

# A BLOCKADED FAMILY

Life in Southern Alabama  
During the Civil War

by  
Parthenia Antoinette Hague

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# CONTENTS

## Chapter One

Beginnings of the Secession Movement . . . . .	5
A Negro Wedding . . . . .	9

## Chapter Two

Devices Rendered Necessary by the Blockade . . . . .	15
How the South Met a Great Emergency . . . . .	20

## Chapter Three

War-Time Scenes on an Alabama Plantation . . . . .	25
The Ingenuity of the Southern Women . . . . .	30

## Chapter Four

How Cloth Was Dyed . . . . .	35
How Shoes, Thread, Hats, and Bonnets Were Made	39

## Chapter Five

Homespun Dresses . . . . .	45
Home-Made Buttons and Pasteboard . . . . .	46
Uncle Ben . . . . .	52

## Chapter Six

Aunt Phillis and Her Domestic Trials . . . . .	55
Knitting Around the Fireside . . . . .	58
Tramp, Tramp of the Spinners . . . . .	60

## Chapter Seven

Weaving Heavy Cloth . . . . .	65
Expensive Prints . . . . .	66
“Blood Will Tell” . . . . .	70

## Chapter Eight

Substitutes For Coffee . . . . .	73
Raspberry-Leaf Tea . . . . .	74
Spinning Bees . . . . .	77

## Chapter Nine

Old-Time Hoopskirts . . . . .	81
How the Slaves Lived . . . . .	85
The Slaves' Barbecues . . . . .	87

## Chapter Ten

Painful Realities of Civil Strife . . . . .	89
Straitened Condition of the South . . . . .	92
Treatment of Prisoners . . . . .	94

## Chapter Eleven

Homespun Weddings . . . . .	97
A Pathetic Incident . . . . .	99
Approach of the Northern Army . . . . .	101

## Chapter Twelve

Pillage and Plunder . . . . .	109
"Papa's Fine Stock" . . . . .	110
The South Overrun by Soldiers . . . . .	114

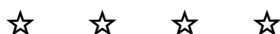
## Chapter Thirteen

Return of the Vanquished . . . . .	117
Poverty of the Confederates . . . . .	119

## Chapter Fourteen

Repairing Damages . . . . .	121
A Mother Made Happy . . . . .	124

# CHAPTER ONE



## Beginnings of the Secession Movement

On a glorious sunshiny morning in the early summer of 1861 I was on my way to the school-house on the plantation of a gentleman who lived near Eufaula, Alabama, and in whose service I remained during the period of the war.

As I was nearing the little school-room on a rising knoll, all shaded with great oaks and sentineled with tall pines, I heard skipping feet behind me, and one of my scholars exclaiming, "Here is a letter for you, Miss A —! It has just been brought from the office by 'Ed'" — the negro boy who was sent every morning for the mail.

A glance at the handwriting gave me to know it was from my father. I soon came to a pause in the school path: for my father wrote that my brothers were preparing to start for Richmond, Virginia, as soldiers of our new formed Southern Confederacy. As he wished to have all his children united under his roof, before the boys went away, my father earnestly desired me to ask leave of ab-

sence for a few days, so that I might join the home circle also.

The suspending of the school was easily arranged, and I was soon at home assisting in preparing my brothers for military service, little dreaming they were about to enter into a four-years' conflict!

But oh, how clearly even now I read every milestone of that convulsed period, as I look back upon it after a quarter of a century! Our soldiers, in their new gray uniforms, all aglow with fiery patriotism, fearing ere they should join battle that the last booming cannon would have ceased to reverberate among the mountains, hills, and valleys of "Old Virginia." The blue cockades streaming in the wind, while Southern songs, inspirations of the moment, were heard on all sides: "We conquer or die," and "Farewell to brother Jonathan," leading with fervent ardor.

