

Adeline Hall Johnson

Interview with Adeline Hall Johnson, 93 Years old

—*W.W. Dixon, Winnsboro, S.C.*

Adeline Hall's husband was Tom Johnson but she prefers to be called "Hall", the name of her old master. Adeline lives with her daughter, Emma, and Emma's six children, about ten miles southeast of Winnsboro, S.C., in a three-room frame house on the Durham place, a plantation owned by Mr. A.M. Owens of Winnsboro. The plantation contains 1,500 acres, populated by over sixty Negroes, run as a diversified farm, under the supervision of a white overseer in the employ of Mr. Owens.

The wide expanse of cotton and corn fields, the large number of dusky Negro laborers working along side by side in the fields and singing Negro spirituals as they work, give a fair presentation or picture of what slavery was like on a well conducted Southern plantation before the Civil War. Adeline fits into this picture as the old Negro "Mauma" of the plantation, respected by all, white and black, and tenderly cared for. She has her clay pipe and stick ever with and about her. There is a spacious pocket in her dress underneath an apron. In that pocket is a miscellany of broken pieces of china, crumbs of tobacco, a biscuit, a bit of wire, numerous strings of various colors, and from time to time the pipe becomes the warm individual member of the varied assortment.

Her eyes are bright and undimmed by age and the vigor with which she can telegraph her wants to the household by the rappings of that stick on the plank floor is interesting and amusing.

She is confident that she will round out a century of years, because: "Marse Arthur Owens done tell me I'll live to be a hundred, if I stay on his place and never 'lope away wid any strange young buck nigger.

"I's not so feeble as I might 'pear, white folks. Long time I suffer for sight, but dese last years I see just as good as I ever did. Dats a blessin' from de Lord!

"Who I b'long to in slavery time? Where I born? I born on what is now called de Jesse Gladden place but it all b'long to my old marster, William Hall, then.

"My old marster was one of de richest man in de world. Him have lands in Chester and Fairfield counties, Georgia and Florida, and one place on de Red River in Arkansas. He also had a plantation, to raise brown suger on, in old Louisiana. Then him and his brudder, Daniel, built and give Bethesda Church, dats standin' yet, to de white Methodist' of Mitford, for them to 'tend and worship at. He 'membered de Lord, you see, in all his ways and de Lord guide his steps.

"I never have to do no field work; just stayed 'round de house and wait on de mistress, and de chillun. I was whupped just one time. Dat was for markin' de mantel-piece wid a dead coal of fire. They make mammy do de lashin'. Hadn't hit me three licks befo' Miss Dorcas, Miss Jemima, Miss Julia, and Marse

Johnnie run dere, ketch de switch, and say: 'Dat enough Mauma Ann! Addie won't do it agin'. Dats all de beatin' I ever 'ceived in slavery time.

"Now does you wanna know what I do when I was a child, from de time I git up in de mornin' to de time I go to bed? I was 'bout raised up in de house. Well, in de evenin', I fill them boxes wid chips and fat splinters. When mornin' come, I go in dere and make a fire for my young mistresses to git up by. I help dress them and comb deir hair. Then I goes down stairs and put flowers on de breakfas' table and lay de Bible by Marse William's chair. Then I bring in de breakfas'. (Table have to be set de night befo') When everything was on de table, I ring de bell. White folks come down and I wait on de table.

"After de meal finish, Marse William read de Bible and pray. I clear de table and help wash de dishes. When dat finish, I cleans up de rooms. Then I acts as maid and waitress at dinner and supper. I warms up de girls' room, where they sleep, after supper. Then go home to poppy John and Mauma Anne. Dat was a happy time, wid happy days!

"Dat was a happy family. Marse William have no trouble, 'cept once when him brudder, Daniel, come over one mornin' and closet wid Marse William. When Marse Daniel go, Marse William come in dere where me and de mistress was and say: 'Tom's run away from school'. (Dats one of Marse Daniel's boys dat 'tended school at Mt. Zion, in Winnsboro) Her 'low: 'What him run away for?' 'Had a fool duel wid a Caldwell boy,' him say. I hear no more 'bout dat 'til Marse Tom come home and then I hear plenty. White folks been laughin' 'bout it ever since. Special talk 'bout it since Marse Tom's grandson b'come a United State Judge. Bet Marse Dan Hall told you 'bout it. Want me to go ahead and tell you it my way? Well, 'twas dis a way: Marse Tom and Marse Joe Caldwell fell out 'bout a piece of soap when they was roomin' together at school. Boys crowd 'round them and say: 'Fight it out!' They hit a lick or two, and was parted. Then de older boys say dere must be a duel. Marse Joe git seconds. Marse Tom git seconds. They load guns wid powder but put no bullets in them. Tell Marse Joe 'bout it but don't tell Marse Tom. Then they go down town, fix up a bag of pokeberry juice, and have it inside Marse Joe's westcoat, on his breast. Took them out in a field, face them, and say: 'One, two, three, fire!' Guns went off, Marse Joe slap his hand on his chest, and de bag bust. Red juice run all over him. Older boys say: 'Run Tom and git out de way.' Marse Tom never stop 'til him git to Liverpool, England. Marse William and Marse Daniel find him dere, sent money for to fetch him home and him laugh 'bout it when he git back. Yes sir, dat is de grandpappy of Marse Lyle Glenn, a big judge right now.

"De white folks near, was de Mellichamps, de Gladdens, de Mobleys, Lumpkins, Boulwares, Fords, Picketts, and Johnsons.

"When de Yankees come, they was struck dumb wid de way marster acted. They took things, wid a beg your pardon kind of way, but they never burnt a single thing, and went off wid deir tails twixt deir legs, kinda 'shame lak.

"After freedom I marry a preacher, Tom Johnson. Him die when in his sixties, thirty years ago. Our chillun was Emma, Mansell, Tom, and Grover. Bad white folks didn't lak my husband. Dere was a whiskey still, near our house where you could git three gallons of liquor for a silver dollar. Him preach agin' it. Dat gall both makers and drinkers. Him 'dured persecution for de Lord's sake, and have gone home to his awards.

"In slavery, us have all de clothes us need, all de food us want, and work all de harder 'cause us love de white folks dat cared for us. No sirree, none of our slaves ever run 'way. Us have a week off, Christmas. Go widout a pass to Marse Daniel's quarters and they come to our'n.

"Dr. Scott and Dr. Douglas 'tend sick slaves. I don't set myself up to judge Marse Abe Lincoln. Dere is sinners, black and white, but I hope and prays to git to hebben. Whether I's white or black when I git dere, I'll be satisfied to see my Savior dat my old marster worshipped and my husband preach 'bout. I wants to be in hebben wid all my white folks, just to wait on them, and love them and serve them, sorta lak I did in slavery time. Dat will be 'nough hebben for Adeline."