

Joel Chandler Harris (Uncle Remus) Sketches from his Life and Works

by
MARGARET EVERHART

In the year 1862, an advertisement in a local newspaper in Georgia ran thus: "An active, intelligent white boy 14-15 years of age, is wanted at this office to learn the printer's business".

The war between the Northern and Southern states was still raging, the dead and wounded of both sides exemplifying the immortal words of the poet, Robert Burns – "Man's inhumanity to man".

The Countryman, in which the advertisement appeared, was owned by Joseph Addison Turner Esq., – lawyer, journalist, cotton planter, merchant and owner of "Turnwald Plantation".

After answering the advertisement in his own handwriting and composition, which, surprised Mr. Turner, the boy, Joel C. Harris, found himself installed as an apprentice, beginning in the humble capacity of printer's devil.

The Countryman was operated in an outhouse on the stately plantation of "Turnwald" in Putnam County, where the noise of battle scarcely penetrated the solitary pine woods, "The Forest Primeval".

As Joel advanced in his work, operating a hand-press (an old Washington no. 2, which had seen considerable service) he also progressed in other departments, for he was a young man with ambition. It was not long before he was setting type quickly and accurately. "He was the fastest pressman on a hand press". Before many months, he became assistant to the foreman, who was also compositor and pressman.

Young Joel was happy with the life on the plantation, and felt quite at home, especially among the books of Mr. Turner's famous library, where he was allowed to browse about in his "off" time, and with Mr. Turner's meticulous training and fatherly guidance, it soon became apparent that the talent of the young boy was manifesting itself in his contributions of short poems. "Certainly no university course could offer better training and development for his gifted qualities."

As time went by, the apprentice began writing editorials which he submitted to his patron. Mr. Turner would always find time to examine them and point out to the gifted apprentice his errors, saying at times, "I regret that I have to reject it because it is not up to the standard of *The Countryman*."

"You have made a bad selection in your editorial." Joel never lost heart under this severe censor, but persevered until finally his work was accepted for the columns of *The Countryman*.

At the age of 17, his apprenticeship as a printer was ended. He was admitted into the Typographical Union no. 48. His happy days at Turnwald Plantation were drawing to a close. The war having ruined Mr. Turner, as it did most of the southern planters, it behooved Joel to took elsewhere for a living.

" 'tis pleasant sure to see one's name in print,
A book's a book, altho there's nothing in't".

It was with the *Monroe Advertiser* that Joel took on the new job as Editor, with the above phrase ringing in his ear. He likewise thought that the *Advertiser* could win more subscribers if he ran a Society Column. He declared that "politicians were not the only people who liked to see their names in print". The Society Column was introduced with great success. The townsfolk eagerly subscribed to the paper, checking on the reporting of their various activities, "albeit, to have it the neat little sheet that would attract attention there must have been considerable leg work, as the reporters say, to collect the right news".

Joel was well pleased with the surroundings of the town of Monroe, in Forsyth County, and boarded with the proprietor of the paper, Mr. James P. Harrison. A page from his scrapbook reads in part: "I was mightily pleased with my wages of \$7 a week plus board. I was also well satisfied with the high sounding name of "Business Manager". Describing his job, he said: "I set all the type, pull the press, keep the books, sweep the floor and wrap the papers for mail. My mechanical accounting and menial duties were concealed from the vulgar hilarity of the world by the impressive title of editor."

It was at this time that the editor made the acquaintance of "Uncle" George Terrell, a kindly old darky who, since the emancipation of the negro, earned his living working as gardener to several of the townspeople.

Joel listened to the legends of the dark race told by old "Uncle George". He heard of the runaway slaves and the "patter-rollers" (Patrollers). He heard the spirituals sung by the negroes on the plantation. It was during these happy months Am the creator of "Uncle Remus" wrote "Mingo", "Free Joe" and others.

After the day's work was done, Joel would meander down to the negro cabins and listen to the sweet music of the "Quills". The banjo is invariably associated with the negro as a musical instrument, but the Quills impart the sweetest music of the pipes of Pan. These are composed of reeds tied together with waxed twine. The negroes who lived near a river were fortunate to secure

the quills which were cut from the canebrake that grew near the water. The colored folk living away from the rivers probably adopted the banjo.

It must be here mentioned that the freed people were at liberty to go and earn their living where they pleased, but many preferred to remain in the good homes of the plantation, where they had lived and worked "befo' de Wa'", and where they had been well treated and cared for.

