

cruel chapters, or the dry, tough genealogies,» and especially that he could not beg off from the serious task of memorizing large portions. In fact, he attributed to this early and close familiarity with the Bible all that was best in his intellectual equipment, and all the power he possessed of good literary expression.

One of his most memorable passages of biblical panegyric was whimsically prefaced. To illustrate the honesty of medieval art in contrast with modern sham, he pointed out an arabesque from a manuscript of the Psalms, copied with coarse inaccuracy for a tail-piece in a current magazine. He made us see how the graceful lines were distorted, and the whole perfect design cheapened and

falsified. «And that 's what you like, you blessed English!» he railed, as he flung the offending (Fortnightly) on the floor. Then, taking up his manuscript Psalter, he opened to the first psalm, and began to read it, giving both the majestic Vulgate Latin that was before him, and the English he knew so well. In a moment his spirit was rapt into an ecstasy. Striding back and forth behind his platform rail, he poured out a rhapsody of exalted thought in rhythmic phrase which no one could have attempted to transcribe, but which must have overwhelmed all who heard it with the thrilling consciousness of being in the immediate presence and listening to the spontaneous exercise of creative genius.

## BR'ER COON IN OLD KENTUCKY.

BY JOHN FOX, JR.

Author of «A Cumberland Vendetta,» «The Kentuckians,» etc.

WITH A PICTURE BY MAX F. KLEPPER.

De ole man coon am a sly ole cuss;

Git erlong, coon-dog, now!

An' de lady coon am a leetle bit wuss;

Git erlong, coon-dog, now!

We hunts 'em when de nights gits dark;

Git erlong, coon-dog, now!

Dey runs when dey hears de big dogs bark;

Git erlong, coon-dog, now!

But 'deed, Mister Coon, hit 's no use to try;

Git erlong, coon-dog, now!

Fer when we comes you 's boun' to die;

Git erlong; coon-dog, now!



HE day was late in autumn. The sun was low, and the haze of Indian summer hung like mist on the horizon. Crows were rising from fat pickings in the bluegrass fields, and stretching away in long lines through a yellow band of western light, and toward the cliffs of the Kentucky River, where they roost in safety the winter long. An hour later darkness fell, and we rode forth the same way, some fifty strong.

There were «young cap'n,» as «young master» is now called, and his sister Miriam; Northcott, who was from the North, and was my friend; young farmers from the neigh-

borhood, with their sisters and sweethearts; a party from the county town not far away; a contingent from the Iroquois Hunt Club of Lexington; old Tray, a tobacco tenant from the Cumberland foot-hills; and old Ash, a darky coon-hunter who is known throughout the State.

There were White Child and Black Babe, two young coon-dogs which Ash claimed as his own; Bulger, a cur that belonged to Tray; young captain's favorites, June Bug and Star; several dogs from the neighborhood; and two little fox-terriers, trotting to heel, which the major, a veteran, had brought along to teach the country folks a new wrinkle in an old sport.

Ash was a ragged, old-time darky with a scraggly beard and a caressing voice. He rode a mule with a blind bridle and no saddle. In his belt, and hanging behind, was an ax-head fixed to a handle of hatchet length; the purpose of this was to cut a limb from under Br'er Coon when he could not be shaken off, or to cut a low entrance into his hole, so that he could be prodded out at the top with a sharp stick. In his pockets were matches to build a fire, that the fight could be seen; at his side hung a lantern with which «to shine his eye»

when the coon was treed; and under him was a meal-sack for Br'er Possum.

Tobacco had brought Tray from the foothills to the blue-grass. His horse was as sorry as Ash's mule, and he wore a rusty gray overcoat and a rusty slouch-hat. The forefinger of his bridle-hand was off at the second joint—a coon's teeth had nipped it as clean as the stroke of a surgeon's knife one night when he ran into a fight to pull off a young dog. Tray and Ash betrayed a racial inheritance of mutual contempt that was intensified by the rivalry of their dogs. From these two the humanity ran up, in the matter of dress, through the young farmers and country girls, and through the Hunt Club, to Northcott, who was conventional perfection, and young captain's picturesque sister, who wore the white slouch-hat of some young cavalryman, with the brim pinned up at the side with the white wing of a pigeon that she had shot with her own hand.

