

THE CONJURER'S REVENGE.

SUNDAY was sometimes a rather dull day at our place among the North Carolina sandhills. In the morning, on pleasant days, my wife and I would drive to town, a distance of about five miles, to attend church. The afternoons we would spend at home; I occupied myself with the newspapers and magazines, and occasionally looked over a novel, while Annie, who is a strict Presbyterian, employed her time in reading religious books and playing sacred music on the parlor organ. Sometimes old Julius McAdoo, our colored man-of-all-work, would come up to the house and sit on the piazza and listen to the music; and Annie would come out and exchange religious experiences with him, and supply him with religious literature, although she was aware that he did not know his letters.

One Sunday afternoon in early spring,—the balmy spring of North Carolina, when the air is in that ideal balance between heat and cold where one wishes it could always remain,—Annie and I were seated on the front piazza, she wearily but conscientiously plowing through a missionary report, while I followed the impossible career of the blonde heroine of a rudimentary novel. I had thrown the book aside in disgust, when I saw Julius coming through the yard, under the spreading elms, which were already in full leaf. He wore his Sunday clothes, and advanced with a dignity of movement quite different from his week-day slouch.

“Have a seat, Julius,” I said, pointing to an empty rocking-chair.

“No, thanky, boss, I’ll des set here on de top step.”

“O, no, Uncle Julius,” exclaimed Annie, “take this chair. You are too old to sit on the hard floor.”

The old man grinned in appreciation of her solicitude, and seated himself somewhat awkwardly. Annie went into the house, and shortly came out with a small hymn-book, bound in black cloth, with red edges.”

“Uncle Julius,” she said, “I want to make you a present of this hymn-book. If you know of any of your friends who would like to have one, I have several others which were sent to me for distribution.”

My wife was quite a zealous missionary, but confined her ministrations chiefly to the colored element of the population. When I asked her why she neglected the poor white people around us, she would answer that they had always been free, and that if they were ignorant, and poor, and degraded, it was their own fault; and for a long time I was unable to reason her out of this unchristian view of her lantern-jawed, tallow-faced neighbors who were unfortunate enough to have been born white. After a residence of several years in the South, however, she began to perceive that the blacks were not the only sufferers from slavery, and her gentle influence won for her many warm friends among our poorer white neighbors. Her judgment was not always equal to her zeal; but on the whole there was perhaps less of misdirected effort in her labors than usually attends missionary enterprises in untried fields.

Julius took the book between his fore-finger and thumb and inspected the cover with a pleased smile. He next took out a pair of ancient spectacles from a leather case, and adjusted them on his nose. Then he opened the book, holding it upside down, and turned the leaves over clumsily.

“Thanky, Miss Annie. Dish yer is a monst’ous fine book, en I’ll ha’ ter take

good ker un it." He looked at the book a moment longer, and a shade seemed to pass over his face. "Miss Annie," he said, "is yer got —" he broke the question off in evident embarrassment.

"What is it, Uncle Julius?" asked Annie.

"O, nuffin, Miss Annie," he replied hesitatingly, "only I was des a wond'rin' ef yer did n't hab one er dese yer books wid aidges er some yuther color."

"Yes," she replied, "I have them of different colors; but I thought you liked red edges; they look cheerful, and form a pleasing contrast to the black cover."

"Dat 's so, Miss Annie, so dey do. I lacks de red aidges bes' my'se'f. But, den, yer see," he added, deprecatingly, "folks is alluz sayin' cullud people lubs red so; en I was a thinkin' maybe ef yer had one wid some yuther kine er aidges, en' would n' min' swoppin' it fer dis, I 'd be bleedst ter yer."

Annie exchanged the book for one with blue edges, and Julius put it in his pocket with reiterated thanks.

"Julius," I remarked, "I am thinking of setting out scuppernong vines on that sand hill where the three persimmon trees are; and while I'm working there, I think I'll plant watermelons between the vines, and get a little something to pay for my first year's work on the hill. The new railroad will be finished by the middle of summer, and I can ship the melons North, and get a good price for them."

