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Southern Folkways Journal Review Number 4

The
Rogue's
March
by
Rita Turner Wall

Auspices
Bulloch County Historical Society
Post Office Box 42
Statesboro, Georgia 30459

RITA TURNER WALL

Laura Rita Turner Wall is one of Bulloch County's most talented citizens. She is a descendant of Bulloch's oldest families and thus has a store of knowledge of folkways of this area.

She is a prolific writer whose works we have been pleased to publish in Readings in Bulloch County History.

She is an artist. We have published many of her sketches of old Bulloch houses, especially in the west portion of the county. She measured the principal dimensions herself in order to insure accuracy of her sketches. We were able to secure permanent placement of her original sketches in Special Collections of Georgia Southern University's Henderson Library.

The "Rogue's March" is written as fiction but the reader will recognize much of the setting as typical of a bygone era.

Statesboro, Georgia

March 1993

The Rogue's March

The men were all sitting in a spread-out circle around the big cold iron heater, and the hot June breeze poured through the old high-ceiled country store, through the wide-open door and the two high, grated windows in the bay at the back which served as a natural draft. Josh Whitsell sat on his four-legged stool with his elbows on the counter, a counter of flat-sawed sixteen-inch boards still marked with the up-and-down saws of his ancestors who had operated water-powered mills on Jethro's Creek since Old Indian Times. Around him on measured shelves were stacked overalls and blue chambray shirts and boxes of shoes and bolts of calico and homespun, and columns of canned peaches and tomatoes and salmon and evaporated Pet milk. In the ample back bay were barrels and firkins from whence the evasive smell that permeated the whole building, molasses and corn meal and muscovado sugar, smokehouse hams and midlings and salt pork—and the new compound lard that smelled like crushed cotton seed. On the counter that hemmed in the bay was a great coffee mill turned into an anachronism by stacks of Maxwell House pure ground coffee and Louisiana and Charmer with chickery for the Louisiana taste some Georgians preferred. The coffee mill was an eternal temptation to the generations coming on, but one look from the store-keeper was ever

enough to faze the one daring enough to approach and seize the handle on the wheel and give it a whirl. Above the back counter there hung an ancient brass kerosene lamp, twice replaced by more modern lighting, first carbide, and now a mantled "Aladdin Lamp" under pressure which hung above the counter where the store-keeper leaned. On the highest shelves around the store, out of reach altogether without a stepladder, was a striking display of beautiful ewer and bason sets, butter dishes and crocks and molds, chamber pots and shaving mugs, and high stacks of dust-covered open stock dinnerware in old-fashioned, long discontinued patterns with liquid and base-gold decorations. Directly behind the storekeeper was a row of small dusty earthenware mortars with blue bands the Southern Cotton Oil plant in Savannah had vainly put out to advertise its new product Wesson Oil for the making of mayonnaise. In the center of the back wall, between the high windows, an old schoolhouse wall clock ticked the minutes and hours away as it had for fifty years—give or take a few—and struck on the hour and half-hour with a melodious gong that enforced silence on all congregations.

In the slow unspiraling of time, the changes that man would affirm were not evident in this segment in the memory of one or two present who could grasp it. Some of these men knew their ancestry, that their

forebearers had come from North Carolina or Virginia after the Revolution to claim the bounty grants Georgia gave those veterans who fought on her soil. Others of a much more ancient lineage in Georgia had let it slip by them that their ancestors had come with Oglethorpe and had held fiefs under King George's seal, the transfers through three wars and many ups-and-downs from riches and shirt sleeves having been lost in time and the struggle for survival, and uncarving links in the chain of descent. Two share-croppers were late-comers, having been brought to St. Phillip's County as children about the turn of the century, from "Up the Country" which they were unable to identify. The circle of men was remarkably reminiscent of others, their ancestors fifty years before (one thirty-eighth of the time since Christ), showing the telltale resemblance of family. Their predecessors who had gathered here in this same store to hob-and-nob time-out-of mind, now inhabited the grave yards that dotted the countryside. Even their names were the same as those on the weathered tombstones that stood in sometimes weedy enclosures. They were a circle of provincial elites and sharecroppers hobbing and nobbing in common interest, an undemanding association of men when no women were present. But times being what they were, the depression so deep and disheartening, there was nothing of the insolence of

prosperity among them, even among those who held fiefdoms of unmortgaged land.

Even the subjects of their conversations were not much different from what it had been among their ancestors half a century before. Talk of weather and crops, years of flood and drought long gone, the demerits of an undershot waterwheel, deaf fields, and how much ground was a wend. The only new subject was the crash of the stockmarket a year-and-a-half before that had caused disastrous runs on banks all over the country, devastated farm prices, and caused two local suicides, and put everybody's automobile off the road and up on blocks; and the deepening depression surely caused by a Republican president who could not be removed from office before next year's election. But the subjects that kept recurring like a persistent bubble in a simmering pot was the sheriff's recent raid on a neighboring farm that had turned up nothing of either still or mash or moonshine, and who it could be that had gone with the accusation before the desk of the Law. The young fellow who had just had his hair cut for a dime at the country barber's up the road, kept looking at the men with the tilted face who silently and suspiciously watched the others talk, and picked his nose with thumb and forefinger, furtively dropping the dry gleanings on the floor. Somewhere off in the woods a mourning dove cooed mournfully,

foretelling the needed rain.

