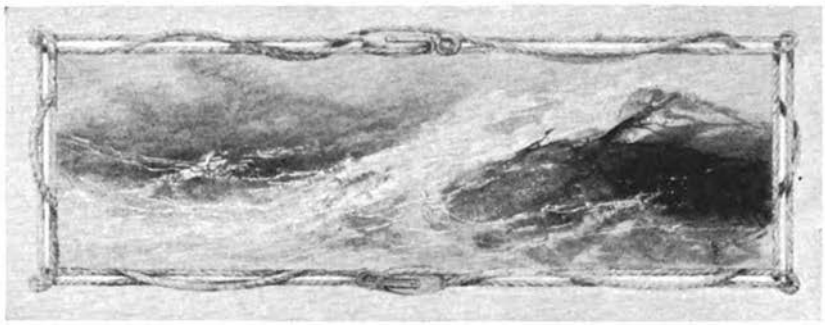


THE SEA ISLAND HURRICANES.

THE DEVASTATION.

By Joel Chandler Harris.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DANIEL SMITH.

I.

THE year of our Lord eighteen hundred and ninety-three will long be remembered as the year of storms. Inland gales rose and blew furiously southward. Cyclones rushed out of the tropics and raged northward. Hurricanes plunged through the Mexican Gulf and shook the southern region. Tornadoes crashed along the Atlantic coast, carrying death and destruction with them. The memory of the oldest inhabitant fails him when he tries to recall such another year of storms. The records show no parallel to it. And the storms themselves have wrought unprecedented destruction to life and property.

A storm in the South Atlantic and Gulf coasts is no new experience to the people who live near the danger line of the sea, nor even to the people who live far inland. It is a part of the climate. It belongs to expectation. These elemental disturbances are confined to no particular area, as the oldest inhabitant will tell you. Their feeding-grounds are in the tropical seas—the treacherous West Indian waters—but when they gather strength and gain bulk, they rush madly forth, describing vast circles, or tearing straight ahead until they exhaust themselves. They sweep along the coasts, or go raging inland, sometimes in the shape of a whirling cyclone, and sometimes in the shape of a roaring hurricane. And the effects of them are felt hundreds of miles in all directions, even when they fail to break across the coast-line barriers; for the inland winds that are roguishly playing rock-a-bye baby in the tree-tops are keen for a frolic, and no sooner do they feel that preparations for one are going forward in the tropics than they hurry to join and feed the monstrous riot of the ele-

A Primitive Industry—Grinding Corn.

ments. And so wildly do they rush and tear along in their haste to become part of the whirl and swirl in the tropics, that trees and houses fall before them. This sweep of the inland winds to the central disturbance, or to the mad vacuum behind it, is usually described as a storm, but the frolicsome gales that form it are merely feeders of the real storm.

On the morning of the 28th of last August, a heavy gale arose in Atlanta, coming out of the northwest. It increased steadily until its velocity reached fifty miles an hour. With less steadiness this gale would have been dangerous to life and property, but it rose slowly, maintained its greatest velocity for some hours, and then gradually subsided. The heel of the weather-vane, veering slowly from the southeast to the east, pointed in the direction of the great disturbance, central in the Bahamas, and heading for the Atlantic coast. The gale that passed over Atlanta was rushing to that centre and feeding the tremendous hurricane that swept up the South Atlantic coast during the night and fell upon the Sea Islands.

II.

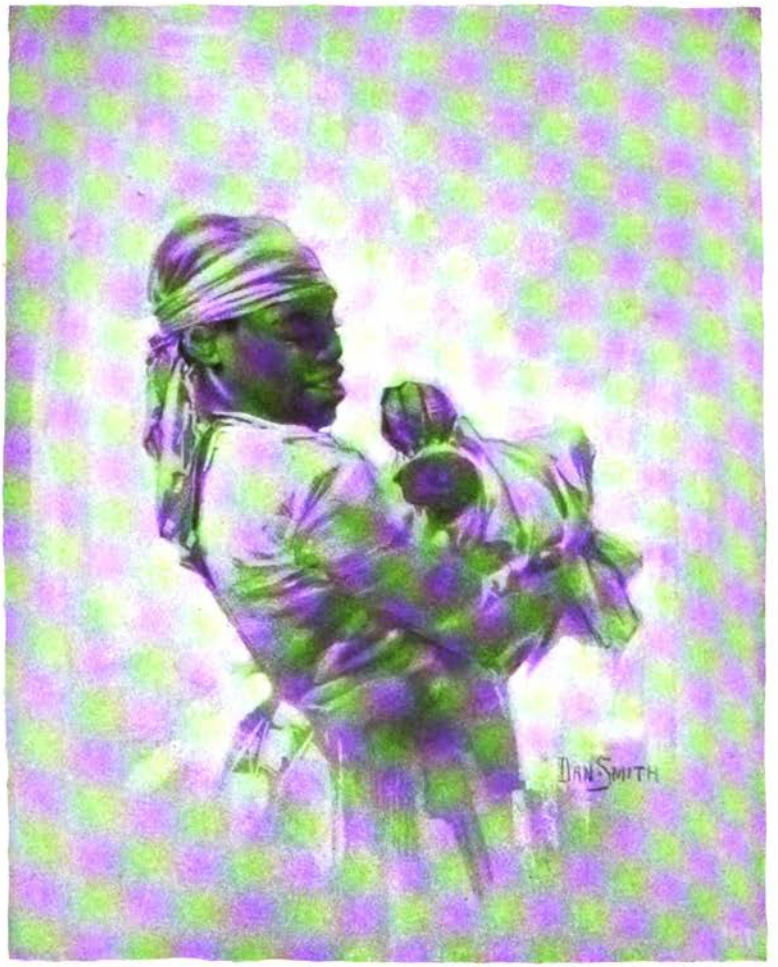
A YEAR of storms! The August hurricane—the October tornado that followed in the hurricane's track—the Oc-

DRAWN BY DANIEL SMITH.

An Island Home.

tober cyclone that swept down upon the Gulf coast! It is a record full of the horror of death and devastation!

Of the Gulf cyclone not much need be said. It may be disposed of as it disposed of its hundreds of victims, briefly. It was the intention of this investigating expedition to treat of the great Gulf whirlwind at some length—to unravel some of the storm-twisted details—but little was left to treat of. The record of the cyclone is as brief as it is awful. It swept down upon the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts and the island homes of the fishermen, wiped out the population, swallowed the boats and the luggers, stripped the land bare, and so disappeared. That is the whole story shorn of its ghastly particulars. Scarcely a bush or a tree was left for charity to hang her gray hood upon, and it is said of those who were swift to carry succor there, that they wandered about aimlessly in the waste places, finding only a few lonely and heart-broken young men to call upon them for aid. The Chandeliers, Cheniere Caminada, and Grand Island were struck with the force and fury of a Titanic explosion, and when all was over the few cripples that crawled from the dire wreck, and the fewer who



Undisturbed Survivors.

DRAWN BY DANIEL SMITH.

Talking about the Storm.

Burning Marsh Sedge off the Potato Patches on St. Helena.

had saved themselves in rafts or by clinging to trees, were not able to bury the dead that lay in ghastly and festering heaps around them. That is the brief record of the storm. Even now, those who have had an opportunity to measure its results, say that in that region there has never been anything comparable to this awful calamity since the country was settled. It stands unparalleled in its completeness. In the track of the cyclone everything was wrecked. Nearly two thousand people were killed and five million dollars worth of property blown as it were from the face of the earth. A similar disaster on the Gulf coast—the one that gave Mr. Lafcadio Hearn the basis of his beautiful sketch of "Lost Island"—caused the death of 286 persons, and six years ago 220 lives were lost in the storm that struck Johnston's Bayou. But in the October storm that fell on the coast and islands of the region that lies between Lake Borgne and the Gulf, 1,972 lives were lost.

One peculiarity of this storm was that the aged, the very young, and the infirm were all killed. The survivors were young men in the vigor of manhood. Very few were seriously wounded, and hundreds were found without a bruise on their bodies. They were killed by the sheer pressure and fury of the wind. In the settlements where the storm was worst, not a single child survived, and very few women. At Cheniere Caminada, opposite Grand Island, 822 people perished. Of these 496 were children. From this one settlement 240 fishermen were lost at sea in their boats—more than one thousand dead out of a community of 1,640

souls. There were 310 houses in the settlement, and 3 were left standing. At the Chandeliers, and in the centre of the storm—where 200 fishermen dwelt—not a soul escaped.

The dead were buried in trenches, where they were buried at all. In many instances, the young men who survived the shock of the storm were compelled to bury the rest of their families. The wind blew at the rate of 125 miles an hour, and those who were exposed to its fury needed to be robust indeed to survive. Many died from the peculiar nervous collapse that is the most vivid experience of those who are caught in a cyclone. One hundred and twenty schooners and barges and 265 luggers were sunk.

Safe on Shore.

