'd turn up, saying:

"I want to look at your bees," and away ~~himself~~ he'll go to the orchard, to life the lids of gums, poke around, tap, and watch. His dull, gray, colorless eyes will be bright in their flat way, eager like a child in his keen watch of the bees. He'll search for the queen-bee.

Then he'll come and get your smoker, pop up in your back, screened porch: "Hello, hello," he'll call, and when you come to the door, he'll already have the smoker down: "I'm going to rob Joe Sykes gum, and I want to get Gene's smoker."

Lige knows he is king in his ~~domain~~ domain. He knows he is respected, trusted. So he plays his part, takes all his authority to himself, and uses it as far ~~as~~ as it goes, but makes not a step over the line. He ~~must~~ considers himself above the farmers who come to town; for he never associates with them. It would seem ^{he is} ~~he would have~~ much more in common with the farmers, dressed as he is in ~~his~~ jumper and overalls, but ~~it~~ ^{he} ~~isn't~~ ^{doesn't} the case. ^{perhaps considering himself a town man} He walks down the street, lord-loafer, drifts into the store, never bothered with: "Something for you?" "Can I wait in you?" or "What is there for you?"

Perhaps he will say: "Clyde ^{young} ~~will~~ won't sleep with his head to the West and his feet to the East." Clyde is the nigger at the hotel.

"No?" says the ~~man~~, Mr. Rogers.

"He says that is the way people are buried, East and West." Lige went on drily: "The other night it rained, and he had a leak; so ~~he~~ ^{he} set the dishpan on his belly to keep from changing his bed around."

Quick as a flash Lige left the store; for when he tells something he gets going just as soon as it is over.

While there is bickering, jealousy, and hard-feeling in the town, Lige takes no part. He takes no side. He has no particular buddies, no chums. Out of ~~some~~where he came, where it makes no difference; ^{since} ~~so~~ he tells no one. He came, has become a harmless fixture. What he believes, what he thinks, what he knows---none of ~~these~~ these, people know; ^P people aren't ~~bring~~ prying when it comes to Lige.....

Pink Petree, Postman,
R. F. D.,
Red Bay, Alabama

R. V. Waldrep
Editorial Department

PINK PETREE

Pink Petree was sitting on the front porch. He didn't like the idea--
much--for visitors to come in on him when he was getting ready to go to
Sunday School. He was in his swing, Bible on his lap, and newspapers at
his side, and a cigar between his fingers. He was having his early Sunday
smoke.

When the coupe drove up, across the protruding limestone rocks before
the store, he didn't get up, but his red-faced, pleasant-faced son came
down across the front yard, fenced in so you couldn't drive a car up--came
down under the tall, old cedar trees. He walked on bare ground, for the
cedar trees killed the grass. He left his mule with another fellow. He
opened the back door of the house, and unbarred the front door, while Pink
Petree looked on from his front porch seat.

The three town-fellows got out, while Son Petree opened the door of
the store. The store was long as a train box-car, and some wider and taller.
It was made of timber that was beginning to gray and blacken with age. It
looked very much like one of those old cotton outhouses in Southern fields.
It certainly didn't look like a store.

And the town boys didn't think a person should expect to see a store in Pleasant Site; for they had driven mile after mile out of Red Bay. They had driven along roads that dipped and dipped, and never did anything else. A person couldn't see over twenty feet ahead for dipping and for the twelve-foot, or more, wall of green bushes and trees that stuck up on each side of the road.

The store was on a grade, and the house where old Man Petree was sitting on the front porch, was higher on the grade. The fence that went around the yardful of cedar trees used the long store as part of itself.

The boys went into the store, and talked and asked for Coca Colas, and snooped around with their eyes, at the horse-collar on the wall, the pods of red pepper hanging from the ceiling, the canned goods that lined the wall, the table of sacked flour. It looked like a storage room in place of a store. It was dark and looked like no one had been there in quite a while. Petree didn't have any Coca Colas.

The boys figured they'd go up to the house and they went up there, while the son Petree got his mule again, (first locking the doors, which were like stable doors). He began to show the foot of the mule to another fellow.

The boys said hi-de-do, and so forth, and they took a seat on the porch.

They wanted to hear all about Pleasant Site; for Pleasant Site was here before the war when Red Bay wasn't even dressed of, and Petree had been there a pretty good while. He didn't look so hilly as you would expect, however. He had on a clean, blue shirt, buttoned all the way up, but not finished off with a tie. His dark hair was neatly combed, if not prettily combed. He looked as if he had just shaved and washed. His small face was not as dark as most Pleasant Site people. He is a store-keeper and doesn't work out in the sun so much. He is a small man, sixty-four years old; he likes sports, and never misses a ball game. Once, so one of the boys' fathers says, they wanted to keep him out of a game because he was too old, but he got in and beat them all. His voice has plenty of spirit and the movements he makes with his hands and legs as he sits, are quick and young. He wants to be young.

One of the boys asked: "How old are you, Mr. Petree?" Pink grinned like a monkey, and slapped the Bible he had laid aside. He got serious and austere when he spoke, a tone a fellow uses when he's telling some lie he wants believed.

Forty-nine." They all laughed. So he told them the truth.

The boys began to talk about the people and Pleasant Site, the water

mill. Pink told them how he had worked down at the water mill with Dr. Underwood. He told how the mill used to grind flour out. There were three grades; for it had to go through three grindings.