Clayton Pottle, the fiddle player, turned to the storekeeper: "Josh, you ever sold any likker?"

"A many a gallon. And drunk a many another one, but that's a long time ago, mostly before prohibition. One time when I was a younger man, J.T. Dana come in here--that 'as D. T.'s daddy, you older ones remember him I expect, he's buried down in the old section at Hebrun--an' he was drunk as a hog 'round a mash barrel, worse than D. T. ever was, and y'all know how bad he is! Well, J.T. was beligerent and insultin', wantin' to jump on everybody, and so I finally had to run 'im off before he run everybody else off. He was so drunk he clumb in 'is buggy two-three times 'fore he ever made it. Kept fallin' out on t'other side! That's when I decided I'd never drink another drop--a man never knows if he's the sort to let it get a-hold of him like the Danas. Later on, after prohibition I'as a-sellin' it, but Trudy Mae, she made me quit. She didn't like the looks of some characters hanging about here! But if times don't pick-up pretty soon I may have to go back a-sellin' it--that's the one commodity nobody ever asks credit on! And y'all know I can't put my truck up on blocks and join the rest of you in mule-power on account o' havin' to haul ice and goods for the store!"

"I've never been one to drink likker," said the

man with the drooped eyelids, but nobody made him any answer. His stringy cigarette had burned so close he had to keep moving it about to keep from burning his lips, his face contorting from the heat: finally, he ground it out on top of the heater. The sober-faced chap with the fresh haircut watched him agape, also looking at the two boys hanging about his chair who bore their sire's mark.

Someone finally got the young man's attention by asking if he were going to college in the fall, at which he shook his head uncertainly, finally said, "Don't know, sir, it depends on our crops, especially tobacco."

"John David, you don't never say nothin', do you?"

"No, sir."

Josh spoke up: "John David, he'd done good in school all his life; it's been honor roll all the way, but the biggest thing he learned--or already know'd--was how to keep 'is mouth shut! You can talk in front of him all you please, about anybody, good or bad, and be assured it won't go no further, just ponds up in his head! But he's got a-plenty o' words all right: he's just about wore out his daddy's old unabridged dictionary he used back when he was a'teaching school, but he don't see no use in usin' 'em. You might say he's thrifty with words!" As everybody began to

laugh, the young scholar blushed under his thick, close-cropped dark hair.

Ransom Oglesby flashed his quick grin that showed one front tooth notched from a lifetime of playing the Jews' harp: "John David will keep on 'til he'll be talkin' that University of Chicago language like Mister Josh here!"

Clayton Pottle replied immediately: "Mr. Josh don't use that kind of talk except when there's a bunch o' lawyers or professors around--the rest of the time he talks just like us Yokels!" The storekeeper was taken aback, but as the laughter filled the store he too joined in, in some consternation.

"Yo' cousin still with you?" someone asked Mudge Mitchum.

"Still with me. The old man is about a bubble-and-a half off plumb, and all day he lies on my front porch mashing ol' crazy ants with a ten-penny nail--he's goin' t'get rid o' all my crazy ants!"

"I be owner o' ol' crazy ants on my front porch too!" Kennice Bloodworth told Mudge. "So when he gets rid o' all yours, bring him over my way an' he can get rid o' mine too." The cattlemen, Jason Stallybrass who owned the tenant house Kennice lived in was disconcerted but tried to ignore it.

"No," Mudge told Kennice, "you'll have to get rid o' yo' crazy ants yo'self! I'm goin' t'haul the old

man back over to that boy's house and tell him to shoulder his responsibility as I did mine by my daddy, and if that wife of his can't stand it, get another one! And everybody agreed that people must be responsible for their aged parents.

The doorway of the store was framed by the diagonal facing boards of the wide-open massive doors, in one of which was the old letter slot that had served when the store was a franchised post office in the last century before Rural Free Delivery. The doorway showed a shining, sunbleached view of the old Savannah-Dublin road, and across it the old Whitsell plantation house. The house stood like a picture, two stories raised high on its stout brick pillars, framed by the two end-chimneys with their tops magnificently geometric protuberant, its ridge pole between bristling with lightening rods, the steep gothic gable above the front framed with an elaborate verge board and rilled with wooden filligree round the Christian Cross. The house was neat and well-kept, all the gingerbread in place around the porch, all the rich cathedral glass still in the sidelights that framed the open door, the windows open above the shed roof with scrim curtains blowing out. It was like a painted backdrop for the road on which acts came and went. A Negro man and woman with perfectly balanced hoes over their shoulders came into view, and marching

a short distance behind, a younger woman with her balanced hoe. The woman ahead, tall, very black, with legs like saplings, thin lips protruding like a rim around her cigarette, was preceded by a great cloud of odoriferous smoke. The three held conference in the middle of the road, then approached the store where the women sank down on the steps while the man came inside. He got a Ne-Hi and two Orange Crush drinks which he opened and carried outside, collecting a nickel from the younger woman, and returned to drink his soda water.

