Joe Vaughn and Family
Bayou La Batre, Alabama

Ila B. Prine
Mobile, Alabama.

AL-60

ng

LIFE IN A SHRIMPING AND OYSTER SHUCKING CAMP.

On the south side of the bayou in the little town of Bayou La Batre, Ala., is a camp that houses the families who work in the Dorgan, McPhillips Packing Company. The approach to the Camp from the paved county highway, is over an unpaved road, ~~on~~ along which ~~whose sides~~ are the factory and the houses, or camps of the workers.

The camp itself is made up of two long houses and several smaller ones, near the edge of the bayou. The two long houses are built alike, both having a long porch running the entire length of the front side. The buildings are partitioned so that ten families can live in them. each family having the use of part of the porch, which has steep steps leading to the ground. ~~and~~ The structures are high off the ground, so that the water can not get in them, when the bayou overflows. The whole place is bleak and bare.

~~The place is bleak and bare, and with the efforts that the people are making to eke out an existence.~~

On the edge of the bayou, facing the camp are six hogpens built of slabs of wood. In between each of these are outdoor privies.

Wandering around the camp were a few scrawny chickens that looked as though a slight puff of wind would blow them away. They were picking at the oyster shells that were spread over the ground in front of the camp house nearest the water.

In the end compartment of the long camp house nearest the

To typist 1/4/39

bayou, lives an old man, seventy-seven years of age, and his wife, who is sixty-seven. This man is Joe Vaughn, whose father came directly from England to Canada, where he was married to a Canadian French woman, Joe's mother. Joe left Canada when a very small boy, and came to New Iberia, Louisiana, where he lived for sixty-three years.

Joe, who is of medium height and weighs a hundred and sixty pounds, is very erect for his years. His hair is grey, and he has soft brown eyes. Joe said he farmed while living in New Iberia, but has also fished all his life, as he has lived on the sea-coast. His wife, Ezora, is a French native of Louisiana who cannot speak English. Ezora is a tall, thin, dark-skinned woman, whose hair is still black, even though she is sixty-seven years old, and has had a hard life.

Joe was preparing the ground just back of the camp to plant English peas. When he was asked ~~to give some information~~ about planting lore and superstitions, he smiled broadly and said:

"Just a minute, I'll come in the house where we can talk,"

Joe climbed over the slab fence and came around the back of the camp to his compartment.

He asked ~~the writer~~ me to come in, and have a chair, ~~and~~ When we were seated, in walked three women and several children, to find out what was happening. Joe never introduced them, but sat complacently and began to talk. In a few moments one of the women said something about her mother sitting in the door way, between the bedroom and kitchen.

Ezora smiled and spoke in French. It was then that Joe said:

"This is my wife Ezora and how old do you think she is?"

When I replied, that I thought she must be in her sixties from what he said about his own age, he then said that she was sixty-seven, and explained that she could not speak a word of English.

Joe said, that he had lived on the sea coast, but ~~he also~~ loved to farm also.

"The people here often say I'm a lucky old man, because everything I plant grows but that ain't it, I plants according to the moon. Now, let me tell you, never plant on the increase of the moon for the plants will be big and healthy but there wont be any vegetables on them. The time to plant is on the decrease of the moon, that is why I'm working so hard to get my English peas planted now, 'cause it's on the decrease of the moon. I usually has some kind of vegetables to sell, but this year it has been so dry I hasn't got anything now.

"B'fore coming to Bayou la Batre I farmed in New Iberia, Louisiana, but I hunted plenty, too. I has killed over three-hundred and thirty-five deer in my life. In 1919 I killed sixty-six deers in twelve months time. Miss, a dog has got almost as much sense as a person. I always kept a pack of hounds in New Iberia, b'fore times got so hard. When hunting with them, I carried an old horn to blow, and I had them trained so that when I wanted them to come often a trail, I'd blow three long blows, and them dogs knew to come to me."

Just then one of the women who had come into the room, spoke up and said:

"That was the way mamma had papa and us children trained, and

when she wanted us, she would blow that old horn."

Joe paused a minute and a sad expression came over his face, and said:

"I'll tell what happened one year before leavin' Louisiana. I had a fine dog, part houn' and half bird dog. One day he an' my boy lef' the house together an' after a while the dog come home, an' it was a pity to hear that dog, an' we knowed somethin' was wrong, an' shore enough the nex' day we foun' our boy drownded in a canal. A dog has railly got sense, an' you can learn them just like a person. I kept that dog thirty years."

"You know, there's times for all things. Lots a people don't b'lieve in a lot of things, but don't never start anything on a Friday, 'cause it's shore bad luck. Another thing don't never go fishing on the decrease of the moon, 'cause fish wont bite on the decrease, they seems kinda weak, but on the increase they bites hard.

"I believes in dreams, too, for just as shore as I dream it comes true. One time I bought my wife a sewing machine, an' every night before the man would come to get the money on it, I would dream about it, an' I knowed to git up and get that money, so it would be there when that man came.

