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THE CALHOUNS OF GRANNY BOGGS

Four years ago in the little town of Pickens, South Carolina there died a remarkable old woman. Elmyra Stephens Boggs was her name, but throughout the community she was known as "Granny". Visitors came from neighboring counties, and often from other states, to meet Granny Boggs and to hear her tell of a day that she alone remembered.

Granny was born in 1829. It must have been about 1832 that her father, a poor carpenter of Pendleton district, became overseer for John C. Calhoun and took his family to live in the shadow of the Calhoun mansion.

"As I have heard my father tell," said Granny, "it happened this way. One fine spring day Pa was walkin' to the village when he met Mr. Calhoun ridin' on his big bay. Instead o' passin' Pa, Mr. Calhoun stopped and says brisk-like, 'Good day, Green Stephens, what are you seeking?' 'Work, sir,' says Pa. 'Then I will make you overseer of Fort Hill,' says Mr. Calhoun. That was how we children happened to see and hear the great things that went on at the white mansion."

Later Green Stephens bought a farm of his own near the Fort Hill plantation, but Granny continued a welcome visitor

at the Calhouns'. After John C. Calhoun's death, when his son, Andrew Pickens, became master of Fort Hill, Granny's husband, Aaron Boggs, became overseer, and again Granny lived near the family she loved.

Into the history of the American people has been written the part John C. Calhoun played from his election to Congress in 1811 to his death in 1850, but little has been said of the home and family life of this man called by his people to be the framer and exponent of their sectional creed. Granny knew almost nothing of the Calhoun who figured in national politics, but she knew the man who returned from Washington to try to forget for a time the problems threatening to tear asunder the union he loved. In those last years of her life, Granny delighted to recall the time when Fort Hill was gay with guests, when blithe African songs made merry the cabins beneath the hill.

If Granny was correct in saying that she was three years old when her father went to work at Fort Hill, it is small wonder that John C. Calhoun consummated quickly the deal that brought him a competent overseer. 1832 was a critical year in the history of the nation. Since the tariff acts of 1828 that gave protection to all save the cotton growers of the South, trouble had been brewing in South Carolina. Calhoun had written in 1828 the "South Carolina Exposition", which his state adopted as its creed. Subsequent events led to the South Carolina Convention of 1832 and its adoption of the Ordinance of Nullification, and finally to Calhoun's resigning the vice presidency that in the senate he

might fight for the things his state demanded. Just at this time Granny Boggs went to live at Fort Hill and began to know the man who with Clay and Webster formed the great debating trio at Washington. Her memory retained what historians failed to record.

It was in 1832 that the famous Perry-Bynum duel, which so profoundly touched Calhoun, was fought. While Granny did not remember the duel itself, its aftermath was deeply impressed upon her mind. Calhoun, it will be remembered, had enemies even in his own state. Pendleton district stood firmly by the South Carolina Exposition and the nullification of the tariff acts. In Greenville, however, the opposition was led by Benjamin F. Perry, later governor of the state, who edited a unionist paper, The Greenville Mountaineer. The Calhoun doctrines found a brilliant exponent in young Turner Bynum, who started a rival paper, The Greenville Sentinel. In 1832 matters came to a crisis between the two men, and on a little island in the Savannah river, opposite the Calhoun plantation, Perry and Bynum met in a duel in which Bynum was fatally wounded.

"I was only about three years old when the duel took place," said Granny, "but I remember folks talkin' about it when I was a mighty little girl. I've heard a tell how old Mr. Calhoun took on about young Bynum dyin', and it did seem a pity."

The sixty-eight years of John C. Calhoun's life covered an eventful period in the history of the nation, and the great statesman's death in 1850 came at a time when the South could ill spare his clear cut oratory and forceful logic. All these

years Granny knew the man and not the statesman, and it was about the man she loved to talk.

I saw Granny Boggs last a year or two before her death and went with her in her son's car through old Pendleton district. The day of the trip she was dressed in her best, and she must have known that she looked exceedingly well. Under her quaint little bonnet, her hair shone pure white, its snowy undulations confined by the whitest of combs. Granny's one vanity was her hair, and no one would give just reason why it should not have been. Granny's face that morning, always a pleasant thing to look upon, radiated an inner joy. We were off to explore the sacred places of her memory. Peeping out from her mufflings, the old lady noted the landmarks--Liberty, Norris, Central, the old home of the Boggses, finally the Calhoun home to the very front yard of which Clemson College has encroached.

"Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful!" Granny said reverently, as she was helped from the car. Indeed, simple though it is, the house has the distinction that comes from spaciousness and straight lines. In the relic room, we touched the old furniture, sat in George Washington's chair, fingered the American eagle on the long Washington divan, stood where Calhoun's daughter and Thomas Clemson had been married, marveled at the carved likeness of King Leopold II on the chair the cruel king had given to Mr. Clemson, touched the faded red curtains Calhoun had brought from Washington, and listened to Granny Boggs' reminiscences.

Behind the house stands the little library where John C. Calhoun used to spend his mornings when at home. The negro cabins

are gone; the old ice house used to occupy the place where the college library now stands; but on the hill above no one has disturbed the graveyard where Andrew P. Calhoun, his wife and three children lie buried. A summer house obstructs the view of Keowee Heights, the home of John E. Calhoun, cousin of the statesman. Between the college and the station we passed Cold Springs, where Mrs. John C. Calhoun's mother had lived. In the evening we were again in Pickens, Granny in her chair by the fire, a calm afterglow lighting her kindly face. It had been a day Granny would sit and dream of through long winter evenings.