"Caesar, you and Lilly and Maidie got caught up with yo' new hoeing job?"

"Yasah, Mista Mudge, we finey got done. Crowfoot grass, you haf to jus' dig it out an' tu'n it ovah." He spoke Gullah, the patios of the South Carolina lowlands and Sea Islands, a mixture of African and English, but all the men understood. Six of the Gullahs had been recruited at Augusta the year before for cotton picking by Caleb Mitchum, and they had found so much extra work in the neighborhood, and living so much better than in the depression-ridden city that they had stayed with him.

"Caesar, you heard if Gustus got any better?"

"Mista Balty, doctor say he gwine t'live. But his dogs all done dead."

"He's lucky. He oughta run that Dodie off long

ago!"

"I wonned Gustus 'bout that cre-owl woman—seein' in de dark, puttin' hexes on fo'ks. Gustus, he say a many a night he wake up in bed and see dem two eyes high-up in di doah lookin' at 'im, shinin' de da'k like possum eyes! You know how tall dat Dodie be!"

The gloomy old dowser nodded. I expect it'll be a long time 'fore he'll be able to work again, if ever. Voodoo is a ruinous thing. Especially mixed with arsenic, an element, meaning forever."

Caesar wanted a plug of "Bull o' the Woods," and a sack of "Bull Durham" for Lily, and a reminder to Mistah Caleb, if he come that way to get him a mess of fish, to which the storekeeper agreed. He paid for the tobacco and the sodas with the required coins and went away, marching with the tall woman and the column of smoke and tailed by the younger woman a short distance behind.

"Maidie's not got her a new man yet? Clayton asked.

"Lord, no" replied Mudge. "There's nobody in this whole country 'ould touch her with a sixteen-foot pole—not after her being widowed by a bolt of lightning! That put a hex on her that a whole bracelet o' dimes round her ankle wouldn't break. A conjury bag throw'd in the' yard 'ould never match that! Maidie will remain widowed forevermore—she won't have no

choice in the matter! Even right there in the house with them, Lily knows she won't never have no trouble with Caesar over her!"

A gangling Negro boy came from the paling-enclosed front yard and sauntered toward the store, came up on the porch and propped himself against the doorpost. The storekeeper leaned forward: "Get out of the door, Bloomer, you're cuttin' off the breeze."

"I's finished wid de weeds."

"The teaweeds too?"

"Soles o' mah hands might-nigh blistered from pullin' teaweeds," and he held up the yellow palms of his hands.

"They'd 'ave been worse blistered if you'd been on the chain-gang where you ought to 'ave been! And you know why you had to pull the weeds! Because you couldn't make nothin' out of yo' hoe but a gun! Pointin' all up in the sky shootin' at buzzards and things! I could hear you powin' from the garden all the way to here! And next time the judge wants to parole something like you off on a man to keep 'im off the chain-gang with the grownups, he's not goin' to victimize me--now come get yo' soda water and get out of here!"

The boy came to the drink box, and after much reflection on the bottles on ice, picked an Orange Crush, and once again the store was filled with the

cloying smell that made the men squirm. He returned to the porch and went to the further end by the ice house and settled himself on the floor where he drank long and thirstily, slushing the liquid about in his mouth, then gradually relaxed until he was full length where he dozed contentedly with the flies gathered to his huge inverted bottom lip.

Shortly there came two emaciated boys, 10-12 years old, under frayed straw hats, reddened by the reflected sun, hollowed-eyed with fatigue. They fairly stumbled up the wide board steps and across the porch and into the comforting interior of the store where their blue eyes blinked in the gloom. They saw the man with eye lids so drooped that his face was forever tilted so that he could see on a plane. They saw the two boys hanging about his chair who bore their sire's mark, faces tilted so they could see. They stopped short and bristled, and the other boys suddenly raised their hackles. The confrontation was short, and the two newcomers went to the counter and asked for a can of salmon--not mackerel, they said--and the older one produced a nickel and three pennies, and then after a frantic search of his ragged overalls, the missing nickel. The storekeeper returned the pennies, told them it was only a dime that day. They received the salmon, but made no move to leave. They surveyed the attitude of the men which was not

unfriendly, then hesitantly breached the circle and squatted on their heels against the opposite counter where they gazed intently at the cheese box and coffee mill and hanging lamp, and then the shelves behind the storekeeper were was a row of small dusty earthenware mortars with blue bands the Southern Cotton Mill plant in Savannah had vainly put out to advertise the new product Wesson Oil for making mayonnaise.

