
Memories of a South Carolina Farm

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THROUGH the years Uncle Will Harris remains my ideal farmer. He created Greystone, his farm-home, a principality of which any man could be proud and where everybody seemed to be happy. Southern hospitality was the lodestar that drew a steady stream of guests to that serene place. I am particularly grateful that I was privileged to share at times the life on those productive acres which was more like that of the ante bellum South than any with which I came in contact, having been born at the turn of the century. If I could tolerate the idea of slavery even under the most ideal conditions I still think the plantation owners of the deep South had the most perfect and pleasant civilization that has ever been known, but Uncle Will did not bear the stigma of profiting by slavery. Indeed, on his place he did not even experience the sadness of the poverty of tenant farm labor; he paid his workers a living wage for the time they actually put in, then they were free to spend their earnings when and where they pleased. Paying as they went, they were not confounded as was usually the case with tenant laborers, by a bill for necessities at the end of the year which was so staggering that it was unbelievable and which consumed their wages and left them in debt to the landowner.

Greystone consisted of a thousand or more acres of rich land in the Piedmont section of South Carolina. It lay about sixteen miles west of our town of Laurens, and I must have been around ten years of age when we began to spend Thanksgiving vacations there. It was quite a journey for my mother to agree to make in a carriage drawn by Belle and Anna, two spirited chestnuts, for she did not like to take us children away from home in winter weather.

For days before we were due to go we were so good it was painful for we did not want anything to interfere with our trip. Father was our ally for we knew that nothing short

of a tempest or sudden death would keep him from going to "Sister Lou's" at this season. Most of the time Indian summer was just giving away to winter and the sun glittered on hoar frost that laced the red clay sides of the road, but occasionally it looked like snow, and we children prayed that it would, only we hoped it would wait until we were too far on the way to turn back.

The trip was a joy from beginning to end. There were nine Harris children and Aunt Lou had eight brothers and sisters, so there was plenty of little cousins of all ages to play with. The white pillared colonial house, surrounded by oaks, stood on a high spot and it was unbelievably comfortable for a country house of that time. There was a telephone and a bathroom with running water which was furnished by a wind mill and a tread mill operated by Molly, a small bay mare. As soon as Deleo systems were perfected there were electric lights, and for the table there was the great abundance of the yielding land. Frequently thirty people spent the night there for when the house overflowed, the boys slept in the "schoolhouse," a small building in the yard that had been built as a workshop for the children when they had had a tutor before a community school was established.

As soon as we reached Greystone we could hardly wait to jump from the carriage and frisk around like colts, getting the crimps caused from heavy lap robes from our legs. We usually ran to the barn to see the new calves and then to the stables to investigate the horses. One mare named Roxy was my favorite for she could be depended upon to have a tiny colt for us to admire. Then we would run to the back of the house to see if Molly was busy on the tread mill. How stupid our town waterworks were compared to that! Next we headed for the kitchen for we were eager to see "Black" a two hundred pound colored woman who was the undisputed dictator, and her aids, a

young girl named Pleasant and her strapping coal-black brother, Precious. Again the country surpassed in glamor—our servants were named Addie, Lizzie and Jim.

Soon midday dinner would be served and if there was a crowd the youngsters endured the torture of waiting for the second table. We made up for lost time, however, when we finally had our chance, and generally had to take a turn or two around the house before we could possibly eat dessert. A typical dinner consisted of soup, turkey, chicken pie, home cured ham, rice, gravy, dressing, biscuits, corn bread, sweet potato pone, home canned corn, fresh tomatoes that had been picked green and wrapped in paper and put away for this occasion, Waldorf salad in a scooped-out red apple topped with whipped cream, pickles and preserves of every imaginable kind, pumpkin pie, devil's food cake and ice cream made from pure cream. Needless to say, it was perfectly prepared and served.

I liked the midday meal best for I must have been a bit of a heathen even at that tender age. There were family prayers before breakfast which even the babes in arms were expected to attend but the real ordeal came at night. We would all be seated around the table and Uncle Will would clear his throat in case anybody happened to be off guard. Then he repeated a verse from the Bible. When he had finished the person on his right did likewise, and so on until every man, woman and child had recited a Bible verse, and after a lengthy grace, supper was served. Those who were guests for the first time were always warned beforehand and invariably before supper, the children ran about with a frenzied look, hunting for a Bible. One of my brothers, timid and anxious to have his part soon over was told that "Jesus wept" was the shortest verse in the scriptures; he planned to say that one night but in his confusion said, "Jesus cried."

Such a funny thing happened at the "schoolhouse" once that no story of Greystone would be complete without it. It was a rainy night and the older girls were having a party so the small boys were sent to the quarters in the yard to get them out of the way. About eleven o'clock the rain was pierced by a thin wail that seemed to come from the "schoolhouse." Upon investigation it proved

to be the youngest boy sitting drearily on top of the house in his night shirt while the rain beat mercilessly upon him. The rescuer said, "Teague, what on earth has happened?" Teague replied, "I dreamed I was Santa Claus, and climbed the chimney and when I got to the top the rain waked me and I couldn't get down." Scratched knees and a tow head streaked with soot were eloquent witnesses to the truth of the incident.

Aunt Lula, as we called our Aunt Lucinda, was a wonderful woman. She had unusual executive ability and each member of her household had some particular responsibility. Of course there were many colored servants around the farm and Aunt Lula thought so much of her cook, affectionately called "Black" that she named one of her daughters Frances in her honor. Still, she bore nine children whom she reared to maturity and educated at college, and was the charming mistress of the plantation in addition to having guests practically all the time and I never remember seeing her do any actual work. She loved to ride horseback over the farm with Uncle Will and I think she was about as capable a farmer as he was.

The usual southern crops were grown at Greystone: Cotton, corn, enough wheat, oats and ensilage to carry the stock, pigs, chickens, turkeys and everything to supply the bountiful table was produced at home. One of the things that made Uncle Will famous in the Piedmont was his ability to grow Irish potatoes; he specialized in a variety called Lookout Mountain potatoes which he introduced from Tennessee. Everybody bought seed from him but few were able to achieve any outstanding success with them, while he raised bumper crops year after year. His innovations in farming were so outstanding that Clemson Agricultural College, the state school of South Carolina, conferred an honorary degree upon him as a reward of merit. This was the first time any farmer in the State had been so honored.

When I notice how jittery mankind is growing, and how people struggle now for a mere sustenance, I want to tell them about Uncle Will and the rich, peaceful life he led at Greystone.