

Week ending March 26, 1937.

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Nash Copy

Essay: ALABAMA FOLKLORE
(Re-written by David Holt.)

Alabama has not been the human melting pot that many other states have been, hence its growth of tradition has not been colored by the beliefs of varied nationalities. Only three broad classifications need be outlined to cover the subject of folklore - Indian, Negro and the lore of the white man.

This essay attempts to present the source and growth of such lore. Manifestations of this knowledge will be expressed as stories, traditional or in the process of becoming tradition, ballads, songs, superstitions, customs and beliefs.

Indian folklore is the almost completely native and expresses itself in tradition, which discloses the poetic characteristic of the race in its approach to the processes of Nature. Indian lore generally accounts for most geographical nomenclature of the State. With only two exceptions, every river in the State has an Indian name.

At times it is impossible to separate the white and Negro lore into separate classifications. This is due to two main facts; first, both races in the early days of the state faced common obstacles in the clearing of the land and establishing the agricultural dynasty that ruled until comparatively recent years; second, the close association of the whites and blacks in older days, and still continuing to a large extent. From infancy to adolescence a majority of the whites were nurtured by Negro nurses who instilled in them the fancies, fears and fables inherited from African sources. The white man's religion and particularly his hymns furnished the basis for the Negro spirituals, through which recurs the thought of blood sacrifice and some spectac-

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ular assent into heaven.

While the strictest interpretation of folklore might eliminate some of the examples cited, nevertheless they are indicative of the "learning" of the age in which they became current. It will be found that the most frequent background for Alabama tradition will be that of the tenant farmer, the sharecropper and the mountaineer. These were the types who kept legend alive by word of mouth.

In discussing the folklore of Alabama, a widespread similarity of legend and fable, changed to meet the environment of tribe or community, must be considered in claiming specific ownership of any story. However, there are exceptions. Among them is the word "Alabama."

The State Name

Until recently it was generally accepted the word "Alabama" had derived directly from "Alibamo," which was construed to mean "here we rest," and was given legendary origin as the exclamation of a homeless and wandering party of Indians on beholding the Alabama river from Montgomery bluffs. (Objection to the implication of laziness, or a static condition, was behind the legislative attempt to change Alabama's slogan from "Here we rest" to some phrase implying action.)

Much controversy has raged about the proper definition of the Indian word and certain savants agreed that the proper meaning is "To open or clear a thicket."

Internal warfare of a tribe in the Southwest ended with a group of Indians setting out to find new hunting grounds and a permanent home. Each night the leader would set up a wand, stripped clear of its bark. In the morning the wand would be leaning toward the Northeast, so the wanderers would continue their journey.

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This went on day after day, until one morning the wand was discovered to be standing upright.

"Alibamo, Alibamo," cried the chieftain and his followers echoed his cry. So "alibamo" they named the land, as they set about clearing the thicket for a permanent village.

Natural or Supernatural manifestations, are the basis for most of the Indian legends handed down through the years.

The sun, the sky, the weather, flowers blooming beside a hunting trail, white water cascading over a cliff, clear pools where the reflection of the sky lent added depth, these were the sources from which the aborigine drew his stories, clothing them with force or poetry as the occasion fitted his mood. The bold river, black in its deeper pools and like war paint white where it rushed over boulders and falls, from the coal-laden hills to reach the smiling valleys of the Coastal Plain was named the Black Warrior, for example. Behind most unusual nomenclature of spots of interest in the State may be found some tradition that come down from the days when the tribes of Tuskalusa and his forbears saw, in natural occurrences, manifestations of a power beyond their understanding.

The relation of Indian folklore of Alabama to that of other sections even infringing somewhat on the Germanic fairy tales, is fully illustrated by the story of "The Lady Slipper," a woodland flower. The legend of the flower will be found in various forms in several states, though none more poetic than the Alabama version.

Indian Cinderella

Just as it was the tiny glass slipper of Cinderella that made Prince Charming pursue her to the wretched chimney side where she sat in ashes, so did the dainty moccasin of Papilla, bewitching maiden of the

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Creek nation, attract a hardy young brave who found it. The legend relates that in all the tribe of the Creeks there was no foot so small as that of Papilla, whose fame was widespread. So he hastened to find her and return the moccasin. He came upon her in a romantic spot and speedy was his wooing. Together they went to her father, the chief, and his consent was obtained readily for their marriage.

In her happiness at the forthcoming wedding, Papilla's tiny feet hardly touched the ground as she went to the tepee of her future husband, but each dainty mark was filled by a flower, just the shape of her moccasin.

