COTTON-PICKING TIME IN THE SOUTH.

By Anne Hobson.

Illustrated by A. E. Frost.

OCTOBER and cotton-pickin' time in the South; the time of the year when scarlet Christmas berries hang themselves in graceful festoons all about the fields and bushes, when muscadines and fox grapes fill the woods with fragrance, and golden rod and black-eyed Susans throw their yellow-coated armies against each other for the supremacy of the fields, and look with haughty disdain upon the humble little daisies and asters that grow in clusters around their feet; the time when 'little niggers' skirt the fields and hunt along the fences and ditches for may-pops, now yellow and luscious, and little boys love to go deep into the woods for the ripening chinesepins and chestnuts.

Summer is loath to depart, and amuses herself with playing hide-and-seek with Autumn, who has already turned the corner and come in sight with his gay heraldries, though only fleeting glimpses of his red and yellow coat can be caught in and out among the gums and maples as we see him approaching with his gaudy train. Nearer and nearer he comes, and already we feel his breath upon our cheek. We see the leaves fall down and spread a carpet for his feet. The tall yellowing hickories send down their brown-clad messengers to make obeisance, as if imploring gentle treatment at his hands. From the fields and woods the note of dove and whirr of partridge sound forth in welcome, while many merry-throated songsters flutter and chirp about as if to prove their loyalty, and cover up the disgrace of their faint-hearted companions who have quailed at the first chilling touch and flown away. There is an uncanny feeling in the air. Signs of change on all nature; a subtle uncertainty and elusiveness hangs over everything.
At twilight we sit without and listen to the sounds of the evening. There are crickets chirping under the step; we hear the milkman calling up the cows from the pasture; the barking of a lonely dog in the distance, then the dull thud of wood as it is brought in and heaped up for the fires of the evening.

A whip-poor-will calls in deep distress from the woods, and saucy Bob White answers back in gay derision. Far away in the still distance some one is calling to the pigs, and the weird echo comes to us, “Who-o-o-p pig, whoo-o-o-p pig, pig, pig!” It has a lonely, far-away sound in the evening air. Then the winding of the hunter’s horn is heard through the woods, the yelp of hounds, and the echo of galloping horses, as they round the hill and are off.

Then all is quiet. We sit very still, and a gentle melancholy creeps over us. Then we shudder in the frosty air, and say, “Fall is here.” But lo! the next morning we rub our eyes and search for him, but he is gone—he has slipped away in the night. We look without and there lies Summer napping in the lazy October sunshine on the leafy couch which she has beguiled from Autumn by her soft smiles and caresses.

The fields are white with the opening cotton that fearlessly spreads its riches out beneath the open sky; and the pines skirting the fields in the distance stand proudly like sentinels guarding this great wealth of the Southland.

From far and near come scratchs of “fiel’ songs” from the cotton pickers bending low over the fleece-laden stalks, picking for “fifty cents or hundred”; the ambitious doing their utmost to pass the hundred mark “’fo’ dark,” and the free-and-easy, happy-go-lucky ones taking time every now and then to sit in the shade and rest, or go down to the branch for a drink of water, hoping to make up for lost time by throwing in a boll every now and then with the cotton, or sprinkling that in the bottom of the basket with water to increase the weight. Thus from “first light” till dark they pick on, only stopping when the sweep sounds twelve o’clock for “han’s” to stop off for dinner.

As “ole Unk Asberry” said, “Cotton pickin’ sho duz ’gres wid er nigger. Jis seems lak it cum nachul, ’tain no trouble ’tall. Er nigger jis seems ter tek ter cotton pickin’ lak er ’possum duz ter ’simmons arter fros’ fall.

“Jis yer show me er nigger whut doan lub ter chop cotton, en pick cotton, en 1 gwine be’ spichus er dat rascal sho es yer bawn. Laws er massa! how I rolls outs de bad en rubs mah eyes whin I hears de sweep knock in de mawnin’ ’fo’ day fer de han’s ter go ter de fiel’.

“Everything looks right quare at fas, sorter lonesum lak. Dem blame roosters wid dey impertent crowin’, en de jow all ober everything, en de mockin’ buds jis ’gimmn’ ter wake up in de trees, en de cows all er stannin’ ’roun’ shibberin’, en ole 81’s yaller dog er barkin’ down ter de cabbin in de bottom. Er nigger sorter feel lak he’s
"THE FIELDS ARE WHITE WITH THE OPENING COTTON."

