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A STUDY OF THE LIFE AND
WORKS OF HARRY
STILLWELL EDWARDS

—

Doris Lanier

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A STUDY OF THE LIFE AND WORKS OF
HARRY STILLWELL EDWARDS

by
Doris Lanier

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Georgia Southern College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department of English

Statesboro, Georgia

1970

APPROVED:

Laurence Huff
Major Professor

Felding D. Russell
Committee

Hollis L. Cate
Committee

Laurence Huff
Department Head

Jack N. Curtis
Dean, Graduate School

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PREFACE

In 1885 Harry Stillwell Edwards published "Elder Brown's Backslide" in Harper's Magazine and began a literary career that was to extend over the next fifty years. During this period he published numerous short stories, two novels, a book of poetry, various essays, and several hundred newspaper articles. In the main, these writings represent a truthful portrayal of Southern life, manners, customs, and institutions of the years preceding and following the Civil War and make a significant contribution to Southern literature and, more especially, to the literature of Georgia. The purpose of this thesis is to study the life and works of Edwards and to evaluate his contribution to the literature of the South and Georgia.

My approach will be to examine Edwards' background through a study of the many newspaper stories, magazine articles, and pamphlets that were written about him during the course of his life and then to proceed to his works, beginning with an analysis of his earlier short stories and proceeding to the novels, poetry, and stories of the later period. In discussing Edwards' literary career, I have thought it worthwhile to devote some time to biography, especially such biographical information as seems

pertinent to his development as a writer. This material will be included in all sections of the paper. My approach will be, basically, chronological, as this seems to be the simplest method of combining the biographical material with the critical. This study will not include all of Edwards' publications but will be restricted to his works published in book form.

I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Lawrence Huff, the director of my thesis, under whose instruction I first learned to understand and appreciate Southern literature and to value the scholarly method of study. I would also like to thank two members of the Edwards family for sharing valuable information with me and giving me permission to use various letters. Mrs. Prentiss Edwards, Sr., Edwards' daughter-in-law, allowed me to copy numerous articles, which were invaluable, and graciously invited me to visit her home at Holly Bluff, where she shared with me many memories of her father-in-law. Mrs. Nelle Edwards Smith, granddaughter of Edwards', gave me permission to use several letters and, through correspondence, answered many questions concerning her grandfather.

I have received courteous and efficient assistance from the staffs of many libraries. The cooperation of the librarians at Wesleyan College, especially Miss Tina Roberts, greatly facilitated my work by making available Edwards'

rare books and allowing me to use them in my own home. The assistance of the Interlibrary Loan Department at Georgia Southern College, especially the services of Mrs. Mildred Sanders, was a valuable aid in obtaining microfilm of newspapers from the University of Georgia, Emory University, and Wesleyan College. Libraries that made letters and manuscripts available for study are as follows: Academic Center Library, University of Texas; Alderman Library, University of Virginia; Columbia University Libraries; Emory University Library; Henry E. Huntington Library; Ina Dillard Russell Library, Georgia College; The Library, Vassar College; Lilly Library, Indiana University; Pennsylvania State University Library; Perkins Library, Duke University; and University of North Carolina Library.

CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS

On March 30, 1925, Harry Stillwell Edwards of Macon, Georgia, wrote an open letter to the Atlanta Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in which he made the following statement:

In my hundred or more stories and many verses I have endeavored to record the story of the South; the pathos, love, endurance and sacrifice of her sons and daughters;--and the faithfulness and devotion of those of an humble race whose lives are linked with ours. There has been no thought in this of class.¹

Edwards was a true Southerner, and his conception of himself as a recorder of the South was an accurate one. He spent eighty of his eighty-three years in what he called the "semi-tropical environment"² of the South; he knew and loved the South as few men have, and throughout his lifetime he labored to express his love by immortalizing the South and

¹Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to the United Daughters of the Confederacy, March 30, 1925, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

²"Atlanta Journal's Radio Editorial Hour," WSB, Atlanta, April 23, 1937. Edwards was the guest speaker for the evening. The original text for the broadcast is at the home of Mrs. Prentiss Edwards, Sr., Holly Bluff, Macon, Georgia.

her people in his many writings.

The parents of this champion of the South were transplanted onto Georgia soil in the first half of the nineteenth century. James Carson Edwards, the father of Harry Stillwell Edwards, came to Georgia from Philadelphia in 1821, and a few years later he was followed by his cousin, Elizabeth Griffing Hunt, of Gorham, Maine, and the two were married. The nineteen-year-old Elizabeth was the youngest of the three daughters of Captain Daniel Hunt and Angelina Griffing Hunt.³ Captain Hunt was a successful shipping merchant with a large fleet, and between the years 1812-1816 he gained some renown as the commander of the Louisa, a privateer with sixteen guns, his major exploits being in the War of 1812.⁴ In 1802 Peale painted a portrait of him, which remained in the possession of Harry Stillwell Edwards as late as 1902.⁵ Included among Mrs. Edwards' ancestors

³Sarah Harriet Butts, comp., The Mothers of Some Distinguished Georgians (New York: J. J. Little and Company, 1902), p. 133.

⁴Ibid. In another article Edwards states that his grandfather commanded the ship from 1814-1816, but I have considered his article in Butts' book to be more nearly correct since it was written some twenty years earlier and seems to have been more carefully researched. For comparison see Harry Stillwell Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, July 30, 1923.

⁵Butts, p. 133. The granddaughter of Harry Stillwell Edwards, Mrs. Nelle Edwards Smith, of Macon, Georgia, gives additional information about the Peale painting in a letter to the writer on July 7, 1969: "The miniature you mentioned

is Jasper Griffing, who came to America in 1664 and whose remains, as late as 1935, were in a carefully preserved cemetery in Southold, Long Island.⁶ She was also a descendant of the sixth generation of Lieutenant Nicholas Stillwell.⁷ He was recorded historically as "the Valiant Stillwell" and was credited with deeds of valor in the Indian wars of the period. He is said to have captured "a fat and famous old chief" who was the number one enemy of the period. Also, it might be of interest that Mary Stillwell Burr, mother of Aaron Burr, was one of the descendants of Nicholas Stillwell.⁸

The long line of ancestors of the two cousins includes the Edwardses, Hunts, Stillwells, Griffings, Landons, and Kirklands. The Griffing genealogy alone

is of James Carson Edwards, my great-grandfather . . . and was painted by the sister of Rembrandt Peale; their house was adjoining the Edwards' house in Philadelphia. The grandfather of Harry Stillwell Edwards, James Edwards, was painted by Rembrandt Peale in full size. It is my understanding that relatives in England are in possession of both, but their identity is unknown to me. I have a copy of the miniature of James Carson Edwards."

⁶Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, July 6, 1935, editorial page. Edwards wrote a column for the Atlanta Journal during the years 1923-1938. This column appeared on the editorial page three or four times a week during this time. Future references will not include page numbers.

⁷Butts, p. 133.

⁸Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, January 10, 1937.

numbered nearly two thousand names as early as 1881,⁹ and on both sides the genealogical tree has been traced back to prominent families from England and Wales. These families are believed to have settled in New Jersey and Long Island about 1650.¹⁰

Mr. and Mrs. Edwards were not isolated entirely from their family in the early years of their life in Georgia. Mrs. Edwards had a sister, Mrs. John D. Watkins, who was living in Georgia at the time and was the wife of a prosperous Georgia planter. Also, three of Mr. Edwards' sisters were living in Georgia: Mrs. Joseph Nisbet of Athens and Milledgeville; Mrs. Robert A. Allen of Savannah and Augusta; and Mrs. James Wilson, whose husband became well-known for his missionary work in India.¹¹

Harry Stillwell Edwards became a part of this large family clan when he was born on April 23, 1855,¹² as one of

⁹Butts, pp. 133-134.

¹⁰Sidney Ernest Bradshaw, "Harry Stillwell Edwards," The Library of Southern Literature (Atlanta: Martin and Hoyt Company, 1909), IV, 1499.

¹¹Butts, p. 133.

¹²The Author of Eneas Africanus (Macon: J. W. Burke Company, n.d.). A copy of this pamphlet is on file at the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia, File II.

the ten children¹³ of Mr. and Mrs. James Carson Edwards. In the years preceding his birth the family had prospered and had accumulated large land holdings, which probably amounted to about 50,000 acres at the time of Harry's birth. It has been said that at one time James Carson Edwards sold the whole of Appling County. Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson Davis became the godparents of young Harry, an indication that the family was well-known by many notable and influential people of the time.¹⁴

Apart from the prosperity of Harry's parents, the intellectual, moral, and spiritual qualities they emphasized in their family life were somewhat above the average. Mrs. Edwards was an educated woman, at least by the standards of her day, having received her early education at the Gorham Academy in Gorham, Maine, and her later education at Mrs. Okill's Seminary in New York City, one of the best schools for girls of the time.¹⁵ Mr. Edwards was a "Puritan of Puritans," firmly grounded in the Presbyterian faith,¹⁶ and

¹³Willie Snow Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards," Macon Telegraph, n.d. A copy of this article is on file at Willett Memorial Library, Wesleyan College, Macon, Georgia.

¹⁴"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon," Atlanta Journal, October 22, 1938.

¹⁵Butts, p. 133.

¹⁶Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal March 1, 1936.

he was also a poet of some note, publishing several poems between 1840 and 1861.¹⁷ Some of these poems were published in school textbooks, and others were published in a few of the literary magazines of the South.¹⁸ The atmosphere of the home reflected the intellectual and spiritual qualities of the parents, and their love of poetry and music probably instilled in their son a lifetime interest in the beauty and harmony of words.¹⁹ An appreciation of the aesthetic and a grasp of the fundamental truths of life were young Harry's greatest inheritance, these qualities being found not only in his immediate family but in the "ancestral soil" of his forefathers.²⁰

Though Mr. Edwards had a profound effect on his son during the boy's formative years, he was never to learn that Harry had inherited his gift of expression. The bitter struggle between the North and the South, which began on April 12, 1861, with the shelling of Fort Sumter, foreshadowed the calamity that was to come to the Edwards home shortly afterwards. The father died "while the Sumter guns were busy," and, in his son's words, "his genius was

¹⁷Butts, p. 133.

¹⁸Harry Stillwell Edwards, "Writer Recalls Telegraph Days," Macon Telegraph, November 25, 1926, sec. F, p. 14.

¹⁹"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon."

²⁰"Atlanta Journal's Radio Editorial Hour," WSB, Atlanta, April 23, 1937.

smothered under adverse conditions and in the great breakup forgotten."²¹ Mr. Edwards was buried with his family in Rose Hill Cemetery in Macon, Georgia, on a lot that was laid out when the cemetery was founded. His widow planted a Lamarque rose near his grave, and years later her son was to remember his visits to the cemetery with her. At that time Harry was still so small that his mother had to hold his hand when he went to a nearby spring to fill his little bucket with water for the rose.²²

Harry's mother was left a widow with ten small children, and during the next few years she was to face many difficult situations but with such courage and wisdom that her son later referred to her as "the wisest woman who ever lived."²³ Her oldest child, Richard Somers Edwards, joined the Southern forces when he was only sixteen and died at Petersburg when he was nineteen,²⁴ having been the

²¹Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Fred Lewis Pattee, December 20, 1914, Pennsylvania State University Library, Pattee File.

²²Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, November 22, 1935.

²³"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938." A copy is on file at Willett Memorial Library, Wesleyan College, Macon, Georgia.

²⁴Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal January 10, 1935. Mrs. Nelle Edwards Smith gives additional information about the death of Richard Somers Edwards in a letter to the writer on July 7, 1969: "Richard Somers

youngest member of the Macon Artillery. The harrowing experiences of the war prompted Mrs. Edwards to forbid Harry to "play soldier" with his friends, tearfully telling him he was too young to die.²⁵ However, Mrs. Edwards accepted her great loss to the Southern cause without bitterness and hatred. In the spring of 1865, when Macon was occupied by the enemy forces, she came to recognize the basic humanity of most of the Northern officers and men, even allowing an officer to be quartered in her home. This officer was Captain Bedan of Wilson's Cavalry Division, and he rendered her valuable assistance when her youngest child became mortally ill. She also allowed young Harry to play about the army camp and accept the gun powder the men offered him for his little gun.²⁶

Edwards was a twin brother to Wilson Edwards. Wilson was injured in a childhood accident and was not acceptable for active military duty. Richard, however, joined a light artillery unit from Macon and received a mortal wound at Petersburg in 1865. . . . He was taken by the Yankees to a hospital in Richmond, where he died. His body was never recovered, and it was only years later that the record of his death was discovered by Harry Stillwell Edwards. When the Yankees overran their position, he turned back as all the defenders fled and fired a gun that had been left loaded so that it could not be turned on his comrades. That was when he was struck."

²⁵"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938."

²⁶Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, August 23, 1937.

Throughout the Reconstruction Period the Edwards family met with a barrage of difficulties, all of which Mrs. Edwards faced with courage. By the end of the war the large Edwards estate of 50,000 acres was almost valueless, worth, perhaps, \$5,000. New mortgages were made and some titles lost,²⁷ but through the leadership of a courageous mother the family managed to survive. The mature Edwards later paid tribute to his mother's courage and fortitude during those war years and the years that followed:

Deprived in 1861 of her husband . . . and in 1865 of her eldest son . . . she faced the hard conditions of war with more than Spartan fortitude, successfully reared and educated her children, and in silence has submitted since to the heavy hand of fate, as death has relentlessly claimed most of these. In all these years, while bending to the rod, she has never despaired nor lost her pride in her people. No ancestor, no descendant has ever looked adversity in the face with a courage nearer the supreme. Marvellous in her intuition and memory, she has instilled into those about her, at all times, the value of character, the influence of lofty ideals, and the manliness of a dauntless endeavor.²⁸

Certainly, Mrs. Edwards' life must have been a great inspiration to her son, and his lifetime of reverence and respect for women can probably be attributed to the influence of his mother's sterling character.

²⁷"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon."

²⁸Butts, p. 133.

The trials of the Reconstruction years were such that it was difficult for a child to obtain an education, but Harry was given the best education available at the time. In 1863, when he was eight years old, he was enrolled in a private school, located on Orange Street²⁹ in Macon, under the instruction of Ben Polhill, who ran the school for some years after the war. Polhill is said to have been the most capable instructor of boys in his time.³⁰ He was a stern "old-fashioned Georgia pedagogue,"³¹ and young Harry's first experience with him was such that he would remember it all the years of his life. In 1938, the year of Edwards' death, he told of his first experience with Polhill.

I had several brothers and a sister in the Polhill school when it came my time to enter. I was then about 8 years old and the proud possessor of a bit of looking glass. We entered the Polhill school yard by steps that led over the fence, a substitute for a gate. Waiting on the top step for recess, when I was to go in and get the formalities of enrollment over with, I amused myself shining the Polhill eyes with sunlight on my glass. It was awfully funny to witness his reactions.

²⁹Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards."

³⁰"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938." Edwards also held this opinion of Polhill. He stated: "I have always regarded Polhill as the best teacher the state has produced." See Edwards, "Writer Recalls Telegraph Days."

³¹Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, September 12, 1937.

Then a boy came out and summoned me. Ben Polhill was famous for his exploits with the pomegranate switches. Before I know /sic/ what was going to happen he had me by the collar and dancing around him to the rhythm of the rod. I kept yelling that I didn't go to school there. He assured me that it made no difference; that I was going to start next day, and he was starting in on me at once.³²

Polhill had several able assistants, and Harry became especially attracted to one of these, of whom he said in his later years: "I loved her as only a child can love."³³

Though some of the qualities of the Polhill School were admirable, other aspects of the school were not so admirable. Polhill "abandoned the rod entirely" when the boys were thirteen or fourteen and gave out spelling pages in the "blue back spelling book" as punishment,³⁴ but the feelings of fear that had pervaded the students' early years remained. At one time Edwards said of the school:

. . . the beatings inflicted on children by the teacher and other assistants, horrified and terrified me beyond words to express. And there were the frequent flashes of temper, intemperance and injustice.³⁵

Edwards said that he "learned nothing of morality, gentleness, justice and love at school," stating that he learned

³²Ibid., January 12, 1938.

³³Ibid., September 12, 1937.

³⁴Ibid., January 12, 1938.

³⁵Ibid., September 12, 1937.

these qualities from "one of the grandest little mothers on earth, and other saintly women."³⁶ His early experiences in the Polhill School may have been a contributing factor to his lifetime interest in education, which culminated in 1928 in his publication of The Tenth Generation, a plea for higher education.

The distressingly meager days during and immediately after the Civil War were felt even by the youth of the time. Young Harry contributed his share of the family income by selling newspapers on the streets at a very early age, becoming a newsboy for the Macon Telegraph when he was eight or nine years old. Many of the boys who attended Polhill School sold papers, and it was the custom for the boys to begin their work very early in the morning in order to report to the school at eight o'clock. For two years, Harry and his brother, who also sold newspapers, would rise early and go down to the old Telegraph building at the corner of Second and Cherry Streets; then they would scale the wall and enter the building through a window, thus acquiring their issues of the paper first, avoiding the long line of newsboys waiting outside. At times the young boy accumulated as much as eighty dollars in Confederate money, some of which he used to purchase shoes. Part of the money was spent to buy powder for his little gun, the powder being

³⁶Ibid.

used to shoot birds in the residential section of College Street, and he admitted later that part of it went for candy. Probably the most exciting paper he ever delivered was the one announcing General Lee's surrender. In his old age Edwards could remember vividly the day when he ran down Cherry Street shouting, "Lee has surrendered!"³⁷

These years must have made a vivid impression on young Edwards' sensitive and impressionable mind, for he was never to forget the feelings of poverty he experienced while working as a newsboy. On several occasions in his later life he made a special effort to contribute some joy to the lives of the young newsboys with whom he came in contact. For example, one cold December morning he saw a small newsboy, shabby and shivering, gazing through a colorfully-decorated window at a new bicycle. Reading the emotions of the child, Edwards inquired where he lived, and on Christmas morning the newsboy was delightfully surprised when he saw the desired bicycle under his tree. Needless to say, Edwards was the Santa Claus.³⁸ At another time Edwards saw two young boys peering hungrily through a bakery window, and to their surprise he offered to buy them whatever goodies they desired. After buying the goodies,

³⁷Edwards, "Writer Recalls Telegraph Days."

³⁸Belle Williams, "Once a Newsboy he Never Forgot," Atlanta Constitution, April 11, 1964.

he told them:

Maybe you think I'm buying these for you, but I am not. You are just to eat them, that is all. I am buying them for a little boy who was once poor and sold papers along this street, and who used to flatten his nose against bakery windows and wish for somebody to come along and buy the goodies on the inside.³⁹

Edwards was always sensitive to the needs and desires of others, especially of children, and it may have been the distressing days of his own early life that caused him to look with compassion on the lives of others.

In 1870, when Harry was fifteen years old, he was forced to give up his schooling and assume the responsibilities of a job. He went to Washington and became a clerk in the office of the sixth auditor of the Treasury,⁴⁰ a position he later attributed to "the grace of the Lord and a wrought iron pull,"⁴¹ this "pull" being that of the Hon. John Jacob Martin of South Carolina. Martin was young Edwards' cousin, the sixth auditor, himself, and he was a personal friend of General Ulysses Grant, who was responsible for Edwards' receiving the position. Edwards assumed his position in 1870, earning a hundred dollars a month⁴² and

³⁹Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, March 17, 1924.

⁴⁰Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards."

⁴¹Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, October 2, 1938.

⁴²Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards."

taking up residence at Inness Place, which was a short distance from his work.⁴³

To a boy of fifteen, Washington was an exciting place, full of unusual events and interesting people. Young Edwards' first exciting experience in Washington occurred the first week after his arrival there, when he attended the state funeral of an important Federal general. He attended the funeral with the John Jacob Martin family and, later, ruefully admitted that he "enjoyed it all very much." It was through his close association with the Martin family that he came in contact with many people of importance.⁴⁴ During his years in Washington he played baseball with President Grant's youngest son, Jesse; two of Grant's nephews, known as "the Dent boys"; the son of the Registrar of the Treasury; and the son of the third-assistant postmaster general. The group of boys proudly called themselves "the Administrative Baseball Club." Miss Nellie Grant, daughter of President Grant, was a frequent visitor to the area of the baseball field, and young Edwards often watched her trot her pony around the circle.⁴⁵

While in Washington, the boy continued his education in a haphazard manner, taking penmanship in a Spencerian

⁴³Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, October 2, 1938.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., July 19, 1923.

school at night and learning something of bookkeeping in the Treasury by day.⁴⁶ However, the greatest contributions to his education were probably his frequent visits to the Library of the Treasury, the Congressional Library, and the library at the Y. M. C. A. During this period he learned to love books, and, starting with Scott's Ivanhoe, he read novels, histories, adventure stories, biographies, poems, and anything else that appealed to his interest. His work was not demanding in these years, and he often worked only six hours a day and read ten.⁴⁷

Also, contributing to Edwards' education were the many points of interest in and around Washington that were easily accessible to him during his stay there, including the favorite resort areas of Washington officials such as Chesapeake Bay, Old Point Comfort, near Norfolk, and the Virginia and Maryland hills. Edwards' favorite place was Warrenton, Virginia, which boasted a high hill with a single tree on top. From this tree, which was called "View Tree," the dome of the Capitol in Washington could be seen, and it was the happy pastime of many young people to climb the hill to watch the sunrise. On one such occasion Edwards witnessed his most beautiful sight while in Washington; his description of the event sixty-seven years later shows the deep

⁴⁶Edwards, "Writer Recalls Telegraph Days."

⁴⁷Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards."

impression made by the scene on the boy's mind, revealing the esthetic quality of an artist in the making.

It was the fashion in my days, . . . to ride out to this hilltop, with its single tree . . . to see the sun rise. And there it was that I once gained for memory's wall an exquisitely beautiful picture. The sun was just rising over the lovely landscape and all the plains and valleys seemed submerged in an ocean of color, when I heard the far-away hunter's horn, followed by the cries of a hound pack, and presently I saw below me the dogs spread out across a level field, followed by riders in red coats and white trousers. Several women were among the riders, speeding like the wind, taking all obstructions bravely in their stride. Sixty-seven years have passed since that morning of thrills, yet, had I the artist's skill, I could paint that picture in its every detail.⁴⁸

It was about this time that Edwards began to show the qualities of a writer. One day the Duke of Connaught visited Washington, and Edwards went to see him at the Epiphany Church, where the Duke was making an appearance. To the youth's impressionable mind the most interesting thing about the Duke was his enormous feet, which he had seen as the Duke ascended the steps. In his next letter home he delightfully described the Duke's feet, and amused relatives sent the letter to the Macon Telegraph, where it was published, causing a little flurry of excitement.⁴⁹ This was Edwards' first contact of any

⁴⁸Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, October 2, 1938.

⁴⁹Edwards, "Writer Recalls Telegraph Days."

significance with the Macon Telegraph since his days as a newsboy, but he was to become much more intimately connected with the paper in the years to follow.

Edwards lived in Washington for three years, and sometime about the end of his stay he was appointed to Annapolis by General Grant;⁵⁰ but his mother, remembering the loss of another son on the battlefield, forbade him to accept the appointment. However, six months after the appointment his mother relented, and he was reappointed by General Grant, but during the waiting period he had gone a few months beyond the age limit and was, thus, disqualified.⁵¹ Edwards was greatly disappointed that he was not able to serve his country. Adding to his disappointment was the knowledge that other members of the Edwards family had had the opportunity to prove their patriotism, every male descendant of the Edwards clan, above the age of sixteen, having fought in the Civil War.⁵²

Whether Edwards resigned his position in Washington before or after his appointment to Annapolis is not known, but it is clear that he returned to Macon in 1873, the year

⁵⁰I was not able to determine the year of his appointment to Annapolis, but I have assumed it near the end of his stay in Washington since he would have been about the right age at that time.

⁵¹Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards."

⁵²Butts, p. 133.

he was eighteen, a little richer and wiser, having saved over two-thirds of his salary⁵³ while in Washington and having acquired a broad general education through his copious reading and his contacts with people of considerable knowledge. He took a bookkeeping job in Macon and, after two or three years, enrolled in some night courses at Mercer University, where he applied himself to the study of law.⁵⁴ His professors were such noted men as Clifford Anderson, who later became the attorney general of Georgia; Walter B. Hill and John G. Rutherford, who were both well-known in their fields; and Professor Shelton Sanford, who was a teacher of mathematics.⁵⁵ But even while studying under these men Edwards was not satisfied with his chosen profession and began trying his hand at writing.⁵⁶

Edwards graduated from Mercer in 1876⁵⁷ and became a member of the Macon Bar.⁵⁸ He opened an office, but few clients came, and, as one person stated, "Two years of sedentary and unprofitable expectations behind Coke and

⁵³"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon."

⁵⁴The Author of Eneas Africanus.

⁵⁵Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards."

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸The Author of Eneas Africanus.

Code, with a few desultory convictions, satisfied whatever craving for legal excitement he may have had."⁵⁹ At any rate, Edwards seemed destined to fail as a lawyer, and he finally closed his office. However, his failure was probably the result of his inward nature rather than any inadequacy in the area of law. As one friend said, "Mr. Edwards might have been a successful lawyer, but . . . his nature demanded an atmosphere in which fancy might roam, unhindered by the narrow rules of court procedure."⁶⁰ Edwards' years of legal study, however, were not wasted, for his knowledge of law was later to be reflected in many of his short stories, and his plots reveal a keen, penetrating, professionally-trained mind.

After Edwards abandoned his law office he began applying himself more seriously to writing⁶¹ and in 1879 became local editor of the Macon Telegraph.⁶² He was

⁵⁹Mildred L. Rutherford, The South in History and Literature (Atlanta: Franklin-Turner Company, 1907), p. 529.

⁶⁰"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938."

