

## [Women and the Changing Times]

WOMEN AND THE CHANGING TIMES

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"It seems as though I have always worked with cotton in some form." Said Mrs. Blount as she pressed some dress material. "Why before I started in the dressmaking business I used to help pick cotton. In fact I earned the money to buy my trousseau in this way."

This busy little woman operates a dressmaking establishment in one of Augusta's large buildings on Broad Street. The place is a mecca for woman who for various reasons fail to find satisfactory clothes in the ready-to-wear shops.

"We are now citizens of Augusta and have made it our home for quite a number of years." She went on. "However, I was born and reared in Walton County, near Mansfield, Georgia. My parents lived on a farm and had eight children - four boys and four girls. I am the eldest and there are three girls and three boys still living.

"My father was a good provider, but it kept him going pretty hard to support a large family. We did manage to live well, but I can assure you there was not much surplus money floating around our domicile. Everybody had to help when 2 cotton picking time came. We picked cotton to get the money to buy our clothes. As I told you before I earned my wedding clothes in this manner. I didn't mind, though, for I was going to marry my Joe.

"My mother lived to be 74 years old and my father will celebrate his 87th birthday in May.

"How do country children amuse themselves?" I questioned.

"Well," she answered, "I suppose we amused ourselves just as other normal children do. The little girls loved their dolls and pets - kittens, puppies, chickens, and even white rats. The little boys also had their pets and all kinds of things.

"I guess that sometimes we would be real smart and help do the work around the place and then again we would feel terribly imposed upon when mother called upon us for assistance. Oh, yes, we were just normal kids. Of course when we got large enough we were assigned certain duties that must be done before we could play.

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“My father humored me quite a bit and we were great pals. Sometimes when he went fishing he would take me along and did I love to go with him. I remember on one occasion when he went fishing he carried me and one of the boys. When we reached the river he left us on the riverbank to await his return. He had put out some trot lines, and he got in his bateau and rowed over 3 to the trot lines. In just a little while he came back bringing a catfish that weighed 28 pounds. You can just imagine how excited we were.

We carried that big fish home and took great pride in showing it to everybody we could find. We invited all the neighbors and had a catfish supper that night. We had lots of fun and plenty to eat.

“It was great fun to go visit my grandmother. I recall one occasion when my father and I made a visit to her home at Conyers, Georgia.

The railroad station was three miles from our house and we had to walk to the train. I started walking but soon got very tired, and as I was such a little girl, my father took me up in his arms and carried me. When we got to grandmother's house she gave me a big rag doll and I named it Dick. I just adored that doll and when we got ready to go home I held fast to my doll. As we were walking along I felt something pulling and when I looked down there was a big old dog with Dick's foot in his mouth and he did his best to take my doll away from me. I screamed and my father chased him away and saved Dick for me.

“The grown boys and girls in our community used to have parties where we danced and played games. Every visitor in the neighborhood was always invited. One night Joe brought a young lady to the party and when I saw him I said:

“Hello Joe!”

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“It made the girl furious to have me speak to her escort in such a familiar manner.

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“Not long after that Joe and I began to have dates and in a few months we were married.

“Did you ask me if we were married at home?” She asked smilingly. “Oh, yes, we were. You see, my parents' home was not very large and we invited just a few friends. The young folks refused to be left out so easily so they got together and not only filled the house, but lots of them were in the yard. So we showed them we were game and marched out on the porch and were married there where all of them could witness the ceremony.

“In those days the young man very often wore frock-tail coats for dress-up occasions. My grandmother would tease me so when I would walk home from Sunday-School with him. I denied emphatically that I even liked him. But she said, ‘Never you mind, honey, some of these days you will marry that frock-tail fellow.’ Of course she was just teasing, but she proved to be a good prophet for just a little later Joe and I were married.

“You're right, we didn't get our schooling as easily as modern children do. There were no school busses and we had to walk three miles to school. We got used to walking but I can't ever recall turning down a ride when it was offered.

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“And that reminds me of a story I once heard of an old Negro woman who was walking along the road carrying a basket of clothes on her head.

After a while along came a man driving a team of mules hitched to a wagon. Feeling sorry for the old woman he asked her if she wouldn't like to have a ride. She replied: ‘Yassir, Boss, I sho would.’ With that she crawled up in the wagon. After driving a mile or so the man turned his head to make some remark to the woman and discovered that she was sitting flat on the floor of the wagon with the clothes still on her head.

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'Why don't you put the clothes down Mammy and rest your head?' He asked solicitously. She answered right up: 'Lawsy, Boss, I's so grateful to have dis ride myself, cat I wouldn't think of imposing on you to carry my clothes.'

"We married when we were both quite young and we have four children - 2 girls and 2 boys, and they are all living. We lived on the farm for five years after we married and then moved to Covington, Georgia, where my husband had obtained work with a Furniture Manufacturing Company.

He received a good salary which enabled us to live very comfortably.

