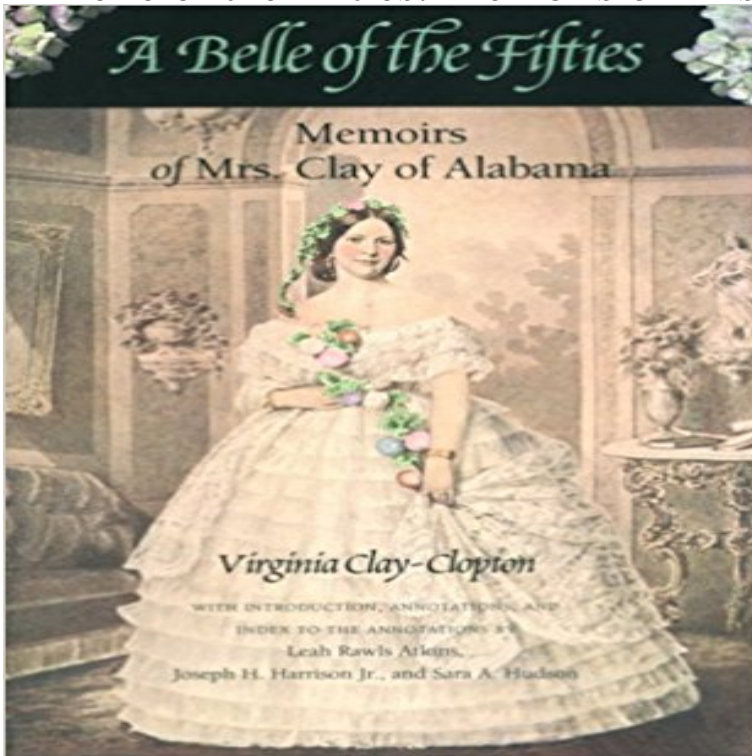


A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay of Alabama



This memoir of a remarkable southern woman gives us an unusual eyewitness account of events in Washington and Richmond before, during, and after the Civil War. Raised in Alabama and married to a U.S. congressman, Virginia Tunstall Clay-Clopton always showed more interest in politics than in household duties. Her memoirs, covering the tumultuous period from 1853 to 1866, provide an insiders look at national and southern politics as she traveled with her husband, Clement Claiborne Clay, to Washington, D.C., and then on to Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, where he served as a senator. The book relates it all--balls and state dinners, romantic entanglements and weddings, manners and fashion, secession and war. At the age of 75, Virginia Clay-Clopton drew from her voluminous letters and family papers to compose her memoirs to give readers a new appreciation of the events and the individuals who moved in the social and political worlds of Montgomery, Huntsville, Washington, and Richmond in the 1850s and 1860s. Her social standing and access to important people set her memoirs apart from those of other southern women who were writing strictly from a plantation-based perspective. A Belle of the Fifties therefore offers a much-needed balance to the study of womens experiences in the South. The introduction for this first annotated edition describes the principal factors that shaped Virginias early life and illuminates the role that her initial editor, Ada Sterling, played in bringing the memoir to life in print. The extensive annotations add rich detail by providing for the modern-day reader in-depth descriptions of the key figures and events of the period. A Belle of the Fifties offers keen insight into the important events of the time and shows us a southern woman leading an active and independent life. This reissue of what has long been considered one of the finest female

memoirs of the period will provide a new generation of readers with a revealing perspective on the Civil War era.

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