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This picture of Corra Harris, Georgia author of "A Circuit Rider's Wife" and 21 other novels and numerous articles, was made in 1932.



O. B. Keeler's career began in 1909 when he joined the staff of *The Atlanta Georgian*, working without salary and furnishing his own typewriter. He spent three years in Kansas City, came back to *The Georgian*, and joined *The Atlanta Journal* sports staff in 1920 "to cover Bobby Jones," an assignment that lasted 16 years until Jones' retirement. O. B. covered all the other facets of sports and news. He died in 1950.

Corra Harris, wife of Methodist preacher Lundy Harris, began writing for magazines in 1899, and in 1910 produced her first novel, "A Circuit Rider's Wife," which created a sensation in the book world. She wrote 21 more books and countless magazine articles, was "the first woman war correspondent" for *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1918, and for years turned out "A Candlelit Column" three times a week for *The Journal*. At her death in 1935 her home, "In the Valley," near Rydal, became a shrine.

Corra Harris Takes First Rest in 27 Years

Author expresses her views on reform,
food, education, salvation

By O. B. Keeler

Published Feb. 22, 1925

ON the eve of what she calls her Sabbatical year—her first year of rest after 27 years of work—I was privileged to talk with Corra Harris several times. Not interviews. We just talked. For once in my life, I did not do most of the talking. For once in my life I really wanted to listen. Of the rather considerable number of people I have encountered who know anything worth talking about, Corra Harris is the most reassuring. The number is not so considerable at that. And of that number those who have the faculty of Corra Harris for seeing to the heart of things, and of telling what they see can be counted comfortably on the thumbs of one hand—namely, Corra Harris.

Again and again there came to me that amazing epigrammatic estimate by Bob Ingersoll of William Shakespeare, "an ocean of thought, whose waves touch every human shore." I know what it means, now. The spell Corra Harris lays is not merely the hypnotic charm of a tremendous personality; there is in her heart a consuming and seeking interest in all things, great and small. She has the will to understand, and

the heart. Naively as a child she confessed, with that sudden flashing smile of hers, "You know, I love God and this cockeyed old world; He made it and it must be right!" And the leaden metal of life she transmutes with the golden touch that old King Midas really wished for—and missed.

I never had met Mrs. Harris before, except in her writings, those amazingly convincing pen-products culminating in the greatest autobiography ever given the world, "My Book and Heart." I was persuaded that no one could talk as she writes, not even Mrs. Harris. I was entirely wrong. In a way it is a pity that her gifts to the world she loves so well must be certified to posterity in the chaste, cold forms of the printer's art. The spoken word, as it comes from her lips, is a treasure of gentleness—and she employs all kind of words, too. By her own confession, she has some "raw-boned thoughts" unsuited to the garb of crepe de chine adjectives and verbs. She uses some stalwart words for her thoughts, and some of them come with a crack like a whip-lash. But while they cut deep, there is no petty sting in them.

We were talking of the softening up of society in its latter-day notions of reform and uplift, particularly with regard to dealing with criminal offenders. Mrs. Harris had written a sharp and brilliant essay on the subject, in which she considered the general attitude of newly enfranchised womankind.

"It seems to be easier and softer to forgive the criminal," she said, "and we seem determined to practice the Golden Rule toward delinquents. But it is only safe to experience it in dealing with honest people."

IT requires straight thinking and not emotional excitement, dealing with criminals, she said. And suddenly—

"It takes courage to think straight!" she said, "and that seems to be mainly what we haven't got. We can feel a loving and tender interest in the welfare of delinquents so much more readily than in our own neighbors and their children. Why should we prefer the genius of delinquency and incorrigibility to the care and development and education of good children?"

One prime trouble with our latter-day activities, says Mrs. Harris, is the preponderance of emotionalism.

"Emotion is overemphasized," she said. "And thus we have these waves of reform and uplift, so-called. . . . Do you know, I think I never have seen a reform. A revolution, yes. But the reformers and the uplifters—they seem so much like chaff, that God is blowing about. He will take care of it all, certainly. But not by emotional explosions. Emotion does not supply the motive power, even in human affairs. It is the spark plug, perhaps; the flashy part of the machine. But of itself it never made any wheels go 'round. And when the spark plug is erratic the machine is stalled."

