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THE FORUM 1924 PRIZE SHORT STORY

OUT of six hundred stories submitted to THE FORUM contest between February and July the following story was unanimously selected by the judges, Fannie Hurst, John Erskine, and William Lyon Phelps, as being, in their opinion, the most worthy of the \$1000 award.

THE SECRET AT THE CROSSROADS

JEFFERSON MOSLEY

IT was late in August. I had been attached to the General Medical Foundation since my professional graduation in June of the preceding year and was now on my way to a remote settlement known as Bell's Brake, where I was to continue my monotonous and personally distasteful routine of hookworm investigations. The inspiration of the physician's ideal seemed far-fetched to me that day, and its forlorn drudgeries their own reward.

Bell's Brake lies twenty miles west of Dalby, the nearest railway stop. At Dalby I hired horse and vehicle for ten days and set out across country according to schedule.

It was a hot, sandy plod all the afternoon, through typical bottom country, forest spaces alternating with rail-fenced corn and cotton clearings, and the light of other days broke on me in the color, odor, and grand passiveness of it all. South is South, and emotionally I was in the heart of home. Nevertheless I was a casual and transient through the particular region, and loneliness for things vanished took possession of me. I was jaded from long travel.

The accident that befell me about eight miles from Bell's was nothing extraordinary, but it brought on a futile delay. The rack-boned horse quietly pulled the swingletree in two, and I found myself without the means to repair it. At last, however, an old Negro drove up in a tottering buckboard. He had a half roll of cotton bagging with him, and from the cordage around this and a hickory pole I had cut he accommodated me with an African's best splice. After losing a full hour I got under way again, precariously. It was nearing six o'clock, and the sun was sinking. I wondered where I should be at midnight.

There is a curve in the road just before you reach the fork, five miles this side of Bell's. On the left is an undefined area of land once cleared but now run wild again, save for a clump of four or five half-tended graves. On the right stands a grove of live oaks, perfect of its kind. A swampy "branch" flows through it, leading the eye back into vistas of semi-gloom. The oaks spread their elephantine limbs wide and low, and the sluggish waters mirror long festoons of moss and muscadine. Frogs were beginning to chirp and grunt as I drove past, and spirals of mosquitoes were drifting out. A specimen of *culex pipiens* found me and wailed indefinitely in my ear.

But habitation of some sort met my eyes just around the turn. Nearest me suddenly appeared a group of outhouses, at the farther end of which was a larger unpainted board structure, — a store, it seemed, with gable and porch facing the road. Just beyond, the fork branched off; past that, woods again. Someone was cooking supper, — there was a rich, inviting smell of ham and coffee.

On the porch was a man in his shirt sleeves, seated in a slack posture, his chair propped against the wall. "J. H. R. Agard, DRUGS AND SPECIALTIES," the sign read, succinct and utterly vague. As I drew aside, the man on the porch arose with symptoms akin to those of lumbago, pivoting his steps at the knee. He took a stance against one of the posts, put his hands to his back, and expectorated.

"Good day," he addressed me, in a flat voice.

I answered and looked at him. He was small, sallow, and crestfallen in aspect. His eyes were dark and penetrating, yet curiously unexpressive, as though fencing for thoughts and exchange-

ing distrust. He wore a wide-brimmed, buff-colored hat, and glossy celluloid collar and cuffs.

"Stranger in these parts?" he inquired, hitching himself a trifle nearer.

"Yes, at present," I admitted. "Are you the — proprietor here?"

"Well, you might say I am. . . . Hello, what's the matter with that s'ingletree? Where you headed for?"

"Bell's Brake."

"Bell's, huh? — Might' poor place, Bell's." He seemed to weigh some delicate proposal. "Tell you what you might do: Suppose you put up here to-night. Feed that hoss; eat supper; get a good night's rest. There's a shop down the fork a ways; have your buggy fixed up there. Care to stop? Agard's my name, Mr. —"

He had come to the point. I introduced myself and alighted.

"Oh, John!" Agard called. "Come over here. — I want to ask you a favor."

"Comin' right now, Doctor. — Yes, suh! Git up, *mule*." This ready reply came from a big-muscled Negro field-hand, who had ridden up the road behind me.

