

I stopped Diamond in front of the house and told her I wouldn't try to go cross that ditch if I was her. She said, "How come? Come up, Pigeon." Little old Pigeon put his shoulders to the load, and there they went. Furniture leaned so far over, they almost touched the ground; but she made it; made it all the way up to the house. When we came in from the field that night, she was cooking supper. Had put the furniture inside, had gone back up the road and got another load, and had put that inside, and now she was cooking supper. We could see the smoke coming out the chimney.

"Member, Miss Grace?"

"Don't I, though?"

The Travels of Miss Jane Pittman

by Grace Turner

"You and Miss Jane joined church at the same time, didn't y'all, Grace?"

"Yes, the same time."

"Wesn't Nancy Hawkins in there, too?"

"Nancy joined much later. Nancy joined when Batlow went to war."

"Lord, didn't she carry on when Batlow went to war," Olive said. "I was still weering short dresses, but I still remember."

"You don't remember well," Grace Turner said. "Batlow didn't go to war till 1919; you was already married to Bouche."

"Well, I just do declare," Olive said. "That had plumb slipped my 'memberance."

Grace Turner expected Olive to say something else, and she remained silent a while. But Olive was silent also.

I joined the church soon after they took Polly to Jackson. I think I joined the church because I felt we all had run Polly crazy. Katie Jenkins was the one who kept challenging her and challenging her and challenging her till she broke her down, but I think we all wanted to see Polly dethroned from queen of the field. We was sorry after it happened, but I think we all was a little jealous of Polly. When Katie Jenkins came up from Pointe Coupee with that little yellow fellow she called a husband and said she was going to challenge Polly, it made us all feel good. We all had tried it once or twice, but nobody had done it, so we was all glad when Katie Jenkins showed up. At that time, you know, challenging somebody in the field was the biggest sport you could have to make the time go by. If you wasn't challenging somebody on a row of cotton, you was challenging somebody on a row of cane. Women after women--and a few men, too, had challenged Polly, but nobody had done it--till Katie got here. She did it and did it well. Polly started screaming and chopping cotton down like a wild woman. Jacques rode up to her and started hitting her cross the back with the whip. (That same whip he used to keep on that saddle all the time.) ~~He~~ ran

down there and throwed Polly down and covered her with my own body so he could hit me instead of her, because I saw that she had lost her mind. He started beating on me just like he was beating her, and that's when Bessie drawed that hoe back to chop his neck off. I jumped off Polly and grabbed Bessie. By then, the rest of the people had come from down the field to help out. That was a day, you hear me?

That was in 1913, the year after Jane came here. I don't know who made who join the church, to tell you the truth. She was living right across the quarters in front of me, and we used to sit out on our galleries at night and talk while we listened to the singing and praying up the quarters. The church wasn't there yet; they used to hold meeting in one of the houses. The one 'side that well up there.

I was married to Mr. Turner then, and I was staying over there with him, his mama and daddy and Te-Ta, his sister. I used to call over to Jane and ask her if she was listening to that good music going on up the way. She would call back and say she was. It was so dark, you couldn't see your hands before your face, so, Kk of course, we couldn't see each other sitting on the other gallery 'cross the road. But we didn't need to see each other to talk, and sometimes we would hold long conversations there in the dark. People going by in the road, people staying in the houses next to ours, could hear us better than we could hear each other.

One day she came up to me in the field and said, "Gracie, I think I'm go'n join the church." She never called me Grace, always Gracie. I said: "Sure 'nough?" She said: "Yes, I'm go'n join. I'm tired fighting in my heart, Gracie. I'm tired saying Yes and No. I'm at the age now where I got to say one or the other and stick by it."

Jane had been fighting in her heart ever since she was a slave. How could the Lord love both her and the master. If he loved one, he couldn't love the other one. Since the master went to church every Sunday, and since the master had everything he wanted, then the Lord musta loved him. Of course, the people told her God didn't care about money, and the rich could never enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but this only added confusion to her mind. And this brought on the fighting in her. Do God love me or don't God love me? "Yes" sometimes; "no" sometimes. When good things happened to her--"Yes": bad things--"No". Once she tried to wipe God out of her mind altogether. What she would do was work for herself and Ned; do what her hands and her back could do for herself and Ned; and think about nothing else except what the hand and the back had to do. And for a while, that's how she tried to live. But Ned came back and died. And now she had nothing. She had no children--and she never would have any. When they took Tee Man back to Kansas, she knowed that to go on at all, she had to find some other interest in life. At

times she would think "Yes" for God; other times, "No". Then she came here. She was in her late fifties then. Came here and used to sit out there on the gallery in the dark and listen to the people singing up the quarters. Both of us listening and talking, and that's how we decided to join. I remember when she got religion. We was picking cotton in the field that day when she ran down the row where I was. "I got it, Gracie, I got it," she said. "He done touched me with His powerful hand." I said, "Oh, Jane, I'm so glad for you." And I said, "Jane, you feel light? You got to feel light. You feel light?" She said, "I feel light, Gracie, I feel light." And I said, "That's it, Jane. That's it. If you feel light, that's it." And I was so glad for her I started leaping and clapping myself. The people in the field thought I was the one had come through (they knowed I was praying) and all of them ran down there to hold me. I told them it wasn't me, it was Jane, and they told her she ought to knock off and prepare herself for her talk that night. She went home like the people suggested, and when Jacques came out there to weigh-up, we told him she had gone home because she had found religion. He said: "What I care 'bout her and her finding 'ligion there. Find that 'ligion at night. Find that cotton in the day. And that go for the rest o' y'all hunting 'ligion round here, too." When Jacques said that, I thought to myself, "I ought to been let Bessie chop his neck off with

that hoe." But I remembered I was praying, too, and I ran down in the field to ask God pardon for thinking evil, even if it was toward somebody as evil as Jacques Colbert. The people round there thought, when they saw me running, that I had come through like Jane had; but when I came back, not shouting or anything, they felt I had been touched just slightly: not the real thing, yet.

