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Through
THE
Looking
Glass

Back yonder in the long ago, when we were somewhat littler, most anywhere you chanced to look you'd see a happy whittler....Relaxed, and sort of comfy like, armed with a barlow knife, he pared off curly shavings, as he gave his views on life.

Youngsters in the neighborhood would listen with delight, marveling at the things he carved, his blade so sharp and bright....He fashioned fancy walking sticks, and boats complete with sails, and while he whittled he would pin the gallest kind of tales.

Conversation didn't lag, when whittlers got together, on those wintry evenings, or in sultry summer weather.....They whiled away the pleasant hours, praising and belittling, discussing weighty world affairs, all the time a whittling.

Today we do things differently, we're in a scrambled age, and we end up being jumpy, like a squirrel inside a cage....we get no fun from being still, we've got to be a going, helter skelter here and there, always to and froing.

Home ain't where the heart is, it's where we hang our hat, and home we find in times like these we're seldom ever at....We're folks plumb full of fidgets, we try a pace that kills, too doggone much commotion is to blame for lots of ills.

Perhaps there'd be few ulcers, and more folks would stay well, if instead of all the fretting we cut shavings for a spell....So of late we've been a wondering if it weren't a better life, when there were folks who whittled with a good old barlow knife.

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Yesterday was when Martha Royall, who thousands of New Bernians knew only as Vegetable Martha, rattled residential windows for many blocks around, as she peddled her fresh collards, corn, butter beans, and newly dug potatoes.

If Gabriel's trumpet blares forth louder than Martha's voice used to, waking the dead won't be a problem. She sang her sales pitch in the manner that other blacks did in days of old, along Charleston's Catfish Row.

However, no one to the south of us, in the generation that inspired George Gershwin to write Porgy and Bess, had lungs to compare with hers. Amplification of her voice was a needless as gilding the lily.

Short and plumpish, she was remarkably agile and appeared to be tireless. Before noon she covered much if not all of the town. There were other black peddlers on the street, but only one Martha.

She was as much a part of the local scene as the Post Office (now City Hall) clock, male juveniles skinny dipping in the Neuse off guano docks, and courtly Confederate veterans, the few that were left.

Down at Central School, the kids listened for her each morning. To such an extent that Mr. Smith considered it distracting, and asked her to

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SWEETS FOR THE SWEET
—Photo by Eunice Wray.