Fortunately for the survivors, they were in reach of immediate aid. They lived near New Orleans, one of the richest and most charitable communities in the country, a community in which the organization of benevolence has reached the highest point of efficiency. Relief was instantly forthcoming; there was not a moment's delay. Before the violence of the sea had subsided the work of charity had begun, and it was forwarded by the enterprise of the newspapers—the *Picayune* and the *Times Democrat*—which sent relief boats to the suffering survivors. Relief was as complete as it was prompt. The fishermen

Left by the Tide.

are a hardy race that do not depend on agriculture, and all they asked was a few days' grace to enable them to set their tackle together.

III.

And so, hearkening to the clamors in behalf of the distressed, and following the tide of relief that was beginning to flow tardily in, investigation turned its attention to the Sea Islands on the South Atlantic coast; and it found there, after painstaking exploration, a situation that has probably never had a counterpart at any previous time or in any other region on this continent. But, to be appreciated it must be described, and to be described it must be approached as the Sea Islands themselves are approached, by sinuous channels that turn upon themselves and wind in and out, and lead in unexpected directions. The facts of the situation do not lie upon the surface.

The details that stand out most sharply, and that form the basis of the fragmentary information current along the coast and among the Sea Islands, are the extraordinary freaks of wind and wave. All are curious, and some are even humorous. It seems to be a relief to those who are asked to tell about the storm, to turn from the horrible story of death, and wreck, and devastation, and recall some of the queer incidents of that dismal night. All the

reports of the great storm are of a fragmentary character—almost as commonplace as taking a census, or as a sum in subtraction. This report will not be an exception. In order to present the situation, it will have to conform to the requirements of that situa tion. It will have to jump from one fact to another, and return along a devious way, and take up the thread of such a narrative as can be woven out of the tremendous jumble left by the storm.

But it should be said here, that the SCRIBNER expedition had every means of getting at the true condition of affairs on the islands. It had advantages for investigation that were not of the ordinary. Tug-boats and steam-launches were placed at its disposal, and the people, as well as current events, seemed to combine to forward its purpose.

IV.

A GLANCE at a map of the Gulf coast will show that the Chandeliers, curving outward, present a sort of barrier between the Gulf and Lake Borgne. The fishermen on the Chandeliers perished—there were two hundred perched on that lonely and insecure foothold—but it is natural to presume that the reef, owing to its position and formation, had some influence in mitigating the force of the inflowing tide. There was no such barrier between the August storm and the Sea Islands on the South Atlantic coast. These islands lie open to the sea, and the wind struck the richest and most thickly populated with full force and fury. The islands that suffered most lie between Port Royal and Charleston, and it is on these that the eye of the public has been turned since the first intimations of the results of the August storm.

The formation—the contour—of the Sea Islands is peculiar. The sea has crept in between them and the mainland in the most wonderful way—sometimes in the shape of a large river that is called a creek, or in the shape of a sound that is called a river; sometimes only a wide and level marsh intervenes through which are sinuous water-ways, known only to the native boatmen. What the lapping tide takes away from one shore it gives to another, so that the islands

Sketch-map of the Sea Islands and Coast from Charleston to Savannah.

bear about the same relation toward each other from age to age.

At the ancient town of Beaufort, one is nearer to the group of islands devastated by the storm than at any other point. The autumn days pass pleasantly at this old place. The midday sun throws the shadows far northward, but there is no sign of winter. The summer foliage is still fresh and green, and June seems to have taken the place of November. But the lonely and far-reaching marshes, with their rank and waving sedge, yellow as if waiting for the sickle, give a sombre touch to the scene that does not belong to spring, nor yet to summer. And the long gray moss, streaming from the trees like ghostly signals long hung out for succor unavailing, is another element that subdues the mind and imparts a sense of solemnity. The birds may sing never so blithely, the flowers bloom never so gayly, and the sun shine never so brightly, but they are all overshadowed by the brown marshes, and by the gray beards of these immemorial oaks.

All day long, the negroes go by in their queer little two-wheeled carts, each drawn by a diminutive steer or a more diminutive donkey. All day long the negro pedestrians tramp back and forth. All day long the negro boatmen shoot out from, or disappear in, the tall marsh grass. There is not much noise of vehicles; the sand prevents that. There is not much noise from the passers-by or from the boats that flit in and out the marsh grass. There is no loud laughter on the streets; there are no melodious songs wafted back from the water.

The streets swarm with negroes, on the sidewalks, in the middle way, and on the corners. At the headquarters of the Red Cross Society, which has in hand the work of relief, they are huddled together until they block the way. And yet there is no loud talking, no loud laughter, no singing. The mind resents this as unnatural. Where there are negroes there ought to be noise, surely there ought to be laughter and song. What is the trouble? You look into these black faces and see it is not sullenness. You note these quick smiles and discover that it is not depression. If the puzzle brings a frown to your face, as it did to mine, an old Auntie will look at you steadily until she catches your eye, and then, dropping a courtesy, will exclaim:

"You look worry, suh!" And then, when you turn to her for an explanation, "I bin worry myse'f, suh. Many time."

Whereupon you will be no longer puzzled, for here is a type of negro different from that of the upland regions—a type that knows how to be good-humored without being boisterous, and that has the rare gift of patience. Coming or going, men, women, and children will pause to salute you, and their courtesy is neither familiar nor affected. Their pensiveness fits in with the sombre marshes and the gray moss that swings solemnly from the trees.

"It is a great pity," says the oldest inhabitant, waving his shining cane in the air, "that you could not have come here before the storm struck this grove. You see how the trees are stripped and twisted."

At last your companion has hit upon the matter that is uppermost in your mind, and so, gently—very gently and cautiously, for fear of a relapse—you lead the genial old gentleman to forget about the antiquity of the old fort and the practical utility of Port Royal harbor—"the most magnificent that the flag can claim, sir—" and tell you some of the experiences of the August tornado; to give you some idea of the horror and confusion of that vast elemental disturbance; and to present to your mind a clear outline of results.

But this seems to be out of the question. The memory of the oldest inhabitant is more to be depended on in the recital of events that have become matters of tradition. He gives you details that bear no definite relation to the large results. The storm blasted hundreds of landmarks that were a part of his daily associations. Curious incidents occur to his mind. A lad clinging to an overturned dredge for thirty-six hours, finally gave up all hope and sank back into the water. The tide brought him twenty miles to Beaufort and landed him in a pile of driftwood near his mother's door, where he was found and, strange

to say, restored to life. Immense lighters employed in the phosphate business were lifted out of the water and driven far on shore. The barometer on the tug Weymouth dropped to 27.60 and stood there quivering like the hammer of an alarm-clock. Yes! and a great many negroes were drowned—hundreds of them, poor things!

The impression left seems to be as vague and as shapeless as the tempest was. Nevertheless, the more active and alert representatives of the younger generation have no advantage over the oldest inhabitant in the matter of definite information. Nor have the newspaper correspondents, nor has any living soul, so far as I have been able to discover. There are those who know what was and who know what is; but between what was and what is lies the awful cataclysm of the storm. The curtains of the night flapped over it; the cavernous clouds enveloped it; the raging tempest drowned it; the thundering tide covered it. The leaf from the tree, the ship from the sea, and man that was set to rule over all, became companion atoms, and all were caught by the storm and hurled into chaos. And when the morning dawned, and the tide fell, and the sun shone serenely over the scene of wreck and devastation, there was none left to tell the definite story of the hurricane on the Sea Islands. There is none to tell it to-day.

V.

THE oldest inhabitant is able to remember some very severe storms, but not such another year of storms. He is able to measure the intervals that have elapsed between these disturbances, and from this measurement he has constructed the comfortable theory that after every severe storm there must be a peaceful interlude of ten or fifteen years. But to-day, as he stands in the bright sunshine, the solemn mystery of the marshes stretching away before him as far as the eye can reach, he shakes his head sadly, and digs his cane feebly into the sand. His theory has been blown northeastward into the sea, and it is no wonder he sighs as he walks by your side and points to signs of the storm's devastation that might otherwise escape the eye of a stranger. A house was here or a cabin. Near by a shoal of dead bodies had been seen drifting along, or were washed ashore. Here was where a magnificent dock and warehouse stood, but there is nothing now to mark its site except a few scattered piles which, at low tide, are important only as showing the architectural ability of the teredo, the insect that eats them away. But the oldest inhabitant has no appreciation of the ability of the teredo. He lifts his shaggy brows when you ask about it, and dismisses the wonderful little worker in wood with a wave of the hand.

All around, and for miles and miles, farther than the eye can reach, as far as a shore bird can fly, the results of the storm lie scattered. Here a house has staggered upon its end, there a boat has been flung into the arms of a live oak, and yonder a phosphate dredge, weighing hundreds of tons, has been lifted from the water and turned completely over; here a magnificent grove of live oaks has been uprooted; there a broad-beamed lighter has been lifted across the marshes; and yonder hundreds of tons of marsh sedge have been spread over arable land.

The old man casts his eyes seaward across the long stretch of marshes that lead to the inland shore of St. Helena. A small column of smoke stands out against the sky, and seems to be fixed there. "The poor things!" he sighs. "They are trying to burn the marsh sedge off their potato patches."

