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THE *Atlantic*



WHAT DO THE STRIKES TEACH US? . Sumner H. Slichter

The strikes have cost us plenty. But what lessons have they taught us? What have government, the unions, and management learned about price-fixing? What will their attitude be when the present contracts must be renewed?

NEW AIDS FOR THE BLIND Paul A. Zahl

In anticipation of our casualties, early in the war a special committee of scientists went quietly to work on devices which were designed to relieve the darkness. Here are some of the results.

MY BOYHOOD IN A PARSONAGE . Thomas W. Lamont

His father was a Methodist minister, his happy hunting ground was the Hudson River valley, his allowance was 5¢ a week. The winning account of how one of our greatest financiers came up the American way.

AMERICA REMAKES THE UNIVERSITY . James B. Conant

The American university, says the President of Harvard, has broken away from the European model. If it keeps the balance between professional education and the general training of students, if it makes learning available for the best brains, regardless of family means, we shall have the leadership we need.

THE ATLANTIC REPORT on the WORLD TODAY

The Far East—London—The Middle East
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prove a sounder financial investment than many of his stocks and bonds, and at his death be an asset to his estate or a means of perpetuating his name as a museum donor.

But if the lag in public appreciation of pioneer artists cannot be shortened it can be compensated for. In France in 1920, a law known as *le Droit de suite* made a percentage of the receipts from all works of art sold at public auctions payable to the artist or his heirs. The percentage is on a sliding scale, beginning with one per cent on sales up to 10,000 francs and rising to three per cent on 50,000 francs and over. At the Gangnat sale in 1925, 225,000 francs went to the heirs of Renoir and Cézanne, 150,000 to Daumier's. The percentage might well be higher, for these sums represented a very small fraction of the spread be-

tween the original purchase price and the sale price of most of the pictures involved.

This French law is an innovation that should be duplicated in this country, with its scope enlarged to include private resales as well. The artist might then stand to benefit during his lifetime as his reputation became established and his work commanded higher prices. Such a law would in effect be an equivalent of copyright, which gives to authors and composers legal title to royalties over a long period.

Painters and sculptors have every right to some share in the profits which their genius makes possible. Every art patron should welcome the opportunity of contributing to such an effort, a necessary first step in aiding the artist in his struggle for economic security in the world of today.



OF SOUTHERN LADIES

by BRANCH CABELL

I

THAT, without any fear of succeeding, the intrepid native Virginian will dauntlessly attempt to conceal his superiority to everybody else remains a tribal virtue which has not escaped the comment of anthropologists. He treads among the commonalty of other commonwealths, it has been remarked, with the meticulous and maddening courtesy of M. le Duc upon a casual visit to the peasantry of this or the other of his minor estates. And yet not really for this Virginian version of politeness is any living Virginian who can remember when Grover Cleveland occupied the White House at all blameworthy. Rather is this an enforced trait which has been developed in the man's nature by two circumstances such as through no precautions could he have avoided.

The one circumstance is that throughout the first years of his life (during which his character was taking form, irretrievably) he was reared as a godling who could not, not even in the false teeth of parental reproof, be wrong as to anything. The second circumstance is that he knows there has been reserved for him in heaven a very special place.

In short, he once had a mammy.

With a forlorn sense of impotence, one pauses here to reflect that, nowadays, in no household anywhere

does one find an authentic mammy; so that whosoever speaks as to this vanished subdivision of fauna needs to depend upon a scant number of sexagenarians to divine exactly what he may be talking about. For the mammy, the true mammy, the mammy *au vieille roche*, is now extinct, along with the passenger pigeon and the bison and the hack driver; but in the Richmond of the 1880's a mammy still ruled over every household in which there were children.

So in no part of Richmond were mammies infrequent; but it was in Monroe Park that you noted them, upon clear afternoons, in full panoply. To every bench there would be two or three mammies; alongside most of the benches sprawled a baby carriage formed of rotund and elaborately betwisted wickerwork, of which the occupant was screened by a vividly blue veil; and whatever it was that mammies talked about, for some two hours, with a serene and Oriental indolence, between their slow outbursts of sedate Olympian chuckles, you did not ever hear, because you were playing, in common with a select number of yet other children, under the uncompromising surveillance of all these mammies. Any one of them, at any instant, might direct toward you the attention of Sister Nelson with an acerb shrillness. And besides that, when you played in Monroe Park, you had to be careful not ever, upon any imaginable pretext, to get your nice clean linen suit messed up; because otherwise you became just the most aggravating child that ever was.

