

MAHALA JEWEL
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MAHALA JEWEL Ex-Slave—Age 76.

[Pg 316]

Mahala Jewel, known in the community as "Aunt Hailie," was sitting on her tiny porch when the interviewer arrived. "I'se a-tryin' to git my foots warm," she declared. "Dey was cold all last night, and didn't warm up none even when I had done walked all de way up to de courthouse to git dem cabbage what de welfare ladies had for me today. Yes Ma'am, hit sho' is hard times wid old Hailie now. I was raised whar folks had plenty. Our white folks warn't no pore white trash, and if my old Marster and Mist'ess was a-livin' today dey sho' would do somepin' for old Hailie in a hurry, 'cause dey allus give us plenty of evvything dey had."

Aunt Hailie's rickety chair was kept in vigorous motion as she talked and the visitor was fearful it would collapse at any moment. One rocker was broken and on top of the cushions in the low seat of the chair she was sitting on an old cheese box. Suddenly she arose to go in the house to "see if dem cabbages is a-burnin'," and when she returned she carefully adjusted the box before resuming her precarious perch in the old rocking chair. When she was sure that her feet were in a sunny spot, she began her narrative.

"Gracie Wright was my Ma's name 'fore she tuk off and married my Pa. He was named Tuggle, and both of 'em belonged to Marse Hamp McWhorter on his plantation down in Oglethorpe County. Marse Hamp was sho' a rich man and on his big old plantation dey raised evvything dey needed lak, peas, 'tatoes, ingons, collards,[Pg 317] cabbages, and turnip sallet, beans, punkins, and plenty of corn, wheat and rye. Marse Hamp had lots of cows, hogs, sheep, and goats too. Miss Liza was our Mist'ess, and she raised more chickens dan dey ever could use. I just tells you, my white folks warn't no pore folks.

"I was born and raised up right dar. Ma wukked in de fields, and Mist'ess brung me up in de big house 'cause she said I was gwine to have to wait on her when she got old. Dare was sho' a moughty big lot of slave chillun a-comin' on all de time and Marster and Mist'ess was good as dey could be to all of 'em. Marster and Mist'ess had seben chillun. Deir boys was William, Joe, James, and Mack. Miss Tildy and Miss Mary was two of deir gals, but I just can't ricollect de name of deir oldest daughter.

"Whilst us was little, slave chillun didn't have much wuk to do. De littlest ones just picked up trash when de yards was bein' cleant up and done easy jobs lak dat.

"Marse Hamp never fooled wid dem little one track stores at Maxeys, de town nighest our plantation. When he needed somepin', he just cotch a train and lit out for 'Gusty (Augusta), Georgie. Mist'ess knowed when he was comin' back, and she allus sont de car'iage to meet him. When us chillun seed 'em gittin' out de car'iage and hosses, us didn't wait, us just lit out and when dat train got to de crossin' all of us was right dar a-waitin' to see our Marster step off. Den us followed dat car'iage down de big road plum back to de plantation, 'cause us knowed Marster never forgot none of us. Dere was new dresses for de gals and clothes for de boys too, and us felt moughty proud when us dressed up in dem store bought clothes f'um 'Gusty. Chilluns' evvy day clothes was just slips cut[Pg 318] all in one piece, sleeves and all. Boys wore long shirts 'til dey was big and strong enough for field wuk. Clothes for de grown folks was made out of cloth wove in de loom house right dar on de plantation, but dere was some beaded cloth too.

"Us sho' did have a pretty place. De big house was painted white, and dere was big old yards wid lots of flowers. De slave quarters was white too. Dey was one room cabins built in long rows, way off f'um de big house. Home-made beds was nailed to de wall and had just two laigs, and de big ticks stuffed wid straw made dem beds moughty good places to sleep.

"Most of de slaves et at de two long tables close by de kitchen up nigh de big house. De kitchen warn't built on to de big house, but hit sot out in de yard a little piece. Dat's de way evvybody had deir kitchens built dem days. Marster kept a big strong man to do de cookin' for his slaves. Pa was de boss for Marse Hamp. I don't 'member much 'bout him. My brother stayed in de cabin wid Pa and Ma, but I was all time up at de big house wid Mist'ess. She was good to me as she could be. She told me to allus do right and never do no wrong to nobody. I had a little highup cheer what I sot in to keep de flies off of Mist'ess.