⁶¹According to Mildred L. Rutherford, Edwards contributed stories to a Boston magazine, Waverly Magazine, during this period. She contends that his first short story published by this magazine was "Varoli Bayerdierre." However, I have found no evidence in any of the material I have studied to substantiate Miss Rutherford's claim. See Rutherford, p. 529.

⁶²The Author of Eneas Africanus. According to Edwards, his literary life began at this time. In a letter

offered this position after the publication of two short stories, "The Dooly County Safe" and "The Man on the Monument,"⁶³ both of which were well received in Macon and elsewhere. According to Edwards, his first "bow" to the public, "The Dooly County Safe," was based on an actual happening.

. . . somewhere around 1879 Dooly County bought an enormous safe and attempted to haul it from Montezuma, Georgia, to Vienna. It lodged somewhere along the road and there remained for several months. I wrote the adventure for this safe for the Telegraph of which Jessie Jones was the city editor, and it made quite a bit of excitement, not only in the city but throughout the South. This may be regarded as my first real bow to the public.⁶⁴

The short sketch appeared in the Macon Telegraph for the first time in 1879 and was reprinted far and wide.⁶⁵

The sketch is a short account of the problem concerning the safe and a series of letters suggesting various solutions. It seems that the ordinary of Dooly County became concerned about the safety of his county's

to Fred Lewis Pattee he said: "My literary life began in a newspaper office in 1879." See Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Fred Lewis Pattee, December 20, 1914, Pennsylvania State University Library, Pattee File.

⁶³"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938."

⁶⁴Edwards, "Writer Recalls Telegraph Days."

⁶⁵Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, May 26, 1935.

records after he heard of a fire that had destroyed those of a neighboring county; therefore, he ordered a safe which was about "six feet deep, ten feet high, and ten feet long . . . [weighing] some nine thousand pounds . . . and fire-proof." It was shipped to Montezuma, about twenty miles from its destination of Vienna, the county seat of Dooly County. But trouble developed when an attempt was made to transport it on to Vienna. About halfway it slipped from the conveyance designed to carry it, and no human power could budge it from its resting place. A meeting was called, and a committee was formed that issued a circular offering a hundred dollars for a satisfactory solution. Various persons wrote to the committee offering their ideas, the most practical being that the county seat of Vienna be moved to the safe. However, this posed a problem because the safe had stalled outside the county line and because it was not possible to have two seats in one county.

Actually, the sketch is an interesting and humorous comment on the problems of small-town government, and the sober-faced and serious narrator adds to the humor of the situation. Though the sketch is brief, Edwards makes some attempt at characterization: the names⁶⁶ of the persons

⁶⁶Some of the names used in the sketch and referred to here are "M. Levelhead," "H. Roundtree," and "E. Brilliant."

submitting the plans to the council and the nature of their plans suggest a variety of character types that might be found in the sparsely-populated county of Dooly, including the level-headed person, the well-rounded person, and the brilliant strategist. Edwards' presentation of character types, rather than individuals, and his use of the actual become two major features of his later works, and he developed the epistolary form to perfection in his well-known Eneas Africanus.⁶⁷

"The Man on the Monument" concerns Grant's visit to Augusta in 1879.⁶⁸ The "man on the monument" is a Confederate private, and during an interview he expresses his feelings about the praise General Grant received on his visit to Augusta. Although this sketch was also a success and was published in all parts of the South,⁶⁹ Edwards apparently did not write anything else for the paper until he became the local editor. One of the first articles he wrote after obtaining his position was the description of a trip to Cumberland Island. This article appeared in the

⁶⁷Edwards never indicated that he was influenced by the epistolary novels of the eighteenth century, such as Richardson's Pamela. However, his development of the epistolary form in the short story indicates that he probably read such novels.

⁶⁸This account of "The Man on the Monument" is taken from Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards."

⁶⁹Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards."

paper on May 22, 1880, and was illustrated in four cuts.⁷⁰

Edwards' first few years on the Macon Telegraph were not uneventful, and, at times, his lack of experience led him into some embarrassing situations. One such incident concerned a rival paper, the Macon News, an evening paper. Edwards became annoyed when he saw his news stories rewritten, with the addition of some new facts, in the evening edition of this paper, not realizing this was the usual thing. In an attempt to embarrass the plagiarist, Edwards invented a story of a near drowning, in which a small boy narrowly escaped death through the bravery of a Newfoundland dog that came to his rescue. The same story appeared in the evening edition of the rival paper, twice as long and better told, and gave the boy's name and residence, the occupation of the father, and a vivid description of the emotional reactions of the parents when the rescued boy was returned to them. Edwards was so delighted that the reporter had stepped into his trap he "stepped around swelling with happiness." However, as he hurried to his office to tell his colleagues the story, he met a Presbyterian lady who had found a minor error in one of his columns, and she gave him a scorching upbraiding on the principle of truth. This removed some of his elation,

⁷⁰"One of Harry Edwards' First Telegraph Articles Was Description of Trip," Macon Telegraph, November 25, 1926, sec. F, p. 6.

but he proceeded to the office, only to be met by the editor-in-chief, who informed him that the story of the rescued boy was much better in the News than the coverage done by Edwards. After these two incidents, Edwards felt so rebuked that it was years before he would explain that the story was a hoax.⁷¹

When Edwards began to think about marriage, it was natural for his attention to turn to Wesleyan College, where dwelt a bevy of eligible young beauties. Wesleyan had always held a special interest for Edwards; the Edwards home was located only about two hundred yards from the school on College Street, and his oldest sister attended school there. The Wesleyan bell could be heard quite distinctly by the Edwards family, and it served as their timepiece, announcing breakfast, dinner, and supper and getting them in and out of bed. When Edwards was about fourteen his attention began to shift from the "Wesleyan bell to the Wesleyan belle," and even at this early age, he joined in with the groups of young boys who would gather underneath the windows to serenade the girls. Perhaps one of the most painful experiences of his adolescent years occurred when he learned, through the grapevine, that the particular girl he adored had referred

⁷¹Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, October 18, 1936.

to him as a little "rat."⁷²

About the time of his acceptance of the position on the Macon Telegraph, Edwards' interest became centered on one particular Wesleyan "belle," Miss Mary Roxie Lane. Miss Lane was the daughter of Colonel Andrew Jackson Lane, who served at one time as the commanding officer of the 49th Georgia Regiment⁷³ and later became a large landowner and railroad builder of Hancock County, Georgia.⁷⁴ To court a Wesleyan girl in those days was an almost impossible task because strict regulations were imposed on the girls and rigidly enforced. Edwards' later account of the difficulties involved in seeing the young ladies runs thus:

There was no visiting a Wesleyan girl in those early days. Only on Sunday did the boys get a square look at them as they marched to church. Several looks. For we would be at the gates when they filed out, and after they got lined up and caught step, we'd march past the column. We passed them several times before they reached the church. Giggles, smiles and blushes. Finally they reached the Methodist Church . . . there they would find us lined up for the last review. That Sunday march, that route never varied in my memory.⁷⁵

A high wall surrounded the college and discouraged

⁷²Ibid., March 1, 1936.

⁷³The Author of Eneas Africanus.

⁷⁴"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938."

⁷⁵Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, March 1, 1936.

any invasion of the privacy of the girls. The windows of the residential buildings facing the street were not allowed to be opened, and the girls were not permitted to walk out on the porch as they might be seen by someone in that vicinity.⁷⁶

However, the strict regulations of the school were not enough to keep true lovers apart, and attempts were made, occasionally, by enthusiastic young men to associate with the ladies within. One such attempt was made by Harry Edwards. While serenading with a group of boys, who called themselves the "Starlight Quintet," Edwards threw a pebble to one particular window. The window opened warily, and Edwards then threw a ball of twine, attached to a box of candy, through the window. The box was cautiously drawn inside by the eager occupants of the room, and they, supposedly, enjoyed its contents. However, someone informed the administrators of the conduct of the two girls, one of whom was Miss Lane, and they were brought before the faculty and condemned to public disgrace. As punishment for their misdemeanor they were sentenced to sweep the sidewalk from Georgia Avenue to Washington Avenue during the busiest hour of the day. Unknown to the administrators the punishment was a failure; since the street was not visible from the college porch, the girls gave their sweeping job over

⁷⁶Ibid.

to some volunteers, while they had a happy visit with their suitors around the corner.⁷⁷

Edwards' association with the girls at Wesleyan reaffirmed his respect and reverence for women, and he became convinced that these girls represented the height of spiritual beauty and the ideals of Christian womanhood. His ardent love for Wesleyan led him to give the school, perhaps, a too generous amount of credit for literary development in Georgia. In a letter of December 20, 1914, written to Professor Fred Pattee of Pennsylvania State University, in which Edwards discussed Georgia's literary development, he made the following statement:

. . . I wish to state as my personal opinion that Georgia's literary development which is undoubtedly more extensive than that of other Southern states is due to the intellectual and spiritual soil or environment produced by Wesleyan College in the fifty years of its existence previous to 1890. You will understand how this can be true tho the mothers of the state's best known writers may not have been graduates. In my youth, every girl associate I had was of this college. Its atmosphere was everywhere apparent. Today its graduates lead all over the state.⁷⁸

Edwards was especially proud of an article published in the Century Magazine in which he produced evidence that Wesleyan was the first-chartered college for women in the world. In this article he disputed the earlier contention put forth in

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Fred Lewis Pattee, December 20, 1914, Pennsylvania State University Library, Pattee File.

the magazine that Vassar College held this honor.⁷⁹

Edwards' romance with Miss Lane continued, and after her graduation they were married. The wedding took place in Christ Episcopal Church on January 20, 1881. It was one of Macon's largest weddings, with twelve bridesmaids, twelve groomsmen, three hundred guests, and a grand banquet.⁸⁰

The couple had planned a honeymoon, but at the last minute it had to be called off because of the illness of the chief editor of the Macon Telegraph. Edwards was working for the paper at this time, and it became his job to take over the paper for the few days of the chief's illness. The few days turned into years, however, and, when the Edwardses were able to take their honeymoon, a baby had arrived.⁸¹ Undaunted by the situation, they went ahead, baby and all, the time being spent in Hancock County at the historic Lane

⁷⁹Edwards, "The First Female College," Century Magazine, XL (May, 1890), 159. For further information concerning the writing of this article see Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Charles Edgeworth Ines, May 4, 1890, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

⁸⁰Editorial, Macon Telegraph, January 21, 1881. Besides the account of the wedding an editorial appears in the paper under the title "Exit XIE," in which Edwards' loss of bachelorhood is bemoaned. However, the writer hastens to add that Edwards' marriage was not too tragic because "the bride is one of Bibb County's fairest daughters who is alike beloved for her sterling worth and holiness of character, and admired for the striking gifts which illustrate an intellect unusually bright and lovely." XIE was a pseudonym used at times by Edwards, taken from the last three letters of his wife's name.

⁸¹Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, October 20, 1935.

plantation.⁸²

One of the first homes of the young couple was a picturesque mansion across from Mercer University. It was built about 1840 by a Mr. Ross. Edwards later sold the house to Olin Wimberly, whose heirs sold it to a hospital group. This group turned it into Oglethorpe Sanitarium. Many notable personages visited in this home during Edwards' stay there: governors, senators, judges, and writers always found a genial welcome. It was here that James Whitcomb Riley and Bill Nye attended a banquet in 1896; it is said that Nye "convulsed the party" by referring to a barbecued pig on the table as the "finest product" of Edwards' "pen."⁸³ Here, also, Frank Stanton's son died from injuries received in an automobile accident. This son was the inspiration for Stanton's famous "Mighty Lak a Rose," which he claimed was suggested by Edwards' "Mammy's Li'l' Boy." Edwards' piece was written around his own little son and published in the Century Magazine.⁸⁴

When Edwards married Miss Lane in 1881, he was probably standing at the crossroads of his life, and he may have already made a decision to become a writer. As a child he had caught a glimpse of the glorious period of the

⁸²"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon."

⁸³Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, October 20, 1935.

⁸⁴Ibid.

South preceding the war; as an adolescent he had suffered with the South in the humiliation and hardships of her defeat; as a precocious young adult in Washington, he had viewed the South from a distance; and as a mature adult, he had returned to his native soil, embarked on a career as a newspaperman, and married. During these years he had acquired a great loyalty and love for his land and her people; he had published a few articles that had been enthusiastically received by the public; and he had married a woman who would prove to be an ever-ready source of inspiration and understanding. That he would eventually choose to devote himself to the task of recording the South he knew and loved is not surprising.

If Edwards had advanced materially, physically, and mentally during these somewhat hectic years of his life, he had also advanced spiritually. In a letter to Paul Hamilton Hayne, dated the year Edwards began his work with the Macon Telegraph, Edwards revealed a spiritual maturity far beyond his twenty-four years, as he counseled with and consoled the older Hayne in one of Hayne's periods of grief. Edwards began by expressing his regrets that Hayne's mother was ill and then continued:

I deeply sympathize with you in the trouble which surrounds you, and earnestly hope that the double affliction which has fallen upon you may soon fade away beneath brighter skies. In God's own good time will life's mystery be unfolded, its sorrows hushed, its cravings satisfied; the only 'rub' in the grand

development of his purpose, is the harsh grating of distrust, with an instinctive belief. Suffer me to say this without presumption--' out of the mouths of babes and sucklings' knowledge may come--the Truth, it matters not how and when, will surely be revealed, and that which we now see as through a glass darkly, will shine before us as beautiful as the dawn upon the eastern hill.⁸⁵

In closing the letter, Edwards admitted a need for sharing his higher thoughts:

I am always delighted when I have an opportunity of rising to a higher plane of correspondence and for this reason will be glad of an opportunity to exchange my poor views for those of one whom I have long admired.⁸⁶

In the years ahead, Edwards was to choose the medium of writing to express these deepest longings, and he was to spend a lifetime devoted to the task of recording the South he knew and loved.

⁸⁵Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Paul Hamilton Hayne, December 10, 1879, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

⁸⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER II

FROM NEWSPAPERMAN TO SHORT STORY WRITER

If there were any doubts in Edwards' mind in 1881 concerning a career as a newspaperman, he did not let them interfere with his becoming more deeply involved in newspaper work. In 1881, H. H. Jones, owner of what was then called the Telegraph and Messenger, sold the paper to a stock company called the Telegraph and Messenger Publishing Company,¹ with shares in the company being purchased by a group of interested citizens of Bibb County.² At this time, Edwards purchased a small interest in the paper and was named associate editor with A. R. Lamar as editor and H. C. Hanson as manager.³ During his next few years on the paper, Edwards was to become involved in many of the major controversial issues of the day, political, social, and otherwise.

¹R. L. Brantley, "Dr. R. L. Brantley Gives History of the Macon Telegraph," Macon Telegraph, November 25, 1926, sec. A, p. 6.

²Louis Griffith and John Talmadge, Georgia Journalism: 1763-1950 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951), p. 385.

³Edwards, "Writer Recalls Telegraph Days."

The political orientation of the paper was apparent even in the earliest stages of the company's organization, as can be seen by Edwards' account of the transactions between the rival parties of the stock company.

My recollection is that there were $21\frac{1}{2}$ shares of stock, that 18 of the shares were equally divided between rival political factions, and that Major Hanson controlled nine of these. I gave him control of my stock which carried control of the paper, and for about six years he ran it successfully. . . . Major Hanson suggested in the beginning that I become editor of the paper, but I knew nothing of politics and very little of anything else of use to a paper, and in turn suggested the appointment of Albert Rucker Lamar, who had recently contributed a series of brilliant articles on the railroad commission.⁴

Lamar served in the position of editor until the paper was sold in 1886 or 1887.

When Major Hanson and his company took over the management of the Macon Telegraph, it was deeply in debt with no cash in the bank, very little supplies, and a minimum number of subscribers. However, within three years, under the capable management of Hanson, the paper was out of debt, and the increase in the subscribers was as much as 400%.⁵ The support and confidence of the people were won by the editors' strong stand on issues close to

⁴Ibid.

⁵Brantley, "Dr. R. L. Brantley Gives History of the Macon Telegraph."

the hearts of many Southerners, the stated purpose of the paper being

. . . to reform the abuses which have crept into our political system, to destroy the apathy which seems to have settled upon the minds of the people, and to uproot forever the miserable system of favoritism and personalism that have debased the representative and emasculated the public press.⁶

During these years the paper came to be known as a "reform" paper and, as a political rival of the Atlanta Constitution, encountered the opposition of Henry W. Grady on issues concerning the 1882 campaign for governor.⁷

Though Hanson was a competent manager, a great amount of credit for the success of the paper during these years can be attributed to the editors of the paper. Albert R. Lamar was a talented man, and Edwards was a man of extraordinary abilities. The paper was an advocate of the protective tariff, and as the editorial paragraphist of the paper, Edwards wrote many articles on the protective idea.⁸ Also, an article written by Edwards during this period has been credited with starting a movement for a state institution of technology. This article was published in the Macon Telegraph in 1882.⁹ A copy of the article

⁶Ibid.

⁷Raymond B. Nixon, Henry W. Grady (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), pp. 208-10.

⁸Rutherford, p. 529.

⁹Williams, "Once A Newsboy He Never Forgot."

was presented to Georgia Tech in 1936 when Edwards was Honors Day speaker.¹⁰ While a newspaperman, Edwards also "boomed the railroad enterprise" for his father-in-law, Colonel Andrew Jackson Lane, and, within a short period, traveled each county separately, writing a report on each, ran an application for a charter in all county papers, and carried the charter to Atlanta, where it was signed by Governor McDaniel.¹¹

Major Hanson's years with the paper were profitable ones for all concerned, and the stock purchased in 1881 for \$800 per share sold for \$1,800 per share in 1886.¹² It was about this time that Hanson and, presumably, Edwards sold their shares in the paper, thus closing several years of successful work by the editors and the manager of the paper. After the paper was sold, the three men--Hanson, Lamar, and Edwards--started the Sunday Times, which lasted for about a year. The expenses involved in publishing the Sunday Times may have been one reason for its short life. A new type of printing press was used, the Cottrell press, and a high grade of paper used by the better magazines.

¹⁰"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon."

¹¹Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, June 5, 1934.

¹²Edwards, "Writer Recalls Telegraph Days."

When the three suspended publication of the paper, they had in the bank a small balance, which was spent when a check for the entire amount was sent to Winnie Davis for some articles previously written for the paper.¹³ Shortly after this venture, Edwards and Lamar, with "Hanson's backing," bought the Evening News. Edwards owned half-interest in this paper, but his enthusiasm for journalism had diminished, and he retired at the end of two years, saying simply that he "was tired of newspaper work."¹⁴ His years with the Macon Telegraph, the Macon Sunday Times, and the Macon Evening News comprised the period between 1879 and 1888.¹⁵

Edwards' decision to give up newspaper work was probably inspired by previous literary successes. By this time he had published several short stories of considerable merit in two nationally famous magazines. "Elder Brown's Backslide" was published in Harper's Magazine in August, 1885, and was followed by "Two Runaways," which was published by Century Magazine in July, 1886. Shortly after these two stories came "Sister Todhunter's Heart" and "De Valley An' De Shadder," both published by Century Magazine

¹³Ibid. Winnie Davis was the daughter of Jefferson Davis.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Editors of Library of American Literature, January 10, 1890, Columbia University Libraries, Special Collections. Edwards gives this and other biographical information in answer to a query by the editors.

in July, 1887, and January, 1888, respectively. In July, 1888, Harper's Magazine published another of his stories, "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart.'" So by the year 1888, when Edwards quit newspaper work, he was already receiving recognition by national magazines as an outstanding short story writer,¹⁶ and his works were being sought by editors for use in anthologies of American literature.¹⁷

Several different accounts have been given of Edwards' first attempts at writing and publishing stories, and, while these accounts vary somewhat in detail, they agree in general. Robert Lanier Anderson, a prominent Macon lawyer and relative of Sidney Lanier, gave the following account of his close friend's first experiences with the short story:

Five years after their marriage, while Mr. Edwards and his wife were reading together the stories of Thomas Nelson Page, Mrs. Edwards inquired: 'Harry, why don't you write some stories like these?' In reply, Mr. Edwards sat down at his desk and wrote his inimitable story entitled 'Elder Brown's Backslide,' which, encouraged by his wife's approval, he . . . sent to Harper's Magazine, and was pleasantly surprised, shortly thereafter, to receive

¹⁶Charles W. Coleman, "The Recent Movement in Southern Literature," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, LXXIV (May, 1887), 854.

¹⁷Letter, Editors of Library of American Literature to Harry Stillwell Edwards, September 14, 1888, Columbia University Libraries, Special Collections.

in return a check for \$75.00. It was the first time one of his stories had ever been bought and paid for on its own merits. He afterwards said that he was so proud of it that he almost wore the check out carrying it around and showing it to his friends.¹⁸

According to another account, Edwards' wife "sketched a plot, and he put it to paper," whereupon it was sent to Harper's and was bought for \$75.00. Edwards is reputed to have told one group: "I showed that check to so many people it was almost demolished before I cashed it I wish now I could have kept it forever."¹⁹

While attempting to publish his first stories, Edwards encountered some of his first problems in publication. According to Willie Snow Ethridge of the Macon Telegraph, Edwards' first short story posed no difficulty. He mailed "Elder Brown's Backslide" to Harper's Magazine, believing "Harper's was the best magazine printed and should be favored." The story was immediately accepted, but he was not so fortunate with some of his others. The following account given by Ethridge was, apparently, written after an interview with the writer and includes some of Edwards' comments:

¹⁸"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938."

¹⁹J. S. Pope, "Mr. Edwards, 80, Aspires to Great American Novel, He Says at Birthday Party," Atlanta Journal, April 23, 1935.

His second story, 'Two Runaways,' was soon completed and he mailed it also to Harper's, but it was returned with the explanation that it was 'too boisterous' for that magazine. 'Then I mailed it to Century,' Mr. Edwards recounted, 'believing Century was a cracker jack magazine and shouldn't be slighted. It was accepted. And a funny thing. Richard Watson Gilder, the editor of the Century, often declared that the "Two Runaways" was the best short story written by an American up to that time. And Henry M. Alden, editor of Harper's, contended just as vigorously that "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart'" which he had published about the same time as Century did "Two Runaways" was the best short story of the day. I had offered "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart'" first to Century but Richard Watson Gilder said it was too sad. He wrote me that nothing could be gained by such a sad story and he could not publish it. So I then sent it to Harper's. So you see, the two stories which both these editors declared on various occasions were the best two stories published were turned down by rival magazines.'²⁰

After Edwards' first publication in Century Magazine, he became good friends with the editor, Richard Watson Gilder, and he published at least twenty-eight or thirty of his short stories in his magazine and several poems and articles.²¹

Edwards' wife provided much of the inspiration for his writing and was probably the main source of strength and encouragement during his most productive years, but all the while other influences were at work on Edwards.

²⁰Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards."

²¹Ibid.

It was not chance that Edwards and his wife were reading some of the stories of Thomas Nelson Page when she asked him the inspiring question already mentioned. Both of them were admirers of Page, and he exerted not a little influence on Edwards. In a letter of December 20, 1914, to Professor Fred Lewis Pattee of Pennsylvania State University, in which Edwards discussed his beginning career as a writer, he mentioned the "splendid stories of Thomas Nelson Page" and made the following statement:

I recall distinctly my delight in reading 'Marse Chan,' 'Meh Lady,' and 'Uncle Edensboro's Drowndin.' I had been plunging around to find a field and these stories were my guides and inspirations.²²

Apart from the inspiration he received from his wife and Page, one of Edwards' major sources of encouragement was his friend, Paul Hamilton Hayne. While Edwards was with the Macon Telegraph, he published Hayne's works in the paper whenever possible.²³ In return, Hayne encouraged his young friend in his writing. In answer to a letter from Hayne in which Hayne praised his "Elder Brown's Backslide," Edwards made the following reply:

²²Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Fred Lewis Pattee, December 20, 1914, Pennsylvania State University Library, Pattee File. The story mentioned as "Uncle Edensboro's Drowndin" should be "Unc' Edinburg's Drowndin'."

²³Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Paul Hamilton Hayne, August 5, 1885, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

Your kind note referring to my little sketch in Harper's came to hand on yesterday. Such commendations from one who has himself done so much for Southern literature, fills me with gratitude and encouragement. It is beyond my power to thank you as I would.²⁴

He continued by saying that the most satisfying results of his efforts at writing had been the kind "applause" they had provoked. This "applause" he valued more for its effect on his wife than for any feelings of self-satisfaction he might have derived from it:

The privilege of placing testimonials like yours in the hands of a little wife at home and watching the happy lights rise in her eyes as she reads, is such as to leave me deeply in debt. I think you will understand what I mean. It is a great day in any man's life when he feels that he is beginning to justify the faith of a woman who has taken him on trust, even if he has to introduce the biased evidence of friends.²⁵

Edwards' friendship with Hayne lasted until the latter's death. On July 4, 1886, while Edwards was "engrossed in an exciting political campaign," he learned of the serious illness of Hayne,²⁶ who died shortly thereafter.

While the three major influences on Edwards during

²⁴Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Paul Hamilton Hayne, August 2, 1885, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Mrs. Paul Hamilton Hayne, July 4, 1886, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

his early career as a writer may have been Mrs. Edwards, Thomas Nelson Page, and Paul Hamilton Hayne, his later association with other literary men helped to mold his art form. In December of 1888, Edwards became associated professionally with James Whitcomb Riley, the "Hoosier" poet, and Bill Nye, a humorist from Maine. Edwards, Riley, and Nye made a lecture tour of the South.²⁷ Edwards prepared himself for his debut with Riley and Nye by taking dramatic expression from Franklin Sargent of New York, who taught "Harvard elocution" and whose most famous scholar was Mary Anderson, the Shakespearean actress. Edwards was in New York long enough to take forty lessons from Sargent, for which he paid five dollars per lesson.²⁸ Several years later, upon hearing of the suicide death of Sargent, Edwards recounted his experience with him, giving him some credit for his success as a short story writer:

It was about thirty years ago that I met Franklin Sargent, head of the School of Dramatic Arts, whose suicide was recently noted. . . . He gave me forty lessons in dramatic expression, most of them wasted. I remember him as a grave, unemotional man, whose health did not seem good. He rarely smiled . . . generally, only at my Southern pronunciation, over which we had a number of wordy combats. I challenged his rendition of a number of words, and remember that he finally gave up to me on the word "now."

