

ON THE CREEK ROAD

SUSIE REVELS CAYTON

One of the first things that Doctor Joseph Bradsberry did, after arriving in Gainsville, a small town in Mississippi, was to purchase a homey little cottage two blocks from the main street. Then he hung up his sign in one of its front windows, and turned his attention to putting in an early summer garden. That finished, the doctor purchased a horse and a buggy in which to visit his prospective patients, and hired Elias Green, a young Negro boy, to care for the stable and drive for him. It so happened that 'Lias lived in "Freeman Town," an unpaved, poorly lighted section of Gainsville, where most of the poorer class of Negroes lived. Hence "Freedman Town" soon knew that the new doctor was destined to become very popular, as his office consultations were frequent and 'Lias had driven with him to make professional calls at several of the wealthiest people's homes.

This was interesting, but when 'Lias reported that the doctor was expecting a Negro woman from New Orleans to keep house for him, excitement in "Freedman Town" was on tip toe. It gradually died down, however, when it was learned that the woman from New Orleans was apparently a Creole woman, better looking than any of her race in Gainsville, answered to the name of Lucelia, was as old as the doctor himself but as neat and dainty as a girl of fourteen, worshipped at the Catholic institution every Sunday, rain or shine, kept the doctor's house as clean as a new pin; minded her own business and stayed in her own yard.

So the days began to roll by as calmly as they did before Lucelia Fitzpatrick came to keep house for Doctor Bradsberry. The summers followed the winters, the flowers bloomed and withered, the gardens grew and yielded, as year after year passed over Gainsville.

At the lower end of "Freedman Town" stood a delapidated one-roomed house. This was the home of "Graveyard Pete" and his wife, Aunt Emeline. Pete had been given the name of Graveyard because as far back as some of the oldest inhabitants of Gainsville could remember he had dug the grave for every man, woman and child that had died there. Then, too, there was Pete Bellos and old Pete Rehno, both members of the same church as "Graveyard", and it saved trouble when speaking of them. Graveyard Pete was a very small, slim man, yet noted for his physical strength, and except when in the presence of his wife, Aunt Emily, his tenacity of purpose.

Now nature was out of humor, else she jested when it came to Pete's wife. Aunt Emily stood six feet nine, her enemies called her "double jointed," her voice and manner were, to say the least, masculine, while her face—it was of a shiney black with protrading eyes, the whites of which were always red—but words are weak to describe Aunt Emily, she had to be seen physically to be appreciated mentally. Sufficient is it to say, if she were a woman of any outward charms or inner graces no one in Gainsville had ever been heard to mention it.

The noon day meal was just over and Graveyard Pete was lighting up his corncob pipe. One unvarying rule in that home was that after dinner Pete smoked, in the winter seated by the fireplace, in the summer in the front doorway, while Emily did the heaviest part of her week's washings. Soapsuds and tobacco smoke were much in evidence when Emily favored Pete with this unpreambled remark:

"Givin' the devil his due, whatever else she is, that housekeeper of Doctor Bradsberry, Aunt Celesia they calls her, is one big-hearted uman."

"How so?" grunted Pete.

"Why, I takes notice there aint been a sick person in this town of our people since she has been here but what she sount 'um a pail of soup or broth or somthin; there aint been a laying-in woman but what the next Sunday after her baby was born she got a free cooked dinner sount her; the hand o' death aint struck down a single person but what flowers was sount um, that is when flowers was; and sister Perkins tol me this mornin that sister Johnson told her that the minister's wife tol her that every Saturday night since the first week she sot foot in this town there was a couple o' pies or cake or somthin sount 'um for they Sunday dinner."

"It would 'pear that way," answered Pete.

During the several years just past, the excel-

lent services of Doctor Bradsberry had made themselves felt. There had not been as many deaths as theretofore. Hence Pete had not been kept very busy. This meant a corresponding growth in the number of Aunt Emily's washings. Clothes were piled up high around her one hot day that mid-summer. She was working diligently. Pete and his pipe occupied the doorway. After what must have been a short nap, for the smoke had cleared away for a space of time, Pete drolled out: "Saw the minister's wife an' Aunt Celesia setting out on the doctor's back porch, sewing, as I come along."

"Sewing," almost screamed Aunt Emily. She dropped back into the tub the piece she was wringing. Good Lord! I hope that minister's wife ain't fool enough to be making baby clothes. Seems like the conference would have sense enough not to send a little one-horse town like Gainsville a minister as has nothing but six children and an organetta no how, Pete!" and Aunt Emily put her wet hands on her hips and looked her disgust. "You are as unmitigated a no-count pile of skin and bones as I ever laid my eyes on. Seems like you was jus born to 'sturb my peace o' mind. Now I gotta stop all my work and take Aunt Celesia a sample of my peach preserves I made yestiday. Bet I see if hits baby clothes they're making."

When Aunt Emily arrived she found the two women still seated on the porch quietly having a cup of tea. In a box near the door lay several fancy bags, aprons and pin cushions, all in readiness for the Methodist church bazaar.

The next five years brought several changes to the people of Gainsville. Doctor Bradsberry, after a lingering illness, had died. No one was much surprised when it was learned that he had left all of his earthly possessions to his housekeeper. There seemed to be no relatives with whom he was in touch, and a mother could not have been more faithful to a beloved son than was Aunt Lucelia to him during his entire illness.