It was John C. Calhoun, the farmer and the man, that Granny knew. Home from Washington, he would stroll across the fields to the overseer's house. From behind the door, Elmyra and her older sister, Lucinda, would listen to the two men as they talked. Granny's father used to say that no man understood farming more thoroughly than did John C., himself.

Two blissful days came to Elmyra and Lucinda Stephens when Mrs. Calhoun took them to Pendleton, first to a circus and later to the races. They rode in the costly rockaway drawn by the spirited Calhoun horses. Granny's eyes shone as she told how Mrs. Calhoun's own sons rode on the step made to carry the colored boy who opened the gates, while the two little country girls were given seats within.

When Aaron Boggs was courting Elmyra Stephens there was a memorable wedding at Fort Hill. In place of Green Stephens, a man named Fredericks had become overseer for Mr. Calhoun. His daughter, Susan, and young Joberry Caradine were married in the

white mansion. Aaron Boggs was present and tantalized sweet Elmyra Stephens by talking too pleasantly to Sarah Fredericks, a pretty younger sister of the bride. The guests had all assembled when Mr. Calhoun came down in his stately frock coat, bearing on his arm his wife, lovely in brocaded satin.

Indeed Granny's mind seemed to revert more often to "Old Mrs. Calhoun" than to any other friend of the early days. In boxes and bags she hoarded the treasures--newspaper clippings, old shawls, a butterknife that had belonged to John C. Calhoun, letters and many other precious trifles. As I drew my chair close to hers on the evening after our ride through Pendleton District, I saw that Granny was fingering a bit of yellowed lace.

"I got this out to show you," she said. "I spun the yarn, and Mrs. Calhoun made the lace."

It was loose crochet, and the yarn was coarse, but it had belonged to the great lady of the mansion.

History tells us that John Calwell Calhoun married his cousin, Floride Calhoun, the pretty grand daughter of his uncle, Ezekiel Calhoun. Floride's mother, after the death of her husband, came to Cold Springs to live--the little white home between Clemson College and Calhoun Station. In the days when the Stephens lived at Fort Hill, Elmyra and Lucinda were often sent to Cold Springs on errands. Granny remembered Mrs. James Ewing Calhoun as a tall old lady, austere but kind. When the little girls had delivered their bundles, she would invariably give them something to take home with them. Upon one occasion, they received mugs bearing the legend, "Keep thy shop and thy shop will keep thee."

Out of the treasure box Granny drew two yellowed newspaper clippings.

"You may have one to keep," said Granny. "I clipped them from the Seneca paper. It's a love letter Mr. Calhoun wrote Mrs. Calhoun before they were married. Read it aloud."

"I rejoice, my dearest Floride," I read, "that the day is fast approaching when it will no longer be necessary to address you through the cold medium of a letter. Ay furtherest it can not be much more than a month before I shall behold the dearest object of my hopes and desires.... What pleasures I have experienced in your company! What transport in the testimonials of mutual love! My dearest one, may our love strengthen with each returning day! May it ripen and mellow with the years! And may it end with immortal joys!"

"Doesn't he say it beautifully?" asked Granny. "It sounds just like him--so fine and ponderous-like. And it was a love match. They went on thinkin' a heap o' each other, but they had their ups and downs, and Mrs. Calhoun had a dreadful temper--so to say."

Then, smiling reminiscently, Granny told how Mrs. Calhoun would lock herself in her room for days at a time until the storm had blown over. When his "dearest Florid" began to visit her wrath upon his offending head, John C. would walk away, whistling a tune, to the increasing indignation of Floride.

Straight-laced Scotchman that he was, Mr. Calhoun did not approve of dancing; while from her mother, a Miss Bonneau of Charleston, Mrs. Calhoun inherited the French love of gaiety. One amus-

ing little story Granny used to tell describes the clash between John C.'s piety and determination and Mrs. Calhoun's temper. A great ball was to be given at Pendleton. Quite sure that her husband would not wish her to attend, Mrs. Calhoun went early in the afternoon to a home mid way between Fort Hill and Pendleton, her plan being to go from there to the ball. As evening drew near, one of the negroes informed his master of the plan, and Mr. Calhoun immediately drove towards Pendleton, overtaking his wife as she entered the village. According to the story told Granny Boggs, it took a big negro and John C. himself to force the lady into the roakaway and that all the way home she beat her husband in the face with her slipper. The story went its rounds, as stories will, neither denied nor affirmed by a Calhoun. The family bore the penalty of greatness.

I have been able to recount here only a few of the stories Granny Boggs used to tell of that romantic day in which her youth was spent, and even these, divorced from Granny's personality, must lose the quaintness that gave them charm. If Granny could have written her memoirs, what a commentary they would have been upon a phase of the past that can never be made to live again. All those dear people about whom Granny loved to talk are gone now, and in the little burying ground at the old Boggs home Granny lies beside her Aaron. Upon the estate of John C. Calhoun Clemson College rises to honor the family. The woodland had been cleared away; fields once white with bursting cotton bolls are now smooth-mown, but the old home remains as it always was, and in the little graveyard Calhouns are keeping their silent watch upon Fort Hill.

Another day has dawned for old Penfleton District. Manufacturies have sprung into existence introducing a new aristocracy in place of the old. Typical of much of the best in the past was Granny Boggs. The daughter of a poor carpenter of old Pendleton, she was nature's gentlewoman, great in humility and humble in true greatness.