Across the road, a woman came from the open hallway of the house and out the gate to the store with a pan under her arm. She had on a man's hat like a widow, and a great pair of man's shoes which testified that she had just scoured her kitchen floor with a shuck scrub and scalding lye water. The men all spoke to her or nodded, calling her Trudy Mae or Mis' Trudy, according to their age or caste, and she passed appropriate comments back to them. She went to the back counter where was the new wheel of cheese and lifted the lid and cut a good-sized wedge which she wrapped in a piece of mottled, glazed paper from the great roll on the stand. She told Josh she was getting a couple of croakers for supper.

"Make one of 'em a mullet," Josh told her.

"It'll smell up my clean house, Josh," she protested.

"All right, Trudy Mae. I'll eat whatever you fix. But do cook us a pot of good fluffy hominy grits

out of that last grind, and melt some cheese in it, and have some wedges of ripe raw tomatoes and a good unsalted hoecake instead of hushpuppies."

She went out and they heard her open the heavy icehouse door and afterwards watched her return to the house with the tails of two fish sticking out of the shallow pan.

Mudge asked, "What's ailin' Trudy Mae?"

"Aw-w-w! She's been all swold-up and in a huff for a week or more. Y'all know that my kitchen is painted black? That 'as the way my daddy had it painted back in 1880 to hide the smoke and the fly-specks. Well, she's been goin' to that homemaker's club over at the consolidated school, and lookin' at Sears Roebuck catalogues and now she's ready to modernize—that's what she calls it! I think Caleb's wife put the notion in her head! She wants to paint the ceiling white and the walls green, and put in a counter in place of Pa's ol' cypress tables, and throw away the old poplar meal bin that's got lined containers for flour and rice and hominy and meal. She replaced the salt gourd with a salt crook and the soap gourd with a soap crook! She had ideas about Pa's old pantry too, but I sure scotched that—that wall is load-bearing an' if you took it out the whole roof 'ould cave in! I'm not goin' t' let her do anything—women just don't appreciate the old things

like they ought! And she¹/₂'s sure-enough gettin' even! You should 'ave seen my dinner when she brought it over today! Put it in a pan like a field hand's sop, peas and okra and boiled fat pork and fried cabbage and hoecake and biscuits--and then poured my syrup in with the rest and tilted it about four ways on the way over, and when she got here it was one gaum--not fitten for a hog to eat!"

"What'd you do with it, Mr. Josh?" Ranson asked.

"I eat it! Matters are out o' hand a'ready without aggravating her worse!" And everybody laughed.

"Better give in to 'er, or you'll be mannin' the kitchen range or learning' Bloomer to be a cook!" the dowser told him sourly.

"No. I'm not cookin'--an' I can't learn Bloomer nothin'! I'm not changin' my daddy's ol' kitchen and pantry--not as many good sweetenin' breads and other rations as 'ave been cooked there! Trudy Mae just won't appreciate the old things. I'd as lief sell one o' my ol' chamber pots or washstand sets or my clock, or lightening rods with the colored glass balls."

"Hebrun might be a-wantin' some of them washbowls 'fore long," the miller said. "I hear tell they broke one at the last footwashin'!" One of the Hardshells present gave a confirming nod.

"They'd never bother me about 'em--mostly it's

drummers."

A Model-A drove up and maneuvered among the rubber-tired Hoover carts and other conveyances and whipped into place at the gas pump, and the heavy-set driver got out and came in, his dusty bare feet padding softly and self-assured across the wide, worn pine boards. All the heads dipped in greeting, and some spoke his name, to which he nodded and replied.

"Josh"--he was interrupted by the loud striking of the clock on the hour of five, then continued in his turn, "a nickel's worth o' cheese off that fresh wheel back there." He reached into a big glass apothecary jar and fished out three large Jonny-cakes and then went and got a Coca-Cola from the drink box and opened it, and laid 13 cents on the counter. Josh moved leisurely around to the back and cut the liberal slice of cheese and moved it carefully off the broad cheese knife onto a fold of the glazed paper without touching it and gave it to the latecomer who then took the remaining chair in the circle, a hide-bottomed one with a little goat hair still remaining except two bald spots centered like eyes. He began to eat, and the flavor of cheese and vanilla crackers and cola drink filled the store, and the two boys hanging about their father's chair began to drool.

"Three o' yo' hands stopped by and said to tell you to bring 'em a mess o' fish."

"Caesar, Lily and Maidie? They get anything else?"

"They got some tobacco and bellywash, but they paid for it."

"Have to get fish for Gill and Nicie's bunch too. They're ailin' again, malaria. Light-skinned ones like them get the fever just like us whites. Geeches are pure African blood and they just don't get it! But a good mess o' fish and some quinine ought to help straighten 'em out."