A Virginian, born and bred in Richmond, BRANCH CABELL, the novelist and historian, is doing what every eloquent Southerner would like to do on reaching maturity: he is writing a book about his beloved country. In this essay he pays his tribute to certain Southern ladies in words that touch the heart.

These ladies wore white caps and large white aprons, befrilled proudly. They ran, rather, to stoutness; and to steel-rimmed spectacles they accorded a perceptible vogue. Each one of them was — legally, at any rate — a Negress. Each one of them some twenty years earlier had been a slave; but now they were tyrants. Not for one quarter instant would I suggest that their despotism was often, or indeed ever, unkindly. I mean merely that none dared to assail the authority of the mammies of Richmond within the borders of their several kingdoms; and that this was especially true of the parents who paid to each one of them ten dollars a month.

I grant that in every household — in order, it is my theory, to cajole into self-complacence the cook and the house girl — the children's mammy was ranked, through a jocose flight of fancy, as being one of the servants. For that, most precisely, is what a mammy was at no time whatever, except only upon the courteous principle by which a monarch elects, in state papers or in formal proclamations, to describe himself as being the servant of his people.

In brief, the mammy was a Virginian institution which, under the encroachments of democracy, has vanished; she survives only in the heart's core of her fosterlings; and she is not comprehensible any longer except by those who have need to remember her forever. The children of Virginia, so nearly as I can understand their unhappy estate, are looked after nowadays, more or less, by a visitant duchess, more or less Negroid, who stays with them for as long as the job contents her; and who passes on by-and-by to another nursery somewhere else. Her place is then filled, for a month or it may be for two months, by some other nomad; and later, by yet another. Thus Amurath to Amurath succeeds, barbarically. It must be, for these luckless children, rather like living in a world which every once in a while shoots off into space and finds an alien sun about which to revolve. It is, at any rate, a state of affairs which does not bear thinking about, by us who once had a mammy.

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AND so, while in theory I would like for a fair number of these children to be dealt with competently by Mrs. Louisa Nelson, yet to the other side Mrs. Nelson was my mammy; and she was by me regarded with an affection which, during some sixty years of research work, I have not found any other person to merit. Were she alive today, I with an incivic stoicism would observe every brat upon earth in transit to a state reformatory rather than permit Mrs. Nelson to leave me. For she was my mammy once, now, and forever afterward; so that I must decline, even in thought, to be severed from her by the dictates of altruism.

Although, of course, she had not always been Mrs. Nelson. In fact, at the beginning, which was about 1820, she was just Louisa, when she belonged to Miss

Patsy Brander. She was Miss Patsy's own colored girl; and every night she used to sleep in old Miss Patsy's room, in the trundle bed which enduring the day you stuck under Miss Patsy's big bed. That was so you could wait on Miss Patsy Brander, in case she wanted something, or if Miss Patsy got took sick in the night. She did, right often. And so Miss Patsy had a little stepladder to get in and out of bed with.

All this was sort of before Mammy had married up with Mr. Cornelius Winston, who belonged to Miss Patsy too; and he was mighty handsome. He was always pleasant spoken. He toted fair with the high and the low. He was a fine good man. Mr. Winston was just the finest man that anybody ever knew. So he and Mammy were real happy together in those bad old slavery times; and their daughter was named Kizzy. But Miss Patsy Brander up and died; and when her ownings got settled, Mr. Cornelius Winston was sold off to be the head butler for a white gentleman that fancied him a heap, out West.

That was why Mammy did not ever see Mr. Winston again until after The War. He came back to her then, to find out how she and Kizzy were getting along; and he and Mr. Solomon Simms liked each other very much.

Mr. Solomon Simms was the other gentleman that Mammy was married to by this time. And Mr. Winston had married up too, to a colored lady in Kentucky. So he brought her picture along with him, and a picture of both the children, to let Mammy see what his family looked like. Mr. Winston was always mighty thoughtful. They were nice enough children; they took after Mr. Winston, you could tell that right off. The boy was his very living spit and image. But if you wanted an honest and true to God opinion, that fat, greasy-mouthed colored woman was kind of ornery looking. Anyhow, Mr. Winston and Mr. Simms got along fine; and Mr. Winston stayed with them, out on the farm over in Powhatan County, for about two weeks.

