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LIFE AMONG THE CRACKERS.

BY ZITELLA COCKE.

The origin of the Crackers is not unlike that of many heroes who have figured in the chronicles of the historian or the story of the bard—it is clouded in obscurity, with here and there a ray of information, which at best but serves to illumine the path of conjecture. From whatever source they have sprung, it is unquestionably true that they are "*sui generis*" in character, dress, habits of life and dialect, whether found among the sand-hills of Carolina or in the hills and mountains of Virginia, Georgia, and Alabama.

With man in his highest state of civilization they have and wish only that intercourse which subserves their purposes of petty barter and exchange. A closer association than is required by such necessities they seem to repel with something of the untamed persistency which characterizes the wild Indian. Their thoughts, manners, and vocabulary set at naught all legislation of custom, fashion, or grammar. Their conservatism is of the intensest school; and their religion, being that of their fathers, is, they declare, quite good enough for them. The same words and expressions and the same type of physical and facial conformation will run through a whole community of these strange people with a fidelity which is startling to one who beholds them for the first time. In a section of country where, if we accept the verdict of Dean Stanley and Lord John Russell, the educated classes speak purer English than elsewhere on the Continent, we find these in-

habitants of the hills and mountains speaking a dialect with a harsh and incisive accent—a reverberating Western *r*—and a prolonged nasal twang which might have been imported from "down-east." To ears polite such language might well suggest the lines of Shakespeare:

"What cracker is this same that deafs our ears
With this abundance of superfluous breath"?

Why they bear the name Cracker remains an unanswered question. Some argue that as the Sand-hillers receive their name from the lank, ungainly sand-hill crane — *Grus Canadensis* — so the Cracker, a branch from the same stem, obtains his name from the corn crake, a bird of similarly ungraceful proportions. It is even claimed that they are descended from the Hessians of Revolutionary notoriety, and not unfrequently a patronymic found among them points strongly to such an origin.

They are not slow to perceive the vast difference which lies between themselves and their civilized countrymen, and anything in word or manner which betrays a consciousness of superiority on the part of the better class is sure to provoke the bitter resentment of the Cracker. "Them white-handed restercrats," as they dub ladies and gentlemen, he always eyes with the suspicion that to them he must necessarily be an object of contempt, and in the presence of such contempt he feels bound to assert his manhood.

"I'm jest about a leetle the best man in this settlement!"—strong accent on last syllable—

TABERNACLE PULPIT

A MONTHLY REPORT OF THE SERMONS DELIVERED BY REV. T.
DE WITT TALMAGE, D.D., FROM THE PULPIT OF THE
BROOKLYN TABERNACLE.

The reports of my sermons published in THE BROOKLYN MAGAZINE, made by my own stenographer and printed after my personal revision, are authorized and recommended by me to the public as accurate reports of the sermons delivered from the pulpit of the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

T. DE WITT TALMAGE.

Brooklyn, March 15, 1886.

HARDSHIPS OF THE WORKING CLASSES.

DELIVERED IN BROOKLYN TABERNACLE, SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 30, 1886.

TEXT: "So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil."—ISAIAH xli. 7.

You have seen in factories a piece of mechanism passing from hand to hand and from room to room, and one mechanic will smite it, and another will flatten it, and another will chisel it, and another will polish it, until the work be done. And so the prophet describes the idols of olden times as being made, part of them by one hand, part of them by another hand. Carpentry comes in, gold-beating comes in, smithery comes in, and three or four styles of mechanism are employed. "So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil." When they met, they talked over their work and they helped each other on with it. It was a very bad kind of business; it was making idols which were an insult to the Lord of heaven. I have thought if men in bad work can encourage each other, ought not men engaged in honest artisanship and in honest mechanism speak words of good cheer?

The Bible comes down to the minutiae of everything. It tells us how many dollars Solomon paid for his horses. It tells us in Deuteronomy what kind of a roof we ought to have on our house. It applauds the industry

and ingenuity of the Israelitish spinsters. It gives us specimens of old-time needlework, leather-making, tanning establishment, pottery, brick kiln, city water-works, shipbuilding.