"Yeh," the miller said. "They do love mullet fish."

"Me too," Josh replied.

Clayton asked, "Still dry over yo' way, Caleb?"

"Oh, Lord! If I could get a-hold o' the Ol' Man's old Gray Beard I'd give it such a jerk he'd cry enough to wet my crops."

"Caleb Mitchum! You oughta be ashamed to even think something like that--much less say it! Takin' God's name in vain!"

Caleb looked at the man with the tilted face. "Lookup," he said, "I ain't ashamed to think it, and I ain't ashamed t' say it. All them prayers for rain you and the brethern been sayin' over at Shiloh sure ain't helped none! And friend Cuthbert here, he might like to get a-hold of a few whiskers too and get his millpond filled up again so he could grind corn--but

one o' them ol' mill pecks o' his'n might be more effective." The old miller, Ross, had never been known to smile since the day he was pecking millstones and a chip flew away and horrible furrowed his cheek and put out one eye, but he nodded, at which the dour old waterwitch looked at him askance.

"We done our best prayin' for rain, but the Lord, he turned his face from us." Lothair gave the little abashed snicker he had when cornered by the gentry, the snicker of a man reminded that for all he had begat children by the daughter of an old landed farmer, he himself had not yet been accepted in the community. But Caleb Mitchum was the only man who'd ever called him "Lookup" to his face. As a schoolboy in altercations he had been forever affronted with his name Clayhill vulgarized to Clayhole, the pits from which clay was taken to floor cabins; but as a man, only Caleb had taunted him in public with epithets. Wrathful Caleb feared no man, and respected only those from old landed families such as the d'Aldermanburys and Whitsells, and cattleman Jason Stallybrass whose Tory ancestors had held their fief since Colonial Times and owned a Hester Bateman coffee service still in the family.

"The Lord couldn't stomach hypocrits!"

"Maybe it 'ould help some if you'd join us!"

"That'll be the day!" Caleb had a look of

disbelief at the man's audacity. "I've had no use for no church and no preacher and no prayers since my granddaddy died! The Ides of March, 1912. I was just a boy then, fifteen--sixteen years old, and that's the last thing I'll ever forget as long as I live! There was Granpa Mitchum, a corpse a-layin' in that shiny black hearse with all them black velvet curtains and them black horses. Ol' man Mike Dasher wouldn't let 'em have the keys to Hebrun Meeting house, and for hours Grandpa lay out there in front, his grave open in the cemetery--ground his Granddaddy give's in the first place and all his kin buried there--and all the people waitin', not wantin' to leave and not knowin' what to do. Finally somebody got a'hold of the horns of the dilemma and went to "Cousin Mike's" house--that 'as what everybody called him--and simply ordered him to hand over the keys or have his door broke down! And they said that when that ol' man put out his hand through the crack o' the' door he was so mad that his hand shook like tremblin' palsey. Grandpa, he wasn't no pinioned angel, but he was an honorable Confederate Veteran that served four years for his country, nine months of it in that hell-hole at Elmira New York where half the prisoners died of contrived starvation, and froze to death three men to one ragged blanket with an equal weight of lice, and the whole place covered with snow! And when it was over he drug

himself back to Georgia with half his insides out! An' 'twas two--three years before he could do more'n tend a few sheep, sittin' round his little two-room house with out-kitchens he'd built before the War. He deserved more respect than that even if he wasn't no born-again member at Hebrun! An' Cousin Mike's daddy didn't serve a-tall--claimed he was too old! Anyhow, grandpa didn't kill all them sheep-killin' dogs like people thought! An' he didn't burn all them woods for early wiregrass like people accused neither!"

There was an uneasy silence until the old dowser felt his chance to soothe the hostile circle. He had that day found water for a neighbor whose hogs were perishing, and still had his divining rod on a string around his neck. "Our brethren the Hardshells," Balty said, "'ave got some peculiar ways, al'ays have had, but that 'as their way--like God had his hand on their shoulder pointin' 'em in the right direction--so to speak--and their will was His'n. I remember hearin' my daddy tell how they done ol' Ebb Mitchum--limpin' Ebb, they called 'im, and no kin to yo' granddaddy, Caleb. Now he wasn't no pinioned angel either, he drunk a little likker, and he had an extra woman in a house on the old Mitchum place in her own right--so to speak--because she was the widow of his brother killed in the Civil War. An' I reckon Ebb had the conviction of his conscience that he was obeyin' God's command

