

**RECORD OF AN
OBSCURE MAN**

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Record of an obscure man by Mary Lowell Putnam

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MARY LOWELL PUTNAM

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OBSCURE MAN**

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OF
AN OBSCURE MAN.

"Aux plus déshérités le plus d'amour."



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RECORD OF AN OBSCURE MAN.

I.

IN the spring of 1842 I made a tour through some of the Southern and Southwestern States. I travelled chiefly on horseback, — partly for health, partly on account of the greater opportunity thus afforded for those way-side adventures which give such a zest to the rambles of a young man journeying without any definite object. I met with many, — some piquant enough, others far from charming. But all seem pleasant in the distance; and these, my earliest travelling-experiences, furnished me long, and furnish me still, with stuff for many an after-dinner story and many an evening reverie.

Among the incidents of this youthful excursion was one of the more quiet sort, to which my thoughts have reverted oftener than to the many comic adventures or even to the hair-breadth escapes that have entertained my listeners. Yet, up to this time, it has been shared with no one. I now first break the seal of silence which some feeling inexplicable to myself has laid upon my lips, and open at once to the great public a corner of my

life into which neither intimate acquaintance nor trusted friend has hitherto looked.

At the close of an April day, hotter than in the North we often know in June, I was surprised by one of those sudden storms of rain and lightning so common in Southern regions. The night came on prematurely, bringing with it a thick darkness that might be felt. This, taking turns with the frequent blaze of blinding lightning, at length completely bewildered and discouraged me, tired as I was, and following a strange road, with no very clear idea of my place of destination. I let my horse take his own way, and, sitting listlessly in the saddle, judged of our progress and of the nature of the route only by the sound of the poor beast's feet, as they sank softly in the moist sand, or plashed in the swollen torrents that now and then burst across the path.

I had gone forward in this way for about an hour, when I was roused from my half-stupor by the sudden stopping of my horse. I looked up, and saw near me on the right a friendly glimmer, sent, apparently, from the window of a not distant house, of which a flash of lightning soon gave me a more distinct view. When the peal of thunder had died away, I lifted up my voice; for a fence lay between me and the promised shelter; and the lightning, now less frequent, hardly sufficed to guide me to

the entrance. My appeal was not lost. The light on which my eyes were fixed moved; a window was heard to open. I repeated my call; but, before I had time to explain my situation, the window was hastily closed, and in another moment a light was seen moving from the direction of the house and coming by a somewhat circuitous path towards me. The bearer soon reached me, guided by my voice, and, with a simple "Good evening," spoken in a tone which assured me I had fallen into no unfriendly hands, opened the gate against which my horse was already pressing. The gleam of the lantern led me through the black darkness to the house. My guide threw open the door, as I somewhat slowly brought to the ground my cramped and dripping limbs, and, leaving me to find my way by myself, led off my horse, whose lively step betrayed that he hailed the prospect of a shelter with as much satisfaction as his master. I eagerly gained the doorway, through which the light streamed invitingly; but paused when I had passed the threshold, and turned quickly to close the door and exclude the damp night-wind.

The most conspicuous object in the room I had entered was a low couch, on which was extended a woman, whose pale features I saw distinctly by the light of the lamp which stood on a little table near her. She was giving directions to a black woman

who was busy near the fire, which, to my great contentment, glowed on the wide hearth. I was struck, even in the moment of entering, by the gentleness of the speaker's voice, contrasting, as it did, with the imperious tones to which my ear had become habituated during the weeks I had passed in the Southern country. As I hesitated to advance, she addressed me with courtesy and invited me to approach the fire. I obeyed her gladly. The black woman, who, on my sudden entrance, had advanced into the middle of the floor, had stood erect and watchful, until she saw the impression made on her mistress by the new guest. She now returned to the hearth, and, after a quick glance of inspection, offered me welcome in her turn by heaping wood on the fire. The blaze rose high, and, through its influence, I had already sufficiently recovered myself, by the time our host reëntered, to return with grateful cordiality the greeting he offered me.

My till now unseen friend was a man a little above the middle height, apparently about thirty years of age. He had in his appearance and manners little of the backwoodsman and still less of the small planter. He wore a blouse of homely material, confined round the waist by a leathern belt. This rude costume—about that time much affected on summer excursions by young