

**JOHN HILL**  
**1525 Broad Street**  
**Athens, Georgia**

**PLANTATION LIFE, AS VIEWED BY AN EX-SLAVE**

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**JOHN HILL**  
**Ex-Slave, Age 74**  
**1525 W. Broad St.**  
**Athens, Georgia**

John Hill, an old Negro about 74 years old, was seated comfortably on the front porch of his little cabin enjoying the sunshine. He lives alone and his pleasure was evident at having company, and better still an appreciative audience to whom he could relate the story of his early days.

"My pa wuz George Washin'ton Hill. His old Marster wuz Mr. Aubie Hill, an' dey all lived on de Hill Plantation, in de Buncombe district, nigh whar Monroe, Georgia is now. My ma wuz Lucy Annie Carter, an' she b'longed to de Carter fambly down in Oglethorpe County, 'til she wuz sold on de block, on de ole Tuck plantation, whar dey had a regular place to sell 'em. Dey put 'em up on a big old block, an' de highest bidder got de Nigger. Marse George Hill bought my ma, an' she come to stay on de Hill plantation. Dar's whar my pa married her, an' dar's whar I wuz borned.

"When I wuz just a little tike, I toted nails for 'em to build de jailhouse. Dey got 'bout two by four planks, nailed 'em crossways, an' den dey drived nails in, 'bout evvy inch or two apart, just lak a checkerboard. When dey got it done, dat jail would evermo' keep you on de inside. Dere wuz a place wid a rope to let down, when de jailbirds would

need somethin', or when somebody wanted to send somethin' up to 'em. No Ma'am, dat warn't de [Pg 202] rope dey used to hang folkses wid.

"My pa stayed on wid old Marster 'bout ten years atter de War, den us moved to de farm wid de Walkers at Monroe, Georgia. Dat wuz Governor Walker's pa. Dere wuz a red clay bank on de side of de crick whar us chilluns had our swimmin' hole, an' us didn't know when us wuz a frolickin' an' rollin' young Marse Clifford down dat bank, dat someday he would be gov'ner of Georgia. He evermo' wuz a sight, kivered wid all dat red mud, an' Mist'ess, she would fuss an' say she wuz goin' to whup evvyone of us, but us just stayed out of de way an' she never cotched us. Den she would forgit 'til de nex' time.

"When I wuz 'bout eight years old, dey 'lowed it wuz high time I wuz a larnin' somethin', an' I wuz sont to de little log schoolhouse down in de woods. De onliest book I had wuz just a old blue back speller. Us took corn an' 'tatoes 'long an' cooked 'em for dinner, for den us had to stay all day at school. Us biled de corn an' roasted 'tatoes in ashes, an' dey tasted mighty good.

"Us had corn pone to eat all de time, an' on de fust Sunday in de month us had cake bread, 'cause it wuz church day. Cake bread wuz made out of shorts, but dem biscuits wuz mighty good if dey wuz dark, 'stead of bein' white.

"Us had big gyardens, an' raised all sorts of vegetables: corn, peas, beans, 'tatoes, colla'ds, an' turnip greens. Us had plenty of milk an' butter all de time. An' Marster made us raise lots of cows, hogs, sheep, an' chickens, an' tukkeys. [Pg 203]

"Dey warn't no ready made clo'es or no vittuls in cans at de sto'keepers' places, an' us didn't have no money to spend, if dey had a been dar. Us didn't have nothin' what us didn't raise an' make up. Cotton had to be picked offen de seed, an' washed an' cyarded, den ma spun de thread an' wove de cloth an' sometimes she dyed it wid ink balls, 'fore it wuz ready to make clo'es out of. De ink Marster used to write wid wuz made out of ink balls.

"I wuz still little when my ma died. De white folks' preacher preached her fun'ral from de tex' of Isaiah fifth chapter: fust verse, an' dey sung de old song, "Goin' Home to Die no Mo'." Den dey buried her on de place, an' built a rail fence 'roun' de grave, to keep de stock from trompin' on it. Sometimes several owners got together an' had one place to bury all de slaves, an' den dey built a rail fence all 'roun' de whole place.

"Hit wuz just lak bein' in jail, de way us had to stay on de place, 'cause if us went off an' didn't have no ticket de paddyrollers would always git us, an' dey evermore did beat up some of de Niggers.

"I 'members de Klu Klux Klan good. Dey kept Niggers skeered plum to death, an' when dey done sumpin' brash dey sho' got beat up if de Kluxers cotched 'em.

"One time de Kluxers come by our place on de way to beat a old Nigger man. I begged 'em to lemme go wid 'em, an' atter a while[Pg 204] dey said I could go. Dere wuz horns on de mask dey kivered up my head wid an' I wuz mighty skeered but I didn't say nothin'. Atter us got dar, dey tied de old man up by his hands to de rafters in his house. He wuz beggin' 'em to let him off an' yellin' 'O Lordy, have mussy!' Dere wuz a little gal dar an' I wanted to skeer her, so I started atter her, an' de old man tole her to hit me on de head. She picked up a shovel an' th'owed it an' cut my leg so wide open de blood just spilt down on de floor. I got so bad off dey had to take me back to old Marster, an' he fix me up. Hit wuz six months 'fore I could use dat leg good, an', I nebber did wanter go wid dem Kluxers no more.

