## AUNT VIGT'R'Y.



"YES, VICT'RY, IT'S ME," SAID POOR LIGE.
The Temples' cook was from the country, and it was the surprise of Mrs. Temple's Southern life that she was such

good cook. She explained it very lucidly: "Laws. I knows a heap on'y I done forgot it!"
Evidently, at some period in her life,
she had cooked for a table of some pretensions. Every now and then, a most unexpected accomplishment would sail into our admiration. Thus, once she broke out:-My marster! Mis' Temple, fo' de lawd, dat ar cream sass er yourn, dat aint noways diffrunt to my ole missus' white sass 'cept like you all don't putt no cream in yourn. But ye cripses

de butter jes de same."

Another time, "Scallop isters? I pintedly kin, Mis' Temple. Allers done scallop de isters fo' ole Miss."

Indeed she suggested a number of new viands to Mrs. Temple-generally from the frying pan, but toothsome and delicate.

She brought her only child with her, slim, brown lad of 14, who waited on table better than we feared from his first appearance, at which he brushed the crumbs off with the hearth broom into the dust pan. He was his mother's pet and, considering that fact, a marvellous ly good darkey, almost industrious, and the best tempered boy in the world.

We were not long in discovering Aunt Victory's history. One evening we found her at the smallest kitchen table, with Reme and the slate, plainly getting

"Why, Aunt Victory, can you read?"

said Mrs. Temple.

"Yes'm," with a smirk of modest pride, while Reme added, "Maw, she kin read a right smart I learned her."

"How nice! Then you can read the

Up went Aunt Victory's braids in a -"Laws, Mis' Temple, I'se outer de Bible an inter de newspapers!"
"And I writes fo' the newspapers

says Reme with an indescribable air of

"He does so," said his mother. "Aint you never seen de Mosaic Temple?" We admitted our ignorance. "Well; he admitted our ignorance.
does write reg'lar fo' dat."

And you like it? Yes ne'am. I like living to city. It may like the country is 72.

Yes'm yes m, you all got mighty an outs yere, but girmine de lentry!

She was one of those nut-brown Africans that have hair long enough to braid; to-night, her head was covered with a red bandana, drawn out square cornered, back of her ears, giving her a queer resemblance to the sphinx. Flinging herself forward on the table with a supple, sinuous motion that few negroes get too old to use, she let her head fall into the open palm of one hand, above the bent elbow; and as she talked this sphinx-like head rolled inher hand like a ball in a cup. "Oh, de kentry wid de wavin' fiel's an de red birds dat comes a peck-peckin' at de winder an de darkies a snatchin' cotton, an sech a heap er room! Oh, de kentry am so pleasureful! I'se tiresome in de city; got t'cyar' Remelonger me if I goes out in de night. But in de kentry, I rents my little fyarm an' I'se got my two mules Mis' Carrol give me. Las' year we uns did make five hundred dollars. Done so! When I paid out t' de sto' dar en hunerd an' fifty-five dollars comin'

"An it all been stole!" inturrupted Reme in a lugubrious tone.

"Nev' you mine bout dat, Reme Sanders! Dat come longer havin' no purtec ter, dat huccome dat.

A more sullen look than I had ever seen on Reme's handsome brown face answered this speech. He pushed back his chair, muttering something about going to the office, quite with the white man's air; and so smuggled himself out of the lesson or further conversation, Rather to our surprise, his mother made no effort to detain him.

"My, my!" she gurgled in the negro fashion, swaying herself to and fro, "dat boy caynt b'ar a word bout me needin' a man t' look out fo' me! Now, he are gone off rarin' on me; an' won't have a word t' say fo' a whole day. He's tem-pered jes' like he paw; sulks twel he gits

I asked Aunt Victory if Reme's father was dead. "Laws, no," said she. he left you?" said Mrs. Temple.
"He has dat."

"And doesn't Reme want you to let him come back?"