Then he grows reminiscent. He has heard his father tell of the great storm of 1804, which began on the morning of the 8th of September and raged until ten o'clock at night. Hundreds of negroes in the islands were drowned. Eighteen vessels were destroyed in the harbor of Savannah, and several large boats were wrecked. The devastation on the Sea Islands and all along the South Atlantic coast was terrible, but the story of the storm lost something of its horror because there were no lines of communication by which the details could be gathered. They became known little by little, and so lost something of their force and effect.

In 1830 a storm curved in from the sea, striking the coast above Cape Hatteras and doing great damage to shipping. On September 10, 1854, a storm of great violence passed over Savannah and the Sea Islands, devastating the whole coast region. The yellow fever was raging in Savannah at the time, and the storm was accompanied by a tidal wave that carried destruction with it and left pestilence in its wake.

In 1873, a violent storm passed between Cape Hatteras and the Bermudas, striking the northern coast in the neighborhood of Nova Scotia and seriously crippling the fishing industries of the United States and Canada. Twelve hundred and twenty-three vessels were lost in this storm. In 1881 a storm passed over the Sea Island region and northwestward into Minnesota, pursuing a very unusual course. A tidal wave accompanied the storm, and more than four hundred persons lost their lives.

On these dates, the oldest inhabitant had formulated his storm-period theory. Every tenth year he expected a storm. If it failed then it was sure to come on the twentieth year. And the theory has had full confirmation in experience until 1893, when the storm period was reduced to a few brief weeks. There is nothing for the oldest inhabitant to do but to shake his head sadly, as much as to say the times are out of joint, and tell you of the more eccentric features of the storm that is newest in his experience, the storm that has caused more suffering and loss of life than any that has preceded it.

VI.

THE August hurricane was not unexpected. In fact it had been heralded, and for at least three days before it made its appearance warnings had been given. The Weather Bureau, sensitive to such disturbances, had found it in West Indian waters, and so the announcement went forth that a storm was forming in the neighborhood of St. Thomas. Next day the bulletins stated that the disturbance near St. Thomas had moved slowly westward. The day after came the announcement that the West Indian storm, after moving to the west and then to the south, had turned and was heading directly for the South Atlantic coast.

How aptly these announcements would fit the mad antics of some wild and terrible monster! It is found roaring and wallowing in its tropical pasture. It runs westward, and then southward, feeding and gathering strength as it goes. Then turning about, it rushes furiously northwestward, carrying terror before it, and leaving death and destruction in its path. One of its wings touched Brunswick, a city already stricken with the yellow plague, but the touch was light. Savannah was more directly in the path of the storm, and the Sea Islands, that lie between that city and Charleston, were exposed to the full fury of the tempest. And the winds fell upon them as if trying to tear the earth asunder, and the rains beat upon them as if to wash them away, and the tide rose and swept over them twelve feet above high-water mark. Pitiable as the story is, it may be condensed into a few words: near three thousand people drowned, between twenty and thirty thousand human beings without means of subsistence, their homes destroyed, their little crops ruined, and their boats blown away.

The tangled thunders of chaos shook

the foundation of things. The bellowing waters of the sea leapt up and mingled with the shrieking spirits of the air. Out of the seething depths disaster

sprung, and out of the roaring heavens calamity fell. No just and reasonable estimate of the loss of life on these islands has been made. The adjacent coast was prompt to tell of its losses over the long tongue of the telegraph. Its dead were known and identified. Its searching-parties found them out. Its tugs and launches brought them ashore.

But the Sea Islands were dumb, and they are dumb to this day. When the tide was friendly, it carried their dead ashore, or lodged them in the rank marsh sedge, but when the tide was careless it drifted the bodies seaward. In one little corner of St. Helena, the coroner inspected eighty bodies that had been thrown ashore, and then went on about his business. Some were known, but a great many were not identified and never will be. All about the channels and through the boatways in the waving marsh-grass, the bodies of the unknown drifted, and some floated miles away. Some had their clothes torn from them, mute witnesses of the fury of the tornado. All this is to be heard away from the islands. The islands themselves have not spoken, and they will not speak. Gentle, patient, smiling, and good-humored, the negroes have no complaints to make. They discuss the storm among themselves, but not in a way to impart much information to a white listener. They speak in monosyllables. They strip phrases to the bone and get to the core of words. Their shyness is pathetic, and their smiling patience is in the nature of a perpetual appeal to those who come in contact with them.

"Were many lives lost around here?" an old man was asked. He stood with his hands folded in front of him and his eyes seeking the ground. If he had held his faded and flabby hat in his hands his attitude would have been that of the peasant in Millet's picture of the Angelus. He stood stock-still, his bare feet placed close together.

"He gone deaf, suh," said a woman standing near.

She touched him gently on the arm, and instantly he was alert. The question was repeated.

"Were many lives lost around here?"

"Oh, yes, suh; 'bunnunce!" His

voice sounded as if it came from far away.

"How many?"

"One, two, t'ree—" he held up the fingers of one thin hand. "Mebby se'm. Mebby l'em. Enty?" He turned to the woman to confirm his figures, but she merely smiled. "We no count dem," he went on, shaking his head and shutting his eyes. "Dee gone!"

Then the old man relapsed into his former attitude. His eyes sought the ground, his hands clasped in front of him, his bare feet close together.

The woman who had spoken for him formed part of a little group standing near. She was rubbing the head of a four-year-old pickaninny.

"How many children have you?" she was asked.

"T'ree, suh. Two boy; one lil' gal."

"Were any of them drowned?"

"How dee gwan drown, suh?" she answered, laughing. The intonation of her voice was indescribable. "I up'd de tree," she said, after a pause, with a

gesture that explained how she saved them. "Dee choke — dee strankle — I up'd de tree!" The woman turned and pointed to another woman who was standing apart by the water's edge, looking out over the lonely marshes. "She los' dem chillun, suh. She have trouble."

And so it turned out. This woman, standing apart, as lonely as the never-ending marshes, had lost three children. She had five. In the fury and confusion of the storm, she had managed to get them all in a tree. The foundations of this place of refuge were sapped, and the tree gave way before the gale, plunging the woman and her children into the whirling flood. Three were swept from under her hands out into the marsh, into the estuary, and so into the sea. They were never seen any more. She had nothing to add to this story as brief as it is tragic. One moment she had five children clinging to her, in another moment there were only two. The angry winds and the hungry waters had torn them from her and swept them out of hearing before they could utter a cry. But what this woman said did not run in the direction of grief. "I glad to God I got two lil' one lef'." After all, the woman had reason to be glad. Pathetic as her own story was, it was not as touching as another that she told of a neighboring family. She showed where the house had stood, but there was nothing to mark its site, save a blackened stone that had lain in the fireplace. Every other vestige of the cabin, and of the other cabins that had clustered near, was swept away.

"T'irteen in de house, suh," the woman said, "I call dem w'en I run. I call dem an' run. If dee make answer, I no yeddy dem. Dee gone!"

An entire family swept away, and their friends and neighbors too busy with their own troubles to grieve after them, unless, indeed, a keen ear might catch a note of sorrow in the plaintive voice that told the story.

VII.

But this is not even the beginning. It hardly gives an intimation of the worst. The great trouble about these islands is the lack of communication. On the 30th of August, two days after the storm, not a word had come from the Sea Islands, and it was only through the adventurous energy of a newspaper reporter from Atlanta, that the public knew of the condition of Beaufort and Port Royal on that day. On the first of September, four days after the storm, there were vague hints of the condition of the islands. Beaufort and Port Royal, while engaged in rescuing their own dead from the tide, found the bodies of strangers among the rest. Two of these were identified as negroes living on the farther side of Ladies' Island, and another was thought to be the body of a woman from Coosaw. Still there was no definite information.

But on September 2d, Charleston heard a part of the dismal story, and on the same day the people of Beaufort and Port Royal awoke to the fact that, severe as their own trouble was, the trouble on the Sea Islands was greater. A demand for instant relief came from these settlements, and the demand was the more imperative because of its plaintiveness. It was the more urgent because of the knowledge of the whites of the exposed situation of the islands that faced the open sea. Prompt measures were taken, but, in the very nature of the case, they could bear no proportionate relation to the demand that was made on the zeal, energy, and benevolence of those who, before slavery was abolished, held themselves responsible for the safety and well-being of the negroes on the islands, and who, in some sort, still feel the pressure of the old habit of responsibility.

Relief would have been inadequate if it had been on a much larger scale than the adjacent communities could afford. It would have been tardy if it had been undertaken the day after the storm. But the work was undertaken as soon as possible and went as far as it could go. At the very best, the lack of communication is remarkable. No other portion of the continent is more secure in its isolation. Doubtless the tax-collector visits the islands—he goes everywhere; perhaps a pension agent is to be found there occasionally, for there are pensioners on the Sea Islands; but, practi-

cally, the people are isolated. They come to market in their little boats, but they have no regular channels of communication. Their coming and going is intermittent. If a stranger wants to visit the islands he must depend on a happy chance, and if he is in a hurry he will go away without seeing them. This was so before the August storm, and it will be so when the storm has become a tradition.