"John," said my host, "I want you to unharness this gentleman's horse for him, unload his baggage, and take his buggy down with you to Mr. Comer's shop. Tell him this gentleman had a breakdown on the road, and ask him if he can't put on a new s'ingletree soon in the mornin'."

"Deed I will, Doctor," said John, beginning to unfasten the traces. Within five minutes he had mounted and started away, with a shaft in one hand.

"Look here, John," I suggested, "hadn't you better tie that thing to the saddle? You'll get pulled off."

"No, boss," he grinned, "I reckon I better take 'er dishere way, — mule's got all *she* kin do to ca'y *me*. San's heavy rollin'. We'll git 'er dar all right!"

The two of them dragged my buggy away. I had forgotten to offer John a quarter. "He didn't expect one," said Doctor Agard. My heart began to warm. It was the kindly feeling of my boyhood; I was getting nearer home.

* * *

The doctor and I had supper in the small dwelling house near by. Agard was a bachelor, I learned.

Toward the end of the meal he excused himself and crow-hopped across the hallway into another room. He and the servant, a bedizened young Negress named Sarah, were talking there in a low tone for some minutes. As he returned, I saw his hand on the door and heard his dismal voice:

"You might as well get Number Four ready. . . . Yes, but you never can tell. And take those ear-rings off, like I told you."

The next I saw of him was in the drug store, making up a chill tonic for a late customer, the blacksmith's son. A couple of wall-lamps with tin reflectors showed a surprisingly neat stock of drugs and sundries, though with the usual excess of patent nostrums.

After young Comer left, Agard and I sat on the porch.

He kindled a smudge. I removed my coat, took a chew of his tobacco, and tilted back my chair. He had become so friendly that all my suspicion melted into a sensation of being at home. I knew the accent he spoke, could foretell his very phrases, make the responses, — and the old stirring of the pines and the chirp of frogs set me aching for I know not what.

I told Agard why I was going to Bell's.

"Well, I expect you better start your treatment on me," he laughed. "I've been feelin' mighty no-account lately. Can't hardly keep up to my work a-tall."

I assured him that he hadn't the "hookworm look" about the eyes, but in my mind I was not so certain. I promised to leave him a test treatment if he so desired.

I was naturally curious about this man's medical education and practice. His being druggist and so-called "Doctor" in one would not pass as the conventional thing in some places. It savored just a trifle of the quack. I wished to establish his ethical background.

I got a very candid story. He had started out as prescription clerk, he said; then druggist. He had been importuned again and again to recommend remedies, had seen a local need, and had "read medicine." He had attended brief sessions at Louisville, Kentucky. Though lacking a degree, he had passed the State licensing board's examination and was freely entitled to practise.

He was not, however, a member of any regular medical association, so far as I could infer.

I persuaded myself that he was doing more good than harm, though as a rule I am opposed to all forms of empiricism in my profession.

We had sat for a half-hour or so, when he apologized that he had been losing a good deal of sleep and would have to "look around a little" and go to bed.

Just as I was rising to follow the hint, a gun went off somewhere in the woods. In the moment of silence that followed its echo there came to our ears a duller cadence, along the road from the west, — the monotonous plodding of heavy feet. Agard listened to this, and as it continued he hobbled in and came back with a lamp in his hand. Two men presently arrived in the lighted circle. Negroes again; one black as the ace of spades, the other yellow. Their faces were shining with sweat. They carried a tossing form between them on some sort of stretcher which they laid flat on the ground, grunting as they did so; then looked up toward the porch.

"Who's that?" Agard demanded.

"Bob Tolliver an' Morgan Luckett," the black one answered.

"You're Bob?"

"Yas, suh."

"Where you from?"

"Down Craney Bayou."

"Got your wife there?"

"No, suh, my sister, Pearline — Morgan's wife." Morgan seemed to shoulder some part of a man's responsibility at this. They stood looking up with foolish expectancy.

"When was she taken?"

"'Bout sundown."

The nature of the case needed little explaining.

The doctor seemed to wrestle with some loathsome incubus. "Well," he concluded, smiling feebly at me, "I reckon you might as well take her to the back."

They lifted their burden again, and Morgan started up the front steps without more ado.

"Hold on, there," Agard abruptly asserted himself. "Go around to that side gate. There's no way for you through here."