Joel had accumulated a vast knowledge of negro folk-lore, and now started writing the stories which brought him fame, not only in the south but in the north and abroad, in England and in foreign speaking countries. He represented his characters as being told by the kindly old darky "Uncle Remus", who brought to life the stories of Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Sis Cow and the wonderful Tar Baby.

One day a "leading article" appeared in the paper, written by the proprietor, Mr. J. P. Harrison. It began "I do emphatically wish to have a Southern literature – and prominent in our books I wish the negro placed". "The literature of any country should be a true reflex in letters of the manners and customs, institutions and local scenery of that country". Hence, when our authors write, I do not think they should run off to Greece, Rome, The Crusades, England or France about things for their pen. Let them write about things at home and around them"

This article from the pen of Mr. James Harrison impressed Joel deeply, for it was this that he had in mind since first he entered the printer's business – contributing to a Southern Literature.

His first paragraphing was done on the Monroe Advertiser. His pointed comments on news were a novelty to his readers and were copied all over the state. In his leisure time, he wrote charming little stories which were immediately popular. Unfortunately, those have not been preserved. It was the success of his paragraphing that eventually took Joel Chandler Harris to Savannah and the *Morning News*.

In the early Autumn of 1870, Joel received a letter written by Col. J. H. Estill of the *Savannah Morning News*, with the offer of a position as paragrapher. Joel was very surprised. He ran with it to Mr. Harrison, but before the proprietor could read it, the young lad had blurted out, "They have offered me forty dollars a week". Mr. Harrison stared at him in amazement. Forty dollars a week was a high salary for even an editor of seasoned vintage, let alone a stripling of twenty-one.

So, to Savannah.

The very first thing he attempted to do was to raise a mustache so as to give the impression that his venerable appearance warranted this hebdomadal windfall.

Among the boarders of the Florida House Hotel, where Mr. Joel, as a man of affairs, took up his residence, were a middle aged couple, Captain Pierre LaRose and his wife, Esther Dupont LaRose and three children, native of St. Ephrem d'Upton in the Province of Quebec. They spoke English with that charming French accent. Captain LaRose was the owner of the steamship "Lizzie (Baker)" plying from Savannah down the coast and up the St. John's River to Palatka, Fla. He also owned large farmlands in Canada.

For a long time, Mr. Joel saw only two of the LaRose children. "The oldest", Captain LaRose explained, "attends the Convent School of St. Hyacinthe in Quebec. She was born in Lansing, N.Y, in the year 1864. I was running two boats, the "John Tracy" and the "Edmund Lewis" on the Hudson River. Then, after the Civil War, I took the "John Tracy" to Washington, D. C., and carried mail and supplies between there and the Army."

Continuing, the Captain recounted, "On the trip back to Washington, D. C, there would always be a load of Confederate prisoners and wounded soldiers of both armies (Northern and Southern) on their way to prisons and hospitals. In the summer, they lay upon open decks. Picture it in your mind, Mr. Harris; the summer sun beating down unmercifully on the sick and wounded. It tore at my heart. One day some wounded Confederate prisoners begged to be thrown overboard in their agony. What did I do? I protested to the officers in charge. It is inhuman, I cried; you should provide shelter for the sick. The commanding officer bade me attend to my own affairs. I was reported to the War Department and was arrested as a rebel sympathizer. Soldiers came to my boat and led me off to prison."

"Esther, my wife, on hearing the news, hurried down to Washington. Some one had told her that 'When you want justice, when you need kindness and understanding, do n't go to minor officials - go to President Lincoln' - and so she did. Oh, there was a great man, Mr. Harris; what a pity he was not allowed to live. How much better off the South would have been now!"

"Of course, the president would receive my Esther. He received any one who went to him in trouble. Esther told the great president that 'Pierre, my husband, acted only out of humanity. We are French Canadians, Mr. President. We do not interest ourselves in your politics, but my husband was in your government service and whatever work he goes into, he is loyal to it'. She looked into the sad eyes of Lincoln and said: 'If you had been in his place, Mr. President, I know you would have done just as he did'. The order was given for my release and I went back to my boat."

Joel Chandler Harris lived in the Florida House Hotel with his good friends, the LyRoses, but in these two years he had not set eyes on the eldest daughter. In the Spring, about the time for the school term to close, Mrs.

