

Foreword

Moonlight, roses, and the song of mocking birds, the scent of magnolias in full bloom, the laughter of youth, the crooning of happy Negroes on fabulous plantations have come to be the traditional setting for stories of the Old South. But writers about the new South often feature poverty, disease, degradation and death. The pendulum has swung and we pay in sordid detail for that earlier and more than a little fictitious glamor.

However neither is more than a thumb-nail sketch. True pictures would present the same range of scenes, events and emotions common everywhere to the great adventure of living. But even so, it is obvious that between the Old South and the new a bridge has been built -- and ~~crossed~~.

Those who were just beginning adult life at the close of the war between the states were the builders of that bridge. Members of the generation before them helped, or hindered, according to their several abilities to grasp the meaning of changes wrought by the war. Helped, or hindered, and were gathered to their fathers, leaving the bridge only partially built.

The younger brothers and sisters helped. Helped and benefitted. Passing from the old to the new in the inconsequential way of youth. We, their children, helped by our very helplessness. They built that they might carry us to safety in their arms. That is the answer in general. To me, the answer cannot be general because it is specific. My parents built ~~that~~ that bridge.

They built it away from the desolation which had been the land of moonlight, mocking birds and ~~magnolias~~, but had become a land of poverty and sorrow. Away from that to this new land where the song of the mocking bird is often drowned by the sound of the steel riveter as we develop our industrialized New South. Away from that land where the primitive luxuries of a pioneering plantation-owner class often contrasted blackly against the lives of their slaves; To this, our new South, where the lives of mill owners, lumber kings, oil magnates and merchant princes still present contrasts to the lives of those who labor for them.

To me my mother is the heroine of that bridge building time. Just 20 at the close of the war; newly married; quickened by shocks and sorrows, I present her to you as typical of the women of the era when the bridge was built. In order that you may really know her, I must introduce you also to her family and friends. And take ~~you~~ at times into their homes. And I must tell you about her children to whom she so fervently devoted her long life.

With no intention to belittle my father, I am only sketching him in. This is rather a pity because he was by way of being a great character himself. Humorous, charming, popular, determined, clever and rather dashing, he played a good part in the bridge building. But his was a political part mostly, while that of my mother was economic, and the pride and glory of the new South is its economic progress.

As you meet my mother, let her interpret to you the life of the generation of Americans who spanned the gorge between the thought and customs of the conservative agricultural economy of the 1850s and the tumultuous, rushing, industrialized, mechanized, revolutionized world of today.

From Alabama to Texas

Macon county,

Sallie Comer Abercrombie was born in/Alabama in 1845.

She died in Galveston, Texas in 1930. Her life and times lacked only fifteen years of ~~being in the~~ ^{greatest} covering the ~~most important~~ century of/ change and development the world has yet seen. She had a keen mind. She was an omniverous reader. She was gifted with that divine curiosity which made her want to see and try all the new things the century provided in such a flood tide. If she had been beginning life in 1930, instead of leaving it, that curiosity would have made her a research scientist because she had a mind open to all truth.

The father of Sallie Abercrombie was John C. Abercrombie, a cotton planter. Dr. J. Marion Sims, with whom Irving Cobb's ancestor "rode out" from South Carolina, says in his autobiography that he settled "near Cubahatchee Creek" because of an "offer so favorable that I, of course, accepted it." and was "introduced into a ~~very~~ very large practise in the Abercrombie neighborhood. The Abercrombie's were all rich and influential I was exceedingly happy in my new position." He names three brothers John, Milo and Charles. In time all these good cotton planting brothers came to Texas seeking new land upon which to ~~pharmant~~ follow their soil-destroying system. Science had not then convicted the soils-sinner of his crime and these three brothers were known as fine farmers. Good men they certainly were, well loved by all who knew them in spite of explosive temperaments and inflamatory vocabularies. Sallie Abercrombie adored her father and counted him her best friend. ~~mm~~ Stories of his goodness were forever on her tongue.

The mother of Sallie began life as Jane Minerva Sims. She was the sister of Dr. Sims. He speaks of her in his book as being ^{twelve} 12 years old when he, at his father's request took her ~~mm~~ to

Philadelphia in 1836 and entered her in a girls school there. He speaks of her again later as living with him and his wife in Alabama. She and her sister, two years younger, were the only girls in the Sims family and their mother was dead. That was the reason they were sent away from home to a boarding school so young. That presumably was the reason why they came to Alabama as young ladies, instead of going back to Lancaster, South Carolina, where they had lived. Later in his book Dr. Sims speaks of his father living "with my sister, Mrs. John C. Abercrombie, in New Waverly, Texas". But he never mentioned ~~MINNIE~~ the fact that Minerva Sims had eloped from his house to marry John Abercrombie. ^{Eloped because} ~~at a time when~~ he had bought the license to marry her off to ~~one of~~ his best friends ^{who} who was desperately in love with her. That story came down to us by word of mouth, along with the tradition that Minerva was a great ~~beauty~~ beauty and ~~an~~ ^{an} ~~great~~ belle. Many a romantic tale came down the years about Minerva.

Two children were born to the good cotton planter and his beautiful young wife on the Alabama ~~cotton~~ plantation. The first was a boy, Leonard Burford Abercrombie. The second was Sallie. And then a third who did not survive. So many babies did not in those days. You get a glimpse of the awful mortality from Dr. Sims' book, The Story of My Life, written toward the close of an eventful career which took him not only to New York City and the establishment of The Woman's Hospital there, but to ~~Europe~~ Europe as consulting physician to the royalties of that era. You get a glimpse too of the terrible scourge that malaria was to the river bottom farm families, and of the ignorance of the times in the cause and treatment of the disease.

Speaking of the summer of 1840 in Lowndes county, Ala., he says "every cabin we passed had sick people in it. Everybody

looked malarially poisoned. I went by no house where there was not one or more beds stretched out before the door, with servants fanning some member of the family down sick with malarial or intermittent fever". And again " ..my poor wife had a chill, and I don't think she saw a well day for six months. In the course of twelve months from the date of my first congestive chill, I had seventeen different attacks. ..We were completely malarialized and demoralized." " But strangely enough my two sisters escaped."