The mulatto backed away, muttering, whereupon Agard checked him peremptorily. It is a knack requiring practice and a clear-cut point of view.

"Mope along dar, Morgan, an' shet yo' damn' mouf," his brother-in-law mumbled urgently as they shuffled away.

"Sarah!" Agard called. "Side gate! Number four fixed?"

The reply seemed to be in the affirmative.

He turned to me complaining. "Woman drug in here from a saw-mill for me to look after. Seems like I never *can* get any rest. You go on and turn in, — you'll find your room ready."

But I did not rush off to bed. Instead, I explained the propriety of my going to the "back" with him.

"No, no!" he protested, wretchedly.

* * *

It was as I had surmised: a "hospital," the most unprofessional thing of its kind I have ever beheld; a squatting-place for misery. A playhouse dispensary and operating room; two sheds in lieu of wards, with two-tiered board bunks along each wall. An imbecile black hag in one room, whimpering for cocaine; in the other, a care-free son of Ham who, from some incentive, had reached a hand under a logging locomotive. Dearth of linen; the cases lay on unsheeted oilcloth; dismal kerosene lamps, and remnants of greasy victuals on tin plates.

Pearline was brought in. She was made as easy as possible in the bunk referred to as "Number Four," which Sarah had by some process made "ready." The case was well advanced but not yet urgent. Agard sent the two men on their way and set the elegant Sarah to watch and doze while nature took its course. His one expressed notion as we walked to the dwelling house was that he might yet "get a little sleep."

But by this time curiosity had got the upper hand of me. Agard's "ethical background" was becoming far more complicated than I had supposed. I was to leave early in the morning. He and I talked and tramped around in my room for some time, at the point of saying good night, and at last sat down on opposite sides of the bed.

"Well, you see," he admitted in a manner of desperation, "things sort-of *drove* me to it, — *everything*, seems like. You

know, it can get powerful quiet here in the brush. Sometimes for an hour you might hear a pin drop. An' I'd set an' think, — just as free as if I was ridin' up yonder on one o' them hot-weather clouds. It's hard to explain. . . ."

"Those mental processes can't be explained," I agreed, diagnosing a solitude-complex.

"No — you understand? Well, an' these niggers, now, — you can't let 'em think they're as good as you are, or first thing you know they're *better* than you are, by George."

"Quite right," I observed; "in some localities I could mention they won't give a white woman a seat in a street-car."

"Certainly they won't," he went on. "But, in his place, I've got no grudge against a nigger, — on his side of the counter and in his end of the house. When they used to come to me with the asthma or water-brash, I would always ask 'em about their symptoms an' their kids an' their crops whilst I was takin' their money. Fact is," — he bowed his cheeks to his fists in thought, — "I kind o' *like* a decent nigger. It was bred in me, I reckon."

There are limits set in the South to a "liking" for Negroes, — somewhat dangerous and very proper limits. This man recognized them; evidently acted within them. His case was very strange.

"Why let that bother you?" I humored him, "I like 'em myself, — any man does, that really knows 'em."

"Any man that had the dry-nurse I did," he mused, "a stout, half-grown Kafir-blooded nigger boy! — Well, about the drug business, I don't know hardly how it started, but it seemed to be the talk amongst the darkies that I would give 'em a *square deal*, — that I would go to some pains to mix 'em the right medicine, and all that."

"You mean, they took you for their *only* friend?" I countered this assumption of virtue.

"Well," he confessed, "I don't know just what to say when you put it that-a-way. There are some as fine old families in these parts as you will ever meet; but there have been a lot o' mighty wild boys that grew up over Dalby way. — God knows I believe in chivalry, an' the supremacy of the white race, Stranger; but —" He turned and faced me, suddenly on his guard.

" — But you don't believe in leaving the proof of it entirely to

the hoodlum element," I conceded. "Any thoughtful white man will agree with you there, so go ahead."

He went ahead somewhat more directly: "Well, I *will* say that things have occurred in this very county that can never be justified under any law of God or gentlemen, and our citizens just let it drift along, drift along. That's what's the matter with our nigger population to-day. Sullen? Disrespectful? Yes; even the good ones feel like they've got no show, no matter how well they behave. Doctor, we're losing our grip on 'em *morally*. It's a big, tangled-up question, I'll tell you. . . . Of course, I went along treatin' 'em about the same as usual, you understand; but more and more they got to lookin' to me as, — well, you might say, a friend. I had to read medicine; I *bad* to do the best for 'em I could."