LaRose and her two children would journey to Canada and she would spend the summer on one of the farms with her three children.

However, in the Spring of the third year, "Essie" the eldest, came down to Savannah and – one glimpse of her changed the whole aspect of life for Mr. Joel. She was small, dainty, with sparkling dark eyes, and wore her hair in ringlets. "She played the piano and sang prettily. She had the most delicious touch of French accent that one ever heard."

He began shyly to linger after dinner; finally became bold enough to throw in a few words, and with the result of a few more came an announcement:

Savannah, April 21, 1873
Joel -Chandler Harris
and
Esther Dupont LaRose

were joined in the holy bonds of matrimony. The happy young man would often remark, "twas a pity to change such a pretty name – but it had to be."

Essie having been raised in the strict Catholic family of LaRose, practised her faith, her inheritance, with increasing fervor, and Joel, a fond husband became "a good Catholic" albeit he had not as yet made his profession.

They lived in Savannah where two children were born, but in the year 1876 the yellow fever was rampant in Georgia, and to escape the epidemic, which was worst in Savannah, he bundled up his little family and made for Atlanta.

It was at the Kimball House (hotel) that they took up their abode. In a short time, he was offered a desk on the *Atlanta Constitution* as Editor.

He had been contributing various poems and stories since he was a lad of 15 years, and now Northern papers and magazines were making him offers. Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox and others of the animal world took shape and frolicked through the pages of his books with the voices and laughter of human beings.

Here was opportunity to further the folk-lore of the plantation and the South. His most distinguished contributions to American literature consisted in his dialect pieces dealing with negro life and folklore. His stories are mostly characteristic of negro gongs and sayings and work on the plantation, and "Uncle Remus", the principal character, represents a kindly old darky with an abundance of common sense and humor galore.

The first collection of his stories was published in 1880 as "Uncle Remus; his songs and his sayings". Among his later works are "Nights with Uncle Remus" (1883), "Mingo and other sketches in Black and White" (1854), "Free Joe and other Georgian Sketches" (1887), "Balaam and his Master and other Sketches and Stories" (1891), "Uncle Remus and his

friends" (1892), "On the Plantation" (which is partly autobiographic) (1892), "Sister Jane" (1896), "The Chronicles of Aunt Minervy Ann" (1899), "The Tar Baby and other rhymes of Uncle Remus" (1904).

More purely juvenile, are "Daddy Jake the runaway and other stories" (1899), "Little Mr. Thimblefinger and his Queer Country" (1894), and its sequel "Mr. Rabbit at Home" (1895), "Aaron in the Wildwoods" (1897) "Plantation Pageants" (1899), "Told by Uncle Remus" (1905), "Uncle Remus and Brer Rabbit" (1907).

He was one of the compilers of "The Life of Henry W. Grady", including his writings and speeches (1890); he also wrote "Stories of Georgia" (1896) and "Georgia from the invasion of DeSoto to recent times" (1899).

"On the Plantation" deals mostly with his life at Turnwald and is dedicated

To the Memory of
Joseph Addison Turner
Lawyer, Editor, Scholar, Planter and Philanthropist.

Critics say that "On the Plantation" is one of the most delightful of Mr. Harris' works.

Mr. Harris and family left the Kimball House and accepted an invitation of their old friends, Mr. & Mrs. J. P. Harrison, to visit them at their home in Decatur, a few miles from Atlanta, until a suitable house was offered on the market to accommodate the increasing family.

In 1890, one finds the Harris family well and comfortably established in a home in the West End of Atlanta. The name of the place, "Snap Bean Farm", was called so by Mr. Harris in playful imitation of the "Sabine Farm" of Eugene Field. So, together with his writings, Mr. Harris was also a farmer, and like all other farmers, had trouble with that garden pest – Johnson grass. When the farmer saw the cockles choking his corn, he sat down and wrote to the offender thus:

La! Mister Johnson is dat you' grass?
Well! I done foun' sumpin yo' all owns at las'
Jes' tote it away an' don' gib we no sass.

It is unfortunate that this letter was not finished. However, it gives one the impression of the whimsical and spontaneous humor of Mr. Harris.

The President of the United States, Mr. Theodore Roosevelt, was guest of honor at a dinner given in Atlanta. Many distinguished writers in the field of literature were present. Mr. Harris occupied the chair next to Mr.