Well, I do not wish to discount the stories of the beauty and charm of Minerva Sims, who after all was my sainted grandmother, but I cannot help thinking it must have been a fairly easy job to shine in a world where you were ^{one of only two} ~~the many~~ persons not yellow with malaria and chattering with chills. On the other hand the ~~hm~~ magnificent constitution which continued to resist ~~hm~~ what Dr. Sims called the " malarial poisoning coming from the decomposition of vegetable matter in alluvial soils" such as "we find in new countries", naturally endowed Minerva with the beauty of good health which in itself is charming.

But why examine critically the ^{cause of} beauty so well attested by husband, children and old friends? Beautiful she must have been. And when I digressed malarially, she was the mother of a boy aged seven and a girl aged five. ~~And~~ That was in 1850, the year the John C. Abercrombies moved to Texas. And that, I think, was the year from which Sallie Comer Abercrombie dated many things, even if she was only five years old. I was her seventh child, but the most vivid memories of my own life are the stories she told me of her ~~own~~ childhood. And the first of the series is to me the removal from Alabama to Texas.

The first step of course was the decision to move.
~~and~~ little enough came down to us about that. But I have my own ideas. It wasn't malaria. Now was it, really, eroded cotton fields, though grandfather Abercrombie disposed of his share of the Abercrombie plantations a year before he actually settled in Texas. That year grandmother, Leonard and Sallie spent in a rented house in Montgomery having ~~agay~~ social time while grandfather rode out to Texas on horseback to "prospect for land" as they called it. Fundamentally the move was related to greatgrandmother's cap strings, which were said to fly out behind her when things went wrong. She lived with Mr. and Mrs. John Abercrombie or they lived with her, I was never quite sure which.

about 60 miles north
of Houston,

When the Texas land was located in Walker county, near some relatives named Wood and some ~~other Alabama~~ other Alabama families, Mrs. Abercrombie and the two children came out to Texas by boat from Mobile to Galveston. Sallie remembered, or thought she did, two things about the packing. One was bringing her little books and handing them one at a time to her mother to pack in the box with the other books. Even then books were a necessity of her life, ~~Also even then~~ she had absorbed from the ~~elders~~ elders the idea that frontier-Texas might be short on just that kind of thing. The other memory also had to do with an anticipated shortage. Fruit was plentiful. Strawberries grew wild. Apple orchards in Alabama put on glad pink dresses to welcome spring, but would they do that in Texas? And what about raspberries? None of course. So Sallie smeared red ripe berries on sheets of paper and dried them in order to carry seeds to Texas. But I think they did not grow, because we still did not have raspberries when I came along. And Sallie was still lamenting the ~~fact~~ ^{fact}. Nothing in life ever disappointed me so much as a raspberry did when I finally met one. Seedy I thought them. Nothing like so good as the Texas wild dewberries I had such fun picking

and eating every ~~thing~~ spring. Even a good thing can be over advertised, I suppose.

The journey from Mobile to ~~Alabama~~ to Texas was in itself an adventure. By 1850 ~~from~~ the pirates had gone from the Gulf. But the people of Mobile and New Orleans had not yet forgotten that when the governor of Louisiana offered five hundred dollars ^{for} Jean La Fitte's head he, from his base ~~in~~ on the Island of Grand Terre, ^{fifteen} countered by offering ~~thirteen~~ thousand for the head of the governor. ^{because of} Par-doned ~~from~~ his loyalty and services in defense of New Orleans under Andrew Jackson, La Fitte removed to Galveston Island and continued to ply his trade (or was piracy a profession in those days ?). At any rate the net result was to extend the terror of his bands to that part of the Gulf and even, later on, up through east Texas.

But pirates constituted no peril to Mrs. Abercrombie and her children ~~in~~ in 1850. Storms, however, did. And the last night of the voyage the little ship which was carrying them to their new home climbed the waves and slid down into the following troughs until nearly every one on board was desperately sea sick or scared to death. Finally, mid morning of their last day on ship board, the boat went aground on ^(in Galveston harbor) a sand bar with a jolt which lost nothing in the telling fifty years ~~later~~ later. A little story always went along with the incident which made it very real: one cabin on the ship was occupied by a lady who had been so ill all the way that all of her meals had been served to her in the ~~one~~ cabin. During the storm every one was either so busy or so sick themselves that no one carried her any breakfast. When the ship went aground the jolt burst open the store room and food was scattered up and down the decks. It also burst open the door of the sick lady's cabin and a bag of loaf sugar rolled in spilling over the floor. Said the sick lady with admirable nonchalance and some sarcasm " Good morning breakfast ! Come at last !"

In those days Galveston harbor was just a good natural harbor. Steam dredges and jetties had not then improved its native advantages, and the wash of the tide built up a sand bar which had a bad habit of changing base under duress of storms so that unwary boats sometimes stuck on it before the new location was charted. The story goes that the very boat which brought Sallie to Texas stuck on the bar on its next trip also, this time without a happy ending. It was beaten to pieces by wind and wave and tide. This always made me feel that Sallie had a near thing of it, and that because of her peril I too had been in danger. What if she had embarked for Texas just one sailing date later?[?] It was a nice question.

From Galveston to Houston on another boat up Buffalo Bayou went Mrs. Abercrombie and her children to meet her husband. He had ridden overland again on horseback, this time escorting a wagon train of his goods and slaves. Houston in 1850 already showed the indomitable spirit which today makes it - fifty miles inland - the greatest cotton port in the world. It also exhibited the same indomitable still mud which ~~interminable~~ makes paving a must for every street and side walk and road. Early letters and books tell that ^{those who} ~~anyone~~ venturing ^{ad} ~~ing~~ ^{in wet weather} to walk in the Houston of those days carried ~~a~~ short sticks and at intervals pushed the mud off their feet in order to be able to lift them. Even then it was a market town. Even then it had plans to become a railroad and shipping center. At first, of course, it was the capitol city ~~x~~ of the Republic of Texas. But ^{the year} ~~when~~ Sam Houston was succeeded by Lamar as president, the Congress appointed a committee to select a new site. Austin, in the central part of the state was decided on and the government moved there. The town of Houston, apparently, never broke its stride because of this loss, and when the Abercrombies arrived ten years later it was well on its way to controlling the commerce of east Texas.

