

"OLD BLACK JO."

BY AGNES HAMPTON, IN "ST. JOSEPH'S ADVOCATE."

Uncle Jo's picture gallery was a wonder to the neighbors around the settlement at Wilson's Cross-Roads, and many an hour was spent by the children from the "big house" reveling in the bright colors and wonderful scenes portrayed on the grimy walls of the old log-cabin.

Jo was not born a slave, but he had married one of Colonel Wilson's slaves, a bright, pretty mulatto woman, a housemaid and seamstress, and her master had given them a cabin on the roadside, separated from the family mansion only by the lawn and orchard. Here they lived very happily, surrounded by their merry, romping family of little ones, who kept the mother's hands full of work and rarely ever left her a whole day to spare for her master's house, where little was required of her except an occasional helping hand at very busy seasons.

The cabin originally consisted of one large square room, built of logs, neatly chinked with plaster to keep out the wind, and having a rude, old-fashioned fireplace opposite the entrance; but Jo, who was something of a carpenter, indeed a "Jack-of-all-trades," obtained permission to build an addition in the shape of a long, low shed, which, with the help of his thrifty partner, he made quite profitable; for it was often used by teamsters and peddlars as a lodging-house, and Nancy, Jo's wife, served them very palatable meals. The cabin, being on the roadside, afforded a convenient stopping-place for travelers, who, in the olden times of which we speak, were very numerous, all the hauling and traveling being done by private conveyance. Many a jolly crowd collected at the wayside house on long winter nights, in preference to camping out, as is so frequently done even to this day in some parts of the Southern States; and very often a lone peddler with his pack would seek the comfortable shelter of Uncle Jo's long shed.

By degrees the itinerants came to know of the old man's fondness for pictures, and then rarely a peddler passed that way without having a contribution for his art gallery. There was no end of variety in the collection; there were fruit and flower maidens with rosy cheeks and cherry lips; there were bedaubed Indian warriors and their dusky squaws; there were landscapes with wonderful perspective and gorgeous coloring; there were stately portraits of Washington and Jackson, and other celebrities dear to the patriotic American, and there were Biblical prints without number; but the gems of the collection were, strange to relate, pictures of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Sacred Heart of Mary. These two prints were very highly colored, and being encased in gilded frames, occupied the place of honor and of light opposite the entrance.

When we remember that the only light admitted into this primitive picture-gallery came through the doorway exactly opposite these two pictures, it is easy to see how very conspicuous was the position they occupied; and it was no wonder that little Florence Wilson, in her many stolen visits to Nancy's dingy cabin, should have spent hours gazing up into those sweet faces, and talking to the "booful lady" and the "booful man."

II.

One day Uncle Jo came in and found the child standing in front of the pictures, gazing earnestly at them, and she asked him who they were.

Jo replied: "Ole Jake de Irish peddler, he hung 'em here, an' he tole me one was de Lord, an' t'other was de Lord's Mother."

"But why do their hearts show, Uncle Jo?"

"Little missy," said he, scratching his head slowly and wagging it in a meditative way, "I doan' jakeky understand dat mysep; but Jakeky I can't hep showin' o' da'ir hearts. But ain't dey sweet do', little missy? De eyes ob Jesus seem to look right fro' yo' heart, and de eyes ob Mary seem to say: 'Jo be good an' min' my Son.'"

"Jesus and Mary," said little Florence in a curious whisper. Then she added abruptly: "Uncle Jo, is that the Virgin Mary?"

"Honey, I spee' it's de same pusson, for Jake he said de 'bressed Virgin Mary,' an' I reckon da'ir nebbber was but one; anyways, da'ir nebbber was one like her, an' she was de Lord's Mother, yo' see she must er bin 'bressed.'"

"Uncle Jo, if that is the Virgin Mary yo' oughtn't to have her hangin' up here, for Mr. Miller, our Minister, said the other day that Papists worship the Virgin Mary, and she is a brazen image, and he said the Bible says yo' shall not have brazen images."

"Laws, honey, don' you go lisnin' to dem preachers what talks sich nonsense at dat. Now da'ir's a picture I would say was a brazen image; here he struck quite a pugilistic attitude, as he pointed out a copper-colored maiden with very scanty clothing, which obnoxious print was pasted up in a dark corner; "but I jes' dar' any body to call my Mother of the Lord a brazen image;" here seeing the frightened look on the little girl's face, he added more gently: "Little missy, I hope yo' ain't a gwine to let any ob dem posky preachers skeer you out ob lubbin' de Virgin Mary, de Bressed Virgin, as Jake calls her."