After Mr. Winston went away, he sent back some presents for Kizzy, and along with them came a necklace of real coral beads for little Julia Simms, so as to keep her from having croup. Julia was Mammy's other daughter. You could always count on Mr. Winston to act handsome. And that was the last what Mammy ever heard about him. She sure would have liked to find out what did become of Mr. Winston, when she had his street address out in Kentucky too, where he was setting up at catering and waiting on white people's parties; but then she and Mr. Winston never could get around to learning just how to read and write, what with all the other things they had to do.

And presently Mr. Simms, that nebulous and, as one somehow felt, that rather shiftless farmer — concerning whom, to the best of your recollection, you at no time heard anything quite definite, except only his delight in being honored with a visit by Mr. Winston, his all-gifted predecessor — Mr. Solomon Simms of Powhatan took sick and died.

That was how Mammy came to marry Mr. Jeremiah Nelson, who was just as smart as you make them. He was right dark-complected, though.

Mr. Nelson was a city gentleman. He was born and brought up in Richmond. He had rooms upon St. James Street. He worked for the *Richmond Evening State*. He packed papers.

One imagines, nowadays, this must mean that Mr. Jeremiah Nelson used to tie up, with very shaggy brown string, and to deposit within the *State's* delivery wagons, those oblong bundles of printed matter which, later, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, when people were watering their front yards, and Mammy was wheeling John's baby carriage back home from Monroe Park, and you and Robert were walking alongside her, were flung out upon the red brick sidewalk, with an unforgettable massive slumping noise, and came pretty close to you sometimes, so that you held on to Mammy's skirts, while the enormous Percheron horse which drew the white-and-blue covered wagon continued its un-hurried trotting toward wherever it was going.

One is not certain. One does not even know upon what principle those big bundles of newspapers were flung out upon the pavement, or who took charge of them afterward. One knows only that Mr. Nelson packed papers for the *Richmond Evening State* until the final 1870's, which was when Mr. Jeremiah Nelson died.

And to the very last, let it be observed, Mr. Nelson acted with more force of character than was displayed by Mr. Solomon Simms, who, so far as it can be remembered, did not even die of anything in particular. But Mr. Jeremiah Nelson died of pneumonia, just like that, and almost before you could snap your fingers, along about three days after he caught a bad cold in a snowstorm; and it showed how careful you ought to be about not forgetting your rubbers.

That was why Mr. Nelson's widow decided to work out. She retained the rooms upon St. James Street. But she came to my parents when their first child was a month old, and when she was fifty-two, and she remained with us for the rest of her life.

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IT IS a trait to be dwelt upon, the fact that after some threescore years of existence, Mrs. Nelson came to us when she was fifty-two, because never during the time that one knew her did her age vary. She was fifty-two. If pressed as to this point, through any ignoble considerations of arithmetic, or if reminded, with an unmannerly precision, as to the unusual number of years throughout which she had stayed fifty-two, she would so far yield as to concede that anyhow she was about fifty-two. Beyond that, there was no budging her, not even in her most lenient moments.

Now, technically, Mrs. Louisa Nelson was a

Negress; but it is not conceivable that anybody ever said so in her presence, not even after she had become very deaf. She elected instead to rank as a colored person; and her color, to be precise, was the just not golden yellow of peanut butter. As to her parents it is not remembered that Mrs. Nelson ever spoke, but her features were unmistakably Indian; her eyes had the alert black gleam of undried ink; her nose hooked slightly; her lips were thin. She too was thin; and until she had passed eighty, a ramrod would have seemed, in comparison with Mrs. Nelson, to be liquescent. Upon her flat left breast, except only when she visited Monroe Park, or during yet more stately occasions which called for an appearance in her black silk dress, she wore two or three needles with thread in them; she had wholly beautiful white crinkly hair; and she smelled very pleasantly with an indefinable odor which I can but describe as that of musk mingled with cloth.

She must have had Negro blood, but in her exterior there was not any trace of it. She most certainly had a great deal of Caucasian blood; and one imagines that every drop of it was aristocratic. Mrs. Nelson, in any case, was.

She likewise was that patron saint who performed miracles for your comfort tirelessly; and who served as an efficient mediator between you and powers which (in academic theory) were stronger than Mrs. Nelson, such as unfamiliar policemen and God and large dogs and your parents. Parents were well enough in their place, and you loved both of them; but, relatively, their place was remote; and in it they now and then were engaged, with an irresponsible graveness, by grown-up affairs in which you were not interested.