"Ef yer gwine ter hab any mo' plowin' ter do," replied Julius, "I spec' yer 'll ha' ter buy ernudder creetur, caze hit 's much ez dem horses kin do ter 'ten' ter de wuk dey got now."

"Yes, I had thought of that. I think I'll get a mule; a mule can do more work, and does n't require as much attention as a horse."

"I wouldn' 'vise yer ter buy a mule," remarked Julius, with a shake of his head.

"Why not?"

"Well, yer may 'low hits all foolish-

ness, but ef I was in yo' place I would n't buy no mule."

"But that is n't a reason; what objection have you to a mule?"

"Fac' is," continued the old man, in a serious tone, "I doan' lack ter dribe a mule. I's allus afeard I mout be imposin' on some human bein'; eve'y time I cuts a mule with a hick'ry, 'pears ter me maybe I's a cuttin' my own gran'-son, er somebody e'se w'at can't he'p deyse'ves."

"What put such an idea into your head?" I asked.

My question was followed by a short silence, during which Julius seemed to be engaged in a mental struggle.

"I dunno ez hit 's wuf while ter tell yer dis," he said, at length. "I doan' hardly 'spec fer yer ter b'lieve it. Does yer 'member dat club-footed man w'at hilt de hoss fer yer de yuther day w'en yer was gitten' outen de rockaway down ter Mars Archie McMillan's sto'?"

"Yes, I remember seeing a club-footed man there."

"Did yer eber see a club-footed nigger befo' or sence?"

"No, I can't remember that I ever did," I replied, after a moment's reflection.

"You en Miss Annie would n't wanter believe me, ef I wuz ter say dat dat nigger was onct a mule?"

"No," I replied, "I don't think it very likely that you could make us believe it."

"Why, Uncle Julius!" said Annie, severely, "what ridiculous nonsense!"

This reception of the prologue of his narrative reduced the old man to silence, and it required some very skillful diplomacy on my part to induce him to continue the story. The prospect of a long and rather dull afternoon was not alluring, and I was glad to have the monotony of Sabbath quiet relieved by a plantation legend.

"W'en I was a young man," said Julius, "dat club-footed nigger — his name

is Primus — use' ter belong ter ole Mars Jim McGee ober on de Lumberton plank-road. I use' ter go ober dere ter see a 'ooman w'at libbed on de plantation. Dis yer Primus was de livelies' han' on de place, alluz a dancin', en drinkin', en runnin' roun', en singin', en pickin' de banjo, 'cep'n' once in a w'ile, w'en he'd git so stubborn dat de w'ite folks could n' do nuffin wid 'im.

“It was 'gin de rules fer any er de han's ter go 'way f'um de plantation at night; but Primus did n' min' de rules, en went w'en he felt lack it; en de w'ite folks purten' lack dey did n' know it, fer Primus was dange'ous w'en he got in dem stubborn spells, en dey ruther not fool wid 'im.

“One night in de spring er de year, Primus slip' off f'um de plantation, en went down on de Wimbleton road ter a dance gin by some er de free niggers down dere. Dey was a fiddle, en a banjo, en a jug gwine roun' on de outside, en Primus sung en dance' tel 'long 'bout two o'clock in de mawnin', w'en he start' fer home. Ez he come erlong back, he tuk a nigh-cut 'cross de cotton fiel's en 'long by de aidge er de Minnal Spring Swamp, so ez ter git shet er de patter-oles w'at rid up en down de big-road fer ter keep de darkies f'um runnin' roun' nights. Primus was santerin' 'long, studyin' 'bout de good time he had wid de gals, w'en, ez he was gwine long by a fence corner, he heard sumpn' grunt. He stopped a minute ter listen, en he heard sumpn' grunt ag'in. Den he went ober ter de fence whar he heard de fuss, en dere, layin' in de fence corner, on a pile er pine straw, was a fine, fat shote.

“Primus look' at de shote, en den started home. But somehow er nudder he could n' git away f'um dat shote; w'en he tuk one step forrers wid one foot, de yuther foot 'peared ter take two steps back'ards, en so he kep' gittin' closeter en closeter ter de shote. It was de beatines' thing. De shote des 'peared ter charm Primus, en fus' thing you

know he foun' hisse'f way up de road, wid de shote on his back.

