



FOLKS  
FROM DIXIE



*Paul L. Dunbar*





Joseph Bede Braithwaite,

"THE HIGHLANDS,"

NEW BARNET, HERTS.

*From the  
Library of*



*Phil W. Petrie*



# FOLKS FROM DIXIE



MR. BEYLER.







# FOLKS FROM DIXIE

BY

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

*Author of "Lyrics of Lowly Life"*

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

E. W. KEMBLE



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**JAMES BOWDEN**

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**To my Friend**  
**H. A. TOBEY, M. D.**



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ANNER 'LIZER'S  
STUMBLIN' BLOCK

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# Folks from Dixie



## ANNER 'LIZER'S STUMBLIN' BLOCK

It was winter. The gray old mansion of Mr. Robert Selfridge, of Fayette County, Ky., was wrapped in its usual mantle of winter sombreness, and the ample plantation stretching in every direction thereabout was one level plain of unflecked whiteness. At a distance from the house the cabins of the negroes stretched away in a long, broken black line that stood out in bold relief against the extreme whiteness of their surroundings.

About the centre of the line, as dark and uninviting as the rest, with its wide chimney of scrap limestone turning clouds of dense smoke into the air, stood a cabin.

There was nothing in its appearance to distinguish it from the other huts clustered about. The logs that formed its sides were just as scamy, the timbers of the roof had just the same

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abashed, brow-beaten look ; and the keenest eye could not have detected the slightest shade of difference between its front and the bare, un-whitewashed fronts of its scores of fellows. Indeed, it would not have been mentioned at all, but for the fact that within its confines lived and thrived the heroine of this story.

Of all the girls of the Selfridge estate, black, brown, or yellow, Anner 'Lizer was, without dispute, conceded to be the belle. Her black eyes were like glowing coals in their sparkling brightness ; her teeth were like twin rows of shining ivories ; her brown skin was as smooth and soft as silk ; and the full lips that enclosed her gay and flexible tongue were tempting enough to make the heart of any dusky swain throb and his mouth water.

Was it any wonder, then, that Sam Merritt — strapping, big Sam, than whom there was not a more popular man on the place — should pay devoted court to her ?

Do not gather from this that it was Sam alone who paid his adoration to this brown beauty. Oh, no ! Anner 'Lizer was the "bright, particular star" of that plantation, and the most desired of all blessings by the young men there-

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about. But Sam, with his smooth but fearless ways, Sam, with his lightsome foot, so airy in the dance, Sam, handsome Sam, was the all-preferred. If there was a dance to go to, a corn-husking to attend, a social at the rude little log church, Sam was always the lucky man who was alert and able to possess himself of Anner 'Lizer's "comp'ny." And so, naturally, people began to connect their names, and the rumour went forth, as rumours will, that the two were engaged; and, as far as engagements were among the slaves in those days, I suppose it was true. Sam had never exactly prostrated himself at his sweetheart's feet and openly declared his passion; nor had she modestly snickered behind her fan, and murmured yes in the approved fashion of the present. But he had looked his feelings, and she had looked hers; while numerous little attentions bestowed on each other, too subtle to be detailed, and the attraction which kept them constantly together, were earnest of their intentions more weighty than words could give. And so, let me say, without further explanation, that Sam and Anner 'Lizer were engaged. But when did the course of true love ever run smooth?

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There was never a time but there were some rocks in its channel around which the little stream had to glide or over which it had to bound and bubble; and thus it was with the loves of our young friends. But in this case the crystal stream seemed destined neither to bound over nor glide by the obstacle in its path, but rather to let its merry course be checked thereby.

It may, at first, seem a strange thing to say, but it was nevertheless true, that the whole sweep and torrent of the trouble had rise in the great religious revival that was being enthusiastically carried on at the little Baptist meeting-house. Interest, or, perhaps more correctly speaking, excitement ran high, and regularly as night came round all the hands on the neighbouring plantations flocked to the scene of their devotions.

There was no more regular attendant at these meetings, nor more deeply interested listener to the pastor's inflammatory exhortations, than Anner Lizer. The weirdness of the scene and the touch of mysticism in the services — though, of course, she *did* not analyse it thus — reached her emotional nature and stirred her

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being to its depths. Night after night found her in her pew, the third bench from the rude pulpit, her large eyes, dilated to their fullest capacity, following the minister through every motion, seeming at times in their steadfastness to look through him and beyond to the regions he was describing, — the harp-ringing heaven of bliss or the fire-filled home of the damned.

Now Sam, on the other hand, could not be induced to attend these meetings; and when his fellow-servants were at the little church praying, singing, and shouting, he was to be found sitting in one corner of his cabin, picking his banjo, or scouring the woods, carrying axe and taper, and, with a dog trotting at his heels, hunting for that venison of the negro palate, — 'coon.