²⁷"Edwards Makes Stage Debut With Riley and Nye in 1888," Macon Telegraph, November 25, 1926, sec. F, p. 11.

²⁸Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, January 18, 1936.

. . . I finally persuaded him that as I was to use my vocabulary chiefly in the South, and in the rendition of my own stories, we had best let my pronunciation stand and try to do something about my shyness and enunciation. In this field he gave me long instruction, most of which has been forgotten, for I was not taking myself very seriously as an expressionist then. . . . [Later] I came to realize that my time with him was not wasted: that the dramatic appeal I never learned to convey verbally, found its way into some of my stories. Such of them as contain the dramatic probably owe their success to Franklin Sargent. 'His Defense' is one of these. 'Sons and Fathers' and 'De Valley An' De Shadder' are others.²⁹

At any rate, Sargent's "system" prepared Edwards for his tour with Riley and Nye, whom Edwards claimed to be "two masters of elocution, never excelled on the American platform."

Edwards made his debut with Riley and Nye at the Macon Academy of Music on Friday evening, November 30, 1888. The Macon Telegraph gave this account:

Macon people had their first glimpse of Bill Nye and the Poet Riley last night. The other member of the two has been seen often, but never to better advantage or with more pride than last night, it being his first appearance on the stage. . . . Bill Nye [appears as] a peeled onion dressed in broadcloth. . . . his head . . . bare. . . . His face . . . as bare of smiles as his head . . . of hair. . . . Mr. Riley . . . is full of life and feeling. . . . Mr. Edwards adds no little to the programme. He fills a place that heretofore has been wanting. He tells the stories of the South in a truthful way. Messrs. Riley and Nye know no more of the Southern darky than they do of the razor-backed hog. . . . Mr. Edwards was reared

²⁹Ibid., September 8, 1923.

with the old-time plantation negroes and their dialect lingers in his memory. Last night he read his 'Two Runaways' and 'The Valley and the Shadder' and received unbounded applause.³⁰

The total receipt at the door was \$360.00,³¹ from an audience reported to have been "the largest and best audience ever seen in the city on an occasion of the kind."³² Though the tour promised to be "a grand financial bonanza" for Nye, who was the head of the organization and had hired the other two, it ended as a failure. "Inherent defects of temperament" caused the disintegration of the company, and it was dissolved in Indianapolis after Riley failed to appear for a show.³³ However, Edwards and Riley were friends as late as 1898, and probably later.³⁴

The break-up of the Edwards, Riley, and Nye team did not discourage Edwards from seeking further experiences on the lecture stand. On August 20, 1889, he suggested in a letter to Thomas Nelson Page that the two of them would

³⁰"Three Funny Men," Macon Telegraph, December 1, 1888, p. 2.

³¹Ibid.

³²Editorial, Macon Telegraph, December 2, 1888.

³³Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, January 18, 1936.

³⁴Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Frank L. Stanton, March 21, 1898, Indiana University, Lilly Library, Stanton Collection.

make a good combination for a tour of the New England states. His letter also gives some indication of the extent of his fame at this time:

It has occurred to me that during this fall we might make a tour through New England that would be very profitable, both in immediate and future results, and I write to ask your consideration and opinion of the project. You are probably aware that the Boston papers have been especially complimentary and kind in their notices of our work, and it stands to reason that we may now rely safely upon their assistance. Last year I could have gone to Boston for a week's reading, but I was then new and raw. Now I am better equipped. If we go together we can give at least four evenings of readings and get such advertisement as will make the New England tour successful. . . . If we can pick up a few thousands each on the lecture stand, why not do it? . . . I suggest we can get a 'send-off' that few others can commend, and now is the time.³⁵

Whether Page accepted the invitation for the tour is not known, but it does seem that Edwards was fairly certain that such a tour would be a success.

During Edwards' brief romance with the stage, he either continued with his writing or had a stock waiting to be published. From November, 1888, to November, 1889, he published three short stories and two poems in Century Magazine. These stories, poems, and even novels continued to flow from his pen at a rapid rate for the next ten or

³⁵Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Thomas Nelson Page, August 20, 1889, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

twelve years, decreasing somewhat after 1902. Of these, eighteen short stories were collected and published in book form by the Century Company of New York: His Defense and Other Stories in 1899 and Two Runaways and Other Stories in 1904. Several later editions of these books were also published. Other book publications of stories written during this period are a few pocket-sized editions, including one entitled Brother Sims's Mistake, How Sal Came Through, Isam's Spectacles and another entitled The Adventures of a Parrot, both published by the J. W. Burke Company in Macon, Georgia. These books were not published until 1920, but the stories in them were written about twenty years earlier.

II

Most of the remainder of this chapter will deal with the twenty-two stories written between Edwards' publication of "Elder Brown's Backslide" in 1885 and "The Adventures of a Parrot" in 1902. These stories do not represent all of Edwards' publications during this time but only those published later in book form.³⁶ They fall into a number of

³⁶The following is a list of the books and the short stories they contain: His Defense and Other Stories includes "His Defense," "William Marsdale's Awakening," "Isam and the Major," "The Hard Trigger," "Mas' Craffud's Freedom," "The Woodhaven Goat," "Captain Isam," "The Gum Swamp Debate," and "Charley and the Possum." Two Runaways and

interesting groups and will be studied accordingly.

Some of the first of Edwards' stories portray the rural people of Georgia and are of considerable merit, including "An Idyl of 'Sinkin' Mount'in,'" "Sister Todhunter's Heart," "Elder Brown's Backslide," and "His Defense." A close look at these reveals that Edwards was probably influenced by the whole body of literature produced by writers before and during his early literary career, especially that of the local colorists and the humorists of the Old Southwest. Many of the local colorists were publishing stories in Century Magazine at the same time as Edwards, including Bret Harte, George Washington Cable, Mary Noailles Murfree, Joel Chandler Harris, and Mary Hallock Foote.

Of his stories featuring rural characters of Georgia, "An Idyl of 'Sinkin' Mount'in'"³⁷ is written very much in the vein of the local colorists. Even the title resembles

Other Stories includes "Two Runaways," "Elder Brown's Backslide," "An Idyl of 'Sinkin' Mount'in,'" "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart,'" "Sister Todhunter's Heart," "De Valley an' De Shadder," "Minc," "A Born Inventor," and "Tom's Strategy." Brother Sims's Mistake, How Sal Came Through, Isam's Spectacles includes the stories in the title, and The Adventures of a Parrot is one story.

^{37A} corrected manuscript copy of "An Idyl of 'Sinkin' Mount'in'" is located at the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, Manuscript Department.

Bret Harte's "The Idyl of Red Gulch," and the treatment of subject matter is similar to that of Harte and Murfree, describing passions of the heart, with a tendency to idealize. Edwards portrays poverty, but it is a poverty combined with such virtues as endurance, loyalty, fortitude, and faith. Along with these qualities is his realistic depiction of the rural countryside, which is comparable to even the most realistic writers such as Hamlin Garland, as can be seen in the following passages:

There were no pigs to disturb the flower-garden overrun with the prince's-feathers, bachelor's-buttons, four-o'clocks, old-maids, and sunflowers, and the dismounted gate leaned restfully against the post on which it had once hung. Somehow everything in the neighborhood of the Sykes cottage seemed inclined to lean towards something else. The cow was long gone, and the . . . little boarded shed, which straddled the sparkling springbranch near at hand and once served as a dairy, was lurching towards the hillside. Near the staggering fence was a bench that had settled back against it, thrusting its legs well to the front, and there once nestled a score of bee-hives; but none remained, and only the great yellow and maroon butterflies that floated down the valley, and the bumblebees, reveled in the honey-flowers.³⁸

Obadiah Sykes, the hero of the story, is just as realistically drawn:

Ezekiel Obadiah Sykes leaned over the tumble-down split-picket fence that had once kept the pigs and chickens from his mother's humble flower-garden, and gazed fixedly at the mountain before him. His was not a striking figure,

³⁸Harry Stillwell Edwards, Two Runaways and Other Stories (New York: Century Company, 1922), p. 64.

being lank and somewhat round-shouldered. . . . A pair of worn jean trousers covered his lower limbs, and were held in place by knit 'galluses,' which crossed the back of his cotton shirt exactly in the middle and disappeared over his shoulders in well-defined grooves. A stained and battered wool hat hung like a bell over his head. . . . The face was half covered by a reddish brown beard, the first of his budding manhood. The sun had just sunk beyond the mountain, and the great shadow that crept across the single field of starving corn and the tobacco patch deepened into twilight, and still the young man rested on the picket-fence. Occasionally he would eject into the half-defined road . . . a stream of tobacco-juice, and pensively watch it as it lined the gravel and vanished into the soil with something like a human gasp. Once he lifted a bare foot, and with a prolonged effort scratched with its horny toes the calf of the supporting leg.³⁹

One might also note the decadence of the two preceding scenes, but, unlike that of other writers, this decadence is not one of despair, but of hope. These passages also reveal Edwards' tendency to favor compounds, especially compound modifiers, in his descriptive passages, a tendency which is present in all of his works. The full development of plot and character in "An Idyl of 'Sinkin' Mount'in'" is a characteristic not found in all of Edwards' works.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 63-64. In an address at a birthday dinner for Edwards, William Cole Jones also noted these passages by saying: "The present-day cult of so-called and sadly self-conscious realism might well take a leaf from the opening chapter of . . . 'The Idyl of Sinkin' Mountain.' These are . . . more real than the unmitigated sordidness set forth by certain writers today." See William Cole Jones, "What Harry Stillwell Edwards Means to Georgia," Atlanta Journal, April 23, 1935.

In "Elder Brown's Backslide" and "Sister Todhunter's Heart," which could be called companion pieces, Edwards concentrates more on the depiction of character and the development of humor than on plot and setting, though local color is present in these as in all of his works. The "sassafras bushes," "persimmon sprouts," and "thread-like rows of cotton," which can be seen along the elder's route to Macon, add a picturesque note, but it is the elder, himself, astride his donkey, Balaam, in his "old-fashioned stove-pipe hat," "Henry Clay" coat, and "red jeans," who finally captures our attention. Likewise, in "Sister Todhunter's Heart" we get an interesting glimpse of a gossipy rural community, but it is finally Sister Todhunter who takes the spotlight. Edwards' effective portrayal of these characters reveals a particular skill in a fine blending of pathos and humor. His humor is somewhat akin to that of the humorists of the Old Southwest, but it is not quite as boisterous, or we might say that the boisterous quality of the humor has been refined by Edwards' own special touch.

Edwards is always the humorist, and, even in those works where the humor does not break forth in peals of laughter, the play of a smile can always be noted at the corner of the writer's lips. In "Elder Brown's Backslide" the humor does break forth in peals of laughter, and, to present this humor, Edwards relies on the favorite device

of the humorists of the Old Southwest: incongruity. The high point of humor occurs when Elder Brown, countrified and intoxicated, goes into a hat shop to buy his wife a bonnet, having been inspired to a feeling of warmth for his wife by the alcoholic apirits, the first he had taken in twenty years. He enters the hat shop, bows like a "Castilian," drops all the odds and ends of his day's shopping, and collapses in laughter on the floor as he attempts to pick up the articles. With the help of the pretty girls in the shop, he finally gets up and proceeds to choose his wife a bonnet. The girls are overcome with the humor of the situation when, with pride and affection in his voice, he chooses a pink bonnet for his "sorta red-headed 'ooman," with the explanation "Nancy's red an' the hat's red," so it ought to "soot" her. Afterwards, the reader is almost ashamed of having laughed at the hen-pecked Elder and his wife, when the latter, who has long since discouraged any attempt at the amorous, weeps over the pink, frilly hat.

The humor of "Sister Todhunter's Heart" is directly connected with the theme of initiation that runs throughout the story. This theme concerns the new young parson of Sweetwater, Parson Riley, the humor occurring when he attempts to have Sister Todhunter turned out of church. The parson was moved to discipline the woman after her husband reported that she had acted violently toward him.

According to Colonel Todhunter, who admitted to taking a "julep" every now and then, his wife, who was superior in strength and weight, forced him between two mattresses on a hot July day, whereupon she immediately sat with her 300 pounds and calmly knitted all afternoon, attempting and succeeding in "sweatin" his whiskey out of him. The fun begins when the "erring sister" appears before Mount Zion Church to be disciplined. Swiftly disposing of her accusing husband by hooking her crook-handled umbrella in his coat collar and jerking him backward to her, she delivers the best sermon on sinful man ever heard in the church, naming specific sinners in the church along with his or her particular sin. Needless to say, the church was quickly emptied of the erring sinners, and the young minister learned a valuable lesson.

Mingled with the humor of these two stories are the genuine love and compassion of the author for his creations. Edwards possessed the unique ability to see the good in people, and, if he laughs, it is the laughter of love. Elder Brown is not a bad man in spite of his backsliding. The extent of his use of foul language is "Hannah-Maria-Jemimy! goldarn an' blue blazes!" which, it is true, he utters at times with all the force his placid nature can summon; and, though he is weak and has no will power, he is not bad. Likewise, the writer hastens to tell us that Hannah Brown "was not a hard woman naturally. Fate had

brought her conditions which covered up the woman heart within her . . . but it was there still"; and Sister Todhunter is shown to "have a good heart," when the writer graciously gives her the chance to cure the parson's baby of a fatal illness. Sister Todhunter, herself, probably voices the writer's own sentiments when she tells the parson, "Trouble and worry sometimes sorter crusts over er person's heart, so that ev'ybody can't see hit . . . but hit's there all the same."

"His Defense," the success of which Edwards attributed in part to his dramatic lessons with Franklin Sargent, is one of Edwards' stories of rural life that also deal with the legal profession. Though Edwards was a lawyer for a time, his stories in this group are concerned more with the defendant and the kindly judge than with the lawyer. Edwards seems to have been impressed with the integrity of most judges, and he believed some of the most humorous scenes ever to be witnessed took place on court day when the mountaineers, Negroes, and backwoodsmen were brought into court for their petty offenses. He was a frequent visitor at such court cases and was the friend of several judges; in fact, it was his familiarity with such court scenes as that of "His Defense" that inspired him to write these stories.

Other than the dramatic quality of "His Defense," Edwards' particular skill in introducing the reader to the

subject and his indirect manner of revealing character should be mentioned. With the economy of Poe, Edwards quickly gets the reader into the central action of the story:

'What?'

Colonel Rutherford shot a swift glance from the brief he was examining at the odd figure before him, and resumed his occupation quickly, to hide the smile that was already lifting the heavy frown from his face. 'Indicted for what?'

'For the cussin' of my mother-in-law. . . .'⁴⁰

Having introduced the reader to the story, Edwards proceeds to set up a narrative frame, whereby the defendant tells the chain of events that led to the "cussin." The naive narrator, completely unaware of the implications of his testimony, reveals that he is at once kind, generous, loving, patient, understanding, and long-suffering. The appeal of the story is such that Theodore Roosevelt, Edwards' personal friend, called it one of the best short stories of its length ever written. In a letter of November 9, 1900, Roosevelt said,

I have enjoyed your two books so much, as Mrs. Roosevelt has, that I cannot forbear sending you a line to thank you. I am almost inclined to call "His Defense" the best short story of the same length ever written! It certainly is one of the best.⁴¹

⁴⁰Harry Stillwell Edwards, His Defense and Other Stories (New York: Century Company, 1899), p. 1.

⁴¹Letter, Theodore Roosevelt to Harry Stillwell Edwards, November 9, 1900, Wesleyan College, Willett Memorial Library, Macon, Georgia. This letter is included in a pamphlet entitled A Dinner to Harry Stillwell Edwards, B. L., LL. D.

And Roosevelt's evaluation in this case is certainly a valid one.

In these stories of the rural people of Georgia, Edwards, like the local colorists, made an attempt at accurate dialect reporting, giving his characters the speech their particular locality and station in life would demand. In an open letter to Century Magazine in May, 1895, which was prompted by an article by Val. Starnes, apparently reprinted in the same issue of the magazine, Edwards made these comments about dialect writing:

The safest way to write dialect is to write some particular person's dialect after indicating the environment. If this is impossible, don't write in dialect, for it will illustrate nothing. In the stories I have written, every person who speaks, speaks after the fashion of some real person selected for that purpose.⁴²

In answer to Starnes' criticism of Southern authors for writing dialect in the manner of Dickens, Edwards replied:

In touching upon Georgia 'cracker,' Mr. Starnes unwittingly indorses while he criticizes one of our Southern writers who 'constantly inserts a w in place of a v,' when he attributes this habit to close reading of Dickens. It is true that the cracker of today has largely gotten over this variation; but even now, in the backwoods, it is still heard.

The Georgia cracker is the least Americanized Englishman we possess. The South Atlantic States received the cockney direct from London. Georgia had him by the ship-load from the slums, the workhouses, and the debtors' prison. He is here today. . . .

⁴²Harry Stillwell Edwards, "Open Letters," Century Magazine, L (May, 1895), 156.

The point is that, allowing for the environment and consequent change of ideas and similes, and allowing for the dulling of wits due to want of association, the Georgia cracker is the cockney; and the closer one follows Dickens's treatment of him, the closer he gets to the truth, in spelling at least.⁴³

Whether Starnes' criticism was directed at Edwards is not certain, but it seems likely that it was since he was so quick to defend the writers mentioned. Also, he gives some examples of the cockney speech as heard in Georgia, and a close examination of his works will reveal some of the same expressions as he mentions.

III

Edwards' stories depicting the Negro are unquestionably his greatest contribution to Southern literature, and sixteen of the stories written during the period now under study fall into this group. Eight of these constitute a series we may refer to as the "Isam" stories, since the central action revolves around Isam, the Negro body servant of Major Crawford Worthington. Five represent an interesting study of Negro religion, and, of the remaining three, "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart'" deals with the loyalty of an antebellum "Mammy" to her mistress; "Charley and the Possum" concerns a court case of two Negroes in which the rightful owner of a possum is determined; and

⁴³Ibid., pp. 156-57.

"Minc" is an interesting study of an African who has retained some of the unusual characteristics of his ancestors. Of the last three stories "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart'" will be studied briefly, and the remainder of the chapter will analyze the Isam stories and those of Negro religion.

"'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart,'" the story considered "too sad" for publication in Century Magazine, was inspired by the death of Edwards' nineteen-month-old daughter, a fact which probably accounts for the melancholy tone of the work. Of the two major characters, Sweetheart is modeled after Edwards' baby daughter and Ole Miss after his daughter's maternal grandmother, the grandmother-grandchild relationship being retained in the story.⁴⁴ This is the only work written by Edwards in which he deals at length with a Mammy of antebellum times, and in manner of telling and theme it bears a marked resemblance to Thomas Nelson Page's "Marse Chan," which preceded Edwards' story by four years.

Edwards stated that Page's stories were his guides and inspirations, so the resemblance between "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart'" and "Marse Chan"⁴⁵ should not be surprising.

⁴⁴Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards."

⁴⁵"Marse Chan" is included in Richmond C. Beatty and others, eds., The Literature of the South (New York: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1952), pp. 460-75.

Although the pathos and tenderness of Edwards' story may have been provoked, in part, by his emotional state at the time of composition, it is exactly this quality or tone that so closely resembles that of Page's work. As in "Marse Chan," the principal theme is loyalty, and, like Page, Edwards uses the narrative frame, allowing a Mammy of ante-bellum days to tell the tragic story of her former mistress. The naive narrator introduces a note of pathos as she unknowingly appeals to the deeper emotions of the listener; the story is pitiably sad, and Edwards' ability to bring tears to the eyes of the reader rivals that of Page.

Similarities other than the theme of loyalty and the elements of pathos and tenderness exist between "Marse Chan" and "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart.'" In "Marse Chan" the story is told to a horseback rider, who chances upon an ex-slave who is looking for his former master's dog; in "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart'" the narrator relates her story to a hunter, who accidentally comes upon her cabin while looking for his bird dog. Additionally, there are times when the phraseology of the two stories is similar. For example, in "Marse Chan," when the young boy who had been killed in the war was brought home for burial, his Negro body servant said, "I couldn't see I wuz cryin' so . . . and ev'rybody wuz' cryin'," and when Sweetheart was nearing death, Edwards' Mammy was "all broke down en er-cryin' like ev'body else." When Marse Chan was born "dey

wuz de grettes' doin's at home you ever did see. De folks all had holiday, jes' like in de Christmas," and when Sweetheart recovered from her illness, "sech doin's nev'r uz seed on de plantation. . . . Ole Miss sed de Lord hed dun show'd 'er mussy en ev'body mus' have er hol'day." Likewise, the two women of the stories resemble one another, with Page's Ole Missis as "proud ez anybody" and Edwards' Ole Miss like "iron all ov'r." However, in spite of the striking similarities Edwards' story has a distinct flavor of its own.

Five of Edwards' Negro stories deal with Negro religion, and are particularly good at depicting the old-time Negro preacher, his congregation, and the form of worship, including prayer, music, conversion, and the practice of debate. The time span of these stories is broad, extending from shortly before the Civil War to about the end of the nineteenth century. "How Sal Came Through," for example, is set in the days of slavery; "De Valley An' De Shadder" and "De Gum Swamp Debate" represent a period a few years after the emancipation of the Negro; and "Brother Sims's Mistake" and "Tom's Strategy" are sometime later but before the twentieth century. The setting for at least two of the stories, "Brother Sims's Mistake" and "How Sal Came Through," is Holly Bluff Plantation, Edwards' home, near Macon, Georgia. The stories were probably written around the author's first-hand observations of Negro religion.

That Edwards probably attended at times Negro church services is indicated in the answer to a letter of inquiry concerning his knowledge of Negro religion. The letter was written to Mrs. Prentiss Edwards, Sr., of Macon, Georgia, Edwards' daughter-in-law, who lived with Edwards at Holly Bluff the last ten or fifteen years of his life. The answer to the inquiry reads in part as follows:

I have looked through some papers and found the proofs of 'Brother Sims's Mistake,' given to me by Mr. Edwards, and a notation at the top in his handwriting says, 'some of this story is Holly Bluff. Note the lake and sandbar.' Of course, I have no way of knowing what church he had in mind when he wrote the story. I am sure that he had attended such services in his lifetime, but where I do not know. I think the colored church on Jeffersonville Road (I think it is Swift Creek and is probably still there) was one in his later years.⁴⁶

Edwards stated that his stories of Negro religion were necessary to bring out fully the "humorous and pathetic features" of the older Negro. In these stories Edwards does not show a lack of respect and reverence for the Negro religion, and he would not have the reader think the Negro is irreverent in his form of worship.

It should be stated here that this negro is rarely ever irreverent; that, however his words may appear in print, in reality they never suggest anything improper. Those who read them, however amused they may be by his

⁴⁶Letter, Mrs. Prentiss Edwards, Sr., to Doris Lanier, July 16, 1969.

odd and incongruous ideas, methods of expression, and the scenes in which he becomes involved, should bear this fact in mind. The prayers, sermons, and hymns . . . differ but little from the real, and that chiefly in arrangement.⁴⁷

So, if the reader of these stories will remember that Edwards' primary purpose is to portray the Negro and his religion rather than to ridicule them, he will probably read the stories with a deeper appreciation of what the writer has done.

Of these stories, "The Gum Swamp Debate" and "Brother Sims's Mistake" probably present the clearest picture of the old-time Negro preacher. The Reverend Elijah Williams, preacher of the Gum Swamp congregation and master of oratory, is the undisputed authority on all questions concerning his community and congregation.

For many years 'Lige had held undisputed possession of the pulpit and forum, and swayed his audience with homely eloquence, his logic irresistible, his fact unassailed. He had been authority on all questions, settling family as well as doctrinal disputes. If there was a mooted point in Scripture that 'Lige had failed to clear up, it was because the point was fortified behind an array of words that no one in Gum Swamp could spell out.⁴⁸

Another brother of the faith, the Reverend Joshua Sims, visiting preacher to the Holly Bluff congregation, is more

⁴⁷Edwards, Two Runaways and Other Stories, Preface.

⁴⁸Edwards, His Defense and Other Stories, p. 193.

feared for his sermons than respected for his authority, and his skill at oratory is no less than Brother Elijah's.

His roving eyes . . . flashed their keen, comprehensive glances; his flow of words and ideas . . . was marvelous, his wit and satire . . . brilliant, his invective . . . terrific. . . . He was not a preacher of discourses; he was no defender of the faith. He was mighty, but in charge only; and the devil, to him, was always a personal one. If anybody could withstand Brother Sims's charge, he might defeat him; but few, even with the backing of the arch-enemy himself, would attempt such a thing. . . . His skill in . . . preparation was nothing less than phenomenal, his execution something more than frightful.⁴⁹

The major preparation for the Reverend Sims's sermons is his collection of bits of information from members of the flock on their specific sins. Scathing accusations are then unreservedly heaped on the heads of the sinners. Sims also appears in "Tom's Strategy," in which the philandering Tom escapes a scathing attack by Brother Sims by bribing him with "crackling" bread, "'possum warmed over," "baked sweet potatoes," and "persimmon beer."

Most of these stories of Negro religion feature members of the same congregation, with the major action of each story revolving around one or two specific members. The following description of the congregation that gathered to hear Brother Sims preach includes most of the identified

⁴⁹Harry Stillwell Edwards, Brother Sims's Mistake, How Sal Came Through, Isam's Spectacles (Macon: J. W. Burke Company, 1920), pp. 4-5.

church members.