“Ef Primus had a knowed whose shote dat was he'd 'a' manage' ter git pas' it somehow er nudder. Ez it happen, de shote b'long' ter a conjurer w'at libbed down 'mong's' de free niggers; co'se de conjurer did n' hab ter wuk his roots but a little w'ile 'fo' he foun' out who tuk his shote. One mawnin', a day er so atter dis happen, Primus did n' go ter wuk w'en de hawn blow, en w'en de oberseah wen' ter look fer him dey wan' no trace er Primus ter be foun' nowhar. W'en he did n' come back in a day er so, eve'ybody on de plantation 'lowed he had runned away. His marster a'vertise' him in de papers, en offered a big reward fer him. De nigger-ketchers fotch out dey dogs, en track 'im down ter de aidge er de swamp, en den de scent gin out — en dat was de las' anybody seed er Primus.

“Two er th'ee weeks atter Primus disappear', his marster went ter town one Sad'day. Mars Jim was stan'in' in front er Sandy Campbell's bar-room, w'en a po' w'ite man f'um down on de Wimbleton road come up ter 'im en ax 'im ef he did n' wanter buy a mule.

“‘I dunno,’ says Mars Jim, ‘whar is de mule?’

“‘Des 'roun' yer back er ole Tom McAlister's sto,’ says de po' w'ite man.

“‘I reckon I'll hab a look at de mule,’ says Mars Jim, ‘en ef he suit me, I dunno but w'at I mout buy 'im.’

“So de po' w'ite man tuk Mars Jim 'roun' back er de sto', en dere stood a monst'us fine mule. W'en de mule see Mars Jim, he gin a whinny, des lack he knowed him befo'. Mars Jim look' at de mule, en de mule 'peared ter be soun' en strong. Mars Jim thought he see sump'n' fermilious 'bout de mule's face, spesh'ly his eyes; but he had n' los' naer mule, en did n' hab no recommemb'ance er habin' seed de mule befo'. He ax de po' bockrah whar he got de mule, en de po' bockrah say his brer raise de mule

down on Rockfish Creek. Mars Jim was a little s'picious er seein' a po' w'ite man wid sech a fine critter, but he finally 'greed ter gib de man fifty dollars fer de mule — 'bout ha'f w'at a good mule was wuf dem days.

"He tied de mule behin' his buggy w'en he went home, en put him ter plowin' cotton de nex' day. De mule done mighty well fer th'ee er fo' days, en den de niggers 'mence' ter notice some quare things erbout him. Dey was a medder on de plantation whar dey use ter put de hosses en mules ter paster. Hit was fence' off f'um de corn-fiel' ; but ter one side'n de paster dey was a terbacker patch w'at w'a'nt fence' off, caze de beastisses doan' none un 'em eat terbacker — dey doan' know w'at's good ; terbacker is lack religion — de good Lawd made it fer people, en dey ain' no yuther creetur w'at kin 'preciate it. But ez I was a sayin', de darkies notice' dat de fus' thing de new mule done w'en he was turnt inter de paster, was ter make fer de terbacker-patch. Cose dey did n' think nuffin' un it, but nex' maw-nin', w'en dey went ter ketch 'im, dey 'skivered dat he had et up two whole rows er terbacker plants. Atter dat dey had ter put a halter on 'im, en tie 'im ter a stake, er e'se dey would n' a been naer leaf er terbacker lef' in de patch.