Of course this utter irreverence on the part of her lover shocked Anner 'Lizer; but she had not entered far enough into the regions of the ecstasy to be a proselyte; so she let Sam go his way, albeit with reluctance, while she went to church unattended. But she thought of Sam; and many a time when she secretly prayed to get religion she added a prayer that she might retain Sam.

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He, the rogue, was an unconscious but pronounced sceptic; and day by day, as Annet 'Liner became more and more possessed by religious fervour, the breach between them widened; still widening gradually until the one span that connected the two hearts was suddenly snapped asunder on the night when Annet 'Liner went to the mourner's bench.

She had not gone to church with that intention; indeed not, although she had long been deeply moved by a consciousness of her lost estate. But that night, when the preacher had pictured the boundless joys of heaven, and then, leaning over the pulpit and stretching out his arms before him, had said in his softest tone, "Now come, won't you, sinnahs? De Lawd is jes' on de othah side; jes' one step away, waitin' to receive you. Won't you come to him? Won't you tek de chance o' becomin' j'int 'ars o' dat beautiful city whar de streets is gol' an' de gates is pearl? Won't you come to him, sinnah? Don't you see de pityin' look he 's a-givin' you, a-sayin' Come, come?" she lost herself. Some irresistible power seemed dominating her, and she arose and went forward, dropping at the altar amid a great shouting and



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clapping of hands and cries of "Bless de Lawd, one mo' recruit fu' de Gospel army."

Some one started the hymn, "We'll bow around the altar," and the refrain was taken up by the congregation with a fervour that made the rafters of the little edifice ring again.

The conquest of Anner 'Lizer, the belle of that section of Kentucky, was an event of great moment; and in spite of the concentration of the worshippers' minds on their devotions, the unexpected occurrence called forth a deal of discussion among the brothers and sisters. Aunt Hannah remarked to Aunt Maria, over the back of the seat, that she "never knowed de gal was unner c'viction." And Aunt Maria answered solemnly, "You know, sistah, de Lawd works in a myste'ious way his wondahs to pu'fo'm."

Meanwhile the hymn went on, and above it rose the voice of the minister: "We want all de Christians in de house to draw up aroun' de altar, whar de fish is bu'nin': you know in de wintah time when hit's col' you crowds up clost to de fireplace; so now ef you wants to git sp'itually wa'm, you mus' be up whar de fish is." There was a great scrambling and shuf-

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ring of feet as the members rose with one accord to crowd, singing, around the altar.

Two of the rude benches had been placed end to end before the pulpit, so that they extended nearly the full width of the little church; and at these knelt a dozen or more mourners, swaying and writhing under the burden of their sins.

The song being ended, the preacher said: "Brer' Adams, please tek up de cross." During the momentary lull that intervened between the end of the song and the prayer, the wails and supplications of the mourners sounded out with weird effect. Then Brer' Adams, a white-haired patriarch, knelt and "took up the cross."

Earnestly he besought the divine mercy in behalf of "de po' sinners, a-rollin' an' a-tossin' in de temper' of dese sins. Lawd," he prayed, "come down dis evenin' in Spirit's power to seek an' to save-ah; let us heah de rumblin' of yo' cha'iot wheels-ah lak de thundah f'om Mount Sinai-ah; oh, Lawd-ah, convert mou'nahs an' convict sinners-ah; show 'em dat dey mus' die an' cairn't lib an' atter death to judg-ment; tu'n 'em aroun' befo' it is evahlastin' an' eternally too late." Then warming once and

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more, and swaying his form back and forth, as he pounded the seat in emphasis, he began to wail out in a sort of indescribable monotone:

"O Lawd, save de mou'nah!"

"Save de mou'nah!" came the response from all over the church.

"He'p 'em out of de miah an' quicken's of dere sins!"

"He'p, Lawd!"

"And place deir feet upon de evahlastin' an' eternal rock-ah!"

"Do, Lawd!"

"O Lawd-ah, shake a dyin' sinnah ovah hell an' fo'bid his mighty fall-ah!"

"O Lawd, shake 'em!" came from the congregation.

By this time every one was worked up to a high state of excitement, and the prayer came to an end amid great commotion. Then a rich, mellow voice led out with:

"Sabe de mou'nah jes' now,  
Sabe de mou'nah jes' now,  
Sabe de mou'nah jes' now,  
Only trust Him jes' now,  
Only trust Him jes' now,  
He'p de sinnah jes' now!"

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and so to indefinite length the mournful minor melody ran along like a sad brook flowing through autumn woods, trying to laugh and ripple through tears.

Every now and then some mourner would spring half up, with a shriek, and then sink down again trembling and jerking spasmodically. "He 's a-doubtin', he 's a-doubtin'!" the cry would fly around; "but I tell you he put' nigh had it that time."

Finally, the slender form of Anner 'Lizer began to sway backward and forward, like a sapling in the wind, and she began to mourn and weep aloud.