Roosevelt. The President, in the course of his address, said "I am going to very ill repay the courtesy with which I have been greeted, by causing, for a minute or two, acute discomfort to a man of whom I am very fond - Uncle Remus. Presidents may come and presidents may go, but Uncle Remus stays put. Georgia has done a great deal for the Union, but never has done more than when she gave Joel Chandler Harris to American literature."

Mr. Roosevelt proceeded to indicate how much the author of "Mingo" and "Free Joe" had done to bring together the different sections of the country, "having written what exalts the South in the mind of every man who reads it, and yet there has not been even a flavor of bitterness towards any other part of the Union".

As Mr. Harris returned from his office one Spring afternoon, he discovered that two wrens had built their nest in the mail box of "Snap Bean Farm", surely a compliment to his own warm hearth. They had already laid the flooring in the form of straws.

The farmer would not allow the nest to be disturbed. His orders were - to the household and the mail-man, "Make other arrangements for your mail - we cannot break up a home". From that day forward, the name of "Snap Bean Farm" was dropped and "The Wren's Nest" was adopted.

The late Andrew Carnegie was a devoted friend of Mr. Harris. The first time they met was at the "Wren's Nest". Shaking hands, Mr. Carnegie opened the conversation by saying "How's ol' Sis Cow"? Mr. Harris chuckled "She's fine". Sis Cow had put them on easy terms "And they sat on a bench under the mocking bird tree and had a mighty good time, joking and chuckling, the one in negro dialect, the other in broad Scotch brogue." "Andrew is just a plain fellow and mighty good company too" is said to have been reported by the farmer. And Andrew Carnegie, the millionaire and ironmaster said of him: "He has given a helping hand to all the world. He's won the hearts of the children, and that's glory enough for any man."

"Gabriel Tolliver" into which Mr. Harris has written a large part autobiographic, is dedicated to his good friend James Whitcomb Riley, and "Jeems", as Riley often signed his letters to his friend, dedicated a complete edition of his works in ten volumes "To Joel".

Offers were now coming from all parts of the country. He was invited to accept the editorship of *Everybody's Magazine*. Two publishing companies wanted to put him on an annual salary and take everything he wrote. He rejected the magazine and accepted a contract with McClure, Philipps & Co., and by so doing, relinquished the office of the *Atlanta Constitution*, after twenty-four years as Editor.

He received tempting offers to go to Europe, but always came the same answer "Too far away from home - Georgia's good enough for me".

“Balaam and his Master” was published by Houghton, Mifflin and Co., comprising six tales of life in Georgia, before and after the Civil War. At the same time, Osgood, McIlvain and Co. of London published the same. The story ran in serial form in the *New York Sun*, *Boston Globe*, *Philadelphia Times*, *Washington Evening Star*, *Chicago Inter-ocean*, *St. Louis Republic*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *Louisville Courier-Journal* and the *New Orleans Times-Democrat*.

Mr. Harris’ illustrator was A. B. Frost, whose fanciful and humorous sketches made the animals “Jes” like folks”.

Mr. Henry Grady invited his friend Joel to join him on a trip to New York City for a week or perhaps two. The Literary Society heard they “had come to town” and at once arranged a dinner in their honor. Mr. Harris knew he would (be called upon for a speech. The thought almost convulsed him. He shunned all manner of publicity and whenever he found himself away from home and in a crowd, he became lonesome and homesick for the “Wren’s Nest,” for his wife and children. In this case, he caught the first train back to Atlanta and family.

His wife, who was not expecting him for several days, passed a familiar looking figure on Peachtree Street (his figure was mild Chestertonian). “If I didn’t know he was in New York” she told herself, “I’d be sure that was Joel”. On her return home, she found her husband in sweet contentment among the flowers at the “Wren’s Nest”. “Joel! Why are you back so soon?” “Aren’t you glad to see me” he asked in mock reproach. “Of course I am, but you came back so much sooner than I expected”. “I got so homesick, I couldn’t stand New York any longer. I just had to come home as soon as I could get here.”

A learned philologist said that variants of the story of Brer Fox and the Tar Baby which he made to catch Brer Rabbit, are in the Indians of North and South America and the West Indies, in Africa from the Cape of Good Hope up through the Congo to the Niger region and in India.