Little Florence was only six years

old, but she had already outgrown her baby talk, and was very demure and thoughtful for her age. The earnest expressions of the old man raised quite a tumult in her little heart. With the keen intuition of childhood, she quickly recognized that Uncle Jo and Jake certainly had the best of the argument; but then they were both poor and ignorant, whereas Mr. Miller must be very right and smart. Children judge from appearances, and she knew that the minister was always well dressed, he spoke in a measured tone, and he said such fine prayers and preached such wise sermons that she could not keep awake to listen to them. When he dined with her father, everybody seemed very solemn, the blessing was so long and dinner so stately that Florence had long ago concluded that Mr. Miller must be a high and mighty personage. And she remembered hearing this great man talk one day in scornful tones of "papists and the Virgin Mary." He surely must know, and yet—and yet—well, the end of her reverie was that, shaking her curls out of her eyes with a little defiant gesture, she said:

"Uncle Jo please lift me up. I want to kiss Jesus and His Mother, 'cause I know He couldn't be such a bad Boy as not to want me to love His Mother; and I don't care what Mr. Miller says, I intend to love the Virgin Mary."

Then, from her perch on the old man's shoulder, she solemnly kissed the pictured lips, stroking the painted cheeks lovingly, as she had done many a time before. Just then her attention was diverted by the shrill laughter of her little brother, who had harnessed three of Jo's pickaninies into a tandem team and was careering wildly around the outside of the cabin in a small wagon, drawn by his willing steeds, which he enjoyed the sport as much as he did. Florence was so amused by the sight of Charlie's fun that she forgot all about the trouble perplexing her brain, and joined in the play until, suddenly remembering that her mother would be uneasy about them, she coaxed the little fellow to return home with her.

This was one of her last visits to Uncle Jo's cabin, for soon after that she commenced going to school, and later on she made a long visit to her grandmother in Maryland; then came a few years at boarding-school, and by the time she was ready to graduate, her father had given up his home in the country and moved to a small town about fifteen miles from Wilson's Cross-Roads.

III.

The removal of Colonel Wilson was a great misfortune to Uncle Jo. The old man was partially crippled by an accident which had befallen him in his youth, and he had enjoyed an exceptionally easy place under the indulgent rule of his wife's master. He had been a privileged character—cultivating a small kitchen-garden of his own, and spending the greater part of the day snoozing in the sun to make up for his hours of prowling about at night.

His peccadilloes were well known to Colonel Wilson's family, who looked upon them as nothing more than innocent jokes; and it was a sad day for the poor old man when his domain fell under the sway of a more exacting landlord. Now that his faithful Nancy was dead, he clung with strange tenacity to his old log-cabin, allowing his children to accompany their master to his new home. The habit which had become so long winked at had become a second nature to him, and he was continually getting into trouble. Finally landed in prison, and being unable to pay the heavy penalties incurred by his constant transgressions, he came to be looked upon as a life-long inmate of the county jail. His oldest daughter, a very good girl named Amanda, obtained permission of Colonel Wilson to pay her poor old father periodical visits, ministering to his wants, carrying him clean clothing and dressing his old wound, which had become very sore and troublesome.

Colonel Wilson finally remonstrated with the authorities at the Cross-Roads, who replied that the only thing to be done was to "sell the old man to the highest bidder," when some one might be induced to buy him for charity's sake. He was actually sold at auction, and bought for the sum of one dollar by General Homes, a wealthy planter of the neighborhood, who gave him his freedom and advised him to leave Virginia. Making a small bundle of his most precious possessions, he set out for Washington city, the land of promise in those days for the poor freedman. Here was entirely lost sight of by his old friends, swallowed up in the turbulent stream of the stormy war times, until a sudden and unlooked-for message called Amanda to his dying-bed in Providence Hospital.

Meanwhile a strange grace had pursued the members of Colonel Wilson's household, drawing them one by one into the fold of Christ. Little Florence, now a beautiful woman of twenty years, after spending a few years of her girlhood in a convent boarding-school, had become a fervent Catholic. Her father had been attracted to the Church partly by his own researches, but more especially by the prayers and example of his idolized daughter. Amanda, Uncle Jo's devoted daughter, had followed the example of her young mistress, and was a good practical Catholic, zealously bringing up her younger sister and brother in the faith. Every day she prayed earnestly for the safety and conversion of her lost father, and her prayers were answered in a most wonderful manner.