I rather disliked his drift. "But," I broke in, "do you mean to say that the doctors —"

He caught the implication instantly. "Oh, far be it from me," he hurried, "to say anything against the regular medical profession. It's the highest calling on God's earth. I'm just a quack, but I'd give ten years of my life for a proper training. I don't say for a minute that these doctors around here wouldn't treat a black case as straight as they would a white one. But I *do* know that the niggers have got so they are doubtful and suspicious of everything a white man does, — think that the only interest he has in 'em is what little money he can get out of 'em."

"Not *my* kind of white man," I objected.

"Nor mine, either. Well, they got to comin' my way, — afoot, a-horse-back, an' on stretchers, — mostly at night. You wouldn't believe it; fifty miles around." A groan escaped him. "The sights I have seen, the tales I have heard! My friend, I *bad* to build those measly sheds out there."

"You will have your Reward."

"I hope to obtain Mercy. Anyhow, this nigger business has nearly got the best of me, — strength, property, self-respect, and all. I feel like an outcast, — not a soul left to stand by and help me but — a black wench."

I rose to the challenge. "Give me your hand, Doctor Agard," I said. "You are my kind of man — my *father's* kind. Your allies are the right-thinking classes here and everywhere, and they will

stand up for you, too, whenever they understand about you. As long as I am in this county, people are going to hear you well spoken of; and if I lived here, I would go *partners* with you, provided you would take me on. Just write me down as one *friend*."

His hard eyes melted as he silently returned my grasp, there across the counterpane.

* * *

A sound of decrepit wheels in sand.

"Doctor! O Doctor!" The call came stifled out of the dark, — searching, vehement — a monstrous whisper.

Agard and I rose and looked at each other.

"That means —"

"Trouble," I nodded.

"Nigger trouble." He seized my lamp and hopped out into the road. I followed. The same crazy buckboard that I had seen that afternoon was in front of the house, the same ancient driver, apparently the same roll of bagging.

"Why, it's Uncle Gabe — Gabe Peak," was Agard's puzzled remark. "What's the matter, Gabe?"

"Doctor, my boy got shot."

"*John* shot? My God *Almighty*!" The doctor spoke as though patience with Negro vagaries had limits. "I heard a gun, but never thought about John."

We looked over the back wheel. Unmistakably it was John, or what remained of him. A glance revealed an extravasated chest wound. He was in a daze, and, with thick gore bubbling from his lips, I thought he mumbled some reassurance to me about my buggy.

"Drive around to the side gate," said Agard.

The flimsy establishment got into action quickly. A stout stretcher was brought, and John was immediately conveyed into the rear shed and laid on a table of planks. There was rapid raking through an old sawmill surgeon's kit, opening of a can of chloroform from the store, fetching of gauze and absorbent cotton.

Gabe was terrorized and talkative. At a certain point of his babble, Agard closed up his kit and spoke: "Sarah, telephone for .

Braden the first thing you do. . . . Doctor," he asked quietly, "can you bear a hand with this case?"

I am a physician, and I answered as such.

"Well," he announced, "we'd better be on the move now. Gabe, you shut up, and take all you can carry — here, take this bag. Wait, Sarah, — standin' there with those damned ear-rings on you! — you help get this man back on the stretcher. . . . Now, — I left here at six o'clock on the Dalby road, but you don't know where I was bound for, *do* you? — until the deputy sheriff gets here."

"Doctor, I don't even know whichaway you went, so help me Gawd!" Sarah added the artistic touch.

"All right; you telephone, and then stay here with your patients. Don't try to bar any doors. — Where's that Steve?"

The individual in question, sleek and hearty save for the amputation of a hand, stepped in promptly from behind the door.

"Havin' a fine time around here, ain't you?" Agard greeted him. "Now you take that buckboard and get it away from here as fast as you can, towards Dalby. Get it clear off of the road as soon as you can, and don't worry about coming back right away. Understand?"

Steve apparently caught the meaning. Agard turned to me: "Doctor, shall we be going?"