The cavalcade moved over the turf of the front woods, out the pike gate, and clattered at a gallop for two miles down the limestone road. Here old Ash called a halt; and he and Tray, and young captain and Blackburn, who was tall, swarthy, and typical, rode on ahead. I was allowed to follow in order to see the dogs work. So was Northcott; but he preferred to stay behind for a while.

«Keep back thar now,» shouted Ash to the crowd, «an' keep still!» So they waited behind while we went on. The old darky threw the dogs off in a woodland to the left, and there was dead silence for a while, and the mystery of darkness. By and by came a short, eager yelp.

## II.

ONLY two days before, Northcott and I were down in the Kentucky mountains fishing for bass in the Cumberland, and a gaunt mountaineer was helping us catch minnows.

«Coons is a-gittin' fat,» he remarked sentimentally to another mountaineer, who was lazily following us up the branch; «an' they 's a-gittin' fat on my corn.»

«You like coons?» I asked.

«Well, jes gimme all the coon I can eat in three days,—in three days, mind ye,—an' then lay me up in bed ag'in' a jug o' moonshine—» Words failed him there, and he waved his hand. «Them coons kin have all o' my corn they kin hold. I'd jes as live have my corn in coons as in a crib. I keeps my dawgs tied up so the coons kin take their time; but»—he turned solemnly to his com-

panion again—«coons is a-gittin' fat, an' I'm goin' to turn them dawgs loose.»

White moonshine, coons, and sweet potatoes for the Kentucky mountaineer; and on through the blue-grass and the Purchase to the Ohio, and no farther—red whisky, coons, and sweet potatoes for the night-roving children of Ham. It is a very old sport in the State. As far back as 1785 one shouting Methodist preacher is known to have trailed a virgin forest for old Br'er Coon. He was called Raccoon John Smith, and he is doubtless the father of the hunt in Kentucky. Traced back through Virginia, the history of the chase would most likely strike root in the homesickness of certain English colonists for trailing badgers of nights in the old country, and sending terriers into the ground for them. One night, doubtless, some man of these discovered what a plucky fight a certain ring-tailed, black-muzzled, bear-like little beast would put up at the least banter; and thereafter, doubtless, every man who loved to hunt the badger was ready to hunt the coon. That is the theory of a distinguished Maryland lawyer and coon-hunter, at least, and it is worthy of record. The sport is common in Pennsylvania, and also in Connecticut, where the hunters finish the coon with a shot-gun; and in New England, I am told, «drawing» the coon is yet done. Br'er Coon is placed in a long, square box or trough, and the point is to get a fox-terrier that is game enough to go in «and bring him out.» That, too, is an inheritance from the English way of badger-fighting, which was tried on our American badgers without success, as it was usually found necessary, after a short fight, to draw out the terrier—dead. Coon-hunting is, however, distinctly a Southern sport, although the coon is found all over the United States, and as far north as Alaska. It is the darky who has made the sport Southern. With him it has always been, is now, and always will be, a passion. Inseparable are the darky and his coon-dog. And nowhere in the South is the sport more popular than in Kentucky—with mountaineers, negroes, and people of the blue-grass. It is the more remarkable, then, that of all the beasts that walk the blue-grass fields, the coon-dog is the only one for which the Kentuckian does not claim superiority. The Kentucky coon-dog—let his master get full credit for the generous concession—is no better than the coon-dog of any other State. Perhaps this surprising apathy is due to the fact that the coon-dog has no family position. A prize was offered in 1891 by the Blue-Grass Kennel