Aunt Victory rubbed her right ear against her right shoulder with a coquettish gesture; and for the first time I realized that, according to African no tions, she was a pleasing woman. "Well sir! why Miss Freddy, 'taint my ole man, Reme 'jects to, 'cose not! Hit am de torrer gentleman."

were too well used to negro morslity to either feel or show any particul-

ar surprise. But it seemed decent to in whether the departed husband quire whether the departed husband was divorced from her. No, of course he was not; that was why she had come to the Rock-as the Arkansans call Little Rock

"I gwine get a divorcement fo' fo'ty dollar, de lawyer man say" she explained; "done guv 'im t'irty dollar a'ready. Den I go back 't de kentry. I pintedly does crave 't be in de kentry agin'."

"Reserved to be in de kentry agin'."

"Work, Victory!" I suggested, loath to see a promising cook

'Hard wuk? Taint nuffin t' do stove wuk. Gimme my hoe an' my row an' I'se happy. An' laws, Missy, it do pear like I cayn't breve in dis yere shut up town. Aint no sunshine yere. I does love de sunshine. All cullud folks jes natchelly drinks up de sun. I knows song bout dat."

She had a beautiful voice, and we easily persuaded her to sing. I fancy that 'ole Miss," whom she was always quoting, had written the song for her:-

"Oh, give de darky sunshine, An' fair an' softly wedder. Wid a bite to eat, an' he will wuk, Fo' days an' days togedder!

Take away his fine clo'es, Still he'll dance an' sing. Take away his 'musements, Still de laff will ring. But take away his sunshine-

Good-by wuk an' play, Darky, he go hide his haid, Twell sun come back some day!" It was easy to learn her story when she was in such a mood. Sitting at

ease, alone with us, in the kitchen, (for Manda, the chambermaid, was at a colored ball), she poured out her whole humble tragedy.

The ole Miss who had "raised" her

and taught her to cook had died. After her death she married a negro, and they went to "making a crop" on the plantation. This negro, Lige by name, accepting her picture, was a very decent man. "Yent never seen de like er Lige t' wuk. He raise de bigges' crap on de place, and he cyar so much mischief wid 'im, too, I does jes be laffin all de time. An' he done ben pintedly kind t' me, I says dat fo' him, and nev' did fault his vituals. Allers so proud er my cookin' w'en we all has a festival or a log rollin'! Yes'm, we did give a festival onct an' made ten dollars." Perhaps I should explain that negro festivals purely private affairs, wherein hospitality is exercised at a profit, instead of expense, since the thrifty host sells the refreshments, after which there is dancing at the less pious houses and games at the houses of the "professors."

At log rollings, however, the dinner is provided by the host. The log rollers clear the ground of felled trees, which they collect in heaps for burning.

As Victory's memory recalled the

days of her past domestic joys and so-cial triumphs, we could see that she was

Year m, Lige nev did give me ha'sh so she continued, rocking her supple body to and fro, "onlies' ting I have agin his behavior, den, ben he did be so fond er coon an' possum huntin'. Mos' de onlies time I ever given him a pintblank hard time ben de time he 'sisted on gwine 'possum huntin' an' whilst he ben gone dat boy, my fustis chile, ben bawn, Oh! I tell ye, Lige he was struck by dat. He did jes cry out loud; an' he name dat baby Remorse, he did, kase t' bar 'im in mine allus, an' he didn't go 'possum huntin' fo' a terrible long spell, not twell I say I kinder cravin' 'possum meat, myself. Oh, he did ben a good man t' me. I'se sorter highstrung an' feery an' w'en de stove didn't bake right, or it rain, wash day, or my fingers git so numb pickin cotton dat I caynt sew like I uster, why, I does be sorter ill like; but, laws, he jes laff an coax it outer me. Den de torrer two chillen Her face changed and come an' die." quivered. "He ben mighty kind to me, dem times," she said. For a little space she was silent, then with a pe hardening of her mellow voice she went

'We got on fine fo' a spell. Me an' Lige, we uns done been raised by white folks—we ain't no niggers. We done wuk hyard an' 'sess a heap o' goods, an' live so happy an' feels so proudbiggoty, jes' hones' proud—twell—My Lawd!" a look of anguish keen enough hones' proud-twell-My to startle us came over her face while the swift flow of her words was broken by a sudden sob, and she covered her face with her hands and screamed, "Oh, my Lawd, he lef me! He done taken up wid a nigger 'oman!"

