

## [A Florida Squatter Family]

26032 2389 [?]

A FLORIDA SQUATTER FAMILY

JASON AND LILY [?]

Jason's [?] beneath the huge old oak tree which sheltered his desolate two room house was disturbed. Finally [???] from sleep, [?], and lumbered toward the broken gate swinging in the [?] fence surrounding his clearing in the hammock.

“Come right in;, Ma'am. I haint had time to fix this here gate since I been a-livin here, [?] like. Don't pay no mind to them pigs a-sleepin on the steps, they'll run away soon'a they see a stranger. Kinder nice havin pigs in the yard, for they sho do clean up the scraps.

Sure enough, the pigs did run/ with loud squeals and grunts as I approached the door, and this so frightened several [?] chickens that 100 they flew out the front door with terrified squeaks.

As Jason [?] led me around the place of old tin cans, rags, bones, corn cobs, and other debris he spoke again. “I'm sorry, Ma'am, you find so much trash here. This yard been jus like this most ever almost [?] we come here but I jus haint had time to clean hit up.”

We reached the door and Jason yelled for his wife Lily. Receiving no response, he reached simply around the corner of the shack and [?] his twelve year old son [?] from his hiding place, shook him gently and [?] him to “find your [?] and tell her we got a visitor.

Three little girls, Rosy, Betty, and [Telly?], age eleven, nine, and eight, [?], quietly [?] around the corner of the house and 225

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[?] into the front room shortly after [?] entered. Jason was / [?] in praising them, but they seemed too shy to speak a word. Then in came Lily from the adjoining room with a babe in her arms and another tugging at her shirts. She smiled as she extended a limp hand in greeting. As there were no chairs in the room she indicated that I was to be [?] upon one of the beds while she sat upon the other with the two babies. Jason took the place of the pigs upon the step, and the older children ranged themselves upright and rigid against the wall.

The floor was greasy and grimed with dirt. There were 100 two rickety, lopsided beds with dirty covers. Three girls sleep cross-wise on one bed, [?] sleep on a [?] on the floor, and Jason, Lily, and the two youngest children sleep in the other bed. At the window openings were starched white curtains [?] of [??]. A broken [?] held an assortment of [?] medicine and odds and ends. A rough shelf leaning against the rear of the [?] supported a tin pan and rusty bucket. There was no toilet of any kind.

Jason was wearing a patched, faded, and dirty pair of blue denim overalls, and a faded and soiled blue shirt. Like Lily and all the children, he was barefoot. Lily's loose dress of feed-sacking, from which [?] most of the lettering had been bleached, was soiled too. Her hair was disordered and a dirty rag closely bound her head. Thin streams of snuff ran down from the corners of her mouth. She had a cold and frequently wiped her nose with a rag or the back of her hand. The baby began to cry and she gave it her breast to nurse.

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"I [?] have to talk for Lily as she is so deaf," Jason said. "We don't often have visitors. When strangers come while I'm gone Lily shuts the doors and winders and won't let em come in." He seemed proud of his family. "Me and Lily was both borned in Pasco County bout forty year ago. I don't rightly know how old Lily is, but I guess she's nigh as old as me. We got married some thirteen year ago and set out to find a likely spot to farm. Then we seen this place already built here in the hammock we jus lit and moved right in and been

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here over since-t. The roof leaks right smart 100 but hit's [?] to put [?] cane under the leaky places ifen hit rains hard.

“We don't need a larger house than this, hit suits us all right. One room for sleepin and another for cookin and eatin in. Some folks I know haint got but one room and they cooks out in the yard, but we got a fine stove which a man give me haulin hit away. An see them stiff curtains at the winders? A lady give them to Lily when the last baby was borned. She give Lily and the baby and the girls 200 each a nice dress too and me and [Tilly?] a shirt. Lily takes right good care em em washes and irons em when we go to Church and each like.