Club at Lexington, and was won, of course, by a Kentucky dog; but the American Kennel Club objected, and the prize has never been offered again. So the coon-dog has no recognized breed. He is not even called a hound. He is a dog—just a «dawg.» He may be cur, fox-terrier, foxhound, or he may have all kinds of grandparents. On one occasion that is worth interjecting he was even a mastiff. An Irishman in Louisville owned what he called the «brag coon-dog» of the State. There are big woods near Louisville, and a good deal of hunting for the coon is done in them. A German who lived in the same street had a mastiff with the playful habit of tossing every cat that came into his yard over the fence—dead. The Irishman conceived the idea that the mastiff would make the finest coon-dog on earth—not excepting his own. He persuaded the German to go out in the woods with him one night, and he took his own dog along to teach the mastiff how to fight. The coon was shaken out of the tree. The coon-dog made for the coon, and the mastiff made for the coon-dog, and reached him before he reached the coon. In a minute the coon-dog was dead, the coon was making off through the rustling maize, and Celt and Teuton were clinched under the spreading oak. Originally the coon-dog was an uncompromising cur, or a worthless foxhound that had dropped out of his pack; and most likely darkies and boys had a monopoly of the sport in the good old days when the hunting was purely for the fun of the fight, and when trees were cut down, and nobody took the trouble to climb. When the red fox drove out the gray, the newer and swifter hounds—old Lead's descendants—took away the occupation of the old foxhound, and he, in turn, took the place of the cur; so that the Kentucky coon-dog of to-day is usually the old-fashioned hound that was used to hunt the gray fox, the «pot-licker»—the black-and-tan, long-eared, rat-tailed, flat-bellied, splay-footed «pot-licker.» Such a hound is a good trailer; he makes a good fight, and there is no need in the hunt for special speed. Recently the terrier has been introduced to do the fighting when the coon has been trailed and treed, because he is a more even match, and as game as any dog; and, thanks to Mr. Belmont's «Nursery» in the blue-grass, the best terriers are accessible to the Kentucky hunters who want that kind of fight.

But it is the hunt with an old darky, and old coon-dogs, and a still, damp, dark night, that is dear to the Southern hunter's heart.

It is the music of the dogs, the rivalry between them, the subtleties of the trail, and the quick, fierce fight, that give the joy then. Only recently have the ladies begun to take part in the sport, and, naturally, it is growing in favor. Coons are plentiful in the blue-grass, even around the towns, where truck-patches are convenient, and young turkeys and chickens unwary. For a coon, unless hard pressed, will never go up any tree but his own; and up his own tree he is usually safe, for trees are now too valuable to be cut down for coons.

It is the ride of only a few hours from the mountains to the lowland blue-grass, and down there, too, coons were getting fat; so on the morning of the second day Northcott and I woke up in the ell of an old-fashioned blue-grass homestead,—an ell that was known as the «office» in slavery days,—and old Ash's gray head was thrust through the open door.

«Breakfast 'mos' ready. Young cap'n say you mus' git up now.»

Crackling flames were leaping up the big chimney from the ash kindling-wood and hickory logs piled in the enormous fireplace, and Northcott, from his bed in the corner, chuckled with delight.

That morning the Northerner rode through peaceful fields and woodlands, and looked at short-horn cattle and Southdown sheep and thoroughbred horses, and saw the havoc that tobacco was bringing to the lovely land. When he came back dinner was ready—his first Southern dinner.

After dinner, Miriam took him to feed young captain's pet coon, the Governor, and Black Eye, a fox-terrier that was the Governor's best friend—both in the same plate. The Governor was chained to an old apple-tree, and slept in a hole which he had enlarged for himself about six feet from the ground. Let a strange dog appear, and the Governor would retreat, and Black Eye attack; and after the fight the Governor would descend, and plainly manifest his gratitude with slaps and scratches and bites of tenderness. The Governor never looked for anything that was tossed him, but would feel for it with his paws, never lowering his blinking eyes at all. Moreover, he was a dainty beast, for he washed everything in a basin of water before he ate it.

«Dey eats ever'thing, boss,» said old Ash's soft voice; «but dey likes crawfish best. I reckon coon 'll eat dawg, jes as dawg eats coon. But dawg won't eat possum. Gib a dawg a piece, o' possum meat, and he spit it

out, and look at you mean and reproachful. Knowin' possum lack I do, dat sut'nly do look strange. Hit do, mon, shore.

«An' as fer fightin'—well, I ain't never seed a coon dat would n't fight, an' I ain't never seed nuttin' dat a coon would n' tackle. Most folks believes dat a possum *can't* fight. Well, you jes tie a possum an' coon together by de tails, an' swing 'em over a clothes-line, an' when you come back you gwine find de coon daid. Possum jes take hole in de throat, an' go to sleep—jes like a bull-pup.»

A gaunt figure in a slouch-hat and ragged overcoat had slouched in at the yard gate. His eye was blue and mild, and his face was thin and melancholy. Old Ash spoke to him familiarly, and young captain called him Tray. He had come for no reason other than that he was mildly curious and friendly; and he stopped shyly behind young captain, fumbling with the stump of one finger at a little sliver of wood that served as the one button to his overcoat, silent, listless, gentle, grave. And there the three stood, the pillars of the old social structure that the war brought down—the slave, the poor white, the master of one and the lord of both. Between one and the other the chasm was still deep, but they would stand shoulder to shoulder in the hunt that night.