Then, just as suddenly, she lifted her head, dried her eyes and said: "But bye'm by Lige he got tired o' her. He ben raised by white folks, an' he come a beggin' back to me to take 'im in!'

'And you took him back?" asked Mrs. Temple, The sphinx-like head was reared again with indescribable pride. Victory's grandfather was an African prince, she told us once, and I can well believe her "Miss Temple, I taken him back! Me

ben raised by white folk. He leff me fo' a black nigger; I never take him

"But dow did he happen to do such a

wicked thing?" said Kate Temple.
"How I know?" sullenly; "she live down de ribber, whar he go 'possum huntin', an' she gaily young thing an'an' dey call her mighty harnsome; an', some way, she 'tice him off. He been too shamed come nigh me; but he sen!

wud dat ne give me de truck in de house an' de mules an' ever'ting, cep' only hundred dollars he have at de sto'. An' so he light out. But he nev' did get no satisfaction livin' wid her. She cudn't no mo' cook a meal o' vituals dan she cud match me pickin' cotton, an' she taken t' goin' on mighty bad torrer niggers; so dey pahted an Lige came straight t' me. Mist' Thompson, he say Lige done make sighty sho' he git me. The Lighty sho' he git me.

I somehow inferred from her conscious air that Thompson was the other man in the case. I asked her, and she admitted that he was; "he was a mighty pleasant, good man," a preacher with a gift for prayer, and all the sisters admired him. I said:-"But didn't it ever occur to you, Victory, that Mr. Thompson might be prejudiced witness against Lige?

'How dat, Missy?" "He wants to marry you himself. you know; mightn't he tell lies about Lige?"

'No'm. He's a plumb good man. Dar aint no such prayin' like hisn in the kentry. He done hab a revival er 'li-

gion sence he come."

"But hasn't he another wife somewhere?" said Kate, who has cynical notions about negro pastors.

"Dat jes' Reme's meanness!" declared Aunt Victory vehemently. "Brer' Thompson swar t' me dat jes de talk o dem ornery, pusillanimous niggers in Dogtown, dat wudn't give nuffin t' de chu'ch. Me an' Reme, we give \$5. Dat Reme, he is a good boy, but I'se consarned baout him, kase he won't go t' meetins nur t' chu'ch nur nuffin, and says dat Mist' Thompson aint a mor'l man. He is prejdeeced, dat all, Mist' Temple. Dat story 'bout Sal Miller aint got wud o truff in it. She got t' swar dat ar baby on somebuddy, an' so she taken po' Brer' Thompson dat aint skacely pahted lips wid her. He say he skacely seen her. Aint nare critter 'cept Reme Sanders does believe it. An' he believe anything on earth agin Brer' Thompson. knows Reme; he jes aimin' de plumb wile; git me take his paw back!"

"But could you? Would he come?" said my artful friend.

Victory's great eyes flashed? "He does come ev'ry month, ober t' see me from Newport, in de cyars, an' walk out six mile, fo' seben months pleadin' wid me!" said Victory, "look like he aint

"Dont you think you could forgive him?"

Victory's handsome face hardened again. De fust time I say t' him: 'Lige Sanders, I aint gwine to take you back fo' my husband twell de sun drop! You git outer my house! Dat how I talk t' him. An' he go off mighty down, wid Nex' time, I says: 'I don't want no wuds wid ye, Mist' Sanders.' But I let him come in speak wid Reme, kase he did set a heap o' store on Reme an' Reme on him. An byme by he got t' Hayin longer av den Reme wud hab son says he make his braggs or dat, say I ben turning my mind t' him. Det rile,me. But delas' time w'n he come, he done shaved his beard an' look so like de Lige I married dat"-she flung out a clinched hand to strike her breast furiously—"something hot come up, dar, mindin' me o' all dem times t'gedder an' de li'le dead chillen an' all, an' ben

fair choked. So I hilt my haid mighty boyish like, an marched outer house, nev passin a wud wid him.
An' de next dey I done rent de house t' Br'er Thompson to him an' norrer culled man wot batches (meaning they were both bachelors.) t'gedder, t' keep twell I come back, an' I drawed out my money dat I got leff t' de sto'; an, I come on yere. I done prommus Mist' Thompson I git a divorcement from

"And promised him, I daresay to marry him afterwards, said I.

