



Green Cumby

GREEN CUMBY, 86, was born a slave of the Robert H. Cumby family, in Henderson, Texas. He was about 14 at the close of the Civil War. He stayed with his old master four years after he was freed, then married and settled in Tyler, Texas, where he worked for the compress 30 years. He lives with his daughter at 749 Mesquite St., Abilene, Texas.

"Durin' slavery I had purty rough times. My grandfather, Tater Cumby, was cullud overseer for forty slaves and he called us at four in de mornin' and we worked from sun to sun. Most of de time we worked on Sunday, too.

"De white overseers whupped us with straps when we didn't do right. I seed niggers in chains lots of times, 'cause there wasn't no jails and they jus' chained 'em to trees.

"Spec'lators on hosses drove big bunches of slaves past our place from one place to another, to auction 'em at de market places. De women would be carryin' 'il ones in dere arms and at night dey bed 'em down jus' like cattle right on de ground 'side of de road. Lots of 'il chillun was sold 'way from de mammy when dey seven or eight, or even smaller. Dat's why us cullud folks don't know our kinfolks to dis day.

"De best times was when de corn shuckin' was at hand. Den you didn't have to bother with no pass to leave de plantation, and de patter rolls didn't bother you. If de patter rolls cotch you without de pass any other time, you better wish you dead, 'cause you would have yourself some trouble. [Pg 261]

"But de corn shuckin', dat was de gran' times. All de marsters and dere black boys from plantations from miles 'round would be dere. Den when we got de corn pile high as dis house, de table was spread out under de shade. All de boys dat 'long to old marster would take him on de packsaddle 'round de house, den dey bring him to de table and sit by he side; den all de boys dat 'long to Marster Bevan from another plantation take him on de packsaddle 'round and 'round de house, allus singin' and dancin', den dey puts him at de other side de table, and dey all do de same till everybody at de table, den dey have de feast.

"To see de runaway slaves in de woods scared me to death. They'd try to snatch you and hold you, so you couldn't go tell. Sometimes dey cotched dem runaway niggers and dey be like wild animals and have to be tamed over 'gain. Dere was a white man call Henderson had 60 bloodhounds and rents 'em out to run slaves. I well rec'lect de hounds run through our place one night, chasin' de slave what kilt his wife by runnin' de harness needle through her heart. Dey cotch him and de patter rolls took him to Henderson and hangs him.

"De patter rolls dey chases me plenty times, but I's lucky, 'cause dey never cotched me. I slips off to see de gal on de nex' plantation and I has no pass and they chases me and was I scairt! You should have seed me run through dat bresh, 'cause I didn't dare go out on de road or de path. It near tore de clothes off me, but I goes on and gits home and slides under de house. But I'd go to see dat gal every time, patter rolls or no patter rolls, and I gits trained so's I could run 'most as fast as a rabbit. [Pg 262]

"De white chillun larned us to read and write at night, but I never paid much 'tention, but I kin read de testament now. Other times at night de slaves gathers round de cabins in little bunches and talks till bedtime. Sometimes we'd dance and someone would knock out time for us by snappin' de fingers and slappin' de knee. We didn't have nothin' to make de music on.

"We mos'ly lived on corn pone and salt bacon de marster give us. We didn't have no gardens ourselves, 'cause we wouldn't have time to work in dem. We worked all day in de fields and den was so tired we couldn't do nothin' more.

"My mammy doctored us when we was feelin' bad and she'd take dog-fenley, a yaller lookin' weed, and brew tea, and it driv de chills and de fever out of us. Sometimes she put horse mint on de pallet with us to make us sweat and driv de fever 'way. For breakfast she'd make us sass' fras tea, to clear our blood.

"My marstar and his two step-sons goes to de war. De marster was a big gen'ral on de southern side. I didn't know what dey fightin' 'bout for a long time, den I heered it 'bout freedom and I felt like it be Heaven here on earth to git freedom, 'spite de fac' I allus had de good marster. He sho' was good to us, but you knows dat ain't de same as bein' free. [Pg 263]