A southern author told of visiting a Georgia Plantation and finding a young lady – the daughter of the family – reading aloud to the mom delighted audience of negro children, stories which had come down through the generations of the colored race... “and Brer Bar he had a son name Simon an’ a gal name Sue, not countin’ his ol’ooman an’ dey all live with one ‘nother day atter day, and night atter night; an’ when one on ‘em went abroad, dey’d be ‘spected home ‘bout meal time if not befo’, an’ dey segasuated right ‘long fum day to day washing dey faces an’ han’s in de same wash pan on de back po’ch an’ wipin on de same towel same as all happy famblies allers do”...

In 1905 a new magazine appeared – *Uncle Remus Magazine* with the farmer as Editor-in-chief A personal note in the first issue began:

“principles and scope of the new magazine as outlined by its editor. Joel Chandler Harris.

“For all practical purposes, the monthly magazine which is issued under the editorial supervision of the undersigned might well be called Optimist, for it will preach a cheerful philosophy and practise a seasonable tolerance in all matters where opinions and beliefs are likely to dash. It will be a Southern magazine, by reason of the fact that the South is a part – a very large and definite part – of this great republic of ours, but all its purposes and intentions, its motives and its policies will be broader than any section and higher than partisanship of any sort.

“It is purposed to issue a magazine that will be broadly and patriotically American and genuinely representative of the best thought of the whole country.

“The note of provinciality is one of the chief charms of all that is really great in English literature, but those who will be in charge of this magazine will have nothing to do with the provinciality so prevalent in the North, the East, the South and the West – the provinciality that stands for ignorance and blind prejudice that represents narrow views and an unhappy congestion of ideas.

“Neighborly knowledge is perhaps more important in some respects than most of the knowledge imparted in the school. There is a woeful lack of it in the North and East with respect to the South, and this lack the magazine will endeavour in all seemly ways, to remove. The new generation in the *South* has been largely educated in Northern and Eastern institutions, with the result that a high appreciation of all that is best and worthiest in those sections is spread further and wider than ever before and is constantly growing in extent. On the other hand, at the North – Neighbor knowledge of the South is confined almost entirely to those who have made commercial explorations of this section and who have touched Southern life at no really significant or important point.

“It shall be the purpose of the magazine to obliterate ignorance of this kind. It will deal with the high-ideals towards which the best and ripest Southern thought is directed; it will endeavor to encourage the cultivation of the rich field of poetry and romance which, in the southern states, offers a constant invitation to those who aspire to deal in fictive literature. Itself standing for the best and highest in literature and life, the magazine will endeavor to nourish the hopes and beliefs that ripen under the influence of time and that are constantly bearing fruit amongst the children of men.

“It will endeavor to represent all that is good and true, all that is sane and sensible and all that is reasonable and just. In all things it will be conservative, but its conservativeness will represent energy instead of inertia, movement instead of rest. Its pages will, at all times, be open to new ideas

and fresh thoughts, and it will be friendly to the hopes and aspirations of new writers who are earnest and sincere, and who have something to say. Literature will be dealt with in a large way. Such criticism as it will give place to, will represent standards in literature rather than individual opinion.

“Fiction is to be one of the main features of the magazine, and yet no part of our industrial life and history is to be neglected. The needs of the South is progress and development and the essentials of its growth are all to play a large part in the programme that has been laid down, and so, likewise, of the whole Republic. Events that are of timely and satisfying interest will be presented graphically in paragraph and picture.

“Moreover, as much care will be given to the editing of its advertising pages as to the rest of the magazine, so that from beginning to end it may enter the homes of its friends clean, sweet and wholesome.

“In discussing and commenting on men and measures or political propositions and policies, or matters affecting the social and economic welfare of the people, the magazine will hold itself high above partisan politics and prejudices and will refuse to mistake opinions for principles or be blinded by prolific and offensive suggestion of sectionalism. It shall be its purpose to faithfully represent right and justice, that every man in the land, from the humblest to the highest will stand on a plane of perfect equality in its pages.”

Needless to say, *Uncle Remus Magazine* was cordially received by the public and it enjoyed a success far beyond the hopes of those engaged in producing it.

“Christmas and the Fairies” was one of his first contributions to the *Uncle Remus Magazine*. “The farmer wishes for old and young the merriest Christmas and the happiest New Year the world has ever seen. He hopes that the materialists may never be able to destroy in the minds of the children the budding faith in things unseen, the kindly belief in things beyond their knowledge. He hopes that Santa Claus will come to them while they sleep and the real fairies dance through their innocent dreams.”