And then, so say the Creeks, did the Lady Slipper, one of the commonest of Alabama's flowers, come to be born.

Alabama Pocahontas

A further illustration of this duplication of legend may be found in the factual and historical story of Milly, daughter of the half-breed chieftain Hillishadjo, who offered herself as a sacrifice to save a white captive of her father's tribe. In this act, Milly paralleled the famous Pocahontas-Capt. John Smith story of the Virginia Colony. Milly, however, unlike Pocahontas, did not marry a white man, but became the wife of an Indian brave.

Chief Hillishadjo was the son of Dr. David Francis, who settled in Alabama in 1761 at the Indian town of Atagi (Autauga) about 12 miles from the present capital of Montgomery. There he married an Indian girl and Hillishadjo was his only child. The boy became the Great Prophet of the Creeks when he grew to manhood and married a daughter of the nation. His first child was a girl, Malee, known to the whites as Milly.

During the fighting between the Creeks and the whites under General Andrew Jackson, Hillishadjo and his family moved to Fowl Town

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on the Apalachicola River. One day Duncan McKrimon, a young Georgia militiaman stationed at Fort Gadsden, was captured by the Indians. He was sentenced to execution and tied to a tree.

Milly pleaded with her father to save his life, but he ordered the execution to proceed. Milly then threw herself between the white man and his threatened slayers. Her bravery and pleadings won McKrimon his life and he was spared to be sold to the Spaniards at St. Marks, Florida. Shortly thereafter McKrimon escaped.

On the death of Hillishadjo, Milly was in want and McKrimon learned of it and offered to marry her. Milly, feeling that the offer was based on pity rather than affection refused, and later married a member of the tribe.

Seas that Mourn.

Legend does not take such idyllic twists in all of Alabama's Indian folklore. There are the 12 Indian maidens and the mourning waves of Portersville Bay (Tour #12), whose suicide to escape marriages without love strikes a note in harmony with European folk tales.

The tragic maiden who surrenders life to avoid an unhappy fate is more than national in scope. Alabama's prototype is the beautiful Alavelda who threw herself into the falls of the Nocallua to escape the persistent attentions of a Cherokee Chieftain.

The imaginative today claim that the vision of the beautiful Alavelda may be seen in the still clear water below the falls, three miles from Gadsden (Tour No. 3).

Water, whether in the sea, a lake or some swift flowing stream, is the setting of many legends in all lands. A bottomless pool in Northwest Alabama, near Russellville, is supposed to mark the wrath of the gods at a council which ordered the death of two mothers.

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Blue Pond, as the pool, several acres in extent, is known, is credited with having been created when a Cherokee tribe ordered the execution of the mothers and their infant sons, who had been born spotted as leopards.

Legend states that the mothers were placed on a blazing pyre and that as the flames licked round them, the earth yawned, so that pyre, victims and the entire tribe dropped into a bottomless pit. Water rushed in and Blue Pond was born.

Earth Shaker.

Mighty heroes always have their counterparts in folklore. Men of might who wreak vengeance on the craven may be found in every language, so it is normal to hear the tale of Tecumseh, who stamped his foot and a village hundreds of miles away crumbled to splinters.

Tecumseh came to Alabama in 1811 to persuade the members of the Creek nation to join the war against the whites. In no town could he find volunteers. Finally he stood before a gathering of chiefs at Tuckabahchoe Town, south of Tallassee (Tour No. 5) and lashed them with fiery eloquence.

"You become squaws," the majestic Tecumseh sneered at them. "You call Kowaligee a Red Town (war town) but the blood of your fathers has turned to water in your veins. Tecumseh goes to Detroit to carry the message that the chiefs of the Upper Creeks are Squaws parading in war paint. When Tecumseh reaches Detroit, he will stamp his foot and your houses will fall. When they fall you may know Tecumseh is with his people.

Sixty days after Tecumseh galloped away the only earthquake in the history of this part of the State occurred, and the cabins of the Creek towns were smashed to pieces. And where Tecumseh stood in Elmore County

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and made his pronouncement more than a century and a quarter ago, there is a huge rock with the plain print of a foot on its surface. It is known as Tecumseh's footprint.

The stamp of a foot that rocked the world may be found also in the Arabian poetic fantasy of wise King Solomon, who one day overheard a butterfly boasting to his wife that he could shake the earth. Solomon smiled, as he heard the wife demand of the butterfly that he put his boast into action, so the legend goes, and stepped into view. The wifely butterfly was frightened into immediate flight, but the male was too terrified to move.