But Victory drew herself up, proudly, "No'm, I doesn't go so easy. I only done prommus git divorcement fum Lige. I show Lige I don't nebber furgive him!"

We both surmised that it was more anger against the erring Lige than love for Thompson (whom we unreasonably disliked) that was at the bottom of Victory's motives.

From this time our sympathies were entirely with the husband. Reme clared that Thompson stole his mother's money. He knew about the hiding "She wouldn't tell me where she place. "She wouldn't tell me where she hid it," says Reme with indignation, but she owned up she told him.

There had been suspicions of Thompson, it appeared, in regard to some church moneys that were in his hands. Oh, yes, Reme, admitted, he had paid the money back, but not until they had lost their little hoard.

"I know maw, she sets store by paw, still," said Reme, "but this fellow talks so smooth he's fairly bewitched her. I did write to paw where we ben, and I'm hopin' he'll git round. I sent him all the money maw let me keep outer my wages and my grips."

The grips, I suppose, were Reme's tips, which he received on various occa-

Maw'll git her divorcement in two weeks she says," Reme went on gloomily, "and she lowate go back t' the country right straight, but I ain't going with her if you will keep me."

Reme's prediction came true. With a profusion of thanks for our kindness, Victory gave us warning. She was go ing back in three weeks to her own house. We couldn't complain as far as we were concerned, especially as she had

nunted up a new cook of great girts in sauces and salads (according to her former employer), neat, industrious, in-deed lacking little of perfection except a

good temper. Reme, on this official confirmation, as it were, of his fears, became a walking statue of gloom. It was at this period that he broke a Royal Worcester plate and three cut glass wine glasses, all of which, of course, just slipped from his books while hear wasn't doing nothing."

His misery over the wreck was such

that Kate hadn't the heart to scold him. He came to us later, and begged Kate not to take any money out of his wages,

due the next day.
"Maw, she sayd you'd keep 'most all,' he whimpered, "cause there the nicest kind of dishes and costs a terrible sight, she says. But if you'd please not this month, I'll sure work for you, all next

month." Kate reassured him. going to take his money, but why was he so anxious to have the wages this

Then Reme confessed that his father was in town, and so was Mr. Thompson.

"And Thompson, he's all fixed up, cried Reme, "out of our money. In a black preacher coat and a silk hat. Oh, he looks nighty fine. But paw does look pint blank ghastly. You see, Mrs. Temple, he did ben sick ever since he went home the last time, and the house where he ben burned down and he lost his good clothes and ever' cent er money, and now he's come here, all ragged, aimin' to git some work and some clothes and make it up to maw. And I don't want maw it' see him all in his rags, and Thompson strutting round in his high So I was reckoning I'd buy him some clothes."

We sympathized with Reme, but, as it turned out; our sympathy came to

Either Victory's lawyer got the divorce sooner than expected, or Victory, herself, found the money sooner; anyhow, a few evenings later Kate came to me to say that Thompson was calling on Victory. I at once wanted to look at a new experiment in puddings, left in the "cold closet," to reach which one must pass through the kitchen.

True enough, there sat a smug-faced, six-foot negro, gleaning all over in a black broadcloth, with a gorgeous gold watch and chain and dazzling linen. Victory would not let us pass without

introducing him. It was at this moment that there came

a timid kind of half hearted knock at the door.