Men see in their own work hardships and trials, while they recognize no hardships or trials in anybody else's occupation. Every man's burden is the heaviest and every woman's task is the hardest. We find people wanting to get into other occupations and professions. I hear men in all kinds of toil wishing they were enabled to do something else, saying to me: "I have mistaken my path in life; I ought to have been a mechanic and I am a merchant;" or, "I ought to have been a merchant and I am a mechanic. I ought to have been a lawyer and I am an artist; if I had undertaken some other path in life I would have had an easier time and I would have had grander success." I suppose when the merchant comes home at night, his brain hot with the anxieties of commercial toil, disappointed and vexed, agitated about the excitements in the money market, he says: "Oh, I wish I were a mechanic! When his day's work is done the mechanic lies down; he is healthy in body, healthy in mind, and healthy in soul, but I can't sleep;" while at that very moment the mechanic is wishing he were a banker or a merchant. He says: "Then I could always have on beautiful apparel; then I could move in the choicest circles; then I could bring up

think of the blood of the soul, and the foam on the top of the cup would remind you of the froth on the maniac's lip ; and you would go home from this service and kneel down and pray God that, rather than your children should become captives of this evil habit, you would like to carry them out some bright spring day

to the cemetery, and put them away to the last sleep, until at the call of the south wind the flowers would come up all over the grave—sweet prophecies of the resurrection ! God has a balm for such a wound ; but what flower of comfort ever grew on the blasted heath of a drunkard's sepulchre ?

THE BLACK SERVANTS OF THE SKY.

DELIVERED IN BROOKLYN TABERNACLE, SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 20, 1886.

TEXT : " And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening."—1 KINGS xvii. 6.

The ornithology of the Bible is a very interesting study. The stork, which knoweth her appointed time. The common sparrows teaching the lesson of God's providence. The ostriches of the desert, by careless incubation, illustrating the recklessness of parents who do not take enough pains with their children. The eagle, symbolizing riches which take wings and fly away. The pelican, emblemizing solitude. The bat, a flake of the darkness. The night hawk, the ossifrage, the cuckoo, the lapwing, the osprey, by the command of God in Leviticus, flung out of the world's bill of fare. I would like to have been with Audubon as he went through the woods with gun and pencil, bringing down and sketching the fowls of heaven, his unfolded portfolio thrilling all Christendom. What wonderful creatures of God the birds are ! Some of them, this morning, like the songs of heaven let loose, bursting through the gates of heaven. Consider their feathers, which are clothing and conveyance at the same time ; the nine vertebræ of the neck, the three eyelids to each eye, the third eyelid an extra curtain for graduating the light of the sun.

Some of these birds scavengers, and some of them orchestra. Thank God for quail's whistle and lark's carol and the twitter of the wren, called by the ancients the king of birds, because when the fowls of heaven went into a contest as to who could fly the highest, and the eagle swung nearest the sun, a wren on the back of the eagle, after the eagle was exhausted, sprang up much higher, and so was called by the ancients the king of birds. Consider those of them that have golden crowns and crests, showing them to be feathered imperials. And listen to the humming-bird's serenade in the ear of the honeysuckle. Look at the belted kingfisher, striking like a dart from sky to

water. Listen to the voice of the owl, giving the key-note to all croakers. And behold the condor among the Andes, battling with the reindeer. I do not know whether an aquarium or aviary is the best altar from which to worship God.

There is an incident in my text that baffles all the ornithological wonders of the world. The grain crop had been cut off. Famine was in the land. In a cave by the brook Cherith sat a minister of God, Elijah, waiting for something to eat. Why did he not go to the neighbors ? There were no neighbors ; it was a wilderness. Why did he not pick some of the berries ? There were none. If there had been, they would have been dried up. Seated one morning at the mouth of his cave, the prophet looks into the dry and pitiless heavens, and he sees a flock of birds approaching. Oh, if they were only partridges, or if he only had an arrow with which to bring them down ! But, as they come nearer, he finds they are not comestible, but unclean, and the eating of them would be spiritual death. The strength of their beak, the length of their wings, the blackness of their color, their loud, harsh " cruck ! cruck !" prove them to be ravens. They whirr around about the prophet's head, and then they come on fluttering wing and pause on the level of his lips ; and one of the ravens brings bread, and another raven brings meat, and after they have discharged their tiny cargo they wheel past, and others come, until after awhile the prophet has enough, and these black servants of the wilderness table are gone. For six months, and some say a whole year, morning and evening, the breakfast and supper bell sounded as these ravens rang out on the air their " cruck ! cruck !" Guess where they got the food from. The old rabbies say they got it from the kitchen of King Ahab. Others say that the ravens got their food from pious Obadiah, who was in the habit of feeding the persecuted. Some say that the ravens brought the food to their young in the trees, and that

Elijah had only to climb up and get it. Some say that the whole story is improbable—for these were carnivorous birds, and the food they carried was the torn flesh of living beasts, and that ceremonially unclean; or it was carrion, and it would not have been fit for the prophet. Some say they were not ravens at all, but that the word translated "ravens" in my text ought to have been translated "Arabs;" so it would have read: "The Arabs brought bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening." Anything but admit the Bible to be true.