In kindly tones, Solomon wanted to know just what the husband was going to do when the wife returned and demanded that he start stamping and shaking the earth. The butterfly confessed that there was nothing he could do. So Solomon agreed to let him shake the earth on condition that never again would he make a boast to his wife that he couldn't make good. The bargain was sealed, the wife returned. She made her demand and the husband stamped his tiny foot and the earth trembled to maintain male supremacy.

While there is no analogy in motive, there is in execution and comparable glorification.

Shades Valley.

There is always a fringe between fact and fancy and it will be found in Alabama in the naming of Shades Valley, where white and Indian met for the naming of a section.

At a point on the ancient trail from the Alibamo Country to the Atlantic Seaboard was a region of fear. White traders who attempted to cross this evil valley risked their lives. No friendly Indians planted corn in the fertile lowlands. Its wooded slopes hid hostile savages who

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before.

The rose multiplied so rapidly that soon the new country was abloom with roses. So many covered all the land in one section that today it is called Cherokee County.

Another legend is that when the Cherokee Indian tribe removed from their southern homes to the west the surviving squaws scattered rose cuttings to mark the way for their hoped for return.

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WHITE FOLKLORE:

Tradition flourishes best in a homogeneous population and requires centuries to produce. Alabama is lacks both for its white folklore. Its early population was not homogeneous, with settlers of widely variant predilections segregating themselves in different sections of the State. The Latins who colonized the Southern portion clung to old customs. The Nordics in the Northern part were too busy hewing out civilization and then settling into what amounted to a caste system when the wilderness was conquered.

Thus there is no such heroic figure in the State nor in the South as Paul Bunyon, that great woodsman of the Northwest. Nor is there any widely known phantom such as Washington Irving described in the Legend of Sleepy Hollow.

White tradition in the State is largely anecdotal. In sections, still unreconstructed, and there are a few, heroic tales of the War Between the States are growing into folklore proportions. Along the Coast, fishermen and other followers of the sea tell brave tales of Jean LaFitte and his pirate band roving the reaches of Mobile Bay and landing at Bayou La Batre (Tour #12). However, these are so vague and so local in aspect they may not be considered folklore. They have not yet assumed the lusty status that will hold the tale true to form through many tellings, varying as it does with the concept of the teller.

To attempt to collate the varied tales of either the local heroes of the Confederacy or the pirates of the Gulf would be impossible within any limited space and would provide in the end more neighborhood tales that do not fit the classification of folklore.

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Famous Brigands:

Legend is becoming mixed with fact in the stories of two of the State's more famous brigands.

John Murrell, whose activities spread from the Natchez Trace in Mississippi to the mountain trails of Carolina, left many stories behind him. His rendezvous in Alabama was near the intersection of the Selma-Carlowville highways. Murrell was not a lone wolf, and his gang was a varied collection. Among its members were an evangelist and a beautiful girl, reputedly the daughter of the parson, the Reverend Sorrell.

Story has it that the preacher would assemble a crowd for a camp meeting at some bush arbor. There he would exhort the temporary congregation the whole day through. His beautiful daughter would lead the singing of spirituals. In the meantime Murrell and the gang would be at work in the pastures and among the slave sheds of the congregation.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century Rube Burrow, who did most of his work alone, flourished and tales of his exploits are growing in the rural communities to heroic proportions.

In the Southern counties of the State may be heard now tales of the day when Geronimo, famous Apache chief, was captured and brought to Florida, then removed to Mount Vernon Ala., for imprisonment. The older generation remembers the fears of his possible escape and what might follow in the way of massacre. Told with color and circumstance to their descendants, it is not unlikely that in the not too distant future, Geronimo will have become a bloodthirsty brave who snatched scalps and burned settlements when he was brought to Florida and Alabama.

The exploits of General Andrew Jackson, colorful enough as they are in history, are being painted even more glowingly in corner store recollections by oldsters who heard it from their grandfathers and

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and one day he undoubtedly will be a hero of fiction as well as fact.

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CREOLE LORE.

The following Creole Chanson d'amour was popular from early French days in Colonial Mobile, until the close of the Spanish Régime. The accompanying free translation into English is by Francois Ludgere Diard:

Creole:

AH, CHER BIJOU D'ACAJOU.

Si to te 'tit zozo
Et moi-meme mo te fusil
Mo sre tohoue toi - boum!

.....

Ah, cher bijou
D'acajou
Mo l'aimin vous
Comme cochon aimin la boue!2

Free Translation
into English:

If thou wert a little bird,
And I were a little gun,
I would shoot thee - bang!

Ah, dear little
Mahogany jewel,
I love thee as a little pig loves the mud!