"When Dr. Underwood and me run the mill, we'd take shifts at being sawyer and off-bearer." They were running the sawmill part. "I didn't make much money out of it. The kids got to wanting me to buy them a car, and I wouldn't do it; finally I told them that when I made enough money out of the mill I'd buy them a car. So I put it all down in a book, and pretty soon that told me we had enough money. I bought the car, paying over \$600 for it. But that mill never made any more money, and I sold out."

The boys wanted to know about Pleasant Site! He told them! "The Watsons used to own all this land through here; Watson used to own that store I'm running down there. I still have some of his old books. It was after the war they made their money. Then old man Watson lost it all in Iuka. I was down there at Iuka to see one of them fellers jump out of an airplane, and I saw one of his folks in a cafe. She talked a long time about old times, and I had to go because it was getting nearly two, when the jump was to be. I haven't seen her since.

"The old man put all his money in them mineral springs in Iuka, in Mineral Springs Hotel, and he lost it all. One of his boys is down at

Fuscaloosa now.

"A feller came to see me," he told ^{it} but I forgot the feller's name,
"and wanted me to go down there at Fuscaloosa and talk to a boy of his'n
in the saylup. I told him I couldn't go, but he says he couldn't talk, and
he wanted me to talk to the boy and the doctors. I called my wife for some
clothes and took out down there. We went in there, and I told them I wanted
to see Watson and this feller's boy.

"They brought them in there, and I talked to them. Old Watson, the
Old man's son, was going 'kddduhtttthhhh'," Pink made a noise and waved
his fingers in such a way you thought about a hen cackling. "He went on
like that and never would stop until you ask him his age, and he said, nice
as you please! 'seventy-one,' and he'd start that muttering again. Then I
mentioned Pleasant Site, and he quit the noise and said something intelligent
again, but started the noise right after that."

Petree told me how he was postmaster: "I went in business with old
man John Petree 39 years ago. I was postmaster, for about three years."
He laughed and shifted his small bulk on the swing, and remembered his fears:
"I was scared to death once. I was drinking, and a fellow name of Burman
from Kentucky came into the store and wanted to know if I was postmaster,
and I told him that I wasn't interested--I was drunk. He told me if I was

postmaster I'd better be interested, and I asked him what he wanted. He asked me if I had approved of a subcontract on the Star Route from Belgreen. I told him I had..."

"I did it one day when I was drunk; had five bottles in my pocket. Two or three fellows was with me, and they said I ought to do it. I told them I couldn't, but they kept a talking, and I rared back right big, and give him the oath--just the kind you take in Court.

"Then this fellow Burman begin to tell me how sorry he was for me; he pulled out the postal regulations an' asked me if I had read them, and I told him there was so many I didn't have time. He said I'd better take time. I told him who was it had got me in this mess? I asked him did I apply for postmastership. Then he begin to aske me what I had, and I told him I didn't have nothing but a wife, and that old man John Petree owned the store. We went up to the house, in this room." Pink jerked his thumb toward the window nearest the swing.

"I had a shotgun up there on the wall. I told him if he was the fellow that got him to be postmaster he'd reach up there an' get that gun an' shoot the sonofabitch's brains out before he could get out the door. He backed up a little; I guess he knew I meant what I said. Then he got

to talking about money, and he said if I'd give him \$5 we'd call it off.

I got the money, and he give me a receipt. I still have that receipt down there in the store.

"Pretty soon I got a letter from a Judge saying that they understood that I had paid out some money, and that they could fix things up, since I hadn't done anything wrong. I wrote him to drop it all, that it was such a little that I didn't want to start nothing else. Let it die, I told them."

One of the boys was assistant Postmaster in Red Bay, and he wanted to see the books, and after a while the boys and the old man went down there and they turned the pages of the half-rotten records, read about dead-letters, receipts, money-orders. It was interesting; and they went into the charge account books too. They read how in 1872 liquor was charged and marked "Hdse, 4 qts."

But first Pink told how Austen owed him \$65, and it looked like he wasn't going to collect the money. He tried but he couldn't get nowhere, he said.

"They was having a revival meeting over in the Methodist Church." Pink indicated the direction of the church, toward the left of the porch, down into the trees somewhere. The church is not there now. "The presiding

Elder was preaching, and he was stirring up the people. He preached a right good sermon on death-payment. I liked it so well that I dropped a dollar in the collection plate, and I wished after that I had put in five dollars.

"The next day Austen came up to the store!

"Did you hear the sermon last night?" he asks.

"Austen," I says, 'are you trying to pick a fight, or are you really wanting to know what I think of that sermon?

"I want to know what you think about the sermon," he says.

"Well, Austen, I think he hit it just right. It's just the way he said it, don't you think so?"

"Yeah, I think the same thing," he says, and says 'I owe you \$65.

You want to buy a mule?' He had a mule with him. I looked at the mule.

"Yeah, I'd like to buy a mule."

"Will you give me \$65 for him?" I told him I would, and for him to go turn the mule in the pasture."

Pink grinned, and said: "I wished I'd give \$5 that time in place of that \$1."

Pink got back on the Watsons, and told how one of the Watsons went up to Wall Street. "He went up there to be a shark, but he got among them sharks.

and they outsharked him. They cleaned him out in no time at all.