Mrs. Nelson had no such frivolous avocations: to her children (a heading under which she did not include Julia and Kizzy, or any of Kizzy's descendants, but which meant your two brothers and you) she devoted twenty-four hours of each day — excluding only her Sunday afternoons and her Thursday evenings out. She went then to her rooms upon St. James Street. She was Head of the Sub-ordinate Department of the Tents of Ham and the Daughters of David; and upon St. James Street the members of this organization were accustomed to confer with Sister Nelson as to matters which she could not talk to you about, because they were Lodge secrets.

You did not mind the Sunday afternoons, when company came in, or else you went out with your parents somewhere and were allowed to be company yourself, and to let people see your raising, just as Mrs. Nelson had told you to do. But Thursday evenings were lonesome, after you had gone to bed, and the gas jet out in the hall had been turned down, and when both your brothers were asleep. Robert talked in his sleep a great deal, but that was not any help. As you remembered it afterward, there was always a soft-coal fire in the room upon those long

Thursday evenings; and this made the shadow of the mantelpiece, upon the wall above it, jump every which way, like a big black chained-up Something that was trying to get loose with no friendly intentions.

So you did not ever quite fall asleep until after Mrs. Nelson came in at twenty minutes after eleven. She said that you ought to have been asleep long ago. She asked if you children had been good children, and not kept everything in a swivet the first minute her back was turned. She brought you a glass of water, because you said you were sort of thirsty. That was so you could touch her. Then she got into her bed, which was next to your bed; and you went to sleep in less than no time, because everything was all right, now that Mammy was back.

So long as Mrs. Nelson stayed near you, all matters tended to straighten themselves out satisfactorily. Even when you were sick-in-bed (for until you were at least ten years old you thought of this condition as being one word), she saw to it that you were not very sick, and had a plenty of boiled custard, and in fact, rather enjoyed yourself. But she remained rigid. She was not touched to the quick, nor did she condole, when you were sick-in-bed. It was her official attitude upon all such occasions that you were just upsetting the house from top to bottom by being sick-in-bed. For there was not anywhere one minim of tenderness in Mrs. Nelson's nature, nor any reasonableness either, but only an unlimited devotion to her children.

So did it follow that at all times her ideas as to corporal punishment stayed sound and unshakable. To begin with, she did not ever concede that in any circumstances any one of her children had been bad; at utmost, the small accused might have been, it was allowed fair-mindedly, sort of mischeevous, but then, good Lord, what child would not be, when folks started in to upset him like that without attending to their own business? Through this dashing gambit, any parentally discussed punishment, instead of figuring as the result of a misdemeanor, was left unmasked as the true cause of it. The child had been mischeevous because folks who were more than twice as big, and who did not know how to keep their temper, had started in to spank him, and what child, what child anywhere upon this earth, would not be? That, and that alone, was just simply what the indignant dark lawyer for the defense wanted to ask of Dr. Cabell and Miss Annie; and did ask, freezingly.

Moreover, should the incriminated parent remain deaf to remorse, then promptly the exposed rear of the condemned was shielded by both of Mrs. Nelson's lean and wiry, peanut-butter-colored hands. Nor from this strategic position was she detachable. So the foiled parent, or it might be both parents, withdrew. And Mrs. Nelson, triumphant but still icily offended, began to speak as to the convenience and the accessibility of her rooms upon St. James Street.

Throughout twenty-five years these rooms re-

mained the weapon which made her always, at the last pinch, invincible. For Mrs. Nelson did not have to stay where folks did not like her ways. She did not intend to go on slaving where people were not satisfied. And so, about once every month, we learned that she was going back home, the very first thing tomorrow morning, to live in her rooms over on St. James Street without being stormed at and fussed with enough to run anybody clean crazy.

I do not think that at any time she had the least intention of doing this. But the knowledge that she, after all, was free to desert us for those rooms upon St. James Street kept every one of her dependents in a proper state of subjection throughout the quarter of a century. For Mrs. Nelson, of course, like all other authentic mammies, after her children had become too old to require a nurse, retained an anonymous ranking as a general assistant in our household affairs — and, at need, as their autocrat. In title, to be sure, she remained Mammy. But so far as went her indoor pursuits, she merely swept, and dusted, and sewed, and excelled in darning, and delighted to wait at table in her black silk dress whensoever we had company. She tended the ill; she now and then cooked meals, but only when a creative urge to cook was upon her; and she “laundered” — if that verb be still in current usage — with a perfection which to the present age is unknown. In fine, Mrs. Nelson, after her actual retirement as a mammy, did everything; but always, it must be recorded, upon her own terms.