IV.

It was a wild stormy evening in

March, and two Sisters of Charity were carefully picking their way homeward through the muddy streets of Washington, not the stately, cleanly capital of to-day, but the ugly, dirty, ill-lighted city of twenty-five years ago. The street traversed by the Sisters was in the suburbs; it was only partially paved, and the houses were of the meanest, poorest kind. As they neared the corner of the street, they found the pathway obstructed by a pile of bricks and building materials carelessly dumped on the sidewalk. This unlooked-for barrier obliged them to retrace their steps for some distance, for the street was so muddy that it was impossible to cross it except at the stepping-stones.

Just as they were passing an old tumble-down shed, more like a shelter for cattle than a human abode, the younger Sister paused suddenly and said:

"Hark! Sister Agatha, was not that a groan?" Both stopped and listened. A muffled groan as of some one in mortal anguish smote their ears. They looked at one another with paling faces. It was a perilous venture to go peering into that low, ruinous shelter; but again the weak sounds of distress pierced the silence.

"Sister, it is—it must be a human being in the last extremity. God pity him, we must try to save him."

Sister Agatha stooped and led the way, and by the waning twilight, which straggled in sickly rays through the broken shingles, she descried within the desolate shed a human form, so covered with rags and filth as to be almost hidden from view. The two good Samaritans, undismayed, looked around for some means of helping the sufferer; a few pieces of broken crockery were lying around, and with these they scraped away some of the dirt covering the poor creature, who, they found, was an old negro. Sister Agatha had in her pocket a small vial of spirits, and after pouring a few drops down the throat of the famishing man, she finally had the satisfaction of seeing him partially restored to consciousness. Making him as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, they went out and procured a conveyance to take him to the hospital.

The heroic work done by the Sisters in restoring this destitute creature to the semblance of decent humanity can be better imagined than described; suffice it to say, on the following morning Uncle Jo, for it was he, awoke in a clean, comfortable cot in the hospital ward. At first he thought he was in heaven, for the rest, the cleanliness, the light, cheerful surroundings, so positively luxurious to the poor, forsaken, friendless outcast. And lo! opposite the foot of his bed were the very pictures he had so loved and honored in the old log-cabin long ago, the Saviour, the same gentle, loving smile of His Mother. How strange that, after years of wretchedness and misery, the old man should come to rest at length beneath the gentle smile of those familiar faces!

He slept again, and in his dreams he was once more in the old log-cabin with his wife and little ones. The dusky figures from the pictures on the walls came down and greeted him as an old friend. Irish Jake, little Florence and Mr. Miller, one by one, glided through his vision. The dear Lord and His Mother left their stiff, gilded frames and sat at his firesides as honored guests; and as he gazed upon them, their faces became so radiant that his eyes were dazzled, and he awoke suddenly to find good Sister Agatha standing beside his cot.

Finding her patient unconscious, though now and then his thoughts grew strangely confused and wandering, the Sister managed to draw from him the name and address of his friends, and she had a message sent to his faithful daughter telling her of her father's condition. His days were evidently numbered. The good religious thought it well to lend his mind toward preparation for death; but here she met with unforeseen difficulty.

Uncle Jo listened with very little apparent interest to her suggestions; and when she asked him if he did not belong to some church, and if he would not like to see a minister, he replied that he did not know much about churches, but he hated ministers. A short time after he asked: "Does yo' minister lo' yo' hab dat picture ob de Mother of de Lord?"

Sister Agatha, very much astonished at the abrupt question, replied:

"An' does yo' 'ligion learn you to do like yo' do?"

"We try to live as our holy religion teaches, but none of us can ever be so perfect as our beautiful Model whom we try to follow."

"Who do you mean; who do you try to follow?"

"Jesus Christ, our dear Lord," she replied, reverently bowing her head at the holy name.

"Well," said he, after a long pause, "I'll jine yo' church, for de 'ligion dat kin make fine ladies be so good an' kin' to a po' miserable forsaken nigger like me, must be de Lord's yo' 'ligion. It's de kin' ob 'ligion for po' ole Jo."

And so it came to pass that when Amanda reached the great city and made her way to the hospital, she found her poor old father happier than he had ever been in his life. As he lay with his head propped up on the snowy pillows, a rosary twining about his long, bony fingers, and a scapular upon his breast, there was an unwonted light shining in his eyes and a great happiness beaming from his face.

"O father," she cried, "I am so glad to find you are a Catholic."

