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**Bryant Huff**  
**Old Slave Story**

Bryant Huff was the son of Janie and Daniel Huff who were born on neighboring plantations between Camack and Augusta. They were married while they still belonged to separate owners, but when "Marse" Jesse Rigerson, to whom Janie belonged, decided to move, he bought Daniel in order that he might live with his wife and family. They moved to Warren County and it was here that Bryant was born. He was one of twelve children.

Bryant's early life was not one to inspire pleasant memories for his master, a highly educated man; ardent church worker, had a cruel nature and a temper that knew no bounds. Owning 800 acres of land in a fairly level section, he ruled his small kingdom with an iron hand. Bryant's father, Daniel, was the only man who did not fear "Marse" Rigerson.

The quarters consisted of poorly constructed cabins with worse interiors. There were no beds, only bunks made of two poles balancing sides nailed to the walls. Rags and old clothing served as a mattress and the other furniture was equally bad. Food was cooked on an open fireplace and the frying pan was the most important utensil; vegetables were boiled in a swinging kettle. The griddle stood several inches from the floor, on three small pegs. Through the middle a "pin" was placed so that the griddle might revolve as the bread etc., cooked on the side near the hottest part of the fire. Matches, a luxury, were then sold in small boxes the size of the average snuff box at ten cents per box.

All the slaves worked from sunrise to sunset; the majority did field work. Women, as well as men, shared farm work. Small boys not old enough to be sent to the field, minded horses, drove cows to and from the pasture, and did chores around the "big house". A

few women prepared meals and supervised a group of younger girls who did general work in the big house.

Sunday was the only day of rest and usually all the adults attended church. On this plantation a church with a colored Minister was provided and services, while conducted on the same order as those of the white churches, were much longer. Generally children were not allowed to attend church, but occasionally this privilege was granted to one. Huff recalls vividly his first visit to Sunday services. Being very small and eager to attend he sat quietly by his mother's side and gazed with wonder at the minister and congregation. An emotional outburst was part of the services and so many of the "sisters" got "happy" that the child, not having witnessed such a scene before, was frightened; as the number of shouters increased, he ran from the building screaming in terror.

Of the 12 children in his family, 2 were sold. The eldest child, Harriet, owned by a Judge who lived on a neighboring plantation, returned to the family after Emancipation. The father left home in a fit of anger because one of his children had been whipped. The master, knowing how devoted he was to his wife, placed her and her infant child in jail. Shortly afterward, the father returned and was allowed to visit his wife and to go unmolested. A few weeks later he came back to the jail, and was allowed to enter, as before, but when ready to leave, was told that he was there for safe keeping. The next day, he and his son, Johnie, were sold to some speculators who promised to carry them so far away that they could not return. As Daniel left, he told his wife to wait for him to return, whether it be months or years. She grieved over his departure and refused, although urged, to marry again. A few months before the close of the Civil War, her husband appeared and remained on the plantation until emancipation. Johnie was accidentally killed shortly after his departure.[Pg 240]

While most of the punishment was given by the "patty-roller" and the Master, in some instances overseers were allowed to administer it. Some of these overseers were Negroes and occasionally there was trouble when they attempted to punish another slave. Huff recalls having seen one of these "bosses" approach his mother as she toiled in the field and questioned her regarding her whereabouts on the previous evening. She refused to answer and as he approached her in a threatening manner, she threw piles of twigs upon him. (She was loading a wagon with small limbs cut from trees on "new ground"). He fled in terror. That night, as the mother and her children were seated in their cabin, the same man accompanied by their Master entered, tied her hands and led her from the home. She was carried quite a distance down the road and severely beaten.

Food was provided by the Master who gave it out in regular weekly allotments. Collard greens, peas, smoked meat and corn bread were the chief items on all menus. On Sundays a small amount of flour for biscuits and some coffee was given; buttermilk was always plentiful. Holidays were usually synonymous with barbecue when large

hogs and beeves were killed and an ample supply of fresh meat was given each person. As all food was raised on the plantation, everyone had plenty.