Hew away at this miracle until all the miracle is gone. Go on with the depleting process, but know, my brother, that you are robbing only one man—and that is yourself—of one of the most comforting, beautiful, pathetic, and triumphant lessons in all the ages. I can tell you who these purveyors were: they were ravens. I can tell you who freighted them with provisions: God. I can tell you who launched them: God. I can tell you who taught them which way to fly: God. I can tell you who told them at what cave to swoop: God. I can tell you who introduced raven to prophet and prophet to raven: God. There is one passage I will whisper in your ear, for I would not want to utter it aloud, lest some one should drop down under its power: "If any man shall take away from the words of the prophecy of this book, God shall take away His part out of the book of life and out of the Holy City." While, then, this morning we watch the ravens feeding Elijah, let the swift dove of God's Spirit sweep down the sky with divine food, and on outspread wing pause at the lip of every soul hungering for comfort.

On the banks of what rivers have been fought the great battles of the world? While you are looking over the map of the world to answer that, I will tell you that the great conflict to-day is on the Thames, on the Hudson, on the Mississippi, on the Kennebec, on the Savannah, on the Rhine, on the Nile, on the Ganges, on the Hoang-Ho. It is a battle that has been going on for six thousand years. The troops engaged in it are eleven hundred millions, and those who have fallen are vaster in numbers than those who march. It is a battle for bread. Sentimentalists sit in a cushioned chair, in their pictured study, with their slippered feet on a damask ottoman, and say that this world is a great scene of avarice and greed. It does not seem so to me. If it were not for the absolute necessities of the case, nine tenths of the stores, factories, shops, banking-houses of the land would be closed to-morrow. Who is that man delving in the Colorado hills, or toiling in a

New England factory, or going through a roll of bills in the bank, or measuring a fabric on the counter? He is a champion sent forth in behalf of some home circle that has to be cared for, in behalf of some church of God that has to be supported, in behalf of some asylum of mercy that has to be sustained. Who is that woman bending over the sewing-machine, or carrying the bundle, or sweeping the room, or mending the garment, or sweltering at the wash-tub? That is Deborah, one of the Lord's heroines, battling against Amalekitish want, which comes down with iron chariot to crush her and hers.

The great question with the vast majority of people to-day is not "Home Rule," but whether there shall be any home to rule; not one of tariff, but whether they shall have anything to tax. The great question with the vast majority of people is: "How shall I support my family? How shall I meet my notes? How shall I pay my rent? How shall I give food, clothing, and education to those who are dependent upon me?" Oh, if God would help me to-day to assist you in the solution of that problem, the happiest man in this house would be your preacher! I have gone out on a cold morning with expert sportsmen to hunt for pigeons; I have gone out on the meadows to hunt for quail; I have gone out on the marsh to hunt for reed-birds; but this morning I am out for ravens.

Notice, in the first place, in the story of my text that these winged caterers came to Elijah directly from God. "I have commanded the ravens that they feed thee," we find God saying in an adjoining passage. They did not come out of some other cave. They did not just happen to alight there. God freighted them, God launched them, and God told them by what cave to swoop. That is the same God that is going to supply you. He is your father. You would have to make an elaborate calculation before you could tell me how many pounds of food and how many yards of clothing would be necessary for you and your family; but God knows without any calculation. You have a plate at His table, and you are going to be waited on, unless you act like a naughty child and kick and scramble and pound saucily the plate and try to upset things. God has a vast family, and everything is methodized, and you are going to be served if you will only wait your turn. God has already ordered all the suits of clothes you will ever need, down to the last suit in which you shall be laid out. God has already ordered all the food you will ever eat, down to the last crumb that will be put in your mouth in the dying sacrament. It

may not be just the kind of food or apparel we would prefer. The sensible parent depends on his own judgment as to what ought to be the apparel and the food of the minor in the family. The child would say: "Give me sugars and confections." "Oh, no," says the parent, "you must have something plainer first." The child would say: "Oh, give me these great blotches of color in the garment." "No," says the parent, "that wouldn't be suitable."

Now, God is our Father, and we are minors; and He is going to clothe us and feed us, although He may not always yield to our infantile wish for sweets and glitter. These ravens of the text did not bring pomegranates from the glittering platter of King Ahab. They brought bread and meat. God had all the heavens and the earth before Him, and under Him, and yet He sends this plain food because it was best for Elijah to have it. Oh, be strong, my hearer, in the fact that the same God is going to supply you! It is never "hard times" with Him. His ships never break on the rocks. His banks never fail. He has the supply for you, and He has the means for sending it. He has not only the cargo, but the ship. If it were necessary, He would swing out from the heavens a flock of ravens reaching from His gate to yours, until the food would be flung down the sky from beak to beak and from talon to talon.