"Us went to de white folkses church, but onct a year on de fust Sunday in Augus' de white folkses let de Niggers have dat day for camp meetin'. Dey fixed good dinners for us, an' let us go off in de woods an' stay all day. Dem chicken pies an' dem good old 'tato custards, 'bout one an' a half inches thick, made wid sea sugar, dey make your mouf water just to talk 'bout 'em. What wuz sea sugar? Why it wuz dat crawly, kind of grayish, lookin' sugar us used den. I wuz grown 'fore I ever seed no sho' 'nough white sugar.

"My pa hired me out to Mr. Ray Kempton to tote cotton to de gin on his plantation, when I wuz 'bout 16 years old. I wuz wukkin' dar when de fust railroad wuz laid, an' dey named de place Kempton station fer Marse Ray Kempton. I wuz paid five dollars a month an' board for my wuk, an' I stayed dar 'til I married.[Pg 205]

"I wuz 'bout eighteen when I rode on de train for de fust time. Us rode from Social Circle to Washin'ton, Wilkes, to see my ma's folkses. Ma tuk a heap of ginger cakes an' fried chicken along for us to eat on de train, an' de swingin' an' swayin' of dat train made me so sick I didn't want to ride no more for a long time.

"Soon atter I wuz twenty years old, I married a gal from Washin'ton, Wilkes, an' us moved to Athens, an' I been livin' right here ever since. Us got here de last day de old whiskey house wuz open. Dey closed it down dat night. I wukked a long time wid de Allgood boys in de horse tradin' business an' den I wukked for Mr. an' Mrs. Will Peebles 'bout ten years. Dey runned a boardin' house, an' while I wuz dar, Dr. Walker come to board, an' I wuz mighty glad to wait on him, 'cause he wuz from Monroe an' had done been livin' on de old Walker place dat I stayed at when us wuz down dar.

"My uncle, Ambus Carter, wuz a preacher on Marse Jim Smith's place. He b'longed to Marse Jim durin' de War, an' he never did leave him. Atter freedom come, most of Marse Jim's Niggers lef' him, an' den he had what dey called chaingang slaves. He paid 'em out of jail for 'em to wuk for him. An' he let 'em have money all de time so dey didn't never git out of debt wid him. Dey had to stay dar an' wuk all de time, an' if dey didn't wuk he had 'em beat. He evermore did beat 'em if dey got lazy, but if[Pg 206] dey wukked good, he wuz good to 'em. Sometimes dey tried to run away. Dey had dogs to

trail 'em wid so dey always cotched 'em, an' den da whippin' boss beat 'em mos' to death. It wuz awful to hear 'em hollerin' an' beggin' for mussy. If dey hollered, 'Lord have mussy!' Marse Jim didn't hear 'em, but if dey cried, 'Marse Jim have mussy!' den he made 'em stop de beatin'. He say, 'De Lord rule Heb'en, but Jim Smith ruled de earth.'

"One time he cotched some Niggers down at de Seaboard Station, what had runned away from his place. He got de police, an' brung 'em back 'cause he 'lowed dey still owed him money. I wuz mighty sorry for 'em, for I knowed what dey wuz goin' to git when he done got 'em back on his place. Dat whippin' boss beat 'em 'til dey couldn't stan' up.

"But he wuz good to my uncle, an' treated him just lak one of de fambly. He helped him wid all his sermons, an' told him to always tell 'em to be observerant an' obejent to de boss man. He provided good fer his help an' dey always had plenty to eat. He used to try to git me to come an' stay wid him, but I didn't want to stay on dat place.

"Marse Jim used to have big 'possum hunts for his Niggers, an' he would sen' me word, an' I most always went, 'cause dem wuz good times den, when dey cooked de coons an' 'possums, an' eat an' drunk mos' of de night. Coon meat is most as good as lamb if you is careful to take out de musk sacs when you dress 'em to cook." [Pg 207]

Smithsonia, the Jim Smith plantation, covered thousands of acres, but the words of the feeble old Negro showed that he could not imagine it possible for any farmer to own more than one hundred acres.

"Marse Jim had a hund'ud acre farm, an' he had to keep plenty of Niggers to look atter dat place, but I wuz 'fraid to go dar to stay, for it wuz sho' just lak de jailhouse.

"Dey ain't but four of our nine chilluns livin' now an' dey's all up Nawf. Dey done sont atter me when deir ma died, an' tried to git me to stay wid 'em, but its too cold up dar for dis old Nigger, so I just stays on here by myself. It don't take much for me to live on. In crop times I wuks in de fiel' a choppin' cotton, an' I picks cotton too. I'll just wait on here an' de waitin' won't be much longer, 'cause I'se a living right, an', 'Praise de Lawd,' I'se a gwine to Heb'en w'en I die."