"Yes, chile, thank de good Lord,

who bring me right here to de very doors ob heaben, an' to de bressed feet ob Jesus and Mary to make my peace befo' I die. Thank de good Sisters who looked for me and foun' me po' an' starvin' an' dyin', an' lifted me up outen de pit of corruption and foted me to de berry Church ob God. Mandy, my chile, be good, be good."

He did not seem to think it strange that Amanda should be glad he was a Catholic. His mind was too feeble to grasp anything beyond the present, save when he wandered in dream-like fancies to the long-ago. Sometimes he would smile and say: "Little missy, don't yo' min' dem foolish preachers. Uncle Jo will lif' yo' up and let yo' kiss de bressed Virgin. Bress de chile's sweet little heart."

Toward evening he dozed awhile, holding Amanda's hand tightly clasped in his; then suddenly opening his eyes, he stared wildly about:

"Mandy, Mandy, my chile, fetch a light. I can't see my dear Lord and His Mother."

The poor girl bent sobbing over the glazed and sightless orbs, whispering:

"Father, dear, you will see them soon."

Then slipping upon her knees beside his bed, she commenced praying earnestly in simple words, repeating over again the names of Jesus and Mary, hoping that those blessed sounds might reach her old father's dulled senses.

There were two or three twitches of pain, a long-drawn breath, a peaceful smile, and the faithful watcher knew at last that the poor wanderer had reached his Father's house. The weary outcast was at rest forever, "neath the smile of his Blessed Mother, in the loving Heart of his Lord."

A Peanut Christian.

A well-known clergyman, now in the West, tells the following anecdote about his early experiences in the ministry: "I was fresh from the seminary," he says, "and had entered upon the duties of my first charge at a salary of \$500 a year. Never shall I forget the novel way in which one good brother of my church proposed to pay his part of my salary. 'This dear, good pillar of the Church kept a small country grocery, and one day, while making my pastoral calls I stepped into the establishment of my brother to inquire after his spiritual welfare. He motioned me to where he was seated, and after finishing his pipe of the vilest tobacco I ever smelled, began:

"'I ain't much good anyhow, parson, and don't deserve a very large share of the kingdom, but bless me if I don't want to do the square thing by you, so I'll contribute \$10, to be paid in peanuts."

"I took the first instalment and retreated soon after, wondering all the time what some of my young ministerial brethren would say to such a pastoral call."

At the Moment of Death.

Father F.W. Faber. Listen to this beautiful story from the revelations of St. Gertrude. She heard the preacher in a sermon urge most strongly the absolute obligation of dying persons to love God supremely, and to repent of their sins with true contrition founded on the motive of love. She thought it a hard saying, and exaggeratedly stated, and she murmured within herself that if so pure a love were needed, few died well, and a cloud came over her mind as she thought of this.

But God Himself vouchsafed to speak to her, and to dispel her trouble. He said that at the last conflict, if the dying were persons who had tried to please Him and to lead good lives, He disclosed Himself to them so infinitely beautiful and desirable that love of Him penetrated into the innermost recesses of their souls, so that they then made acts of true contrition from the very force of their love for Him; "which propension of Mine," He vouchsafed to add "thus to visit them in that moment of death, I wish my elect to know, and I desire it to be preached and proclaimed that among My other mercies this also may have a special place in man's remembrance."

Milk-and-Water Catholics.

Some Catholics are weak enough to think that they rise in the estimation of their Protestant friends by professing indifference to the teaching of their Church. They aspire to be thought liberal, and they foolishly imagine that they cannot be liberal and Catholics at the same time. Hence they are guilty of disloyalty to the Church, and they endanger their salvation from unworthy motives that earn only contempt and ridicule, where they had expected commendation and applause. Protestants have too much common sense to allow themselves to be deceived in their estimate of disloyal Catholics.

"You milk-and-water Catholics," they say, "either believe in your Church or you do not. If you believe in her, you should submit to her teaching and not be ashamed to confess your submission to it. If you do not believe in her then it is unmanly and ignoble to hang on to her and call yourselves Catholics, when she throws you off and disowns you."

A Two-Strike.

The out-door household work in summer such as that of the summer-kitchen, washing and ironing, is a sort of wretchedness with many mishaps like burns and scalds. But Mr. Jno. Heinemann, Middle Amuna, Iowa, U. S. A., has found the true remedy. He says: "I scalded my leg with boiling water, and a sprained ankle at the same time. One bottle of St. Jacobs Oil promptly cured both." That doubles its value easily, and shows its great usefulness.

