

Jane

Interview with Jane

—*Mildred Scott Taylor, Georgiana, Alabama*

DID THEY OWN US OR WE OWN THEM?

"Yas, chillun, I 'members de wah; 'caze I was here when de Yankees come t'rough an' I was about fourteen year ole. Ole Marster he went off to de wah wid a whole passel of sojers, en' he been gone a long time, en' nobody to home to look atter de plantation, 'cep Ole Mistis en' Unker Jude, what was Ole Marster's fust slave he ebber owned. Ole Marster en' Unker Jude was borned de same day, en' Ole Marster's pappy gin Unker Jude to him, whenst dey was leetle bitsy babies. When Ole Marster maied Ole Mistis, dey was young folks, en' dey move to his own plantation. He tuk Unker Jude wid him, en' Unker Jude was de ca'i'ge driver. When Ole Marster went off ter de wah, he tole Unker Jude ter look atter Ole Mistis en' evy'ting on de place 'twell he come back. Whilst Ole Marster gone to de wah, Unker Jude was oberseer for Ole Mistis, en' he made de niggers wuk harder dan Ole Marster did, to make co'n, en' oats, en' fodder, en' meat fer de sojers.

"Ole Mistis made de womens card bats, en' spin en' weabe on de loom. What er loom look lak? It look lak er loom, dat what it look lak; what you spec' it look lak? All de womens, white en' black, wuk hard makin' jeans fer de sojers clo's en' makin' linsey fer de women's clo's. Us didn't hab no udder clo's 'cep dem linsey, but dey sho was good uns en' las'er long time, iffen yer didn't stan' too close ter de fire en' scorch 'em.

"Us kep' hearin' of de Yankees comin', en' one mawnin' Ole Mistis she say: 'Jane, you go down ter de front gate en' stay dar en' watch en' see iffen de Yankees comin' down de big road, en' when you sees 'em, you run tell me quick.'

"Bimeby, I seed de Yankees comin' about a mile down de road, en' I run tell Ole Mistis, en' she call de womens en' dey run down t'rough de orchard to de big woods, en' I run tell Unker Jude en' he onhitch de mules en' lead 'em down ter de big gully behin' de fiel'.

"Ole Mistis tole me to run back to de house, quick, fo' de Yankees get dar, en' git her gole watch en' chain outen de bureau drawer; but de Yankees come in whilst I was gitten de watch en' chain, en' one ob 'em grabbed it outen by han' en' put it in his pocket en' tole anudder Yankee: 'I'se gwine tek dis home ter my gal.'

"De house en' de yard was plum full of Yankees en' dey rid dey hosses en' tore up ev'yting, lookin' for money en' jewelry. Dey ax me whar it was hid, en' I tole em' I didn't know en' dey said I was lyin', en' iffen I didn't tell 'em, dey would kill me 'lak er dam Rebel', en' I sho was skairt.

"Dey et up all de sump'n' to eat in de kitchen en' tuk all de meat en' meal outen de smokehouse en' didn't lef' us nuddin', en' dey went to de crib en' tuk ev'y year co'n en' all de fodder en' put it in wagins en' tuk 'em off.

"De Yankees ax me don't I wanner be free en' I say: 'No, suh', en' dey say ev'body gwine be free an' I won't hab ter wuk fer Ole Marster no mo'. Den dey ax me whar Ole Marster at, en' I say: 'He gone to wah', en' dey ax me whar Ole Mistis, en' I say: 'I dunno whar she at; she done gone off summuz.' Dey ax me whar de guns, en' I tole 'em us didn't hab no guns.

"Dem Yankees mighter been dar till yit, iffen one ob 'em hadn't rid his hoss ober a bee gum en' Man! dem bees en' dem Yankees sho did mess up! In about a minute dere wan't no Yankees nowhar 'cep down de big road whar de dus' jes' foggin' up! 'Bout a week some mo' Yankees come, but dey muster heard 'bout de bees, 'caze dey lef' dey hosses outside de big gate en' walked up to de house, but dey didn't stay long 'caze dey wan't nuffin' lef' atter de fu'st Yankees done to' up ev'ything. En' when dey ready to go dey tuk dey guns en' stood way off en' shoot de bee gums all to pieces, en' dey flewed aroun' en' us had to stay 'way 'twel night. Unker Jude, he wuk all night long, makin' bee gums outen a hollow log, en' nex' day he hive ebery one ob dem bees en' put 'em in de new gums, en' de bees dey tote all dey honey en' put it in de new gums fas' as dey could make comb fer it. Dem bees sho' was smart.

"When de wah done gone, Ole Marster he come, wid one he arms shot plum off, en' Ole Mistis she cry, she soglad to see him en' Unker Jude he cry en' hug Ole Marster, en' us all cry en' tek on, we so glad Ole Marster come back en' so sorry he arm shot off. Ole Marster tell all de niggers dey free now en' don't hatter wuk fer him no mo', en' some er de young niggers went off atter de Yankees, en' neber did come back, but de res' ob us jes' stayed right whar we is. Us had a mighty hard time for a long time, but de white folks had de same hard time en' us didn't mek no diffunce. I mai'ed Rufus en' us raise a big fambly right dar on Ole Marster's plantation, en' outen us's twelve chilluns, ain't nary one eber seen de inside ob de jailhouse. I raise my chilluns jes' lak Ole Mistis raise her'n en' dat's de way to raise 'em, to wuk en' keep outen debilment. Ole Marster dead en' gone en' Ole Mistis too, but I 'members 'em jes' lak dey was, when dey looked atter us whenst we belonged to 'em or dey belonged ter us, I dunno which it was. De times was better fo' de wah. Us had good things to eat en' plenty of it, en' we had good clo's en' clean clo's fer Sunday. Dat's mo'n some triflin' niggers got now.

"I goes to church en' sings en' prays, en' when de good Lord teks me, I 'se ready to go, en' I specs to see Jesus en' Ole Mistis en' Ole Marster when I gits to de He'benly Lan'.