"Praise de Lawd!" shouted Aunt Hannah, "de po' soul 's gittin' de evidence: keep on, honey, de Lawd ain't fa' off." The sudden change attracted considerable attention, and in a moment a dozen or more zealous altar-workers gathered around Anner 'Lizer, and began to clap and sing with all their might, keeping time to the melodious cadence of their music with heavy foot-pats on the surrounding floor.

"Git on bow'd-ah, little chiddering,  
Git on bow'd-ah, little chiddering,  
Git on bow'd-ah, little chiddering,  
Dere 's soon fo' many mo'.

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"De gospel ship is sailin',  
It 's loaded down wid souls.  
If you want to tek heab'n yo' happy home,  
You mus' ketch it 'fo' it goes.  
Git on hea'd, etc.

"King Jesus at de helm,  
Fu' to guide de ship aright.  
We gwine fu' to put into heab'n's po't  
Wid ourh sails all shinin' white.  
Git on hea'd," etc.

With a long dwell on the last word of the chorus, the mellow cadence of the song died away.

"Let us bow down fu' a season of silent pray," said the minister.

"Lawd, he'p us to pray," responded Uncle Eben Adams.

The silence that ensued was continually broken by the wavering wail of the mourners. Suddenly one of them, a stalwart young man, near the opening of the aisle, began to writhe and twist himself into every possible contortion, crying: "O Lawd, de devil's a-ridin' me; tek him off—tek him off!"

"Tek him off, Lawd!" shouted the congregation.

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Then suddenly, without warning, the mourner rose straight up into the air, shouting, "Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!"

"He's got it — he's got it!" cried a dozen eager worshippers, leaping to their feet and crowding around the happy convert; "bless de Lawd, he's got it." A voice was raised, and soon the church was ringing with

"Loose him and let him go,  
Let him shout to glory."

On went the man, shouting "Hallelujah," shaking hands, and bounding over seats in the ecstasy of his bliss.

His conversion kindled the flame of the meeting and set the fire going. You have seen corn in the popper when the first kernel springs up and flares open, how quickly the rest follow, keeping up the steady pop, pop, pop; well, just so it was after this first conversion. The mourners popped up quickly and steadily as the strength of the spiritual fire seemed to reach their swelling souls. One by one they left the bench on which, figuratively speaking, they may be said to have laid down their sins and proclaimed themselves possessors of religion;

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until, finally, there was but one left, and that one — Anner 'Lizer. She had ceased from her violent activity, and seemed perfectly passive now.

The efforts of all were soon concentrated on her, and such stamping and clapping and singing was never heard before. Such cries of "Jes' look up, sistah, don't you see Him at yo' side! Jes' reach out yo' han' an' tech de hem of His ga'ment. Jes' listen, sistah, don't you heah de angels singin'! don't you heah de rumblin' of de cha'iot wheels? He 's a-comin', He 's a-comin', He 's a-comin'!"

But Anner 'Lizer was immovable; with her face lying against the hard bench, she moaned and prayed softly to herself. The congregation redoubled its exertions, but all to no effect, Anner 'Lizer would n't "come throo."

It was a strange case.

Aunt Maria whispered to her bosom friend: "You min' me, Sistah Hannah, dere 's somp'n' on dat gal's min'." And Aunt Hannah answered: "I believe you."

Josephine, or more commonly Phiny, a former belle whom Anner 'Lizer's superior charms had deposed, could not lose this opportunity to have

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a fling at her successful rival. Of course such cases of vindictiveness in women are rare, and Phiny was exceptional when she whispered to her fellow-servant, Lucy: "I reckon she 'd git 'tigion if Sam Mc'Int was heah to see her." Lucy snickered, as in duty bound, and whispered back: "I wisht you 'd heish."

Well, after all their singing, in spite of all their efforts, the time came for closing the meeting and Anser 'Lixer had not yet made a profession.

She was lifted tenderly up from the mourner's bench by a couple of solicitous sisters, and after listening to the preacher's exhortation to "pray constantly, theo de day an' theo de night, in de highways an' de byways an' in yo' secret closet," she went home praying in her soul, leaving the rest of the congregation to loiter along the way and gossip over the night's events.

All the next day Anser 'Lixer, erstwhile so cheerful, went about her work sad and silent; every now and then stopping in the midst of her labours and burying her face in her neat white apron to sob violently. It was true, as Aunt Hannah expressed, that "de Spirit



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had sholy tuk bolt of dat gal wid a powahful han'."

All of her fellow-servants knew that she was a mourner, and with that characteristic reverence for religion which is common to all their race, and not lacking even in the most hardened sinner among them, they respected her feelings. Phiny alone, when she met her, tossed her head and giggled openly. But Phiny's actions never troubled Anner 'Lizer, for she felt herself so far above her. Once though, in the course of the day, she had been somewhat disturbed, when she had suddenly come upon her rival, standing in the spring-house talking and laughing with Sam. She noticed, too, with a pang, that Phiny had tied a bow of red ribbon on her hair. She shut her lips and only prayed the harder. But an hour later, somehow, a ribbon as red as Phiny's had miraculously attached itself to her thick black plaits. Was the temporal creeping in with the spiritual in Anner 'Lizer's mind? Who can tell? Perhaps she thought that, while cultivating the one, she need not utterly neglect the other; and who says but that she was right?