Descendants of Arcadians who drifted to the Gulf Coast following their expulsion by the British from their Canadian home, found in the Creoles of Mon Louis Island, Dauphin Island and several other Mobile county communities congenial friends and neighbors. Having the same religious training and belief, the same basic language and finding themselves misunderstood by their English-speaking neighbors, with whom they had little disposition to associate, they families inter-married and intermingled, not only with the French and Spanish families about Mobile but also with those of the Pascagoula, Back Bay of Biloxi and Wolf River settlements in Mississippi. Those among them who made their home on or near the bay or sound became expert sailors of small craft, which furnished means of communication between their scattered families, who were visited periodically by Catholic Missionaries.

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USING THE SAME MEANS OF TRAVEL. Church records of marriages, baptism and burials are practically the only written records of these people that remain, nor did they preserve much of their history in surviving song, story or tradition. Broadening use among the present and immediately preceding generations of the phonograph, then the radio the movies and the schools has taught the use of the common language of the region, so that only a trace of the Cajan-Creole dialect remains among the older people and even they appear more anxious to lose this lingual means of identification than to perpetuate it.

"Ef you see my cow 'across de bayou, push heem home",

This typical sentence will convey some idea of their old form of speech. The old-timers never seemed able to get their personal pronouns straight. They habitually mixed "Him" and "Her", sometimes with amusing results.

A folk song which was still sung by coast shrimpers of the old coast families twenty years ago and may still be recalled by the older members tells of the adventures of one Jean Grabeau and his tragic end. One of its numerous verses:

Jean Grabeau, poor Grabeau he steal my boat and away he go.
The rain he fall an' de win' she blow,
An' dat was de en' of Jean Grabeau.

Florian Seale used to recite the narrative recounting the death from yellow fever of his little friend Babette, as told by the child's grief stricken papa:

Wat for Le Bon Dieu tak my chile
An mak she's mother almos' wile
Wid loss of one lik dat so sweet
Wat for He go and tak Babette?

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Dis worl is beeg an verry wide.
Ole age should always have a guide.
Now wat I do? My tremblin feet
Mak me fall down witout Babette.

I miss her when I go to bed-
No more can pat dat curly head-
When mornin come no one to greet
Papa-none like dat chile Babette.

"God's will be done", de good pries' say
An tell me on my knee for pray.
But prayer lak dat I can't repeat-
I mees to much Dat chile Babette.

Ah me! soon, soon I go for slep
An leave no one behin' for wep
But then- I walk de golden street,
Wid happy, smiling, pure Babette.

.....

HILL BILLY LORE

The mountain folk of Alabama are racial brothers of those of Tennessee, Carolina, Georgia, Virginia and Kentucky. The natives of the Appalachians and the Blue Ridge stem from the same source. In their oft told tales and more frequent songs may be found a similarity not due to accident. So, too, with their customs and their habits. The charm used by midwives and others for stopping blood is common to most, if not all, of these states and has long been in use among Alabama mountaineers. It consists merely of thrice repeating "When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live: yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. Ezekiel 16:6.

In the doleful tenor of their music and the graveyard strain of their lyrics is to be found a literary gloom that springs from austere morality and the stern struggle for existence. The songs deal with the simple essentials of life, love and hate, hunger and cold.

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Many of the so called hillbilly songs so frequently heard over the radio are based on ballads that were unwritten for generations, being handed down from minstrel to minstrel.

A celebrated ballad deals with the everlasting theme of the unhappiness that lies in a marriage for gold above one's station. For many generations mountain folk of North Alabama have sung of the sad results of Nellie's choice in the following verses:

Come, listen to me, a story I'll tell,
A story so sad and so true,
I once lived and courted a dear little girl,
Whose eyes were soft and dark blue.

I know that she loved me,
For she told me so then and promised to be my dear wife.
How happy it made me to hear that dear girl
Agree to live with me through life.

The next time I saw her she had tears in her eyes,
Saying, "Johnny, my promise can't stand,
Papa and mama are both angry with me,
They say I must marry a rich man."

The next time I heard from Little Nellie,
She had gone and married that young Mr. Brown.
He was wicked but wealthy, owned horses and land;
Little Nellie was living in town.

He soon ceased to love her and drank all the time,
And her life was so lone and so sad,
Her grief soon o'ercame her, she sank in despair
And nothing could make her heart glad.

The good Lord of Mercy took pity on her
And told the bright angels to come
And take little Nellie, the drunkard's wife,
To where she might have a bright home.

I hope that I'll meet little Nellie up there,
Where friends will never part.
The only inscription I want on my tomb
Is the tale of a broken heart.