"I remember when one of the Watsons was a boy. I went down to the spring," he pointed into a thicket on the side of the hill. "I found Watson there with a snake, a small snake about the size of a pipe-stem. He was playing with the snake. I went up to him. Pink was pointing out with his hands how the boy was playing with the little snake. "I was scared of the snake. Watson called me over, and he said: 'This snake is little now, and he don't amount to much. But he'll grow, and the first thing you know, he'll be a big snake, and dangerous.' He was serious as you please: 'That's the way with sin. First you don't notice it, then it gets big and bigger.' I was scared of that snake and got away from there."

In the store the boys were curious about the books, looking for ones that were old. They turned through the half-eaten leaves, looked at faded ink-writing. "One fellow came in one day and he got to looking through them old books, and he saw where he had been sent after a box of snuff. It said in the charging book: 'Box of snuff, got by Jack.' He wanted to tear a leaf out, but I told him I wouldn't do that, just take the whole book. Some traveling salesman came in here, and I gave them a book too. They have just been laying up there for years, and ain't no use to me."

Pink wanted to go to church, the boys could tell; so they got in the car, and Pink said: "If I can find some of them older books, I'll send 'em over to Red Bay for you."

7/20/39

S.J.

W. W. Skelton,
Red Bay, Alabama.

Franklin Co #1

R. V. Waldrep
Editorial Department

I'LL BE AN OLD MAN TOMORROW

"I believe in letting your boys do what they want to. If you put them in something they don't like they won't learn as fast and never will do any good. I let my boys do what they wanted to. I give them that Cook Correspondence Course in Chicago--I give it to Alvin and Earl; J. W., he picked up what he knew from them."

Mr. Skelton really believes what he is thinking and saying; but, as a matter of fact, his boys just grew; as he didn't have a word or take a drop of authority. He might have done something for the boys if he had wanted to, but it never occurred to him to do anything.

Mr. Skelton is one of these scrawny, little, thin, leatherly guys, looking as if he has been fried crisp and brittle like bacon--good bacon. He is a talker; quite intelligent and fluent, too. He was talking about himself, and the things he had done, and the boys he had trained. The correspondence course he was telling about was in electricity. The boys received little motors, diagrams of the ignition of cars, and diagrams of house-wiring.

"The boys are all healthy. Roy eats the most; J. W. never did eat anything much. But Roy, he could eat more than anybody I ever saw. For breakfast, I never do want more'n two fried eggs, three biscuits, some bacon, and some coffee. When supper comes I like nothing more than corn-bread and milk. That's all I ever eat, and I reckon I'm healthy." He stood there small and scrawny, and tough as a string of rawhide. His hands, one horribly mutilated, were gnarled, bony, and stiff to the shake. His neck came out of his shirt as lean as his wrist, and as tough.

"Whiskey won't hurt a fellow, I reckon. I was raised in a house

where we kept a jug under the head of the bed, and I have always kept one under my bed. It ain't done me no harm, and I'll be an old man tomorrow!" His shriveled face creased in a grin, and he said happily: "I'll be 67. You know, you're an old man when you git to be 65. I'll be 67 tomorrow.

"I come in at night from the sawmill so tired I can't hardly wiggle, and I take me a little drink, and then I eat me a hearty supper, and I go to bed. I sleep good. Then, when I get up, I take me another drink, eat me a good breakfast, and I feel good all day. I ain't no drunkard, and it's all right if I ain't a drunkard."

He laughed: "I said I went directly to bed, but I don't. I set up and read, sometimes to 11 o'clock, and I always git up at four. I reckon if a feller gits out of bed at four all his life, he just tumbles and tosses if he don't git up every time at four. I allus get up at four, no matter when I go to bed." He reads western magazines, and has been doing it all his life. His wife reads to him, when he is too tired.

He was happy as he began to remember his early days. He would talk all day about that, anybody could see; for his voice took on strength and vitality like that of a young man. "About that whiskey", he went on, "I had it on and off with that preacher down in Jacksonville, in Calhoun County!" He paused to rock his memory with glee, as he was asked whether he had ever ~~at~~ made any speeches about prohibition.

"No, I didn't make no speeches; I was working in those days, contracting and sawmilling. But we won that time; we beat in the election. I'd come in from work and write articles in the paper to the preachers." The memory made the old man happy, and his fried-bacon body seemed to sing like taut rawhide twitted by a breeze. "They preached me to hell, and I'd answer 'em every time, and get the best of it too. We won that time."

He stopped for a question, and said no, it wasn't when they voted in prohibition; "It was around 1905 or somewhere, and we won it."

He drifted about in his memories without prodding. He skipped the years, bounced along happily, glad to be heard; for he is usually a solitary figure on the streets there in Red Bay. Rarely do people talk to him and take interest in his affairs. Now he talked

"I didn't marry until I was up in the thirties. I never did settle down to then, and I didn't drink as much after I got married, but when I was sawmilling all over Mississippi and Alabama, I was something! I spent money! I spent every dollar I made, and I made \$150 a day sometimes. We'd go to Birmingham every Saturday. We'd go out to Red Light. That town! Was there women? ---the damndest town ever I was in! It was tough! It was over there past that old L. and N. Depot that we was." "No, there wasn't no 26th Street then. The tough place was Red Light, we called it."