But on the day after the hurricane, and for days that must have seemed an age to the negroes on the wind-torn and tide-swept islands, there were no possible means of communication. The little boats of the negroes had been blown away; the tugs and launches in and around Charleston, Beaufort, and Port Royal were driven ashore or temporarily disabled; a clean sweep had been made of all the craft that are available on ordinary occasions. It is said that the first information of the real condition of the islands was brought to Beaufort by two negroes in a boat, one rowing and the other bailing; and only men impelled by dire necessity would have dared to venture across from one island to another in such a disabled canoe.

Relief, as eager as it was meagre, had few means of reaching the islands, and when it reached them, it found itself in a dismal swamp where the dead lay about the shores unburied, where the living were either starving or dying from the pestilence generated by the decaying bodies, or by the stagnant ponds of sea-water left by the receding tide.

VIII.

It has been said of the Gulf storm that it is unparalleled in its terrible completeness. It should be said of this South Atlantic hurricane that it is the most disastrous that ever visited this coast. It struck helplessness where it was weak. It is not to be measured by the destruction to life which it caused, though that was something terrible, but by the suffering which has followed.

It is estimated—and the estimate is not in the nature of a rough guess—that two thousand five hundred lives were lost in the islands and on the adjacent coast. The truth would not be missed very far if the number were placed at three thousand. Not all of those were lost in the storm. Two thousand persons, the great majority of them negroes, were drowned or killed on the night of the storm. The others died from exposure, from a lack of food, or from the malarial fever that was epidemic on the islands during the hot September days that succeeded the disturbance.

This epidemic originated from two causes—from the stench of bodies buried hastily in shallow graves where the tide could uncover them—and from the stagnant pools of water left when the high tide receded. The wells on the islands were filled with sea-water. The first reports of the dead left unburied were exaggerated. The negroes were quick to bury their dead, but the work was necessarily hurried, for there was a great deal of it to be done. But they have a superstition or belief—these island negroes—that is tersely expressed in one of their childish rhymes—

> "Die by water,
> Lie by water."

That is to say, those who are drowned should be buried as near to the water as possible. In their haste they buried many where the tide could uncover them, and the exposure of these added to the epidemic.

Surgeon Magruder, of the Marine Hospital, who inspected the sanitary condition of the largest of the islands during the first weeks after the storm, reports that three thousand seven hundred and nine cases of sickness were treated, of which two thousand five hundred and forty-two were malarial fever. This report covers only eight of the islands. The same condition existed on all the islands.

There was a windfall for St. Helena. The storm brought close to its shores the wreck of the City of Savannah. When the passengers and crew were rescued, the negroes seized upon the stores that had been left, and surely Providence never poured timelier gifts

into the laps of the needy. Almost out of reach of relief, many of these negroes must have perished but for this succor, sent them on the wings of the storm that had stripped them of their small possessions. But the wreck was a bone that was soon picked. Its stores were but a mouthful as compared with the needs of the population.

It has been estimated that at least thirty thousand people were left practically homeless and in need of relief by the storm. I cannot vouch for this estimate, but it has not been challenged. It is made by those who have made a thorough canvass of all the islands exposed to the storm. But let us give cold doubt the benefit of its prudence—a prudence that is frequently untimely; let us say that there are twenty thousand negroes on the Sea Islands whose possessions were destroyed by the hurricane—twenty thousand who stand in need of relief; is not this something for the benevolent to think about, even now?

Bear in mind that relief in this instance means not a momentary ebullition of benevolence, but the actual means of subsistence for a period covering several months. The negroes have lost not their possessions alone, but their growing crops. When the storm swooped down upon them they were just getting ready to market their cotton—the famous Sea Island cotton that enters into the manufacture of the finer grades of goods—they were just getting ready to dig their sweet potatoes. But the wind whipped their cotton out of the bolls and off the stalks, the salt sea-water rose and ruined their potatoes, and wind and sea carried away their boats; so that relief, in order to be at all effective, must carry these practically helpless negroes over the period that lies between two crops. And there comes into the calculation this additional problem—to what extent has the deluge of salt-water destroyed the productive capacity of the land? All these things are to be considered, and the Red Cross Society is engaged in considering them.

To provide for the pressing and immediate wants of twenty or thirty thousand people from the first of September to the end of February, a period of six months; to give them subsistence without making beggars or drones of them; that is the task to which the Red Cross Society has set itself. It is a task so noble in its conception and purpose that it ought to attract the sympathetic attention of the American people; for its success depends wholly on those who have the will and the means to fill the hands of the little band which, marching under the flag of the Red Cross, is devoting itself with an unselfishness that involves the sacrifice of all personal comfort, and with a zeal that is beyond all praise, to the work of relieving the victims of the storm.

Until now I have not mentioned, except incidentally, the Red Cross Society, of which Miss Clara Barton is president. The work of that organization, the methods it has employed, and the results it has wrought out of resources the most slender, will be fully set forth in another article. But meanwhile, before that article can appear—even before this can be printed—it is to be feared that the apathy of the public will have cut down the means of the Society to a limit too pitiful to think about. These means were pitifully narrow in November, and at that time the flood-tide of public benevolence was flowing in to aid Miss Barton's Society. The newspapers were devoting columns to the necessities of the storm sufferers, and one enterprising journal, the New York *World*, had chartered a railway train to convey supplies to the coast. From every quarter came food, clothing, tools. The sympathy of the public had been thoroughly aroused.

But there were from twenty to thirty thousand people to be tided over the winter months and into the spring. Recognizing this fact, Miss Barton and her assistants adopted from the very first the most rigid system of economy—a system far more efficacious in the end than any lavish dispensation of charity could have been. A peck of grits and a pound of pork—these are the rations for a family of six. They seem at first thought to be a poor excuse for charity, and the negro who goes after them in his little ox-cart most likely takes them away with a disappointed

DRAWN BY DANIEL SMITH.

A Windfall for St. Helena.

(Wreck of the City of Savannah.)

A peck of grits and a pound of pork.—Page 244.

look on his face, glancing back at the little bundles as he drives along, or shaking his head doubtfully as he measures their weight by lifting them in his hand. "Mockin' bud been eat mo' dun dat!" He remembered the days when the Government poured out its bounty through the Freedman's Bureau.

But a peck of grits and a pound of pork mean something more than momentary relief — something more than mere charity. They mean that the head of a family which has to depend on them for a week's subsistence must bestir himself; that he must catch fish to go with the rations; that, in short, he is not to eat the bread of idleness. This rigid economy on the part of the Red Cross Society grows out of the necessities of the situation, and is not intended primarily to spur the needy ones to provide for themselves. It is a pinching policy that does not, I imagine, commend itself very heartily to the approval of Miss Barton, except as a measure of absolute necessity that looks carefully to the future. But those who have seen measures of relief misdirected and private bounty mismanaged, will recognize in this economy of the Red Cross Society, a wise administration of the resources that benevolent people have placed at the disposal of those who were despoiled by the storm. For surely that measure of relief is wise (whether dictated by necessity or by experience) that prevents those whom it succors from sitting in idleness to be maintained by charity, public or private.

In November the Red Cross Society had barely completed its work of organizing relief for the suffering and destitute on the Sea Islands. Compared with the demands made upon it, the Society's resources were small, and the fear—which may have developed into absolute certainty by the time these pages go to the public—was that they would grow smaller and smaller as the cold weather came on. Miss Barton's last word to me was to ask that an appeal be made to benevolent people throughout the country, to the end that the resources at the command of the Red Cross Society may not be sensibly diminished by reason of the increased demands made upon them in the winter months, and to the end that, at least by the first of April, these unfortunate negroes, despoiled by wind and tide, may

be placed securely on their feet, as nearly independent as they were the day before the storm.

I went to the Sea Islands with no prejudice against the Red Cross Society, but certainly with no prepossession in its favor. I had pictured it in my mind as a sort of fussy and contentious affair, running about with a tremendous amount of chatter and flourishing a great deal of red tape—a sort of circumlocution office, situated in the air between individual officiousness and newspaper notoriety.

As a matter of fact, the Red Cross Society as I saw it at Beaufort is something entirely different from any other relief organization that has come under my observation. Its strongest and most admirable feature is its extreme simplicity. The perfection of its machinery is shown by the apparent absence of all machinery. There are no exhibitions of self-importance. There is no display—no torturous cross-examination of applicants—no needless delay. And yet nothing is done blindly, or hastily, or indifferently.

This poor little tribute to Miss Clara Barton I want to pay in heartily seconding her appeal to the benevolence of the whole country to aid her in carrying out her work on the Sea Islands. Such aid will be more important in the last days of her mission than it was when the sympathies of the public had been touched by the awful story of the disaster that went tingling over the wires on the last day of August.

(To be followed in the March number by a second article—"The Relief.")

GUNDRYGGIA.

No sorrow knowing, laughter hath thy heart
For all eternity since that one day
Thou sawst the Saviour fainting by the way
And lookedst down from thy light life apart
Upon His sorrow and the bitter smart
Of thorns that hedged His path from thine away,
And thy heart found no other thing to say
Than laughter—to the Saviour of thy heart.