"cummin' throu' er graveyard on er rainy night. But 'fo' yer knows it, hyar cum de sun er peepin' throu' de clouds kinder shy lak at fus, en I say, 'Ork-or, Mr. Sun, yo cyan fool dis nigger, I'se dun hed too much spernace wid yer en yo shy ways. I 'tows yer gwine ter git mighty bile en impertent 'bout twelb erclock.' En sho 'nuff, ef I ain' dun spak de gorspol, 'tain' neber been preached frum de pulpit. Bless yo sole, I ain' mo'n got started ter pickin' 'fo' I feels myself gittin' all het up, en I look up en dar's de ole gintmun in er broad grin, en keepin' pretty familyus comp'ny wid me, gibben me so much 'tention, you'd er thot I wuz de onliest nigger in dat fiel'."

"Well, de cotton luk so white en shiny wid de jew all over'n hit, en hit feel so saf ter ma fingers, dat 'fo' I knows 't I wuz er pickin' cotton right erlong ter de time uv er brekdown, en singin' 'jis es fas' ez I cud, "'New coon in town, new coon in town,
Doan dance me down, ma darlin',
Doan dance me down.
Fly roun' ladies, so Mr. Brown,
Fly roun' ladies, so Mr. Brown,"
"I specs,' en I ain' mor'n got de wads out'n
ma mouf 'fo' I hears de sweep knock fer
dinner.

"Laws er massy, whin I gits ter eatin'
dem yaller yams with fresh buttermilk what
ma ole woman done fixed up fer me, en dem
cole hoecakes wid de fat meat greese er
runnin' out'n 'em, en dat punkin pie ter
een up on, I 'low ter masef, ' Unk-unk, dis
mos' ez good ez settin' under er shade tree
eatin' watermillions in de summer time.'
But I allers did say dat de fall er de year
beats de yuthers all to holler. Ain' dat de
time whin de 'possum hang hissef by de tail
ter er 'simmon tree, jis specfully fer ter
fatten sum po' nigger? Ain' dat de time
whin de cooshaws en punkins is er runnin'
wile all ober crestshun, en almost er makin'
deysebe inters pies! En cawniel peas is
'er cummin' in, en yer kin jis hyar de shotes
er crackin' hickernuts en skinns, en puttin'
on fat ter greese de skillet wid. En chinky
pins en chestnuts plentiful en free ter all,
en evywhar yer tun yer c'n smell de sorgum
juice er suin' inters lasses. Yasser ree,
Bob! gimme de fall er de year evertime.

"I hyar 'em talk 'bout de glories uv de
springtime. Uuh! De mos' glories dat I
meets wid in de springtime am de eber-
lastin'mawlin'-glories er sneakin' en spread-
in' deysebe rund, worl' widout end, en
ruinatin' ma young cawn en cotton. Now,
soh, dem am argimints what yer can't git
end. En ter squenct de whole business,
I lak ter ax, 'Whin dux circuses cum?'
Haw-haw-haw, I got cher dar, sho. Ye'r
'bleege ter answer, in de fall er de year.

"Clar ter goodness! Hyar I bin or lay-
in' out in de sun er argifyin' ter masef, tell
I dean ferget all 'bout dem two hundred
pouns dat I 'lowed ter pick 'fo' dark. En
evy one uv dem black niggers is done gone
back ter de cotton patch. De Lawd knows
ef I koches one uv 'em or pickin' in ma part
er de fiel', I gwine ter ring 'im out ter dry,
sho ez yo hawn. Howsumever, dey is got
hit wrong if dey thinks dey gwine mek en-
thiny by hurryin' off right arter dinner en
not gibbin' deysebe time fer dey grub ter
settle. A nigger ain' good fer nuthin'
right arter dinner till his vittles is dun set-
thin' en mixin' wid one er mudder. En I
gwine een up wid mo' cotton dis day den
enny han' in de fiel'.

"Laws! de bestes time I eber sperunees,
en de happies', too, lessen hit's whin I'se
gittin' 'ligun ergin arter I dun backslide,
"'WHIN DIZ CIRCUSIS CUM?"
"'DE GLORIES UV DE SPRINGTIME.'"

is arter I dun et 'bout two quarts uv cawn-
fiel' peas cooked right greasy wid er poun'
er two er bac'n, en sum yaller yams ter
sop in de pot licker, en fo' or five hot hoe-
cakes wid sorgum, en plenty uv good strong
buttermilk ter wash 'em all down wid, en
den lays out in de sun en feels 'em all gitt-
tin' 'quainted wid one 'udder. En den dey
sorter quiets down, en I feel so peaceful en
happy, I feel lak I gwine ter sleep. But I
ain' mo'n doze off 'fo' I shakes masef ter-
gedder en gits up en hustles, kase I knows
COTTON-PICKING TIME IN THE SOUTH

erleettle mo' en I'd be off sho; en 'twouldn't neber do not ter pick dem two hunderd poun's 'fo' dark, en leah all dat cotton er grimm' on de storks.