An editorial written on the matter of belief reflects his own simple faith. “We must become as little children, we must be brotherly – and the farmer knows that he who created life, which is the greatest mystery of all, is fully equal to the production of all other mysteries and miracles.”

His wife said, “His faith in Providence was always very strong.”

Mr. Harris did not always write in the effervescent manner of Uncle Remus. Many of his contributions signed “The Farmer” are on a different plane. One is on the subject of Death. ...”Death is but the beginning of life and the grave is but a station house on the road to Heaven!”

Whilst his eldest son was a student at the Freres Maristes College in St. Ephrem d'Upton in the Province of Quebec, a (letter written him by his father contains the following:

“Writing is an easy matter, but fairly good writing is a matter of hard work and the very best, like Cardinal Newman, is simply the outcome of abject painstaking.

“His admiration for the writings of Cardinal Newman inspired him to further efforts, both the form and the work fascinated and moulded him”. Probably the most powerful single influence that swayed his later years, was the subtle thoughts and measured music of the great Prelate's *Apologia*.”

Ten years previous to his last sickness, he had sought and received instructions from Rev. Father James O'Brien, at that time in charge of the Catholic Church at Washington, Georgia, but Father O'Brien's unexpected death terminated the instruction, which unfortunately was not resumed.

In a letter to Mr. Harris from Sister Sacred Heart of St. Joseph's Academy, Washington, Georgia, where his two daughters were students, this reference occurs: “Dear Father O'Brien! We miss him more and more. If he remembers his friends, which we believe he does more prayerfully than when on Earth, he is still interceding for you; “The one thing he thought necessary' was coming to you though Him”

His health had been failing for some months past. Of his nine children, Death had already taken three in childhood. A dialect poem, “It's good to be old if you know how to do”, incorporated in the “*Tar Baby and other Rhymes*”, reveals his confidence in things spiritual,

“Dey all got to answer till de call er de roll,
Dey answer and go. Does you 'speck dat's all?
Is de oak tree sorry when de acorns fall?
Bless you Honey! I know what I know
Lots better than I did fifty years ago.”

Again he writes, “We are mysteriously bound, indeed, not only to the living but to the dead and to all who have ever lived”...

His household was gravely concerned about his health. His wife noticed he did not take the same interest in his flowers. He had many friends and neighbors in West End, and one of whom he was very fond was Father O. W. Jackson.

One day Father Jackson called at the “Wren's Nest.” Mrs. Harris asked her husband if he felt equal to seeing Father Jackson. He replied that he was and suggested that he be left alone with the priest. After a brief visit, Mr. Harris modestly asked Father Jackson if he might be received into the Church.

As one can imagine, with the careful instruction of the late Father O'Brien, and having lived in the Catholic atmosphere at home, he was already well prepared. So at last he was baptized and confirmed back to the "Faith of our Fathers". As he had not been baptized heretofore, he received the Sacrament Absolute.

He once wrote, "Humor is a great thing to live by, and other things being equal, it is a profitable thing to die by".

On July 3rd, 1908, as the sun was setting, he lost consciousness. The hand of death had touched him and he passed to his eternal rest.

Shortly before his death, he told his daughter, "I have put off this important matter too long, but procrastination has been the bugbear of my life and I feel that the Lord will make allowance for this weakness, for I have believed the teachings of the Catholic Church for many years. In fact, some years ago I had fully made up my mind to become a Catholic, but some event prevented my doing so."

Another time, he said "The example of my wife and children has taught me more about the Church than anything else".

His daughter asked him once whether fear of unintelligent comment had anything to do with his delay in coming into the Church. He replied, "No, I should say shyness had more to do with it".

He was borne from his home on July 4th to the Church of St. Anthony nearby, and simple as he would have had it, the last rites were performed.

Catholic and Protestant united to pay a last tribute to their dear and beloved "Uncle Remus".

His grave is marked by a rough granite boulder, and on a bronze plate are these words, serving as an epitaph, and selected from his writings:

"I seem to see before me the smiling
Faces of thousands of children;
Some young and fresh and some
Weary with the friendly marks of age;
But all children at heart, and not
An unfriendly face amongst them
And while I am trying hard to speak
A voice lifted among the rest, saying;
'You have made some of us happy' and
As I feel my heart fluttering
And my lips trembling,
I have to bow silently and turn away
And hurry into the obscurity that fits me best."