While the war was in progress, it so happened that I was far removed from the seaboard and border States, in southern Alabama, where our people, encompassed and blockaded by the Federal forces, were most sadly straitened and distressed. It is of the exigencies of that stormy day, as hydra-headed they rose to view, that I have to write; of the many expedients to which we were reduced on our ever narrowing territory, daily growing not only smaller, but less and less adequate for the sustenance of ourselves, our soldiers, and the Northern prisoners who were cast upon us by the fortunes of war.

Blame us not too severely, you who fought on the Union side; we, too, loved the Union our great and good Washington bequeathed us: with what deep devotion God knoweth. But, as Satan sagely remarks in the Book of Job, "all that a man hath will he give for his life." Also a writer of profane history has truly said that "a man's fam-

ily is the nearest piece of his country, and the dearest one.” Need there be any wonder that, when a political party, with no love in its heart for the Southern white people, came into power, a party which we believed felt that the people of the South were fit only for the pikes hidden at Harper’s Ferry, we should have cried out, “What part have we in David? to your tents, O Israel.” It is cheering to know that our deeds and intentions have one great Judge, who will say, “Neither do I condemn thee.”

I well remember the day when word came with lightning speed over the wires, “The State of Georgia” – my native State, one of the original thirteen of revolutionary fame – “is out of the Union.” I also remember that we were by no means elated at the thought that our own noble commonwealth had seceded from the sisterhood of States. Feelings of sadness, rather, somewhat akin to those of the Peri outside the gate of Paradise, overcame us, but we thought and said, Come weal or woe, success or adversity, we will willingly go down or rise with the cause we have embraced. And at that moment an unpleasant recollection rushed to mind, which caused me to think that perhaps after all, secession was not so very bad. I remembered a temperance lecturer from one of the New England States, who came to our settlement and who was kindly received and warmly welcomed in our Southern homes. There was nothing too good for this temperance lecturer from the far North. He was given earnest and attentive audiences, with never a thought that in the guise of the temperance reformer his one sole purpose was to make a secret survey of our county, to ascertain which settlements were most densely populated with slaves, for the already maturing uprising of the blacks against the whites.

After the failure of the insurrection at Harper's Ferry, we saw with sorrow deep felt that the three places in our own county which were known to all too well to be most thickly peopled with slaves were marked on John Brown's map of blood and massacre, as the first spots for the negro uprising for the extermination of the Southern whites.

When my brothers had left for Virginia, I started again for southern Alabama, to renew my school duties. As the train sped onward through the tall, long-leaved pines and funereal cypress-trees rising here and there on either side, a feeling of homesick desolation gathered as a thick mist around me, with vague and undefined forebodings of sorrows in store for us.

To add to the depression, clouds dark and lowering were slowly looming up and spreading themselves over the nether heavens, while low and distant thunder dying plaintively away seemed never before to have fallen so mournfully on my ear. As I looked from the window of the speeding train to the dark green gloom of the almost unbroken forest, the low wail of the wind in the tops of the pines, the lowering dark clouds dimly outlined through the shaded vista, pressed down my heart as with a great sorrow; the far-away mutterings of thunder, the low moan of the wind as it rocked to and fro the tops of the pines, came to me as the Banshee's lonely wail. All seemed to presage some dire affliction. Could it be that my father's household had joined together for the last time in their earthly home? Poe's ghastly, grim, and ancient raven seemed to speak the "Nevermore;" and, alas! nevermore did we children of that happy circle ever meet again.

As the train gathered itself up in the village of Hurtville, the inky black clouds, flashes of almost blind-

ing lightning, and heavy peals of rolling thunder told that the tempest was unchained.

I still had a distance of fourteen or fifteen miles to travel by the hack before I should reach my school. But as the storm began to increase so much in violence, I deemed it advisable to remain in Hurtville for the night. On inquiring for a place to stop at for the night I was directed to Mrs. Hurt, whose spacious mansion and large and beautiful flower yard and grounds stood fair to view from the little village depot.