Education, now. Mrs. Harris has her own very clear ideas about that, one of them being, as I gathered, that there is a strong tendency to too much pedagogy before the fact. There are Bessie and Tranny, young mountain girls in Mrs. Harris' own household.

They are of Dutch and Irish ancestry and Bessie is 20 and Tranny nearly 19, and they are the pride and joy of Mrs. Harris' heart, and she is



Corra Harris at her home near Rydal, called "In the Valley" because she was "In the valley of the shadow" when she bought it in 1912.

educating them according to her own views.

"About the house, now, I never have told either of them how I do anything. I tell them what I wish done and let them work it out in their own way. If it is not well done, I explain how to do it better. Bessie is housekeeper. When a room is to be arranged, I tell Bessie: 'Make this room look like a good woman, so that one who comes in will feel there is character here.' Or, 'Today we will have this room dressed out like a fine lady; there must be style in it.'"

And Bessie goes to work to express her own ideas of goodness and character and style, in her own way.

"You must come up there some time," says Mrs. Harris, "and see how well she succeeds."

EVEN to the cooking. That is Tranny's principal concern, and when she came to Mrs. Harris she had no experience in any but the plainest kind of rural cooking. But the responsibility of doing her own thinking was not spared Tranny, even when company was coming. There was one day when a guest was expected and that happened to be the day Tranny was to undertake her first broiled chicken.

Mrs. Harris smiled reminiscently. "It was a terrific broiled chicken," she said.

And in the mornings—
"You know I like a bed less than almost anything," said Mrs. Harris. "I never have been much of a sleeper, and to me a bed is merely something to sleep in, and a place to eat breakfast. How people can dislike to get up is a mystery to me. But I insist on breakfast in bed."

And in the mornings, while breakfasting, Mrs. Harris talks to Bessie and Tranny, seated by the bed, and again I do not need to guess that she tells them wonderful things, very good for their souls. One thing that she reiterates is about ambition.

"I tell them that the meanest of all inspirations is the desire to claw one's way upward over the backs of others; it is the ugliest of all the competitive instincts. Ambition is the eternal vulgarity. I tell them this in all the ways I know

of saying it, because I want them to get the idea."

What a wonderful place must be that home, "In the Valley," shut away from the world in the mountains of north Georgia, seven miles from Rydal, the nearest railroad station. In the early morning the first thing you hear is the whistling of the partridges; and sometimes they go parading right past the door, "talking away and probably making love," Mrs. Harris says.

And you can look out and see flocks of doves at any time in the daylight; and squirrels all about—nobody bothers them. And there is Bosco, the Great Dane, who used to stand his massive, lordly head seven feet from the floor as he towered with his front paws on the mantel, to peer at the ticking clock. Bosco is old now and ill; one reason Mrs. Harris did not stay longer in Atlanta on her latest visit was because she was worried about Bosco. While she was at work in her study—The Pot, it is called; The Pot of Gold, at the End of the Rainbow; built off from the house—Bosco would lie before the study door and escort her solemnly and sedately back to the house, where he might always enter—if Mrs. Harris were there.

Fifteen years Mrs. Harris has lived there, and she found it a noteworthy encouragement to speaking the truth. We were talking of the apparent difficulty these days of even the approximation of that fine art.

"Integrity needs to be practiced, like scales on the piano," she said. "For 15 years, I've had no one to tell lies to, you see. There are the trees—no use telling them anything but the truth. And the people up there; it would be hard work lying to them."

The people, now. Mrs. Harris says they probably are as bad as other people, or as good, whichever way you look at it.

"But their sins are straightaway and uncomplicated," she said. "They do not go in for involved and ornamental wickedness. Sort of primeval wrongdoing and clear-cut. It's ever so much easier to deal with."

There was a man who was exception- (Continued on Next Page)

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