accordin' to the Old Testament, admonishin' him to provide heirs to his dead brother's name: and he provided rations and all other necessary things too. Now when he died, him not bein' no church member neither, but a Free-and-Accepted-Mason, they was a-goin' to hold graveside services in the old Mitchum Graveyard. They asked ol' Preacher Dowds to hold a little service and he agreed readily enough. Now you older ones remember Preacher Dowds was a short man, red-faced, and fat on the good chicken dinners the members' wives at Hebron cooked for him." Several of the older listeners nodded in agreement. "Well, they turned a one-horse wagon body down by the grave so Preacher Dowds could stand on it and he raised above the crowd. There was all the family around, the chil'ren of the widow and the brother's widow, all named Mitchum. Ol' Preacher got up there and started a-flailing 'is arms about an' then started his sermon: "Yere lies limp'in' Ebb Mitchum, d-d-d-d-d-aid, an' done gone to Hell!" An' when he said that, Ebb's two sons, one on each side, reached and got an arm apiece an' they lifted him off! An' they buried Ebb—an' that 'as all the funeral there was: What did that sanctimonious ol' preacher say something like that for! He didn't know where Ebb went!"

"I heard tell of that," Caleb told Balty. "My daddy was there, an' it was just like you told it—but

Ebb was kin to our set, but it was a long way off.

"I trust us Old-Liners 'ave mellowed somewhat since them times," Denver Bonner said agreeably, and they all nodded.

"I remember ol' Preacher Dowds well enough," the storekeeper said, "an old-time give-em-hell preacher that scared little youngons into joinin' the church. He had a cowpen full o' youngons himself and so had to keep addin' onto the back o' his house 'til it reached back down in the field like a shotgun house to keep 'em from pushin' him out by sheer numbers. Then when they took to marryin' off, he started tearin' off them add-on houses, one by one, to make sure none of 'em come back. When he lost his wife he took to wendin' his way about in a buggy with a fringed umbrella top like the young bucks. And he'd use his buggy whip to trim up the dogfennels a-growin' alongside the road. and they he set 'is cap for a young girl from his congregation, and her parents egged her on to marry him. The girl was reluctant, but she obeyed and throw'd herself away on that ol' widower. Young don't b'long with old in that connection! and everafter, 'til the day she died, that girl had the look of a trapped animal, her spirit broke. Made you feel like shootin' that ol' preacher—an' her daddy and mommy too!"

Josh was interrupted by a newcomer with a fishing

pole and two tiny fish on a pronged twig. He wanted a mess of croakers.

Lothair asked, "Josh, mullet still a nickel a pound?"

"Still a nickel, not likely to get any cheaper."

"I'll take five pounds when you start weighin' up."

"How you feed that many youngons on five pounds o' fish?" Caleb asked irritably.

"It's a-plenty. I got other things to furnish, and medicine for my trench foot."

"How'd you get trench foot when you never got no closer to France than Ft. Screven? If you'd pull off them shoes and go bare-footed, yo' feet 'could get well. 'Course you'd lose yo' pension!"

"Ain't enough pension to make that much difference!"

"It's the difference 'twixt you and us that served!"

The tension a-building between the two antagonists was interrupted when a late-model Chevrolet Landau came in a cloud of dust from the direction of the county seat and parked in front of the store and the owner came in, clean but sweaty in his white shirt and tie. Everybody spoke or nodded to him, addressing him as Dorsey or Mr. Oldham, and inquired how court was coming on. He avoided the

question by shaking his head, and complained that the courthouse ceiling fans cooled the onlookers more than the jurors. The storekeeper handed him a nail keg over the counter and he took it and sat down where they made him a place in the circle.

"I hear tell the Law pulled a raid on Othelle English's place! Throw'd away everything he had and his fife's too, playing the stock market when he ought to 'ave been tendin' his farm! Now he's sunk to bootleggin'! Wonder if they found anything?"

"Naw," Caleb said gruffly. "They didn't find nothin'!"

"Sheriff must 'ave sent 'im word."

Sheriff's not been out this way since he brought out that sorry boy the judge paroled off on me," Josh said.

"He could 'ave sent word!"

"By who?!"

Caleb asked, "What I'd like to know is: Who made the complaint to the sheriff? When a man's down and out and under a toadstool and youngons perishing, you don't kick the top off so they'll be rained on too! Y'all know how our remote ancestors settled in Massachusetts and how they were self-richeous, self-annointed, and self-appointed, and so they burnt witches! And now we've got a latterday witch-burner in Georgia also self-annointed and self-appointed,

face forever pointed toward God and trying to hitch a witch to the stake in Judge Kirkland's courtroom."

The restraint that had prevailed over the group since the arrival of the two boys was suddenly broken when Josh jerked his head around to look at them crouched down against the opposite counter. They immediately rose and fled through an opening in the chairs, dropped the can of salmon, retrieved it, and bounded across the porch and down the steps, leaving a scent of stale sweat and green tobacco.

"Who's them two boys?" asked the juror.