“Never into obscurity, oh, sweet, brave soul. The sun shines, and it shines for us all, wherever you are.”

The Farmer has gone from the “Wren’s Nest” but his stories continue to be read in castle, hamlet and cabin.

So - “The rabbit will hide
As it always hid;
And the fox will do
As it always did.

But who can tell us
What they say
Since Uncle Remus
Has gone away?”

An account of the activities of “Uncle Remus Memorial Association” is given in the memorial booklet prepared for the association by Mrs. Myra Lockett Avery.

A monument for a memorial of Joel Chandler Harris came as naturally as a flower might upspring from a grave, and while yet he lay at rest in his home, the birds he loved sang an unconscious requiem in his trees.

With the announcement on July 4th of his passing away, the press voiced public feeling in calling for a monument, but there was divergence of opinion as to the form the monument should take. A statue, an Uncle Remus Park, a Drinking Fountain, a bronze tablet, or the purchase and preservation of his home.

At a meeting called by the Mayor July 10th in the City Council Chamber, the “Uncle Remus Memorial Association” was organized; a committee appointed to decide on the form of memorial, reported at a memorial meeting in the Grand Opera House July 19th in favor of the home. Thirty thousand dollars, it was estimated, would cover the purchase and equipment. A statue in a public place, the more conventional type, might have been chosen but for Mr. Harris’ own protest, as often expressed to wife and friends: “Done erect any statue of marble or bronze to me, to stand out in the rain and cold and dust.” It was remembered how he loved his home; how characteristic of him it was, the house built according to his own ideas; the grounds eloquent of his ramblings and his tending. The committee’s decision was generally approved, yet there lingered as is usual, some division of opinion.

The gentlemen of the committee who were burdened with personal business responsibilities, presently found that they could not give the movement the attention it required, and welcomed the formation of the Ladies Auxiliary in February 1909; in October, they decided to retire as an

organization, the ladies succeeding to the title and office of the "Uncle Remus Memorial Association", and themselves appearing as Advisory Board. Colonel Frederic J. Paxon, Chairman of the Board, had been an unfailing friend and counsellor to the ladies; they felt that the successful issue of the movement was largely due to his readiness to give them his time, his advice and his aid.

The official Board of the Association as existing, is nearly the same as of the Auxiliary when formed, with Mrs. A. McD. Wilson as President. The ladies, from the first, limited operations to what they could do themselves, without one paid officer on their Board. They made no active canvass for funds. The idea was that, as so many loved "Uncle Remus", many might have a share in his memorial with special opportunity for small aids from children.

Assistance has been welcomed and utilized in whatever form it came. A gift of Greek coins from a friend in Illinois; five dollars from a woman's club, with request for violet roots from the home; a tiny sum from a children's Sunshine Society in Florida; an offering from the Children of the Confederacy in Marietta, Georgia, a modest check from Matthew Page Andrews, President of the Randall Literary Memorial Society; another from the Southern Club of Smith College — first southern body in a northern institution to remember their cause; one from the Bessie Tilt College in Forsyth, Georgia, where part of Mr. Harris' early struggles were made. These helped by the sympathy and interest thus evinced in the formative period of their undertakings.

Co-operation from schools and colleges has been and is highly valued. Miss Hannah's School, Atlanta, was first to render aid. Next came schools and kindergartens in Ohio, Illinois, the Carolinas, Alabama, and in Athens, Albany and Covington, Georgia. Kentucky's children rank next to Georgia's in interest shown. Mrs. Frank Woodruff, the Association's Field Secretary in that state, sent several contributions from "Uncle Remus Circles" in Louisville and Lexington — once, one hundred dollars in pennies. Among Atlanta institutions, the Boys' and Girls' High Schools, Marist College, Georgia Tech Boys' High School, Miss Woodbury's School and Washington Seminary have lent a ready hand.

The ladies gave several entertainments and assayed various feminine devices, in the interest of the fund, all tending to social pleasure and good feeling. They felt that cheerfulness and sweetness of spirit must pervade all they did for a memorial to "Uncle Remus". The teas in the Governor's Mansion, by courtesy of the Governor's wife, Mrs. Joseph W. Brown, merit more than passing note. Much more than passing mention must be made of the May Festival at the "Wren's Nest" inaugurated by Mrs. Brevard Montgomery, which has passed into an annual custom, having been observed every May since Mr. Harris died. Its growing beauty and popularity are a

reward to the many ladies whose diligent labors go to making it the pretty pageant it is. Besides the chief reason, its memorial interest, for continuing the custom, there is another. Small admission fees and sales of simple refreshments and souvenirs supply revenue toward the support of the home.

