

KATHARINE
THEUS
OBEAR

was born in Vermont in 1852 and came to Winnsboro three years later. Her father was an Episcopal clergyman who established the Episcopal Church in Winnsboro and conducted a school for young ladies. Her mother, also a teacher, was an Englishwoman who had been visiting in Jamaica, was forced to flee because of slave insurrections, and came to Charleston, S.C., where she met and married Mr. Obear. One of seven children, Katharine Theus Obear grew up during the turbulent years of the Civil War and Reconstruction and remembered Sherman's march through Winnsboro. She was educated by her father and mother and, from the age of eighteen on, taught more than two generations of Winnsboro citizens in a private school for small children. A devoted church member, she was organist at St. John's Episcopal Church for forty years. She has been described as cheerful, possessing a good sense of humor, loving "interesting places and interesting people, good books, and dogs and cats," and being "something of a mystic." She died on February 15, 1942, at the age of ninety.



Through the Years in
OLD WINNSBORO

By
KATHARINE THEUS OBEAR



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The tables were on the back and side piazzas in the shape of an L, glistening with crystal and silver. Every gentleman wore his beaver, while the Rabbi asked the blessing. More than a score of telegrams came from the absent relatives and friends during the repast. The guests were all of Rosa's friends and relatives from Georgetown, Camden and Chester, besides those who had come on with the groom from New York. That night Mrs. Ladd gave a reception in honor of the bride and groom, to which most of the town was invited.

The couple returned from their wedding trip and stopped for a few days, before going on to their future home in Grand Rapids. On leaving our house one night, they proposed I should go to walk with them. The moon was gorgeous and it was almost as bright as day. We went to Allen's Branch, skirted Spurrier's Hill, where the Winnsboro Cotton Mill now stands, and on to Lover's Rock where we rested. This rock was chair-shaped, on this side of the railroad, in front of the Creight house. Rosa and I sat on the upper part, while Henry,⁶ as she called him, sat on the lower part, with his head in her lap. She was smoothing the hair back from his broad forehead. It gleamed in the moonlight like polished white marble. She sat looking at it in silence for a few minutes, then turned to me and said, "Kiss him, Kate—he is so sweet." She was very happy. In time, her husband, at the head of a big mercantile establishment, became exceedingly rich. This was in Chicago.

When their children were grown, they went abroad. In Switzerland their only daughter met and married some nobleman there, whose name I have forgotten. This was the source of both grief and pride; grief that they would be so far separated from the girl, and pride, that in the eyes of the world,

⁶ Mr. Henry Lytton, still living at ninety-four.

she had risen to such distinction. Dear Rosa! In her early married life, she had a crushing blow, from which she never quite recovered. Her eldest child, a splendid boy of seven, happened to be in the house, with no one but the servants, when a fire broke out in the neighborhood. All frightened, they forgot the child. He ran out in the street, right in the path of the speeding fire engine. It ran over him, injuring him so dreadfully that he died a few hours later.

But to me, Rosa was gone. Occasional letters—a visit home now and then—increased absorption in home affairs—and then death, many years ago—to me, a memory.

Life is just like a kaleidoscope. We never know what the next turn will bring. Annie—Annie was the next, she was to marry John Neil in November. As they were to live in Winnsboro, I was not going to lose this friend.

Such a fall as that was. Perfect days, dreamy days, sunshine every day, until the day of the wedding. That day, it began raining at dawn, continued all day and poured in torrents by night. I was first bridesmaid, and honestly, the misery of getting to the bridal party all crushed and mussed and wet, in spite of umbrellas and carriage, has quite effaced from my memory all recollections of this wedding. I can't remember whether the ceremony was in the church or at home. The next morning the sun was shining again and uncloudy weather followed for weeks. I did not like this, for I have always been superstitious.

I believe it was Dr. Marion Sims,⁷ who passing through Winnsboro, stopped to spend a day or two with Dr. Robertson. While there, a dozen or more young ladies and gentlemen were invited to a buffet supper. This gentleman might have

⁷ J. Marion Sims, M.D., pioneer surgeon and the father of Gynecology. He was a native of Lancaster District, South Carolina.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KINDERGARTEN YEARS

Anxious months followed. Father's health was failing. Dr. Robertson did not tell us, but we were sure he feared a stroke, and in February, 1882, his fears were realized. As well as usual at breakfast, by midday he came into the house, said he had a dreadful headache, lay down and became unconscious and never roused again, passing away the next day at noon. Dear little Mother! she did her best to hold up for our sakes, but these three shocks, coming so close together, came near being too much for her. Her strength failed, and though, in time, she did recover her spirits, she never was quite well again.

Oh! the kindness of these Winnsboro people when anyone is in trouble. Two or three days after Father's death, Mrs. Kinney Elliott, our old-time neighbor, came to express her sympathy and to tell us that if we were in the least nervous, one of her sons would willingly come down every night and sleep in the house. But we knew we had to get accustomed to feeling insecure, and it was best to brave it out by ourselves. Em was a tower of strength in those days. Almost immediately she took Father's place. Then there was Mrs. Thomas Robertson, the most loyal friend we ever had. She, her mother, Mrs. Couturier, and the doctor did everything they could to show their love and sympathy. Mrs. Gaillard, Mrs. Boylston, Mrs. Dwight, the Rions, oh! everybody, was kindness itself. Such sympathy helps.

Time, the wonderful healer, dulled the pain of separation, and after a while, youth reasserted itself, and life went on once more, but on different lines.

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About a year after Annie died, Mr. John Neil, her widower,¹ married Mary Gray Thompson. Mrs. Ladd and her family soon after left Winnsboro and went to Monticello to live. She lost her eyesight, but continued cheerful in spite of her blindness. She lived for several years after this. I saw her only once again—I was with Ria Dwight, and she said to Mrs. Ladd as we went in, "This is Kate with me," so naturally she thought Ria meant her sister, Kate Ellison. We didn't find this out until we were leaving, so we let it go at that.

One afternoon, happening to glance out of my window, I saw a column of black smoke rolling above the trees in the southeast. It was a fire, I knew, and from the direction, either Judge Robertson's or Mr. Henry Gaillard's house. It was Clifton, the Gaillard home. As there were no telephones in those days, the building was wrapped in flames before anyone in Winnsboro knew of it. Of course, although the family and neighbors struggled heroically, nothing could save it.

Our neighbors, the Clowneys, about this time moved to Texas. The winter before they left, we had had record cold weather—zero, in Winnsboro. Mrs. Sam Clowney sent us jars of preserved fruit, frozen solid. Who had ever heard of such a thing before. We had a lemon tree, full of lemons, killed by the cold, although it grew in a double house, the space between the walls being filled with cotton seed. Fig trees were killed. There was no keeping warm, even with big fires going all day and almost all night. That was the coldest weather I have ever known.

¹ John J. Neil was for many years Clerk of Court of Fairfield County. He was the father of Charles Henry Neil, an alumnus of the University of South Carolina, now head of the Department of English, University of Hawaii. Another son, John J. Neil, lives in Columbia. The names of both the latter occur among the roster of Miss Obear's pupils.