So now, thou laughest throughout all the years,
Kundry—thy soul runs wild from sin to shame,
From woe to death, from death to life thereafter;
And laughter holds thine eyes, while still the tears
Well from thy soul in anguish at His name
To press behind thine eyeballs strained in laughter.

SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE.

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THE SEA ISLAND HURRICANES.

THE RELIEF.*

By Joel Chandler Harris.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DANIEL SMITH.

I.

WHEN the condition of the survivors in the Sea Islands became known, the first spasmodic attempt to succor them developed two problems of vast magnitude. The first was, Where is the necessary relief to come from? The second, How is it to be distributed when it does come? How many perished from sickness and exposure before these problems were solved will never be known. But the suggestion—when we take into consideration the number and character of the population and the extent of island area—leaves a wide field for the imagination to cover.

The American public is exceedingly sensitive to demands on its benevolence. Its readiness—nay, its anxiety—to give is most remarkable. Its promptness is electric in its manifestations. Touch it and the response is instantaneous. Where the pestilence strikes and leaves desolation, where the floods rise and breed destitution, where the flames leap forth and leave poverty and distress, there the people of the republic send their gracious gifts and bestow their precious sympathy.

There was the Johnstown catastrophe, to mention no other, where the population was overwhelmed by the waters that rushed down the valley. Relief was so prompt that the survivors hardly had an opportunity to make an appeal for aid, and so abundant that a considerable fund was left over when the needs of all had been carefully supplied. But Johnstown is the centre of a rich and populous district. It is in easy reach of the great cities. It had not a day to wait for relief, and there was no difficulty in reaching those who were in distress. But the Sea Islands are remote even from the cities that are nearest to them. They were farther from Charleston and Savannah the first fortnight after the great tornado than these cities are from New York.

Taken together these islands cover a great deal of territory. They reach from Savannah to Charleston, and there was more or less suffering in all of them. Those lying between Savannah and Port Royal are not so large either in area or population as those that lie between Port Royal and Charleston. They were not struck so heavily by the storm. The destitution there was not so great, and those who needed relief

* For First Paper, "The Sea Island Hurricanes—The Devastation," see SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE for February.

Rations for Lady's Island.

were more easily reached. The storm struck more heavily on St. Helena and fifty miles north of that island than elsewhere. At least the devastation was greater there, and all this region is off the lines of travel.

For that reason it was a fortnight, almost a month, before any organized measure of relief could be applied to St. Helena, Ladies, Coosaw, Dawbaw, Edisto, Little Edisto, Wadmalaw, St. Philip's, and the others that belong to the group between Beaufort and Charleston. The cities that figure on the map as the geographical neighbors of the Sea Islands did the best they could. Charleston, wrecked and torn, gathered itself together to aid in the work of relief, and Beaufort and Port Royal were as prompt. In a little while, too, aid began to flow in from various parts of the country; but how was it to be utilized? How was it to be distributed? This was the problem that made the situation intolerable for those who were in need, and almost unendurable for those who were anxious to extend relief.

In the very nature of things these first efforts to aid the negroes on the islands were feeble and futile. Those who made the effort were themselves sufferers from the storm, and the means they had at hand were utterly inadequate. They had no organization. Relief committees were hastily formed, but there was still the problem of distribution. This would have been a serious problem even if all the ordinary methods of communication had not been swept away.

DRAWN BY DANIEL SMITH.

Steamboat Landing—"Look de boat."

Gathering Sweet Potatoes.

But with the small boats gone, and the sail- and steam-craft crippled and out of use, the question of relief ceased to be a problem and took the shape of an impossibility.

II.

At a time when everything was in confusion, and when the negroes on the islands were in the throes of starvation, the Red Cross Society, represented by Miss Clara Barton and a staff of assistants, took up its abode in Beaufort, from which the stricken section could best be reached. Miss Barton and her assistants had faced a good many emergencies, but I have their word for it that the conditions they were compelled to deal with in relieving the population of the Sea Islands have never been paralleled in all their experience. The problem before them was new, but they had the capacity for organization, the gift of promptness, the quality of decision ; they had tact, energy, and enterprise. They knew what was to be done at once, and there was no delay nor yet undue haste in setting the machinery of relief in motion. The local committees turned over everything to the Red Cross, and immediately the

work of relief, as distinguished from indiscriminate charity, took form and became substantial.

Miss Barton had some experience with the negroes of this region in the first months after the war, and therefore had nothing to learn or to unlearn in dealing with them. Her name was known to the older ones, and one old negro woman — Aunt Jane — who had cooked for her "when freedom come 'bout," came thirty miles to see her.

But with all its experience, with all its energy and discipline, the Red Cross Society was compelled to move slowly. It was not superior to the lack of the means of communication. It could not give boats to its messengers nor wings to its messages. All that it could do was to launch some of the boats that had been blown ashore, and hire others that had been rescued. Presently, too, the negroes began to recover some of their own boats that had lodged in the marshes, and then the work of organizing relief committees on the islands began. It was slow and tedious. The delay was almost disheartening. Malarial fever was playing havoc with the destitute—not killing them outright, but so weakening them as to cause death from the lack of nourishing food or from exposure; for hundreds were living in the bushes, practically without shelter, and hundreds were without clothes.

In the very beginning one thing was made clear to the negroes—that to get help they must help themselves; that there was to be no indiscriminate distribution of alms. Some of the older ones, remembering the days when the Freedmen's Bureau was in operation, came to the conclusion that the government had charge of the relief funds; but their minds were promptly disabused by the methods which the Red Cross adopted. Was a negro able to work? Then he was provided with tools and material—hammer, saw, nails, and lum-

The Lonely Marshes.

ber—and set to building houses for families of women and children who had been left homeless.

The first object of the Red Cross Society was to aid the helpless, to succor those who were unable to work or to help themselves; the next was to help those who were willing and able to help themselves. Miss Barton is very much afraid that this part of her work will be misunderstood.

"I feel that we are standing on the edge of a volcano," she said, with a smile. "We have had a very delicate and difficult task before us. It is still before us. I have been doing, and propose to do only what my judgment and experience approve. But you know how small a foundation misrepresentation needs for a foothold. I expect to hear any day that Clara Barton and her Red Cross Society are selling—actually selling—the supplies the people have donated for the relief of these Sea Island sufferers. You may smile—I smile myself to think of it—and yet it is a very serious matter. Our regulations do not permit us to give relief to able-bodied men. But these men need relief. There is no work for them to do. They are as absolutely dependent as if they had been crippled in the storm. Yet they are able-bodied; they can work. They need food, they need clothes, and, as the cold weather comes on, their needs will be sorer.

"This was the first problem that presented itself after the needs of the helpless had been met, so far as we could meet or reach them. Here were men able to work, anxious to work, and really needing relief almost as badly as those who were helpless. So we said to these people, 'We will give you work and pay you for it in food and clothing so far as we are able.' A great many responded promptly, and these we have set to work rebuilding the houses of those who were left homeless by the storm. In this way we have made one element of the needy strengthen and maintain another element, and all in the direction of the rigid economy that we are compelled to observe.

"What I fear is that those who look critically at these matters from afar will assume and say that we are selling the supplies that have been placed in our charge by the benevolent people of the country. You know how such things go. Such a rumor, if it should get out, would spread mightily among the women's circles and societies of the North, and my reputation would be wounded among those who are most kindly disposed.

"But you have seen for yourself what we are doing. You have visited the islands. You have discovered how difficult it is to reach these people. We can only do our best, and that best is very little when you take into consideration the extent of the desolation and the means of reaching the sufferers. When we give able-bodied men work, and pay them out of the supplies in hand for rebuilding the poor little homes that have been blown away, we are merely economizing. We are making our material go as far as it can be made to go. And we must economize. We dare not, at this time, scatter our supplies indiscriminately. The cold weather is coming on, and these island people—the helpless ones, the women and children—must be cared for."

That has been the whole policy of the Red Cross Society from the outset—to make its relief fund go as far as possible. Houses would have to be built for the homeless in any event, and it certainly seems to be the essence of wisdom and economy to give the work of rebuilding them into the hands of those who need relief and who are willing to accept it in return for their labor.

One instance will stand for the whole policy of the Society, which is simplicity itself. A negro man is so fortunate as to have his cabin left standing by the storm. He is able to work and willing to work, but there is nothing for him to do. His nearest neighbor, a woman with five children, has lost

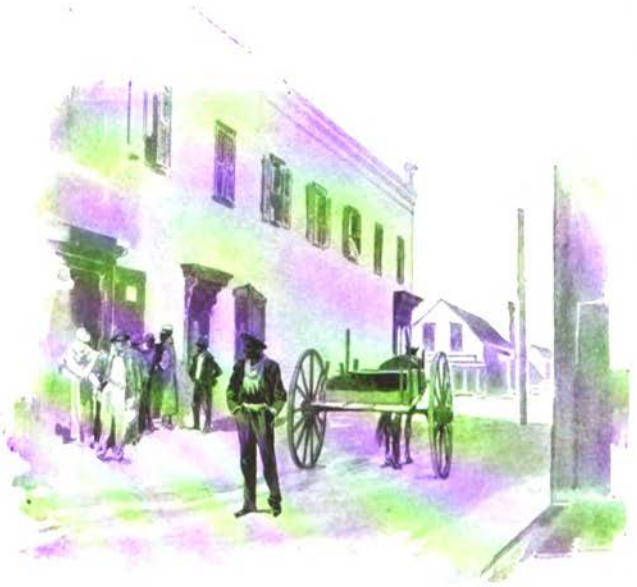
DRAWN BY DANIEL SMITH.

