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The Southern Cracker.

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The war of 1861-5 developed many phases of human nature in strange and unexpected ways. For instance, there was an old Cracker of about 60 years of age, an old Whig, who was not so very ardent for secession, who held aloof during the early red-hot days of that strife and simply drifted with the tide. One day, one Saturday in July, 1861, he was at a cross-road "doggerly" where they held Justice Court; a number of the same class spent the day there gossiping, attending a justice trial, drinking and fighting as usual. Most of the talk was of the war, and among other things someone told a wild-cat story of a raid made by some Yankees away off somewhere and among the depredations committed by them was that some women were maltreated. The old fellow went home late in the afternoon "well corned", as they put it then. For a long time he sat on his porch looking off into space, silent save that now and then he muttered to himself. The delicious, soft summer day, the whistle of the birds, the humming of the myriad of insect life, all was lost on him. At last in his muttering they understood him to say, "The dog-gasted curs; and I understand they were good women, too".

All of the deep meaning of that mighty war; all its vast significance; that it was the birth-struggle of a new nation; what it meant in the big sense to unborn millions; all these things had not touched the old man; all that had been as Sanscrit to him; he had seen, he had felt none of it. But the report of the ravishment of a woman away off somewhere, he knew not where, went to his conscience and aroused him, "got his goat" as it were.

Next day he volunteered for the war.

To me this incident had a profound significance. It was not merely a ludicrous incident in lowly life. It was that surely; but it was more. It was the arousing of the home-sense of the natural man; the springing into life of that essential trait of decency that lies at the root of all that is big in American life; it was the answer of the man to the duties environing the sanctity of woman, an expression of what the natural man felt of the essence of our social order. In his undeveloped nature was that right impulse that saves a nation.

James W. Oates.

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