He took off his hat, and the hair was thin and gray, but the scalp was tough and tanned. He pulled his cheap, boy-like, straw hat down on his head again. "I was up from South Mississippi--I was working down there in a mill that had 600 men, nearly all niggers, counting the ones in the woods. We was cutting pines. I was up in Birmingham, and I got to talking to J. E. Williams from Vina. He's the Goddamdest liar that ever lived! There never was a liar like him. He got to telling me about the timber up here; he told me how many thousand and thousand of feet of timber there was here. I listened, since I was nearly through in South Mississippi; timber was pretty near all cut down there.

"Well, he told me so much about that timber, and I was looking for a good timber country to settle down in, that I brought my family and hauled everything to Vina. There was Alvin, Earl, and Roy in the family then. J. W. was born there in Vina ...

"J. E. Williams is the damndest liar ever I saw ..." He growled in his throat like a little pup, his old eyes looked from the glasses, the black, celluloid rimmed glasses. "I moved."

He said: "J. E. Williams didn't own a foot of the timber! Yeah, there was a good deal of timber, but he didn't own a foot, and I had my whole family up here. So I had to get out and buy up a section of timber and go to work. I couldn't do anything else." He paused. "Later on I worked for J. W. Rogers in Vina there."

Now, he launched back to earlier days with the ease that years give; things seemed to be scrambled in his mind; sensations, experiences, hates scattered through many years were all one connected memory--but they all made sense to him. He untied the bundle of experiences without a fumble.

"My father was a sawmill man. I was born in Texas, and raised in Calhoun County. All my people are in Calhoun County. I go back there some. And I'm going back again pretty soon. They're buried out there--my people." His voice was the same in discussing his old home county, but a close attention to the tone brought out the softness of a sentiment; attention to his eyes showed there was a film come over them. And the creases down the lean scrawny jaw moved ever so little. Perhaps his voice was lower, too. "I married my wife when I was in my thirties. She's a Ferguson, from Burleson."

He went back to earlier days, and he was in Texas. "I helped to run telephone lines in Texas, and when we got that finished, I went back over the same lines and put up the poles and wire for a postal telegraph line. Boy, I was free and easy them days. I had money, but I could take seven hundred dollars to town and to the saloon on Saturdays, and spend it every bit! I could have been a rich man, a millionaire right now ..." He is a scrawny fellow, and would have looked funny in one of those long, sleeping limousines--he is a banty-rooster of a man. "I had the money once in my pocket. I was working on that telephone line. A fellow in a saloon tried to sell me a house with five acres of land. It was a big house, four rooms, 16 x 16. He wanted to sell the house--out there in Texas--for \$25, and I

had the money, sewed right here." Skelton marked off the place on his thigh where the money had been sewn; he marked it off on cheap, dollar pants, faded with washing. He drew out his sack of tobacco, rolled a smoke with his lean, mutilated hand. "Well, I wasn't thinking about nothing like that, buying land--I wasn't married then and wasn't thinking about settling down. Well, I come back by that saloon and house when I was working on the postal telegraph lines, and that house was worth \$4500, and it wasn't more'n a year after that. I was there in July, July the Fourth--it was a legal holiday--and I was in the same saloon, and it was just one year later that same parcel of land and house was \$4500! I could have been a rich man, but I'm a pauper..."

"That wasn't all. My brother-in-law--he's in Texas--Ferguson is his name, bought a bunch of land for \$1500, and he's got something, he's been offered \$15000!"

The regret and chagrin in his voice was real; his tone of voice was as angry as if he had just stumped his toe.

"But I've made money. I didn't know there was going to be a panic or anything. It was that panic and trucks that ruined me. Trucks are like gambling; you think if you spend just one more dollar on a truck you won't have to spend anymore. Trucks was my downfall. I was up there in Belgreen, working that timber. I'm up there now, but it ain't hardly worth a dam, but it's all I can get. It's worked to hell and back.

"I bought a bunch of trucks before the panic. I thought it would be better to have a truck, and then I could come home at night. I bought a truck up here at Russellville, one Saturday. I bought the best tires I could buy--them Goodyear--worth \$57.50 apiece. Well, sir, I started home, and when I got to Bear Hill, my rear, left tire hit a strip of iron." Skelton measured with his mutilated hand a strip about $\frac{1}{2}$ x 1 x 6. "It sliced a hole in the tire, ruining \$57.50." He could taste the sound of that money. "Well, I

come down here to Red Bay, and put on another just like it, and I went on toward the Ridge where I lived, and there was a horse-shoe in the road, and that horse-shoe carved a half-moon out of the other tire. Another tire, another \$57.50. I guess it was partly because of the heavy load of timber I had on the truck...

"But that wasn't all! A feller out at the mill tore the back-end out of a truck for me. Then them big heavy loads ruined the brakes. The brakes was on the outside, remember? I ruined them things right and left, and I'd have to have them relined, and that cost like the devil! Yeah, trucks ruined me, and I didn't have sense enough to stop. I've got some checks--cancelled checks over at the house--twelve-thousand-dollars worth, I lost on trucks."

He was asked about his stay in Jacksonville to cool his frustration: "I run a show over there, showed movies and them traveling show-people would come and show for me. The movies wasn't no good is right, but they were new then. I was there in 1903, I think--three years there. I taught Alvin all I knew about the show business--that's how he got started being an operator, and Earl too." Alvin is out in Texas, and Earl operates a moving picture machine in Corinth, Mississippi. Of course, the old man didn't have anything to do with the boys, as he was sawmilling and getting drunk his off days. He would be put in jail there in Red Bay, and you could hear him cuss a mile. But he says he never was a drunkard!