"Ernudder day one er de han's, named 'Dolphus, hitch de mule up, en dribe up here ter dish yer vimya'd—dat was w'en ole Mars Dugal' own' dis place. Mars Dugal' had killt a yearlin', en de neighbor w'ite folks all sent ober fer ter git some fraish beef, en Mars Jim had sent 'Dolphus fer some. Dey was a wine-press in de ya'd whar 'Dolphus lef' de mule a-stan'in', en right in front er de press dey was a tub er grape-juice, des pressed out, en a little ter one side a bairl erbout half full er wine w'at had be'n stan'in' two er th'ee days, en had begun ter git sorter sharp ter de tas'e. Dey was a couple er bo'ds on top er dish yer

bairl, wid a rock laid on 'em ter hole 'em down. Ez I was a sayin', 'Dolphus lef' de mule stan'in' in de ya'd, en went inter de smoke-house fer ter git de beef. Bimeby, w'en he come out, he seed de mule a-stagg'rin' 'bout de ya'd, en 'fo 'Dolphus could git dere ter fine out w'at was de marter, de mule fell right ober on his side, en laid dere des lack he was dead.

"All de niggers 'bout de house run out dere fer ter see w'at was de marter. Some say de mule had de colic ; some say one thing en some ernudder ; tell bimeby one er de han's seed de top off'n de bairl.

"'Fo de Lawd !' he say, 'dat mule drunk ! he be'n drinkin' er de wine.' En sho' 'nough, de mule had pas' right by de tub er fraish grape-juice en push' de kiver off'n de bairl, en drunk two or th'ee gallon er de wine w'at had been standin' long enough fer ter begin ter git sharp.

"De darkies all made a great 'miration 'bout de mule gittin' drunk. Dey never had n' seed nuffin lack it in dey bawn days. Dey po'd water ober de mule, en tried ter sober him up ; but it wa'n't no use, en 'Dolphus had ter take de beef home on his back, en leave de mule alone tell he slep' off his spree.

"I doan' 'member whe'r I tole yer er no, but w'en Primus disappear fum de plantation he lef' a wife—a monst'us good-lookin' yaller gal, name' Sally. W'en Primus had be'n gone a mont' er so, Sally 'mence' fer ter git lonesome, en tuk up wid ernudder young man name' Dave, w'at b'long' on de plantation. Dey libbed in de same cabin whar Primus use' ter lib. One day Dave undertuk ter plow de new mule. De mule 'peared so nice en easy-goin' dat Dave kinder fergot he was wukkin' a mule ; he went 'long behin' de plow, singin' a song w'at he made up hisse'f, 'bout w'at a nice gal Sally was, tell bimeby, w'en dey was makin' de turn at de een' er de row, one er de plow-lines got under de mule's

hind leg. Dave retch' down ter git de line out, sorter keerless like, w'en de mule haul off en kick him clean ober de fence inter a briar-patch on de yuther side — leástways dat 's w'at I hearn.

“Co'se Dave was laid up fer a day er so, en one night de mule got outen de paster, en went down to de quarters. Dave was layin' dere in bed, w'en he heard sump'n bangin' erway at de side'n his cabin. He raise up on one shoulder en look aroun', w'en w'at should he see but de new mule's head stickin' in de winder, wid his lips drawed back ober his toofs, grinnin' en snappin' at Dave des lack he wanter eat 'im up; den de mule went roun' ter de do', en kick erway lack he wanter break de do' down, tell bimeby somebody come erlong en driv him back ter de paster. W'en Sally come in f'um de big house whar she had been waitin' on de w'ite folks, she foun' po' Dave nigh 'bout dead, he was so skeered.

“Cose de niggers tole dey marster 'bout de mule's gwines-on. Fust he did n't pay no 'tention ter it, but atter a w'ile he tole 'em ef dey did n' stop dey foolishness, he gwine tie some un 'em up. So atter dat dey did n' say nuffin' mo' ter dey marster, but dey kep' on noticin' de mule's quare ways des de same.

“Long 'bout de middle er de summer dey was a big camp-meetin' broke out down on de Wimbleton road, en nigh 'bout all de po' w'ite folks en free niggers in de settlement got religion, en 'mongst 'em de conjurer w'at own de shote w'at Primus was charm' by.

“Dis conjurer was a Guinea nigger, en' befo' he was sot free had b'long' ter a gemman down in Sampson County. De conjurer say his daddy was a king, er a gub'ner, er some sorter w'atyer-may-call'em in Affiky, befo' he was stoled away en sole ter de spekilters. De conjuror had he'ped his marster outen' some trouble er nudder wid his goopher, en his marster had sot him free, en bought

him a track er land down on de Wimbleton road.