Effects of the Storm upon an Old Mansion on Station Creek.

her home and her husband, to say nothing of three other children. The man and the woman apply for relief, and both tell their story. Here is a case where each can help the other. So the man is set to work rebuilding the woman's house, and to the woman is given the task of making the man some necessary articles of clothing. The one helps the other, and out of the relief fund the Red Cross Society helps both.

III.

THE negroes of the South, especially those of the Sea Islands, have been the victims of a good deal of exaggeration, first and last. Their tendencies and characteristics have been wofully exaggerated by hasty writers for the press, and their personal appearance has been caricatured by artists. No one can say why, for surely the negro, both on the Uplands and on the Sea Islands, is more interesting as he really is than as he is pictured to be. There has been a theory since the War that the Sea Island negroes are relapsing into a state of barbarism and savagery. It is impossible to say precisely what this theory was based on, but it has no basis now, or not enough to attract the attention of a careful observer. It is just twenty years since I first saw and studied the speech and characteristics of the Sea Island negroes; more than twenty years since Daddy Jack astonished me with his Gullah talk, half African and less than half English. During that time there has been a great improvement in the negroes of this region. They are still different from their brothers in the upland plantations, but the Gullah element is nearly wiped out, and the Congo type is rapidly disappearing. They are not so gay as the upland negro, they do not belong to the same tribes, but they are gentler, they are more unaffected, and there is a flute-like note in their voices, a soft, lilting intonation at the close of their sentences that is indescribably winning.



Headquarters of the Red Cross Society.

In Georgia the prevailing type—not the most numerous, but the most noticeable—is the Arabian. Old Ben Ali (pronounced by the negroes Bénally), who left a diary in one of the desert dialects of Arabic, was blessed with astonishing prepotency, and his descendants after him, so that it is always easy to discover the "favor" of the old Arab in a Georgia negro who is especially intelligent or enterprising. Old Ben Ali—his diary is now in the hands of a son of the author of "The Young Marooners"—never was a slave in the ordinary meaning of that term. He was foreman of his owner's plantation, and as fierce a task-master as a negro ever had.

But these Sea Island negroes belong essentially to the slave type of the African. Their ancestors were in captivity and held in a state of bondage far worse than that which American slavery developed. They were

Going to School.

of the more peaceful tribes, the tribes that devoted themselves to raising cattle and to the rude forms of agriculture that prevail to this day in Africa. They were the unresisting victims of the raids of the fiercer slave-trading tribes, or of the warlike Arabs.

The traits that excited the rapacity of the native slave-traders still manifest themselves in these Sea Island negroes in a way that is both attractive and touching. They are gentle, unobtrusive, and friendly. They are uncomplaining. They smile somewhat deprecatingly when asked about the storm, and they are apt to belittle the details as well as the results. They readily accept such relief as they can get, but if none were to be had they would accept the lack of it almost as cheerfully, though it would mean starvation to many of them.

Thus it was a very difficult matter for a stranger visiting the Islands, say in November, to realize that the negro population were the victims of conditions that, even then, were of the most serious character. He would be misled by their patient good-humor, and by their air of quiet resignation, which could easily be mistaken for content. He might go casually about the Islands without discovering any great need for relief. Those whom he met would salute him with a respectful smile and tacitly agree to anything he might say.

They answer a question according to the tone of it. Thus if you say, "There is not much suffering around here, is there?" the answer would be, "Lil bit, suh; not much." If you say, "There is a good deal of trouble here, isn't there?" the answer is, "Right sma't, suh; dee

yent see all"—meaning that those who are dispensing relief haven't yet heard of all the needy ones.

The negroes are shy with their troubles. If you go to a rude shanty and knock, you are not to conclude that it is uninhabited because there is no response. If you wait a little bit you will see the head of a negro child peep from behind the corner, and then a woman's voice—"Ain't let you in, suh. No cloze to we back." In other words, the members of the family are naked, and they are hiding there in the house until they can be clothed from the relief fund. If you pretend you are going in anyhow, there will be squealing and laughing on the inside.

I don't know how good-humor can abide here after the storm, but it is here. It is not gayety; it is not carelessness. It is the good-humor that nestles close to patience, and that sometimes holds sorrow's hands.

A negro, describing the storm to me, illustrated it by quoting from the Tar-baby story. "De storm, suh"—he paused as if to fix some comparison in his mind—"de storm—you know how Ber Rabbit talk ter Tar Baby: Me turrer han' wusser. You gone ef I is hit you wit' me wusser han'. Dat de storm, suh. Turrer han' wusser. Water hu't mo' dan win'." He was the father of a woman who climbed into a tree holding her baby by its clothes in her teeth, and carrying another child in her arms. Wind or tide wrenched her from her place, and she was found dead, still holding the baby in her teeth by its clothes. The other child—a little four-year old—was saved and stood by its grandfather with eyes wide-staring, and with an expression on its face as inscrutable as that of the Sphinx.

The old negro gave me a fuller description of the storm than I could get from any of the islanders. "De win' come all dat day," he said. "All day, suh. I yeddy 'im blow dat night. I shek my head, suh. I say 'e gwan whip 'roun', 'e done dat befo', suh. 'E been whip' roun'. Josy" (his daughter who was drowned) "come 'cross an' say, 'Daddy, whut dish yer win'? I say, 'Run home, gal, stick by dem chillun.' She gone! Win' whip 'roun'; 'e whip hard; 'e come fahs; 'e come harder. 'E knock at de do'; 'e knock de do' down. 'E knock at de tree; 'e knock de tree down. 'E blow so ha'd 'e stan' still. Den de water—I yeddy 'im lick-lick-lick at de chimley—lick-lick-lick 'neat' de flo. Den mo' win', mo' water, un I been lif' out de do' un fling in de tree dey. Ef dem dead had been live I been save many, suh, when dey come drif' by in de mornin'."

Not a long description, surely, but, with the swift gestures and the sympathetic movements of the body, a very graphic one. All of the negroes could tell something of interest if they would, but the younger generation is something shyer of the white man than the older negroes are, and all are reticent.

DRAWN BY DANIEL SMITH.

Wreckage on Coosaw Island.

IV.

Station Creek divides St. Phillip's Island from St. Helena. On this creek, on the St. Helena side, our exploring party found a fine old two-story house. It had evidently been the home of one of the old-time planters, who had chosen to build here, miles away from all the lines of communication. A story-writer, for the sake of adding interest to his picture, would no doubt describe the old house as a palatial Southern mansion, but, as a matter of fact, it presented anything but a palatial appearance. It stood grim and gray and desolate. Time had worn the paint away, and the storm had given the finishing touches by crushing one of the wide gables, and tearing away the tops of the big chimneys. As our little launch steamed toward the landing the negroes swarmed out of the house—there must have been fifty of them, big and little—and stood on the shore silent and watchful. They returned no answering shout, but, after a while, two of the men separated from the group and brought a boat alongside. Our small party got in, ready to go ashore. But the negroes waited, looking at the launch, at us, and then at each other.

"What is the matter?" they were asked.

"No ration, suh?"

Alas! there were no rations, but the negroes leaned to their oars without a word, and speedily brought us to land. There was not much to see there—not much to learn. All their cabins had been destroyed, their crops ruined, and they were far from Beaufort, the centre from which relief was distributed. They had taken refuge in the big house, which had weathered the storm. There was no other shelter for them.

The house was very snugly built for this section, but there was no wide veranda to catch the breeze and no wide hall. The staircase was narrow, and some of the rooms were very small. That old house has a history that tries to speak aloud in these peculiarities, but there was no one to interpret it to us—nothing to give us a clew. A bell hung over the door, but the clapper was gone, and rust had snapped the wire. The guest that last set it to quivering must have been in the grave many a long year.

Though the negroes here were far from the relief fund, they had been visited by a Red Cross committee, and their immediate wants supplied. All that they possessed, except the clothes they wore and a few blankets, had been swept away by the storm. Four or five out of the small community had died afterward, and a good many—it was impossible to get the exact number—were drowned by the tide.

