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WOMEN OF THE CONFEDERACY

A Bit of a Story About Some of the Things They Were Called On To Do



OFTENTIMES one hears the phrase, "The backbone of the Confederacy." Some say that this was "the thin gray line" of the fighters at the front, others that it was the farmers back here, making supplies for the soldiers. Both are wrong. The backbone of the Confederacy, certainly here in North Carolina, was the woman. It was the woman who cheered on the men when the war flared out and she never stopped cheering them on until the last gasp. She was no fincher. She looked after the farm, she managed the slaves, whether few or many, for while an act of Congress gave exemption to the owner of as many as 20 slaves, not many men had the nerve to try to keep out of the army on that ground. ¶ So then, broadly speaking, the woman of the Confederacy

This was community life. In the South there were scattered farms, each living a life to itself. This was the patriarchal style of living. The New England town was self-reliant and so were Master and Mistress as to their own world, which was greater or smaller according to the number of their slaves. The master had about the power of a captain of a vessel at sea; not the power over life or death, but of punishment and of general masterfulness. ¶ Upon the mistress, with the husband gone to wars, the supervision of this household machine, for that was what it was, began automatically. This quickened all of a woman's wits and things were done which they never dreamed of before except in times of greatest stress. The mistress was a leader as well as a director. Like a good commanding officer, she did not say so much, "Go on," as she did "Come on," and this is one of the secrets of the abounding love the average slave had for the woman whom they fondly termed "Old Miss."



HIGHLAND PINES INN—A FAVORITE RENDEZVOUS FOR SUPPER AND DANCING PARTIES

was the head of the household and the backbone of affairs. This is a bit of a story about some of the things she was called on to do and the way she did them. We will take a plantation on which there were say a dozen slaves. There was the "great house," the casa grande, from which Spanish phrase the negroes really got their name for the building in which master lived. There were the outbuildings, including the barn, stables, corn crib and there were the houses for the negroes, the latter usually having two rooms and a little porch in front. The negroes made it a point then as now in the country, to keep their cabins clean and the ground swept all around them. They did not do this naturally, for it was not an African habit, but Mistress showed them how to do it and to this day the habit remained, thus instilled.

In the South the farm was a little world. The mode of life was precisely the opposite of that in New England, where the people lived in villages, called towns, from which they went out to their farms to work, returning at night to the community, where there was sure to be a school house and church side by side.

This statement of a fact will explain many things. The woman's heart made the slave a creature of God's making, subordinate and not equal to the white, but to be thought of, prayed for and ministered unto. So Mistress was the owner of the property, the land and the slaves too; the physician in all ordinary ailments; the dispenser of charity and comfort, the chaplain and at the same time the head who had to do the thinking in all seasons. ¶ The War of the Revolution had been the great training school for the American woman in all the then territory of the United States. Exactly the same role was played by the women of the Confederacy here in North Carolina. She had to keep her wits about her always, to know almost by instinct the best ways of doing things; upon her shoulders was borne the load of looking after the estate in every detail, of doing her part towards the maintenance of the State, and last but by no means least, of doing everything possible for the soldier in the field. The North Carolina of 50 years ago was precisely like the Belgium of today in the point of the pluck of its men and women, though of course there