Which reminds me to record likewise that Mrs. Nelson, what with all the other things she had to do, still did not ever quite get around to learning just how to read and write. So she remained unfamiliar with novels as to the South of yesterday, and she did not ever hear about any mammies who termed their children “my precious lamb,” or “my own baby,” or “honey chile,” or yet something else of a nature no less affectionate than revolting. I am rather glad of this fact: for in Mrs. Nelson's eyes, these graceless if not actively immoral women would have ceased forthwith to be colored ladies; and in a brief philippic they would have been dismissed, I am wholly certain, as niggers who were just plumb idiots.

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SO THEN did the fourth part of a century pass by without forcing us to conceive of a life without Mrs. Nelson, or to face the notion of any existence thus maimed and bone-bare. Nor did we, until her death, when she was about eighty-five, had left us no choice; and for my part, it is a notion to which, after forty-and-some years of deliberation, I have not as yet become reconciled.

It should be recorded that upon the last day of her life she told the attendant physician she was fifty-two; as well as that, upon this same heart-breaking Sunday, when she was not permitted to leave her

bed, she assured me that, the very first moment she got over this sort of sinking spell, she meant to go straight spang back to her own rooms over on St. James Street, and not be a bother to us, when once she was out of this bed, praise the Lord.

Because it was getting right far past the time for her trundle bed to be pushed under Miss Patsy's big bed. And that was why she was trying to get up, Mrs. Nelson explained. She just had to get up. So please be good kind folks and let her get out of bed.

She, who had been indomitable, now spoke half timidly. She did not know anyone of us. In her last thoughts we figured as unfamiliar — and it might be cruel — white persons who were interfering with the proper duties of Miss Patsy Brander's own colored girl, under the presidency of Andrew Jackson, now that Mrs. Nelson had put out of mind those twenty-five years of tyrannic devotion which she had given to us, "her children," and of which no mortal that ever lived could hope to be worthy. She had forgotten about Julia, and about Kizzy, and about her three husbands, even Mr. Cornelius Winston. With a child's fitful and half-hushed persistence, she repeated that Miss Patsy Brander wanted to have her room kept right enduring the daytime; and it was in this way that Mrs. Nelson left us, in an attempt to wait upon her first mistress, who had been buried for somewhat more than sixty years.

Almost at random I have set down these recollections, as to an illiterate and hard-headed and great-hearted Negress, just as I thought about them, and without any rearrangement or recoloring, because to my judgment Mrs. Nelson explains several generations of not humble-minded Virginians. Every one of these Virginians once had his mammy; by her he was taught, from infancy onward, to regard himself as an all-superior person; by her he was spoiled, completely and forever; and by her, as he very well foreknows, he by-and-by is going to be put in his right heavenly place, not unseverely, with an injunction, for the good Lord's sake, to behave himself now, and to let people see his raising.

In view of these circumstances, I submit, the aforesaid Virginian should not, in common reason, be required to affect any mock modesty. He is of the elect; he willy-nilly has been made a sophomore seraph; and for him to deny the fact would be a sacrilege.

For do you but consider the plight of my own generation. It is wholly certain that all those mammies who once foregathered in Monroe Park are now assembled in an eternally clear afternoon somewhere in heaven. It is just such a partly Hebraic and partly Baptist heaven as they expected, because God, if that were necessary, will have rebuilt it especially so as to prevent their being disappointed. But they will not be seated upon thrones unsociably. Instead, there will have been provided an infinity of broad benches, with room upon every one of them for three persons inclining toward stoutness; these benches will be molded of bright gold, I imagine; and they will be decorated suitably with all the gems which St. John mentions.

Nor will any one of these dark angels wear a long white robe such as, to a respectable colored person, could not but indecorously suggest nightgear. They instead will all wear black silk dresses of the very best quality, as well as befrilled caps and large aprons, and extra-large, loose golden slippers. And everywhere about them, but always under their uncompromising surveillance, will be frolicking obediently a throng of deceased Virginian lawyers and bankers and physicians and tobacconists and clergymen and, I daresay, a few convicts. For the fact has been explained to God, quite firmly, that while upon earth all these Virginians, at their very worst, were just sort of mischeevous.

So then do the mammies of the 1880's as yet talk lazily together forever and ever, between their slow benignant chuckles, while these blessed spirits await the complete return of their children. And eventually, some one or the other of them will be saying — without, I am afraid, any special enthusiasm: —

"Here he comes, Sis' Nelson."

Everything will be all right then.