As bad luck would have it cholera broke out in the Abercrombie wagon train just as it reached Houston. So Mrs. Abercrombie found her husband encamped with his sick on the outskirts of the town, where she settled down competently to supervise the nursing and keep her family well. The ^{Wood} cousins ~~Wood~~ came in carriages to urge her to come and bring the children and stay with them, away from danger of the sickness. When word of this invitation was noised about the camp the slaves in a panic rushed to her tent and falling upon their knees plead with her not to go. "Don' go leave us, Miss Minerva," they cried. "Don' you go leave us here to die!"

Such pleading was wholly unnecessary. Minerva Sims Abercrombie had not lived with a doctor brother in a malaria infested country without learning most of what there was to know about plain medicine and nursing. In this new land of Texas, ~~where~~ ~~ms~~ ~~where~~ ~~doctors~~ ~~were~~ ~~few~~ ~~and~~ ~~far~~ ~~apart~~, she was to become something of an authority on what they called "plantation practise." So she and the children lived in the tents and she trained nurses to take care of the sick. Cool weather brought relief and the whole party moved on to get the new home in shape for the first winter.

It is a funny thing but Sallie seemed not to have picked up a single memory about building the log houses for the family and the servants. It might all have been accomplished by waving a wand, for all it affected her. One family story and ~~mm~~ only one came down to us about the building from anybody. It runs like this: The Negro carpenter in charge of the building was

directly responsible only to Mr. Abercrombie. One day he came with a worried look and this perplexity.

" Marse John, I got a log over here I don' know what to do with."

" Whats the matter with it?" grandfather asked.

" Its too long. If it was too short I could splice it . But its too long."

Well. That was 1850. A long time ago. But there wasn't another story I thought of any oftener during the 1920s while the "sur-plus" of food and fiber piled up and the bread lines of hungry, ragged people lengthened. The carpenter's over-long log came to be symbolic to me of our timid approach to abundance.

With his people under shelter for the winter grandfather turned to his next job which was clearing crop land. ~~MMMM~~ Cutting and burning brush; cutting trees and splitting fence rails; digging and burning stumps went on furiously all that ~~the~~ first winter. And grandfather was out supervising it from dawn to dark. Not later than January plowing began and as weather permitted went on ceaselessly until the ^{Alabama} seed for the first Texas ~~mmmm~~ Abercrombie cotton crop was ~~pin~~ in the ground. A famous crop it was too. The " C " in John C. Abercrombie's name was there for his mother's maiden name, Comer. But in Texas his neighbors proclaimed that it stood for cotton, since he went at the cotton producing business in such ~~a~~ determined and successful way.

Grandmother had plenty to do too. Establishment of a new home in a new land meant ^{setting} ~~sitting~~ up and filling a smoke house for one thing. It meant making Candles and Soap. It meant assembling stores to run the plantation the year around. And clothes for everybody for every season That meant a considerable textile

and purpose.

and clothing manufacturing ~~business~~ went on all the time when the Negro women were not needed as hoe hands and cotton pickers in the fields. Grandmothers job was to supervise these activities and train cooks ~~and~~ spinners and weavers ~~and~~ quilters and seamstresses, not just for service in the "big house" but for all the cabins too. Being mistress of a pioneer Texas plantation, I gather, was a combination administrative and personnel job of ~~great~~ ^{great} considerable responsibility and authority. No doubt Sallie trotted at her mother's side through much of this activity and certainly she early learned to ply her needle in "fine sewing", for which we, her children, were the beneficiaries in the hard years after the war between the states.

Sallie's brother "Len", as he came to be called, in the nature of things spent a great deal of time on his pony riding with his father over the plantation. These two were serving the normal apprenticeship of children in the plantation class, though no one ever called it that or anything so formal. Much of it was fun. None of it was ~~considered~~ ^{called} work. But the time that Sallie liked best and talked most about to us was the time after the candles were lighted when she and her mother and brother gathered beside a small round table in front of the fireplace and waited for John Abercrombie to come in after dark from the fields. ~~for supper~~. Mrs. Abercrombie sewed and taught the children to read by having them read aloud. There must have been a sense of leisure and enjoyment that marked those nightly sessions, for the memory of them to have carried over so clearly through two generations. After coming to Texas Mrs. Abercrombie had six other children, but the bond between her and the two who sat beside the table with her every evening in the new home was of a very social kind, I think.

When I tried to find out, in my mothers later years, what they read, the reply was always the same " Everything". And everything it continued to be as long as my mother's eyes would stay open to see. Her constant and precocious reading as a child gave her a vocabulary which she had a childish love of using to the confusion of less well equipped persons. That gave us some funny stories about the teen-aged Sallie. For instance one of her sisters declares that she heard Sallie/^{issue an}order/^{to}the small Negro girl who was her "maid" ~~mom~~ like this:

" Hale, protrude your cranium through the aperture in the wall and vociferate loudly for Sophia!" Which being interpreted by my aunt meant " Hale, stick your^{yell}head out of the window and ~~huhuhuh~~ for Sophy."

Another effect of her absorption in books was a greater interest in the mature romance of literature than the amateur affairs into which her girl friends were entering with enthusiasm. That gave to the young men of the neighborhood the idea that Miss Sallie Abercrombie was disposed to be intellectually snobbish. Which in ~~tunn~~^{at times} gave rise/to battles of wits which have echoed down the years. One Alabama cousin who rode out to visit the Texas kin liked life in the Abercrombie log house so well that he " stayed on" as my mother used to tactfully express it. ~~Shamman~~^{He had} ample excuse for his tarrying because by that time the place had a great verandah shaded by elm trees clear across the front ^{while} and the hospitality of the Abercrombies was manifested by a guesthouse in the yard to house any men who happened to be visiting ~~at any given time~~. A sort of bachelor's hall served especially by a couple of Negro boys.

So the young man's presence was no strain on the Abercrombie patience until he undertook to be facetious at my mother's expense. He had thought it quite comical to find here in the wilderness a young woman of immature years whose nightly candles had to be strictly limited to keep her from sacrificing sleep to reading. Thinking to get a laugh on her before a group of young people he called out to her as she approached,

" Now, Miss Sallie, don't come quoting Shakespeare to us."

" Sir," she replied with great dignity, " I never quote Shakespeare to those who are incapable of understanding him." And the laugh was on the gentleman from Alabama.