Cloth spun from cotton produced at home was woven into the material under the watchful eye of the mistress, afterwards being cut into dresses for the women, shirts and trousers for men. Winter garments were made of wool from home raised sheep. Some of this home-spun material was colored with dye made from powdered red rocks. With a shoe hammer, last, pegs (instead of nails) and a standard pattern slave cobblers fashioned shoes from the hides of their master's cattle. They were no models of beauty, but strong, durable shoes designed for hard wear.

Bryant was not superstitious, although he did sometimes wonder when "signs" proved true. Superstition, however, had a strong grip on slave life. A fellow slave named Andy was a seasoned runaway and the overseer [Pg 241] usually set the hounds after him. (Going to a fortune teller Andy secured a "hound" which caused all dogs to be friendly with him. There after when the hounds were set upon him, he played with them, turned their ears inside out, and sent them back to their owner.)

The attitude of the slaves toward freedom varied and as they were not allowed to discuss it, their hope was veiled in such expressions as the "LORD will provide". Some were even afraid to settle any statement and silently prayed that their release would come soon. Some feared that something might prevent their emancipation so they ran away and joined the Yankee Army, hoping to be able to destroy their former master.

During this time masters suffered as well as their slaves, for many of their sons went gaily forth to battle and were never heard of again. Simpson Rigerson, son of "Marse" Jesse Rigerson, was lost to his parents. A younger son, who lost his right hand while "helping" feed cane to a grinder, is the only member of the family now living.

Sorrow did not break this slaves group and they soon learned to sing away their troubles. One song which gives some light on their attitude toward the government went as follows:

## I.

Jeff	Davis	rode	the	gray	horse
Ole	Lincoln	rode	the		mule
Jeff	Davis	is	the		gentleman
Ole	Lincoln	is	the		fool

Chorus:

I'll	lay	ten	dollars	down	
I'll	count	it	one	by	one.

I'll give ten dollars to know the man  
Who struck Peter Butler's son.

## II.

I lay down in my bed  
I lay down in no dread  
Conscript come and took me  
And dragged me from my bed.

## III.

I went down a new cut road  
She went down the lane  
I turned my back upon her  
And 'long come Liza Jane.  
[Pg 242]

After freedom was declared, Bryant Huff's family moved several miles from the Rigerson plantation to one owned by an elderly woman. They ran from a mean master but their flight was a "leap from the frying pan into the fire", for this woman proved even worse than their former master. At the close of the war the K.K.K. was very active and their fearful exploits made them the terror of the slaves. A band of the latter was organized to attempt to curb the K.K.K. activities. Neither gang knew who was a member of the other, but their clashes were frequent. One night the K.K.K. appeared at the Huff cabin and when admitted took the father, an uncle, and a man named Mansfield from the house. After forcing the father to break a gun which he had borrowed from Mr. Rigerson, they beat him so brutally that his arm was broken. The uncle, a minister who preached a type of doctrine that they liked, was unharmed. Mansfield, accused of being a member of the anti-K.K.K. gang, was beaten unmercifully. While this was being done, two members of the gang returned to the house where they searched the back room (men slept in the front room, the women and children in the rear) to see if any adults were secreted there. The small boys under the bed said "Don't harm us, we're only children". After this outrage, done at the request of the mistress, the Huff family moved back to the Rigerson plantation.

Mr. Rigerson's harsh disposition was broken after the Civil War ended and he repented of his severe treatment of his former slaves. Daniel Huff whom he had despised and feared, became his best friend who nursed him until death. Huff's wife received three acres of ground and two houses from her former master who also gave her an apology for his past meanness and stated that he wished to provide her with a home for life.

During this period martial law prevailed in the South. The Yankee troops, placed in every town, were the only police present and all cases from the county were presented to them for settlement.

A few years after emancipation, Bryant then a young man, ran away from home and apprenticed himself to a physician who became interested in his thirst for [Pg 243] knowledge and gave him an opportunity to attend school. After several years of hard study, he went before the board of examiners in order to teach. After 2 examinations he was immediately appointed to teach at the school where he had once been a pupil.

Huff, now an aged man, is dependent upon local relief for his sustenance. He is able to do light work like sweeping yards and is a very good umbrella mender and shoe repairer, but is not able to go in search of work. He has smoked since he was a young man and has never taken especial care of his health, so his long life may be attributed to a strong constitution.