«Dat wind from de souf,» said old Ash, as we turned back to the house. «Git cloudy bime-by. We gwine to git Mister Coon dis night, shore.»

A horn sounded from the quarters soon after supper, and the baying of dogs began. Several halloos came through the front woods, and soon there was the stamping of horses' feet about the yard fence, and much jolly laughter. Girths were tightened, and a little later the loud slam of the pike gate announced that the hunt was begun.

### III.

Br'er Coon he has a bushy tail;  
Br'er Possum's tail am bar';  
Br'er Rabbit's got no tail at all—  
Jes a leetle bunch o' ha'r.

WHEN the yelp came, Tray's lips opened triumphantly:

«Bulger!»

«Rabbit,» said old Ash, contemptuously.

Bulger was a young dog, and only half broken; but every hunter knew that each old dog had stopped in his tracks and was listening. There was another yelp and another; and the old dogs harked to him. But the hunters sat still to give the dogs time to

trail, as hunters always do. Sometimes they will not move for half an hour unless the dogs are going out of hearing. Old Ash was humming calmly:

Coony in de tree;  
Possum in de holler;  
Purty gal at my house,  
Fat as she kin waller.

It was Tray's dog, and old Ash could afford to be calm and scornful, for he was without faith. So over and over he sang it softly, while Tray's mouth was open, and his ear was eagerly cocked to every note of the trail. The air was very chilly and damp. The moon was no more than a silver blotch in a leaden sky, and barely visible here and there was a dim star. On every side the fields and dark patches of woodland rolled alike to the horizon, except straight ahead, where one black line traced the looping course of the river. That way the dogs were running, and the music was growing furious. It was too much for Tray, who suddenly let out the most remarkable yell I have ever heard from human lips. That was a signal to the crowd behind. A rumbling started; the crowd was striking the hard turnpike at a swift gallop, coming on. It was quick work for Bulger, and the melancholy of Tray's face passed from under the eager light in his eyes, and as suddenly came back like a shadow. The music had stopped short, and old Ash pulled in with a grunt of disgust.

«Rabbit, I tol' ye,» he said again, contemptuously; and Tray looked grieved. A dog with a strange mouth gave tongue across the dim fields.

«House cat,» said young captain. «That was a farm dog. The young dogs ran the cat home.» This was true, for just then two of the old dogs leaped the fence and crossed the road.

«They won't hark to him next time,» said young captain; «Bulger's a liar.» A coon-dog is never worthless, «no 'count»; he is simply a «liar.» Nine out of ten young dogs will run a rabbit or a house cat. The old dogs will trust a young one once or twice; but if he proves unworthy of confidence they will not go to him sometimes when he is really on a coon trail, and will have to be called by their masters after the coon is treed. As Bulger sprang into the road, old Ash objurgated him:

«Whut you mean, dawg?—you black liah, you!» The pain in Tray's face was pathetic.

«Bulger hain't no liar,» he said sturdily. «Bulger's jes young.»

Then we swept down the road another mile to another woodland, and this time I stayed with the crowd behind. Young captain had given Northcott his favorite saddle-horse and a fat saddle that belonged to his father; and Northcott, though a cross-country rider at home, was not happy. He was being gently rocked sidewise in a maddening little pace that made him look as ridiculous as he felt.

«You have n't ridden a Southern saddle-horse before, have you?» said Miriam.

«No; I never have.»

«Then you won't mind a few instructions?»

«No, indeed,» he said meekly.

«Well, press your hand at the base of his neck,—so,—and tighten your reins just a little—now.»

The horse broke step into a «running walk,» which was a new sensation to Northcott. We started up the pace a little.

«Now press behind your saddle on the right side, and tighten your rein a little more, and hold it steady,—so,—and he'll rack.» The saddler struck a swift gait that was a revelation to the Northerner.

«Now, if you want him to trot, catch him by the mane or by the right ear.»

The horse broke his step instantly.

«Beautiful!» said Northcott. «This is my gait.»

«Now wave your hand—so.» The animal struck an easy lope.

«Lovely!»

We swept on. A young countryman who was called Tom watched the instruction with provincial amusement.

I was riding young captain's buggy mare, and, trying her over a log, I learned that she could jump. So, later in the night, I changed horses with Northcott—for a purpose.