Uncle Eben, however, did not take this view

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of the matter when he came hobbling up in the afternoon to exhort her a little. He found Anner 'Lixer in the kitchen washing dishes. Engrossed in the contemplation of her spiritual state, or praying for deliverance from the same, through the whole day she had gone about without speaking to any one. But with Uncle Eben it was, of course, different; for he was a man held in high respect by all the negroes and, next to the minister, the greatest oracle in those parts; so Anner 'Lixer spoke to him.

"Howdy, Uncl' Eben," she said, in a languid tone, as the old man hobbled in and settled down in a convenient corner.

"Howdy, honey, howdy," he replied, crossing one leg over the other, as he unwound his long bandana, placed it in his hat, and then deposited his heavy cane on the white floor. "I jes' thought I'd drop in to ax you how do you do to-day!"

"Po' enough, Uncl' Eben, fu' sho."

"Ain't foun' no res' fu' yo' soul yit?"

"No res' yit," answered Anner 'Lixer, again applying the spoon to her already swollen eyes.

"Um-m," sighed the old man, meditatively tapping his foot; and then the gay flash of



A TRIP FROM UNCLE BEN.



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ANNER 'Lizer's ribbon caught his eye and he gasped : " Bless de Lawd, Sis 'Lizer ; you don't mean to tell me dat you 's gwine 'bout heah seekin' wid yo' har tied up in ribbon ? What ! tek it off, honey, tek it off ; ef yo' wants yo' soul saved, tek it off ! "

ANNER 'Lizer hesitated, and raised her eyes in momentary protest ; but they met the horrified gaze of the old man, and she lowered them again as her hand went reluctantly up to her head to remove the offending bit of finery.

" You see, honey, " Uncle Eben went on, " when you starts out on de Christian jou'ney, you 's got to lay aside evry weight dat deeth so easy beset you an' keeps you f'om progressin' ; y' ain't got to think nothin' 'bout personal 'dormment ; you 's jes' got to shet yo' eyes an' open yo' hea't an' say, Lawd, come ; you mus' n't wait fu' to go to chu'ch to pray, nather, you mus' pray anywhere an' ev'rywhere. Why, when I was seekin', I ust to go 'way off up in de big woods to pray, an' dere 's what de Lawd answered me, an' I'm a-erjoicin' to-day in de powah of de same salvation. Honey, you 's got to pray, I tell you. You 's got to brack de backbone of yo' pride an' pray in earnest ;

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an' ef you does dat, you 'll git he'p, fu' de Lawd is a praar-beahin' Lawd an' plenteous in mussy."

Anner 'Lizer listened attentively to the exhortation, and evidently profited by it; for soon after Uncle Eben's departure she changed her natty little dress for one less pretentious, and her dainty, frilled white muslin apron gave way to a broad dark calico one. If grace was to be found by self-abnegation in the matter of dress, Anner 'Lizer was bound to have it at any price.

As afternoon waned and night came on, she grew more and more serious, and more frequent recourse was had to the corner of her apron. She even failed to see Phiny when that enterprising young person passed her, decked out in the whitest of white cuffs and collars setting off in pleasant contrast her neat dark dress. Phiny giggled again and put up her hand, ostensibly to brush some imaginary dust from her bosom, but really to show her pretty white cuffs with their big bone buttons. But it was all lost on Anner 'Lizer; her gaze was downcast and her thoughts far away. If any one was ever "seekin'" in earnest, this girl was.

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Night came, and with it the usual services. Anner 'Lizer was one of the earliest of the congregation to arrive, and she went immediately to the mourner's bench. In the language of the congregation, "Eldah Johasing sholy did preach a powerful sermon" that night. More sinners were convicted and brought to their knees, and, as before, these recruits were converted and Anner 'Lizer left. What was the matter?

That was the question which every one asked, but there were none found who could answer it. The circumstance was all the more astounding from the fact that this unsuccessful mourner had not been a very wicked girl. Indeed, it was to have been expected that she might shake her sins from her shoulders as she would discard a mantle, and step over on the Lord's side. But it was not so.

But when a third night came and passed with the same result, it became the talk of three plantations. To be sure, cases were not lacking where people had "mourned" a week, two weeks, or even a month; but they were woful sinners and those were times of less spiritual interest; but under circumstances so favourable

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as were now presented, that one could long refrain from "gittin' religion" was the wonder of all. So, after the third night, everybody wondered and talked, and not a few began to lean to Phiry's explanation, that "de ole sick in de grass had be'n a-goin' on doin' all her dev'ment on de sly, so 's peop' would n't know it; but de Lawd he did, an' he payin' her up fu' it now."