To the humble log church, spacious, but dwarfed by the great pines that sheltered it . . . came the scattered flock. There were nervous little black Tom, guarded vigilantly by his gigantic consort Tempy, the one with a fat lightwood torch, the other with a fat umbrella; Henry Clay Thompson, bent and sad since emancipation forced him to think; black Aleck, with the fisherman's heraldry upon his Sunday garments; Ben Evans, with his wife Melviny; and Sal, whose 'comin' through,' some years previous, left scars upon the whole congregation. Besides these there were a hundred others, grave, silent, apprehensive. . . . And there was present the presiding elder, Uncle Lazarus. . . . from which the 'Yes, Lord!' 'Do so, Lord!' 'Oom hoo!' 'Face the light!' and 'Amen!' were expected to roll promptly.⁵⁰

To this list should be added Sis Chloe, Little Manse, Brother Manuel, and a few other members of prominence.

In two of the stories, the conversion of an unbeliever takes place; one of the unbelievers is converted in the church and the other outside the church. The conversion of Sal, in "How Sal Came Through," was an emotional occasion in which the entire congregation took part and was accompanied by frenzied dancing, shouting, singing, crying, and praying on the part of the participants. Sal's mother led the rejoicing at the conversion, clapping her hands and swaying back and forth, while shouting, "My chile es er-comin' through, she's er comin' erlong de way!" Unfortunately, the conversion ended in a free-for-all. Just

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 6-7.

as the church drifted into "the ecstatic church dance," and Sal was beginning to add a "queer little shuffle to her march, popping her long, broad foot upon the resonant plank," she came face to face with the "yeller huzzy" who was the rival in her current romance; and when the rival made the unfortunate remark, "Look at Bigfoot Sal!" a fight started that finally involved the whole congregation.

The conversion of Mandy in "De Valley An' De Shadder" is a less spectacular and more serious affair, coming after the unfaithful Mandy's husband was jailed for killing her consort. The Negro preacher who brings about Mandy's conversion is peculiarly touching as he haltingly reads and explains the twenty-third Psalm to her, having to spell out many of the words. Strangely enough, the beauty of the biblical passages is not diminished by the halting Negro dialect; in fact, the effect achieved is of a new and special beauty not usually noticed in the passages, perhaps imparted to them by the simple humility of the black minister.

One of Edwards' most striking passages of local color appears in "De Valley An' De Shadder," when he describes Black Ankle, the home of the newly-freed Negroes. An artist with a brush could not have painted a clearer picture.

Yonder are a shed and a corn-crib, and a leaning stack of fodder, and a blue-stem collard patch, and snake fences, and vehicles that have stood

in the weather until sunstruck; a forlorn mule; a cow that all her life . . . practiced the precept, 'It is better to give than to receive': a stray hen with her little family under a gorgeous sunflower. . . . There are little negroes in single garments that reach to their knees only, and the ten-year-old girl bearing in her arms the infant. There are the clothes fluttering on the knotted lines propped up by fork saplings. There are black women, with tucked-up dresses, scrubbing over the wash-tub, and in the air the marvelously mellow plantation hymn, and on the ground the shadow of the circling hawk, and the grasshopper balancing himself in mid air, and the dipping mockingbird on the haw-bush.⁵¹

Even today, in the remote farm areas of Georgia, such scenes exist.

Edwards' interest in the Negro's prayer life and the rhythmical quality of his music is evident in these stories, and most of them have generous sprinklings of verses of Negro spirituals and many prayers. Of interest here is the Negro's ability to improvise. At times, words to the songs were invented on the spur of the moment, the improvisors being a few members of the congregation who carried the verse along and were joined by the others on the chorus. The rhythmical quality of the spirituals usually carried over into the prayers of the brethen, and it was not unusual for a lengthy prayer to have a special rhythm of its own, accompanied by the rocking and chanting of the congregation. In a footnote to a prayer offered by Unc' Manuel, the author

⁵¹Edwards, Two Runaways and Other Stories, pp. 162-63.

tells the reader he can imitate the Negro by selecting one tone and keeping it monotonously low, except on the underlined words, which should be pitched two notes higher.

Unc' Manuel's prayer on the certainty of death has an interesting rhythm when read in this manner.

We all gotter go! An' I reck'n hit'll be ole Manuel nex'; fur-somehow-my-legs-ain'-what-dey-onct-was; an'-w'en-I-git-down-hit's mighty-hard-ter-git-up--mighty-hard-tergit-up; fur-de-mis'ry-en-de-ole-man's back; de-ole-man's-wearin'-out; but-es-trust-es-en-de-Lord; an'-'e-ain'-nev'r-call-but-de-lord-come; mebbe nex'-time-'e-won't-come-but-sen-es-chariot--. An'-es-snow-white-robe-too; . . . an'-de-ole-man-go-'long-an'-fine-es-Master. Oh,-hit'll-be-er-great-day-an'-I-wish-hit'-u'd-come-erlong. . . .⁵²

The prayer was concluded in Unc' Manuel's usual voice with "thine be de kingdom, an' de glory, f'r ever an' de ver, amen." Also, the women were not excluded from praying in public, with Sis' Charlut often called on to lead "en de praar."

It was not unusual for members of the church to pray for another less fortunate member. One such prayer was offered for Brother Lazarus when a fellow member, Br'er Clay, realized Lazarus had been singled out for punishment by the visiting preacher, the Reverend Mr. Sims, the accusation being Lazarus' delinquency in saving souls. After asking for "unlimited blessings" upon the world, Br'er

⁵²Edwards, Brother Sims's Mistake, How Sal Came Through, Isam's Spectacles, pp. 18-19.

Clay continued by asking that Lazarus be spared from punishment:

An', O Lord . . . don't jedge er man too hard what's got er morgidge so big hit covers er mule, er sow, an' er bull yearlin', tel yer wouldn' know dey was under dere ef de trough warn't empty all time. . . . Don't jedge er man too hard what's got fo' chillen too lit-tle ter work an' too big ter fill up three times 'twix' sun-up an' sun-down; 'sides one what's a widder wid two more babies, an' es wife's mother an' es own ter look atter! . . . Don't jedge er man too hard when he's lak dat, fer time has come wid him when hit's more pow'ful ter save bodies den ter save souls; fer ef de body perish, de soul hit will sho'ly git erway fum us all.⁵³

A special effect is achieved by such prayers as these, because they are uttered with dead seriousness, and yet the phraseology is such that the reader cannot help being amused.

The practice of debate must have been common in the Negro churches of the Old South, taking place, apparently, between the minister and some member of the congregation. "The Gum Swamp Debate" features a debate between the Reverend Elijah Williams and "a school Darky," Ike Peterson. The main purpose is to see who can "argify" best the proposition "De pen am more pow'ful dan de powder." The presentation and summation of the two opposing sides are skillfully handled by Edwards, with the old-time Negro, Elijah, winning the debate, his most brilliant argument

⁵³Ibid., pp. 10-11.

coming in the concluding statement:

You got ter have somebody ter 'splain er pen ter folks, but yer don't have ter 'splain de powdah. Powdah 'splain hitself. You got ter know er man'fore you mind what es pen say; but you move fer anybody's powdah, whether yer know 'im er yer don't know 'im! Gimme powdah--gimme powdah--an' gi' Br'er Peterson er pen,--gi' 'im er gol' pen ef he wants hit,--an' ef I don't make 'im put down dat pen 'fo' he meks me put down dat powdah, den de pen ez mo' pow'ful dan de powdah.⁵⁴

Edwards' study of Negro religion is an important and interesting aspect of his study of Negro life, but his "Isam" stories are more extensive and are usually considered his best. These are written around the escapades of a large plantation owner, Major Crawford Worthington, and his Negro body servant, Isam. They cover a period of several years. "Two Runaways," "Isam and the Major," and "The Hard Trigger" concern a period before the Civil War; "Captain Isam" takes place during the war; "Mas' Crawford's Freedom" occurs immediately after the war; and the other sketches--"The Woodhaven Goat," "Isam's Spectacles," and "The Adventure of a Parrot"--are set in a period some years after the war. It does not seem to be the writer's purpose to do a serious study of plantation life in these stories; he simply presents a casual, everyday glimpse at that life, hardly allowing the outer world to intrude on its serenity. Life on this plantation is essentially stable and so unchanging

⁵⁴Edwards, His Defense and Other Stories, pp. 206-07.

that the reader never feels any of the before-war anxiety or the chaos of its aftermath. The main reason for this stability is the relationship between Isam and the Major, which remains unchanged during these years.

The basic purpose of these stories is to study the relationship between master and slave, with the main emphasis on the humorous aspect of their lives. Additionally, they present a wonderful portrait of what must have been a typical plantation of the pre-war South, reveal Edwards' skill at characterization, develop the theme of Southern loyalties and pride in family, along with the gentleman's code of honor, and provide an interesting study of Negro superstitions and folklore.

The setting of these stories is Woodhaven, a huge cotton plantation about ten miles from Milledgeville, Georgia. We are told in the first of the series that Woodhaven boasts of a large, "solemn-fronted and tall-columned house" with a broad veranda and a spacious back yard, but it is only after we read the complete series that the full portrait of Woodhaven emerges. Then we know that a Lamarque rose bush is planted at the end of the porch; that a detached kitchen, built on brick pillars, graces the back of the house; and that the orchard at the far end of the back yard has "triple rows of beehives" resting under the cherry trees, with an occasional goat grazing nearby. Then we can see

the "china-tree" next to the yard and the "single sweet-gun tree" in the fence corner; we can see the "rail fence" under the tree, where sits a "yellow rooster" calling for his family to follow him; and we can see the "generous supply of hound dogs" and a "turkey gobbler" drumming "among his wives," his tail closing "like venetian blinds." We see the smokehouse, where the faithful servant Isam retreats occasionally to give vent to his grief and, a little farther back, the gin-house, with a "stately pea-fowl" perched on the very top. In another area we see the comfortable Negro quarters, where little pickaninnies play their childish games. Surrounding this central area are the spreading cotton fields, which stretch "almost out of sight to the woodlands," where we can see the Negroes "bent over the white staple, a bright turban here and there giving back flashes of color, and the regular cadence of the Negroes' song." In the fall we can see "the great corn fields stripped of their fodder," and we know when the year's work is done and on special occasions the Negroes will gather around a "pile of blazing pineknots" in the back yard at Woodhaven and frolic and sing for hours. This is the picture of Woodhaven: a picture so real that the reader can easily visualize the entire plantation after he has finished reading the stories.

The inhabitants of this domain are varied, including, at all times, the owner, Major Worthington, and his body

servant, Isam, with the addition later of the Major's niece, Helen, and her son. Hovering in the background are Hebe, the housemaid; Aunt Silvy, a witch doctor; three hundred slaves; dozens of pickaninnies; and, over a period of time, various visitors, including two army officers stationed on the estate after the war and a group of children who gather for a birthday party. But the stories belong to Isam and his master, and it is the portrayal of these two with their relationship to one another that is the dominating concern of the writer. The author tells us some of the essentials about them, but mainly we come to know them through their relations to and interactions with one another. They remain static: they are the same before the war, during the war, and after the war. They are characterized mainly in the first few stories, and, although Edwards tells us that the Major is not a type "unless to be one of many singular characters in a region whose peculiar institutions admitted of the wildest eccentricities can constitute a type," both the Major and Isam are actually types.

"Two Runaways," the first of the stories, introduces us to Major Worthington and Isam. In the midst of "peace and plenty" this "self-willed and eccentric" bachelor ruled his domain like a "prince," his throne being a rocker on the broad veranda. He was a rather short individual, inclined to "portliness," with "a voice so large he could make himself heard distinctly a quarter of a mile away

without taking his pipe out of his mouth." He "despised books," "had no periodical," and was a Whig member of the legislature. Other than a "julep" at regular intervals, his "sole diversion" and "unfailing source of amusement" was the study of the Negroes on the plantation. And none of these intrigued him as much as Isam, who, along with the house servant, Hebe, ruled him, until his niece, Helen, came along. Isam was a "privileged character," being only a few years older than the Major and having been given to him at birth, but there was some question as to who owned whom. With his "little black eyes set deep within his complicated face" Isam "galled" even the Major in defying him to penetrate all of his cunning and mystery. He was predictable in some things and wholly unpredictable in others. He had an intuitive and penetrating knowledge of his master's mind, quickly reading his every change of mood.

"Two Runaways" begins an interesting series of escapades in which the Major and Isam take part, and here is revealed what has been called the most beautiful relationship between master and slave ever presented. Each year, when "the catalpa worm crept upon the leaf," old Isam mysteriously disappeared into the generously wooded swamps near Woodhaven, where he lived "loos' en free" for two weeks. The Major cared nothing for Isam's "lost time" and "bad example," but his curiosity was aroused as to where the Negro went each year. When the inhabitants of Woodhaven

awoke one morning to find both Isam and the Major gone, it was no surprise, for the Major was known for his eccentricities. He had run away with his slave, and during the next few weeks he found what Isam meant by "loos' en free." The two feasted on "bacon and hoecake," which were brought from home; bream, redbellies, and catfish, which were caught in the nearby streams; a generous supply of "dew christened melons" and fresh corn, "borrowed" from the neighboring fields; and even one "tender shote." After finding that his first question concerning the method of obtaining the food insulted Isam's integrity, the Major quickly became Isam's "guest," adhering to his remark: "w'en folks goes er-vis'tin' dey don' 'quire es ter de year-marks uv de pig, w'en back-bone en' spar'ribs en' chine is sot out." Soon Isam was not the only one involved in the "daily sins," and the "portly" Major "renewed" his youthful skill at crawling beneath "snake fences" for a melon.

Always the humorist, Edwards outdoes himself in this story. On one excursion, Isam is attacked by a wild deer, and the Major, fearful for Isam's life, rushes to the rescue, grabbing the deer by the horns, intending for Isam to finish off the deer. But the frantic Isam has other ideas. Upon gaining his freedom, he climbs to the top of a nearby haw-bush, and no amount of pleading will entice him down. Adding to the chagrin of the Major, whose position is fast becoming serious, are Isam's frequent

ejaculations of prayer for the soul of his master, in which he excuses the Major's foul language by saying:

O Lord! . . . don' you mine nuth'n' he is er-sayin' now, cos he ain' 'spons'bl'. Lord, ef de bes' aingil you got wuz down dere in his fix, en' er fool deer wuz er-straddl'n' 'im, dey ain' no tel'n' w'at' u'd happ'n er w'at sorter langwidge he'd let loos'.⁵⁵

Isam, whose rationalization is brilliant when justifying his actions, tells the Major he should pray and then continues:

I prayed w'en I wuz down dere Mass' Craffud, dat I did, en' look w'at happ'n. Did n' he sen' you like er aingil, en' did n' he get me up hyah safe en' wholesum? Dat he did, en he nev'r 'spec' dis nigg'r war go'n'ter fling 'esse'f und'r dat deer arter he trouble hisse'f to show'im up hyah. . . . deed'n' hit'u'd be 'sultin' de Lord. Ain' he dun got me up hyar out'n de way, en' don' he 'spec' me furter stay? You reck'n he got nuth'n 't all ter do but keep puttin' Isum back up er tree? No, sah! . . . Hit's my bizness des'ter keep er-prayin'.⁵⁶

The Major is saved only by what the author calls "his fine knowledge of the Negro character"; he informs Isam that he recognizes the wild deer as the spirit of a departed bad Negro, whose object is to chase Isam forever if the Major should die. With that Isam scurries down the tree so hastily he frightens the animal away.

The genial and happy relationship we see between

⁵⁵Edwards, Two Runaways and Other Stories, p. 25.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 26-28.

Isam and the Major in "Two Runaways" remains the same throughout the stories. In "Isam and the Major" we see the gentle and tender side of the two, when the Major's sister dies and the Major is left guardian of her child. Heartbroken, he leads a shopping expedition for the child with the serious-faced Isam trailing his every footstep. They make a touching appearance as they carefully choose a tiny bedroom set and pore over a showcase to select a tiny brush and comb, with the Major occasionally pulling a big handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his misty eyes. In "The Hard Trigger" we see Isam trembling with fear as he watches his master in a duel, even though he has previously made certain that the Major, whose shooting finger is fat, has the gun with the hard trigger. In "Mas' Craffud's Freedom," when the other Negroes at Woodhaven are flocking around the "freedom" preacher after the war, we hear Isam say, "I'm goin' ter stay right hyah, Mas' Craffud," and, later, we see the Major give Isam permission to "whip" the Federal officer who has been the overseer at the farm. And in "The Woodhaven Goat" we see Isam struggling with a goat and calling for help, while the Major, remembering his episode with the deer, holds his sides with laughter and yells, "Don't cuss Isam . . . ! If ever a man had a call to pray, you've got it now." In all these stories, Edwards, like Thomas Nelson Page, tends to idealize the relationship between master and slave, preferring to

exclude the dark side of the master-slave relationship.

Other than the portrait of Woodhaven, the characterization of Isam and Major Worthington, and the master-slave relationship, these stories present a study of Southern loyalty and pride in family, along with the gentleman's code of honor. In "Isam and the Major" the marriage of the Major's sister to a "family enemy" was such a blow to the family pride that she was estranged from her family from that day forward; however, at her death the same sense of family pride and loyalty caused the Major to do everything possible for her child. This family pride and loyalty extended to Isam. When confronted with the information that "the Major had sworn never to recognize his sister," Isam insisted that the Major "know 'bout 'er all de time," moving one person to remark: "Strange how these old negroes will lie when it comes to a matter of family pride."

"The Hard Trigger" carries the idea of family pride and loyalty a little further and reflects the Southern code of honor. The Worthington name was sullied when a rambling tongue said the Major's sister had never been married, though the mother of a child. Upon hearing the slanderous remarks, the Major immediately decided to live up to the gentleman's code of honor and clear the family name, so a duel was planned and the old family guns were brought out. Quick to see the humor in any situation, Edwards turns this near disaster into laughter when, Isam, who had been so

careful to get out of range of the flying bullets, was, nevertheless, hit by one. Isam's wailing and calling "Oh, Lordy! I'm killed. . . . Back broke, Mas' Craffud, back broke, an' bofe legs!" become humorous when it is learned that Isam hasn't a scratch on him, having been saved by his silver watch, which stopped the bullet.

Loyalty to the Southern cause was not the exclusive privilege of Southern whites. The Negroes, too, were loyal. In "Captain Isam" thirty-two Negroes were persuaded by Isam to go to the front lines and fight. In spite of the warning of the Colonel that it had been his observation "the boys were not fond of the smell of powder," Isam insisted on fighting, too, and was finally given thirty rounds of ammunition and made captain of the group. But when a nearby caisson blew up, they all scattered, with Isam explaining later:

. . . hit come ter me dat ev'y nigger dere was worf er thousan' dollahs, an' some er dey marsters was po' white men, an' could n' 'ford ter lose er nigger. So I said I reck'n Gen'l Bragg an' Mas' Alec done look atter dat little bunch er Yankees out in front, an' I better stay back dere an' keep dem niggers an' waggins fum bein' runned off. An' dat's what I did. De white folks dey los' er pow'ful sight er stuff dat day, but dey did n' los' nair nigger, an' dey did n' los' nair waggin.⁵⁷

Generous sprinklings of Negro superstitions and

⁵⁷Edwards, His Defense and Other Stories, pp. 191-92.

folklore are included in most of Edwards' Negro stories. For example, in "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart'" Mammy's remedies for teething babies included "er string er woodants," "er string er snailshells," and "er mole's foot," and even Ole Miss wanted "er rabbit killed en hits brains rubbed on de baby's gums." The "Isam" stories also yield their share of superstitions and folklore. In "Two Runaways" Isam explains to the Major the Negroes' practice of sealing the spirits of the dead in a tree by cutting a hole in a tree near the grave of the buried Negro and then filling it with a plug of "old nails, bits of glass, red pepper, and tar," which was "sprinkled with the blood of a chicken." Each plug "contained a few hairs from the head of the deceased and a piece of a garment that had been worn next to the skin," and each ingredient used in the plug had some special significance. According to Isam, lightning "busted" a tree one summer and seven plugs dropped to the ground, releasing seven spirits; as a result "dat summer de typhoid fev'r struck seben nigg'rs, en' de las' one uv'm died spang dead." However, it was Isam's contention that "ef dem folks had n' burn de light'ud fum dat tree, nuthin' 'd happ'n."

The remaining two stories of the "Isam" group resemble the Uncle Remus sketches of Joel Chandler Harris. They are set in a narrative frame, with Isam telling the tales to Helen's son and the child's friends. In "The

Adventures of a Parrot" Isam tells how he tricked an unsuspecting Negro into entering a neighbor's hen house to capture a talking parrot, and in "Isam's Spectacles" Isam claims to have been saved from a major operation by putting on his eyeglasses at the opportune moment. Edwards was probably conscious that these stories were similar to Harris's. The writers were acquaintances, and letters passed between them occasionally.⁵⁸ At one time Edwards stated that he contributed to Harris "probably a dozen of the adventures of Brer Rabbit" as he had heard them, which service was acknowledged in a card of thanks from Harris.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Julia C. Harris, The Life and Letters of Joel Chandler Harris (New York: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1918), p. 166.

⁵⁹Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Fred Lewis Pattee, December 20, 1914, Pennsylvania State University Library, Pattee File.

CHAPTER III

THE NOVELIST

In 1895 Victor Lawson, owner of the Chicago Record and Chicago Times, announced a world-wide mystery story contest, in which \$30,000 in prizes was offered for the best story submitted. Any area of life could be treated with the exception of "sex and the morbidly tragic." The plan was to publish the winning story in serial form in several leading newspapers, so the contestants were asked to limit their work to about one hundred and fifty thousand words. Edwards entered the contest and won the first prize of \$10,000 with his novel Sons and Fathers, whereupon the novel was published in serial form in twenty-nine leading newspapers. A ten-day delay followed the publication of the twenty-ninth installment to allow readers to send in their solutions to the mystery, after which the thirtieth installment was published and the mystery revealed. An estimated three million people read the story, which was published in such newspapers as the New York Tribune, Boston Globe, Rochester Express, Baltimore Sun, New Orleans Picayune, San Francisco Call,

Chicago Record, and Atlanta Journal, making the writer a celebrity almost overnight.¹ Under the terms of the contest Edwards surrendered all interests in the novel, but, later, he purchased the copyright, and several other printings were made.² The novel was first published in book form in 1896 by the Rand-McNally Company of New York.

Actually, Edwards' winning of the first prize in the Chicago Record contest was quite an accomplishment since he had world-wide competition (817 authors from all over the world entered the contest) and wrote the novel in twenty-three days. The account of these twenty-three days is almost as exciting as the novel itself. To begin with, Edwards had no real desire to enter the contest, having had a bad experience in a similar contest when he was a young boy. When he was about fourteen years old, he wrote a novel which he hoped to enter in a contest sponsored by the Savannah Morning News. He turned his manuscript over to "a loving old elder of the Presbyterian church" for criticism, and about two months after the contest closed the elder returned the manuscript to the disappointed youth with the brief remark "Very Good." So it was only at the insistence of his wife that Edwards decided to

¹"Atlanta Journal's Radio Editorial Hour," WSB, Atlanta, April 23, 1937.

²Harry Stillwell Edwards, Sons and Fathers (Atlanta: Brown Publishing Company, 1937), Foreword.

enter the contest forty days before its close. He had to spend seventeen of these days patching a mill dam which had broken, and, when he finally went to work on the novel, only twenty-three days remained.³ Needless to say, three hectic weeks followed.

Edwards prepared thirty installments in skeletal form and then began writing. The first two installments carried the action of the story to Macon, Georgia, and, according to the author, after that the novel "wrote itself."

With this start the story unfolded steadily in my garret studio for sixteen to eighteen hours the day. [One day] production reached eleven thousand words. I used old ledgers and plantation account books for stationery; pages and scraps of all sizes. When the story was finished up to the last installment, I secured the services of a young amateur typist whose second-hand machine possessed no "w." There was no time for repairs, so we went ahead limping. My niece Miss Hattie Clair Mullally read the story page by page to the typist,-- Tom Ross, by the way,--and finished up the night before the deadline. The story had to be in the mails by two o'clock P. M. next day, to reach Chicago within the time limit. I wrote the last installment next morning in the Macon Club, crammed the sheets, untyped and unread into a box with the others, and got them off with less than twenty minutes to spare.⁴

³"Atlanta Journal's Radio Editorial Hour," WSB, Atlanta, April 23, 1937.

⁴Ibid.

Edwards learned later that this high pressure was an advantage as "the public reads a story in the mood of the writer and craves action."

Edwards related the conclusion of this exciting event to Willie Snow Ethridge, reporter for the Macon Telegraph:

Six months went by . . . and I was going to New York. At Charlottesville, N. C. /sic, a telegram awaited me from home, telling me to return immediately to meet the man who had come down from the Chicago Record to see me. And that was when I knew I had been awarded the first prize of \$10,000. Of course, I turned around and came back and when I got here the man acted somewhat queer. He said I had written only twenty-nine installments in my story and the Chicago Record had syndicated the story in thirty installments. He wanted to know if I would add another installment. I told him that that would be very simple and that evening I sat down and wrote that installment. . . . When I handed it to the man and he read it, he gave a sigh of relief and announced, 'Well, I believe now you wrote the story but I tell you the truth, none of us believed you wrote it. It is the best story and the /worst manuscript we ever saw.'

