



Ellen Butler

ELLEN BUTLER was born a slave to Richmond Butler, near Whiska Chitto, in the northern part of Calcasieu Parish (now a part of Beauregard Parish), in Louisiana. Ellen is about 78 years old. She now lives in Beaumont, Texas.

"My old massa was name Richmond Butler and he used to have a big plantation over on Whiska Chitto, in Louisiana, and that's where I was born. They used to call the place Bagdad. I was his slave till I six year old and then freedom come.

"I don't 'member my daddy, but my mammy was name Dicey Ann Butler. I have seven sister and three brudder, and they was Anderson and Charlie and Willie, and the girls was Laura and Rosa and Rachel and Fannie and Adeline and Sottie and Nora.

"Us used to live in a li'l log house with one room. The floor was dirt and the house was make jus' like they used to make 'tater house. They was a little window in the back. When I was a baby they wrop me up in cotton and put me in a coffee pot—that how li'l I was. But I grows to be more sizable.

"The plantation were a good, big place and they have 'bout 200 head of niggers. When I gets big enough they start me to totin' water to the field. I gits the water out the spring and totes it in gourds. They cut the gourds so that a strip was left round and cross the top and that the handle. They was about a foot 'cross and a foot deep. Us used to have one good gourd us kep' lard in and li'l gourds to drink out of. [Pg 177]

"Massa never 'lowed us slaves go to church but they have big holes in the fields they gits down in and prays. They done that way 'cause the white folks didn't want them to pray. They used to pray for freedom.

"When the white folks go off they writes on the meal and flour with they fingers. That the way they know if us steal meal. Sometime they take a stick and write in front of the door so if anybody go out they step on that writin' and the massa know. That the way us larn how to write.

"Old massa didn't give 'em much to eat. When they comes in out of the field they goes work for other folks for something to eat.

"They jus' have a old frame with planks to sleep on and no mattress or nothin'. In winter they have to keep the fire goin' all night to keep from freezin'. They put a old quilt down on the floor for the li'l folks. They have a li'l trough us used to eat out of with a li'l wooden paddle. Us didn't know nothin' 'bout knives and forks.

"I never did git nothin' much to eat. My sister she de cook and sometime when the white folks gone us go up to the big house and she give us somethin'. But she make us wash the mouth after us finish eatin', so they won't be no crumbs in our mouth.

"Massa used to beat 'em all the time. My brudder tell old massa sometime he git hongry and gwine have to come ask de niggers for somethin' to eat. He say he never do that, but he did, 'cause after freedom he go to West Texas and some niggers with him and he los' everything and, sho' 'nough, old massa have to go to my brudder and ask him for food and a shelter to sleep under. Then he say if he had it to do over, he wouldn't [Pg 178] treat the hands so bad.

"One time my brudder slip off de plantation and they almost beat him to death. He told 'em he had to do somethin' to git somethin' to eat. They used to put 'em 'cross a log or barrel to beat 'em. My mammy had a strop 'bout eight inch wide they used to beat 'em with.

"Most clothes what we git is from the Iles, what was rich folks and lives close by. They folks lives in DeRidder, in Louisiana, I hears. They treated the slaves like white folks.

"On Christmas time they give us a meal. I 'member that. I don't 'member no other holidays.

"When us git sick us go to the woods and git herbs and roots and make tea and medicine. We used to git Blackhaw root and cherry bark and dogwood and chinquapin bark, what make good tonic. Black snakeroot and swamproot make good medicine, too.

"My mammy told us we was free and we starts right off and walks to Sugartown, 'bout 8 mile away. I 'member my brudder wades 'cross a pool totin' me.

"I used to nuss Dr. Frasier. He used to be the high sheriff in DeRidder. [Pg 179]