That night, Jane told her travels. I was sitting on the mourners bench when they led her up to the pulpit. I don't know why, but the first thing I thought when I looked at Jane standing there with those funny little round glasses on was, "How come the Lord didn't give her good sight at the same time He gived her religion?"

"Nothing but the devil trying to get your mind off praying," Olive said.

"I'll never forget her travels. That sack of bricks on her back."

"Her sins," Olive said.

She had to keep that sack of bricks on her back from sun-up to sundown. One day she made a vow she was going to drop it.

"But it ain't easy," Olive said. "Not at all. Not when you done reached that age."

And she said to herself, "How?" She said: "I must figure a way to get rid of this terrible load." And a white man-- with long blonde hair, according to Jane, in a clean white robe--

appeared to her in her travels and said to her, "Jane, do you want to get rid of that load?" And she said, "Oh, indeed. Indeed. But how come you know my name? Can you be the Lord?" And he said, "I will not reveal my true name unto you now, but to get rid of that load and be rid of it for always, you must take it cross yon river."

"Jordan River--chilly and cold."

And she said, though she was working in the field--picking cotton--she looked up, and behold, there was a river, a river she had never seen before. And when she turned to the White man again, He was not there. And she started toward the river with the sack of bricks on her back, and briars sprung up in front of her where briars was not, and snakes started crawling round her bare feet where snakes was not, and wide ditches and bayous with stagnant water stood before her where they was not before now. But she kept on moving toward the river. And a Black man, jet black and shiny, with cuckleburrs for hair, appeared to her and told her he would take that sack off her back if she wanted him to. She--

"The devil," Olive said.

She told him, "No", the White man told her she had to cross yon river, and she was going to cross the river. Then right there in front of her, this Black man turned into Ned. And she said, "Ned, Ned, is that you, Ned? But I thought you had gone from me forever?" And he said--

"Devil takes all forms," Olive said.

And he said, "Give me the sack, Mama." And she said, "Is that you, Ned? Though not of my flesh--but truly the son of my heart,--is that you?" And he said, "Give me the sack, Mama." And she said, "I don't believe it's you, Ned. I believe it's nobody but the devil trying to fool poor Jane. If it be you, Ned," she said. "Tell Jane what you carried all them days after your mama was killed." And she said she peered into the face of this devil playing Ned, and she saw him straining and straining to think of what Ned had carried, but he could not remember. And she knowed for sure it was not Ned--because Ned would never forget this--and she went on. And when she came up to the river, she looked and behold she saw Pittman, and he was like he was before he was killed--still young. And he said, "Give me the sack, Jane." And she said, "I must cross the river." And he said it again, "Give me the sack, Jane." And she said again, "No, Joe, I must cross the river." And when she didn't give him the sack the third time he asked for it, he disappeared. And she moved down into the water, and all around her, alligators snapped at her legs. She looked and there were snakes--hundreds, hundreds of them swimming toward her. But she kept on moving with the sack on her back--and with each step now the water got deeper, and when it came up to her neck she stopped and look'd toward the bank, and behold, she said, there was Albert

Cluveau sitting on the horse that had killed Pittman, holding the same gun that had killed Ned. Now, she looked back toward the other bank, and she saw Ned and Pittman standing together, both of them beckoning for her to come to them. But she would not turn back: she would go on because the load ~~ht~~ she was carrying was heavier, she said, than even the ²wight of death. ₁ When she got near the bank, Albert Cluveau raised the gun to shoot her down. But when he saw she wasn't afraid, she was still coming on him, he disappeared like Ned and Joe Pittman had done before him. And, she said, soon as her foot touched bank, the first White man re-appeared and smiled down at her and lifted the load from her shoulders. She fell down to his feet, and he told her rise, she was safe at last. And she rose, and she felt light and clean and good.

After Jane told her travels, they tied the candidate band round her head, and Unc Ambrose and one of the other deacons led her back to the bench. And the people started singing: Sis Watkins leading: "Leaning on the Lord". And the church did rock that night. When they pulled a young one or a really old one out of the wilderness, they used to really have church.

When church was out, Jane and I walked back down the quarters together, and I kept telling her how glad I was she had made it through. She told me she knowed I was going to catch up--and a week or so later, sure 'nough, I did. A

Thursday morning, I won't ever forget, I was on my way in the field when it hit me. Like a warm light had passed over me-- and I started shouting and shouting and shouting. I talked that night, and a couple weeks later Jane and I talked for the water. We were baptized together in the river out there.

Two Brothers of the South

by Grace Turner

Jane and I didn't miss going to church one Sunday all the time she stayed across the road in front of me. Even when she took Aunt Hattie's place at the yard, she used to come all the way back down the quarters--passing the church--just so we could walk back up there together. She musta stayed across the road there about five years. Yes, five or six years, because it was during the war when Aunt Hattie and Uncle Bud both died. Aunt Hattied passed first, and Uncle Bud followed her not more than two months later. Batlow was still here when Aunt Hattie died, because he help Sappho, Claudee, and them to dig the grave. When Uncle Bud died, and that wasn't two months later, he had already gone in. Nancy carried on so much, people spent much time fanning her and calming her down as they did Em-ma and Fee over Uncle Bud. People don't cry now like they used to when their children go to war. Now they celebrate, they give parties. Then they wept.

It was Tee Bob got Jane to take Aunt Hattie's place at the yard. Remember how he used to ride that little Shetland