A tale of legendary proportion has grown up around the writing of the novel. It is said that Edwards presented such a spectacle with his frantic attempts to complete the novel that the neighborhood children, with whom he was always on good terms, crowded around to share in the excitement. Edwards finally told them: "Run along and

⁵Ethridge, "Harry Stillwell Edwards."

leave me alone, and if I win this prize I'll buy you all a bicycle." Immediately after receiving the prize, Edwards gave his wife the money to deposit in the bank, after which the two of them went shopping. They bought thirteen bicycles on that shopping trip: eleven for the children and two for themselves.⁶

The motivating idea for Sons and Fathers came from Richard Watson Gilder, editor of the Century Magazine. Gilder once suggested that Edwards write "a novel of the free South and the ruined aristocracy, on the order of Tourgenieff's [sic] Russian story 'Fathers and Sons.'"⁷ Edwards indicated, though, that he did not borrow heavily from Turgenev, saying he simply "reversed the Russian's title" and "disregarded his motifs." Although the major themes of the two books are not the same, some analogies can be drawn between them. For example, the social conditions of the eras depicted in the two novels are similar: Turgenev depicts the era of the freeing of the serfs in his country, and Edwards, the period following the emancipation of the Negro. However, the focal point of Turgenev's novel is the social problem that developed

⁶"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon."

⁷"Atlanta Journal's Radio Editorial Hour," WSB, Atlanta, April 23, 1937.

in Russia around the freeing of the serfs: that is, the division between the younger generation and the older generation. In Edwards' work, the secondary theme, rather than the major theme, deals with a similar division in the South: that of the Old South as opposed to the New South, the implications being that this was basically a division between the older and the younger generations. But, although Edwards develops the theme of the generation gap to some extent, as the novel progresses, this theme becomes incidental to the main purpose of the work, which is the creation of mystery and suspense. Edwards probably modeled one of his major characters, Virdow, on the hero of Turgenev's work, Bazarov. Bazarov is a scientist and exponent of the nihilist philosophy, and Virdow is a German scientist and theosophist.

Racing against time, Edwards introduced a variety of incongruous characters and subject matter into the novel and ingeniously proceeded to weave this material into a coherent structure. The hero of the novel, Edward Morgan, is "the bohemian of a dozen continental capitals" and a "half-way metaphysicist and theosophist" returned from Europe to Georgia to receive his inheritance, which includes, among other things, Gerald Morgan, a morphine addict, and Rita, an octoroon housekeeper. Edward's close European friend, who follows him to Georgia, is a German scientist who is

engaged in experiments designed to prove immortality through memory. Added to these peculiarly diverse characters are Colonel Montjoy, a patriot and gentleman of the Old South; his wife and his daughter, Mary, a typical Southern belle; Amos Royson, a corrupt politician of the New South; the Negro Isham, remembered from the short stories as Isam; a voodoo doctor, Aunt Sylla; and a notorious Negro character, Slippery Dick, whose elusiveness rivals that of Defoe's John Sheppard. A variety of other characters is also included, the most important being General Evan, an Old South man; his daughter, Marion; and a New South man, Barksdale. Working with this wide diversity of characters and subject matter and trying to meet a deadline, Edwards was forced to introduce an assortment of impossibilities and chance meetings and happenings, sometimes calling on the death angel to get rid of characters when he no longer needed them. But in spite of the complications, Edwards managed to meet the requirements of the contest as far as mystery, suspense, and interest are concerned.

The major theme of the novel and the source of the mystery is a young man's search for identity. Edward Morgan is attempting to establish the identity of his mother in order to banish rumors that he is the son of Rita, the octoroon. One is led to believe that Rita is the mother of either Edward or Gerald, but, in actuality, Edward and Gerald are the twin sons of Marion Evans, who

was estranged from her family because of her elopement with her music teacher, Gaspard Levinge. Marion's father, who had an exaggerated sense of family pride, felt that his daughter had dishonored the family name by her marriage, but he later agreed that she could return home if she would produce proof of her marriage. However, by this time the marriage had collapsed and the marriage license was lost; so Marion, whose sense of family pride was just as strong as her father's, placed her two infant sons in the care of a friend and spent over twenty years of her life searching for the license in order that she might return home honorably, erase the blight on the family name, placate the injured pride of her father, and reveal her identity to her children.

Although prizes totaling as much as forty thousand dollars were offered by various newspapers for the solution to the mystery of the story, not one reader guessed that Edward and Gerald were twin brothers and the sons of Marion Evans. Edwards believed the most brilliant guess came from a twelve-year-old girl of Montgomery, Alabama. There are two older men in the story, Josiah and Giovanni, and the young lady guessed that Edward and Gerald were twins: "Josiah was the father of one and Giovanni the father of the other."⁸

⁸Ibid.

Edwards introduces two secondary themes in the novel, with the most important of these, historically at least, involving a political contest between rival factions of the Old South and the New South. In this contest the reader is given a first-hand view of a political campaign of the Reconstruction Period, including examples of Southern oratory, which Edwards thought rivaled that of Greece and Rome, and an old-fashioned pistol duel, in which the hero defends his honor. Though Edwards said no pen could adequately portray the political scene of this period, this atmosphere must have been very nearly captured when the Colonel, amid the sounds of "Dixie" and an enthusiastic, even weeping crowd, delivered this eloquent speech:

God forbid that the day will come when the South will apologize for her dead heroes! Stand by your homes; stand by your traditions; keep your faith in the past as bright as your hopes for the future! No stain rests upon the honor of your fathers. Transmit their memories and their virtues to posterity as its best inheritance. Defend your homes and firesides, remembering always that the home, the family circle, is the fountain head of good government. Let none enter there who are unclean. Keep it the cradle of liberty and the hope of the English race on this continent, the shrine of religion, of beauty, of purity.⁹

The other secondary theme deals with the German scientist's attempt to prove immortality through memory and

⁹Edwards, Sons and Fathers, p. 120.

the testing of these ideas on the highly intelligent morphine addict, Gerald Morgan. One of the major ideas of this theme is the power of music, especially in its ability to awaken old memories or inherited memories. In developing this theme, Edwards made prophetic references to radio, underwater photography, x-ray, and mental telepathy, something Edwards never could explain since these things were all unknown at the time of the book's composition.¹⁰ Virchow's scientific pursuits were an outgrowth of his belief in theosophy. Edwards, himself, was a theosophist for a brief period of his life, and two short stories published in Century Magazine are directly on this subject. "The White Spider" deals with inherited memory, and "The Rival Soul" is the secret soul history of a theosophist, written in diary form, in which a lover attempts to follow his wife through several life cycles. Though Edwards said that time reduced his theosophy to a "literary and historical base for speculative dreams and something to wonder and write about,"¹¹ traces of it can be seen throughout his works, including those of his later years. However, we might add here that Edwards' religious beliefs were basically Christian.

¹⁰Ibid., Foreword.

¹¹Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, January 13, 1924.

The incongruities of the three major themes of the work resulted in the main weakness of the novel: its lack of thematic unity. Ironically, however, this weakness is one of its principal strengths. In attempting to achieve thematic unity, Edwards introduced a variety of material that served as padding and glue to hold the work together. The digressions and superfluous material used in this way contain a generous store of information concerning almost every phase of life in Georgia during the Reconstruction Period. This material includes information of economic, political, and social significance and makes a major contribution to an understanding of the period covered.

Some interesting statements are made, for example, about the plight of the large plantation owners after the Civil War, when the situation is explained to Edward Morgan a newcomer to the area, by the younger Montjoy:

You will find things at home very different from what they once were. . . . Without free labor the plantations have run down, and it is very hard for the old planters to make anything out of land now. The negroes won't work and it hardly pays to plant cotton. I wish often that father could do something else, but he can't change at his time of life. . . . I couldn't make \$100 a year on the best plantation in Georgia, but I can make \$5,000 selling clothes.¹²

Later, when Edward Morgan asks Colonel Montjoy if he finds

¹²Harry Stillwell Edwards, Sons and Fathers (Macon: J. W. Burke Company, 1921), pp. 13-14.

the new wheeled farm implements profitable in relieving the labor situation, Montjoy points to a few abandoned cultivators nearby and replies:

I do not, [sic] the negro cannot keep awake on the cultivator and the points get into the furrows and so throw out the cotton and corn that they were supposed to cultivate. Somehow they never could learn to use the levers at the right place, with the revolving plow, and they wear its axle off. They did no better with the mower; they seemed to have an idea that it would cut anything from blades of grass up to a pine stump, and it wouldn't. The disk harrow . . . was broken in a curious way. I sent a hand out to harrow in some peas. He rode along all right to the field and then deliberately wedged the disks to keep them from revolving, not understanding the principle. I sometimes think that they are a little jealous of these machines and do not want them to work well.¹³

The Colonel later explains the political situation to Edward, telling him the Old South was pitted against "the riffraff combination of carpetbaggers, scalawags, and jay-birds, who are trying to betray us into the hands of the enemy." He continues:

The situation is somewhat strained . . . there is a younger set coming on who seem to desire only to destroy the old order of things. They have had the 'new south' dinged into their ears until they had [sic] come to believe that the old south holds nothing worth retaining. They are full of railroad schemes to rob the people and make highways for tramps; of new towns and booms, of colonization schemes, to bring paupers into the state and inject the socialistic element of which the north and west are heartily tired. They want to do away with cotton and

¹³Ibid., p. 159.

plant the land in peaches, plums, and grapes . . . and they want to give the nigger a wheeled plow to ride on. It looks as if the whole newspaper fraternity have gone crazy upon what they call intensive and diversified farming. Not one of them has ever told me what there is besides cotton that can be planted and will sell at all times upon the market, and pay labor and store accounts in the fall.¹⁴

The Colonel stated that the race situation in Georgia was pushing important economic problems in the background, resulting in political campaigns in which the whole issue was "white against black" because the South had to keep "solid" even "at the expense of development and prosperity."

Edwards' own leanings at this time were probably toward the Old South view because he seemed sympathetic toward the views expressed by the Colonel. He described Amos Royson, who was "of the new south entirely," as one with "boundless" ambition, who would not hesitate to "stick a knife in you in a minute." However, Edwards, who was always willing to see both sides of any situation, does not portray all factions of the New South as villainous; for example, Barksdale, a New South man, "is manly and noble . . . the best product of the new south," and Edwards gives Amos Royson's colleagues enough integrity to cause them to walk out on a meeting at which Royson suggested playing dirty politics.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 66.

As in Edwards' short stories, local color is present throughout this novel. One delightful thing about Edwards' local color is his occasional description of a phase of Southern life most writers have failed to see. We have all seen the pickaninny, the tall-columned plantation house, the Negroes chopping cotton, and the smoke-house in the backyard, but when have we ever had the following scene, which was certainly a part of the Southern landscape of earlier times, described in such a delightful manner?

Edward heard . . . a musical voice calling 'Chick! chick! chickee, chickee!' and caught a glimpse of fowls hurrying from every direction toward the back yard. . . . The yard was spacious and full of plants. Sunflowers and pokeberries were growing along the front fence, and mockingbirds, cardinals and jays, their animosities suspended, were breakfasting side by side. . . . Mary's sleeves were rolled up above the elbows and her arms covered with dough from a great pan into which, from time to time, she thrust a hand. A multitude of ducks, chickens, turkeys and guineas scrambled about her, and a dozen white pigeons struggled for standing-room upon her shoulders.¹⁵

In scenes such as these, Edwards makes an appeal to the auditory as well as the visual senses of the reader. For example, along with the preceding early-morning scene, which greets Edward Morgan as he looks from his bedroom window, not only do we see the "great fields of cotton and corn," a cabin in the distance with its "curl of smoke" rising from the chimney, a "flock of pigeons" about the

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 16-17.

barn door, and a "number of goats" at the side gate; but we also hear the sound of the Negroes' "songs" as they work, the steady "clank" of the grist-mill in the valley, and Mary's "musical voice" calling the chickens, the two-fold appeal to the senses bringing the scene to life for the reader and capturing the whole atmosphere of a plantation awakening from its night's rest.

In Edwards' short stories we have already become acquainted with the "possum," "taters," and "persimmon beer" that so often graced the table of the Negroes, and we know the taking of the julep was an integral part of Major Worthington's day. In Sons and Fathers we are given similar glimpses of the eating and drinking habits of the postbellum South. Mary Montjoy's recipe for making mint julep follows:

Into each generous cut glass goblet that lined her little side table she poured a few spoonful of sweetened water, packing them with crushed ice. Down through the little arctic heaps, a wineglassful of each, she poured a ruby liquor grown old in the deep cellar, and planted above the radiated pyramids little forests of mint. Nothing but silver was worthy to hold such works of art.¹⁶

A sumptuous breakfast was also a part of the day at the Montjoys' home, the event taking place only after the chickens were fed and the cows milked:

¹⁶Ibid., p. 203.

They stood for grace, and then Mary took her place behind the coffee pot and served the delicious beverage in thin cups of china. The meal consisted of broiled chicken, hot, light biscuits, bread of cornmeal, and eggs that Morgan thought delicious, corn cakes, bacon and fine butter. A little darky behind an enormous apron, but barefooted, stood by the coffee pot and with a great brush of the gorgeous peacock feathers kept the few flies off the tiny caster in the middle of the table, while his eyes followed the conversation around.¹⁷

In such scenes as this Edwards often manages to capture the whole atmosphere of the occasion, usually with a well-chosen phrase or apt observation. In this scene the simple remark "They stood for grace" creates an atmosphere of reverence and, at the same time, reminds the reader of the rich spiritual heritage of the South. The little Negro's eyes, following the conversation around the table, animates the whole scene, making it so lifelike the reader can easily imagine the twists and turns of the table conversation simply by imagining the rolling eyes of the Negro as the conversation changes directions.

Edwards' style in the novel is generally direct and simple, but, occasionally, he uses figurative language in creating exciting, suspenseful, or ominous scenes. In describing the stormy night of the birth of Edward and Gerald, Edwards personifies the elements of the storm, creating a scene in which the fury of the night foreshadows

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 18-19.

the violence to come in the lives of those involved.

Suddenly one vivid, crackling, tearing . . . flash of intensest light split the gloom and the thunder leaped into the city! It awoke then! Every foundation trembled! Every tree dipped furiously. The winds burst in. . . . They rushed down the parallel streets and alleys, these barbarians; they came by the intersecting ways! They fought each other frantically for the spoils of the city, struggling upward in equal conflict, carrying dust and leaves and debris. They were sucked down by the hollow squares, they wept and mourned, they sobbed about doorways, they sung and cheered among the chimneys and the trembling vanes. They twisted away great tree limbs and hurled them far out into the spaces which the lightning hollowed in the night! They drove away every inhabitant indoors and tugged frantically at the city's defenses! They tore off shutters and lashed the housetops with the trees! . . . Then came the deluge, huge drops, bullets almost, in fierceness, shivering each other until the streetlamps seemed set in driving fog through which the silvered missiles flashed horizontally--a storm traveling within a storm.¹⁸

But Edwards was usually content to express himself directly and simply, and he proved that exciting and interesting scenes can be produced without figurative language.

The critics were kind to the novel; only two adverse criticisms reached Edwards. One critic said the heroine, Mary, was cold-blooded, and another complained that Edwards had confused his "wills" and "shalls."¹⁹ But Edwards said his heroine was "true to life," calling her "a southern girl

¹⁸Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁹"Atlanta Journal's Radio Editorial Hour," WSB, Atlanta, April 23, 1937.

of the old type, whose emotions were too holy for revelation and loyalty too true for question."²⁰ Edwards contended that all of the characters were drawn from real life and were known personally by him under other names. Rita was his childhood nurse, whom he called "a remarkable woman."²¹ Edwards, himself, criticized the work for the errors and crudities that resulted from its hasty composition,²² for these were painfully obvious to him after the book was published.

Even though Edwards considered his second novel, The Marbeau Cousins, which was published in 1897, to be superior to Sons and Fathers, it is superior only as far as workmanship is concerned. Edwards concentrates on one plot in this novel, achieving more unity than in the previous novel, but he has trouble sustaining the plot, and his characters never really come to life. The central plot revolves around an escaped convict, Chilon Marbeau, who has been innocently convicted of a charge of counterfeiting and has served twelve

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Manuscript copy of the Foreword to the 1937 edition of Sons and Fathers, published by the Brown Publishing Company of Atlanta. Penciled in the margin near a statement concerning the hasty composition of the novel is the remark: "Naturally errors and crudities resulted from this rush, and are very apparent to the author forty years later. No attempt has been made to correct them." This article is in the possession of Mrs. Prentiss Edwards, Sr., Macon, Georgia.

years of his sentence at the time of his escape. He returns to his former home, Ravenswood, to seek his wife, who has since remarried, and to get revenge on the man who has brought about his ruin. At times, in order to sustain the plot, Edwards introduces highly improbable incidents. Chilon, for example, slips into the home of his uncle on several occasions, lighting lamps and tiptoeing all over the house, at one time shaving himself and borrowing a suit of his uncle's clothes, without arousing any suspicion on the part of the occupants. At other times some of the characters see real people and convince themselves that some ghostly vision has passed before their eyes.

There are more inconsistencies in the characters of this novel than in Edwards' other works. For instance, Edwards probably intended for the reader to see Chilon as a noble, self-sacrificing person, worthy of the highest respect. Yet he secretly marries the girl he loves, knowing the consequences involved in such a marriage, does not hesitate to use a sword on his uncle in a fight, falls into base companionship immediately after leaving home, possesses a deep hatred for the man who has wronged him, and harbors the idea of murder in his heart. Lena, Chilon's wife, is portrayed as one who could love deeply, nobly, and loyally, yet she is easily convinced of the guilt of her husband and marries his enemy, even though she realizes he is a scoundrel. Chilon's uncle, one of Edwards' true-blue Old-South men,

reveals something less than a noble character when he takes the horsewhip to Chilon because Chilon asks for Lena's hand in marriage. An exaggerated sense of family pride and loyalty is presented as in Edwards' other works. Chilon spent twelve years in prison, wrongly convicted of a crime, because he would not bring dishonor to the family name by revealing that the counterfeit money had been printed on plates acquired at the Marbeau home, and Colonel Marbeau disinherited his niece when she married a good, noble, and worthy man, who was, nevertheless, not a member of the aristocratic society.

The Marbeau Cousins does not deal with as many different phases of Southern life as Sons and Fathers, but it contains one excellent character creation, Aunt Silvy, an African witch doctor who makes her voodoo charms, casts spells, and foretells the future. The reader gets an intimate glimpse of her life when Chilon chooses to make her cabin his temporary home while he is an escapee:

In her queer way, the African woman was physician, magician, alchemist, and pharmacist. She knew every shrub and bulb of the country, and their effects upon the nerves, the organs, and the muscles of the human system. . . . Out from among the rafters and corners her ingredients came as needed. No man could read her formulas; they were wordless, but she knew them all . . . and nature was the one great wholesale supply house. There were queer little bottles, with their infusions of roots and twigs, whose essential elements they contained. And there were the spiders floating in an amber fluid, five drops of which would

lessen the strength of the fiercest pulse, the lizard coiled in oil that made supple the rheumatic joints of age; and sprainwort for sprains. Tanzy, too, was there, and sage and mint and mullein, bark of the red oak for its tannic acid, hoarhound for coughs, and pine splinters for turpentine. And there were milkweed to cure fits, and mole claws to hang about the necks of teething babies.²³

Silvy also had power to "fill the mind with fancies and bend the imagination to her ends," and one of her concoctions was capable of producing hallucinations and temporary insanity in its partaker. She contended that her mother before her had possessed the knowledge to change the color of the eyes by using a similar brew.

Another strength of The Marbeau Cousins is its descriptions of nature. Edwards was always intensely interested in this subject, and in the novel he expresses his interest through the son of Chilon Marbeau. The following passage is one of young Chilon's minute descriptions of insect life:

They found a colony of ants in a piece of clay ground and wondered at their numbers. Little Chilon told him how he first saw them in the early spring come forth from under a rock and march almost two and two for hundreds of yards; how he timed them, finding their speed to be at the rate of a mile and a half per day; and how their march left a pathway in the sand over which came stragglers with unerring accuracy. The little fellow took his magnifying glass and showed him how they met, touched and passed on.

²³Harry Stillwell Edwards, The Marbeau Cousins (Macon: J. W. Burke Company, 1897), pp. 31-32.

. . . Did they speak? Could they behold such objects as men? Or were their senses inverse to man's, taking up sight, sound, smell, and sensation at the points where his left off? And if the human being were invisible to the ant, might not we be surrounded by beings just out of reach of our senses? Such were the ideas the little fellow put forth with face flushed and eyes sparkling.²⁴

Chilon became interested in the minute things of nature and left off studying the stars, when, through the aid of his grandfather's telescope he "found the world was just as big the other way." He was especially interested in vibration, believing it to be the foundation of all life.

Young Chilon was not only a naturalist but also a theosophist, frequently having mystical experiences. The following passage, in which Chilon tells of his communications with nature, in this case the brook, is Whitmanesque in nature.

That day . . . as I lay I heard my name called. At first I thought it came from the wind, but I knew soon it was the brook. I bent and listened. Then it seemed to speak again. 'I know you Chilon; many times I have shadowed you. Do you remember when you were lying upon the grass in the field reading, the shadow of a cloud crept over you? It came with the wind that whispered, and, thinking something called you from the shadow, you followed it until it crept over Ravenswood. It was a weary chase I led you that day, Chilon, but it brought you to the sister you have wished for so long. I am changed now. I fell upon the hills and have sought you through all the forests in vain. I have a message from a woman who came and dwelt one day with me. She loved you Chilon; better than you

²⁴Ibid., p. 188.

know. As we passed over you that day, and you followed the shadow, she wept, saying "he has followed shadows long, but it will not be always. Love will complete the dream." You thought her tears upon your face were rain-drops.' That is what the waters said.²⁵

All elements of the novel combine to produce an atmosphere of mystery, suspense, and intrigue. The setting, Ravenswood,²⁶ is an old plantation home where ghostly apparitions and old memories lurk in every corner. Strange scenes take place in the eerie shadows of Silvy's cabin, where she attends the feverish Chilon in his battle with swamp fever, and Chilon's wife, Lena, is controlled by a mulatto, who periodically administers a black concoction to her victim to keep her helpless. The ethereal nature of the young child, Chilon, whose impressionable mind communicates with nature and conjures up ghostly images, adds an element of mysticism. Reinforcing the mystery and suspense is a mysterious murder, which remains unsolved for the major portion of the novel.

In 1898, a year after the publication of The Marbeau Cousins, Edwards' writing was temporarily halted because of the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. At

²⁵Ibid., p. 238.

²⁶According to Robert Lanier Anderson the Ravenswood of the novel was Holly Bluff, home of the author. See "Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938."

this time the old fires of patriotism were revived in Edwards, and, although he was forty-three years old, he attempted to enter military service, appealing to Thomas Nelson Page to assist him in getting an appointment with General Fitzhugh Lee, nephew of General Robert E. Lee. Edwards began a letter on April 22, 1898, by expressing his regrets about the war situation and continued:

It seems certain that war is now upon us and no one regrets it more than the writer; but the die is cast and now we are simply Americans. I have this in mind which I wish to submit to you and in which, I think it likely, you may be of great assistance to me,--and will, I am sure if possible. For many reasons . . . I am anxious to see the outcome of the war, and go to Cuba with the army in case of invasion. I have no time to present the matter to General Lee in such shape as will secure his consideration, unless you will kindly see him for me. Will you not do this and ascertain whether or not he can give me any appointment near to him,--honorary or active?²⁷

He stated his reasons for desiring to serve under General Lee:

My reasons for desiring to be near Gen'l [sic] Lee, aside from personal ones, are these: . . . I am assured that Gen'l Lee will be not far from the scenes of activity, and that my experience will be valuable to me in a literary way for many years. Aside from [this] . . . is the thought that every section through its correspondents, will take care of the

²⁷Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Thomas Nelson Page, April 22, 1898, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

history of its own troops; and the South hasn't been impartially treated in this direction. If it so be that I shall in a measure become the historian of the South's share in the coming struggle I will bring to the task the best efforts of my best years and serve my country in a lasting way.²⁸

Edwards further informed Page of his services in Georgia as a volunteer soldier for eighteen years, and he explained his refusal of an offer of a staff position with Georgia troops, saying he refused the position because he was uncertain of where he would be located and he wanted to be near the scene of action. Apparently, the appointment was not forthcoming, for Edwards got no closer to Cuba than Key West, Florida, and by this time the brief skirmish was over.²⁹ However, his desire to serve his country had not been destroyed and was to arise anew each time his country was endangered.

After the Spanish-American War Edwards attempted to write at least one other novel. In a letter to Arthur Stedman of New York, who served as an agent for the publication of Edwards' short stories for some time, Edwards mentioned a novel he was writing, which was "of the order of Kentucky Cardinal and Elizabeth's German Garden but un-

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938."

like either."³⁰ Though Edwards informed Stedman the novel would be finished by October 1, 1901, as far as can be determined it was never published. After this, Edwards, who was never quite at home with the novel, apparently abandoned this genre. However, the prize he won for Sons and Fathers inspired him to enter several other contests. In 1912 he won second prize in a contest sponsored by the "Associated Sunday Magazines" for his short story "Fifth Dimension"; in 1916 he entered a similar contest sponsored by Life Magazine and won second prize for a story entitled "The Answer,"³¹ also known as "In the Heart of a Jew"; and he won second prize in a contest sponsored by the Black Cat Magazine, a publication of lesser note.³²

³⁰Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Arthur Stedman, June 28, 1901, Columbia University Libraries, Special Collections.

³¹The Author of Eneas Africanus. Dates of the contests are given in Who Was Who in America (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Company, 1942), I, 36.

³²Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to L. W. Payne, n.d., University of Texas, Academic Center Library, Special Collections.

CHAPTER IV

ENEAS AFRICANUS AND LATER WORKS

In the 1896 presidential campaign, J. F. Hanson, friend and former associate of Edwards during his years as a newspaperman, campaigned for William McKinley, the Republican candidate. When McKinley became President, he expressed a desire to reward Hanson for his support, and Hanson asked that Harry Stillwell Edwards be made postmaster in Macon.¹ Edwards sent in his application for the position, which he confidentially told friends was certain to be "passed upon" in his favor,² and sometime later his appointment was verified. After Edwards assumed his duties on June 1, 1900, he soon began entertaining thoughts of devoting more time to his writing.³ On June 21, 1900, he

¹"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon." This article states that Hanson made the request after the 1901 presidential campaign, but letters written by Edwards, to be cited later, indicate that the request was made after the 1896 campaign, so I have used this date rather than the erroneous one.

²Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Thomas Nelson Page, April 22, 1898, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

³Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Arthur Stedman, June 21, 1900, Columbia University Libraries, Special Collections.

wrote to Arthur Stedman, his New York agent, that, as his salary of \$3,200 a year provided a living and released him from other obligations, he felt his extra time could be devoted to his writing; he promised Stedman some stories shortly since he planned to do "some good work."⁴ However, in spite of his determination to write more, Edwards published only three stories in magazines of note during the next five years, and, though he published at regular intervals for a long period of time following this, in general, the frequency of his publications diminished.

The decline in Edwards' publications may have been caused by his becoming more deeply involved in politics. When Roosevelt became President after McKinley's assassination, Edwards was reappointed as postmaster in Macon and was named "referee" in Georgia for the national administration, retaining these positions until 1913 when Wilson became President.⁵ In the 1904 presidential campaign,

⁴Ibid.

⁵"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon." Edwards' affiliation with the Republican Party must have startled even the most liberal of his friends. In December, 1968, an inquiry from the writer to an elderly lady in Macon, who ruefully admitted she was old enough to remember when Edwards became postmaster, brought the following reply: "When I was a child, I first heard people talk of Mr. Edwards in shocked tones. He was--of all things--a Republican! He had turned Republican when the administration changed and he became postmaster." However, she added: "Mr. Edwards was such a delightful, debonair person that people almost forgave him for going back on his raising in this way."

Edwards seconded Theodore Roosevelt's nomination at the Chicago Convention in a "scholarly and eloquent address."⁶ By 1920 Edwards had broken away from the Republican Party and had entered the political arena in a bid for the Senate as a nominee of the Progressive Party of Georgia,⁷ but, although he enthusiastically predicted success in the campaign,⁸ he was defeated.

While serving as a representative of the Roosevelt administration, Edwards was required to report to the White House frequently, and on these visits he made many new friends. Edwards had observed Roosevelt from a distance while they were both in Tampa, Florida, during the Spanish-American War, but he did not meet Roosevelt personally until 1901, when he was invited to a White House luncheon with the President and other dignitaries.⁹ After a few visits to the White House, Edwards became a close friend of the Roosevelt family, and at the luncheons he was always

⁶"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon."

⁷Ibid.

⁸Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Helen Wright, September 30, 1920, Vassar College Library, Special Collections. Edwards told Miss Wright: "Look out for me. . . . Tremendous protest here against Watson. Big wave rolling across the state and I happen to be in swimming with a life belt on."

⁹Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, July 19, 1923.

given a seat to the right of Mrs. Roosevelt. He praised Mrs. Roosevelt, but her daughter, Alice, he saw as "a woman suffering from chronic acidosis." Edwards took some pleasure, however, in reciting her famous epigrams and especially enjoyed her remark that "Calvin Coolidge was weaned on a dill pickle."¹⁰ Edwards' last interview with Roosevelt at the White House was in 1909. He met H. G. Wells at this luncheon, after which the President, Edwards, and Wells walked around the White House grounds for about two hours, while Roosevelt told Wells wherein he agreed or disagreed with the views expressed in his novels.¹¹

At the beginning of World War I, the energetic Theodore Roosevelt rallied an army to take to France, and the patriotic Edwards, who was sixty-two years old at the time, went to New York to enlist in Roosevelt's army. However, President Wilson refused to give his approval to Roosevelt's move, so the army was disbanded.¹² Later, Edwards went to Washington and New York in an attempt to obtain a training site at Macon. When he was unable to reach General Wood, who was stationed at Governor's Island, he appealed to Roosevelt, who immediately wrote on a small

¹⁰Ibid., March 7, 1936.

¹¹Ibid., July 19, 1923.

¹²Ibid., n.d. The article is on file at the Rosenwald Library, Georgia Southern College, Vertical File.

card the words "Harry Stillwell Edwards is the salt of the earth" and signed it. When Edwards presented the card at General Wood's headquarters, he was taken to Wood immediately, and at this meeting he obtained permission for a training site to be established at Macon, which later became known as Camp Wheeler. The Edwards estate near Macon, which consisted of over a thousand acres, was chosen for the camp site and was leased by the government, with Edwards reserving a small part of the estate for his home and family. After this, Edwards tried to enlist in the Red Cross and the Y. M. C. A. but was told in both instances he was too old. So he contented himself by working with his family among the soldiers and in the camp hospital during epidemics.¹³

Edwards' publications had diminished to some extent during the eight or ten years preceding the establishment of Camp Wheeler, but the activities around the camp stimulated his imaginative mind, resulting in a renewal of his literary efforts. When the camp was first established, Edwards was inspired to write "On the Mount," in which he recounts his childhood experiences and laments his role in the activities of the camp. And another inspiration, "The Anabasis of Heartstrings," which was never published, is a

¹³"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon."

story concerning Camp Wheeler.¹⁴ But Edwards' greatest accomplishment of this period was written immediately after the close of World War I, when the servicemen were returning to Camp Wheeler following their sojourn in Europe. At this time Edwards wrote his literary gem, Eneas Africanus, a story of the Old South. It was first published in book form in 1920 by the J. W. Burke Company of Macon. Other short stories published in book form during this later period include Just Sweethearts (1919), Eneas Africanus, Defendant (1920), Shadow (1920), Madelon Passes and Mam'Selle Delphine (1922), and The Blue Hen's Chicken (1924). These works were all published by the J. W. Burke Company of Macon, with the exception of Madelon Passes and Mam'Selle Delphine, which was published by the Holly Bluff Publishing Company of Macon.

It is difficult to understand how the activities around Camp Wheeler began a reaction in the writer's mind that led to a story of the Old South, but his daughter, Miss Roxilane Edwards, suggested:

It may have been that the return of the boys of the A.E.F. started a train of thought in the author's ever-imaginative mind which carried him back to his boyhood days in the sixties. He pictured again other veterans, ragged, foot-sore and weary, straggling home, and his mind,

¹⁴The original manuscript of "The Anabasis of Heartstrings" is in the possession of Mrs. Prentiss Edwards, Sr., Macon, Georgia.

ever quick to turn from pathos to humor, quite possibly at that time first visualized his old wanderer searching for his lost Tommeysville.¹⁵

At any rate, Eneas Africanus was written and quickly won the sixty-four-year-old writer international fame.

Eneas Africanus was first published in the Macon News in 1919, after having been refused by George Horace Lorimer, editor of the Saturday Evening Post. According to Thomas Simmons, who was editor of the Macon News at this time, when Lorimer returned the manuscript, saying he did not think the yarn "suitable for his publication," Edwards brought the story to the office of the Macon News and asked Simmons if he would give him "about five dollars" for a "little story" he had written, as he needed "a little money for some week-end groceries" and "gas" for his car. Knowing that anything written by Edwards was of value, Simmons gave him ten dollars without looking at the story. He read the story that night and, recognizing its merits, published a double-page feature of it in his paper, with a map showing the route taken by Eneas. He sent a copy of this to Irvin Cobb, who was then staff writer for the Saturday Evening Post, and Cobb immediately wrote to Simmons and then to Edwards, asking permission to incorporate the story in a

¹⁵"Putting the South on Paper," Atlanta Journal, December 1, 1940. This article, which concerns the composition of Eneas Africanus, was written by Miss Roxilane Edwards, daughter of Harry Stillwell Edwards. Miss Edwards is no longer living.

similar yarn he was writing for the Post. However, Edwards refused to consider this offer, having become convinced that his story was of considerable value.¹⁶

The more than dozen letters which make up Eneas Africanus tell a delightful story of the wanderings of a faithful Negro slave in search of his master. Eneas' wanderings began in 1864 near Rome, Georgia, when he lost his way en route between two plantations. Eneas' master, Major Tommey, fearing that his stock farm and family in Floyd County would be captured by the advancing Federal troops, entrusted Eneas with the family silver, put him aboard a "one horse wagon" pulled by a "flea-bitten, blooded mare," known as Lady Chain, and gave him instructions to get him to Jefferson County and the Major's home plantation, Tommeysville. Eneas, who had no knowledge of geography, missed the road to Macon and, thus, was on his odyssey. His search for Tommeysville and his master carried him on a journey through seven states, during which he covered a total of 3,350 miles in an eight-year period, surviving by the generosity of the "white folks" who took him in, along with the proceeds from various occupations, including plowing, preaching, and horseracing. Eneas arrived at his

¹⁶Thomas Simmons, "Macon News Was First Publisher of Edwards' Story, Eneas Africanus," Macon News, n.d. The article is in the possession of the writer.

destination near Louisville, Georgia, in 1872, just in time to deliver the "Bride's Cup," which was among the silver entrusted to him, to the latest bride in the Tommey family.

Eneas was undoubtedly a follow-up to Edwards' already famous "Isam" of the short stories, sharing many of his characteristics and described as a "very talkative," "grey-haired old fellow," with the "wisdom of the serpent" and "simplicity of a child." He was an incurable liar, his most exaggerated stories usually dealing with the Tommey family. For example, his first description of the plantation home at Tommeysville was of a "twelve room house" with "three fountains," a "beautiful lake," and a "hundred negroes." And, while this first description was an exaggeration, it was topped by a later one in which the house had "forty rooms" and was surrounded by "splendid parks," "a great lake with a flock of swans," and a lawn with "twelve fountains." The reader is never fully aware of the enormity of Eneas' fabrications until he reads the last news article of the series; here, the news correspondent correctly described the Tommey home as a "two story" house, surrounded by a lawn with "a tiny fountain with a spray" and a "small artificial lake where ducks abound."

In addition to being a liar, Eneas was also guilty of infidelity, religious hypocrisy, and calculated shrewdness. Disregarding a former marriage and the complications that might result from having two wives, Eneas took another

wife when he reached Tennessee and even dared to bring her home to Tomneysville, where he unashamedly uttered a profound "Thank God!" when he found his first wife was no longer living. As far as religion was concerned, Eneas was an "eloquent spiritual advocate," baptizing "forty converts" on one occasion, but his main reason for preaching was to pass the hat and obtain funds for his travels; and although his claim that he had once been the pastor of a big congregation probably increased his stature in the various churches where he preached, it was an outright lie. Probably, Eneas' most delightful bit of shrewdness was the evasion of a bill of twenty dollars in Tennessee. Eneas, who slipped away at night, left word to the man who loaned him the money that he "had plenty of money to pay the note, but didn't have time to wait for it to come due." It is no wonder that one reader described Eneas as a creature in which "ignorance, shrewdness, shameless mendacity, religious fervor, downright dishonesty, unswerving fidelity, conjugal unfaithfulness, and undying devotion" are blended, remarking that it would be difficult for anyone not familiar with the Negro of that time to "appreciate the accuracy of the story."¹⁷

¹⁷Letter, W. W. Osborne to G. J. Baldwin, January 28, 1920, University of North Carolina Library, Southern Historical Collection, George Johnson Baldwin Papers, Personal Series.

Actually, in spite of his weaknesses, Eneas has two redeeming traits: his innocence and his loyalty. The letters from various individuals to Major Tommey, in answer to an inquiry concerning the whereabouts of Eneas, indicate that he was quite a lovable old Negro, completely harmless, and so child-like in his innocence as to render him unaccountable for his wrongdoings. His major redeeming trait was his loyalty to his master. Upon his return to Tommeysville Eneas presented his new family to Major Tommey with the words "Marse George! Some folks tell me dey is free, but I know dey b'long ter Marse George Tommey, des like Lady Chain and her colt!" Moreover, along with his family and the mare and colt, Eneas produced the trunk of family silver, its lock untampered with, a "bag" of Confederate money, given to him on his departure from home, and, most touching of all, "de c'lections" he "tuk up in de church" and "winned on de track wid Chainlightnin'." One reader of the story remarked that it is "strange" that we are "fond of creatures" with the faults of Eneas but concluded that it is because the "underlying thing we demand is personal loyalty," which, of course, Eneas had.¹⁸

Concerning the epistolary form of the story, Edwards

¹⁸Letter, G. J. Baldwin to W. W. Osborne, February 2, 1920, University of North Carolina Library, Southern Historical Collections, George Johnson Baldwin Papers, Personal Series.

noted that the main character was "built up entirely by the other characters, who never actually appear themselves, but are introduced by letters and newspaper clippings."¹⁹ The letters introduce a variety of characters from various social levels and serve to broaden the scope of the little work. There are, for example, Andrew Loomis of Thomasville, Georgia, who thought Eneas was "loose in the upper story"; Pompey Wiley, a Negro from Louisville, Alabama, who claimed an "ole nigger name of enus come by . . . in the firs yer atter the war with er old mare and er colt he claim was by the lightnin"; an attorney from Washington County, Alabama, who suggested Major Tommey make inquiries through the African Methodist Church as Eneas "ought to be a bishop by this time"; a Reverend John Simms, who lamented Eneas' interest in horseracing, especially since he was "an active minister of the Gospel"; and the Reverend Amos Wells, whose daughter "took down" a letter to Major Tommey, which was dictated by Eneas. In this letter Eneas described his situation as hopeless, saying, "Marse George, I been ter firs one an' den ernuther Thomasville, year in an' year out. . . . De firs Thomasville I got to I got back to fo' times. Hit was harder ter loose it than hit was ter find it!" One interesting aspect of the work is the contrasting style of the language used in the different letters, which ranges from

¹⁹"Putting the South on Paper."

the Josh Billings style to the formal and direct language of the lawyer. The authenticity of the letters is such that Rudyard Kipling wrote: "Surely, Mr. Edwards, even your fertile imagination could not have fabricated the letters."²⁰

An interesting review of Eneas Africanus is that of George Palmer Garrett, which appeared in the Georgia Review.²¹ Calling the book a "comic novel," which demonstrates that "charity is ascendant," Garrett emphasizes the lack of bitterness on the part of the writer, even though he was portraying a painful period in the history of the South. He makes reference to the form of the work, saying the writer used the "mock heroic" and "epistolary" forms to relate the book to its eighteenth-century "ancestors," and he compares the work to Virgil's Aeneid, emphasizing the loyalty of the heroes of the two works. He designates as burlesque the comparison of Eneas with Virgil's hero, remarking that the title of Edwards' work is an "amusing pun," and he sees Chainlightning,²² the foal of Lady Chain,

²⁰Quoted from a leaflet published by the Eneas Africanus Press, Macon, Georgia. This leaflet is in the possession of the writer.

²¹George Palmer Garrett, Review of Eneas Africanus, by Harry Stillwell Edwards, Georgia Review, II (1957), 218-23.

²²Garrett erroneously states that Lightning is the foal of Lady Chain. Lightning was the father of the colt.

as representing the "enduring fertility" of the older order. Finally, he mentions Edwards' "universality," which he believed was a result of Edwards' "intense preoccupation with and love for his native region."

While most of Garrett's statements are valid, some of them could be challenged. As already stated, he refers to the work as "mock heroic," saying "the idea of comparing an illiterate, irascible old Negro with the mythical founder of Roman glory is . . . burlesque," and he calls the title an "amusing pun." Actually, too much emphasis should not be placed on the title when attempting to interpret the book, for, although the title does bring to mind Virgil's epic and the journey of his famed hero, this is probably the only analogy that can be drawn between the two books. Edwards' daughter, who probably knew the writer as well as anyone, said her father's choice of the name Eneas was a part of his portrayal of the Negro character; she said he realized the old Southern Negro was likely to name a child for some renowned person and then proceed to mispronounce it.²³ Edwards has shown this characteristic of the Negro in other works, using such names as "Lige" for Elijah, "Manuel" for Emanuel, and "Noray" for Noah. Miss Edwards further stated that her father "did not intend for the black

²³"Putting the South on Paper."

wanderer to have the name of Virgil's hero," so he pronounced it with the accent on the first syllable and spelled it without the diphthong (E'nūs).²⁴ In fact, there is little about the book that could be called "mock epic," as it contains none of the conventions of the epic such as grandiose speeches of heroes, great battle scenes, and epic similes. So it seems that the sole purpose of the title was to characterize the Negro and bring the idea of a journey to the reader, not necessarily the journey of Virgil's hero.

In fact, Eneas' wanderings could be more directly related to the biblical journey of Moses than to that of Virgil's hero. Throughout his travels, Eneas never mentions Virgil's hero, but his favorite sermon is on Moses' wanderings in the wilderness, and in Eneas Africanus, Defendant, Eneas directly compares himself to the biblical wanderer, saying, "Him an' me travelled lots. I moved eroun' over in de Yallerhama deestric erbout eight years an' Moses travelled in de san' forty. But I reck'n I went funder an' seen mo'n Moses did." Eneas and the other freed Negroes Edwards saw as displaced people, destined to wander in the wilderness for many years before finding their promised land. Virgil's hero possessed the loyalty and strength to become the founder of a great nation; Edwards' hero had only

²⁴Ibid.

loyalty. After all his wanderings, he must return to Major Tommey, who represented all he understood and was his sole hope for survival.

The story is not burlesque in any sense of the word. If we think the character of Eneas was exaggerated or overdrawn in an attempt to produce a comic character, then we have missed Edwards' main point. His one desire in creating Eneas was to preserve a character type that actually existed in the South but was fast "vanishing." As strange as the story may seem and whether or not it actually happened, it is true to life, as can be verified by the correspondence between friends and to Edwards after the publication of the story. On January 28, 1920, W. W. Osborne, a Savannah lawyer, wrote to his friend, G. J. Baldwin, and commended Eneas, attesting to the "accuracy" of the story.²⁵ Baldwin, who had read the story already, replied in a letter of February 2, 1920, that the "whole story is a perfectly true one," adding that he intended sending copies to several of his Northern friends, although he did not know how they would take it.²⁶ Earlier, Baldwin had written in a

²⁵Letter, W. W. Osborne to G. J. Baldwin, January 28, 1920, University of North Carolina Library, Southern Historical Collection, George Johnson Baldwin Papers, Personal Series.

²⁶Letter, G. J. Baldwin to W. W. Osborne, February 2, 1920, University of North Carolina Library, Southern Historical Collection, George Johnson Baldwin Papers, Personal Series.

letter of appreciation to Edwards:

I do not know whether the adventures of "Aeneas" are fiction or fact, but the record is a true one in either event, even down to its smallest details, and having been born and brought up in Savannah, Georgia, I can vouch for the absolute truth of the whole story from one end to the other, although I do not know whether it ever happened or not.²⁷

Edwards replied:

. . . you are entirely correct in your statement that its all true. So many people have recognized the old fellow it would be discourteous to take any other stand. . . . I think Eneas has made every exiled Southerner homesick.²⁸

And shortly before Edwards' death, Irvin Cobb wrote to him to ask if he might use the story of Eneas Africanus as evidence that "truth is stranger than fiction."²⁹ Moreover, we must remember that Edwards' mind was never turned to burlesque or satire, and he probably loved Eneas too much to ridicule him.

There is some basis for Garrett's statement that "Chainlightning," the foal of "Lady Chain" born on Eneas'

²⁷Letter, G. J. Baldwin to Harry Stillwell Edwards, January 27, 1920, University of North Carolina Library, Southern Historical Collection, George Johnson Baldwin Papers, Personal Series.

²⁸Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to G. J. Baldwin, January 30, 1920, University of North Carolina Library, Southern Historical Collection, George Johnson Baldwin Papers, Personal Series.

²⁹"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938."

journey, represents the "enduring fertility" of an older order, showing "birth and continuity" rather than "death and destruction." Edwards had adamant faith in the enduring qualities of the Old South, believing the better elements of the old order would carry over into the new generation, permeating the lives of the people. His major criticism of another work, Gone With the Wind, which dealt with the same period as Eneas Africanus, concerned its title: its "pessimism," its "finality," and its "failure to embalm the truth." To Edwards the wind was not a "careless, idle force in nature" but "a mighty agent of distribution," especially in the area of reproduction. He thought of the New South as a generation whose minds, hearts, and souls had been "pollinated with the beautiful essentials of . . . the Old South civilization . . . hybrids . . . who had combined the best of the two orders in one."³⁰

An interesting story surrounds the mare, "Lady Chain." In the last days of the Civil War, when the Confederate officers were fleeing from the Federal forces, General Breckenridge, who was desperately trying to escape, only to have his horse go lame, stopped at midnight at the Andrew Jackson Lane home in hopes of finding a fresh horse. However, all of the stock on the place had been sent

³⁰Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, August 14, 1937.

elsewhere to prevent their capture by Sherman's troops, with the exception of a palfrey belonging to the twelve-year-old daughter in the family. Breckenridge gallantly refused to take the little girl's horse until her permission had been asked, so the sleepy child was brought from upstairs, and, after hearing of the general's plight, she tearfully gave her horse to him and took his lame horse in return. The morning after the exchange, a Kentucky mule dealer, who was marooned at the Lane home and who had with him the famous New Orleans race horse "Lightning," informed the girl that the horse left by Breckenridge was the Kentucky mare "Idlewilde," for which a group of Kentuckians had paid \$500 in gold and which they had presented to the general. Upon examination, the animal's lameness was found to have been caused by a stone, which was promptly removed from her foot, leaving the mare as good as new. In Eneas Africanus this mare became "Lady Chain," and her colt that was fathered by "Lightning" became "Chainlightning." Edwards said it was no "strain on the imagination" to believe that the mare "was able to draw a one-horse wagon over seven southern states during eight leisurely years, and a plow between times," because the "blood and stamina were there."³¹

In 1920 Edwards decided to write another story in the

³¹ Ibid., December 18, 1937.

Eneas Africanus tradition, the basic motive for the story being his desire to lift the spirits of the people who were still suffering the consequences of World War I. Of the writing of the story Edwards said:

It was written after a careful survey and analysis of its predecessor's success, and realization that what the country then most wanted was a chance to laugh; or at least smile.

The World War had ended, the soldiers were back, the three years' tension was relaxed, but the people were not happy. There was everywhere apparent a spiritual let-down. /The people/ were face to face with horrors. The hospitals were full of physical wrecks; broken forms were propped up on crutches at every corner. . . . What the average man sought was amusement; something to laugh over. In this chiefly lay the motive of the story. At least the underlying thought.³²

So, once again, moved with pity for the unhappy and suffering people around him, Edwards sought to relieve the situation in the best way he knew: he would attempt to brighten and improve the world through the healing qualities of laughter.

Eneas Africanus, Defendant continues Edwards' study of Negro religion, and we find ourselves back with Brother Thompson's congregation, along with Aunt Chloe, Unc' Pete, Aunt Tempy, Aunt Silvy, and Brer Manuel. In this story we get a glimpse of "church court," which the author tells us "sometimes dispenses with both law and equity," something

³²Ibid., n.d. The article is on file at the Rosenwald Library, Georgia Southern College, Vertical File.

the reader understands after he reads the story. Eneas, who is unlikely to be convicted of any crime against the church since his journey in the past raised his status in the church community, is brought before the church on a charge of breaking the Sabbath, the charge being made by Brer Manuel. It seems Brer Manuel had passed Eneas' house one Sunday morning and had seen Eneas' wife, Yallerhama Sue, "er plowin' er patch er taters," the "patch er taters" belonging to Eneas, who allegedly made his wife plow them. Eneas, who had previously practiced his speech of defense "behind the smoke-house," having perfected it to the extent that it "would make a goat cry," brilliantly defends himself by explaining the Jewish Sabbath to the awed listeners, confusing them utterly as to which day Sunday should fall on. In his clinching argument against the charge he equates a man's wife with his mule, contending that "Er man's wife and er man's mule is outside de law" because Moses knew if he got specific in these two cases, it would be "cold dinner Sunday an' walk ter chutch!"

Of the remaining five stories in this general group, three are Christmas stories and as such reflect the miracle of the Christmas season in its ability to arouse love, pity, compassion, and generosity in the human heart. Just Sweet-hearts, published in 1919 by the J. W. Burke Company, is a rather sentimental story, with the atmosphere of a fairy tale and the theme of ideal love. The romance begins when

King Dubignon, an architect from New York, visits his home town, Macon, Georgia, during the Christmas holidays, meets the "ideal" girl, falls in love at first sight, introduces himself, and proposes marriage. The astonished girl, who is really a wealthy New York heiress, refuses to marry him and returns to New York, her home, where she eventually meets King again. Posing as a poor housemaid, she finally accepts his offer of marriage when she finds he still desires her after he becomes a brilliant success. Then, in Cinderella fashion, the housemaid steps out of her apron, lets down her hair, and steps forward as a beautiful young heiress. The theme of ideal love is emphasized throughout the story, the following passage, spoken by Dubignon, reflecting the general tone of the work:

Outside of every man's life there is a woman standing . . . her radiance across his path. He is always conscious of her there, but he cannot see her. He finds himself striving because of her; ambitious, because of her. Then one day she steps in and he recognizes her. And because of her he keeps his soul clean and face to the sunrise. Some call her the Ideal. But I know her as the woman God made for me.³³

According to Dubignon, "We don't just meet the women God creates for us; we have known them all along. We just recognize them and take their hands in ours for eternity."

Shadow, which was published by the J. W. Burke

³³Harry Stillwell Edwards, Just Sweethearts (Macon: J. W. Burke Company, 1919). The pages are not numbered.