“Uncle Remus Day” was inaugurated by the ladies in 1910, when, through their efforts, seconded by Professor W. M. Slaton, Atlanta’s Superintendent of Public Schools, the schools of the city held an “Uncle Remus” hour of song and story, on December 9th, Mr. Harris’ birthday. Another year, the interest was enlisted of the State Commissioner of Public Schools, Professor M. L. Brittain. In 1912, observance extended throughout Georgia and to other states; to colleges, women’s clubs, children’s clubs, and public libraries.

The most important help the work ever received came in 1910 from Theodore Roosevelt. Mrs. Wilson, basing her request on his known friendship for “Uncle Remus”, asked him to lecture in Atlanta for the memorial fund. His acceptance and the lecture that followed, October 8th, turned the balance of fate and public opinion in favor of the home’s preservation, not only because of the money it brought (nearly five thousand dollars) but by this seal of approval from the “world’s foremost citizen” as universally acclaimed. Andrew Carnegie duplicated the proceeds of this lecture. The largest single contribution has been five thousand dollars from the Harris family. Recital of these large gifts by no means minimizes the small ones! The penny of a child he loved would be precious to “Uncle Remus”. The smallest aid to the movement commands the respect of the Association; particularly when it comes from a measure which is, in itself, a memorial, as from “Uncle Remus Circle”, “Uncle Remus Parties” and readings from “Uncle Remus”.

The formal transference of the “Wren’s Nest” to the Association by deed occurred on January 15th, 1913 in “Uncle Remus” favorite room. After this ceremony, Lucien Harris presented Mrs. Wilson with a loving cup, inscribed: “To Mrs. A. McD. Wilson, in appreciation of her efforts in behalf of the Uncle Remus Memorial – Essie LaRose Harris, Julian Harris, Lucien Harris, Evelyn Harris, Mrs. Fritz Wagoner, Mrs. Edwin Camp, Joel Chandler Harris.” – a testimonial which the association was happy to see bestowed upon its leader by those who loved “Uncle Remus” best.

“This has been my home for a long time”, Mrs. Harris said of the transfer, “and I hate to give it up, but I feel that this is for the best. If it passed into private hands, it might suffer change. Now I know that you will cherish every tree, flower and shrub that he spoke of and loved, as I have cherished them. You will let the wild things feel at home here as he did and as I have done. It would please him if he could know that little children will always play about the place.”

"This has been my home for a long time", Mrs. Harris said of the widow donated the furnishings, among which are his favorite chair, writing table, inkstand, pen and many relics besides. Other rooms will be used for a public library, a branch of the Carnegie, already established; a free kindergarten, it is hoped, and similar public utilities as they may be developed, all in keeping with the memorial sentiment. Mrs. Harris has given, for the library, a number of books which belonged to her husband. A valuable collection of Author's autographed copies and of autographed photographs has been secured for it by Mrs. Lollie Belle Wylie. A feature of Mrs. Wylie's collection is the bronze medallion portrait of Mr. Harris, by the sculptor Roger Noble Burnham, a contribution from the members of the Boston Folklore Society and Author's Club. "Brer Rabbit", drawn by A. B. Frost, Mr. Harris' friend and illustrator, is a recent gift from the artist, made through Miss Katherine Wootten.

The grounds are to be equipped as playgrounds for children and as a resort for the innocent recreation and happiness of Youth in general. The Association plans to add "Snap Bean Farm" to present holdings, both because they regard it as an essential part of the memorial, and because of its availability for playground purposes. The preservation of a great man's home, where he made wife and children happy for nearly thirty years, is an object lesson in the moralities and of very wholesome significance in many ways. It is a monument, not to genius only, but to the domestic virtues, a guarantee of the world's respect for faithful married love and the hearth-stones of the world.

Acknowledgments.

I am indebted to the following for use of books and information, many lines being copied from the original:

Mrs. Julia Collier Harris' "Life and Letters of Joel C. Harris"
Alvin F. Harlow.
Encyclopedia Britannica.