Notice, again, in this story of the text, that the ravens did not allow Elijah to hoard up a surplus. They did not bring enough on Monday to last all the week. They did not bring enough one morning to last until the next morning. They came twice a day, and brought just enough for one time. You know as well as I that the great fret of the world is that we want a surplus—we want the ravens to bring enough for fifty years. You have more confidence in the Fulton Bank or Nassau Bank or Bank of England than you have in the Royal Bank of Heaven. You say: "All that is very poetic, but you may have the black ravens; give me the gold eagles." We had better be content with just enough. If in the morning your family eat up all the food there is in the house, do not sit down and cry, and say: "I don't know where the next meal is to come from." About five or six or seven o'clock in the morning, just look up and you will see two black spots on the sky, and you will hear the flapping of wings, and instead of Edgar A. Poe's insane raven alighting on the chamber door, "only this and nothing more," you will find Elijah's two ravens, or the two ravens of

the Lord, the one bringing bread and the other bringing meat—plumed butcher and baker.

God is infinite in resource. When the city of Rochelle was besieged and the inhabitants were dying of the famine, the tides washed up on the beach as never before, and as never since, enough shell-fish to feed the whole city. God is good. There is no mistake about that. History tells us that in 1555 in England there was a great drought. The crops failed, but in Essex, on the rocks, in a place where they had neither sown nor cultured, a great crop of peas grew until they filled a hundred measures; and there were blossoming vines enough, promising as much more.

But why go so far? I can give you a family incident. Some generations back there was a great drought in Connecticut, New England. The water disappeared from the hills, and the farmers living on the hills drove their cattle down toward the valleys, and had them supplied at the wells and fountains of the neighbors. But these after awhile began to fail, and the neighbors said to Mr. Birdseye, of whom I shall speak: "You must not send your flocks and herds down here any more, our wells are giving out." Mr. Birdseye, the old Christian man, gathered his family at the altar, and with his family he gathered the slaves of the household—for bondage was then in vogue in Connecticut—and on their knees before God they cried for water; and the family story is that there was weeping and great sobbing at that altar that the family might not perish for lack of water, and that the herds and flocks might not perish. The family rose from the altar. Mr. Birdseye, the old man, took his staff and walked out over the hills, and in a place where he had been scores of times without noticing anything particular, he saw the ground was very dark, and he took his staff and turned up the ground, and water started; and he beckoned to his servants, and they came and they brought pails and buckets until all the family and all the flocks and the herds were cared for; and then they made troughs reaching from that place down to the house and barn, and the water flowed, and it is a living fountain to-day.

Now I call that old grandfather, Elijah, and I call that brook that began to roll then, and is rolling still, the brook Cherith; and the lesson to me and to all who hear it is, when you are in great stress of circumstances, pray and dig, dig and pray, and pray and dig. How does that passage go? "The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my loving-kindness shall not fail." If your merchandise, if your mechanism, if your hus-

bandry fail, look out for ravens. If you have in your despondency put God on trial and condemned Him as guilty of cruelty, I move this morning for a new trial. If the biography of your life is ever written, I will tell you what the first chapter and the middle chapter and the last chapter will be about, if it is written accurately. The first chapter, about mercy, the middle chapter about mercy, the last chapter about mercy. The mercy that hovered over your cradle. The mercy that will hover over your grave. The mercy that will cover all between.

Again, this story of the text impresses me that relief came to this prophet with the most unexpected and with seemingly impossible conveyance. If it had been a robin-redbreast or a musical meadow-lark or a meek turtle-dove or a sublime albatross that had brought the food to Elijah, it would not have been so surprising. But no. It was a bird so fierce and inauspicate that we have fashioned one of our most forceful and repulsive words out of it—^aravenous. That bird has a passion for picking out the eyes of men and of animals. It loves to maul the sick and the dying. It swallows with vulturous guzzle everything it can put its beak on; and yet all the food Elijah gets for six months or a year is from ravens. So your supply is going to come from an unexpected source. You think some great-hearted, generous man will come along and give you his name on the back of your note, or he will go security for you in some great enterprise. No, he will not. God will open the heart of some Shylock toward you. Your relief will come from the most unexpected quarter. The Providence which seemed ominous will be to you more than that which seemed auspicious. It will not be a chaffinch with breast and wing dashed with white and brown and chestnut; it will be a black raven.

