

deftly working. The other two leaned against a tree and with guitar and violin and trained harmony of voice broke into the drawing hymn with a song of their own:

"De colored people holler and some o' dem shout;
Moses gwine cart dem melon down!
Den I'll be dar when he come out;
Moses gwine cart dem melon down!
Hitch up de cart 'cause I must go;
Moses gwine cart dem melon down!
De mule an thin and very slow;
Moses gwine cart dem melon down!"

By this time the hands had recovered from their first surprise, and even the overseer nodded in time. Jasper in the middle of the row had added his pure ringing tones; the quick ears and rich voices of the African race were ready, and the chorus of

"Ah, ha, Moses! Oh, yes, Moses!
Come along, Moses! Cart dem melon down!"

surged and rose and swelled and sank away again on the air.

During the second verse the slender figure of a young girl, with a white shawl drawn over her head and shoulders, came down the steps of the distant mansion and across the intervening fields.

"I slipped down to hear better," she said, as she approached the overseer. "It sounded so delightful at the house. I heard a violin, too; and—and oh, I hope they have not stopped!"

"Cotton's nearly all in, luckily," scanning some thin dark clouds that were drifting across the moon; "and you would be as glad as I am, Miss Phoebe, if you had been in the fields since daybreak. They are pretty tired, and these fellows—belated, I believe, coming from some wedding—have really helped spirit them up a bit."

The moonlight streamed out again illuminating the scene. The overseer motioned to the silent black figures with fiddle and guitar, and they with suggestive prelude started

"Swing low, sweet chariot."

The new volume of harmony filled the night and gave fresh heart to the tired pickers. Jasper, at work near the overseer, had started on suddenly hearing the girl's voice, and, masked as he was, blushed hotly. He turned to his work with redoubled energy as if his throbbing self-consciousness must betray him.

"It is charming," said she sighing softly while the last hushed sweet refrain died away. "But," tremulously, "I seem to miss a voice that attracted me; a high tenor it was and very unusual. I must have fancied it."

"One of the strange niggers, perhaps," said the overseer indifferently. She went back to the house while they still sang, and presently the hands came trooping around the weighing machine with their last pickings. The field was soon deserted, and the negro quarters alive with the hungry people anxious for their suppers, and ready afterwards with characteristic light-heartedness to forget a fatigue in the sound of Jerry's music and the representation of the "Happy Hottentots," which after their ready hospitality the two older wayfarers performed unimitably around a blazing bonfire.

But the youngest, who had accepted only a glass of milk, had crept away, and keeping close in the shadow of tree and fence and brush had by this time reached the garden in the rear of the house. Here he stood concealed, gazing in where the lighted window permitted a view of the interior. It was a library which fronted towards him; a large, cozy, old-fashioned apartment with an air of comfort in its lamp and fire light. An old man, tall and white-haired and a little stern of aspect, sat in front of the shining brass andirons, as often looking abstractedly at the fire as at the book he held. He arose and began pacing the room, and when Phoebe came in and joined him, her hand placed upon his shoulder, they approached the window together, looking out at the moon.

The boyish figure under the trees shrank back into thicker shadow as though they looked straight at him, and instinctively he raised his hands to his blackened face as if conscious of some degradation. Someone touched his shoulder.

"We came to look for you," whispered Jerry, "I hope you are not planning a burglary prowling about here. I say! Supper with the coons was all right; but how about bed? I vote we ask for that in our own proper or improper persons. We'll pay them in music." And he instantly began on "Golden Moon," with James adding a mellow second.

Judge Thorndyke and his ward, opening their window, stepped out on to the wide piazza. "The strange negroes you

spoke of, my dear? How very sweet! How well they sing."

Jasper was silent, his tumultuous heart beating in his own ears with a noise monstrous and overpowering.

"Sir," said Jerry, advancing cheerfully, cap in hand, "as a matter of fact we are not negroes but only negro minstrels—knights of the burnt cork—tramps if you will; not through our own fault, but that of a rascal manager who robbed and left us. Our names, beginning with the same letter, James, Jasper and Jeremiah, caused us to be known on the bills as The Warbling Jays, in private life as The Jangling or Jocular Jays. We can sing, and have already sung, like the famous Tommy Tucker, for our supper. We should be glad if you could tell us where we could get a night's lodging on the same terms."

The old judge had looked at him keenly when he uttered the name of Jasper, but the rags and white teeth and eye-balls in the blackened face disgusted his old-fashioned refinement, and he visibly shuddered at The Jocular Jays. "My ward, this young lady, may know," he said with a repellent dignity. "It is a little chilly, I will stay inside."

"The rooms over the kitchen," she whispered, following a step or two, "Maum Chloe had them, but they are just white-washed and no one has used them since. There is no place in town to send the poor creatures, and we can't turn them away."

"As you like—if only they do not set fire to the house."

During which colloquy the older minstrels chanted delightfully the softened strain:

"Tell her, my golden Moon,
How I adore her;
Though we are parted,
Soon Love will restore her."

But when she returned her gentle manner unconsciously impressed itself upon them as the flower of a very fine breeding and awed them into respectful gratitude. "You will see that the musicians are comfortable in the kitchen rooms," she told a servant; and she smiled on, going back at the humor of a situation which had offended her guardian.

"It was not their fault after all, that they were left so," she said to him apologetically. "What could they do but sing, and it was less humiliating to do it for the cotton hands with blackened faces!"

"As good as themselves or better, very likely. A common, impudent fellow, the spokesman!"

"Well, it is the fable of the Ant and the Grasshopper over again. And when the wintry blast sweeps over the poor improvident Cigale, I confess that my heart softens—" She stopped, turning white, and slipped away in a moment. The judge, with the duller ear of age, had heard nothing; but to the wide-eyed, expectant girl on the piazza came from the deep shadow of the thicket a voice low and restrained, but vibrant, thrilling—one that she knew—which sang:

"Oh, mistress mine, where are you roaming?
Stay and hear, your true love's coming."

"Jasper! Jasper!" she called, and was in his arms. "It was your voice drew me to the cotton field: I could never mistake that!"

"Phoebe, I meant to go without your hearing it again; but could not, my dear—dear—dearest, until we had spoken once, with no vile disguise between." His face was white now in the moonlight.

"Go? After these five long years? Jasper!"

The young travel-worn features hardened. "It is likely that after five years of—Jocular Jays, I shall find a welcome in the Thorndyke house. Its master, for less matter, thought me unworthy long ago of its dull but sacred walls."

"Dearest, he has been sorry a thousand times, I know, for being too hard on your boyish tricks, though it was thoughtless yes, and wrong, too, Jasper, for you to try him so. He has feared and trembled for you all this time, when we have not known where or how you were. He has aged so; he sighs so heavily; he walks the floor often all night," impulsively drawing him close to the library window, "as he is doing now, thinking, I am sure, of his only son, who wounded and deserted him, too. Come in, come in," she cried, throwing wide open the hall door, "and speak to him!"

There seemed no moment for doubt or hesitation until he found himself in the doorway. His father stopped in his restless pacing and stood transfixed while their eyes met.

"You ought to know," said the boy, with a hard ring still in his tones, "that I am here accidentally, as one of these minstrels, stranded on a Southern tour, whom even with their faces