He seems not to have relished it either. The story runs that he went to grandmother with his humiliation and said that " Cousin Sallie had called him a fool before all the young ladies and should be made to apologize." Grandmother heard evidence in the case and justly held that the young man, who was quite grown up, had tried to get a laugh on her daughter, much younger than he, and that no apology would be forthcoming for the laugh which had been turned on him. Not so long after that the visitor rode back to Alabama.

Another story we loved was that of a proposal of marriage received by my mother from a proud gallant, several years her senior. After laying his heart at her feet with many a florid compliment, he wound up gloriously with " Spurn me not! / I am a Planteganet." To which my mother demurely replied:

" How e'er it be, it seems to me
'Tis only noble to be good.
Kind hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith, than Norman blood."

These pious sentiments she followed with a definite though gentle refusal to accept the honor of becoming the bride of a Planteganet.

Years afterward, when I was sixteen myself, I met that gentleman, then an old man with a white pointed beard. I must say it was quite a shock to me, first because he actually had had no reality in my mind. Not any more than ^a"once upon a time there lived a prince" story has a reality in the form of a flesh and blood prince you can be introduced to and shake hands with. Second because any ephemeral body the man had was ~~him~~ clothed with perpetual youth and certainly had no pointed white beard. I think now the encounter was a shock to him also. He came up to me and after being introduced asked who was my mother --- "Miss Sallie Abercrombie?" When I said that she and no other was my mother he took my chin in his hand and turned my face to the light, comparing it, I am sure, with his own sweet memory of Sallie at sixteen.

The comparison was to my disadvantage, and he turned away murmuring "Not nearly so beautiful!" The whole business annoyed me very much, first shattering my prince, then the too familiar touch on my face, then the frank disappointment. Goodness knows I knew I was no beauty without his rubbing it in. So I longed to ^{ask} ~~maymum~~ him impudently if he was still a Planteganet? But I lacked my mothers wit and courage as well as her beauty.

School Days in Early Texas

Most of her life Sallie Abercrombie thought she regretted the move her family made from Alabama to Texas. She often spoke of it, mentioning not only the good fruits, but the books and furniture and most of all the schools in which Alabama as an older state excelled Texas. As a child this used to worry me. I liked it where I was and I was afraid that my mother might pack up any day and "go back" to Alabama. But later on I became gradually aware that most of the settlers of Texas had clothed their early homes with glamour. Boyce House tells a story of an old ferryman on the Sabine river in the early Texas days which gave me a laugh. This man was at dinner at a boarding house, where a number of new Texans were telling of the glories and goods they had left behind. Finally he spoke:

"Gentlemen," he said "I used to talk like that. I told so many stories of the wealth I left behind that I finally convinced myself. At last, one day, I found myself headed for the Louisiana border. When I got there I stopped. I asked myself 'What are you doing here? You know you left that country with the sheriff after you and you didn't have a dollar. If you go back now he will still be after you, and you still won't have a dollar'. So, Gentlemen," he said "I turned around and came back, but I don't talk like that anymore for fear I will convince myself again and go back to recover the wealth I never had."

But it is true that schools were a problem, or rather the lack of them was. Texans have been worrying about this business of an education for a long time. A letter dated

" On the Brazos, Texas, November 5, 1830 " from a lady who signs herself Julia/^CRay , tells something of the beginning of the ~~mm~~ ~~mmmmmmmm~~ struggle the settlers were making for an educational system. I will quote a paragraph:

" Of our educational advantages I cannot boast. Mexico has recently passed two laws: one that a school shall be established in each division of ~~mmmm~~ each State; the other that children shall be taught reading, arithmetic, Roman Catholic Religion, and a catechism of all the arts and sciences. These laws amount to nothing. We really have no system of public education. A few excellent private schools exist. As the country becomes more thickly settled these will increase."

Saying " We must come to some understanding with Mexico about our future" the Texans called their first convention in 1832. Education was one of the things about their future that worried them. When by March 2, 1836 they had reached the point of seceding from Mexico and declaring their independence, one George C. Childress, following Thomas Jefferson's style, lined up the charges against Mexico in an eloquent Declaration of Independence which was "adopted at the town of Washington" on the Brazos. ~~mmmmmmmmmmmm~~ Education had a prominent place there and the Texans said why, like this:

" It has failed to establish any/^{public} system of ~~mm~~ education, although possessed of almost boundless resources (the public domain) and, although, it is an axiom, in political science, that unless a people are educated and enlightened it is idle to expect the continuance of civil liberty or the capacity for self-government."

After that these education-hungry Texans were on their own and, if the truth be told, they didn't do so much better themselves for the next ten years. But it is fair enough to say that they tried. President ^{Lamar} and the Congress made a start in 1839 to do as the State Constitution^o ordered - namely set up a public school^d system. The Congress granted each county three leagues of land for school purposes that year and the next, ² 1840, added another league. President Lamar made an eloquent speech in favor of this move which Texans ~~annually quote every time~~ quote every^x time they get into educational trouble. And the^{protestant} churches began that year to take ~~up~~ some responsibility for higher education for ~~many~~ young men as well as primary and secondary education for children.

It was in 1840 at Rutersville, in Fayette county, that the first school of college ranking was opened in Texas. Impetus for the establishment of the college came from Dr. Martin Ruter who came out to Texas in 1837 as a missionary sent by the Methodist Board of Missions in New York. In one of his reports he states that "my labors in Texas will be directed to forming societies and circuits, establishing schools and making arrangements for a college or university." Dr. Ruter died May 16, 1938, but he had directed his labors to such effect that the college and the town in which it was located was named for him in recognition of his services. The Congress granted the college four leagues of land; ~~then~~ a charter was granted; and President Lamar made one of his famous educational pronouncements:

"And so, with greatest promise, the first educational institution of college ambitions is launched in Texas!" The college had a faculty of three, one of whom was a "preceptress", Martha G. Richardson. The Methodist Centennial Yearbook doesn't

say, but my guess is that the "preceptress" was the wife of the president whose name was also Richardson.

Ten years later, in 1850, Texas acquired ten million dollars from the United States in a boundary settlement. One half of the purchase money was kept in the United States treasury to settle the debt owed by the young Republic of Texas before it joined the Union. Two millions of it the Texas Legislature/ ^{under Gov. Pease} voted as a permanent school fund and the long discussed system of public education was, ^{in 1856,} about to get under way.