"Then the price of cotton, and in fact all farm products, dropped very low and as the farmers had little to spend, business suffered. This recession lasted for quite awhile and then my husband accepted a position with the Smith Manufacturing Company at Madison, Georgia. This firm operated a general repair and blacksmith shop, sold wagons and buggies, and also ran an undertaking place.

"The proprietor of the place died before he had been there very long and he worked for the widow and her sons for about six years. Then the Brown Manufacturing Company offered him a more remunerative job which he accepted. This concern operated a flour and a grist mill, manufactured ice, and sold fertilizer.

After another year Joe changed jobs again. This time he went to work for the Baxter Milling Company. His work was hard, he had long working hours, and the position entailed a great deal of responsibility. This overwork eventually caused him to have a nervous breakdown. For quite awhile his mind was affected and while he was never actually violent, we were careful not to cross him. We nursed him carefully and after a complete rest his health improved and in a short time he was able to go back to work.

"In 1917 when the United States became involved in the World War, salaries were greatly increased and by strict economy we were able to save enough money to make a down

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payment on a 7 home of our own. It was not long before we had paid quite a nice amount on it. Unfortunately, when peace was declared the market broke, salaries were cut, and we were dealt quite a hard blow.

“Several years previously, believing business would warrant such a venture, Joe had opened a business of his own. He carried practically the same line of merchandise as did the firms for whom he had worked, excepting of course the undertaking business. He sold carriages, buggies, wagons, fertilizers, and some commodities. He extended credit to the farmers; then when the depression came, he was unable to collect and consequently we lost our business and our home.

“The boll weevil also got in its deadly work. They practically destroyed the cotton and damaged other crops as well. Prices dropped so low that what little the farmers were able to salvage brought almost nothing and consequently they had no money with which to meet their obligations. Sweet potatoes sold as low as 40 cents per bushel; corn as low as 50 cents, and other products sold accordingly.

“Joe and I educated our children the best we could. We have given all of them a grammar school education and the equivalent of two years in high school.

“After losing our business and our home we moved to Augusta and made a new start. The children secured work and it wasn't long before Joe was able to pick up temporary work. I took in sewing and helped all I could. I have kept it up and at the present time I am in the dressmaking business with a friend on a 50-50 basis.

“Shortly after we came here my husband worked for the city, and then he worked for the Georgia Power Company. For the next several years Joe worked for cotton oil mills, one of which was located at Raleigh, North Carolina. While at work in the latter place a huller machine blew up and he was hurt badly.

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“The company paid him his entire salary for the six months that he was laid up. He tried to work again but after two or three days he had to give up and go back home. Just as he had recuperated sufficiently to return to work the mill shut down and he was again without work.

“Joe has always been blest with undaunted courage and strong determination and he again sought employment at the Southern Cotton Oil Company in Augusta. We moved back here and he worked until the season was over. For the past five years he has worked at the University Hospital.

“I don't think there can be any doubt but that the World War caused the depression. When our country became involved with Europe and our boys went to France, prices soared and salaries went up by leaps and bounds. There were so many positions left open by the boys who went ‘Over There,’ that there actually seemed to be competition between the heads of businesses as to which one would get the first chance to employ a man and they were not stingy with salaries either.

“People became excited and restless, bought extravagantly and lived entirely beyond their means. Many borrowed money from the banks to buy luxuries they couldn't afford. When things began to level themselves after the close of the war - a depression was inevitable.

“I think President Roosevelt is a wonderful man.” She remarked. “I feel that he has done more to help poor people than any other man could have done.

“To my mind one of the greatest accomplishments of the New Deal has been the organization of the Civilian Conservation Camps. The training given the boys will be of lasting benefit. They have changed many a boy from a liability to a valuable asset to his country. They have kept thousands of boys off the roads just idly roaming over the country - hiking and beating rides on freight trains, etc. Many of them have become good citizens.

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“We have worked hard and had our ups and downs, but we are very happy and enjoy our home so much. When any of the children get out of work they know they are always welcome to come home and stay until they are on their feet again. It would be a great pleasure to us to keep our [brood?] together at all times but of course that is impossible. Boys, particularly, love to get out and run around and see something of the world.

“I recall one time when one of our boys decided to hitch-hike to Raleigh, North Carolina. It was not nearly so exciting as he had expected.

He said he only met one man who treated him kindly and he was a person whom he had known before. He obtained employment at a bakery but worked only one night for when the proprietor demanded his 11 straw that broke the camel's back. It was simply disgraceful.

“I have a friend who firmly believed in women's rights and longed for the day when we would have a say-so in our government. The first time she had the opportunity to register she couldn't get there fast enough. The next morning the paper published a list of the would-be woman voters. When her brothers read the paper they were very indignant and for a while made things very uncomfortable for her.

“Today, every woman who is eligible is expected to vote and is considered unpatriotic if she doesn't.

“Now we have women evangelists, lawyers, doctors, nurses, congresswomen and others. Women now practically run the churches and other religious organizations.

“And today we even have ladies flying.” She exclaimed, “I wonder what next.”