Company in 1920,³⁴ concerns three young girls; two wise but soft-hearted men, a governor and a judge; and a twenty-year-old Negro convict. The three young girls, who were the daughters of a prison inspector, accompanied their father on his periodic inspections of the prison at Wetumpka, Alabama. Shadow, a trusted young convict, was always given charge of the girls with the admonition "Take care of them, Shadow." And the girls, appropriately named Sunshine, Moonlight, and Starlight, brightened the days of Shadow, a common bond of love springing up between the prisoner and the girls. When Shadow told the girls of his tragic life, they were touched with pity and promised they would win his freedom by Christmas Day. Friends of the governor, the young girls irresistibly pleaded with him until he wrote a note for Sunshine, giving his consent for the release of Shadow upon the condition the judge would consent. With the same urgent pleading the girls' mission to the judge was accomplished, and the prisoner received a phone call on Christmas Day, telling him he was free as promised. The major theme is compassion, and the secondary theme is the compelling power of innocence, which the author himself points out: when the children were making their overpowering

³⁴Shadow was written at an earlier date than the other stories of this group. It was first published in Century Magazine in December, 1906, but was not published in book form until 1920.

appeal to the reluctant governor, the author intruded with the remark, "How potent is innocence, how weak at times is wisdom."

With Shadow, Edwards proves once again that "truth is stranger than fiction," for he contends that the story actually happened. In a letter to Professor Payne of the University of Texas, he explained:

"Shadow"⁷ is wonderfully true for a story; Sidney Trapp of Eatonton, Georgia, was commissioner. Johnson was governor. Sayre was judge. The story came to me from Trapp and with it the governor's little note to "Sunshine" which I have preserved somewhere. To me, the dramatic climax was the shout of the convict when he got the little girl's message over the wire. I imagine him dropping the receiver and falling away from the phone.³⁵

In this story Edwards may have been making an indirect appeal for penal reform, a subject he broached often in his later years. Shadow had been given twenty years on the chain gang for a theft committed at the age of fourteen and had labored in the mines until an accident rendered him useless.

Madelon Passes and Mam' Selle Delphine, which was published in 1922, contains companion pieces, one of them a Christmas story. Always a humanitarian, Edwards seemed to turn more in that direction as he grew older, and the

³⁵Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to L. W. Payne, n.d., University of Texas, Academic Center Library, Special Collections.

circumstances surrounding the writing of this little book are but one instance of his generous and loving nature.

Robert L. Anderson gave the following account of the book's composition:

In the year following the armistice of the World War, Mr. Edwards became acquainted with a young woman, who was then a waitress in the Macon Cafeteria, where Mr. Edwards frequently found rest and refreshment when in the city. He was attracted by her ladylike bearing and demeanor and sought her services, whenever he was a customer in the cafeteria, until noting her absence, on several occasions, he inquired about her and was informed that she was sick. . . . Finally, he learned that she was suffering from tuberculosis. He, at once, offered to take her to Asheville, N. C. and place her in a sanatorium, under competent medical care. She protested but he insisted and finally persuaded her. He, then, arranged for her transportation, through the kindness of a friend, who provided the automobile and the chauffeur, and went with her to Asheville, where he persuaded the owner of a private sanatorium for tubercular patients to take her in, on his guaranty to . . . provide the money required for her care and treatment. Thus inspired, Mr. Edwards wrote a story . . . "Madelon Passes and Mam' Selle Delphine," which he dedicated to the sick girl. . . .³⁶

"Madelon Passes" presents the problem of a young, unmarried mother, and "Mam'Selle Delphine" presents the solution to the problem. In "Madelon Passes" we meet the pretty, innocent, and unmarried mother, Madelon, when she happily presents her baby to Father Patrick, an Irishman,

³⁶"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938."

for baptism, after convincing him that her union with a sailor, which was entered into without the benefit of a priest, had all the sanctity of marriage. We last see her as she is laughing and skipping down the pathway, holding the child in the air, determined to wait for the father of the child to come home, while earning a living by sewing.

In "Mam'Selle Delphine" we meet Madelon again, kneeling beside the grave of her departed friend, Mam'Selle Delphine. Here, she narrates the story of Mam'Selle Delphine to a stranger who was attracted by the woman's song as she planted flowers by the side of the grave. She told the story, which was really her own, of a young mother who waited for the father of her child to come home, finally becoming penniless, hungry, and cold when she was unable, because of her sick child, to collect money for her sewing. It was then that she was found by an angel of mercy, Mam'Selle Delphine, who was inspired by the sounds of the Yuletide season to give her own shoes to the mother and spend her last coins on milk for the baby. The benefactress was miraculously rewarded for her good deed, materially and spiritually, when a young child, in the likeness of an angel, drew her name to receive a prize offered at a Christmas drawing, thus, replenishing the woman's purse. The theme of the story is embodied in a biblical passage quoted by the author: "Inasmuch as ye have

done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me."

The final story of this latter group is The Blue Hen's Chicken, which was written in 1924. With this story Edwards captures once again the strength, fortitude, and endurance of the mountaineers, as he had done previously in "An Idyl of 'Sinkin' Mount'in.'" The setting is a governor's office, but the peaceful Blue Ridge Mountains loom in the distance, framed by a window in the office. There, a young mountain boy relates the story of a mountain feud, in which he was innocently charged with and convicted of killing an officer. He tells of his escape from prison, his enlistment in the army, and his distinguished activities there, by which he tried to atone for the sins of his former life. The young man had come to the governor, accompanied by his sweetheart, to give himself up as an escaped prisoner so that he might finish his prison term. The climax of the story occurs when the governor, whose own son had been saved by the bravery of the young man, suggests that he might receive a pardon. To this suggestion the proud young mountain girl dramatically replies: "Pardon? Never! I could never marry a pardoned man! . . . You can live a crime down, but not a pardon. . . . We of the mountains must be, in righteousness, before God, as immovable as our mountains! And that includes us all!" The title of the book refers to the courage and fighting spirit of the young girl, whose

nickname, "the Blue Hen's Chicken," means the "game hen's chicken."

The only collection of Edwards' verse, Little Legends of the Land, was published in 1930 by the J. W. Burke Company of Macon. Edwards began writing verse during the early years of his literary career, publishing much of it in Century Magazine, the Atlanta Journal, and the Atlanta Constitution.³⁷ Little Legends of the Land includes over thirty of these poems, probably representing the best of his publications. A goodly number of these are legends representing the traditions or lore of generations of Southerners, thus, accounting for the title of the collection. A few of the pieces in the collection have been published separately in book form by the J. W. Burke Company.

Edwards did not regard his verse as poetry but as "stories rhythmically told,"³⁸ and, if we understand Edwards' definition of poetry, we can understand why he did not consider himself a poet. Serious poets he looked on with something akin to reverence, believing they were the interpreters of nature and man, having been endowed with an understanding and consciousness superior to that of common man. More especially, they possessed a clear sense of

³⁷Harry Stillwell Edwards, Little Legends of the Land (Macon: J. W. Burke Company, 1930), Preface.

³⁸Blythe McKay, "'Eneas,' The Wanderer Reappears," Macon Telegraph and News, April 19, 1964, p. 22.

beauty and harmony, which to Edwards should be considered as a part of the original senses of man. Of these poets he says:

It is one of the mysteries that we in reality learn nothing vital from the poets except to realize. That which they touch within us is there awaiting the touch,--planted with the soul, in the soul. . . . They teach us, but they teach us to see farther and hear better. They awaken the understanding to its own deep-laid environment, and appeal to the perfection of the undreamed-of knowledge within us. Of the little world we inhabit they make a universe and open every window into an eternity of time and space. We learn without the poets, but without them we could never realize fully, that the soul is not imprisoned. We can find our way without them, but not the harbor.

Who are the poets? They are the men of the chisel, the brush, the viol and the pen whose work reveals us to ourselves. These, alone, knock at the door of our third nature, our third selves. For, if we are fashioned after God, made in His image, we are each three in one. When we know what is the third in the Holy Trinity, we shall know what is third in us. Shall we call it the Eternal Feminine? It will serve. We only know that it is at the foot of this throne the poet kneels.

It is easier with this term to realize the Motherhood in nature; to know that the color of the leaves, the blush and perfume of the rose, the whiteness of the lily, the song of the birds, the sunrise and the sunset, the solemn murmur of the tidal marsh . . . are not elemental facts, but the expression of something behind,--of that which is the source of all things beautiful, tender, good, happy, exalted, and peaceful. . . .³⁹

Edwards' conception of poetry and the poet seems to be very

³⁹George Herbert Clarke, Some Reminiscences and Early Letters of Sidney Lanier (Macon: J. W. Burke Company, 1907), pp. 5-6. The introduction to this book was written by Edwards.

similar to that of Emerson and Whitman. The poet is almost a priest, and in this capacity he interprets man and nature.

The preface of Little Legends of the Land informs the reader that Edwards' verse was published "chiefly to preserve them for their local color, and for such value as they may possess as part of the history of his times." A brief glance at the thirty-five poems included in the collection will give some indication of the diversity of subject matter covered by the writer in these selections. He sings of Macon, his beloved Georgia, and the Southland; he recounts battles, the "cannon's mouth" and the "flaming gun"; he laments with the mother whose two sons were killed, one defending "the stars and stripes," the other defending "Georgia's flag"; he sings of the warrior horse, the faithful dog, the butterfly, the mockingbird, the vulture, the dandelion, and the rose; he sings of happy love and tragic love; he happily praises little girls, big girls, and, most ardently and reverently of all, the Georgia girl. He sings to the honor of Sidney Lanier and acknowledges the power of music; and, lastly, and, most successfully, he captures and portrays the old-time Negro in his poems of dialect. Following such men as Lanier, Whitman, and Poe, Edwards stresses rhythm in all his poems.

Two of the poems most often mentioned by Edwards' admirers are "The Vulture and His Shadow" and "At the Crossing." These poems probably represent Edwards' highest

achievements as far as poetic form is concerned. "The Vulture and His Shadow" is a ballad-type poem, whose subject matter is similar to that of the English ballad "Twa Corbies" and whose stanza form is that of the French ballade. It is composed of three eight-line stanzas, followed by a four-line envoy, with a refrain carrying the motif and occurring at the end of all three stanzas and the envoy. The rhyme scheme of the stanzas is abcb, and the envoy features rhymed couplets. One of the distinctive features of the poem is its matter-of-fact treatment of death. The first stanza and concluding envoy follow:

All the day long, we roam, we roam,
My shadow fleet and I;
His is the way of the land and the sea,
And mine is the sun and the sky.
But when the call of death leaps up
My airy flight to greet,
As friends around the feast and the board,
We meet! we meet! we meet!

Sweeping in circles, my shadow and I,
Leaving no mark on the land or the sky,
The double circles are all complete,--
At the bedside of death, we meet! we meet!⁴⁰

Edwards was particularly pleased that he managed to compose the poem with words of one or two syllables, rendering the statements with utmost simplicity. Letters to Professor L. W. Payne of the University of Texas over an extended period indicate that Edwards probably spent a considerable

⁴⁰Edwards, Little Legends of the Land, pp. 50-51.

amount of time on the composition of the poem.⁴¹ Concerning his method of composition, Edwards told Payne: "I write verse as I play the piano--by ear, so to speak--and have no method of construction. It sounds better at times to vary the rhyme,--why, I don't know."⁴²

"At the Crossing" is noted for its treatment of a different kind of loyalty from that usually treated by Edwards: the loyalty of a dog for his master. The poem has a narrator, a sailor, who spins a yarn of the sea. The poem begins with an eight-line stanza, followed by stanzas of seventeen and twenty lines, the long ones telling the major portion of the yarn:

Old Bill's tyke was battered an' worn,
A uglier terrier never was born;
But say, in the depths of that critter's eye
Was the lesson to all of us,--how to die.
It was half way down to Manila bay
In the tail of a storm on a winter day
They slid Bill over the good ship's rail,
No loss of steam,--no shortened sail. . . .
But that game little devil, that onery sic tyke,
He saw 'im go an' he heard 'im strike,
One jump an' he hung on the narrow rail;
Not a look to the sky nor the swellin' sail,
Not a look to the waves, half a mountain high,--
Just a low soft whine, a dog's love-cry,--

⁴¹Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to L. W. Payne, April 15, 1920, University of Texas, Academic Center Library, Special Collections.

⁴²Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to L. W. Payne, October 15, 1909, University of Texas, Academic Center Library, Special Collections.

God! but I hear it soundin' still!--
Just one,--an' he plunged to hunt for Bill.⁴³

One might also notice the rhythmical quality of the lines, produced in part by the rhymed couplets, the alliteration, the repetition of key words and phrases, and the variation of the meter.

Of Edwards' poems concerning war and the military, "On the Mount" is of significance because it is an expression of some of Edwards' unfulfilled dreams. When only a child, Edwards had been filled with patriotism as he saw the Southern forces marching off during the Civil War and had been rebuked by his mother for playing soldier; his attempts to enter the Spanish-American War had proved to be of no avail; and, later, when World War I began, he tried to enlist in the army but was too old. In the following lines, Edwards reminisces about his thwarted childhood desires:

Full fifty years have slipt away;
There is a little boy at play,
With gun of wood--tin bayonet;--
With vagrant feather in his cap.
Then tears of grief, and mother's lap;
And moisture in that mother's eye;
And whispered comfort, 'Wait; not yet,
You are too young! Forget--forget,
You are not old enough to die!⁴⁴

After referring to a series of battles and envisioning deeds

⁴³Edwards, Little Legends of the Land, p. 31.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 12.

of courage on the battlefields of France, Edwards mentions his thwarted desires of 1918:

As in a dream across the sea!
Ah, there was fame's eternity.
And here the silent tragedy;--
To stand beneath a fading sky
Too old in God's great cause to die!⁴⁵

Edwards wrote "On the Mount" while on the top of Mount Telemeco, which was located on the Holly Bluff Plantation and overlooked Camp Wheeler. The tents, bugles, and martial echoes of the poem are those of the Dixie Division, which was sent to France shortly after the composition of the poem.

Seven poems dealing with the Negro are included in Little Legends of the Land, and of the seven, three treat the familiar theme of the loyalty of the old-time Negro. "A Fence Corner Oration" depicts the Negro's loyalty to the South, to his former owners, to the land, and to God, and touches on some of the problems of the freed Negro. The Negro narrator warns of the deceptive promises held out to the members of his race by the Western and Northern communities and especially of the promise of "five dollers er day,/an' nuthin' t' all ter do." Of this promise he says:

I seen some niggers, be'n out dere
Come er-hustlin' back ergin,
An' I hatter gi'um meat and bread
Ter he'p full out dey skin!⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 105.

"Send Him In" concerns a loyal Negro slave who was left in charge of "ol' Missus" and the children when his master went off to war. When the master was killed in Virginia, the faithful Negro stood by the "Missus" and helped "keep de chillun movin' straight," scattering "ev'y darky what ast ol' Miss fer pay." In "The Truth and Appomattox" the narrator has purportedly talked with the Negro bodyguard of Robert E. Lee, who was present at the historic meeting between General Grant and General Lee. The narrator relates the story as he heard it from the Negro:

. . . they talked and talked and talked,
and sorter walked about;
And Marse Bob said, 'I'd like to know
Just how us folks fell out!'
And Grant he said, "Your nigger thar--
You ought to set him free!"
But Marse Bob laughed: 'Why, Grant,' says he,
'That nigger thar owns me!'⁴⁷

Two of the seven poems about Negroes were meant to be sung. "Coming From the Fields" is set in slavery days and is sung by the Negroes as they return from their work at sunset. Of interest here is something already noted in Edwards' stories of Negro religion: the Negro's ability to improvise. In this song, one person leads by improvising a line, and another just as quickly improvises an answer. After she replies, the whole group joins in on the refrain, which remains very nearly the same throughout the song.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 103.

This continues until the workers have reached the central area of the plantation. The improvised lines always relate to the situation at hand: for example, the first improviser might say, "Sister Tilley de cows en de laine, up yonner!" and Tilley would answer, "an de milkpail soon be erbout!" Or the improvised words could concern a current romance among the Negroes, an approaching dance, a coming hunt, the approaching supper, or any such timely subject.

The other Negro song is "Mammy's Li'l Boy," a "summer rocking song," sung by the mammy as she was getting the baby down for his 11 a.m. nap. The song consists of six verses, followed by a chorus, with the repetition of many of the words and phrases occurring in both the verses and the chorus. The most realistic lines of the piece occur when Mammy, who has apparently been successful in getting the baby to sleep, only to have him almost awakened by a noise at the door, says:

Look hyah, nigger, go way fum dat do'!
You wake dis chile up wid dat jewsop en
I'll wear yer out ter frazzles!⁴⁸

Since the main purpose of the song is to lull the baby to sleep, its rhythmical quality is very evident.

Of the remaining two poems concerning the Negro, one is a tale of biblical times, and the other deals with Negro superstition. "The Most Ancient Mariner," the title of

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 90.

which was undoubtedly taken from Coleridge's poem, is told to a group of children by Eneas Africanus. The tale is a new version of Noah and his ark, and the narrator insists that his version is more authentic than the one already in existence because it came "straight fum Ham, who han' it down the line." The major emphasis is on Noah's attempt to find dry land, and in this respect the tale could be called more accurately "How the Crow Got His 'Ark.'" It seems that "Noray" first singled out Jim Crow, rather than the dove, to search for dry land, but Jim Crow failed miserably and was hoodooed by "Noray" and banished from the ark:

So Brother Crow ain't got no home fum dat day
ontel now;
He loss es home, he has ter roam, an' live des
anyhow.
He never sings, an' he never plays, an' he never
settles down,
An' de gun hit fills es hide wid led, if his foot
hit tech de groun'.
An' when he cross dat cotton fiel' an' when he
cross dat park
You heah 'im say, day atter day, des 'Ark' an'
'Ark' an' 'Ark!'
Po' old Jim Crow, no home, no mo' he's hardly
fit ter kill
He's homesick fer ol' Noray's Ark, but de hoo-
doo's got 'im still!⁴⁹

The remaining poem, "The Wicked One-Eyed Coon," describes the old Southern custom of coon hunting and at the same time incorporates Negro superstition. The central action revolves around a hound dog, a darky, a possum, and

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 83.

a pine. According to old Ben, the "hant" of a murdered man had taken up residence in the nearby woods in the form of a one-eyed coon. However, Ben professes little fear of the "hant" because Ben "allus totes de hind foot of er rabbit." In this poem Edwards yields to his humorous streak. Ben pleads rheumatism after a possum is treed, so the narrator has to climb the tree and knock the possum out. The possum falls on Ben and about ten dogs and furiously grabs Ben's hand as he starts up a nearby tree. At this point the narrator becomes tickled to the point of weakness, and his hands give way from the limb he is holding, and down he comes. When asked the whereabouts of the long-gone possum, Ben, sucking his sore fingers, staunchly declares: "Twarn't no possum, chile; des dat same old one-eyed coon!" Edwards creates some good imagery in his description of this hunt with the sputtering "pineknot torches," the "weeping" willows, and the "flipping-flooping" ears of the hound dogs.

The major value of the poems in Little Legends of the Land is found in the local color and in their reflection of the period. The selections dealing with the Negro are probably the most valuable ones in the collection, but some of the others have poetic merit and should be valued.

CHAPTER V

THE FINAL YEARS

The year before the publication of The Blue Hen's Chicken Edwards became an associate editor of the Atlanta Journal and began writing a column that appeared on the editorial page under the caption "Coming Down My Creek." The articles, which appeared in the paper three or four times a week for about fifteen years, numbered over two thousand and proved to be an outlet for the thoughts and ideas of the aging man. The breadth and scope of their content reveal the broad interests and expansive mind of the writer. They include essays on nature, philosophy, and religion; articles on farming, education, history, and politics; humorous sketches, short stories, and poetry written by Edwards; and an assortment of letters, articles, and poetry, sent to Edwards by his readers. Many times he used the column to advance the cause of some worthy project or to praise some public servant for a job well done. He often said that the whole of his experience, sooner or

later, went into the column.¹

After Edwards began his work with the Atlanta Journal, he took up residence in Atlanta for a while, but after a serious round of illness he was forced to retire to his home at Holly Bluff, near Macon, where he continued to mail his contributions regularly to the paper.² In the late 1920's Edwards' son, Jackson Lane Edwards, an electrical and civil engineer, designed and built a cabin for his father, which he could use as a retreat.³ The cabin was built near a great lake on the estate and was immediately named "Kingfisher Cabin" in honor of the kingfishers that were in abundance in the lake and nearby Swift Creek.⁴ Edwards loved his "modest little creek" and was wont to grow eloquent when speaking of it, calling it a "quick-eyed, sympathetic poet" with a mind attuned to "life and nature."⁵ The creek was a source of inspiration to him, for he contended that he had grown into the knowledge of

¹Letter, Nelle Edwards Smith to Doris Lanier, September 24, 1968.

²Mrs. Prentiss Edwards, Sr., interview in December, 1968.

³"Restored Edwards Cabin To Be Dedicated Today; His 'Bryde's Cup' Comes From Fiction To Reality," Macon Telegraph and News, April 23, 1967.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, July 8, 1923.

many things while lingering by the side of his "deep-souled poet." He would often spend hours in his cabin beside the creek, meditating, after which he would sit down and write an entire article for his column without pausing to think.⁶

During these years Edwards continued his work as a humanitarian, using his position with the Atlanta Journal to advance worthy causes. He was deeply concerned about the welfare of tubercular patients, and in 1923 the young girl who inspired him to write "Madelon Passes" and "Mam'Selle Delphine" became the inspiration for another work, "The Strongest Power." The story was published in serial form in the Atlanta Journal, the first serial appearing on November 18, 1923. The proceeds from this "labor of love" was to go "to the care of a working girl under treatment in North Carolina," and it was the expressed desire of the writer that the story would bring about "a better spirit in the impoverished patients." The "strongest power" referred to in the work is the power of love.⁷

Edwards' deep concern for the young girl and others at the sanatorium is revealed in a letter to a Dr. Taylor, written on June 30, 1923.

⁶Mrs. Prentiss Edwards, Sr., interview in December, 1968.

⁷Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, October 13, 1923.

I have written a story for Ruth:--"The Strongest Power" (love, of course.) It is the story of Ruth with a romance woven in,--the story of five business men who adopted a tubercular working girl, and called themselves "The Brothers of Mary." So, in a way it is a story of myself. . . . The new story . . . is intended to bring about the rescue of tubercular boys and girls, by small circles or groups, that will supply the spiritual forces. The state never cures. The state has no soul or spirit. It can only supply a place for the sick to die in. And they die there Ruth is doing finely. Weighs 112. No cough or fever. And has just a small spot left on one lung. She is getting ready to begin her study for the trained nurse course. For she wants to continue in Asheville, self-supporting.⁸

Though Edwards states in this letter that the "book carries a preface by Bishop Mikell," there is no record available of its having ever been published in book form. It is mentioned here as a reflection of Edwards' humanitarian interests.

Shortly after he began his work with the Atlanta Journal, Edwards became involved in the project concerning the memorial to the Confederate soldiers to be carved on the face of Stone Mountain. The United Daughters of the Confederacy had begun plans for the memorial in the early nineteen hundreds, and after the mountain was deeded to them in 1916 they acquired the services of Gutzon Borglum for the carving.⁹ However, World War I interrupted the program

⁸Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Dr. Taylor, June 30, 1923, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

⁹Historic Stone Mountain Memorial Carving. This pamphlet is in possession of the writer.

and left it in financial ruins, and, by the early 1920's, work on the project had almost halted.¹⁰ It was at this point that Edwards entered the picture; he originated the idea for a commemorative half-dollar, which would bear the profiles of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson and be sold as a money-raising project.¹¹ Edwards was largely responsible for securing the approval of Congress and the Treasury for the minting and issuance of these coins.¹² Five million were minted¹³ and sold for one dollar each,¹⁴ providing funds for the project for some time.

Edwards was still involved in the work at Stone Mountain in 1925, and at that time he participated in the big dispute that developed between the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association, the two agencies involved in the

¹⁰Georgia Department of Commerce, Stone Mountain: Georgia's Beloved Rock (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Commerce).

¹¹A Dinner to Harry Stillwell Edwards, B. L., LL. D., April 22, 1935. A copy of this pamphlet is at Wesleyan College, Willett Memorial Library, Macon, Georgia.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to the United Daughters of the Confederacy, March 30, 1925, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

¹⁴Historic Stone Mountain Memorial Carving.

project.¹⁵ The argument was the result of a shortage of funds and a dispute with the sculptor, Borglum. On March 30, 1925, Edwards wrote an open letter to the United Daughters of the Confederacy in an attempt to serve as peacemaker between the two groups, placing most of the blame for the controversy on Borglum. When funds became scarce, Borglum had angrily stopped work on the memorial and destroyed his models with an axe to prevent others from following his "dream" plan. Edwards, whose closest acquaintances had never seen him angry,¹⁶ probably made a stronger denunciation of Borglum at this time than he had ever made of any other man.

Edwards' indignation sprang from what he considered Borglum's disrespect for the three things nearest to Edwards' heart: his love of truth, his love of the Old South and its leaders, and his reverence and respect for women. First, he accused Borglum of dishonesty in the form of plagiarism:

For the sculptor, Gutzon Borglum . . . nothing commendatory can be justly said. . . . His employment was a great error. . . . All were duped

¹⁵Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to the United Daughters of the Confederacy, March 30, 1925, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

¹⁶Mrs. Prentiss Edwards, Sr., interview in December, 1968. Mrs. Edwards made the following comment: "I have never seen him lose his temper. He never cursed. Only once or twice have I seen him irritated. This was when the Negroes on the place cut down some of his prized trees and used them for firewood."

by one who proved to be utterly devoid of truth, honor, sincerity, and even rudimentary honesty. His record is too plainly, too indelibly written in this state to be missread [sic]. His so-called 'dream' was not an original conception. It was the perfected vision of many minds, and dates from the poet Francis O. Tichnor [sic]. . . . Though himself a Georgian . . . the poet was the son of Connecticut parents. . . . Dr. Tichnor is esteemed in Connecticut . . . and his poems are to be found in every library. Investigation reveals that they are in the library at Stamford, where Borglum had his studio, and where he gave birth to his 'dream.' The dream will be found in Tichnor's poem, 'Stone Mountain,' published in 1869.¹⁷

He then labeled Borglum a "barbarian" for destroying his models for the project, saying that in like manner have "barbarians destroyed statutes [sic] from time immemorial, as an expression of their hatred and contempt." He contended that nothing so "uncouth, so repulsive, so grotesque" had come under his observation in "fifty years of public life." He concluded by expressing his regret that the "beautiful and lovable womanliness" of some members of the U. D. C. had been imposed upon by Borglum, declaring it had always been that "good women" will carry flowers even for the vile men in life.¹⁸ In May, 1925, Edwards declined the position of directorate of the Stone Mountain

¹⁷Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to the United Daughters of the Confederacy, March 30, 1925, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

¹⁸Ibid.