Sarah Merritt alone did not talk, and seemed perfectly indifferent to all that was said; when he was in Phiry's company and she rallied him about the actions of his "gal," he remained silent.

On the fourth night of Anner 'Lizer's mourning, the congregation gathered as usual at the church. For the first half-hour all went on as usual, and the fact that Anner 'Lizer was absent caused no remark, for every one thought she would come in later. But time passed and she did not come. "Eldah Johnson's" flock became agitated. Of course there were other mourners, but the one particular one was absent; hence the dissatisfaction. Every head in the house was turned toward the door, whenever it was opened by some late comer; and around



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flew the whisper, "I wunner ef she 's quit mou'nin'; you ain't heerd of her gittin' 'ligion, have you?" No one had.

Meanwhile the object of their solicitude was praying just the same, but in a far different place. Grasping, as she was, at everything that seemed to give her promise of relief, somehow Uncle Eben's words had had a deep effect upon her. So, when night fell and her work was over, she had gone up into the woods to pray. She had prayed long without success, and now she was crying aloud from the very fulness of her heart, "O Lawd, sen' de light — sen' de light!" Suddenly, as if in answer to her prayer, a light appeared before her some distance away.

The sudden attainment of one's desires often shocks one; so with our mourner. For a moment her heart stood still and the thought came to her to flee; but her mind flashed back over the words of one of the hymns she had heard down at church, "Let us walk in de light;" and she knew that before she walked in the light she must walk toward it. So she rose and started in the direction of the light. How it flickered and flared, disappeared and reappeared,

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rose and fell, even as her spirits, as she stumbled and groped her way over fallen logs and through briars. Her limbs were bruised and her dress torn by the thorns. But she heeded it not, she had fixed her eye — physical and spiritual — on the light before her. It drew her with an irresistible fascination. Suddenly she stopped. An idea had occurred to her! Maybe this light was a Jack-o'-lantern! For a moment she hesitated, then promptly turned her pocket wrong side out, murmuring, "De Lord 'll tek keer o' me." On she started; but, lo! the light had disappeared! What! had the turning of the pocket indeed worked so potent a charm?

But no! it reappeared as she got beyond the intervention of a brush pile which had obscured it. The light grew brighter as she grew fainter; but she clasped her hands and raised her eyes in unswerving faith, for she found that the beacon did not recede, but glowed with a steady and stationary flame.

As she drew near, the sound of sharp strokes came to her ears, and she wondered. Then, as she slipped into the narrow circle of light, she saw that it was made by a taper which was set on a log. The strokes came from a man who

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was chopping down a tree in which a 'coon seemed to have taken refuge. It needed no second glance at the stalwart shoulders to tell her that the man was — Sam. Her step attracted his attention, and he turned.

"Sam!"

"Anner 'Lizer!"

And then they both stood still, too amazed to speak. Finally she walked across to where he was standing, and said: "Sam, I did n't come out heah to fin' you, but de Lawd has 'p'inted it so, 'ca'se he knowed I orter speak to you." Sam leaned hopelessly on his axe; he thought she was going to exhort him.

Anner 'Lizer went on: "Sam, you 's my stumblin' block in de highroad to salvation; I 's be'n tryin' to git 'ligion fa' fou' nights, an' I cain't do it jes' on yo' 'count; I prays an' I prays, an' jes' as I 's a'mos' got it, jes' as I begin to break de cha'iot wheels a-rollin', yo' face comes right in 'tween an' drives it all away. Tell me, now, Sam, so 's to put me out of my 'spense, does you want to ma'y me, er is you goin' to ma'y Phiny? I jes' wants you to tell me, not dat I keers passonally, but so 's my min' kin be at res' sp'it'u'ally, an' I kin git 'ligion.

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Jes' say yes er no; I wants to be settled one way er 't other."

"Anner 'Lizer," said Sam, reproachfully, "you know I wants to ma'y you jes' ez soon ez Mas' Rob 'll let me."

"Dere now," said Anner 'Lizer, "bless de Lawd!" And, somehow, Sam had dropped the axe and was holding her in his arms.

It boots not whether the 'coon was caught that night or not; but it is a fact that Anner 'Lizer set the whole place afire by getting religion at home early the next morning. And the same night the minister announced "dat de Lawd had foun' out de sistah's stumblin' block an' removed it f'om de path."

THE ORDEAL AT  
MT. HOPE



## THE ORDEAL AT MT. HOPE

"And this is Mt. Hope," said the Rev. Howard Dokesbury to himself as he descended, bag in hand, from the smoky, dingy coach, or part of a coach, which was assigned to his people, and stepped upon the rotten planks of the station platform. The car he had just left was not a palace, nor had his reception by his fellow-passengers or his intercourse with them been of such cordial nature as to endear them to him. But he watched the choky little engine with its three black cars wind out of sight with a look as regretful as if he were witnessing the departure of his dearest friend. Then he turned his attention again to his surroundings, and a sigh welled up from his heart. "And this is Mt. Hope," he repeated. A note in his voice indicated that he fully appreciated the spirit of keen irony in which the place had been named.