"En sides dat, I knows diabher summery wedder ain' gwine las'. L'il Miss Summer jis playin' sum er her pranks en foolin' ole Mr. Fall. 'Fo' he know hit, she gwine ter slam de do' in 'is face en be gone fur good; lessen he kin swade her ter cum back fur 'nuff ter kiss her han' ter de rose bushes, en mek de young buds op'n up en bloom, en stay 'roun' jis er leettle while mo' till he kin go en wake ole Man Winter up en Marse Sandy Claib, en tell 'em dey better be git-

in' ready, fer hit'Il soon be time fer 'em ter cum erroon' ergin. En den whin he gits back all puffin' en blowin', little Miss Summer gwine ter mek her bes' bow en kiss her han' ter 'im, en he gwine ter see her no mo' twell nex' cotton-pickin' time.

"En I'se gwine be right hyar masef in dis seffsame fiel' er pickin' cotton dis time nex' year, if I lib en nuttin' hap's. But de Lawd only knows whar I gwine ter be by nex' cotton-pickin' time. Ewy time I koches masef makin' de Lawd's rangements fer 'im, I stops right short en sings ter masef dat good ole hime:

"'Dis time crudder year
I may be gone
In sum er lonesum grabeyard.
Who knows how long?
O Lawd, how long?--
Ben' low, if't Jesus, ben' low--
O Lawd, how long?"

As night comes on, one by one the pickers leave off, and emptying their bags into baskets, they pile them up in the farm wagons and carry them off to be weighed.

Already along the dusty streets may be seen wagon after wagon loaded with bales of cotton on the way to the village depot to be shipped away to clothe the world.

Now it is a four-mule wagon of some thrifty farmer piled up with bale upon bale; now the small, ramshackle, rattling cart of some negro containing one under-weight bale, his year's work and sole income; now a load of baskets, piled high and overflowing with the snowy staple, breaks the monoto-

ny; and every now and then a load of cot-

ton seed being hurried off to sell while the fight between the mills is on and the price is high. Sandwiched in between bales and baskets and crowded thickly upon the seed wagons, with legs dangling over the sides and back, laughing and cracking jokes, are darkies of every size and color.

The load of passengers increases as the wagons go along, and every dark-skinned brother or sister going the same way feels entitled to a place, and calls out, "Lemme ride," and without waiting for permission, pulls up into the crowded wagon.

It is a happy time for the negroes in the South when the crop is gathered, and they have a little "ready money" in their pockets, and can "go to town on Saddy," and hang around and eat ginger-bread and sardines and crackers, and buy a few yards of blue jeans, or some "orzenberg," and perhaps enough "yaller buff calliky" or homespun for a dress; and then, when night comes on, to beg a ride home on some friendly wagon "gwine out our way.

For in the village Saturday belongs to the negro, and it is a brave person who will venture to work his way through the crowded sidewalks on a "Saddy in cotton-pickin' time." They are there from all parts of the country, and in holiday costume. Such lavish combinations of colors would be hard to imagine, the favorites being bright yellow, scarlet, grass green, and royal purple; and the arrangements wonderful conceived. They stand about in picturesque groups, chores tobacco, cracking "gub-

bers," drinking red lemonade, jigging, laughing, playing the "juice harp," and eating everything available, from an apple to a stick of licorice.

By the time the lamps are lighted the streets are deserted, except for a few strag-

gling "town niggers."

Thus do the happy, improvident workers who plant and gather the crops and har-

vests of the South spend their small earn-

ings "goin' inter town on Saddy," and

buying ginger-cake and peppermint candy.

Happy, harmless, good-natured creatures! Kind to those who do them kindness; for-

giving to those who do them harm. How many a dear old mammy with gentle, re-

fined nature turned adrift in declining years among the rough "fiel-han' niggers," upon whom she used to look with so much scorn.

Yet a merrier, happier set of creatures than the Southern darkies singing in the fields in "cotton-pickin' time," or on the streets eating and "tradin'" on a "Saddy," would be hard to find.