It was in 1850 that Sallie Abercrombie and her family came to Texas. When she came she could, at five years old, already read. On the plantation her mother continued to teach her. But by the time Sallie was eight her Texas brothers and sisters had begun to arrive and Mrs. Abercrombie did not have as much time to give to teaching Len and Sallie as she had at first. So, about 1854, both of the children were sent to Huntsville to boarding schools. Len went to Austin College, a Presbyterian school for boys and Sallie went to the Andrews Female Academy established by the Methodist church in 1852. These two schools have an honorable history in the State. Austin College, later removed to Sherman, still flourishes as a school for boys. While the Andrew Female ^{Academy} ~~College~~ lost its identity in 1887 when the Sam Houston Normal Institute absorbed its location and the lovely old building.

Sometimes I go on the Campus of the Sam Houston State Teachers College now just to go into that old building and think about my mother, aged ten, so intent on education then as

always. She boarded with a preachers family and must have been very lonely and homesick because she wrote her mother " Alas! the happiest days of my life ~~are~~ now behind me !"

Huntsville, the county seat town, was only 15 miles away by horseback through the deep pine woods. But that did not help much. Nor did the fact that Len was at school in the same town. Both children were in church schools under rigorous discipline and saw each other seldom. But as long as Len stayed Sallie would not go home if she died of homesickness. She had it definitely in mind that she must be prepared to go east to a girls' school in New York by the time Len was ready to go to the University of Virginia as he planned.

~~They must have~~

~~been very unusual little lanky~~ So she stuck it out in Huntsville until the school at Waverly was established.

The community of Waverly was named for ~~the~~
~~on Sir Walter~~ Scott's novels - best sellers of that era. Indeed
Sir Walter was so much the vogue in the South that Stark Young
has one of his characters in So Red the Rose say " And I can
tell you one thing, Sir Walter Scott will be the ruin of the South,
so much/^{so}I'd take my oath ~~on~~ it." ... " I mean this chivalry ob-
session. Sometimes I think it is only male vanity..." This
when the news/^{came}that General Albert Sidney Johnston had died at
the battle of Shiloh because a minie ball severed an artery in
his leg just after he had left his personal physician to attend
a wounded Federal officer. No one /^{with him}knew how to staunch the
blood so he bled to death. But Waverly was named a good ten years
earlier before anyone had questioned the good Scot's ideals.

The Waverly school when it was set up in 1855 had a bit of chivalry in it too. Determined to make it a genuine community effort the men of wealth asked each head of

a family

to contribute what he could and to send his children to the school on exactly the same terms (free) as everyone else. There was a nice story of one man ^{who said} when approached, ~~whom said~~ " If you ask for money, I are out. If you will take corn, I are in." Now, it being a farming community, everyone else had corn too, but just the same the corn was accepted as that man's contribution to the ^{support of the} school and it was translated into money by some of the more well to do citizens.

Labor and material for the building of the school house were accepted too. And when the building was ready and the fund raised, teachers were brought out from older centers of culture. Not just teachers of the the three Rs. No. Texans still had it in mind, as Julia C. Ray said, that they wanted to be taught "a catechism of all the arts and sciences" and so there were teachers of drawing, music, ^{and} dancing, set to work to bring up these young people with the cultural graces commonly called in those days " accomplishments" suitable to their station in life. But instruction in sterner courses was not lacking. This was a real school and in time became so noted that people living in cities like Houston and Galveston sent their children to board in Waverly and attend this school. But it was never in any sense a boarding school. It was a cooperative community enterprise.

It became in fact the community's pride and joy and the center of community life. On Friday afternoons the community flocked to the school house to be entertained and enlightened by the weekly closing exercises. And when it came to the yearly closing that indeed was an affair. Declamation, composition and music were the favorite program numbers for listeners

as well as for performers. The parents enjoyed these affairs enormously and felt great pride in the education of the young folks. But, judging from the reminiscences of Sallie Abercrombie and her friends in their mature years, the students enjoyed them even more. Listening to their talk I realized that many a locally famous spellbinder got his first/^{heady}experience as a declaimer on a Friday afternoon at the school house. And traits of character more discernable in later life made their first public appearance on a Friday afternoon.

There was talk of one Sam Scott who, having mastered his violin to the extent of one simple tune, was put on the program according to the usual custom. Sam marched boldly upon the stage, gave his violin bow a professional flourish and addressed his teacher, at the piano, in a loud voice, saying,

"What tune shall I play, Mr. Fitze?"

Getting the implication that Sam was selecting from an extensive repertoire, Mr. Fitze emitted a rude snort and bitingly asked,

"Does you play but one?"

This incident was good for a laugh from my mother as long as she lived. And she always followed it with the story of a bashful lad who strongly desired to dance with one of the more popular girls but was afraid to ask her. Instructed by the dancing teacher that he need only ~~nomm~~ bow before any young lady and hold out his hand, to have her rise and join him in the dance, he tried that way --- unsuccessfully. Whereupon he lifted up his voice and bleated to the dancing master on the other side of the room,

"Mr. Bland! Mr. Bland! I bowed three times, and she won't get up!"

The effect of this was complete confusion for

Clara

~~the young lady~~ and unintentional revenge for Robert.

Sallie Abercrombie must have enjoyed her days at that school. You could tell that in the way she made the ~~the~~ whole thing come alive when she talked about it. As ^a child it was quite impossible for me to realize that those other children about whom she told such fascinating tales were now as grown up as she. I always felt that if I could find my way through the pine woods to the school house just such fun would still be going on there. It must have been a good school too, because all of its former students revered its memory. My mother's most intimate girlhood friend outlived my mother by several years. At the age of 87 she wrote me a letter describing the school so well that I will use it here rather than try myself to make a picture of it.

" One room was for the boys, with sliding doors opening in to the girls' room; and oh! how we enjoyed the Friday afternoons, when the doors were wide open, the trustees present to hear the girls read their compositions and the boys orate.

" Your mother was the genius among composition writers, introducing to us allegory, which we thought she had invented! Your Uncle Len made the most finished speeches, using gestures - so graceful and elegant. The other boys could not hold a candle to Len.

" One boy started an oration, beginning it--
' There are three seasons, Spring, Summer, and Fall.'

When we girls laughed and applauded he began to swallow

and swallow, finally retiring to his seat leaving his announcement of three seasons as his sole contribution to the program."