The colour scheme of the picture that met his eyes was in dingy blacks and grays. The

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building that held the ticket, telegraph, and train despatchers' offices was a miserably old ramshackle affair, standing well in the foreground of this scene of gloom and desolation. Its windows were so coated with smoke and grime that they seemed to have been painted over in order to secure secrecy within. Here and there a lazy car lay drowsily snapping at the flies, and at the end of the station, perched on boxes or leaning against the wall, making a living picture of equal laziness, stood a group of idle Negroes exchanging rude badinage with their white counterparts across the street.

After a while this bantering interchange would grow more keen and personal, a free-for-all friendly fight would follow, and the newspaper correspondent in that section would write it up as a "race war." But this had not happened yet that day.

"This is Mt. Hope," repeated the new-comer; "this is the field of my labours."

Rev. Howard Dokesbury, as may already have been inferred, was a Negro,—there could be no mistake about that. The deep dark brown of his skin, the rich over-fulness of his lips, and the close curl of his short black hair were evi-



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dances that admitted of no argument. He was a finely proportioned, stalwart-looking man, with a general air of self-possession and self-sufficiency in his manner. There was firmness in the set of his lips. A reader of character would have said of him, "Here is a man of solid judgment, careful in deliberation, prompt in execution, and decisive."

It was the perception in him of these very qualities which had prompted the authorities of the little college where he had taken his degree and received his theological training, to urge him to go among his people at the South, and there to exert his powers for good where the field was broad and the labourers few.

Born of Southern parents from whom he had learned many of the superstitions and traditions of the South, Howard Dokesbury himself had never before been below Mason and Dixon's line. But with a confidence born of youth and a consciousness of personal power, he had started South with the idea that he knew the people with whom he had to deal, and was equipped with the proper weapons to cope with their shortcomings.

But as he looked around upon the scene which

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now met his eye, a doubt arose in his mind. He picked up his bag with a sigh, and approached a man who had been standing apart from the rest of the loungers and regarding him with indolent interest.

"Could you direct me to the house of Stephen Gray?" asked the minister.

The interrogated took time to change his position from left foot to right and to shift his quid, before he drawled forth, "I reckon you 's de new Meffis preacher, huh?"

"Yes," replied Howard, in the most conciliatory tone he could command, "and I hope I find in you one of my flock."

"No, sah, I 's a Baptist myse'f. I wa' n't raised up no place erroun' Mt. Hope; I 'm natchelly f'om way up in Adams County. Dey jes' sent me down hyeah to fin' you an' to tek you up to Steve's. Steve, he 's workin' to-day an' could n't come down."

He laid particular stress upon the "to-day," as if Steve's spell of activity were not an everyday occurrence.

"Is it far from here?" asked Dekesbury.

"T ain't no' 'n a mile an' a ha'f by de shawt cut."

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"Well, then, let's take the short cut, by all means," said the preacher.

They trudged along for a while in silence, and then the young man asked, "What do you men about here do mostly for a living?"

"Oh, well, we does odd jobs, we saws an' splits wood an' totes bundles, an' some of 'em raises gyarden, but mos' of us, we fishes. De fish bites an' we ketches 'em. Sometimes we eats 'em an' sometimes we sells 'em; a string o' fish 'll bring a peck o' co'n any time."

"And is that all you do?"

"'Bout."

"Why, I don't see how you live that way."

"Oh, we lives all right," answered the man; "we has plenty to eat an' drink, an' clothes to wear, an' some place to stay. I reckon folks ain't got much use fu' nuffin' mo'."

Dokesbury sighed. Here indeed was virgin soil for his ministerial labours. His spirits were not materially raised when, some time later, he came in sight of the house which was to be his abode. To be sure, it was better than most of the houses which he had seen in the Negro part of Mt. Hope; but even at that it was far from being good or comfortable-looking. It

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was small and mean in appearance. The weather boarding was broken, and in some places entirely fallen away, showing the great unshewn logs beneath; while off the boards that remained the whitewash had peeled in scrofulous spots.

The minister's guide went up to the closed door, and rapped loudly with a heavy stick.

"G' 'way f'om dah, an' quit you' foolin'," came in a large voice from within.

The guide grinned, and rapped again. There was a sound of shuffling feet and the pushing back of a chair, and then the same voice saying: "I bet I'll mek you git away f'om dat do'."

"Dat's A'nt Ca'line," the guide said, and laughed.

The door was flung back as quickly as its worn hinges and sagging bottom would allow, and a large body surmounted by a face like a big round full moon presented itself in the opening. A broomstick showed itself aggressively in one fat shiny hand.

