



Donaville Broussard

DONAVILLE BROUSSARD, a polished gentleman of his race, was the son of a mulatto slave of Emilier Caramouche. He was born in 1850, but appears vigorous. Light skinned, with blue eyes and a genial expression, he gave the story of his life in the French patois spoken by Louisiana French Negroes, which has been translated into English.

"My mama was daughter of one of the Carmouche boys. One of M'sieur Francois' sons. She call herself Armance Carmouche. She was house servant for the family and I worked around the house. I remember my Madame brought me the little basket and it had a strap on it. I put the strap over the shoulder and went round with the sharp stick and picked up the leaves on the ground with the stick.

"It was a great house with trees and flowers. Madame liked all clean and pretty. I never worked hard. The ladies and my mama, too, petted me as if I was the white child.

"M'sieur had a widow sister. She made us learn the prayers. We were glad to go where she was for she always had something good in her bag for us. I never saw the baptizing. In those days all the slaves had the religion of the master and the Catholics didn't have no baptizing. They didn't have to half-drown when they got their religion. The church was 15 or 20 miles off. The priest came and held Mass for the white folks sometimes.

"I remember one wedding. My aunt got married. M'sieur Caramouche killed a big pig. The white folks ate in the house. The [Pg 152] slaves sat under the trees and ate in the yard. At four o'clock the justice of the peace came. He was the friend of M'sieur Caramouche. He made my aunt and the man hold hands and jump over the broom handle. When the priest came he made M'sieur sign some papers.

"A slave always had to ask M'sieur to marry. He always let the women slaves marry who they wanted. He didn't loose by that. He was so good the men would come to his plantation.

"We all wore the long chemise. Made out of heavy cloth. They made the cloth on the place and the women sewed it up. We didn't wear the shoes. We didn't like them when we had them.

"Each slave could have the little garden. They raised vegetables and had a couple of beehives for the honey.

"When the Yankees came they told us we could be free, but I don't know of any slaves that left. Old M'sieur died of the fever in the second year of the war. His wife died before he did. No children. They sold us, the house and everything. M'sieur Cyprien Arceneaux of Lafayette bought me and Madame Arvillien Bernard of St. Pierre bought the mama. They used to call it St. Pierre. They call it Carenero now. When war was finished I left M'sieur Arceneaux and lived with mama.

"A year and a half after that the mama married a black man and us three farmed the little farm. My steppapa didn't like me. I was light. He and me couldn't get along. So when I had 20 years I left there and hired myself out. I saved till I bought a little piece of land for myself. Then I married and raised the family. Me and my wife and the children farmed that place up to ten years ago and then she died. My son farms the place now and I came to Beaumont. I live with my girl. [Pg 153]

"I remember me in time of war we danced. Round dances. We sang and danced La Boulangere in time of war. De song go:

"La Boulangere ait ta victoire
Et nous, qui sont en guerre,
Voici le jour que je dois partir.

"Mon cher ami, tu pars,
Tu me laisses un enfant dans les bras
et prend tes armes.
Et moi, je vais dans le moment
verser des larmes.

"Quand je serai en le guerre, [*Handwritten Note: à la guerre?*]
Tu serais de garnison,
Et tu m'oublirais moi,
Qui serai en les haillons.

"J'entends le tombour qui m'appelle
A les points de jour.
Mon cher Armande, si tu m'aimes
Tu penserais à moi, quand tu serais,
Dans tes plaisir.
Moi—que serai au bout du fusil!"

"I got one real scare. I was with M'sieur Arceneaux in Lafayette. There was the battle. Lots of fighting. Lots of killing. The Yankees came right inside the house. I stayed hid.

"I don't know whether it's been better since the war. At all times one has his miseries. We managed to get along on the farm. But now I have nothing. Oh, I don't mean slavery was better than to be free. I mean times were better.

"The reason I'm so light is, my mama was half-white. My papa was Neville Broussard and he was all white. [Pg 154]