"I ought to have stayed there in Jacksonville. I was making money. I was contracting, too. I built more houses than anybody." He will show you pictures of those houses, and himself standing before the house, standing proudly, the huge, box-like affair in the background. "Jacksonville was the biggest place in the county then. Anniston wasn't anything. Jacksonville was County Seat. A company came in and wanted to manufacture in Jacksonville,

but them old forces wouldn't stand for it; they made them stop, even after the company had dug a big place for a spurline to a railroad. The plant went to Anniston, and purty soon Anniston was biggest, and voted the county seat to themselves. I sawmilled the lumber that they built the courthouse with."

In the pause, Mr. Skelton was asked how so much of his hand had been sliced off--the forefinger and thumb was cut off close. Yet he skillfully rolled his own smoke, and pulled the yellow drawstring of his tobacco sack with the few remaining teeth in his mouth; the teeth, he explained, were all right, except they didn't match. "My wife is having her teeth pulled out, and she's a-grunting, because she won't be able to eat right for three months. I told her she'd have to hire somebody to chew for her." He grinned.

He told about the missing digits: "I was working out in Gladewater, Texas, when I got them cut off. It was in a hardwood mill, making shingles." He told of the enormous volume of shingles they produced. "I got them sliced off when I was feeding a rip-saw." He didn't tell then, but when the hand was cut, he took a needle and thread, and sewed the skin over the protruding bones, washed with whiskey, without calling in a doctor.

"My family? Half my family was big! my two sisters weighed three hundred pounds or nearly that apiece. There was two of my brothers little as me. There was seven of us all; some of us is dead. I am the oldest..." He stopped and said with pleasure: "We generally live to be old."

He was told: "A fellow as lean, flatbellied as yourself will live to be a hundred-twenty-five."

"We're all long-lived. I'm healthy." But sometimes he gets to coughing, while he drinks whiskey, cough-medicine, and cusses. He lies on the bed moaning and heaving away in his throat. Now he looked lithe and young and tough--perhaps he is healthy. His belly is flat, his hips narrow, his feet small, his neck and jaws a clean, fried red.

Walking down the street, he said: "I'm right proud of my boys--all of them."

I let them do as they please. I did all I could for them. Earl, he's got a good job, and Alvin has done pretty nigh what he wants to. Two of my kids are dead." There was no sorrow in his voice. J. W. was killed a year or two ago; he was traveling with a show that put on moving pictures in schools, and he hurled his car head-on into another car, and the top of his skull was clipped from his head. He had been a reckless driver, was crazy about cars.

"Trucks ruined me," said his dad again.

The boys are all, except Roy who married a prostitute, and hobos, born mechanics. They are wizards with pliers, screwdrivers, wrenches... They can do things with copper wire, screws, armatures, magnets... They talk and blow, and tell jokes that aren't funny. Early reads joke books in order to be funny. Roy married a prostitute, as said; Earl married a woman who fools him and Alvin never will marry.

"I'm right proud of my boys," said Mr. Skelton, leaving the postoffice.

"I never could educate them like I wanted to, though," he said.

7/18/39

S.J.

R. V. Waldrep

* Dr. Archie C. Waldrep
Red Bay, Alabama

I WANTED TO KEEP A GOOD HORSE

In 1903 Dr. Waldrep came to Red Bay to practice medicine, but he was returning home from school, and just incidentally to practice medicine. He's done right well by himself too. He can keep up a bunch of in-laws on what he makes and not even feel it. He can sit in his office and puff on his pipe and not worry about the expense of the tobacco he smokes.

But he is a dreadful gossip. He tells all about the people he doctors. He doesn't mind telling you that Joe T. Beasley isn't sick. He just shakes his head over him and points to the head.

But he can get dirty in his gossip. He was telling just the other day how a woman came into his office.

He puffed: "She was worried about her husband. I knew what was bothering her." He stopped for a rich, ripe puff, and a wholesome contemplation. "Her husband was in his wild stage, and he wasn't being true to her. I took the woman into my consultation room, examined her, and I told her what was wrong with her." His chuckle was full and fat, and not a bit in a hurry; for Dr. Waldrep is in 70. The doctor told what was wrong with the woman, but it is not fit for print.

Doc Waldrep is always telling things that are not fit to print. He is careless in his use of biological terms. He speaks freely of deliveries, purgatives, and emetics. You can learn about girls that have gone wrong, about women that are worrying about their husbands, about women who just naturally have to be sick in order to have something to talk about. And all the time there is that soft, gentle, and deep contemplative attitude.

He seemed so set, so firmly lodged in his life, so firmly convicted that things don't worry him, that all is a passing show. He is a man with a pipe sitting in a rocking chair. There is smothered joy in his eyes, a comfortable posture to his dumpy body.

Dr. Waldrep always wears a dark suit, not pressed, but a suit, and he wears a tie, suspenders, and when he sits the short legs of his pants slip up and you can see his white calf and the supporters to his socks. In the summer time he often forgets to button all the buttons of his stoggy little belly, and the white of his skin and sometimes his naval peeps out.

You can see him coming across the street to R. V. Waldrep's Store or to J. P. Epps' store, going at a snail's pace, one short step before the other; slowly, thoughtfully he comes. One elbow is outthrust as he holds the stem of his pipe a few inches from his moist lips. On his face there

appears a small, secret grin that is buried in him.