He took the front of the stretcher, and I the rear. Followed closely by old Gabe, we stumbled along through the dark over pathless ground.

I was reasonably certain that a dead white man and a half-dead Negro were involved in this scrape. Gabe would not even admit that John had stolen the corn. But it stands to reason that he had. He had a mule.

Evidently an altercation had occurred down at the Peak cabin. The white farmer's shotgun and John's five-inch dirk had come into play in some sequence, — simultaneously, perhaps, and not in the order of the nightmare that Gabe related.

Gabe did not believe that the incident was closed. He was in extremities of fright.

I wanted to hurry but could not see my steps. I heard the buckboard rattling away. We entered the live-oak marsh; three times I was splashing blindly through the "branch." We forced our

way through tall bear-grass, willows, and sassafras sprouts. The load of the burly Negro was like iron fetters.

At last a black obstruction loomed before us. This turned out to be another of the doctor's shanties, — the "spring-house," he called it. He braced himself and threw back a rusty lock; we passed in and laid our stertorous burden on a dank wooden floor. He then transferred Gabe's load to the inside.

"Now, you clear out of here," he ordered the old ducky. "Go up the branch; go *away* up. Keep goin' till you get to Millard's pasture. Then look out for yourself."

Gabe had done the best he knew for his wayward son. He now embraced the occasion to eliminate himself.

Agard struck a match and coaxed an oil wick into flame. He took off his everlasting cuffs and used my handkerchief to polish the lamp-chimney. I looked about me.

This never had been a "spring-house." There was a broad, rough shelf along one wall, where the surgeon's kit now lay. In the middle of the floor stood a table of pine boards and trestles. There was a window, at the end of the room, closed with a sliding shutter instead of a sash. Below this stood a camp cot. Narrow strips of mosquito screening were tacked here and there over obvious cracks. The lamp hung on a low wooden bracket at one corner of the table.

John was barely conscious. We carefully laid him on the boards and ripped away the rags of his calico shirt.

"Will you operate, Doctor?" Agard ceremoniously invited me.

Operate! — There in the dark.

"No, Doctor, the patient is yours," I replied with due formality. "I shall, of course, be pleased to assist you as required."

I saturated a wad of gauze with chloroform and applied it. The instruments, such as they were, were laid out in order, and I stood by. An intravenous injection was prepared in case of need, — a large veterinary syringe which Agard filled accurately before starting to work.

The traumatism of the case may be passed over. It was inordinately gross; the pericardium itself was exposed and doubly punctured.

Agard, however, was not fazed for an instant. He methodically sutured the still oozing pectoral veins, cleared away bone frag-

ments and pulmonary tissue, and went ahead extracting BB shot as daintily as if he expected a pink-tea convalescence. I merely changed sponges — sponges — as fast as I could roll them, and I made an absorbent dressing as big as a hat. The heat, odor, and gas soon became very bad, since the doctor objected to the door being opened, — on account of the army of insects, if nothing else.

What was the use of it all? I speculated. Mere make-believe; the slayer's life was triply forfeit. Yet Agard worked on, ant-like, always searching out the obstruction. He was grotesquely impeded: he had no tools, no light, no technique, — nothing but intuition; but he exposed the left lateral aspect of the heart and went about reproducing Laurent's operation like the born surgeon he was.

The hunt was up. First we heard a shot; then two; then a tremendous hullabaloo from up above, knocking about, cur dogs barking, and the shrieking of Negroes.

I looked at Agard and dropped a probe. He never paused.

"I can't be in two places at once," he said. "— Glad I can't just now." He faced me. "Would *you* like to beat up to Millard's pasture, Doctor? I can easily turn down the lamp for you."

"I'll do with this for a while yet," I answered. The sweat began to trickle off the point of my chin in a little stream. Agard seemed dry and cool, — a man sapped of all moisture.

The racket at the quarters in time wore away to silence; Sarah had evidently kept her trust. I peeped out to see if the premises were on fire.

"I'd keep that door *shut*, if I were you," Agard harshly whispered.

But it must have been a hunting instinct, and not my indiscretion, that was responsible for what followed. The cry was full on us almost before we knew it had started. All the jungle that had seemed to me so vast was covered in one rush. We had just shot home the prepared injection when the door burst open before a booted heel.