Confederate Monumental Association, believing he could "serve the association more effectively from without."¹⁹

At a time when most men retire and settle down to grow old gracefully, Edwards defied old age and continued with his work. In 1928, when he was seventy-three years old, the Baltimore Manufacturer's Record published his plea for higher education, The Tenth Generation. The story was written for Wesleyan College and later given to the Baltimore Manufacturer's Record, a gift for which Hathway Edmonds, the editor, rewarded the author with a check for a hundred dollars. Edmonds published the story in his periodical with a "glowing editorial endorsement," after which he published 200,000 copies in pamphlet form, selling them at near cost.²⁰ Later, 25,000 copies were issued to Fairfax Harrison of the Southern Railway and distributed through his agencies, their purpose being to combat the idea that "the Southern properties were located in a section devoid . . . of educational facilities." The Liberal Arts College Movement later contracted for one million copies of the story, to be used in an endowment campaign. This is said to have been the largest single order ever given for a story.²¹

¹⁹Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Hollins N. Randolph, May 8, 1925, Emory University Library, Special Collections.

²⁰Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, May 12, 1935.

²¹The Author of Eneas Africanus.

The Tenth Generation presents the story of a successful banker who was concerned about the inheritance he would someday leave his six-year-old son. He sought the advice of a lawyer in order to develop a plan that would assure him that the child's descendants ten generations away would benefit from the inheritance. Edwards explained the message of the story:

The banker is shown by an old philosopher that his son is only one of ten hundred and twenty-four ancestors of the boy 250 years away (A.D. 2157), all living in this generation; and of as many more in the intervening generations. And he is further shown that the only way to help that distant boy, and all the others ahead of him, is to give Christian education to all the ten hundred and twenty-four. Tangible wealth cannot be enlisted over ten generations in this country. . . . But intangible wealth can be freighted down on blood streams. Endow the living with spiritual riches, sound health and enlarged morality. The unborn of all future generations will inherit them.²²

Edwards further pointed out that a man is the sum total of all his ancestors and stressed the shaping influence of a child's environment. He expressed his belief in the perfection of mind, body, and soul, toward which all mankind should be striving. And he believed the greatest progress toward an ideal life would be achieved through education.²³

Edwards did not go unrecognized for his interest in

²²Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, May 12, 1935.

²³Ibid.

education and his efforts toward bettering the educational program of the South. Several years prior to his publication of The Tenth Generation, he was awarded the LL. D. from Mercer University. Edwards always felt that his formal education was inadequate, never fully realizing that he had acquired an education far beyond that of most men. He expressed his boyish enthusiasm over the honorary degree in a letter to Dr. Taylor:

Since writing you last, our Baptist university, Mercer, of which I was already a B.L. alumnus, has conferred on me the higher honor "LL. D.," and I am prouder of it than a boy of his first sweetheart's kiss. . . . I am vain enough to inclose you a copy of Dr. Weaver's remarks as he conferred the degree, and to add that I was presented for it, by U.S. Senator George. For the first time in my life I was too much embarrassed ('rattled') to utter one word. But, do you know, my friend what was in my mind, when I looked out over the great audience and heard the generous and continued applause? It was the thought of the little woman who sleeps today on the bank of the Ocmulgee. How proud and delighted she would have been. But, maybe she was there, too. Who knows.²⁴

Edwards also received honorary membership in the Phi Beta Kappa Society from the University of Georgia,²⁵ and, when he was eighty-three years old, he was paid tribute by Georgia's educators at a special dinner given in his honor

²⁴Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Dr. Taylor, June 30, 1923, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

²⁵The Author of Eneas Africanus.

by the Georgia Education Association.²⁶ In 1923 he served on the faculty at Wesleyan College in the School of Journalism.²⁷ He was also a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the Authors' League.²⁸

Probably one of the high points of Edwards' life was a dinner in honor of his eightieth birthday, which was held at the Dempsey Hotel in Macon. Speeches proclaiming the writer's preeminence were made by various personages, including Dr. S. V. Sanford, president of the University of Georgia, who said among other things:

Harry S. Edwards is a man of great versatility-- editor, lecturer, writer, novelist, poet, short story writer--scholar, friend, gentleman--the embodiment of the cultural ideals of the old south of song and story. Of this princely gentleman it can be said that he belongs to that select group of noble hearts 'who move through life as a band of music moves down the streets, flinging out pleasure on every side through the air, to everyone far and near that can listen.'²⁹

William Cole Jones, chief editorial writer for the Atlanta Journal, spoke of Edwards' literary contributions to the South. Attributing Edwards' skill in interpreting the South

²⁶Frank Daniel, "Georgia Leaders Gather to Pay High Tribute to Harry Stillwell Edwards," Atlanta Journal, April 14, 1938.

²⁷Elizabeth Garrett, "Wesleyan Has 2 New Tutors," Macon News, May 6, 1923.

²⁸A Dinner to Harry Stillwell Edwards, B. L., LL. D.

²⁹Pope, "Mr. Edwards, 80, Aspires To Great American Novel, He Says at Birthday Party."

to his intimate knowledge of the Old and the New South and his ever-youthful, ever-optimistic outlook on life, he said:

The darling of all his loves is a romantic young thing called Tomorrow. He believes in her unreservedly. Never has she played him false, nor ever will; for he, like her, belongs forever to the sunrise.³⁰

At this dinner Edwards reportedly "dumbfounded" the group by announcing his intentions to produce "the great American novel," and his friends believed he meant it.

Other than the congratulatory speeches, Edwards received telegrams of congratulations from many prominent people. President Franklin D. Roosevelt extended "best wishes" for Edwards' "continued health and happiness";³¹ Chase S. Osborn praised the writer because he had made "happy" all who knew his "personality," "intellect," and "art";³²

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Letter, Franklin D. Roosevelt to Harry Stillwell Edwards, April 13, 1935. This letter is included in the pamphlet A Dinner to Harry Stillwell Edwards, B. L., LL. D.

³²Letter, Chase S. Osborn to Harry Stillwell Edwards, April 15, 1935. This letter is included in the pamphlet A Dinner to Harry Stillwell Edwards, B. L., LL. D. Edwards and Osborn were very close friends. Mrs. Chase Osborn gives this information about their friendship in a letter to the writer of December 11, 1968: "They were more than acquaintances: friends. Much different in personality, they had newspaper work as a common background and other mutualities I have never analyzed. Mr. Osborn had a high estimate of Mr. Edwards and promoted him and his books with understanding and affection. He was a frequent visitor at the Edwards home. The two men were given an honorary degree from Wesleyan College at the same Commencement. I think a photograph of both, with the President of Wesleyan College, is

Walter F. George praised the quality of Edwards' writing, saying he portrayed in his works the "simplicity and sweetness of childhood, the hope and faith of youth, and the mature judgment of the man";³³ and Eugene Stetson of New York commended him because he had "lived a noble life" and "freely given" of himself for the "benefit and happiness of others."³⁴ It was not unusual that Edwards received such an outpouring of praise from so many notable people on this occasion. He had always attracted the attention of such people, at one time becoming known as "the friend of Presidents." He was personally acquainted with various presidents, including Grant, Taft, Cleveland, McKinley, Roosevelt, and Coolidge. He called the Confederate President, Jefferson Davis, "the greatest President America ever knew," and, at the request of Mrs. Davis, he wrote the epitaph for her husband's tomb.³⁵ Another of Edwards'

on the mantel in the studio at Possum Poke in Possum Lane, Poulan, Georgia. Once, on Long Island, while looking up his own early American ancestors, Governor Osborn looked up some of Colonel Edwards'. Both were happy knowing that they had ancestors who were something like neighbors in the old times."

³³Letter, Walter F. George to Harry Stillwell Edwards, April 8, 1935. This letter is included in the pamphlet A Dinner to Harry Stillwell Edwards, B. L., LL. D.

³⁴Letter, Eugene Stetson to Harry Stillwell Edwards, April 5, 1935. This letter is included in the pamphlet A Dinner to Harry Stillwell Edwards, B. L., LL. D.

³⁵"Harry Stillwell Edwards Dies of Pneumonia at Macon."

close friends was Henry Ford, who made an unannounced visit to Holly Bluff after reading Eneas Africanus. He was enchanted with the little story and at one time wanted to name Edwards "poet laureate" of the United States.³⁶ A year or two before Edwards' death, Ford expressed his appreciation for Edwards by presenting him with a new car.³⁷

Edwards was to live three more years after his eightieth birthday celebration, and throughout this time he continued to write two or three articles a week for the Atlanta Journal. To the end, his mind never showed evidence of aging. He held no fear of death, but his zest for life never diminished. He meant it when at eighty he said: "It's a grand old world, mates, a grand old world! Don't let anybody fool you." Edwards died on October 22, 1938, a few days after he contracted pneumonia. The following editorial from his pen was published in the Atlanta Journal after his death.

And if at last, on some radiant morn, careless,
perhaps, as usual, I neglect to awake, let no
one smile should some understanding soul de-
clare, 'He died, not of the weight of years,
but smothered in his own adolescence.' Just
draw over me the green coverlet of Georgia sod,
without sadness. For I shall not journey
farther than I can dream back. Possibly, I
shall not journey at all; for oft, in the long
years I have lived, many voices whispered to

³⁶McKay, "'Eneas,' The Wanderer, Reappears."

³⁷Walter Bragg, "Harry Stillwell Edwards' Stature as Author Grows," Macon News, March 22, 1955.

me in the silences, and I have felt love's kisses, the thrill of great souls passing by, and little white hands I had hid under coverlets of blossoms slip back into mine. It may be that only those who are unfit shall suffer exile to that far land whence none return. My prayer is that I be found worthy to remain forever shrouded in the holiness of her beauty, a part of Georgia, my incomparable Mother.³⁸

Edwards' last column appeared in the Atlanta Journal on October 23, 1938, the day he was buried. It was a poem titled "Legend of Moses and Satan," featuring Edwards' beloved Eneas as narrator. Edwards sent the poem to the editors of the paper four days before his death and suggested it be reprinted. In the poem the familiar voice of Eneas tells of the death of Moses:

. . . Moses shet es dim ol' eyes, an', leanin'
fum erbove,
God laid on es ol' sarvent's lips de savin'
kiss o' love.
'Come home, mer fren', come home wid
Me!' de angels heah 'im say;
An' when God straighten up ergin' He tuk
es soul erway!³⁹

Simple funeral services for Edwards were held in the First Presbyterian Church of Macon, with the Reverend Albert Grady Harris officiating. Edwards had earlier requested that there be no vocal music at his funeral, so the organist

³⁸"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938."

³⁹Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, October 23, 1938.

quietly played "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life," Schubert's "Serenade," and "Ah, Sublime Sweet Evening Star," all requested earlier by Edwards. He was buried in Rose Hill Cemetery beside his wife, whose death preceded his by sixteen years.⁴⁰

Edwards was more fortunate than some writers in that he lived long enough to receive recognition for his literary endeavors. He had thoroughly enjoyed his successes, but he had taken his failures without bitterness, because, to him, writing had been more than a pastime, an occupation, or an art: it had been a means whereby the soul might expand and grow into new knowledge and rejoice at each new insight into life. Of writing he once said:

There is no finer way to employ one's leisure than in giving expression to the emotions of the heart in some form of writing. Writing is something far bigger in the development of the spirit than publishing. That may be profitably postponed until the art is perfect. The main thing is to let no fine thought escape. It is a visitor to the soul and a teacher. It is part of the soul's riches. . . . Hold, therefore, to high thoughts. When old age or griefs claim you, they will be your defense against loneliness and perhaps guides to point the way when you pass on. But if your happiness depends on the name in print, look first, last, and all time

⁴⁰"Harry Stillwell Edwards Paid Last Tribute At Macon Church," Atlanta Journal, October 24, 1938.

to your art, and don't bother too much to say something.⁴¹

He looked to the small things in life to reveal the heart and nature of man and believed the "feeling heart" to be nature's "noblest work."⁴²

He spent his life searching for beauty, and wherever he looked he found it. Beauty, to him, took various forms. Of course, nature had her share of beauty, but there were also the beauty of loyalty, the beauty of innocence, the beauty of love, the beauty of strength, endurance, and fortitude, the beauty of compassion, and the beauty of wholesome laughter. Edwards said:

The one thing above all others that makes life worth living is beauty. . . . The life beautiful is the life that reflects the world beautiful. . . . Fortunately the love of the beautiful is inherent in the human race. We all start with it but some lose it. They who lose it are dead though they yet live because they are insulated from the spirit that redeems.⁴³

On one occasion he stated that "beauty in any form" was his "hobby," remarking that he did not "choose" his hobby but "inherited it" from his father. The beauty of nature was a special inspiration to Edwards; here he could see

⁴¹Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, October 7, 1923.

⁴²Ibid., September 4, 1923.

⁴³Ibid., May 23, 1924.

"creation in process, and evidence of a supreme Artist at work."⁴⁴

If Edwards lived the "life beautiful," it was probably the result of a beautiful soul. He had a great supply of spiritual resources, and, though his mind wandered through every labyrinth of religious philosophy, he always came back to the traditional values of the Christian Church. A spiritualist almost to the point of mysticism, he held a faith that was an integral part of his life. He had a deep conviction of the power of God, believing the day of miracles had not passed. He once told a blind friend that there was "no reason" why he should be blind. "Ask God to lay a finger on the eyes," he said, "and if you have not faith enough, I have enough for both of us."⁴⁵ He saw the existence of God as self-evident in all the mysteries of life, and he managed to reconcile all of his beliefs with the belief in a Supreme Creator. His spiritual growth was the result of a constant groping for a higher life and a continuous prayer life. He said:

. . . since reaching the age of discretion and understanding, whose borderline is about half-way up the century every man is hoping to live,

⁴⁴Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Helen Hagan, March 15, 1936, Georgia College, Ina Dillard Russell Library, Special Collections.

⁴⁵Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Dr. Taylor, June 30, 1923, Duke University, Perkins Library, Special Collections.

I have never sent a petition to what our poet-preachers call the throne of heavenly grace; and but one prayer. The prayer, however, has been, practically, continuous; the interregnums being temporary lapses back to the purely human plane. For I have something more than a suspicion that . . . God . . . does not pay any attention to specific petitions; and that desire and aspiration for spiritual growth when continuous and persistent, never fail of answer from some direction. And it is out of this enlargement of spiritual growth and capacity, that come not only happiness but a clearer perception of the verities. Direct petitions for specific results, launched out into the ether, when not simply impudent, are often downright insolent.⁴⁶

For his contribution to Southern literature Edwards should be praised both as a writer and as a social historian. He dealt with fact and took his characters mostly from real life, but he artistically combined this fact with the imaginative creations of his own mind. Though a romantic glow is cast over most of his works, they still reflect the actual life of an age history could only record. This combination of romantic and realistic elements, which Edwards called "romantic realism,"⁴⁷ was probably the result of Edwards desire to emphasize the brighter and better parts of the era he was depicting, a

⁴⁶Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, n.d. This article is on file at Rosenwald Library, Georgia Southern College, Vertical Files.

⁴⁷Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Fred Lewis Pattee, December 20, 1914, Pennsylvania State University Library, Pattee File. The statement made by Edwards was: "As far as I know we all deal with a basis of fact in our stories and the product perhaps should be called romantic realism."

task that was made easy by his natural tendency toward the good in life. He believed man must suffer "man's inhumanity to man," but "he did not glorify it or allow it to obscure higher elements of his nature, such as compassion, sympathy, and spiritual strength."⁴⁸ That he preferred to reflect the "world beautiful" and to disregard the ugly aspects of the era he was presenting does not make his presentation less authentic. Actually, he had a deep concern for preserving the past, and he was aware of a need for an accurate report. His re-creation of the dialect of his region is authentic, representing the speech of some real person. He depended on the phonetic principle to reproduce this dialect, realizing that it is not a language but the abuse of a language.⁴⁹ His characters are clearly drawn and believable, his descriptions of the countryside are artistically presented, and his plots are thoroughly original.

Edwards constantly sought to justify the South's position on slavery, but he did not approve of slavery. He seemed to believe that the peculiar circumstances surrounding the enslavement of the Negro in the South justified the Southern position somewhat, because, even

⁴⁸This quote was taken from a rough draft of a work on Edwards to be published shortly. It was sent to the writer by the author, Mrs. Nelle Edwards Smith.

⁴⁹Edwards, "Open Letters."

as slaves, the Negroes had a better life than they left in Africa. If he justified the South's enslavement of the Negro, he was cognizant of the race problem in the South and farsighted in his appraisal of it. He would probably have been the first to condemn the South for turning her back on what he called her "foster" children. As early as June, 1906, Edwards advocated a program of education and home ownership for Negroes, saying that, unless some forward-looking program were adopted, he would have to prepare his descendants to "face anarchy." On the education of the Negro he said:

For what is the South spending its millions on the Negro if not to assist it? I regret that there are good men in some regions who believe that an ignorant, hopeless people are easier to control and safer to live with than an educated and aspiring people. We are accustomed to call the South's difficulty 'the race question,' and in accepting this term we lose sight of the real issue, and debate impossible remedies.⁵⁰

Edwards' greatest literary accomplishments were his short stories. He was a natural story-teller, and even his first stories show a grasp of the fundamentals of story telling. These fundamentals he retained in all of his stories, improving only in his power of expression and his ability to characterize as he matured as a writer. His mastery of the written word can be attributed to his belief

⁵⁰Harry Stillwell Edwards, "The Negro and the South," Century Magazine, LXXII (June, 1906), 212-15.

in the vigor and strength inherent in short words; at one time he said he was "afraid of big words" and "shunned" them.⁵¹ The local color of "An Idyl of 'Sinkin' Mount'in" and "De Valley An De Shadder," the clear characterizations of "Two Runaways," "Sister Todhunter's Heart," "Elder Brown's Backslide," and others, the side-splitting humor of "The Woodhaven Goat" and "Isam's Spectacles," and the pathos and tenderness of "'Ole Miss' and 'Sweetheart'" and "His Defense" class Edwards among the greatest of the short story writers of his day. H. V. Sanford placed him with Irving, Poe, Harte, and O'Henry, comparing Eneas Africanus with the biblical story of the prodigal son.⁵²

As a novelist Edwards retained his skill at capturing the imagination of the reader and was quite good at creating mystery and suspense. Besides the estimated three million people who read Sons and Fathers in serial form, the book was probably widely read in its half-dozen other printings. In 1937 there was a revival of Sons and Fathers, when a thousand copies, unabridged and autographed, were published in honor of the author's eighty-second birthday.⁵³ The

⁵¹"Harry Stillwell Edwards Tells Civitans His Formula as Writer," Atlanta Journal, n.d. This article is in the possession of the writer.

⁵²Pope, "Mr. Edwards, 80, Aspires to Great American Novel, He Says at Birthday Party."

⁵³Charles J. Bayne, "Today's Book," Macon Telegraph, August 23, 1937.

publication of this edition by the Brown Publishing Company of Atlanta⁵⁴ brought a "flood" of "affectionate" messages to the writer's desk, inspiring him to vow with youthful ambition to justify the faith the people had placed in him.⁵⁵

Eneas Africanus is believed to be the most-widely-read and the largest-selling short story ever published. A few months after its publication it had reached "every state in the union as well as England and Germany--without advertising."⁵⁶ By April of 1921 Eneas had reached almost every part of the world where Americans touch, even China, and its sales had reached 100,000 and were still rising.⁵⁷ The sales of the little book had reached the million and a quarter mark by 1933, and sixty printings of the book had been made.⁵⁸ In January, 1927,⁵⁹ the Reader's Digest

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Manuscript copy of a "Creek" article dated August, 1937. A copy of this article is in possession of the writer. The original copy is in the possession of Mrs. Prentiss Edwards, Sr., Macon, Georgia.

⁵⁶Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to L. W. Payne, n.d., University of Texas, Academic Center Library, Special Collections.

⁵⁷Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to Mary Robertson, April 3, 1921, University of Virginia, Barrett-Edwards Collection.

⁵⁸Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to L. W. Payne, February 15, 1933, University of Texas, Academic Center Library, Special Collections.

⁵⁹Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, November 29, 1936.

published the story in condensed form, circulating the story to another eighteen million people.⁶⁰ By 1955 more than three million copies of the book had been published in Macon alone.⁶¹ About eight hundred and fifty copies of a deluxe edition were published by a New York Company and a special edition by a firm in Texas, mainly for advertising, but the Macon publishers of the book, the J. W. Burke Company, refused to grant publishing permission to other interested firms.⁶² Purchasers of the book include Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Eddie Rickenbacker, Henry Ford II, and a maharajah of India.⁶³ George Arliss bought the dramatic and screen rights to Eneas in 1932.⁶⁴

In 1964, when the original publishers of Eneas Africanus closed because of bankruptcy, Mrs. Nelle Edwards Smith, Edwards' granddaughter, began the Eneas Africanus

⁶⁰Bragg, "Harry Stillwell Edwards' Stature as Author Grows."

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to L. W. Payne, February 15, 1933, University of Texas, Academic Center Library, Special Collections.

⁶³Bragg, "Harry Stillwell Edwards' Stature as Author Grows."

⁶⁴Letter, Harry Stillwell Edwards to L. W. Payne, March 6, 1933, University of Texas, Academic Center Library, Special Collections. In a "Creek" article Edwards stated that Frederick Stower, who dramatized "Two Southern Gentlemen" for Sidney Harris, was at work on Eneas. However, there is no evidence that this dramatization was completed. See Edwards, "Coming Down My Creek," Atlanta Journal, November 29, 1936.

Press, the immediate objective being to keep Eneas "traveling." According to Mrs. Smith,

The Eneas Africanus Press is a non-commercial venture devoted solely to the perpetuation of the writings of Harry Stillwell Edwards. . . . The long-range purpose of the Press is two-fold. First, to keep alive through his writings a record of the people of the South as they rose miraculously from the desolation of their land and, putting death and destruction behind them, staggered under financial ruin and heartbreak to resume their lives and continue their contribution to the nation. But also its mission is to rescue literary heritage for its own sake, and give again innocent pleasure to many.⁶⁵

Since the press began operating on January 1, 1964, requests for the story have continued from bookstores and individuals from all over the country, and sales have passed the three and one-half million mark.⁶⁶ In the near future Mrs. Smith expects to publish a short sketch of Edwards' life, including some comments on Eneas Africanus. The work, which will be of the "size and shape to fit Eneas," will be titled "Harry Stillwell Edwards--Man Not Without Honor."⁶⁷

⁶⁵This account of the press was taken from a rough draft of a work on Edwards to be published shortly. It was sent to the writer by the author, Mrs. Nelle Edwards Smith. Another record of the press can be found in the Georgia Magazine, February-March, 1966, pp. 32-33.

⁶⁶Letter, Nelle Edwards Smith to Doris Lanier, September 24, 1968.

⁶⁷Letter, Nelle Edwards Smith to Doris Lanier, August 22, 1969.

Edwards' friends and the citizens of Macon have not failed to recognize that a distinguished person dwelt in their midst for eighty-three years. On December 4, 1938, a bronze bust of Edwards was presented to the citizens of Macon and installed in the public library.⁶⁸ In 1942 Kingfisher Cabin was moved to the campus of Wesleyan College by the Rotary Club of Macon, where it remained for twenty-two years as a tribute to the writer.⁶⁹ In 1964 it was moved to the Museum of Arts and Sciences at Macon, and work was begun to restore it to its original design.⁷⁰ On April 23, 1967, the restoration of the cabin was complete, and a dedication ceremony was held.⁷¹ At this dedication a replica of the "Bride's Cup" of Eneas Africanus was presented to members of the Edwards family by Shirley Robertson, a master pewterer, of Williamsburg, Virginia. He had been inspired to design the cup by his memories of Eneas, which he had read and loved as a boy. The cups are handmade and sold to future brides to be used as heirlooms. A copy

⁶⁸"Address Of Robert Lanier Anderson Presenting The Bust Of Harry Stillwell Edwards To The Citizens Of Macon, December 4, 1938."

⁶⁹"Final Restoration Set For Edwards' Workshop," Macon Telegraph and News, June 5, 1966.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹"Restored Edwards Cabin To Be Dedicated Today; His 'Bryde's Cup' Comes From Fiction To Reality."

of Eneas Africanus is given with each cup.⁷² Recently, a mural was completed for the lobby of a new U. S. Post Office at Macon, on which appears Harry Stillwell Edwards, in a lifelike pose, along with Sidney Lanier, Alexander Stephens, and other historical figures of middle Georgia. The mural, which is expected to last for about two centuries, was painted by George Beattie, an Atlanta artist.⁷³

Edwards' works will continue to delight and inspire those who still believe that life has meaning; that immortal man has a soul capable of love, compassion, tenderness, sacrifice, endurance, and good will; that a certain amount of idealism is valuable; and that man should constantly strive for the ideal. His works will continue to have meaning for those who believe that each new age should recognize the merits and basic ideals of the past and incorporate them into the present. The wisdom of his insights, the clarity of his reasoning, the gentleness of his nature, the purity of his thoughts, the wholesomeness of his laughter--all these are incorporated into his stories, novels, and verse. These works are his gifts of love to the South and Georgia, declaring for all time that the Old South of song and story was an actuality.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Freda Nadler, "Middle Georgia's Colorful Past," Atlanta Journal, February 2, 1969, Magazine Section, pp. 16-20.

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