Alabama
Harrison Waters
1 mile west of
Talladega Springs,
Alabama.

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Editorial Department

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BY THE GLORY OF GOD.

Harrison Waters is a slender, slightly stooped Negro with graying hair and steady eyes that portray his every mood. On week days, he wears a pair of overalls, faded to a whitish blue, a "strawbonnet," and worn work shoes. On Sundays, he wears a blue suit that he has had for years, a black hat arranged cowboy style, and what he calls "Revival shoes."

Watching him working in the fields that surround the unpainted pineboard house in which he lives, one would think him an ordinary Southern tenant farmer. The house is roomy and neat, but it is no better than those of the neighboring white farmers. His wife, Emma, and his 16-year-old daughter, Selina, dress comfortably and well, but never conspicuously.

Some of the poorer whites, steeped in prejudice born of ignorance, call Harrison Waters, "That damned rich nigger." He owns his own farm of 300 acres. More than 150 acres of this land are in cultivation. Most of the cultivated land lies in the rich bottoms of the Coosa River, which produce profusely.

Pausing in his task of picking cotton, he came out to the roadside, sat down at a respectful distance from his visitor, and mopped his brow with a red bandana handkerchief. Answering a question, he said: "Yes sir, by de glory of God, I'se doin' well enough."

Unless one knows Harrison Waters intimately, one will not penetrate through his mind into his heart. After such a struggle as he has experienced, one learns to be cautious. He does not

like to recall days when he lived only on dried beans, sometimes without a piece of bread.

I said to him: "Harrison, you have known me since I was a kid. You know that you can tell me all about yourself."

He looked off against the horizon, where the pine trees were raking across the sky. He laughed a little, and then slurred: "Hit's not de fac' dat I minds talkin',white people:hit's only dat there is nuthin' much t' tell."

"I would like to know how you came to own the farm, and of those early hardships I have heard about."

Harrison Waters' story probably is not new in the South, where a successful Negro has more than likely written a chapter of courage. He was born in Talladega Springs, and has lived there during the entire 58 years of his life. He secured part of the land he owns now from the town banker, who had employed his father. The land was poor and rocky then (before the Lay Dam sent backwater into the region), and no one else seemed to want it.

Harrison was 23 years old, and although he had never had a day of schooling, he had learned how to work with his hands. He built sa leanto shanty upon the land, and set to work in an effort to grow cotton. There were many discouragements, but he managed to survive by limiting himself to the most meager rations. He smiles when he recalls that he had only one pair of second-hand trousers, a blue workshirt, and shoes that were held together by twine.

He was twenty-six before he could afford to build a house sturdy enough to keep out the whipping winter winds. He built this with his own hands, helped by a lone neighboring Negro who had be-

friended him in times of extreme need. And into this house, when he was twenty-nine years old, he brought Emma, the mulatto wife he still refers to affectionately as "Little Bit."

What he has done since, he credits to her "edication" and her courage. Together, they saved enough to build the house in which they live now, and together they added gradually to those first few acres he acquired.

"You tawk t' her, white people," Harrison urged, "She de brai s of dis farm."

Talking slowly and carefully, he told of how they lost their first child--a boy--and of how they waited to have the daughter, Selina.

"Hit nigh 'bout broke my heart when de boy died," he said, "Fer I guess every man wants er son. But we loves de little girl mi'ty fine. We hopes to sen' her up to Talladega College one of these days. She's lak her mammy--brightlak."

Knowing already what the answer would be, I asked: "Harrison, why don't you buy yourself an automobile?"

He laughed again, and replied: "Hit's not dat I wouldn't lak t' have one; I thinks of hit sometimes. But den I git to figurin', 'What would de white folks say?' And den I 'cides t' stick t' my horse an' buggy. You see, I never was afeerd of makin' good on de farm--I knowed I could do hit--but I'se always been afeerd of havin' de white folks call me 'a biggety nigger.'"

With money in the bank, livestock in his stables, and bins filled with corn, Harrison Waters at last has reached the uplands. He admits that he has, voicing thanks to "De good God" with every other breath. He has excellent credit both in Talladega Springs

and Sylacauga, fifteen miles north. And the white folks like him.

"He has never let his money go to his head," they agree. But back on the farm with Little Bit and Selina, Harrison Waters dreams of the automobile that he can never own, and the fine clothes that he would like to buy for himself and his loved ones.

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