"It's you, Tom Scott, is it — you trif'ain' —" and then, catching sight of the stranger, her whole manner changed, and she dropped the broomstick with an embarrassed " 'Scuse me, sah."

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Tom chuckled all over as he said, "A'nt Ca'line, dis is yo' new preachah."

The big black face lighted up with a broad smile as the old woman extended her hand and enveloped that of the young minister's.

"Come in," she said. "I's mighty glad to see you—that no-'count Tom come put' nigh mekin' me 'apose mys'e'f." Then turning to Tom, she exclaimed with good-natured severity, "An' you go 'long, you scoun'll you!"

The preacher entered the cabin—it was hardly more—and seated himself in the rush-bottomed chair which A'nt Ca'line had been industriously polishing with her apron.

"An' now, Brothah—"

"Dokesbury," supplemented the young man.

"Brothah Dokesbury, I jes' want you to mek yo's'e'f at home right erway. I know you ain't use to oash ways down hyeah; but you jes' got to set in an' git ust to 'em. You mus' n't feel bad ef things don't go yo' way f'om de ve'y fast. Have you got a mammy?"

The question was very abrupt, and a lump suddenly jumped up in Dokesbury's throat and pushed the water into his eyes. He did have a mother away back there at home. She was all

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alone, and he was her heart and the hope of her life.

"Yes," he said, "I've got a little mocker up there in Ohio."

"Well, I 's gwine to be yo' mothah down hyeah; dat is, ef I ain't too rough an' common fu' you."

"Hush!" exclaimed the preacher, and he got up and took the old lady's hand in both of his own. "You shall be my mother down here; you shall help me, as you have done to-day. I feel better already."

"I knowed you would;" and the old face beamed on the young one. "An' now jes' go out de do' dah an' wash yo' face. Dey's a pan an' soap an' watah right dah, an' byeah 's a towel; den you kin go right into yo' room, fu' I knows you want to be arlone fu' a while. I'll fix yo' soppah while you rests."

He did as he was bidden. On a rough bench outside the door, he found a basin and a bucket of water with a tin dipper in it. To one side, in a broken saucer, lay a piece of coarse soap. The facilities for copious ablutions were not abundant, but one thing the minister noted with pleasure: the towel, which was rough and hurt

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his skin, was, nevertheless, scrupulously clean. He went to his room feeling fresher and better, and although he found the place little and dark and warm, it too was clean, and a sense of its homeness began to take possession of him.

The room was off the main living-room into which he had been first ushered. It had one small window that opened out on a fairly neat yard. A table with a chair before it stood beside the window, and across the room — if the three feet of space which intervened could be called "across" — stood the little bed with its dark calico quilt and white pillows. There was no carpet on the floor, and the absence of a washstand indicated very plainly that the occupant was expected to wash outside. The young minister knelt for a few minutes beside the bed, and then rising cast himself into the chair to rest.

It was possibly half an hour later when his partial nap was broken in upon by the sound of a gruff voice from without saying, "He 's hycah, is he — oomph! Well, what 's he ac' lak? Want us to git down on ouah knees an' crawl to him? If he do, I reckon he 'll fin' dat Mt. Hope ain't de place fo' him."

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The minister did not hear the answer, which was in a low voice and came, he conjectured, from Aunt 'Ca'line'; but the gruff voice subsided, and there was the sound of footsteps going out of the room. A tap came on the preacher's door, and he opened it to the old woman. She smiled reassuringly.

"Dat 'uz my ol' man," she said. "I sent him out to git some wood, so 's I'd have time to post you. Don't you mind him; he's lots mo' ha'k dan bite. He's one o' dese little yaller men, an' you know dey kin be powerful contra'y when dey sets dey ha'd to it. But jes' you treat him nice an' don't let on, an' I'll be bound you'll bring him erroun' in litle er no time."

The Rev. Mr. Dokesbury received this advice with some misgiving. Albeit he had assumed his pleasantest manner when, after his return to the living-room, the little "yaller" man came through the door with his bundle of wood.

He responded cordially to Aunt Caroline's, "Dis is my husband, Brothah Dokesbury," and heartily shook his host's reluctant hand.

"I hope I find you well, Brother Gray," he said.



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"Moder't, jes' moder't," was the answer.

"Come to suppah now, bafe o' you," said the old lady, and they all sat down to the evening meal, of crisp bacon, well-fried potatoes, egg-pone, and coffee.

The young man did his best to be agreeable, but it was rather discouraging to receive only gruff monosyllabic rejoinders to his most interesting observations. But the cheery old wife came bravely to the rescue, and the minister was continually floated into safety on the flow of her conversation. Now and then, as he talked, he could catch a stealthy upflashing of Stephen Gray's eye, as suddenly lowered again, that told him that the old man was listening. But, as an indication that they would get on together, the supper, taken as a whole, was not a success. The evening that followed proved hardly more fortunate. About the only remarks that could be elicited from the "little yaller man" were a reluctant "comph" or "comph-uh."