"Ah — ! I knew damned well we'd find 'em together!" the leader exulted.

In the lamp's yellow light he stood instantaneously revealed to my eye, for what he was — a young nobleman. Though frightened

out of my wits, I loved him unawares. I claimed him as of my own people. He was a six-footer, about thirty, trim-belted. He covered us steadily with a blue steel automatic. His face was fresh and full; his very teeth were handsome; his voice, though keen with revilings, had a quality that no mongrel ever yet registered.

He was a young lion lashing himself into a proper frenzy.

Behind him trampled a small but adequate mob. I saw a rope, pistols, faces, — some stern and resolute, others relaxing already into enjoyment.

"Jim Agard will doctor up the black dog!" shouted the leader. "But never mind, Doc, *we'll* treat his ailment now, you misbegotten nigger-hugger!" The supporting party cursed emphatic approval.

"Are you sure there's enough of you to take him away from me?" Agard asked, pitifully sarcastic.

"Don't you get smart!" was the unanswerable threat. "I could take him away from *you* with one hand, you little old fool!"

"Yes, I know you could, Lieutenant, if you wanted to paw around with raw meat. This nigger has been shot to death in the first place, — let him alone. I've called for the deputy sheriff; can't you let the Law have a whack at him, either?"

"To hell with the lawyers! Agard, do you know what that black fiend's done?" the younger man almost wept. "He cut Rafe Bascom's heart out, — *Rafe Bascom!* — the straightest white man God ever made . . . left his poor wife a widow and his girl an orphan, — the black, dirty hound! But *you* don't care for that, — *you* don't even care who your own mother was. All *you* want to do is to harbor dirty niggers and consort with your little painted nigger wench! Bring that rope, men. I'm go'n-to shoot this misbegotten white dog now, and *break up* some of this dirty business around here."

The wretch, Agard, surely thought his last moment had arrived. His voice was a mere husk. "Go ahead and shoot." He grimaced. He turned his limp hands to them, palm outward, his arms blood-stained to the elbow. "If my life has brought me no better esteem than that, — if you believe I misconduct myself with the only woman I can hire for a nurse, — if I am a *dog* for

practising medicine, — why, *go ahead and shoot*. B-But you might have a little mercy, Baldwin."

The deadly finger seemed to hesitate on the trigger for an instant. Tense silence had fallen, broken now by the criminal's groans and quiverings on the table.

"Watch that nigger, — he's tryin' to get up!" an excited voice called.

My tongue, which had dried and cleaved to the roof of my mouth, loosed itself at Agard's last utterance of the name, Baldwin.

"Don't kill that man, *Clifford!*" I shouted, hysterically. "In God's name, don't disgrace your family by shooting down defenseless invalids!"

All eyes centered on me. Clifford's face, the reckless face of my own cousin, unseen and almost forgotten in fifteen years, stared at me blankly for a second.

"George!" he burst out. "Of all people! What in hell are *you* doin' here with this low-down nigger-kisser? — Of course I wasn't goin' to shoot him, — just scare him a little. But you've got no business here takin' up for him!"

"I've got a doctor's right to treat a case," I said, my whole body shaking, "and you and your crowd have got no right to dog this poor fellow like hell-hounds till he's afraid to call his soul his own. How could a Baldwin ever do that?"

"Because he takes up with niggers and has nothing to do with decent white people."

"Because you've driven him to it," I protested. "He's told me all about it. And he's clean as a hound's tooth, too. Clifford, I swear to you, this man's doing your dirty work, all by himself, — doing the best he knows to smooth out this nigger trouble, like a good white man, — because he's got a heart and got nerve. And none of you ever reach him a helping hand."

Agard was hanging on my words like a culprit on his attorney's.

"Then what's he doing hiding out this Negro murderer?" demanded my cousin, his voice rising to renewed wrath.

I told him that Agard had no intention of letting any murderer get away; that he only wanted to save his own neck if he could; that the Negro had no chance, in any event. "Look over there, gentlemen, if you want to see a man die," I addressed the others.

It was a gruesome, almost unreal spectacle, not to be dwelt upon. It had a revealing effect upon the beholders. There was a mixture, a beginning reversal, of emotion, — a new kind of interest in the concerns and doings of the quack doctor. John did not expire quietly. He was a magnificent brute, of untold powers of resistance. But he never could have survived; of that I am certain.