"Another dream that always come true, was, when I dream of silver money, the children would get lice in their heads. You know where there's lots of children, they's always gettin' them. We had ten children, five boys and five girls, but there is only five living now."

Then he turned to the two women standing by the bed, and said:

"These here are my girls, an' their children. We always gits rid of the lice though, by gitting sage an' make strong tea, an' take fat from chicken an' put in the tea and rub that on. The grease kills the nits as well as the lice, an' the tea makes the hair have new life an' color. I'm a great believer in the home remedies, because them remedies do not work on the blood like the medicines these days. We uses the 'Divine healer,' but you've got to believe, b'fore he can do you any good. There's only a certain one learned in healin', but this man can stop blood any time. Once they was a man that the doctors had given up, and this healer cuored him, an' they give him papers to go 'round healin'.

"Some of the home remedies we uses, is cobwebs with raw sugar on it, to stop bleedin'. Tobacco is good for wasp stings, bumble-bee stings and the honey bee sting. Just take a chaw out of your mouth an' put it where you've been stung, an' it will kill the sting right now. I tell you there is some good in every kind of a weed in this world. You take rabbit tobacco is good for colds and fever. Make a tea out of it and drink it. There's the mullen leaves, they make good cough syrup. Take them an' boil down with cherry bark and pine chips, and then put a little honey in it. Another thing, you can make a poultice out of mullen leaves for croup. But the best thing for pneumonia, is take hog hoofs, and scorch them brown to where you can crumble them and boil into a tea, and that'll cure pneumonia, when nothing else wont.

"Another thing I does when the children get the ear ache, you see, I smoke a pipe, an' I blow the smoke in the ear, an' that stops the ache. For malaria we goes into the swamp and get black jack roots an' put in gin."

One of the daughters began to laugh when Joe was talking

about putting the black jack roots into gin, and she said:

"Remember the time brother had pneumonia and you had some gin, Pa. Well, this here sister and me kept a tastin' it and when they went to look for it, it was gone, by nearly night time. We told Ma that we was afraid we was gettin' the flu, and we'd have to go to bed. The next mornin' we was all right, so Ma said, 'well I reckon you ain't gittin' the flu', but we knowed we wer'n't. We had just got too much gin."

"But railly, Miss it is good to use, to keep from takin' colds, 'specially after washin' your head. I puts it on the baby's head and rubs they temples with it.

"I tells you another good remedy" Joe said. "This is for seven-years itch. Take poke root an' boil down to a strong tea, then take fat meat grease an' make salve. It shore is strong, an' you can't put it on too often. The way you does is grease good an' keep your same clothes on for five days, an' then grease again, an' it'll git rid of the itch."

When the writer asked Joe why he came to Bayou La Batre, he said:

"Business got so porely that one of the boys, Sam R., came to Biloxi, Mississippi, to work in the shrimp and oyster factories, then he came back to New Iberia an' got the rest of us. But we didn't stay long in Biloxi, 'cause we heard it was better workin' here in Bayou La Batre, so us come on here, and here we's been for thirteen-well, nigh onto fourteen years. But my! work ain't now like it used to be 'cause the factories used to run nine months in the year, now we do good to get three months work. Jes take las'

year, we only got one month's work in the factory on account of strike and the war they had on. When we does work we gits one cent a pound for pickin' the shrimp, an' they pays us by weighin' the hulls instead of the shrimp.

"Ezora an' me both work in the factory when it runs. Sometimes we make four dollars or six dollars a week. When we make seven dollars, we are doin' fine. The way we know when the factory is going to run is they blow the whistle at two o'clock in the mornin'."

Joe said their main food is gumbo and stews; he said they did not like dry foods, and they had coffee all through the day. He said they never filled their cup, but would take a sip of strong, black coffee very often. He said they always parched their own coffee. He and Ezora were too old for parties, he said but, "when the young folks wanted put themselves together, they call that a picnic."

The workers who live in this camp, do not have to pay rent, but they do have to work for the Dorgan McPhillips Packing Company whenever they are wanted. There is no water in the camp, save ~~but~~ an artesian well, and no way of heating except the flue in each kitchen.

Joe and Ezora's rooms were bare with the exception of an old iron double bed, with moss mattress and dirty covers. Back of the entrance door was a homemade cupboard filled with old dirty clothes, and by the side of the bed was a trunk with some bed clothes on it. In the opposite corner of the room was a foot-long shelf holding a few papers. There were two windows in the room, and over them hung two grey pieces of an old blanket that served as shades. On the wall that separated this room from the

kitchen were two enlarged pictures in oval gilt frames. One of these was Joe when he was fifty-four years old.

The kitchen contained only an old cracked, dilapidated stove. On it sat a dish pan, the bottom of which was covered with soot. There was a table with a badly worn oil cloth covering it. ~~and~~ On occasional spot of color remained of what had been a very colorful cloth in better days. All the dishes and cooking utensils were in a wire-covered safe, and there were as many tin dishes as crockery. Over on the middle of the kitchen table sat a small lamp.

Amid such surroundings, these people were very cheerful, and were delighted to have visitors.

(Bad ending WC)

Washington Copy

11/29/38

L.H.