It was just before going to bed that, after a period of reflection, Aunt Caroline began slowly: "We got a son" — her husband immediately bristled up and his eyes flashed, but the old woman went on; "he named 'Lias, an' we thinks

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a heap o' 'Lias, we does; but — " the old man had subsided, but he bristled up again at the word — " he ain't jes' what we want him to be." Her husband opened his mouth as if to speak in defence of his son, but was silent in satisfaction at his wife's explanation: "'Lias ain't bad; he jes' ca'less. Sometimes he stays at home, but right sma't o' de time he stays down at" — she looked at her husband and hesitated — "at de colo'ed s'loon. We don't lak dat. It ain't no fitten place fo' him. But 'Lias ain't bad, he jes' ca'less, an' me an' de ol' man we 'membah him in oash pra'ahs, an' I jes' t'ought I 'd ax you to 'membah him too, Boothah Dokesbury."

The minister felt the old woman's pleading look and the husband's intense gaze upon his face, and suddenly there came to him an intimate sympathy in their trouble and with it an unexpected strength.

"There is no better time than now," he said, "to take his case to the Almighty Power; let us pray."

Perhaps it was the same prayer he had prayed many times before; perhaps the words of supplication and the plea for light and guidance

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were the same; but somehow to the young man kneeling there amid those humble surroundings, with the sorrow of these poor ignorant people weighing upon his heart, it seemed very different. It came more fervently from his lips, and the words had a deeper meaning. When he arose, there was a warmth at his heart just the like of which he had never before experienced.

Aunt Caroline blundered up from her knees, saying, as she wiped her eyes, "Blessed is dey dat mou'n, for dey shall be comforted." The old man, as he turned to go to bed, shook the young man's hand warmly and in silence; but there was a moisture in the old eyes that told the minister that his plangent of prayer had sounded the depths.

Alone in his own room Howard Dekesbury sat down to study the situation in which he had been placed. Had his thorough college training anticipated specifically any such circumstance as this? After all, did he know his own people? Was it possible that they could be so different from what he had seen and known? He had always been such a loyal Negro, so proud of his honest brown; but had he been mistaken? Was he, after all, different from the majority

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of the people with whom he was supposed to have all thoughts, feelings, and emotions in common?

These and other questions he asked himself without being able to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. He did not go to sleep soon after retiring, and the night brought many thoughts. The next day would be *Saturday*. The ordeal had already begun,—now there were twenty-four hours between him and the supreme trial. What would be its outcome? There were moments when he felt, as every man, however brave, must feel at times, that he would like to shift all his responsibilities and go away from the place that seemed destined to tax his powers beyond their capability of endurance. What could he do for the inhabitants of Mt. Hope? What was required of him to do? Ever through his mind ran that world-old question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" He had never asked, "Are these people my brothers?"

He was up early the next morning, and as soon as breakfast was done, he sat down to add a few touches to the sermon he had prepared as his introduction. It was not the first time that he had retouched it and polished it up here and

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there. Indeed, he had taken some pride in it. But as he read it over that day, it did not sound to him as it had sounded before. It appeared flat and without substance. After a while he laid it aside, telling himself that he was nervous and it was on this account that he could not see matters as he did in his calmer moments. He told himself, too, that he must not again take up the offending discourse until time to use it, lest the discovery of more imaginary flaws should so weaken his confidence that he would not be able to deliver it with effect.

In order better to keep his resolve, he put on his hat and went out for a walk through the streets of Mt. Hope. He did not find an encouraging prospect as he went along. The Negroes whom he met viewed him with ill-favour, and the whites who passed looked on him with unconcealed distrust and contempt. He began to feel lost, alone, and helpless. The squalor and shiftlessness which were plainly in evidence about the houses which he saw filled him with disgust and a dreary hopelessness.

He passed vacant lots which by open and inviting children to healthful play; but instead of marbles or leap-frog or ball, he found little

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boys in ragged knickerbockers huddled together on the ground, "shooting craps" with precocious avidity and quarrelling over the pennies that made the pitiful wagers. He heard glib profanity rolling from the lips of children who should have been stumbling through baby catechisms; and his heart ached for them.

He would have turned and gone back to his room, but the sound of shouts, laughter, and the tum-tum of a musical instrument drew him on down the street. At the turn of a corner, the place from which the noise emanated met his eyes. It was a rade frame building, low and unpainted. The panes in its windows whose places had not been supplied by sheets of tin were daubed a dingy red. Numerous kegs and bottles on the outside attested the nature of the place. The front door was open, but the interior was concealed by a gaudy curtain stretched across the entrance within. Over the door was the inscription, in straggling characters, "Sander's Place;" and when he saw half-a-dozen Negroes enter, the minister knew instantly that he now beheld the colored saloon which was the frequenting-place of his hostess's son 'Lias; and he wondered, if, as the mother said,