The second year after his death Aunt Lucelia was stricken and died very suddenly.

"She must have 'spected jus sich a death," said Aunt Emily to Pete, "for her house was all in readiness an her will was all rit out. I hurd the reading of the one and seed the other with my own two eyes," she concluded in a tone of deep resignation.

There was quite a spirit of disapproval in "Freedman Town" when it was found that Aunt Lucelia had bequeathed all of her money to the Catholic institution. This completely vanished, however, after the Methodist minister's family were comfortably installed in the doctor's old home, which Aunt Lucelia had willed to the Methodist church to be used as a parsonage.

The garden where the doctor was so wont to work was filled with vegetables and the front yard blossoming with the kind of flowers Aunt Lucelia had loved the next summer Pete noted as he passed on his way home to dinner. After he had lighted his pipe and talked from the doorway for some time to any one who was willing to stand in the hot sun and listen to him, he addressed Aunt Emily. "Well, tomorrow I got the hardest day's work I ever had in my life, I reckon. Got ten men to help me."

The work at the tub stopped. Aunt Emily straightened, glared at him several minutes unbelievably, then snapped: "Whatsat?"

"Got to dig two hundred graves," announced Pete.

"Two hundred graves!" screamed Aunt Emily. "Pete! you are the hard-headeddest, contray limb of creation God ever let walk on two legs. What do you suppose some poor man or uman what has been unfortunate enough to die would want with two hundred graves when one is more an he ever had a hankering to lay in?"

"I gotta dig up every colored man, uman and chil as has ever died in Gainsville and put um in a graveyard to they selves," slowly and deliberately announced Pet. They has had the boxes made and is painting um black now."

"Pete, I don't believe it," said Aunt Emily.

"Ain't I been tuck over to the commons, down by the creek road, and showed whar to dig them graves. Ain't I been out to the graveyard an showed the marshal whar all the colored is laid?" asked and answered Pete.

Emeline did not reply. She just snatched up the first piece her hand came to and began a most vigorous rubbing. Garment after garment tumbled out of her tub as if there were hidden electricity about her elbows. Soapsuds spat-

tered the floor all around her—otherwise silence reigned.

'Twas Pet who broke it. "I'm to dig every one of them graves six feet long."

"Wouldn't have 'sprised me, in they littleness, if they'd had some of um dug four feet and some of um dug two," retorted Aunt Emily. "Them town officers jist goes up in that court house, shets them doors, and 'cides what they wants to do, and we poor black folks never knows what is gwinter be did to us til its did. Pete! this is a pretty acting country you are living in."

"Seems that way, ol' uman," answered Pete.
(To be continued)

WHEN WHISKY IS NOT MEDICINE

(From "Literary Digest.")

How much liquor may a physician prescribe for a patient in a "dry" locality without raising the presumption that it is to be used as a beverage instead of a medicine? This problem is set for The Druggists' Circular (New York, July) by a correspondent in Mississippi. A legal authority consulted by the editor reports that he can find no statute-law on the subject, nor any court-decision that would appear to control the doctor's judgment. The editor believes that to secure a verdict against a physician charged with prescribing liquor in excess of the legitimate needs of his patient, the prosecuting attorney would have to show to the satisfaction of the jury that the amount prescribed was really excessive. "And the ideas of different juries are apt to vary in matters of this kind." The legal authority consulted by the editor goes on to say:

"The rights of a druggist in general are well stated in the decision of the Missouri Court of Appeals in the case of State versus Robertson . . . where it was held that when a physician issues a prescription in regular form, it is authority to the druggist to sell the liquor therein prescribed, and such druggist has a right to assume that the prescription was issued in good faith.

"In short, if a druggist delivers liquor on a prescription in the form prescribed by law to cover such sales, without any intimation that the prescription is being used as a subterfuge to evade a law forbidding the sale of liquor as a beverage, he is on the safe side of the law.

"But it has been recognized in numerous decisions . . . that a druggist is amenable to the law, regardless of any claim of good faith, if he has made a sale under a prescription which does not conform to the statutory requirements, and that a prescription, regular on its face, is not conclusive as to good faith, when there is proof to show that the physician and the druggist were parties to an attempt to evade the law.

"Remembering that where a prescription is regular on its face—the question of guilty intent is to be determined by the facts of the particular case—the quantity of liquor prescribed might have an important bearing on a court or jury's finding, especially when the nature of the prescription is such that, in the light of common experience, it challenges suspicion on the point of good faith. The nature of the patient's supposed complaint as established by proof, any intemperate habits, or any other circumstances relevantly pointing to the good faith of the physician in issuing the prescription would control the question in a particular case. Often expert testimony of physicians as to the propriety of prescribing the stated quantity of liquor would prove decisive on an inquiry as to whether the physician acted innocently.

"As to the druggist if he has seen that the prescription is in due form, he can not be held to have violated the law, unless, as above stated, there is proof of the fact that he knew the prescription was not issued in good faith."

Giving the Billingsleys jail sentences looks well in print, but they never go to jail, nor do they quit bootlegging. What the public wants to see is those law-breakers actually in jail.

What the public wants to know of President Wilson is, what is the present army of 140,000 men being held at the Mexican border for? Are they, too, being drilled in the "watchful waiting" effect? If the war cloud has blown over the effect? If the war cloud has blown over the men should be sent home.