"The third room in the building(which was the first white painted frame building in our community, and commanded great respect) was the music room. It was presided over for many years by Professor Fitze. At the end of the ten months school term he always had a fine concert. There was a stage and on it he had for the concert three pianos which, in some numbers, were all played at once.

" How we young folks did enjoy trimming the stage for the event. The boys would go into the woods and get smilax, a lovely, graceful evergreen vine. And how mad they would be when they returned to find the young gentlemen at the schoolhouse with ~~themselves~~ us girls just enjoying ourselves eating the rock candy they had brought to clear our throats for the concert singing the next day!

"After the first concert all the people were invited out on the grounds to a splendid dinner on a long table. Barbecued meats, salads, iced cakes and boiled custard for dessert. I have seen some of the pioneer men take a big slice of the cake, and with a pocket knife peal the icing/^{all}off ^{then} ~~and~~/eat the cake.

"This out door feast was usually managed by my grandmother, Mrs. Sarah Lewis, and her brother, Col. Henry Elmore. They stayed to have everything cleared off while the crowd went home to dress for the night concert."

The other day, among some old papers, I ran across the ~~minstrel~~ program for the first of those famous concerts. It is terrific. But it is easy while reading it to get the picture painted in the letter, so I will put it in.

CONCERT

To be Given by the Students of
Waverly Institute
at the close of
The First Music Session
Under the Direction of Professor C.Gustave Fitze
July 4, 1856
Programme -- Part ~~III~~ I --Half-past 3 p.m.

1. Song of Praise.....Full Choir
2. ~~MMMM~~ Hail Columbia (Duet) Misses Julia Bass and Mary Baldwin
3. Sailor's Grave Miss Emily Powell
4. Sounds from the Valley(Brilliante by Fowler) Miss Sarah Hill
5. Jamie (Scotch Ballard) Juvenile Choir
6. Sontag Polka Miss Mary Mathews
7. Midnight Hour Misses Lizzie Elmore,Ruth and m Clara Scott,Hester Spiller
8. Ellen Bayne (Song and Chorus) ... Ruth, Ella, and Clara Scott,Lizzie Elmore and choir
9. The Rose Will Cease to Blow ... Clara and Ella Scott Acc.by Prof.Fitze
- 10.Early Dawn Polka(Francis Brown) ...Miss Julia Bass
- 11.On to the Charge Misses Sarah Hill and MaryM Mathews
- 12.Fashion PolkaMiss Mary Baldwin
- 13.Thou Hast Learnt (Westmore) ... Miss Mary Mathews
- 14.Nelly Bly (Song and Chorus) ..Emily Powell,Ruth,Ella and Clara Scott,Lizzie Elmore,Hester Spiller and Sallie Abercrombie
- 15.Had I Never Known Thee Sarah Hill

16. Evening Star Waltz Julia Bass
17. There's a Sweet Wild Rose (Duet) Emily Powell, Julia Bass
Acc. by Prof. Fitze
18. Blue Juniata Lizzie Elmore, Ella, Ruth and Clara Scott
19. Happy Land Julia Bass, Mary Mathews, Ella Scott,
and Emily Powell

Part II
Early Candlelight

1. Natalie (Quartette for eight hands and one violin by
Pr Fitze) Perf. by Misses Mathews, Hill, Bass,
Powell and Pr. Fitze.
2. I Know Not Why I Love Thee Miss Clara Scott
3. Maggie By My Side Misses Mary Baldwin, Sarah Hill
and Chorus
4. I Remember Full Chorus
5. Midnight Schottische (Fr. Brown) .. Miss Mary Mathews
6. Old Arm Chair (Russell) Miss Julia Bass
7. Saratoga Miss Sarah Hill
8. Sweet Were My Dreams Miss Mary Baldwin
9. March Miss Emily Powell
10. Some Folks Miss Ella Scott and Juvenile Choir
11. I'll Hang My Harp Misses Ruth and Ella Scott
12. Old Folks Misses Lizzie Elmore, Ruth, Ella and Clara
Scott Acc by Jos. Elmore and Sam Scott
13. Texas Star Schottische Miss Emily Powell
14. Hour of Singing Full Choir
15. Ben Bolt Misses Julia Bass and Emily Powell
16. Bell Brandon ... Misses Sarah Hill, Emily Powell, Mary
Mathews and Ella Scott
17. Massa's In the Cold, Cold Ground ... Misses Clara, Ruth,
and Ella Scott, Lizzie Elmore

18. Poor Folks Polka Miss Julia Bass
19. Old Log Hut Misses Mary Mathew, Sarah Hill
20. Willie My Brave .. Misses Mary Baldwin, Emily Howard mm
and Chorus

Part III

1. Waverly (Polka di Concert for five violins and eight
hands on pianos, by Pr. Fitze) Perf. by
Misses Mathews, Hill, Baldwin and Powell;
Messrs W.B.Scott, R.Lewis, Sam Scott, Joe Elmore
and Pr.Fitze.
2. Try AgainSolo andFull Choir
3. Theme and Variations Miss Julia Bass
4. La Gaité Miss Sarah Hill
5. Firefly PolkaMiss Mary Mathews
6. Rockaway (Russell) Misses M.Baldwin, M.Mathews, E.Scott
and J.Bass
7. Plume PolkaMiss Mary Baldwin
8. He Never SaidMiss Emily Powell
9. Duet, etc (by Miss Sarah ~~Hill~~) Misses Mary Mathews
and Sarah Hill
10. Air Tyrolin Miss Ella Scott
11. Kentucky Home Misses Ruth, Ella and Clara Scott
and Lizzie Elmore
12. Old Dog Tray Miss Mary Mathews and Juvenile Choir
13. Wild FlowersMiss Mary Mathews
14. Do They Miss Me At HomeMiss Sarah Hill
15. Yes, We Miss TheeMiss Emily Powell
16. Julian Polka Miss Julia Bass
17. Joys that We Have Tasted Miss M.Baldwin
18. Spring Song Juvenile Choir
19. White CockadeMiss Lizzie Elmore
20. I'd Offer Thee This HandMiss Mary Mathews
21. Farewell Song --- Evening Song Full Choir

One of the mercies of life is that ^{we} ~~you~~ can skip whole pages of books, so, if that program was too much for anybody the remedy was at hand and it would not be ^{an} astonishing thing to do. The astonishing thing is that our hardy forbears deliberately planned it so and not only sat through it with pleasure, but you may be sure that it had been preceded by proper Fourth of July declamation_s and oration_s complete with ~~gestures~~ "gestures - so graceful and elegant" ~~in~~ in the morning. And dinner on the school grounds.