“I don't have to pay no rent neither. [?] a man did [?] here and say he owned this land and wanted [?] cabbages for rent. Now I believe that if a man haint [??] land, he hadn't order charge nobody else what [?] to use hit. But I give him the cabbages to git rid of him and haint seen him since-t.”

“What was the man's name?” I asked.

Jason looked surprised. “What's 300 the use to bother [?] that?” 304

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As a boy Jason helped his father with what farming he did, and both he and his father worked at any odd jobs that came to hand. They never had steady work. Jason attended school for three or four years and learned to read and write a little. Lily can neither read nor write; she did not go to school because of her ear and eye conditions.

The family arise with the sun because they have always done so. They follow no daily routine even as to meals, and can see no reason why anyone should. Jason works when the impulse moves him. If any 100 of them become tired or sleepy during the day they take a nap. Usually they retire at sundown.

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When I asked Jason about his farm he seemed rather embarrassed. He hesitantly pointed out the window to a small cabbage patch and explained that he hadn't had much time for farming lately and his family wouldn't eat much vegetables anyway. "There haint no sale for em, neither," he added. "Most everybody round here raises plenty."

He insisted that he was a farmer, and spoke of the time about two years ago when he sharecropped for a "wider-woman" in town. He received five gallons of cane syrup as 200 his share of the proceeds. Since that time he has been unable to find time to engage in sharecropping, he said. He was proud of the fact that he was one of these to whom the "Relief" had given seeds to plant several years ago.

"I didn't make much with that there garden," said Jason. "They jus wouldn't give me the kinda seeds I wanted. They jus warnt my kind of vegetables." 268

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Jason owns a dilapidated old automobile which he keeps under a thatched shed. When he needs a little cash, and no public work is available, he sometimes gathers or cuts wood which he piles into the back of his car, / and sells in the towns. Sometimes he can not even do this because he doesn't have gas for the car. "I don't work steady all the time. What's the use? When I gits enough to buy what we needs I don't want no more work noway for a time. I don't have time to work steady on the road; it hurts my arms, too. My wife bein so deaf I have [?] to stay to home and look after things."

He maintains that he does not allow his family to go hungry very often. He fishes, catches rabbits and [??], and gathers the [?] of the cabbage [?] which his whole family likes. They are very fond of "flour dough fried bread," which is made with flour and hog / grease stirred up with water and dropped by spoonful into hot grease. If the flour is self-rising, or if there is baking powder in the house, so much the better, for then the fried bread is crisp.

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“One time whilst I was workin on the Relief a lady come to tell us 200 what to buy and how to cook hit. Now that made me and Lily mighty mad! How did that woman know what we wanted to eat? Jus give us plenty grease, salt pork, a little cabbage, stewed apples, and flour dough fried bread and we is satisfied. Our childrens likes such too. Even that there Little [?] jus bout a year old, she sure likes the bread. When she starts a-cryin, Lily, she will take a piece of salt pork rind and tie hit to Ally's hand and she starts suckin on hit and right off quits her fuss.”

All of Jason's and Lily's 300 children were born in their shack in the hammock without medical aid. Jason is proud that a doctor has never had to 318

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come to his home. Jason said that after the death at birth of three babies in rapid succession following the birth of [Telly?] who is eight years old, there was a wait of several years before another came. “We done thought the Lord was/ not sendin us no more children, but he shore did. And here come Ally bout thirteen month ago and then this baby now two months old for another little pet. Ifen any more comes we want boys. Just as soon not have no more now but I guess it kaint be helped and the Lord knows best.

“Poor Lily, she do suffer [?] terrible with them 100 headaches all her life. Don't nothing do her no good sept headache pills and lots of em. But Ma says hit's caused by too much blood remain in her head so we tie it up tight to stop the blood. When I worked on the Relief they sent Lily to a doctor and he said she had tubes in her ears what was stopped up. That bothers her eyes too. The doctor give her some green medicine to put on cotton and stick down in her ears but she said it burned so she didn't use it.