We could hear the dogs trailing around to the right now, and the still figures of Ash and Tray halted us in the road. Presently the yelps fused into a musical chorus, and then a long, penetrating howl came through the woods that was eloquent to the knowing.

«Dar's old Star,» said Ash, kicking his mule in the side; «an' dar's a coon!»

We had a dash through the woods at a gallop then, and there was much dodging of low branches, and whisking around tree-trunks, and a great snapping of brush on the ground; and we swept out of the shadows of the woodland to a white patch of moonlight, in the center of which was a little walnut-tree. About this the dogs were sitting on their haunches, baying up at its leafless branches; and there, on the first low limb, scarcely ten feet from the ground and two

feet from the trunk, sat, not ring-tailed Br'er Coon, but a fat, round, gray possum, paying no attention at all to the hunters gathering under him, but keeping each of his beady black eyes moving with nervous quickness from one dog to another. Old Ash was laughing triumphantly in the rear. «Black Babe foun' dat possum. Dis nigger's got dawgs!» Northcott was called up, that he might see; and young captain rode under the little fellow, and reaching up, caught him by the tail, the possum making no effort at all to escape, so engrossed was he with the dogs. Old Ash, with a wide smile, dropped him into the mouth of his meal-sack.

«Won't he smother in there,» asked Northcott, «or eat his way out?»

Old Ash grinned. «He'll be dar when we git home.» Then he turned to Tray. «I gwine to let you have dis possum in de mornin', to train dat liah Bulger.»

There is no better way to train a young dog than to let him worry a possum after he has found it; and this is not as cruel as it seems. Br'er Possum knows how to roll up in a ball and protect his vitals; and when you think he is about dead, he will unroll, but little hurt.

The clouds were breaking now; the moon showed full, the air had grown crisp, and the stars were thick and brilliant. For half an hour we sat on a hillside waiting, and, for some occult reason, the major was becoming voluble.

«Now, old Tray there thinks he's hunting the coon. So does old Ash. I reckon that we are all laboring under that painful delusion. Whereas the truth is that the object of this hunt is attained. I refer, sir, to that possum.» He turned to Northcott. «You have never eaten possum? Well, sir, it is a very easy and dangerous habit to contract if the possum is properly prepared. I venture to say, sir, that nawth of Mason and Dixon's line the gastronomical possibilities of the possum are utterly unknown. How do I prepare him? Well, sir—»

The major was interrupted by a mighty yell from old Ash; and again there was a great rush through the low undergrowth, over the rocky hillside, and down a long, wooded hollow. This time the old negro's favorites, White Child and Black Babe, were in the lead; and old Ash flapped along like a windmill, with every tooth in sight.

«Go it, Black Babe! Go it, my White Chile! Gord! but dis nigger's got dawgs!»

Everybody caught his enthusiasm, and we could hear the crowd thundering behind us.

I was next Ash, and all of a sudden the old darky came to a quick stop, and caught at his nose with one hand. A powerful odor ran like an electric shock through the air, and a long howl from each dog told that each had started from some central point on his own responsibility. The major raised his voice. «Stop!» he shouted. «Keep the ladies back—keep 'em *'way* back!»

«Gord!» said old Ash once more; and Tray lay down on his horse's neck, helpless with laughter.

The major was too disgusted for words. When we crossed the road, and paused again, he called in a loud voice for me to advance and see the dogs work. Then he directed me to call Northcott forward for the same purpose. Blackburn came too. A moment later I heard young captain shouting to the crowd, «Keep back, keep back!» and he too spurred around the bushes.

«Where are those dogs?» he asked with mock anxiety.

The neck of the major's horse was lengthened peacefully through the rails of a ten-foot fence, and at the question the veteran whisked a bottle of old Jordan from his hip.

«Here they are.»

Then followed an eloquent silence that turned the cold October air into the night-breath of June, that made the mists warm, the stars rock, and the moon smile. Once more we waited.