"All de slaves went to church wid deir white folks, and sot in de back part of de meetin' house. Us went to old Beard (Baird) Church, off out in de country, and sometimes I had to take de littlest white chilluns out and stay in de car'iage wid 'em, if dey got too restless inside de meetin' house. Out dar in de car'iage us could listen to de singin' and it sho' did sound sweet. Meetin' days was[Pg 319] big days. Dey fetched deir dinners and stayed

all day. De McWhorter family allus carried great big baskets, and one of deir biggest baskets was kept special just to carry chickens in, and de barbecue, it was fixed right dar on de church grounds. Slave gals sot de long tables what was built out under de trees, and dem same gals cleant up atter evvybody had done got thoo' eatin'. Niggers et atter de white folks, but dere was allus a plenty for all. Little Niggers kept de flies off de tables by wavin' long branches kivvered wid green leafs for fly brushes. Some few of 'em brung home-made paper fly brushes f'um home. Most of dem all day meetin's was in July and August. Some folks called dem months de 'vival season, 'cause dere was more 'vival meetin's den dan in all de rest of de year. De day 'fore one of dem big baptizin's dey dammed up de crick a little, and when dey gathered 'round de pool next day dere was some tall shoutin' and singin'. White preachers done all de preachin' and baptizin'.

"Somehow I don't 'member much 'bout de celebratin' when dey got in de wheat and done de thrashin'. Dey was so busy wid de cotton 'bout dat time on our place dat dere warn't much frolickin', but de sho' nuff big celebratin' was in de fall atter all de corn was gathered and dey had cornshuckin's. Marse Hamp 'vited all de white folks and deir Niggers. De white folks visited and de Niggers done de wuk. De fust thing dey done at cornshuckin's was to 'lect a gen'ral. All he done was to lead de singin' and try to git evvybody to jine in his song 'bout de corn, and as dey sung faster, de shucks dey flew faster too. Atter de corn was all shucked, dey et de big feast what us had done been cookin' for days and days. Hit tuk a passel of victuals, 'cause dem shuckers could sho' hide 'way[Pg 320] dem good eats. Den de fiddlers started up deir music wid Turkey in de Straw. De old breakdown dancin' was on, and hit was apt to go on all night.

"Syrup makin' time at Marse Hamp's was a frolic too. Us raised plenty of sugar-cane to make dat good old 'lasses what tasties so good wid hoecake and home-made butter.

"Atter de War, Ma and Pa stayed on wid Marse Hamp a long time. Mist'ess died when I was just a little chile, but she had done willed me to Miss Mary and told her to allus take keer of Hailie. Miss Mary stayed right on dar wid Marse Hamp. My Ma and Pa had done left, and I ain't never heard nothin' more f'um 'em since dey went away f'um Marse Hamp's place.

"Den Marster he done went and got kilt. He had rid off on a middle size pony what must a runned away wid him, 'cause dey found him plumb daid in a ditch. It was all so sudden lak us never could find out if he died happy. Us knowed Mist'ess died happy 'cause she told de folks 'round de bed dat de Lord was a-takin' her home out of dis old world of trouble.

"Atter Marse Hamp died, Miss Mary married Marse Pleaze Winter, and us all moved to Flatwoods, what warn't so fur f'um Marse Jim Smith's place. I 'members when dat Smith man died. Dey buried him in de graveyard on his own plantation at fust, but den

dey said nobody didn't want to live dar atter he was buried dar, so dey tuk him up and buried him somewhar else.

"I didn't lak to live at Flatwoods, but I stayed on wid my Miss Mary and nussed her chillun 'til me and Joe Jewel got married.[Pg 321] Joe was named atter his old Marster, Captain Joseph Jewel, and dey lived on de Jewel place in Oglethorpe County. I never did keer much for fine clothes and Miss Mary said what clothes I had was all right, but she just would give me a nice white weddin' dress. She had us git married at her house, and she 'vited lots of mine and Joe's folks and our friends to a big supper she had fixed for us. Miss Mary sho' did give me a grand send off. Atter dat, I visited my Miss Mary whenever I wanted to, and still helped her wid her babies when she needed me.

"Miss Mary is done daid now, but if she was a livin' old Hailie would have what she needs. I'm a gittin' moughty old now and my old man is done gone on to glory, but Hailie will soon be wid him dar. Whilst I did go and git married to a Jewel, I ain't forgittin' I was borned and bred a McWhorter, and I'm here to tell you dat I'm still just de same—a McWhorter."