

THE OLD NEGRO MAMMY

THE NEW COLORED WOMAN SOUTH COMPARED WITH HER.

A Sympathizer With the Old Order of Things Draws an Unfavorable Picture and Relates Some of the Woes Suffered Under the New Regime.

(New Orleans Picayune.)

With the passing away of a single generation of old negroes, now, alas, nearing the end of the journey of life, one of the most picturesque features of the South will be lost. Already the sight of a neat, respectful, respectable old colored aunty, with a gay bandana tignon on her head, is growing rare. She has been superseded by the "cullud lady," who parades the street in cheap and gaudy finery, and who scorns to demean herself by being polite to any white person, or doing any work.

For there is a new colored woman, as well as a new white woman. If the new white woman is an anomaly in the world, who is neither man nor woman, neither fish, flesh, fowl or good herring, the new colored woman is the Frankenstein of civilization. She is a misfit in creation, who has borrowed all the vices and faults of her model and added to them frills that are peculiarly her own. The new white woman has got to get over the traditions of centuries of virtue and respectability before she acquires the courage of her theories, but the new colored woman is foot loose and fancy free to do as she pleases.

And the first articles in her confession of faith is a deep and abiding determination not to work. Sometimes this is temporarily shaken by hunger or a desire to purchase some gaudy finery to wear to the forthcoming ball of the "Amalgamated Sons and Daughters of Rest," and she will condescend for a short time to preside in your kitchen, or languidly make your beds. But she does it under protest. She has no pride in her work; no desire to do it well. The least work for the most money is the legend she inscribes on her banner, and she mentally registers a vow to leave you the first time you are indiscreet enough to invite company, and to come up missing, as an Irishman might say, the first cold morning.

The Aunt Dinahs, ample of girth, clad in clean cottonade, who went about in a sort of charmed atmosphere of savory smells that made the very mouth water with anticipatory delight, belonged to the old generation. They boasted that they laid a heavy hand on the seasoning in compounding the delicacies for which they were famous, and at dinner would poke an anxious head through the dining-room door anxious to hear the compliments bestowed upon their art. In their kitchens hungry children knew surreptitious dainties were to be had for the teasing; that wonderful ducks and chickens were fashioned out of biscuit dough, and that the perpetual grumbling of the high priestess of the pots and pans meant nothing more than that the roast and the gumbo lay heavy on her mind. Here and there such a figure still lingers in a kitchen, but she is growing too old to work, and her mistress thinks with horror of the time when Dinah will be gone and the new colored woman reign in her stead. Then, indeed, will dyspepsia and confusion worse confounded stalk through the house. For the new colored woman does not burden her mind with the insignificant details that go to make good cooking. She dashes a lot of things together, and if they turn out all right, well and good; if not, also well. All she is concerned in is in drawing her wages, and carrying back and forth the basket that is the commissary department of a tribe of hungry and idle friends.

Time was when every housekeeper pointed with pride to her neat housemaid in a blue calico, so stiffly starched it rattled like the best taffeta. With what precision did she draw your mosquito bar! with what sympathy did she press on you the hot bread at breakfast! She, too, might answer to the auctioneer's cry of "Going, going, gone!" Now a frowy girl in a dirty, lace-trimmed party waist condescends to wait at table or make beds or answer the doorbell, when she feels like it. It is said that an intelligent Chinese servant can insult his master in several thousand ways, so deftly that the master remains in ignorance of it. The new colored woman employs no such finesse. She goes right to the point, and makes the distinction of invariably speaking of her race as "ladies and gentlemen," and yours as "men and women." When you are told that there is a woman down stairs, you know that it is probably some friend noted for her aristocratic lineage, her culture, her wealth and position, while the maid's announcement that a lady wants to see you sends you to the back door to interview the charwoman.

The new colored woman has one desire that ranks above all others, one fixed ambition, and that is to be a school teacher. There must be in the South several hundred thousand young negro women who have announced their determination to follow this career. They are in the process of being educated. Year after year they go to school, with, so far as the outsider can see, no direct results except an added insolence and laziness. Of course here and there one probably gets a fair education, but the most never get beyond the superior elegance of saying "have come" and scorn the humble and admiring mother who takes in washing to support her daughter in idleness. If all the young women who are expecting to make a living by teaching carry out their intention, the Government will have to subsidize every little kinky-headed coon and farm him out, for there won't be more than one scholar apiece. Sometimes, indeed, Mary Jane, now Mary Jane no longer, but Miss Birdie or Lilly or Daisy, gets a diploma from her seminary, and comes home to astonish the community of St. Kinkleville with her airs and graces. No school coming in search of her distinguished talents, she scorns the humble occupation of a housemaid or cook, and lives—God knows how.