Hitherto I had passed the village by, in my trips home and back to school again during my vacation days, so that I was altogether a stranger in the home of Mrs. Hurt, but on making her acquaintance was pleased to find her most kind and generous. My quiet satisfaction was further augmented by a loved school companion stepping into the room most unexpectedly, ere I had been seated half an hour. It was a glad surprise for both. Her father and mother lived in the village, and as the violent wind and rain storm had made roads and bridges impassable for the time being, I accepted the invitation of my friend to spend the time of my detention with her.

### A Negro Wedding

One pleasing episode of that visit yet clings to memory. It so happened that one of the negro girls of the house was to be married the very week I was detained. Preparations in various ways had been making for several days before the celebration of the ceremony. Dear Winnie, if still a sojourner here, and you chance to see these lines, I know your memory with mine will turn back on the wheels of time to that afternoon, when we were seated on

the colonnade of your father's house. With flowers scattered all around, our laps and hands full, we twined the wreath for the negro girl, the bride elect for the evening. When twilight had deepened into darkness, the bride was called into your room to make ready for the marriage. When fully robed in her wedding garment, she was inspected by each and every member of the household, and judged to be quite *au fait*. But Winnie pulled off her own watch and chain, together with her bracelets, and with these further adorned the bride. She was married in the wide hall of her master's house, for having been raised in the house almost from her cradle, her marriage taking place in one of the cabins was not to be thought of.

Directly under the supervision of the mistress of the house, a supper that would have been pleasing to the taste of an epicure was served on tables placed out in the smooth gravelly yard. Then after the feasting was over, a round of merry plays, interspersed with the merrier songs and dance, followed. Perhaps no happier beings existed that night. It was like a vision of fairy-land. The full moon chosen for the occasion rode in silent majesty across the star-gemmed heavens; fleecy white clouds flitted like shadowy phantoms across its silvery path; the dark pines, half in shadow, half in sheen, loomed vast and giant-like on the outskirts of the village. In the deeper forest could be heard the weird notes of the whip-poor-wills. The pleasing strains of the violin, the thrumming of the banjo, accompanied by many negro voices, awoke the sleeping echoes. From the front colonnade, before us lay the slumbering village all so quietly under the starry firmament. We listened there to the mellow peals of negro laughter, to their strange songs, mingling with the strains of the violin, and the low breathing of the night wind in the forest.

As we roam back in the past, events of earlier days rise in bright view to mind; one link in memory's chain runs into another. I cannot forbear here referring to an incident which occurred a few years before the civil war. There came to our settlement from the North, three cultured, refined, and educated ladies as schoolteachers. Their first Sabbath of worship in the South was at the Mount Olive Baptist church, in Harris County, Georgia. The pastor of the church, for some unknown cause, failed to appear at the hour appointed for service. We waited for some time and still no preacher. Then the good old deacon, known by all as "Uncle Billy" Moore, who had lived by reason of strength beyond the allotted threescore and ten, arose, and said, as the hour for service was passing, as the minister's arrival seemed doubtful, and as the congregation had all assembled, he would suggest that Uncle Sol Mitchell, an old and honored negro, preach for us, as he was present, and a member and preacher in good standing in the Mount Olive church. There was not even a shadow of an objection to the negro slave's occupying the pulpit, as our friends from the far North were witness. Ah, friends of the Green Mountain and Bay State, you will, if yet in the flesh, remember with me that Sabbath so long ago in the South, when the negro slave walked up to the pulpit, opened the hymn-book, and announced the old sacred song: "When I can read my title clear, To mansions in the skies."

I remember how loudly my dear father tried to sing – though only a poor singer – just because Uncle Sol was going to preach; how Sol gave the verses out by couplets to be sung, as was the custom then in the country. All joined in singing that sacred song, and bowed the knee when Uncle Sol said, "Let us pray." I am very sure I have