“De conjurer had n't mo'd'n comé thoo good, befo' he was tuk sick wid a cole w'at he ketch kneelin' on de groun' so long at de mou'ner's bench. He kep' gittin' wusser en wusser, en bimeby de rheumatiz tuk holt er him, en drawed him all up, tell one day he sent word up ter Mars Jim McGee's plantation, en ax Pete, de nigger w'at took keer er de mules, fer ter come down dere dat night en fetch dat mule w'at his marster had bought f'um de po' w'ite man dyoin' er de summer.

“Pete was bleedst ter go, fer he did n't daster stay away w'en de conjurer say he mus' come. So dat night, w'en he done et his bacon en his hoe-cake, en drunk his merlasses en water, he put a bridle on de mule, en rid 'im down ter de conjurer's cabin. W'en he got ter de do', he lit en hitch de mule, en den knock at de do'. He felt mighty jubous 'bout gwine in, but he was bleedst ter do it.

““Pull de string,” said a weak voice, en w'en Pete lif' de latch en went in, de conjurer was layin' on de bed, lookin' pale en weak, lack he did n' hab much longer ter lib.

““Is yer fotch de mule?” says 'e.

“Pete say yas, en de conjurer went on:

““Brer Pete,” says 'e, ‘I's be'n a monst'us sinner, en I's done a power er wickedness dyoin' er my days; but de Lawd is wash' my sins erway, en I feels now dat I am boun' fer de kingdom. En I feels, too, dat I ain't gwine ter git up f'um dis bed no mo' in dis worl', en I wants ter undo some er de harm I done. En dat 's de reason, Brer Pete, I ax yer ter fetch dat mule down here. You 'member dat shote I was up ter yo' plantation inquirin' 'bout las' June?’

““Yas,” says Brer Pete, ‘I 'member you axin' 'bout de shote.’

““I dunno whe'r you eber larnt it er no,” says de conjuror, ‘but I done knowed Primus had tuk de shote, en I

was boun' ter git eben wid 'im. So one night I cot 'im down by de swamp on his way ter a candy-pullin', en turnt him ter a mule, en got a po' w'ite man ter sell de mule, en we 'vided de money. But I doan' want ter die tell I turn Brer Primus back agin.'

"Den de conjurer ax Pete ter take down one er two go'ds off'n a shelf in de corner, en one er two bottles wid some kind er goopher mixtry in 'em, en set 'em on a stool by de bed, en den ax him ter fetch de mule in.

"We'n de mule come in, he gin a snort, en started fer de bed, des lack he was gwine ter jump up on it.

"'Hole on dere, Brer Primus,' de conjurer hollered, 'I's monst'us weak, en if you commence on me, you won't nebber hab no chance fer ter git turnt back no mo'.

"De mule seed de sense er dat, en stood still. Den de conjurer tuk de go'ds en bottles, en 'mence' ter wuk de roots en yarbs, en de mule commence ter turn back ter a man — fust his years, den de rest er his head, den his shoulders en arms. All de time de conjurer kep' on wukkin' his roots; en Pete en Primus could see he was gittin' weaker en weaker all de time.

"'Brer Pete,' says 'e, bimeby, 'gimme a drink er dem bitters ouden dat green bottle on de shelf yander. I's gwine fas', en it'll gimme strenk fer ter finish dis wuk.'

"Brer Pete look up on de mantel-piece, en he see' a bottle in de corner. It was so dark in de cabin he could n't tell whe'r it was a green bottle er no. But he hilt de bottle ter de conjurer's mouf, en de conjurer tuk a big drink.

"He had n' mo'd'n swallowed it befo' he hollered out: 'You gimme de wrong bottle, Brer Pete; dis bottle got pizen in it, en I's done fer dis time, sho'. Hol' me up, fer de Lawd's sake, tell I git thoo turnin' Brer Primus back.'