"Them's Othello's youngons," Caleb told him. "They've scraped up a few cents from some place and walked three miles for a can of salmon for Friday night's supper when everybody else gets fresh salt-water fish! They're perishing to death over there and tryin' to keep people from finding out because they're proud. They don't even have coffee for breakfast--I was a-totin' my basket to a fish hole last week and saw Othello diggin' sassafras roots in one of his hedgerows--he didn't see me--that's what they're havin' to drink in place of coffee, sassafras tea! An' now some bastard breedbate has run off to the law with a tale about bootleggin' to cause 'em more trouble! Dorsey, you'll have to take them Sunday shoes clean off to get yo' foot out o' yo' mouth!"

"I didn't notice them two youngons a-sittin' back

there, all scrooched down like that, but I don't know 'em anyhow. They sure do look as throw'd away as puppies. Can't some of the kinfolks help 'em out?" He looked at Lothair.

"I got more to fend for at my house than I can be expected to--and another one on the way."

"I sure would like to know who turned Othello in to the law," Caleb said.

All eyes turned to Lothair. "I've not heard tell," he said.

"What 'ould give anybody the notion Othello was a-runnin' a still--is there a lot o' passin' back-and-to on the road?"

"I be too far from the road to notice."

"There'd be enough passin' you'd notice--especially from the fodder loft o' that ol' high barn! About like there is to Sid Creech's house after that bunch o' ol' painted sandhill tackles."

"I just wouldn't know."

"Well, if they tore the place apart like I've heard tell and didn't find nothin', then it can't be so!"

"I couldn't say," Lothair said. "I've heard tell he was a-runnin' shine. There's been talk. Sheriff musta sent 'im word." He took a cigarette paper and shook the very smallest amount of smoking tobacco into it and carefully licked it and shaped it and lit it

with a match struck on the sole of his shoe and smoked thoughtfully. "Nothin' worse'n a crooked sheriff," he finally said, and ground out the cigarette and put the duck into his overall bib pocket.

"Sheriff's not been out here," Josh repeated.

The man with the two little shiner fish was in a hurry for his croackers. Lothair asked for a bottle of purge; three other customers got wedges of cheese and two got cartons of carefully weighed compound lard, and the whole circle milled about and straggled outside. The Negro boy still dozed on the end of the porch. Josh took a good-sized stack of newspapers from behind the counter and followed them outside. He pumped Caleb's required five gallons of gas into the high ornate glass tank and turned it into the model-A's tank, rinsed his hands at the spigot, then went to the icehouse where he began cutting ice and weighing out fish in his hanging scales and wrapping each order in newspapers.

All about the front of the store were mules and wagons and buggies and rubber-tired Hoover-carts mounted on car axles, the two cars, and cattleman Stellybrass' saddle horse. There was stir and motion about the open icehouse. The storekeeper's wife was sitting on the front porch peeling tomatoes. She was still wearing the man's hat and the big scrub-shoes. The whole house had a look of peaceful, solid security

never seen in new households. Behind it, the high windmill was spinning slowly on its tower and the wooden water tank on its lower tower was overflowing. Further back in the yard were all the out-buildings, smokehouse and sugarhouse and dairy, the wash-shelter and privy, and still further back behind the yard the great three-story barn and enclosing lot over the high board fence of which several mules looked at the gathering. Aligned with the store the old abandoned courthouse of the 1320th district still stood where a Justice of Peace had held his court in the last century, and where ballots had been cast and counted. With the miniature Greek Revival Front and wide ganistered porch, it was a much more formal building than the store. But it was now being used as a storage place for last year's cotton as was the more rustic cottonhouse on the other side of the store. All three buildings aligned along the road displayed lightening rods along their rooftrees as did the house and barn on the opposite side of the road. The two disgraced boys had long since disappeared on the old abandoned trace that ran like a tunnel through the thick piney woods and past the old original Whitsell graveyard enclosed in its wrought iron fence. The windmill's sucker rod slammed gently. The mourning dove still cooed mournfully.

Lothair being first in line received his fish and

a block of ice for the week-end tea and made haste to leave, stepping into his old buggy he had retrieved from his shed of anachronisms and rejects. The younger boy got into the seat with him and the older one stood on the back axle as surplus children had done since the vehicle's invention. The others watched as he turned about and went up the road behind his fat mule, their scarcely controlled snappishness suddenly turning into jocularity.

Caleb said, "Now as soon as Callie gets them fish fried and piled on the big platter, Lothair will take the skillet and pour the hot grease over 'em to make 'em so greasy the youngons won't be able to eat but one piece each! And tomorrow night he'll line 'em all up and dose 'em on that purge; that's how come they look as pale as ol' woodlice when they take off their shirts to play ball."

"What does he buy fish for if he doesn't want the chil'ren to eat 'em?" asked the dignified cattleman.

"Because he's a Clayhill!" Caleb said. "He loves mullet fish and there's a little flicker of human guilt in 'im that forbids him to eat 'em without givin' the youngons a little pittance!"