The negroes at this place had a mystery to deal with, and they were very much perplexed by it. The mystery was in the shape of a little old man, who had come into the settlement in the very middle and height of the storm. The negroes were not afraid of the little old man, but it was plain they regarded him with something more than a shade of superstition. One of the negro men, trying to reach the big house, was tossed by the rising tide against a live oak, into which he clambered with all possible haste. He sat there all night, and at dawn found at his side the little old man, who was not only as contented as possible, but actually nodding on the limb. He was an entire stranger. The negro asked him who he was and where he came from, but all the reply he could get was "John Omcum." I spell the name the best I know how, phonetically. It may be Armcome, or Armstrong. But "John Omcum" was all that could be got out of the little old man in the tree. None of the negroes had ever seen him before, and none had ever heard of him. Where did he come from? Was he blown from Hilton Head Island across the long sweep of Port Royal Sound, or did he drift from one of the little islands in the Chechessee River?

The little old man was pointed out to me. He stood apart, for he was too much of a mystery to invite familiarity on the part of the other negroes. He smiled shrewdly, blinked his little eyes, and seemed to feel some sort of pride in his peculiar position. He was old, and wrinkled, and dried up, and yet wonderfully alert. While the rest of the party were gone to look at the old

family graveyard that had been flooded by the tide, I had John Omcum all to myself. I crossed his palm with a silver dollar, and he followed me about the place, ambling close at my heels wherever I went; but never a whisper could I get from him as to how or whence he came.

"Him so ole, him ashy—eh!" exclaimed one of the women, softly. The "eh!" sounded as if it had been blown from a flute.

"Enty!" exclaimed another, with a sigh.

The description was apt. The old man's ragged pantaloons were rolled up, and his shrunken legs had a tinge of ashen gray over the black.

Poor old John Omcum! shrewd or imbecile—wise or crazy—his was a frail figure to drop smiling out of the thunderous bosom of the storm.

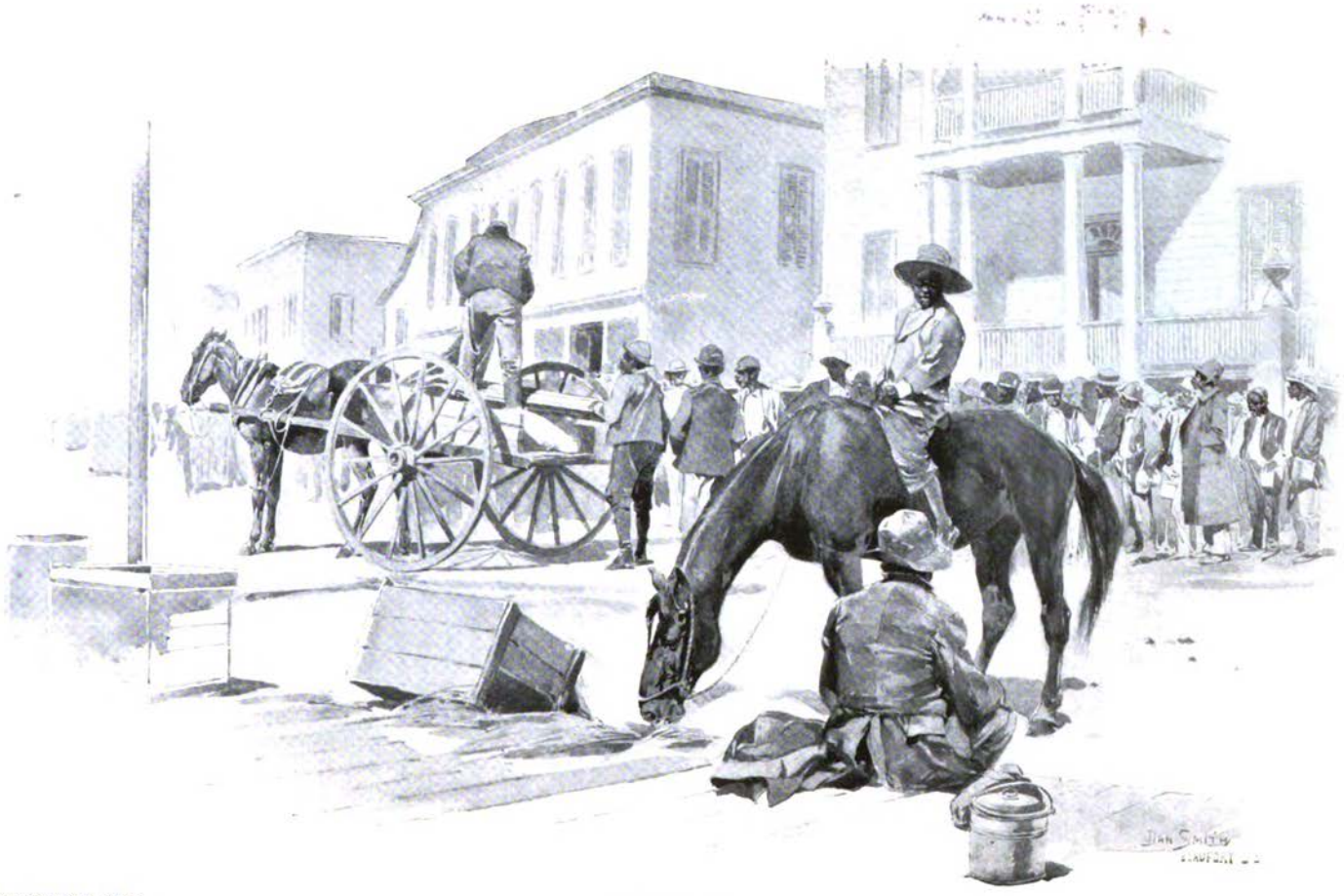
We sailed away from the old place, the screw of the little launch making a mighty stir and splutter in the quiet waters of Station Creek. The negroes stood watching us. One of them waved a handkerchief listlessly, and the little steamer responded with its whistle, sending a ringing farewell over the water. Apart from the rest stood John Omcum, as still as a statue, with one hand raised and his head craned forward a little. He stood thus until a turn in the creek hid him from view.

V.

It is not to be understood, because the negroes of the Sea Islands need relief now and will need it until a new potato crop can be planted and gathered, that they are thriftless or lazy, or slow to look out for themselves. The evidence on all sides goes to show that they are quite as prosperous and progressive—all things being equal—as the upland negroes. They have every invitation to laziness, for nature is kind to them. Spring comes early and summer lingers until far in November. The soil of the islands is black and rich and deep—a fertilizer in and of itself. The warm sun quickens the seeds into life, and sun and soil and air combine to bring all crops to swift and perfect maturity. It is natural, therefore, under the circumstances, that the Sea Island negroes should be a trifle careless in their methods of cultivation, and that they should fall somewhat below the measure of those who are compelled to face harder conditions and a less productive soil.

In Spite of Trouble.

It is enough for the negroes to know that these Sea Island lands produce the finest and the highest-priced cotton in the world, and that the land on which it is grown recuperates and reenriches itself from year to year. This Sea Island cotton enters into the manufacture of the finest goods, and the staple is so long and silk-like that special machinery has been invented to spin it. It is worth twenty-five cents a



DRAWN BY DANIEL SMITH.

In Beaufort, S. C.

pound even when carelessly prepared for market. When grown and prepared with extra care it is worth from forty to sixty cents a pound.

In order to grow a perfect grade, the seed must be renewed from year to year—otherwise the staple slowly degenerates in fineness, in length, and strength. Following the example of the whites, the negroes during the last few years have come to pay more attention to preparing their cotton for market, but, for the most part, they still neglect to renew their seed as often as they should. This has had two results. The first is a lower price, and the second is the increase of imports of Egyptian cotton, which is almost as fine as the Sea Island variety and much cheaper. Five million dollars' worth of Egyptian cotton was imported into the United States last year, and there seems to be a probability that the Sea Island cotton will have to be sold for a reduced price, or cease to compete with Egypt altogether.

Twenty-five cents a pound is a pretty round price to get for cotton produced under such simple and primitive methods as those that are in vogue on the Sea Islands, and there is nothing surprising in the fact that some of the negroes are prosperous. Many of them own ten, twenty, and even fifty acres of land. But the majority, like most of the negroes elsewhere, are tenants and pay their rent by sharing the crop or in so many days' work each week. Some of the more enterprising, who are within reach of the regular lines of communication, have varied their farming operations by engaging in truck gardening on a modest scale.

But all these operations were suspended by the great storm, and the soil itself has been damaged as to its fertility by the salt tide. I heard an interesting discussion between two white planters and land-owners as to the probable damage caused by the inundation of salt-water. They did not come to any definite conclusion, but both agreed that only experiment could decide whether the flooded land would be productive enough to pay the bare cost of its cultivation next season.

The cotton crop, which was mostly open in the bolls and about ready to pick, was almost totally destroyed. Only that which had been picked before the storm was saved, and it bears no relation to the real crop. A factor at Beaufort, whose warehouse had been blown away, told me that his season's receipts up to the 15th of November usually amounted to as many as four hundred bags—not bales. Up to the 15th of last November he had received ten, only three of these coming from the islands proper.

The corn and sweet potato crops—in fact, all the crops on the islands—were destroyed. Harvest time is in September, and the tornado tore over the islands on the 28th of August. Fresh supplies of cotton-seed will have to be distributed in the spring, as well as seed-corn, and, when the time comes, relief cannot take a more substantial shape.