"So Pete hilt him up, en he kep' on wukkin' de roots, tell he got de goopher

all tuk off'n Brer Primus' cep'n one foot. He had n' got dis foot mo' d'n half turnt back befo' his strenk gin out, en he drap de roots en fell back on de bed.

"'I can't do no mo' fer yer, Brer Primus,' says 'e, 'but I hopes yer will fergib me fer w'at harm I done yer. I knows de good Lawd done fergib me, en I hope ter meet yer bofe in glory.' En so de conjurer died, en Pete en Primus went back ter de plantation.

"De darkies all made a great 'miration w'en Primus come back. Mars Jim let on lack he did n' b'lieve de tale de two niggers tol'; he say Primus had runned away, en stay tell he got ti'ed er de swamps, en den come back whar he knowed he'd git ernough ter eat. He tried ter 'count fer de shape er Primus' foot by sayin' Primus got his foot mash', er snake-bit, er sump'n', w'iles he was away, en did n' git it kyoed up straight. But de niggers all notice he did n' tie Primus up, ner take on much 'caze de mule was gone."

Annie had listened to Julius, at first with an air of disdainful incredulity; but as he went on she became interested, for the old man told the story in a very dramatic way; but when he had finished, her conscience, released from the spell of the story-teller's art, warned her that she had been encouraging the dissemination of fictitious narrative on the Sabbath day, and she said gravely:

"Why, Uncle Julius! You ought to be ashamed to repeat such nonsense on Sunday."

The expression of conscious guilt that involuntarily came into the old man's face, very quickly gave place to a well-assumed air of injured innocence, and he answered reproachfully:

"I ain' got no 'casion fer ter be shame', Miss Annie, w'en I ain' tellin' nuffin but de truf. I did n' see it myse'f, but I b'en hearin' it fer mo' d'n forty year."

"Then you were not an eye-witness of these remarkable occurrences?" I asked.

"No, suh, but dey was tol' ter me by folks w'at yer could n' hire ter say w'at wa' n't so. En ernudder thing w'at makes me b'lieve it so, is de way dat olé nigger goes on ef anybody ax him how he come by dat club-foot. I axed him one day, ve'y perlite en civil, en he call me a ole fool, en got so mad he ain' spoke ter me sence. Hit 's monst'us quare. But dis is a quare worl' any way yer kin fix it," concluded the old man, with a weary sigh.

"I knows a man," he added, as he rose to go, "w'at's got a good horse he wan' ter sell — leastwise dat's w'at I hearn. I'm gwine ter pra'r-meetin' ternight, en I'm gwine right by de man's house, en ef you'd lack ter look at de hoss, I'll ax him ter fetch him roun'."

"O, yes," I said, "you can ask him to stop in if he is passing. There will be no harm in looking at the horse."

Early the next morning the man brought the horse up to the vineyard. At that time I was not a very good judge of horse-flesh; the horse appeared sound and gentle, and as the owner assured me had no bad habits. The man wanted a large price for the horse, but finally agreed to accept a much smaller sum, upon payment of which I became possessed of a very fine looking animal. But alas for the deceitfulness of appearances! I soon

ascertained that the horse was blind in one eye, and that the sight of the other was very defective; and not a month elapsed before my purchase developed most of the diseases that horseflesh is heir to, and a more worthless, broken-winded, spavined quadruped never disgraced the name of horse. After worrying through two or three months of life, he expired one night in a fit of the colic, the result of over-eating and an impaired digestion. I replaced him with a mule, and Julius henceforth had to take his chances of driving some one of his relations.

Circumstances that afterwards came to my knowledge created in my mind a strong suspicion of the part Julius played in this transaction: among other things was his appearance the Sunday following the purchase of the horse in a new suit of store clothes, which I had seen displayed in the window of Mr. Solomon Cohen's store on my last visit to town, and had remarked on account of their striking originality of cut and pattern. As I had not recently paid Julius any money, and as he had no property to mortgage, I was driven to conjecture to account for his possession of the means for buying the clothes. After that time, however, I took his advice only in small doses, and with great discrimination.

Charles W. Chesnut.