“Lily been might sick at times but we doctors 200 her at home. Once-t she had such a headache. I had to see a doctor about hit. The Relief paid for that too so hit didn't cost me nothin. I give her six headache pills and she got worse, then I give her some blue [?] pills and she got still worser, then I made her drink most a cup o castor oil, then take salts, but

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she didn't git no better and I had to git the Relief to let me ask a doctor bout her. I didn't hardly have time to go to town about hit neither.”

Two 300 of the girls and [Tilly?] had been fitted with glasses by the Relief, Jason said, but they didn't like to wear the glasses and he didn't make them. He took the glasses out of a box and put them on the children to show me how they looked. The children were also given some treatment for hookworm but Jason believes that they are just as well-off without it. 349

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After living in this house all the years of his married life, Jason said that last year he gres tired of it and decided to move to the “city,” a small town of some two thousand population nearby. He made all plans for moving, and even rented a house — without paying rent. When he suddenly became apprehensive about his prospects in the city and so decided to remain where he was. Jason is now glad that he gave up the idea of moving, as he might not have found work in the city, not knowing any trade. And he doubts if rabbits and gophers 100 are to had right in town. “The children don't have nobody to fight with here, and we don't have to worry bout how our clothes look, as them city-folks allus seem too.”

I asked if he and Lily were interested in politics and if they voted.

“I allus votes,” he replied, “but Lily don't know nothin bout them politics and is fraid to leave home on location days.”

Further questioning brought out the fact that Jason was only vaguely familiar with even local political matters, and always voted for his friends. He has no idea of national affairs, and the “Government” seems a distant and benevolent personality. He [?] is not a member of any political party.

“Politics are all one and the same to me,” he said, “and what's the use to worry over em? Besides I haint got time to find out much about em.” When election day comes he goes to

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vote with anyone who comes for him or buys him a gallon of gas so he can drive his car to town.

Jason wants his children to “Lern readin and writin,” but has no further educational ambitions for them. When I asked what work his children would be educated for, he expressed great surprises at the idea, and said, 297

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“I thought education meant readin and writin!” Jason is certain that that is all that is taught at the school his children attend. He complained that “the teachers there kaint hardly larn [Tilly?] nothin stall.” [Tilly?] is twelve years old and still in the first grade. Jason has never thought of education as a means of making a living, and doesn't believe that education helps people/ much in any way. His children have to go to school at least part of the time or the truant officer will arrest him. He wishes that his children had better clothes to wear to school.

When there is gas for the car, Jason and Lily sometimes 100 take the children to church services, particularly when the service includes a picnic. If there is no gas, and if no one comes by for them, they walk to the graded road and catch rides. When walking Lily and Jason carry their shoes in their hands with the two babies. All of the children go barefoot. The children sometimes want to give money to the church, but Jason thinks that is foolish. He believes that churches should manage their affairs without donations. “Now ifen I had plenty of money,” he says, “I guess I'd give some to the church, and ifen I had a fine car I sure would drive roun and 200 take folks to the church-house.”

Jason and Lily would like to be able to attend the motion pictures regularly. Jason does not like newspapers, and only occasionally does he read a colored picture [?].

Although only forty years old, Jason looks forward to the time when he will be eligible for an old-age pension. He does not know exactly where the pensions come from, but

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he does know several persons “who are now gittin sixteen dollars a month, regular ever month, without doin no work at all. 300

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All they need is to be sixty-five year old and without no money aforehand, and they sure gits all that money.”

Jason would like to have a fine automobile, and enough money to buy food, clothing, snuff, and tobacco, and candy for the children. Lily does not express what she thinks about life, but she has a placid expression, and smiles lovingly at her children as they cluster about her in the bare little room.

As I left, the entire family escorted me to the gate, the children still tongue-tied, Lily smiling, and Jason insisting that I accept a cabbage from his garden. 96