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DIVINE WRATH:

From Pioneer traditions comes the story of divine wrath dealing with the desolation of St. Stephens, which was the metropolis of the Spanish frontier in Alabama and was the territorial capitol. A zealous preacher sought to hold a revival there but found that the only hall large enough for such a gathering was the main saloon. The men half responsible for much of the towns lawlessness not only refused to let him preach there but actually ran him out of town. As the preacher left the sinful capital he threatened to pray God to visit His wrath upon that modern Gomorrah. With startling suddenness the place was deserted by the elements that had made it prosper. The capital, land office and business houses were removed and goats grazed in its streets. This punishment for sin and unrepentance was widely attributed to the preacher's prayers and greatly exaggerated. St. Stephens occupies a limestone bluff high above the Tombigbee river. Millions of tons of excellent material for the manufacture of cement support the town, which has evidently repented and been saved for there is not a more orderly village, anywhere, as the peace records of Washington county will show. Its business sins and prosperity were moved to Mobile when the Spaniard was expelled from that shore.

An opposite view of divine action will be found in the shuddering oaks of Cahaba. Cahaba was the first capital of Alabama after it was admitted to the Union, situated on the Alabama River about eleven miles from Selma. (See History).

While floods did not destroy Cahaba, they were frequent in the Spring and at times the legislators found it necessary to take to boats to avoid the rising waters. The inhabitants of Cahaba noticed then that before each advance of the river a large grove of oaks

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quivered as though in apprehension. Within a few hours the flood waters would descend. Until Cahaba was abandoned this was considered a divine warning of approaching floods.

Materialistic engineers decided to make an investigation and discovered a geological fault which permitted rising waters to flow beneath the grove, thus shaking them and causing the quivering which had once, and still is among the superstitions, assigned to supernatural causes.

Ghost in Glass.

Belief in the supernatural is common among the rural natives and in the smaller communities. The most famous of the ghost stories concerns the likeness of a Negro, lynched more than half a century ago which was imprisoned in glass in one of the windows of the old Courthouse at Carrollton.

The Negro, Burkhalter, was being taken to the State Prison at Montgomery after being convicted of burning the courthouse of Pickens County. A group of Carrollton citizens, so the story goes, took Burkhalter away from the posse and hanged him to a huge tree in a swamp during a terrific thunderstorm. Before he was killed, the mob asked the victim if he wanted to make a statement.

"I am innocent," he said, "and you will always have my face to haunt you".

Undeterred by the protestation of innocence he was swung up and as the rope tightened there was a blinding flash of lightning.

Next morning one of the mob, back home in Carrollton, passed the courthouse and saw Burkhalter's likeness on a pane of glass in one of the windows. An investigation from the inside showed the pane perfectly clear. However, in certain lights many saw the likeness of the Negro from the outside. The glass remained in place, even during a severe

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STORM WHICH SMASHED ALMOST EVERY PANE in the building. For 65 years the supposed face of Burkhalter has leered down at the inhabitants of Marrollton.

Superstitions and Charms.

The close contact for generations with the more primitive Negro in Alabama homes has given the whites perhaps more than their usual share of superstitions. From childhood on most of them have heard of the various signs and portents and the methods of charming away impending danger. Adults scoff publicly at such superstitions, but under the surface there are many who cannot shake off the meaning of omens they learned from black mummies or the pickaninnies with whom they played when they were young.

In the rural sections the hoot of an owl is as portentuous as it was when Homer sang of Troy. In the Black Belt such hooting is stopped by twisting the heel of a shoe or hanging a crooked hairpin in the chimney of an oil lamp. Friday the thirteenth, black cats, passing under ladders, a white horse and a cross-eyed woman viewed at the same time - all of the minor superstitions are common beliefs.

The home weather prophet still reads the signs of his fathers in bark and leaves and the actions of birds and animals, even though he will listen carefully to the radio for the government predictions as to conditions. Phases of the moon are still watched at planting time, as they were when men first learned that edible seeds and fruits could be grown at their will.

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NEGRO FOLKLORE.

The folklore of the Negro in the South is generic, not specific. The homogeneity lacking in the white settlers is found to an astonishing degree among the blacks who were brought in as slaves from many sections of Africa.

While tribal practices and customs have disappeared with the advantages of education and environment extended to the Negro, there are still traces of the ancient beliefs among the oldsters and even the younger generation in the country.

Dangers and cruelties remembered or handed down from days of savagry, slavery or imprisonment have left more than a mere echo of protest and fear in their lore which even lighted streets and a fuller understanding of natural laws have not yet eradicated. Their superstitions are too firmly rooted to be wiped out by a few generations of book education.