For forty or fifty years he has been around, many more years he romped and drank over the country. Red Bay wasn't here when he first came and doctored on horseback.

"The first schooling I ever got was when I was 5 years old. I went to Uncle Bud Still's school, and the next year I went to Uncle Bill Waldrep's school. Now, let me see...." He puffed on his pipe slowly, and slipped his stocky frame into the worn easy chair. The fan in the ceiling was cool, the smell from the little side room where Doc fixed cuts, painted wounds, and set arms came from medicine. The streets of the town were silent except for an occasional rubbered glither of an automobile. "Let me see, in '81, I went to Miss Florence Barnes, and I went to Bill Nabors' school, too. Now, I think it was out at Rara Avis I went to Uncle Bill Waldrep, that was my pa's brother, you know. Then I went to school out there where the Methodist Church is now. The worst school I ever went to was out at the Bullen place; everybody studied aloud. It was the awfulest racket." His face took on an angelic smile. "Then the Gates boys got up a school, and taught 8 months; my pa and the other people went in together to pay them to teach school. I went there two terms. The other schools I went to were

just 3 months in the summer, but the Gates boys school was 8 months."

"You taught school one year?"

"I taught out at Center Point. I had 35 scholars. When I whipped one I never had to whip him again."

"About that time," said the doctor, "Dr. Collier came home from medical school in Louisville, Kentucky. I was looking around for something to do. I wanted a job that would let me keep a good horse. I wanted a good horse. Dr. Collier came in, and he had a big black horse, a fine horse. So I went over to see him, and I told him what I wanted to do." He thought carefully, and said: "He let me borrow 3 books: anatomy was one of the books." The doctor couldn't remember the rest. "Every Sunday I would go to Dr. Collier's, and he would teach me, drill me on the words."

"When I got to Louisville, Kentucky to go to school, I stayed with some fellows from West Virginnny. I didn't want to stay out where they were, but they talked me into it; they told me I could have the feather bed. Back then I liked the feather bed, but I don't care anything about it now.

"On Saturday night, I remember we used to have to give up our room for the girl there to court in. I forget her name. We got tired of having to

get out every Saturday night, and we used to peep through the key hole, and that would make her mad." All the time he was talking, his voice was mellow and slow and plodding, moving carefully forward, stopping to chuckle richly, to take a puff from the pipe that was rarely six inches from his lips. His face was red, round, and covered with a moonlike pleasantness.

"In them days there was two terms, six months each." He puffed and puffed the minutes away. He did not give a picture of the life there; for he didn't try. He did tell in a loose way of putting toe nails in a boy's pockets, mentioned sitting in a room and watching doctors work before students. He did not attempt a vivid portrait of his school years, but behind his face, one knew that the words he said produced a vividness of portraiture that delighted him. In the long pauses, the silent smoking, he was enjoying the memories.

"When I came back in here I had fifty dollars and a horse. I roomed with Miss Florence Barnes' people. The little room I stayed in is still out there on the back of the house."

Dr. Waldrep married, but his wife died, and a year or two later he married once more. He doctored up and down the country. He had interest in the Waldrep and Epps store. He moved his office into the store. His practice extended, and money began to come in.

In 1914 he bought the first car that came to Red Bay, hired a man to come down to teach him to drive. But he still kept a horse in case of emergency. He has had a car ever since.

He has been a staid and steady man. He has been firm and careful to collect his fees. He is a business man, takes no risks, and therefore takes no losses. He has bought land; and the land along Bear Creek just out of Red Bay is some of the best the locality has. He loans his money for interest.

Like most doctors he does lots of charitable work, work for nothing, but even in that he manages well, and comes out all right. His fees are not high; he does not cater to the town-practice, from which he might get high fees.

Once he was president of the bank, but from some cause or another he fell out with the officials, and has never been president or had anything to do with the bank since.

He is a man with a firm, set mind. His hates are real and tough and enduring. He never forgives an enemy. Behind his pleasant exterior, his smiling round face, he nurses jealousy and hate. One of the hates is Dr. Weatherford of the same town, and the hate is reciprocated.

His office is a country-looking place. There is pungent smell of medicine, an atmosphere of use and dirt. The air is heavy with darkness and gloom.

The divans and easy chairs are old and worn. The table on which sits his phone is littered with circular letters, medical journals, and samples of medicine. Above the desk is a shelf of books, old medical books. A heater stands with pipe in the ceiling on one side of the room, and to the right of the heater are two doors. One opens into the small anteroom where the minor wounds, cuts, bruises are cared for, and the other opens into a kind of consultation room where there is a table for people to recline on. On the floor is a pair of bathroom scales. Opening from the consultation room is a small anteroom in which is kept medicine, the walls are lined with bottles and cans. The door to the left in the waiting room, passes through a dark and dingy storage room into the People's drugstore.

The doctor's car is always parked in front of the office, except when the doctor is at home or on a call. Almost any time of the day, you can see that slow short-legged walk of the doctor, as he goes with medical kit to his car. The motor of his car roars, as he backs away, and goes into the country. Many times his calls lead him for miles, many times over almost impassable roads. His car is a coupe.