If you are going to make a tour of the islands, the first thing the pilot of the tug or launch does is to close his compass box. He has and can have no sort of use for that instrument. The waterways are so crooked, the channel is so devious, that in the course of an hour the prow of the boat heads to all points of the compass. It is impossible to say whether you are going away or coming back, and the pilot must depend entirely on his familiarity with the channels. These channels run through the islands themselves. The creeks running through Ladies' Island form Cat Island, Gibbs's Island, Distant Island, and I don't know how many more. A creek cuts Paris Island from Port Royal Island, and Horse Island is scooped out of Paris Island. Northward there is St. Helena, Ladies', Phœnix, Dawbaw, Kiawah, Edisto and Little Edisto, Wadmalaw and John's Islands. From Hilton Head to Charleston lie the islands that were most severely injured by the storm. Together they cover a good deal of territory. Those who will take the trouble to glance at the map will have no difficulty in understanding how twenty or thirty thousand negroes in these remote districts have been left practically destitute, and how, in the nature of things they must depend on the bounty of the charitable for many long weeks and months.

What is it about these islands that attracts the negroes and holds them here? What subtle influence brings them back again when they venture to go away? There is a saying that those who once drink water on one of these islands will never rest contented until they return. But this fancy, or superstition, has its origin with the white race, and is common to all sections and communities.

I overheard a conversation between two negro women and a negro preacher on the little steamer that plies occasionally between Savannah and the islands. One of the women had some property in Beaufort and was going there to look after it. The other woman lived on St. Helena. The preacher lived in Savannah, and was going to the islands to see if he could be of any service.

The three were talking about the storm—that being the sole topic of interest. The preacher said he couldn't understand why any human being would want to live on the islands, exposed to the "relements" (as he put it), and cut off from the world.

"You smell de ma'sh when you n'young—you mus' smell 'im when you ol'—enty?" remarked the woman who was going back to Hilton Head to look after her property.

"T'ank God!" exclaimed the Hilton Head woman. "I been deer, I stay deer, I gwan die deer!"

She had been in the worst of the storm, and had been rescued more dead than alive. Afterward she had gone to visit some of her old master's family in Savannah, and now she was returning, happy to get home again, although there was no home there—"nuttin' 'tall but chimley stack," as she said. She was leaving food and shelter behind her and going back to the devastated island where squalor and destitution had taken up their abode.

VI.

In going about the islands it is necessary to employ a vehicle of some kind, and the most numerous—indeed, the only ones I saw—are the little, two-wheeled sulkies. They are very light and serviceable and seem to be just fitted to the capacity of the island ponies—gaunt little horses that are almost the counterparts of the "marsh tackies" of the North Carolina coast. The sulkies will seat one person comfortably, but two passengers make a considerable crowd. When it became necessary for my travelling companion and myself to engage one of these sulkies, a serious problem presented itself. The conveyance would be worse than useless without a guide to drive it. The negro boy who had charge of the pony and sulky solved the problem without discussion. He seated himself on the shaft in front of the single-tree, and, leaning against the pony, waited for his passengers to take their seats. My companion was a Northern gentleman, and he betrayed considerable anxiety as to the fate of the colored race as represented by the boy on the shaft.

"Aren't you afraid you will fall?" he inquired.

"I been deer 'ready, suh," replied the negro, sententiously.

"What does he say?" asked the gentleman.

"Why, he declares that he has occupied that position on many previous occasions."

My companion shook his head slowly, seized the reins and urged the pony forward.

"Don't fahs, now!" exclaimed the boy.

"What does he mean?"

"He says, don't go quite so rapidly to begin with."

"Well," said the gentleman, "the stenographers ought to get hold of this lingo. It beats the Pittman system."

"Where did you get the horse?" the boy was asked.

"Him been here," he answered.

My companion wanted illumination on this point, and the literal interpretation was that the ragged pony had been born and bred in these low levels and among this underbrush. And so we went hustling along, having constantly before our eyes a panorama curiously made up of the commonplace and the picturesque—the lonely marshes pursuing us, the plumed palmettos watching us, and the

long moss waving its gray banners over us. There was nothing to make the journey across the islands unpleasant except the thought that behind the patience and cheerfulness of the negroes who greeted us was a destitution which they themselves could hardly realize or measure. Those that were living in tents were as cheerful as those whose cabins had escaped destruction as by a miracle, and those who had no home at all were just as cheerful as the rest.

On Ladies' Island a church was left standing by the storm, and this fact was a source of great comfort to the negroes.

"De ain't knock de chu'ch down," said one.

"Him stan' straight," remarked another.

Phœbe of old, who carried the gospel in the folds of her mantle, delivering it to the brethren in remote places, had not more faith than these simple Sea Islanders. Nevertheless, of eight church buildings in Hilton Head only one was left standing.

One negro preacher, named Mandigo, came to grief while we were visiting the islands. Having nothing else to engage his attention, the Rev. Mandigo allowed his commercial instincts to lead him from the straight and narrow path. He made out orders for supplies on the Red Cross Society, and sold them to such of the negroes as chanced to have a quarter or a half dollar. The Rev. Mandigo made no effort to keep up the market price of his bogus orders. If he couldn't get a half dollar, he would take a quarter, or a dime. The Red Cross, in its anxiety to meet all appeals for relief, actually honored one or more of these orders, but very soon after that, Mandigo was in limbo, and before this can be printed he will have received his just deserts.

Everywhere I went I found that the Red Cross Society had been there before me. There was no point so remote that its agents had not visited; there was not a case of sickness that had not received attention.

The question of medical attention was one of the most serious problems the society had to face when it first organized the relief movement on the islands. The statement was freely made on Hilton Head, and vouched for by white people, that the physician nearest to that island charged twenty dollars a visit, and the money or a mortgage of some sort had to be forthcoming before he left his office. I did not care to inquire into the truth of this story. It is incredible on the face of it, but investigation might have shown it to be true. I shall think about it again some day, and come to believe it when I have lost faith in humanity; but not till then.

Not far from where this unhappy and persistent rumor had its origin, I saw the results of private bounty. I saw what happened when the hearts of the people were stirred. Their contributions had poured in from every quarter and from almost every State. I saw the boats of the blacks and their little carts carrying the relief hither and yon; the boats flitting in and out through the marsh grass, across the wide creeks and wider rivers, and the carts crunching along contentedly through the gray sand.

If Nehemiah were in control of the islands, I doubt whether he would investigate the story of the physician's fees or undertake to declare the mortgages void, or shake his lap as he did of old. For he would see here what any man may see—the benevolence of the people of the nation bestowed upon those in sore need, and a little band of men and women sending it about from place to place, not as those who are foolish or hasty, but as those who take measure of wisdom and experience.

One of the most serious obstacles the Red Cross Society had to encounter was the lack of communication. This has been mentioned before, but it was a persistent and disturbing fact. A negro can row forty or fifty miles in his little boat; I saw a great many who had accomplished this feat more than once to secure relief; but not all the negroes could come so far, and those who came were able to carry supplies for but few. Naturally, therefore, this obstacle was calculated to fret and vex those who knew how important it was to act promptly. He gives twice who gives quickly. Miss Barton made constant efforts to remove this obstacle.

Finally she appealed to the Government—to the Secretary of the Treasury—to aid her in the matter. The appeal had to pass through the circumlocution bureau that all governments find it convenient to establish, but at last it was acted on favorably; and in the last days of November two revenue cutters were allowed to aid in the work of distributing the supplies. This simplified matters and permitted the Red Cross workers to give their whole thought to the people who are depending on them for relief.

VII.

In these articles, I have touched but lightly on the real horror of the storm. That is a story that has been told at considerable length in the newspapers. I have tried to describe the condition in which it left the negroes of the islands, feeling that such a description, however loosely strung together, would carry with it a fairly reasonable idea of the force and fury of the storm. In getting at this condition, I have followed, as it were, the course of the creeks and estuaries that run in and through these islands. I have gone forward, halted and turned back, crossed over, and wandered into repetition. But always with one fixed purpose in view—always with an anxiety to return speedily to one all-important fact, lest interest in details that have now become trivial and commonplace should betray me into forgetting to repeat and emphasize the need for continuous relief until these twenty or thirty thousand people shall be able to make and gather some simple food-crop for themselves, such as sweet potatoes, which can be set out in January or February and partially gathered in April.

If you wind in and out among these islands, keeping in sight of the shores of them, you will find yourself sooner or later at the landing from which you set out. So, in this hasty and imperfect record, the turnings and twistings all lead back to the one condition that will cry aloud for succor until sun and season renew their bounty and clothe these islands with something of their old-time prosperity.

And, somehow, as I draw near the limit that has been set for this record, one frail and shrunken figure seems to typify it all. The loneliness and the helplessness seem concentrated in the pathetic figure of John Omcum—poor old John Omcum, who was blown out of the very body of the storm! Standing on that desolate shore, his thin hand lifted, his ragged coat waving in the wind, he seems to be the essence of everything that is to be seen and heard and known in this remote region.