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Two-Weeks' *Shower* of Rocks

How the Rocks at Their Childhood Home in Jackson County, Georgia, Suddenly "Came to Life" and Began to Fly Through the Air, Is Told for the First Time in the Following Interview With Dr. R. B. Adair and Mrs. Josephine Hudson, of Atlanta. The Phenomenon Has Never Been Explained

"Stones whizzed toward me from all directions as I crossed the field with my gun."

BY FRED DENTON MOON

A WEIRD natural or supernatural phenomenon that occurred in Georgia sixty-eight years ago—pebbles, stones and boulders rising from the surface of the earth and sailing slowly through the air seemingly propelled by some mysterious power or impulse of their own—is recalled by Dr. R. B. Adair, 83, of 907 Virginia Ave., N. E., and his sister, Mrs. Josephine Hudson, 80, of 194 Dodd Ave., S. E.

Because of a promise made to their mother in childhood, Dr. Adair and Mrs. Hudson have never before publicly related the family circle the two-week "rock shower" that occurred at their home in Jackson County, Georgia, in 1864, and the publication of this interview marks the first time that any record of the phenomenon has appeared in print.

Dr. Adair and Mrs. Hudson were born and reared on a farm still known as "the old Adair place," which is located on the Mud Mill Road, formerly the Burns Mill road, a mile and a half northeast of Jefferson and the Athens-Commerce highway. Their father, Dr. Robert Adair, a prominent physician, in 1864, was known as Harmony Grove.

What caused the stones on the Adair farm to behave in such a strange fashion over a two-week period in September, 1864, neither Dr. Adair or Mrs. Hudson have any idea. The name of Dr. Adair, who retired from the practice of dentistry in Atlanta a few years ago, is nationally known in dental circles, the aside from being a leading dentist he also won fame as a pioneer in the treatment of pyorrhea, or Riggs' disease. He is credited with being the originator of the word, but nowhere in his lifelong study of science has he found a solution to the mysterious flight of stones which he witnessed at the age of 15.

It was in September, and fodder pulling time, said Dr. Adair, recalling the experience. "We had four negroes on the farm at that time, a man, a woman and two boys, and I had gone to the cornfield with them to gathering fodder in the broom-land just across the creek from our dwelling. After starting them to work, I mounted my horse and left for Commerce. Pen Bowen, in Harmony Grove, to get our mail, as there was no rural delivery in those days, and with father and my three older brothers at the front, the ride to the post office was part of my daily routine. Upon my return home some two hours later, I found that the slaves had pulled very little fodder. They were crouched in a silent bunch in the cornfield, and seemed to be badly frightened.

Dismounting from my horse, I strode toward them, demanding to know what they meant by idling away the whole afternoon. They explained that they had done no work because somebody had been throwing rocks at them ever since I had ridden away. Of course I scoffed at this excuse because I knew that no one in the neighborhood would stone our darkies. But the slaves insisted that they were telling the truth, and assured me that if I'd want a look I'd see the rocks flying over. Sure enough, it wasn't long before rocks began to whizz into the field from all directions, coming from the hills on each side of the bottom and from up and down the creek."

At first Dr. Adair did not notice the peculiar flight of the stones. Like the negroes, he was inclined to believe that they were being thrown by several persons who were hiding in the brush surrounding the cornfield, and he determined to drive the offenders off the farm before he left.

Telling the slaves to go ahead with their work, he returned to the house, got his gun and got my gun. Our watchdog was as big as a young lion and one of the bravest animals I've ever seen, and as I passed through the yard I commanded him to come along with me. He obeyed reluctantly, keeping close to my heels, with his tail between his legs, and whining loudly at the whizzing stones. However, I did not learn until some time later why he was unwilling to accompany me.

"The rocks were still flying from all directions as I crossed the cornfield, and they continued to drop around me as I searched the brush below where the negroes were pulling fodder. Finding no one hiding there, I forded the creek and worked my way up the opposite bank. Still the stones droned through the air, dropping among the bushes on all sides, but nowhere could I discover the persons who were throwing them. Nor did the dog, who was very unfriendly toward strangers, make any sign to indicate that he scented an outsider.

"Directly opposite the cornfield was a stretch of stubble land from which the wheat had been cut a short while before, and as I reached the edge of the cornfield I received a startling if almost fatal lesson to forget the flying stones.