On Sunday the doctor is always in church; he never misses a service, though he once did. He is perhaps feeling his years, feeling the approach

of death---and he wants to feel safe. Once he used to cuss. Once when he got mad he was a dangerous man. But now the wrinkles are gathering around his red, thick neck, the crows' feet are spreading from his eyes over his tomato-red cheeks.

It is told in Red Bay, by some of the old codgers, how he used to drink and carry on. It told how he and Ed Bullin went to bed when the doctor's brother got married, and how he and Ed drank all night, passing the jug from one side to the other. Ples Epps said they were having a trial once and Doc was there drunk and getting dangerous. Ples tells about when he and Doc were in business together, and how they had to fight to collect money.

Doc has had a full life and some great sorrows in his time. His son Orvard went off to school to study medicine, but he didn't go through. His daughter married young.

But when Doc goes through the bottoms, he drives slow to look at the land, and on Sunday he sits in church with an attentive ear. At home he and his wife read the Christian Herald, Alabama Christian Advocate, and Birmingham Post from cover to cover. His wife milks a cow, hoes the garden, and never goes anywhere. She is stooped, pious, and good. She likes to call people on the 'phone and talk for hours. But religion she likes best

of all. And as the years have gone by, she has penetrated her husband; together with the years, she has impressed him with a pious life.

Every night Doc has to get up from his bed, go into the side roads to deliver babies, care for constipation, lung trouble, and malaria.

But his worries and troubles have never been economic; for he has always made money, and owns as much property as anyone in town. He has built an expensive home for his son, built a home for his daughter and her husband. His worries have come from son and daughter, not from poverty.

Now, he worries about nothing. Past is the time when his son sued for divorce, his daughter quit her husband. Past are the days of educating his children.

Looking at him now, one would never guess that passion and anger had whipped that stodgy body. One would never guess the hard, profane, fighting words that had blazed from those lips. He has called a card a card in his day, and not even his patients have been free from his temper.

But now, he sits and grunts comfortably, having about him the air of physical well-being, serene mental attitudes. He is not soft now, but he seems to have slumped, the muscles loosened, the arms dropped---he seems to have slumped into physical ease and objective thought.

He reads the medical journals, and goes to Russellville of late because he wants to be sure he is getting his fair share of the relief doctoring. If you go on a call with him, he'll tell you about the young bucks, the young doctors. He'll tell you of their good liquor, the jokes they tell, and his laugh is good to hear; for it rattles with richness and deepness. It is the same laugh you hear when you jerk back from a throat-mopping, a daub of iodine.

You ask him about socialized medicine:

"I don't care what they do; I won't have anything to do with it. Let them do what they want to." He takes his pipe from his lips, pushes his glasses up on his forehead, and he sits waiting, not caring whether you speak again or not.

The people shake their heads over him: "Looks like a man his age is too old to be getting up at all times in the night. He's making more money now than he ever did." They do not know that the doctor is a sucker for greenbacks, even at 70.

7/20/39
MS

R. V. Waldrep.

*
Bony Winchester
IPD
Red Bay, Alabama

BONY WINCHESTER

Bony Winchester was sleeping when he received a call. His brother and brother-in-law, Mason, were sitting out on the front porch, talking the hours away. Old Lady Winchester rolled out on the porch from the kitchen, and rolled back into the kitchen every little while—she was so fat she had to roll.

"Bony! Bony!" the old lady said loudly into the bed room through the door of the hall. The hall ran from the middle of the porch and made the leg of a T down the middle of the house; there were two rooms on each side of the hall, and an attic. Steps led from the hall to the attic.

A couple of dogs fetched themselves down to the gate to bark and leap in the air, and the visitors came through the gate, and walked up the woody path for about ten feet, since the yard wasn't bigger than ten-by-twenty. They went up the steps, and the old lady scurried around, getting chairs from inside the house.

Bony came out of the house scratching his head, and carrying his shoes.

"Bony was resting," said the fat, barrel of a woman. She stood about five feet high and about three feet across. Her head was enormous with a

peculiar dignity and matronliness to it. The hair was a sort of brown-gray, and combed toward the top of her head. She was bare-footed. When Bony had taken his seat, and was slipping his shoes on his bare, dirty feet, she went back into the kitchen. Once or twice the visitors caught a glimpse of her making a few swipes with the broom, standing in the bed-room door. Once she told Bony what somebody had said; for Bony is hard of hearing.

Bony could have been a handsome man, and may have been. His hair once was black and curly. Now his hair is in ringlets the size of two-bit coins. It grows thickly on his head, this hair does. It comes down to his ear, and his sideburns, almost white, curl. His profile is good, straight, and shows the traces of handsomeness. With good clothes, a clean shave, a good hair cut, and clean clothes he'd look younger than his 69 years.

When Bony shook hands, it was like taking a cloven hoof. He was so sleepy, it was hard to get him to talk, and everybody knows he is a hard talker.

But Bony's brother didn't have any trouble in talking. He was a year younger, but looked older. He was minus teeth, and the Winchester profile was destroyed by a severe dip just below the nose.

Bony's brother was a religious fanatic, as it could easily be seen, from the first word he said. He began to talk about religious things, making statements about heaven. He was a smiling chap, anyway; and everybody was polite enough to stop and let him talk; for everybody believed in religion even if they didn't obey and sometimes said damn.

The dogs took a couch on the floor, leaning their backs to a couple of short-logs of fire wood. The flies settled down everybody's arms, legs, and face, and tried their best to get on everybody's lips.