CHURCH MICE.

There is in every parish a class of critics who seem to devote all their leisure time to the censorship of others. The late Dr. Murray, of Maynooth, used to call them "church-mice," and denounce them as Pharisees who love to nibble at the character of their neighbors. Squeamishness is a good word to denote the extreme nicety in regard to the "proprieties," so peculiarly characteristic of these small-minded people and half-converted sinners. The "church mice," thinking, no doubt, that they will raise themselves immensely in the estimation of others, manage somehow to discover an impropriety in the most innocent words and actions of all with whom they come in contact. They manifest the most earnest zeal in guarding everybody from harm, even when there is scarcely a possibility of harm, and are wonderfully expert in seeing some unavowed motive in every word and action, which they at first suspect, then take for granted, then exaggerate to its fullest proportions and finally, on this for a foundation, build a huge structure of fears and insinuations, calculated to render the unsuspecting suspicious and even fearful of the innocent victim.

Non-Catholics and the silly members of the one fold are liable to be influenced by the hints and insinuations of these outwardly zealous and good people, but a reflecting mind cannot fail to see the shallowness of such self-asserting virtues and the pernicious consequences of the line of conduct based upon it. They are the enemies of true religion and practically ignore the charity which thinketh no evil. The "church mice" take an occasional nibble at the pastor, and with mock sympathy bewail his hard lot in life.

Let us look a little closer into the case of the "church mice." Is this extreme vigor (toward others) on the part of those squeamish individuals any evidence of unusual virtue in them? Decidedly no. Virtue is based upon truth. But the one who finds fault with an innocent action or word, as if it were something bad, does what he can to make others believe that what is innocent is bad. This is a deception—it is a falsehood acted out, and snaps the very foundations of virtue. As a general thing, also, those over-particular censors of the conduct of others are not a particle better than their neighbors, and in many cases are not as good as some of them; and by pretending to a stricter style of virtue they pretend to something they do not possess, and again try to deceive. They think falsehood, they breathe to speak falsehood, they are themselves a living falsehood.

There are two possible and opposite consequences to the conduct of the "church mice." First, if they fail to deceive others, if they are recognized for what they are, they win for themselves the just contempt of every right-minded person; this is the least deplorable of the two consequences. Secondly, if they succeed in deceiving others, if they can pass for exceedingly virtuous people, they will very likely exert an influence on some, making them believe the right is wrong and innocence crime, thus exposing them to incur guilt in many cases in which, were they properly taught, they would have acted an innocent part. This is really serious, and persons who wish to pass for "particularly good" should reflect upon the injury they are likely to do to others before they cry "bugaboo" at a smile or a pleasant joke. There is a standard of right and wrong pointed out by the great Author of Christianity, and every instructed conscience will see it readily, and the true course is: Do what is right and avoid what is wrong yourself, and use your influence to lead others to do likewise; but do not make yourself ridiculous and expose others to harm by trying to invent some excuse for calling that which is harmless sinful.

"Just as Good."

Say some dealers who try to sell a substitute preparation when a customer calls for Hood's Sarsaparilla. Do not allow any such false statements as this induce you to buy what you do not want. Remember that the only reason for making it is that a few cents more profit will be made on the substitute than on having the best medicine—Hood's Sarsaparilla. It is Peculiar to Itself.

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Dyspepsia

Few people have suffered more severely from dyspepsia than Mr. E. A. McMahon, a well known grocer of Staunton, Va. He says: "Before 1878 I was in excellent health, weighing over 200 pounds. In that year an ailment developed into acute dyspepsia, and soon I was reduced to 102 pounds, suffering burning sensations in the stomach, palpitation of the heart, nausea, and indigestion. I could not sleep, lost all heart in my work, had fits of melancholia, and for days at a time I would have welcomed death. I became morose, sullen and irritable, and for eight years life was a burden. I tried many physicians and many remedies. One day a workman employed by me suggested that I take Hood's Sarsaparilla, as it had cured his wife of dyspepsia. I did so, and before taking the whole of a bottle I began to feel like a new man. The terrible pain to which I had been subjected ceased, the palpitation of the heart subsided, my stomach became easier, nausea disappeared, and my entire system began to tone up. With returning strength came activity of mind and body. Before the fifth bottle was taken I had regained my former weight and natural condition. I am today well and I ascribe it to taking Hood's Sarsaparilla."

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8 Years

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