"Why would anybody turn Mr. Othello in to the Law for runnin' good likker, a salable product," asked Ransom gleefully, and everybody began to laugh.

"What I'd like to know," Dorsey said

disapprovingly, "is, who could've trucked a message from the sheriff to Othello to clear out his still. With that deep swamp of his, full o' quicksand and rattlesnakes, no Law could ever find a still in there!"

There was a roar of ribald laughter that rose and fell like a round, and the women on the porch also began laughing. John David received the bundle of fish and ice his mother had ordered and put them into his crocus sack and turned his mule about and climbed into his grandfather's ancient resurrected saddle. From his high position he waited, looking down on the gathering of men, all roguish except the indignant juror, the woebegone miller, and the glum old dowser who sensed death as he sensed water in the ground. There was another churlish remark from Caleb and the laughter burst out anew. Clayton Pottle, lacking his fiddle, hooked a finger in each corner of his mouth and let out a piercing whistle, and the gaggle of Pilgrom geese resting from their foraging labors in the shade of the cotton house responded by rising to their feet with deafening shouts which in turn set off the guinea fowls in a terrified clatter somewhere at the back of the house. The Negro boy woke from his sleep, wild-eyed, spun and clawed on his axis to gain his feet, and wrapped himself around a post to look at the uproar, forever the hanger-on. Clayton began

making fiddle-dees with his mouth, and Kennice suddenly let out a loud gost snort and encored it with the raucious brays of a jackass, neighs and bleats, then raised his picket comb and snatched a swatch of Josh's newspaper to cover it for a sounding board and began to blow on it—the same comb he had learingly smoothed his hair with to mock the freshly shorn scholar when he came into the store. Ransom seized his Jews Harp from his bib pocket and raised it to his notched front teeth and the air was filled with the measured twangs which nearly drowned out the measured beats of the windmill's sucker rod. All of them aimed the racket at the departing buggy. The black shepherd dog who guarded his master's house and yard, but not his store, dashed up on the porch to his mistress and raised his muzzle ceilingward and emitted long broken howls. The tall reserved cattleman standing aside with the dowser suddenly burst out laughing. John David stood up in his stirrups and looked after the retreating buggy in time to see the man and the two boys look back at the uproar pointed at them, at which Lothair seized the whip and laid such a series of cuts on the fat mule's unaccustomed hams—like a scourge of scorpions—that she stretched herself out in flight like a deer hound. The dust swirled up and curtained the vehicle as it spun up the road. Clayton let out another catcall and then more mouth fiddling which set

off the geese in wilder shouting with their open throats all skyward, and somewhere beyond the house the alarmed guinea fowls rose in flight with frenzied cackling and flew over the house and over the store and settled out in the cotton patch with their frightful noise. The rollicking laughter rose in crescendo, cut with the deafening catcalls and fiddle-dees and the loud brays and howls and brays and neighs and the obnoxious twanging of the Jews Harp, all belabored with the measured throbs of the windmill's slamming sucker rod and the shrieking of the geese and the deafening screeching of the terrified guinea fowls that was like a cacophony of logcocks. John David looked at the woman across the road on the porch and she was laughing and clapping her hands and drumming on the floor with the big scrub shoes. He looked back up the road, but there was only a cloud of dust drifting away above the road at the skyline where the buggy had disappeared. John David was learned in books; he was saturated in English and Ancient Roman History; he had read Dante and Caesar and Cicero and Vergil and even Bede in the original Latin, but he was unsophisticated in worldly experience, the thin shelf on which rests the refinements and morals of Western Civilization, the hiatus beyond which certain outrages against one's fellow man will not be tolerated. He had listened to

the stories his neighbors told about sanctimonious hypocrits desecrating their ancestors' remains and memory at gravesides which opened old wounds in all listners; and suddenly it all became clear to him. The latter-day, self-appointed, self-annointed witch burner with his face to God trying to hitch a neighbor to a stake in Judge Kirkland's courtroom had been ferreted out by the ungodly, and foiled in his self-righteous zealotry. what he, John David, had just witnessed from his elevated position on the mule's back was undoubtedly the spectacle of a Transgressor—a witch burner—being drummed out of the human race to the tune of The Rogue's March.

THE END

Characters in The Rogue's March

John David d'Aldermanbury, student
Josh Whitsell, storekeeper
Trudie Mae Whitsell, wife
Mudge Mitchum, landowner
Caleb Mitchum, landowner
Jason Stallybrass, Tory landowner
Othello Richardson, landowner
Dorsey Oldham, juror
Denver Bonner, Hardshell landowner

Lothair Clayhill, called "Lookup"
Cuthbert Ross, miller
Clayton Pottle, sharecropper, fiddle player
Ransom Oglesby, Jews' Harp player
Kennice Bloodworth, sharecropper, harmonica player
Balty Lord, dowser
Clayhill boys

Blacks

Bloomer
Caesar
Lilly
Maidie
Dodie (Albina)

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