The fear of death and the ominous warnings that portend its arrival are still fullblown in the smaller communities, where the Negro retains his naturalness to a large extent. The conjeh man, even in the cities, is not without his power.

Yet this is a side not shown to the white, who as a class is not admitted to the inner mysteries. They may confide in a white friend who has won complete confidence but not to one they merely know by sight. The clannishness of the Negro is unbroken, as any householder seeking a servant who has failed to appear in the morning can testify.

With the most gentle approach, inquiries in the neighborhood of the servant's house as to the exact location will bring blank faces and a shake of the head, accompanied by an "I don't know." You may be "The

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Law," and though the person you seek is not held in especially high esteem, she is black and therefore is to be protected.

That is simply an aside to illustrate the difficulty of learning more than the Negro is willing to tell.

The Uncle Remus Pattern.

Through the justly popular books of Joel Chandler Harris the name of Uncle Remus and his stories have become associated with Georgia. However, the stories do not belong solely to Georgia. Alabama children listened eagerly to the marvelous performances of Bre'er Rabbit and Bre'er Fox long before Mr. Harris compiled his stories.

They were told them at the knees of their black mammies as they stood before flickering fires. They have exclaimed over the astuteness of Bre'er Rabbit and trembled at the dangers that beset him when Bre'er Fox threatened to throw him in the bramble patch. Many a black rag doll has been known as the Tar Baby, derived directly from that famous figure in one of Bre'er Rabbit's many important encounters.

So it is with other stories told by the Negro nurses through generations to their charges from the Ohio to the Gulf. The personification of the gentler wild things repeats itself again and again in the tales. They probably originated with friendly Indians when this country was new.

Less gentle were the stories that were whispered to the older children against the orders of parents, who in their youth had trembled in delicious fear at "Raw Head and Bloody Bones."

That was a figure that was conjured up in detail by the imagination. It was given the appellation and the mind of the listener was permitted to do the rest. "Raw Head and Bloody Bones" was only a threat to the

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sinner. The pure in heart had nothing to fear from him, but any reference especially in the twilight, was sure to bring a deep searching to make sure that the soul was free from sin.

As touched upon in WHITE FOLKLORE most of the superstitions of the Negro were handed on to the whites through this childhood association with nurses and playmates.

Conjeh Man.

The secrecy surrounding the conjeh man extended even to withholding it from children. He was mentioned but details were lacking. They continue to be.

Tales of what has happened to those who were conjured are countless. Usually they had the love motif. A man would buy a conjeh to get a rival out of the way or inspire his beloved with proper affection for him.

Conversely, a jealous woman would seek the elimination of a rival for sweetheart or husband. The dire happenings that would follow on such a conjuring were whispered sometimes to a favored "chile." It would be a story of gruesome physical changes in the victim, such as falling hair, dropping teeth and body withering before death took the final toll.

However, all conjuring was not ^{FATAL} fatal nor dangerous except to the purses of those who employed the services of the conjeh doctor. He always charged and charges as much as the traffic will bear. And an explanation of failure is done with so much circumstance and convincing detail that the client rarely fails to believe that it was much his own fault that the charm failed.

A story of a conjeh doctor's power, so often repeated that it may be included as folklore, is that of the anxious swain who sought aid in winning a recalcitrant maiden.

The conjeh man prepared the bag (usually of red flannel), filled it

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with graveyard earth, hair of the beloved (tracing to the voodooism of Africa and Haiti), animal's teeth, bones (supposedly human) and anything else the doctor's fancy decided.

The lover was given the charm and a set of instructions, which were to learn what the girl wanted and see that she received it; never to cross her wishes in any way and to stand by for any desires she might express. The man won his girl and thereby the faith in the conjeh doctor was built up beyond shaking.

Another story dates back to slavery days, when a slave purchased a charm that would permit him to "cuss his master out" with impunity. Charm in pocket, the slave made the test and was rewarded with a tremendous beating. His complaint to the conjeh man met with the explanation, "Man, what I give yer was a runnin' chawm. Whyn't you run?"

Pen and Plow.

The differences between the white and black races in Alabama are in temperament and position, which latter finds no rancor among the Negroes. They have a legend that it was set by their own unwise choice centuries ago.

In that distant day a white man and a Negro were called before a great judge. On his desk were a silver shovel and a golden fork, glistening in the sun, while beside them were some paper and a pencil.

"Choose," the judge decreed and the Negro was given first choice.

He picked up the silver shovel and the golden fork, while the white man was glad to get the pencil and paper.

So thus did the Negro condemn himself to manual labor, while the white man worked with his brains.