"Heaven must be a fine place. The Bible says that everyday will be a new and better day," said the fanatic. "The Bible says there will be harp-music in heaven," he said mysteriously and fervently: "music on golden harps. Now, I never heard any music on golden harps, but I bet it is a mighty sweet sound."

"Might be like the clinking of golden coins," said a visitor, but no one paid any attention to that.

"I know heaven will be a wonderful place."

"He seems to be a religious person?" asked a visitor over by Bony.

"Is he a preacher?"

"No, but he is a right good man. He's my brother. I never knowed

him to do a mean thing in my life, and I never heard him speak a slighting word of anybody. He don't know nothing, but the Bible and hard work. He don't go to town. Swearing ain't in him a-tall. I knowed him tuh say one swear word about twenty years ago. He was getting off of a wagon, and fell off on his face, and he got up and said 'I'll be damned!'"

"He's never been away from here?"

"Mah, he don't go no where."

"How long have you been on this home place?" The house, the visitor noticed was fairly new. He estimated the house was about 20 years old. There was moss on the roof.

"I've been here 60 years. I was up there on the hill." Across the road, where Bony pointed, was a hill, a bare hill, which looked as if it once had a house on it. "I was burned out there. He and Mason there, we built this house."

"You've never left here?"

"I went out to Texas and stayed four years when I was pretty young, but the rest of the time I've been here." He wouldn't talk about his western trip. And he turned the talk to politics, and told how he thought the farmers needed some sort of help. "Shore I believe they ought to have

some kind of help, but not the kind they're getting. It costs 75¢ to give them 25¢."

He said: "We've got to change this renter-system of farming. When the tenant gets three-fourths and the land owner gets one-fourth it don't work. A land owner can't get along. I used to have five tenants but I don't have but one now, and I'm figuring on stopping that. A land-owner can't keep a house fixed up, and buy everything a tenant wants him to, pay the taxes, and all on no one-fourth of the cotton."

He sighed: "I'm plumb ruined. This is the worst year I've had since 1900. That was a wet-un, just like this, maybe not near as bad. 'Way back yonder I got 38 bales of cotton. Last year I got sixteen bales, and I'll do good to get four bales next year. That ain't nothing."

"Do you think people are meaner now than they used to be?"

"There ain't no doubt about it. I guess it is because there are more people now. And when you educate a person he feels like he oughter have something, and he just takes it."

"Then you believe that education makes people worse than what they naturally are?"

He was speaking slowly and profoundly, searching himself for an honest opinion. His brother was talking to another fellow about the Bible, and Mason was talking politics. Sometimes Rony's brother would raise his voice and wave his arms, and they knew he was preaching.

"I believe in giving a boy a education," said Rony. The visitor knew that he was sending a nephew to Auburn. "A feller needs all the chances he can get."

"Back in my day boys didn't have no hanging-out places. We had tuh work all the week, and Sunday after church was all the time we had. We'd played tomball. We couldn't git into meanness like they do today."

Rony's brother wanted to know: "Do people sleep?"

Nobody ventured to know, and he accepted the ignorance of all by saying: "A Baptist preacher said that people don't sleep, but that sleep comes to people." Rony's brother resumed his talk with the other fellow.

Rony pointed across the road, between the two knolls. On one had once stood his home. Between the hills there was land laying out, but beyond could be seen a corn patch. Tall graceful corn grew there. "There's fifty acres in that of the best land in this country."

Bony crossed his leg, showing his dirty ankles. His shirt smelled of long wearing; it was a deeper blue by the dirt, that had become part of the cloth texture. Bony's brother had on new overalls, on the leg of which was still printed in chalk: 38-32. The cuff of each pant-leg had been given several rolls, but still the pants were too long. Bony's brother had had a hair cut, and the hair was so short, it could not be combed.

Bony's brother wanted to know "I bet he," he indicated a visitor: "I bet he has plenty of cornbread and molasses. Would you give us something, if we are starving to death over here?"

"We could all eat as long as it lasts."

Bony's brother slapped his new overalls, and appeared to be overcome with a kind of good-fellow glee. He said happily. "That's feeling, people. That's feeling! You've got feeling. He's got feeling, people. If people," he said subsiding, "if people didn't have feeling you could cut off a person's hand---" he held out a hand and made a slice at it with the other--- "slice it off like that, and he wouldn't know it!"

Bony said: "When a fellow's hungry, he's going to get out and git something, somehow, before he gets too weak to." Bony filled his pipe.

The visitor decided he would leave, and Bony got up, and went down the

steps, and through the weeds to the gate. The dogs jumped up. Bony began to go toward the garden, which looked down on the house. The house was in a V-shaped valley. On one side, at an angle which permitted a leap on the house if you took a good running start, was the garden, on the other side was a field.

Bony and his visitor lifted the chain latch from the gate in the corner of the garden, and climbed up the side of the garden to the corn. There they picked corn, and the visitor could look out on the roof of the house, above the fruit trees that huddled it, to the field beyond.

Bony began to pull roast'n'ears, and talk: "I don't aim to try to make another dollar," he grunted at an ear of corn. "I'm just going to hang on to what I got."

Out of the garden, loaded with roast'n'ears, the visitor looked at the greenness which was everywhere, the clean greenness, then at the house, with the green-weed yard, the sleeping dogs, the droves of flies, the dirty man, and he stepped into his car and drove off.

7/19/39
MS.