"My God," Agard suddenly exclaimed, and toppled over.

A weakness came over me also; but I did not find it necessary to divulge the unprofessional ruse involved in the manner of John's taking off. I am accountable to no man for knowledge of the kind and quantity of solution that Agard had put into the syringe for the worst emergency.

* * *

"Well, men, let's adjourn and go home," said Clifford several minutes later. "It looks like this raid was a mistake, and I apologize all round. Doctor Agard, here's sixty-eight dollars and some change. I don't think the boys will bother you much in your work after this. Here's my hand on it, — never mind the blood."

More affirmations were received, hands shaken, and the crowd at last was gone, — all but my cousin. We three tarried a short while in the shanty and then walked up the rise together.

Agard and I went into the "hospital." It was less of a wreck than I had anticipated, though there was some breakage. Sarah was still there, cowed, with the two other women and her green glass pendants. She announced her intention of leaving at once, but I helped to dissuade her with reassurances and a present of money.

"Well, you see what's happened to *this* night's rest," Agard tried to joke gaily as he set to work again, this time with the woman in the throes of childbirth. His ordeal had made him look sallow, older, more utterly insignificant. There was still a mystery about the man. He was expiating some doom that I had not penetrated.

It was a sombre reunion for my cousin and me, but the late night air was refreshing as we walked down the fork between the pines, through cool sand and dewy tufts of bitterweed.

"Cliff," I asked at last, "how did you fellows ever get so *down* on Agard?"

"Oh, his immorality, I reckon," my kinsman replied, moodily.

"Humbug. I tell you, he's not immoral."

"Well, — oh, you know, — the nigger business just attracted attention."

"He let his zeal outrun his discretion?" I suggested.

"Yes," Clifford declared testily, "just like every fool Yankee will, with niggers."

"Yankee?" I gasped. "Why, I took him for one of our own people, born and bred."

"Well, yes, he *was* born and raised right there at the forks. It seems a little funny. His mother came of one of the very finest families around here — the Millards. But his *father* was straight-out Yankee. The old man came down here from Illinois after the Civil War, — Springfield, Illinois, I think they say."

"Oh, indeed?" I murmured. "Good God, *you don't say so!*"

So, the mystery about Agard evaporated. At last I had located his Ethical Background. It was not my background, in any vital sense, — I should have had wit enough to know that. His was rather palpably connected with the lowly Abraham Lincoln's Background. . . . Of course, we are all free to choose our lives, to a certain extent; but, on the other hand, there always remains the question of why we choose it.



THE NEGRO MIGRATIONS—A DEBATE

WHAT are the causes, and what are likely to be the immediate and ultimate effects of the exodus of Negroes from their southern homelands to the cities and factories of the North? Are the causes that impel the Negro northward purely economic, as Judge Fortson maintains? Or, as Mr. Pickens believes, do the economic factors merely furnish the opportunity to the Negro to realize his natural desire for freer and fuller life? Both debaters are agreed that the immediate effects of the migration are beneficial to all concerned, but they differ widely as to the nature of these benefits. And when they pass to a consideration of the ultimate effects of this population movement, though they both agree that it will tend to solve the existing racial problem, they differ startlingly as to the manner of its solution. Will the Negro migrate to racial extinction? Or will he disappear as a race only by the gradual diffusion of his blood throughout the entire population of the Nation?

NORTHWARD TO EXTINCTION

BLANTON FORTSON

IN the past few years numbers of Negroes have left the Southern States and settled in the North. The number has been variously estimated at from two hundred thousand to upwards of half a million. From Georgia alone, it appears, nearly a hundred thousand have gone since January first of the present year.

A movement of peoples on so large a scale has naturally aroused widespread interest and speculation as to its causes and effects. All investigators now seem agreed that it is caused primarily by the restriction of European immigration and the consequent shortage of unskilled labor in the North. Of course there are other contributing factors, but that is held to be the chief cause. As to what will be the results, there is no such unanimity of opinion.

There can be no doubt that the presence in the South of the Negro race in such vast numbers has constituted a most vital and difficult problem. This has been true from the time they were brought captive to its plantations; and each passing decade since