"Watermelon vines had grown up in the stubble, and a number of them bore young melons from as large as a teacup to the size of a man's head. As I crossed the stubble field I observed several of these little melons detach themselves from the vines, roll along the ground for a short distance, and break all to pieces. I stood there for a few moments watching the unripened seeds plop out of the rind and scatter over the ground, until a yelp from the dog told me that he'd been hit by a rock and brought my mind back to the business at hand."

Although puzzled at the odd antics of the watermelons, Dr. Adair does not recall that he was frightened; and so for the rocks, which were still falling everywhere, he was more than ever convinced that they were being thrown by human hands. Later, when he learned that the slaves had been telling the truth, he decided he tried to conceal their flight with the bursting of the green melons, but without success.

Renewing his search, he combed both banks of the creek, thoroughly investigated the gullies and washes surrounding the cornfield, and then climbed a steep hill directly opposite the homestead. This elevation, which was covered with scrub pine, was of a small private burying ground that was located on its crest, out of sight of the Adair residence in the valley below. Lest superstitious persons attempt to attribute the phenomenon of the flying rocks to whatever spirits may have inhabited this little cemetery, both Dr. Adair and Mrs. Hudson emphatically deny that any of the slaves had ever given serious attention to the ghost stories that were so dear to the hearts of the old-time black slaves.

"If there were any such things as ghosts, they would have eaten us out of house and home, back on the old farm," Mrs. Hudson pointed out. "For aside from the few graves on Graveyard Hill, there were Indian burial mounds all up and down Turkey Creek, and the negroes were always being turned up human teeth and bits of bone. Beside," she added, smiling, "ghosts are supposed to wait till midnight to start their pranks, and the stones began to fly in the middle of a bright afternoon and continued their antics for two weeks, day and night."

But to return to Dr. Adair's narrative. Failing to locate any marauders on Graveyard Hill he went back in the cornfield and enlisted the aid of the slaves.

Because the cornstalks in the field and the bushes covering the hills and the banks of the creek obstructed his view, it was difficult for young Adair to determine the exact direction from which the rocks were coming. Taking the slaves to a cleared field farther down the creek, where none of the stones were falling, he stationed them in a circle, faces turned outward, and told them to keep their eyes straight to the front. In doing this, he believed that they would eventually locate the hiding places of the people who were stoning them.

"As we were taking up our positions," he resumed, "I first noticed the peculiar flight of the stones. They seemed to be traveling very slowly, much slower than a flying bird, and most of them were following a horizontal course at a height of three to six feet above the ground. The negroes had already been struck several times, and upon reaching the open field a rock hit me on the elbow. It was about the size of an egg, but its impact was so gentle that it caused no pain, merely sending a tingling sensation through my 'funny bone.' After striking me, it dropped to the ground at my feet.

"Giving the word to the negroes, we began to spread out, all of us searching the edge of the field with our eyes in the hope of finding the rock-throwers. Then it was that we discovered that they weren't being thrown at all.

"In all parts of the cleared field rocks of different sizes were slowly rising out of the plowed soil and flying through the air of their own volition."

Needless to say, this uncanny situation was too much for the nerves of the youthful master and the slaves, and the five of them beat a hasty retreat to the house, dodging through the shower of slow-moving rocks. Once in the kitchen behind the "big house" they found gathered the rest of the household, which, in the absence of the father and three older brothers, consisted of Dr. Adair's mother and five younger brothers and sisters. Mrs. Hudson, the eldest of the children, was then a girl of 13.

"The children and the slaves were terrified, but mother assured us that there was nothing to be afraid of," the latter said. "Then I tried to explain what was causing the rocks all over the farm to rise up out of the ground and go sailing through the air for a short distance, but she scoffed at the theory that 'ha'nts' were the reason for the disturbance, as the darkies suspected. She remarked that she was supremely thankful that none of us had been injured, and cautioned us to remain indoors until the rocks stopped flying.

Dr. Adair and Mrs. Hudson remember that one woman—who was absolutely without fear, in the absence of the men of the family, she frequently went out alone at night, carrying a torch and armed with an old pistol, to attend to the stock or investigate strange noises about the premises. She was a heroine of that great corps of wives and mothers who so gallantly kept the home fires of the south burning while their men-folk were at the front with Lee. It is not surprising that Dr. Adair, upon becoming a famous dentist, that during his sojourn at Harmony Grove he visited various parts of the farm in hope of learning what caused the peculiar flight of stones. The watchdog accompanied her on her tour of investi-

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