«How do I prepare him, sir?» said the major. «You skin the coon; but you singe off the hair of the possum in hot wood-ashes, because the skin is a delicacy, and must not be scalded. Then parbille him. This takes a certain strength away, and makes him more tender. Then put him in a pan, with a good deal of butter, pepper, and salt, and a little brown flour, leaving the head and tail on. Then cut little slips along the ribs and haunches, and fill them with red-pepper pods. Baste him with gravy while browning,»—the major's eyes brightened, and once at least his lips smacked distinctly,—«cook sweet potatoes around him, and then serve him smoking hot—though some, to be sure, prefer him cold, like roast pork. You must have dodgers, very brown and very crisp; and of course raw persimmons (persimmons are ripe in possum-time, and possums like persimmons—the two are inseparable); pickles, chow-chow, and tomato ketchup; and, lastly, pumpkin-pie and a second cup of coffee. Then, with a darky and a banjo, a mint-julep and a pipe, you may have a reasonable ex-

pectation of being, for a little while, happy. And speaking of julep—»

Just then two dim forms were moving out of sight behind some bushes below us, and the major shouted:

«Tawm!»

The two horsemen turned reluctantly, and when Tom was near enough the major asked a whispered question, and got an affirmative response.

«All right,» added the major, with satisfaction. «Shake hands with Mr. Northcott. I hereby promote you, sir, to the privilege of staying in front and watching the dogs work.»

Northcott's face was distinctly flushed after this promotion, and he confessed afterward to an insane desire to imitate the major's speech and Blackburn's stately manner. When we started off again, he posted along with careless content, and many sympathized with him.

«Oh, this is just what I like,» he said. «Everybody posts up North—even the ladies.»

«Dear me!» said several.

«I reckon that kind of a horse is rather better for an inexperienced rider,» said Tom, friendly, and Northcott smiled. Somebody tried a horse over a log a few minutes later, and the horse swerved to one side. Northcott wheeled, and started for a bigger log at a gallop; and the little mare rose, as if on wings, two feet higher than was necessary, while Northcott sat as if bound to his saddle.

Then he leaped recklessly into another field, and back again. Tom was speechless.

It was after midnight now, and the moon and stars were passing swiftly overhead; but the crowd started with undiminished enthusiasm when a long howl announced that some dog had treed. This time it was no mistake. At the edge of the woodland sat the old darky at the foot of the tree to keep the coon from coming down, while the young dogs were bouncing madly about him, and baying up into the tree. It was curious to watch old Star when he arrived. He would take no pup's word for the truth, but circled the tree to find out whether the coon had simply «marked» it; and, satisfied on that point, he settled down on his haunches, and, with uplifted muzzle, bayed with the rest.

«I knowed dis was coon,» said Ash, rising. «Possum circles; coon runs straight.»

Then the horses were tied, and everybody gathered twigs and branches and dead wood for a fire, which was built half-way between the trunk and the tips of the overhanging

branches; and old Ash took off his shoes, his coat, and his vest, for no matter how cold the night, the darky will climb in shirt, socks, and trousers. If he can reach around the tree, he will go up like a monkey; if he can't, he will go to the outer edge, and pull a bough down. In this case he could do neither, so young captain stood with his hands braced against the tree, while the old darky climbed up his back, and stamped in sock feet over his head and shoulders. Tray held the fence-rail alongside, and, with the aid of this, the two boosted Ash to the first limb. Then the men formed a circle around the tree at equal distances, each man squatting on the ground, and with a dog between his knees. The major held his terriers; and as everybody had seen the usual coon-fight, it was agreed that the terriers should have the first chance. Another darky took a lantern, and walked around the tree with the lantern held just behind one ear, «to shine the coon's eye.» As the lantern is moved around, the coon's eye follows, and its greenish-yellow glow betrays his whereabouts.

«Dar he is!» shouted the negro with the lantern; «'way up higher.» And there he was, on the extremity of a long limb. Old Ash climbed slowly until he could stand on the branch below and seize with both hands the limb that the coon lay on.

«Look out dar, now; hyeh he comes!» Below, everybody kept perfectly quiet, so that the dogs could hear the coon strike the ground if he should sail over their heads and light in the darkness outside the circle of fire. Ash shook, the coon dropped straight, and the game little terriers leaped for him. Br'er Coon turned on his back, and it was slap, bite, scratch, and tear. One little terrier was caught in the nose and spun around like a top, howling; but he went at it again. For a few minutes there was an inextricable confusion of a brown body, snapping white teeth, and outshooting claws, with snarling, leaping little black-and-tan terriers, and much low, fierce snarling. The coon's wheezing snarl was curious: it had rage, whining terror, and perfect courage, all in one. Then came one scream, penetrating and piteous, and the fight was done.

«Git him?» yelled Ash from up in the tree.