Sallie Abercrombie who appears on the programme as one of the singers of "Nellie Bly" was eleven years old at the time and a reluctant performer. She was shy about lifting up her voice in song. Her technique ~~was~~ in chorus was to make the words with her lips, but let no sound escape. That got her into trouble with Prof. Fitze later on. The Ella Scott who sang in many numbers was ~~my~~ Sallie's best friend and had a beautiful voice. She was the writer of the letter quoted above. The Miss Clara Scott who sang as a solo "I Know Not Why I Love Thee" was nine years old at the date of this concert. Sallie and her friend Ella Scott married brothers and so the good friendship went on through life. When I talked to my Aunt about her singing and the program in general she said "The choice of music represented the sentimentality of the times, but also the scarcity of sheet music in the community limited the selections. But Prof. Fitze was a thoroughly trained musician and a competent teacher".

And that is the way all of the people I knew who went to that school felt about it. Their belief in its excellence, their loyalty to the standards of their teachers was amazing. Not a rah-rah sort of thing at all. Just a simple and

unquestioning faith that here was the best of its kind and a thankfulness for having had it. Sometimes it is hard for me to remember that I did not actually know the school myself. The men and women of that generation were still near enough to the olden times when history/^{largely}came down in the form of stories told by the elders to the younger generation not to have lost the art tale-telling. And they loved the thing they talked about when it was that school. You can see that in my Aunt's letter written more than 70 years after she was a student there.

So when I say that I know the girls on the programme, I mean just that. And I know the teachers too. Not just Professor C. Gustave Fitze, musician and Professor Bland the "dancing master". But also Prof. James, a splendid quiet dignified and competent gentleman. And Prof. Devine, an emotional Irishman, who wore his hair in long curls, and was given to complimenting the girls in public. He called Sallie "Miss Saylie" and was unfortunately heard to cry out "What beautiful hands you have, Miss Saylie". The boys, led by Uncle Len took it up and teased little Sallie unmercifully. Len would catch up one of her hands and hold it up and they would all yell "What beeee-uu-tiful hands you have Miss Saylie, especially this finger and this finger!" separating out the two fingers that had small scars on them from a childish accident.

The great man of the school was Prof. Hook. His wife taught the girls. But there was a small group of ambitious young ladies who expected to go east to finishing schools who were taught Latin and mathematics by Prof. Hook. Not with the boys. Of course not. Certainly not. Indeed no. Prof. Hook

came into the girls' room to teach this group of girls. In that school only the Friday afternoon affairs were co-educational. But even so, not all the men and boys of the community approved of the girls taking Latin and math. The more conservative expressed a degree of doubt as to the wisdom of this type of education for women. Uncle Len, Sallie's older brother, was a leader in this disapproval, frequently stating that he wanted his wife to have no more learning in the field of mathematics than she needed to count the money he would give her.

Sallie did not like for her own brother to take this attitude. She was saucy to him about it. And the controversy deepened her determination to keep up with him in all her studies. It was her proud boast ~~forever~~^q that she did this. And the understanding from the beginning had been that when Len was ready to go to the University of Virginia, she, Sallie, would be taken along and then on to New York. Mrs. Abercrombie herself was "finished" in Miss Edwards School in Philadelphia. But in the meantime her brother, Dr. Marion Sims, had gone from Alabama to New York and was by now a world famous physician, with honors a-plenty, including a "handsome marble bust of Dr. Sims, the founder, presented by Mrs. ^Russel Sage" set up in the Woman's Hospital as a testimonial to his greatness. He had invited Sallie ~~from~~^{from} when she was quite little, to come to New York for her final schooling. She had counted on it and worked for it ~~practically~~ - practically all her school days.

When Len was 17 he was ready, and went. Sallie was ready too, but she was left behind. That was the first great disappointment of her life. And from her point of view there was simply no excuse for it. At the University of Virginia

Len passed his entrance examinations with such excellence that the faculty deemed it proper to write a letter to the parents and compliment them on the preparation which this student had undergone. Prof. Hook and all the teachers were thrilled over this letter. Mr. and Mrs. Abercrombie were proud. The neighbors shared the family honors because the school was a community affair which they had all helped to create. In fact the only person not completely happy about the letter was Sallie. Not that she grudged Len his laurel wreath. She knew he deserved it. But there it was. She, at 15, two full years younger, was equally well prepared and nothing had happened. She was deeply hurt. She stayed hurt all her life. That was what Sallie was like. She did not get over things lightly.

She blamed her parents for their failure to keep what she felt was a promise to her. Analysing the matter in the light of history, I think probably her parents greatest mistake was a lack of frankness with Sallie. And I think that was usual in those days. It created a great gulf between the elders and youth, but it was the custom. This is what they might have told their daughter. Len went to Virginia in the autumn of 1859. That was a period of great uncertainty, with war between the states hovering darkly and coloring all decisions and planning. Probably Mr. and Mrs. Abercrombie and Dr. and Mrs. Sims agreed that it was not best for Sallie to go north that year. And maybe they thought the postponement no great matter to a girl of 15. Better the unexplained disappointment than to put into ~~into~~ words the fear that was in their hearts. Especially as grandfather Abercrombie shared with his friend and neighbor Sam Houston the

difficulties
 hope that ~~difficulties~~ between the North and South could be adjudicated within the Union.

Be that as it may the fact remains that Len went to Virginia and Sallie was left for the anti-climax of ~~mm~~ another year at the local school. It was true that she was only 15. But 15 then was quite grown up. One of my father's brothers married his wife when she was only ~~fourteen~~ 14. Her boast was that she "put off bib-aprons to put on her wedding dress." And two of my aunts who were great belles began their flirtatious careers before they were 12. one of them confessed later in life that she had her first proposal of marriage when she was 11. This was one was heard to say at Sallie's wedding,

"One thing cerain, I do not intend to be an old maid like Sallie!" S Sallie was a trifle over 17 when she was married. At 15 she felt quite mature.