Here is where we all make our mistake, and that is in regard to the color of God's providence. A white providence comes to us, and we say, "Oh, it is mercy!" Then a black providence comes toward us, and we say: "Oh, that is disaster!" The white providence comes to you, and you have great business success, and you have fifty thousand dollars, and you get proud, and you get independent of God, and you begin to feel that the prayer, "Give me this day my daily bread," is inappropriate for you, for you have made provision for a hundred years. Then a black providence comes, and it sweeps everything away; and then you begin to pray, and you begin to feel your dependence, and begin to be humble before God, and you cry out for treas-

ures in heaven. The black providence brought you salvation. The white providence brought you ruin. That which seemed to be harsh and fierce and dissonant was your greatest mercy. It was a raven.

There was a child born in your house. All your friends congratulated you. The other children of the family stood amazed, looking at the new-comer, and asked a great many questions, genealogical and chronological. You said—and you said truthfully—that a white angel flew through the room and left the little one there. That little one stood with its two feet in the very centre of your sanctuary of affection, and with its two hands it took hold of the altar of your soul. But one day there came one of the three scourges of children—scarlet-fever, or croup, or diphtheria—and all that bright scene vanished. The chattering, the strange questions, the pulling at the dresses as you crossed the floor—all ceased. As the great Friend of children stooped down and leaned toward that cradle, and took the little one in His arms and walked away with it into the bower of eternal summer, your eye began to follow Him, and you followed the treasure He carried, and you have been following them ever since; and instead of thinking of heaven only once a week, as formerly, you are thinking of it all the time; and you are more pure and tender-hearted than you used to be, and you are patiently waiting for the daybreak. It is not self-righteousness in you to acknowledge that you are a better man than you used to be—you are a better woman than you used to be. What was it that brought you the sanctifying blessing? Oh, it was the dark shadow on the nursery; it was the dark shadow on the short grave; it was the dark shadow on your broken heart; it was the brooding of a great black trouble; it was a raven—it was a raven! Dear Lord, teach this people that white providences do not always mean advancement, and that black providences do not always mean retrogression.

Children of God, get up out of your despondency. The Lord never had so many ravens as He has this morning. Fling your fret and worry to the winds. Sometimes under the vexations of life you feel like my little girl of four years, who said, under some childish vexation: "Oh, I wish I could go to heaven and see God and pick flowers!" He will let you go when the right time comes to pick flowers. Until then, whatever you want, pray for. I suppose Elijah prayed pretty much all the time. Tremendous work behind him. Tremendous work before him. God has no spare ravens for idlers or for people who are prayer-

less. I put it in the boldest shape possible, and I am willing to risk my eternity on it; ask God in the right way for what you want, and you shall have it if it is best for you. Mrs. Jane Pithey, of Chicago, a well-known Christian woman, was left by her husband a widow with one half-dollar and a cottage. She was palsied, and had a mother ninety years of age to support. The widowed soul every day asked God for all that was needed in the household, and the servant even was astonished at the precision with which God answered the prayers of that woman, item by item, item by item. One day, rising from the family altar, the servant said: "You have not asked for coal, and the coal is out." Then they stood and prayed for the coal. One hour after that the servant threw open the door, and said: "The coal has come." A generous man, whose name I could give you, had sent—as never before and never since—a supply of coal. You cannot understand it. I do. Ravens! Ravens!

My friend, you have a right to argue from precedent that God is going to take care of you. Has He not done it two or three times every day? That is most marvellous. I look back and I wonder that God has given me food three times a day regularly all my lifetime, never missing but once, and then I was lost in the mountains; but that very morning and that very night I met the ravens.

Oh, the Lord is so good that I wish all His people would trust Him with the two lives—the life you are now living, and that which every tick of the watch and every stroke of the clock inform you is approaching! Bread for your immortal soul comes to-day. See! They alight on the platform. They alight on the backs of all the pews. They swing among the arches. Ravens! Ravens! "Blessed are they that hunger after righteousness, for they shall be filled." To all the sinning and the sorrowing and the tempted deliverance comes this hour. Look down, and you see nothing but your spiritual deformities. Look back, and you see nothing but wasted opportunity. Cast your eye forward, and you have a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversary. But look up, and you behold the whipped shoulders of an interceding Christ, and the face of a pardoning God, and the irradiation of an opening heaven. I hear the whirr of their wings. Do you not feel the rush of the air on your cheek? Ravens! Ravens!

There is only one question I want to ask: how many of this audience are willing to trust God for the supply of their bodies, and trust the Lord Jesus Christ for the redemption of their immortal souls? Amid the clatter of the hoofs and the clang of the wheels of the judgment-chariot, the whole matter will be demonstrated.