«Yep.»

«Well, dar 's anudder one up hyeh. Watch out, now!»

The branches rattled, but no coon dropped, and we could hear Ash muttering high in the air, «I bet ef I had a black-snake whip I 'd lif' you.»

Then came a pistol-shot. Ash had fired close to him to make him jump; but Br'er Coon lay close to the limb, motionless.

«I got to cut him off, I reckon,» Ash called; and whack! whack! went the blows of his little ax. «Whoop!»

The branch crackled; a dark body, flattened, and with four feet outstretched, came sailing down, and struck the earth—thud! Every dog leaped for him, growling; every man yelled, and pressed close about the heap of writhing bodies; and there was pandemonium. A coon can fight eight dogs better than he can fight three, for the eight get in one another's way. Foot by foot the game little beast fought his way to the edge of the cliff, and the whole struggling, snarling, snapping mass rolled, with dislodged dirt and clattering stones, down to the edge of the river, with the yelling hunters slipping and sliding after them. A great splash followed, and then a sudden stillness. One dog followed the coon into the water, and after a sharp struggle, and a howl of pain, turned and made for the bank. It was Bulger—the last to give up the fight. Br'er Coon had escaped, and there was hardly a man who was not glad.

«Reckon Bulger can fight, ef he is a liar,» said Tray—«which he ain't.»

The stars were sinking fast, and we had been five hours in the saddle. Everybody was tired. Down in a ravine young captain called a halt when the dogs failed to strike another trail. The horses were tied, and an enormous fire was built, and everybody gathered in a great circle around it. Somebody started a song, and there was a jolly chorus. A little piccaninny was pushed into the light, bashful and hesitating.

«Shake yo' foot, boy,» said old Ash, sternly; and the nimble feet were shaken to «Juba» and «My Baby Loves Shortenin'-bread.» It was a scene worth remembering—the upshooting flames, the giant shadows leaping into the dark woods about, the circle of young girls with flushed faces and loosened hair, and strapping young fellows cracking jokes, singing songs, and telling stories.

It was all simple and genuine, and it pleased Northcott, who was one of the many Northerners to whom everything Southern appeals strongly—who had come South prepared to like everything Southern: darkies, darky songs; Southern girls, Southern songs, old-fashioned in tune and sentiment; Southern voices, Southern accent, Southern ways; the romance of the life and the people; the

pathos of the war and its ruins; the simple, kindly hospitality of the Southern home.

Nobody noticed that Tray was gone, and nobody but Tray had noticed that Bulger was the only one of the dogs that had not gathered in to the winding of old Ash's horn. A long howl high on the cliff made known the absence of both. It was Bulger; and again

an' you would n' come, so I climbed up an' shuk him out. When I got down the coon was dead. Bulger don't run polecats," he said with mild scorn, and turned on Ash: "I reckon you 'd better not call Bulger a liar no more." And the blood of the Anglo-Saxon told, for Ash made no answer.

It was toward morning now. Only one



«GO IT, BLACK BABE! GO IT, MY WHITE CHILE!»

came Tray's remarkable yell. Not an old dog moved. Again came the howl, and again the yell; and then Tray was silent, though the howls went on. Another song was started, and stopped by old Ash, who sprang to his feet. A terrific fight was going on up on the cliff. We could hear Bulger's growl, the unmistakable snarl of a coon, a series of cheering yells, and the crackling of branches, as though Tray were tumbling out of a tree. Every dog leaped from the fire, and all the darkies but old Ash leaped after them. There was a scramble up the cliff; and ten minutes later Tray came into the firelight with a coon in one hand, and poor Bulger limping after him, bleeding at the throat, and with a long, bloody scratch down his belly.

«Bulger treed him, an' I seed the coon 'twixt me an' the moon. I hollered fer you,

white star was hanging where the rest had gone down. There was a last chorus—«My Old Kentucky Home»:

We 'll hunt no more for the possum an' the coon.

And then, at a swift gallop, we thundered ten miles along the turnpike—home. The crowd fell away, and day broke as we neared young captain's roof. The crows were flying back from the cliffs to the blue-grass fields, and the first red light of the sun was shooting up the horizon. Northcott was lifting Miriam from her saddle as I rode into the woods; and when I reached the yard fence they were seated on the porch, as though they meant to wait for the sunrise. At the foot of the apple-tree were the Governor and Black Eye, playing together like kittens.