The marriage tie is seldom the tie that binds with her, and she is so far advanced that she practically illustrates the matrimonial theories advanced by Thomas Hardy and Grant Allen in their recent fiction. She has no shame and no remorse. In the peculiar theory of life and morality held by the new colored woman, anything is better and more respectable than to make a living by work.

The older generation of negro women who were brought up before the war had the advantage of close association with gentle and refined ladies. Essentially imitative as the colored race is, they copied the manners and the graces of the people they served, and many an old black mammy has the manners of a grande dame, many an old uncle the courtly grace of a Chesterfield. The young negroes have had no such opportunities, and would not have used them if they had. They have chosen to imitate the worst class of whites, and it is as if one saw a vulgar picture ineffably seasoned by being reproduced in glaring colors that emphasized in every unlovely detail. They believe liberty is license, and do not know that reverence and respect are attributes that adorn the highest station.

One of the saddest fashions of this passing away of the old-fashioned negroes is the loss of that old negro mammy. In every Southern home she was a figure unique in the peculiar love and tenderness that surrounded her. In her strong arms every white baby was first laid, with the certainty that nothing amiss could befall it there. On her broad breast childish sorrows sobbed themselves out, and broken baby hearts were mended by the magic of mammy's touch. Her hands guided the first faltering step, her tongue first opened the doors of romance and marvels; her voice, deep, soft, mellow and sweet as the voice of love, croned the lullabies that lie on the threshold of hushaby-land. The passing years but strengthened the ties that bound the black mammy and her white children. It was her province to watch over their growth, and her "mind your manners" was a stern admonition no well-bred Southern child dared disregard. She packed the trunk of the boy about to start to college, she inspected the suitors who came a-shwooing, and passed judgment, often as shrewd as unconventional, upon them, she pinned the veil over the face of the bride, and gave sage advice on the best way to manage husbands to her "baby" about to embark on the uncertain sea of matrimony. In every event of life, joy and sorrow, mammy's faithful heart beat like the echo of her white folks.

Did sickness come, what hand so tender on the aching brow, what watching so unwearyed as mammy's? Who so wise in the knowledge of herbs and simples? What broth had ever such a flavor as that made by her skillful hand? And when death kissed the eyelids down it was mammy's loving hand that did the last sad offices for the dead and robed them for their burial. She folded lilies in the pulseless hands and she and her mistress, white mother and black mammy, who had both known the passion and the pain of motherhood, who had both lost the child

that had lain upon their breasts, walked hand in hand behind the tiny coffin to the little graveyard in the corner of the garden. Afterward, when the sweet ground myrtle had hidden the mound with living green, it was mammy who would go in the quiet dusks of summer evenings and bring her mistress away from that hallowed spot.

Truth, loyalty, devotion, knightly qualities were stamped in every line of mammy's fine old face, and made it beautiful. Sometimes misfortune befell her white people, but mammy's love never faltered. The war came and set her free. Mammy staid on. She scorned new people, and would not leave her own. Shrined in the unwritten history of a thousand Southern homes is the story of the faithful devotion of some old negro woman who remained and served for love the people too poor to pay her wages. Sometimes she turned to account her talent for cooking or nursing, and with the money thus made she educated the children of her former mistress, and gave them a start in life. If anything could justify slavery, it was this mutual love and tenderness that existed between the black mammys and their white "chillien."

So few, so few are the white children now who are privileged to know the spoiling and correction and chiding of a black mammy, who listen to the tales of "Brer Rabbit" and the "Tar Baby" from the inspired lips that embroider the tale to suit the occasion, who miss the delicious terror of having their souls scared out of them by tales of witches and "hants." Unfortunate little people, who know nothing of a colored nurse except somebody who jerks the little arms out of the socket and stands the baby perambulator in the glaring sun, while she examines millinery in a shop window, or flirts with a "cullud gentleman" in tan shoes and hand-me-down clothes, who, too, has embraced the profession of loafing for a livelihood.

Soon the last bandana head-dress will be gone from the streets. The merchants will have no more call to display guinea blue calico, for imitation French millinery will crown every colored woman's head, and ragged finery clothe her body. Dinah no longer will wheel the baby carriage. She has taken a step forward or backward in the process of evolution. The house is unswept, the food uncooked, the dusky pickaninny sprawls unheeded across the cabin door, for the new colored woman has gotten a bicycle, and is making a spin up the avenue. Instead of spinning at home. But we who knew what it was to be rocked to sleep in the loving arms of a black mammy look back sorrowfully, and mourn the vanished grace of a day that is dead, and regret the evolution that is bringing to the front the colored new woman.