

FANNIE JONES
37—12th Street
Augusta, Georgia

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Fannie Jones lives in a ramshackle, two-story, rooming house near the banks of the Savannah River. She is an old Negress with iron gray hair and a gingercake complexion. Her ill-fitting old dress was none too clean, and her bare feet exposed toe nails almost a half-inch long. Fannie apparently hadn't a tooth in her head, but she was munching some bread.

The old Negress thought the purpose of the visit was to see about an old age pension for her, and she was very much disappointed when she learned the real reason; however, she invited her visitor into a bedroom. This place was much too dark, and the interview finally took place on the back porch where an old cat was made to get out of the only chair. Fannie settled herself on the doorsteps, while the visitor fanned flies and gnats with one hand and took notes with the other.

"I was born on Marse Jim Dubose's plantation 'bout de year 1853," she began. "My Marster and Mistiss was de overseer and his wife. You see, honey, I was born in de overseer's house. When my Ma was 12 year old she was give to de overseer's wife, Miss Becky Ann, when she married. My Marster was named Jesse Durden. I never did see Marse Jim Dubose's house nor none of de slave quarters, and I don't know nothin' 'bout dem or none of his Niggers.[Pg 353] I jus' stayed in de house and waited on Marster and Mistiss. I cleaned up de house, made de beds, churned for Mistiss, and made fires for

Marster. My Ma, she cooked for Marster and Mistiss, cleaned up de house, and waited on Mistiss 'cause she was a invalid.

"Marse Jim Dubose's plantation covered thousands of acres, and he owned hundreds of slaves. You see, my Marster was de man what handled all of dese here Niggers. Evvy mornin' Marster Jesse would git up and go out and blow his horn, dat was de way he called de Niggers to de fields.

"De overseer's house was a one-story buildin' and it was furnished in de old time stuff. De beds was teestered and had slats to hold de mattresses. When Marster would come in from de fields he would be so tired he never did go nowhar. Sometimes I would say to him, 'T'se cold,' and he would say, 'Nig, you jus' crawl up on de foot of my bed and git warm.' He would say 'Nig, what you want for supper?' and I would say, 'I wants some bread and milk and a little syrup.' He give me anything dat I wanted to eat, and us had good things to eat. Us had chickens, hogs, and good milk cows. I kin see de big bowls of milk now dat us used to have. Us made a heap of butter and sont it to Augusta onct a month and sold it for 25¢ a pound.

"Atter freedom come, Marster said to me and Ma, 'you all is free now to go wharever you wants to.' Ma, she wanted to go, but I jus' cried and cried 'cause I didn't want to leave Marster and Mistiss; dey was too good to me. So Ma tuk me and[Pg 354] us went to her grandma's down at Barnett. Us stayed dar awhile, den us lef' and went to Thomson. Us stayed at dat place a long time, and I was married dar to a man by de name of Claiborne Jones. Us had 'leven chillun, but dey is all daid now 'cept two. I lives here wid one of my daughters.

"My husband b'longed to Marse John Wilson. Durin' de war Marse John wuz a captain, and he tuk my husband 'long to cook and to wait on him. He said one night de Yankees was atter 'em and him and Marse John jumped in a big ditch. Later in de night it rained and dey couldn't git out of de ditch, so de rest of Marse John's company lef' 'em alone. De next mornin' when dey got out of de ditch, dey didn't know which way dey had went, but Marse John got a hoss and dey got on and rid 'til dey caught up wid de company.

"At Christmas dey give us anything dat us wanted. Dey give me dolls, candy, fruit and evvything. Mistiss used to git a book and say, 'Nig, come here and let me larn you how to read.' I didn't pay no 'tention to her den, but now I sho' does wish I had. My Mistiss didn't have but one chile, Miss Cornelia."

At this moment Fannie, tired of sitting on the doorsteps, abandoned the back porch for her room. The place was very untidy, but she explained this by saying that she was not able to clean it up. On one side of the room hung a picture of the Sacred Heart and on another a reproduction of the Lord's[Pg 355] Supper. An enlarged family portrait decorated the front wall. The symbolic pictures aroused curiosity as to whether Fannie was a church member. She answered questions on the subject by saying "Yes honey, I

joined de Mount Pleasant Baptist Church 58 years ago and wuz baptized by Brother Mike Wilson." When she was asked to sing, the cracked voice broke into this song:

"I am a Baptist born,
And my shoes cried,
And my eyes batted,
And when I'm gone
Dere is a Baptist gone."

Fannie was now completely tired out, but when her visitor arose to leave, she sang out cordially: "Honey, God bless you; goodbye."