Place Fables.

Legends have begun to attach themselves to places as well as persons

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in Alabama for the Negro. There is the Snake Hole, a small cavern in the mountains in the Northwestern portion of the State.

A Negro boy one day, many years ago of indefinite date, disappeared in the vicinity of the cavern. A searcher found his body just inside the entrance and stooped to drag it out, when the body slowly withdrew into the hole.

The man drew back and peered in, to see a coil of an enormous snake wrapped about the body. He fired and saw the bullet bounce harmlessly from the scales of the serpent. Frightened, he fled and brought other members of the searching party. When they returned the boy and the snake had disappeared never to be seen again.

Death Omens.

The usual superstitions that surround death and warnings of its approach are all current with the Negro. To these he has added certain sure signs of his own. One is that a burned wedding dress means tragedy for both the bride and groom.

They offer the story of Melissa Beard and Colonel Louis Wells, both Negroes, as evidence. Melissa was to marry Colonel and her "white folks" had provided her with a beautiful wedding gown. The day before the wedding, she pressed the dress and hung it before the fire as she went about other tasks. A coal popped from the fire and before she could stop the resultant blaze, the dress was almost completely destroyed.

Friends and relatives begged Melissa to call off the wedding. The portent was too unmistakable. But Melissa and Colonel laughed at their fears and were married at the appointed time.

Several children were born to them, but all died from horrible diseases. The father suffered acute rheumatism for many years, while Melissa died a lingering death from dropsy.

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So few Negroes will permit a wedding dress to be anywhere near a fire.

Even after death has come there are certain proprieties that must be observed in grave digging and burial, according to Negro lore. All Graves must be dug East and West and the head of the corpse could be to the West. Buried North and South the body is "crossways of the world" and it ought to face to the East so it will not have to turn around when "Gabriel blows the horn."

The devil is not a religious symbol of evil with the Negro. He is a person of dire power and his realm is ablaze with everlasting fires. Birds know just what it is like, mammies tell their white charges.

The robin, for instance, has a red breast because of his daily trips to Hell to try to quench the fires with drops of water he carries in his beak. The bluejay is not a godly bird. He is a familiar of the devil and spends every Friday with him to help rebuild the fires. This superstition is not the black man's alone, because many a white ^[Person] will tell you that you never see or hear a jaybird on Friday.

The incarnation of the devil will be found in many of the spirituals with which the Negro comforts himself in time of stress or uses to uplift his emotions. These spirituals may truly be called folk songs in that they express fully the racial interpretation of the deity and his greatest foe, Satan.

This is exemplified in the following opening verse of "De Ship Gwin'ter Land Us On De Shore":

The ship gwin'ter land us on the shore,
There we will live forever more,
I don't like old Satan,
Old Satan don't like me.

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Because I love King Jesus,
Me and Satan cannot agree.

While in the main spirituals are formal in context, there are many variations during their singing by congregations in churches. Antiphonals are frequently extemporaneous and as such unfortunately cannot be recorded.

Songs of Play.

The Negro sings naturally and easily. He sings at work and at play. Frequently he just sings. The verse is usually formless but there are certain songs of work and play that have been dignified by such long usage that there is a general rough form in which they are preserved and thus become worthy of inclusion as folksongs.

Children in the rural communities, both black and white, use verses in rhythmic chant that were sung a century ago on the plantations in games that show little variation.

In hide and seek and similar games, the favorite warning of "it" is the following quatrain:

Bushel er wheat,
Bushel er rye,
Dem's ain't hid
Jess holler I !

The equivalent of "Pease Porridge Hot" will be found in the rhyme:

May-ree Mack
Dressed in black,
Silver buttons
All down her back.

A dance, now limited to rural sections, was banned among the white youth a generation ago because it was felt to be a touch barbaric. It is known by the colorful title of "Poosum-ah-Lah" and is danced by couples facing each other, dancing back and forth with gestures and

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poses that at times grew suggestive. An integral part of the dance is the repeated rhyme:

Put your hand on your head,
Let your mind go forward,
Back back, back,
And look at the star.
Shines so brightly.
Shines so brightly.
That's the Possum-ah-Lah.

The children frequently do their own rhyming, making such shifts as suit their fancy, the group following easily the transitions of the leader.

Land Chanteys.

The work songs, which are really chants in rhythm with the rise and fall of a pick or the shove and lift of a shovel, punctuated with hefty grunts in chorus, are more extemporaneous in character than any of the other forms.

A song of the Mobile docks, which in its day rivaled the "coon-jine" jingles preserved by Roark Bradford in his Mississippi stories, is still sung though machines have replaced most of the man power is once urged to labor. The following is the cotton stevedore's chant.

