

Cull Taylor

Personal interview with Cull Taylor

364 N. Scott Street, Mobile, Alabama

—Ila B. Prine, Mobile, Alabama

A SLAVE IS GIVEN HIS YOUNG MISSY'S NAME

A tall, stoop-shouldered, black Negro man came trudging down the road with a hoe in his hand. Asked where Cull Taylor lived, the old man said, "Lady I'se Cull Taylor. Dis is mah house here. Does you want to see me?"

When told that his visitor was looking for old people who lived during slavery days Cull said:

"I were born a slave, but warn't very old when de niggers was freed. I were born March 5, 1859, in Augusta County, Alabama. Mah maw come from Richmond, Virginia and her name were Jane Hare. Mah paw's name were Willingham Hare, and he were brought to Alabama from North Carolina. I guess you'se wonderin' why mah name is Taylor when mah maws and paws name was Hare?

"You see when dey was fust brought here, a man name Tom Taylor bought 'em, an' when I were born, dey gib me to Miss Bennie Taylor. Ol' Marse Tom's girl. Miss Bennie gib me de name Taylor an' I'se allus kept hit. She shorely was good to me. I neber had nothing much to do, I stayed wid her, 'til I was grown, atter she married Mr. Bob Alexander.

"'Bout de war, I does 'member how mah maw was a-weavin' cloth when de Yankees come through. An' atter de niggers was freed ol' Marse Tom gib mah maw de loom.

"Ol' Marse was a good man. He neber 'lowed no o'seer or anybody to mistreat his niggers. He had plenty of 'em, too, and a big plantation wid plenty to eat. Course de slaves had to work on de plantation an' raise de stuff to eat. His house was a big fine, white place, an' de cabins whar de slaves libed was built in rows, wid streets between dem, so you could drive 'tween 'em wid big double team wagons. De cabins was built out ob logs wid a notch out in de shoulders, an' laid on top ob one another an' when dey built de wall up as high as dey wanted hit, dey would bore a augor hole an' put a pin in hit to hold 'em together. Den dey put de roof on. Dey filled de cracks between de logs wid mortar, so as to keep de wind out, an' it sho' made de houses warm. Us had jes' wooden home-made beds, wid mattresses made of cotton, or moss, an' sometimes hay. Us neber hab no springs on de beds.

"As I said, Ol' Marse Tom was a good man, an' he was too old to go to de war, but he had two boys. De oldest one went to de war an' was killed. But de youngest warn't old enough to go. Ol' Marse Tom had de women sew, makin' clothes, an' had nurse women to look atter de little niggers while dere maws was in de fields. I 'members as a li'l boy how dey had one house whar de nurse kept de chillun an' it was as

clean as a pin. Dere was wooden troughs different heights for de different age chillun, an' dose troughs was scrubbed as white as cotton mos'. When meal time come, dey would crumble up cornbread wid pot licker, or milk an' gib to de youngest ones. An' dey had plenty ob milk, I 'members de big milk dairy, an' smoke house on de place, an' when de Yankees come through dey went into de dairy an' drank all de milk dey wanted.

"I 'members mah paw was out in de woods hidin' de mules when dey come through an' dere was only one old horse on de place. Dem Yankees turn hit loose, but otherwise dey behaved very nice."

Cull said that they didn't know anything about dishes and spoons such as are used now, for they had wooden spoons for the slaves. He said that the usual rations for a week included a peck of meal, and six or seven pounds of meat to each man, and if he had a big family he was given more. They raised rice, sugar cane, pumpkins, watermelons, cushaws, peaches, pears, plums and grapes.

"Mah white folks not only tuk keer ob us durin' slaverytimes, but dey gib us things atter us was freed. You ax me 'bout de slaves clothes? Yas'm, lady, us had good, stout, clothes, made out ob de cloth dat de women wove. I can see mah maw throwing dat ol' shickle from one side to de other, weaving cloth on dat loom. Dey dyed de cloth wid red oaks an' dogwood bark, and Chinaberry bark, and had all kinds ob colors, sich as blue, red, brown, and black.

"Den dere was de big times, sich as de hog killin' time, an' corn shucking, an' 'specially cotton pickin' time. Sometimes de neighboring plantation would hab a regular cotton pickin' festival, an' all ob us would go and he'p pick de cotton, and de nigger what would pick de mos' would git a dress or de men would git a suit ob clothes. De suits was made out ob osnaburg, and sometimes bed tickin'. When a big crowd would come to dese cotton pickin's, dey would pick out three or four bales ob cotton.

"De li'l niggers had a good time playin' in de sand makin' frog houses, an' spinnin' tops. But, Lordy! when us got sick, dey gib us Jerusalem oak and sassafras tea. But neber was dere anything said 'bout hoo-doo stuf. I never heard ob hit, 'til dese later years.

"But us did hab church, an' prayer meetin', an' funerals! Lor', yes, dey don't bury folks now. In dose days dey started singin' at de house an' sung all de way to de graveyard; an' den dey put dem in de groun' good full six feet deep, dey jes' lays folks on top ob de groun' now-a-days. But times is different now, lady.

"I 'members how de men would go out nights an' hunt de possums an' de coons, and wild cats. Dey den would sometimes go deer an' rabbit huntin' in de daytime; an', too, dey would set traps to ketch other varmints. Dere was plenty ob squirrels too.

"But let me tell you, de bes' thing ob all, was de good locust beer, dey made from locust seeds. Dey also made 'simmon beer, an' wine out ob plums. Dem war good days den."