Victory opened it and absolutely stag-gered back. "My Lawd! Lige!" she screamed, "whut's got ye!" Lige, indeed it was, and a forlorner

spectacle than he presented is difficult to picture. He looked sick and wretched, and his clothes were no better than rags. What a contrast to the resplendent Thompson!
"Yes, Vict'ry, it's me," said poor Lige,

"I know I aint fit t' come t' see ye in such cloes, but I did wanter see ye so

All Victory said was, "Mymy! mymy!

By this time-for half unconsciously Victory had opened the door-Lige had shambled into the circle of light. He saw Thompson. As if by magic his humility was rent from him, his limp form straightened, head erect and eyes burning, he shook his fist at the preach-

"You black nigger! is you darin' come twixt me an' my wife?"

Mandy, who was on the other side of

the table, an admiring listener to Brother Thompson's elequence, jumped up with a scream.
"You hush!" said Victory quietly, "he

won't do no hyarm!" She turned herself to Lige with actual dignity. "Who you talkin' 'bout, Mist' Sanders? Not me. I ain't no wife er yourn. I got my bill o' divorcement dis very day.

eyes. "Anyhow, she ain't aimin' to de herself to a low down, trampin' niggar like you," said Thompson, from his glistening height of broadcloth. "Miss Vict'ry lows t' become the bride of a gentlemen in the profession—" A swift blow from Lige's fist knocked

the rest of the sentence out of time, Like a tiger Lige flew at the white shirt bosom and the gorgeous watch-chain. But, weakened by illness he was no match for the brawny preacher, who knocked him half across the kitchen. Mandy tittered

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Temple, "Victory!

Heeding her no more than the wind, bleeding but undismayed, as Lige, bleeding but undismayed, dashed again at Thompson, Victory her-self flung the dish towel tight over Thompson's unsuspecting head, pulling from behind with such force and fury that, thus harassed in the rear, he made a misstep and all three went down together under Lige's onslaught.

"Git you' razor, Lige!" shrieked Victory. "You let my husband 'lone or he cut you wid a razor?"

I believe that it was quite as much the bewildering effect of Victory's conduct as Mrs. Temple's commands that sent a calm on the turmoil.

Thompson crawled to his feet and glared at Lige, also on his feet, flourishing a razor, while Victory panted, supporting herself by the table, and Mandy called on the police out of the dining-room door, as if they were hidden us-

Reme's appearance at this moment rather helped the confusion, since he supposed the house to be afire, and ran to the water faucets.

"What does all this mean, Victory?" Kate demanded, as soon as she had sup-

pressed Mandy.
"Hit mean dat I ain't gwine hab no black niggersass my husband!" answered Victory. "Mist' Thompson, sah, I bids you good-day, fo' eber mo'. An' I b'hebes ever' word in me tell no

I shall have to ask you to leave, too,"

added Kate. In vain Thompson begged Victory to think of the past and her promises.

"I didn't prommuse you nary," cried Victory in high wrath; "I nev' sayd like I'd marry you, I sayd I'd git a divorcement fum Lige; an' a big fool I ben t' de it; but I done it."

"Maybe," snarled the goaded Thompson, "you didn't prommus you'd never take Lige Sanders fo' your husband—"

"Well, I ain't taken him back," came the reply with a toss of Victory's head and a roll of Victory's eyeballs. "Fo de Lawd, I gwine marry him fresh, and Dat what I gwine do?"

"Lawd bress you, Victory," cried Lige, "I sho' did reckon you turn me loose, w'en ye see me in dem po' ragged closs an' him so fat an' sassy

Yes, on de money he stole from us!" shouted Reme, who was for having his oar in the matter.

"Lige, you a fool sho'!" retorted Victory; "ain't I jes' ben' had my hairt turned t' ye longer dem po' cloes de minnit I seen ye, ye did look so distressid! An' w'en he begun a pickin' on ye, looked like I cudn't bar de sight er him."

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"Oh! laws. Vict'ry!" gasped Lige. Thompson gave his former mistress a murderous glance; but he fished his hat from under the table and, muttering a kind of apology to Mrs. Temple, went

out with Mandy.
Perhaps Mandy consoled him.

There is nothing more to say except that on the following Wednesday Aunt Victory baked her own wedding cake.

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