Oh, have you ever been in Mobile Bay?

Roll that cotton down.

Rolling cotton for a dollar a day,

Roll that cotton down.

Oh, a pleasant place is Mobile Bay.

Roll that cotton down,

Where a white man get's a nigger's pay,

Roll that cotton down.

The unskilled laborer who digs with pick and shovel has an occasional chantey which is constant in form, such as;

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All de nigger's looking for
Is fat meat and sundown.

The Negro treats his occasional departures from the patch of righteousness lightly. Once Alabama leased its convicts as laborers in the mines and in those days there was a work song that ran:

Police he caught me,
Judge said de fine,
De Clerk write it down;
I'se back in de mine.

Interesting in its philosophy, is the following verse by Jim Thomas, one time slave of James Roulston, a Mobile Auctioneer noted for his wit:

Remember, masser, mind this now, the sinfulness of sin
Is 'pending 'pon the spirit that we goes and does it in.
And in a righteous frame of mind we's going to dance and sing
A-feeling like King David when he cut the pigeon wing.

Colorful Vernacular.

The dialectic variations of the Negro's speech have always been colorful in song and story and he adds to its qualities by the use of certain words and phrases that convey an import all their own as is the case with some French and Spanish idioms that are not easy of translation.

No glossary of the black man's vernacular has been compiled because so much of it is purely local it is difficult of compilation. However, there are some terms which have survived for generations, though they grow less frequent among the younger Negroes who are finding the more conventional usage of the white fitted to their needs with their enlarged vocabularies. The following are a few examples;

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Do you eat me or does I eat myself? (Do you supply board and lodging or just lodging?).

Burn de' wind (Move rapidly).

Enjoy de bed (Be ill in bed).

Make Po' mouf (Claim a state of poverty that does not exist).

Pay no mind (Disregard).

My folks (The whites by whom employed or protected).

Quality (One's folks are always quality as are other whites who understand the Negro).

Tol'able (The condition of health, no matter what degree, so long as not confined to bed).

PIDDLE: piddling (To work aimlessly; aimless).

Disremember (Forget).

Plum' sight (Good to look at; an amusing person).

Huc-cum (How did it happen that, or why did you do so and so?)

Projicken (Projecting, meaning fooling with).

Joree, Mobile usage (To flirt).

Simon-fish (Canned salmon and always used in the plural as "dem simon-fish").

Beatenest (Indescribable, unequalled).

Moratin (Advertise by word of mouth).

Chunk (To hurl).

Other forms that might sound unusual to unaccustomed ears have been accepted as a part of every day language in the State so that to pick them out as idioms would be almost impossible to the average person.

Just as no new folk tales arise, the language is not being enriched to any great extent by the Negro in these modern days, since

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he has become an integral part of the general educational movement.

Improvised Work Songs.

Gangs of field or road hands regularly working together out of the prison farm or highway camps sometimes use their improvised work songs as a means of communication and they are often used as a means of comment in regard to their bosses, working conditions and the weather. Singing about Old Hannah and her slowness on a hot August afternoon, they may be lamenting the leisurely manner in which the sun sets on their tiresome labors, when she sometimes appears to stand still in the heavens. Hannah symbolizing the sun, seems to be quite common among them, though each prison develops its own vocabulary for reference to the lash, the warden the guards and other painful intimates. These songs sometimes take a humorous turn, occasionally causing a gang to break into laughter, where discipline is not too rigid.

Some of the guards hired from outside the prisons object to this singing on the belief, not altogether unfounded, that prisoners are singing their plots to escape, or at least, making fun of their bosses, though most of this melody expresses the Negro's natural love for rhythm. Often the leader sings the words along and the gang joins in with some rhythmic refrain, timed to the stroke of the pick or other implement with which they are working, such as:

Oh! der gals don't love me
Lak dey use to, 'ungh'!
Oh no! 'ungh' ! Oh no'. 'ungh' !

In some of the states, including Mississippi, convicts are guarded by trustees from among the prisoners of their own race. These prisons encourage singing as it speeds the work, takes the prisoner's mind off of his troubles and gives him an outlet to get things "off his chest". The guards are presumed to be able to understand the significance, if any,

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consealed in words or music.

Death of Folklore.

The simple tales that have colored existence for the generations also become fewer, unless captured and put on the printed page. The line of story tellers grows thin. Widespread education, new modes of thought and life are responsible for the passing.

To preserve these legends that are so essential a part of the history of the people, the chronicler must prepare his records with haste before the sources have dried.

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