Stories of Sallie's last year at school indicate that it was avery happy time in spite of ~~her~~ disappointment. And in spite of missing her brother who had been her constant companion ever since the Alabama days. That year she boarded in the home of her friend Ella Scott. It was a great deal nearer the school and this made it easier to attend than the daily horseback journey. At least that was the reason given Sallie. But probably her parents also thought it would give her companionship that would, to a certain extent, make up for the absence of her brother. And perhaps the change would take her mind off her disappointment. Whatever the reason, that year she was in constant company with a bevy of girls her own age who were very gay.

Visions of their loveliness come easily to my mind. And their clothes. By the time I came along hoop skirts

had been ~~run~~ routed by war and the machine age, but the old Godey's ~~Ladies~~ Book were still around and fascinated me. Many a time have I whirled and whirled and squatted suddenly to balloon out my short full skirts and so help my imagination as to how I would have looked in an elegant hoop skirt. Hoops were supplemented in those days by white cotton petticoats tucked, embroidered, and ruffled to measure at least five yards around the bottom. They stood out bravely when starched and ironed by a good laundress. But even slave washer-women complained bitterly of the burden put upon them ^{by them} belles of 1860 who wore, each one, daily fresh, six such triumphs of the seamstress' art. They must have looked like truant morning glories, with their slender waists and bouyant ballooning skirts of gay colors and fanciful trimming, floating down the road to school in the dewy freshness of a Texas spring day.

That dewy freshness was the cause, however, of the laundress' woe. No modest maiden would have considered it proper to lift her skirt out of the dampness of the dew, so each day's set of petticoats was ready for the tub by night. Cleanliness was sacrificed to modesty without a qualm in 1860. Having so clear a mental picture of how Sallie and her friends looked, I can easily imagine how that gentleman of the old school felt when he first realized what the machine age had ~~run~~ done to petticoats. It happened at a dance attended by him in honor of the debut of a favorite great grand daughter. His shocked statement was: "By gad sir! There were only two petticoats at that dance and my wife had them both on!"

Beautiful, but not convenient, the girls knew there ~~are~~ lovely dresses to be. Consequently discreet activity was of necessity the order of their lives. But there was one story of activity not so discreet -- the story of a wild flower expedition broken up by the appearance of a fierce bull in the meadow. The scattering and fleeing of the girls must have looked to the surprised bull like the breaking up and blowing about of light soft roseate ^{sunset} clouds ~~minimally~~ by a high wind. One unfortunate cloud hung on a rail fence and almost fainted with terror before a companion came to the rescue and disengaged her hoop skirt from the rail. Another story Sallie always denied but Aunt Ella vouches for has to do with a dance. Aunt Ella's partner stooped to recover her fan just as Sallie came ~~swirling~~ waltzing by. Sallie's hoop completely eclipsed the young man who is said to have risen with a very red face. Sallie, also with a red face, all of her life denied that any such thing ever happened. But I suppose it could have happened, hoops took a bit of management to keep them always in order, I imagine.

Gay and delightful as everything was for the girls, heartburning was not lacking on the scene. Unfairly enough, however, it was chiefly suffered by the boys. Those youths who, although of the same age and generation as the girls, were yet not accepted by society as adults, while the girls were. The beaux with whom the girls danced and flirted; before whose ardent advances and extravagant compliments they blushed; about whose dashing appearance and behavior they whispered confidences were all much older. The reference in my aunt's letter to "the boys" who gathered smilax and the "young gentlemen" who brought rock candy indicates this situation. It also indicates that the girls

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were aware of the heartburning and that it enhanced for them, human nature being what it is, their pleasure and excitement over the attentions of the older men.

Being a part of man's lot on earth, shocks too had their place in ~~my~~ Sallie's school days, halcyon though they were. The one which left its vicarious mark on me was, of all things, a murder. On the road leading to the school house the community doctor, ~~him~~ a fine, well loved man, had his office. Next to it a shoemaker plied his trade, a rather important one in a pioneer community. This man was a drinker. And sometimes in his cups he was an evil talker. Passing the shoemaker's shop one morning on the way to school a group of girls were annoyed by his calling out personal remarks: "Thats my girl! " "That one is a beauty !"

Offended they went into the doctor's office and complained, because the doctor rented the shop to the shoemaker. Scarcely had they arrived at school before another girl came speeding with wide eyes set in stark white face, crying out,

"O! Girls! Girls! The shoemaker has murdered Dr. Spiller! I saw him lying there dead. He was stabbed with a long, sharp, knife."

They guessed that the doctor had acted on their complaints and the drunken impudent shoemaker had been enraged by the rebuke. They felt responsible and were very much upset. So shocking it was to them that even as old ladies they could still summon the vision of their white faced hysterical school mate who brought the news. And what is more they could make us see her, too, as plainly as they ~~made~~ did themselves.

But they always made amends for our disturbed emotions by ~~saying~~ declaring that this murder was the only crime ever committed in Waverly.

Another story, not so tragic, but still highly exciting was what we called the ~~mammoth~~ "panther story". It positively curdled our blood, but we never tired of hearing it told. However, after Frank Dobie made the statement that Texas panther stories are "true folklore", I went back and questioned witnesses on this one. I even had the good fortune to talk to an old gentleman who, as a little boy of 12, was the hero of this story. He, my mother, and any number of other Waverly folks vouch for the truth of this tale. ~~And~~ I will give it to you as my aunt wrote it to me when I was taking testimony. Here it is as she remembers it after so many years:

"Col. Hill, a wealthy planter with a large family, had several plantations in different parts of the county each directed by a paid overseer. An overseer named Jackson died, leaving a wife and four small children. So as to give the children the advantage of the school, Col. Hill built a cottage nearby and moved the Jackson family into it. The next winter on a very cold night Mrs. Jackson heard her dog barking, seemingly at bay at the door. She opened the door to call to him and in there sprang a vicious panther, knocking her down as he came in. The oldest boy ran to the open fireplace and seized a stick of burning wood which he thrust into the panther's face, forcing him back off his mother's body. Frightened by the fire the panther ran under the bed.

" Mrs. Jackson snatched her husband's hunting horn off ~~minna~~^{its} hook and frantically marshalled her four children out of the house shutting the panther inside. While the children cried loudly for help, she blew the horn until Col. Hill heard the distressing commotion. The men of the family respond-