

**HARRIET COLLINS was born in Houston, Texas, in 1870. Her family had been slaves of Richard Coke, and remained with him many years after they were freed. Harriet recalls some incidents of Reconstruction days, and believes in the superstitions handed down to her from slave days.**

"My birthday done come in January, on de tenth. I's birthed in Houston, in 1870, and Gov. Richard Coke allus had owned my daddy and mammy, and dey stayed with him after freedom. Mammy, what was Julia Collins, didn't die till 1910, and she was most a hundred year old.

"She done told me many a time 'bout how folkses git all worked up over Marse Coke's 'lection. Mammy took lunch to de Capitol House to Marse Richard, and dere he am on de top floor with all he congressmen and dat Davis man and he men on de bottom floor, tryin' to say Marse Richard ain't got no right to be governor dis here State. Old Miss and de folkses didn't sleep a wink dat night, 'cause dey thunk it sho' be a fight. Dat in 1873, Mammy allus say.

"De old place at Houston was like most all old places. Dere was little, small dormer windows, dey call 'em, in upstairs, and big porches everywhere. Dere was 'hogany furniture and rosewood bedsteads, and big, black walnut dressers with big mirrors and little ones down de side. Old Miss allus have us keep de drapes white as drifted snow, and polish de furniture till it shine. Dere was sofies with dem claw foots, and lots of purty chiny and silver.

"On de farm out from town dere was de log house, with quarters and[Pg 243] de smokehouse and washhouse and big barns and carriage house. De quarters was little, whitewashed, log houses, one for de family, and a fence of de split palin's round most of dem.

"De white and cullud chillen played together, all over de place. Dey went fishin' and rode de plough hosses and run de calves and colts and sech devilment. De little white gals all had to wear sunbonnets, and Old Miss, she sew dem bonnets on every day, so dey not git sunburnt. Us niggers weared de long, duckin' shirts till us git 'bout growed, and den us weared long, dark blue dresses. Dey had spinnin' and weavin' rooms, where de cullud women makes de clothes.

"Old Miss, she sho' a powerful manager. She knowed jes' how much meal and meat and sorghum it gwine take to run de plantation a year. She know jes' how much thread it take for spinnin', and she bossed de settin' hens and turkeys and fixin' of 'serves and soap. She was sho' good to you iffen you work and do like she tell you. Many a night she go round to see dat all was right. She a powerful good nuss, too, and so was mammy.

"De white folks had good times. Dey'd go hossback ridin' and on picnics, and fishin' and have big dinners and balls. Come Christmas, dey have us slaves cut a big lot of wood and keep fires all night for a week or two. De house be lit with candles from top to toe, and lots of company come. For dinner us have turkey and beef roast and a big 'ginny ham and big bowls of eggnog and a pitcher of apple cider and apple toddy. All us git somethin' on Christmas and plenty eggnog, but no gittin' drunk.

"I can jes' see Marse Dick, tall and kinder stooped like, with de big flop hat and longtail coat and allus carryin' a big, old walkin' stick. He[Pg 244] was sho' a brave man and de big men say dey likes dat flop

hat, 'cause dey done follow it on de battlefield. He had a big voice and dey do tell how, in de war, he'd holler, 'Come on, boys,' and de bullets be like hail and men fallin' all round, but dat don't stop Marse Dick. He'd take off dat flop hat and plunge right on and dey'd foller he bald head where de fight was hottes'. He was sho' a man!

"When I gits married it was eight folkses dere, I jus' walks off and goes to housekeepin'. I had a calico dress and a Baptist preacher marries us.

"Dere been some queer things white folks can't understand. Dere am folkses can see de spirits, but I can't. My mammy larned me a lots of doctorin', what she larnt from old folkses from Africy, and some de Indians larnt her. If you has rheumatism, jes' take white sassafras root and bile it and drink de tea. You makes lin'ment by bilin' mullein flowers and poke roots and alum and salt. Put red pepper in you shoes and keep de chills off, or string briars round de neck. Make red or black snakeroot tea to cure fever and malaria, but git de roots in de spring when de sap am high.

"When chillen teethin' put rattlesnake rattles round de neck, and alligator teeth am good, too. Show de new moon money and you'll have money all month. Throw her five kisses and show her money and make five wishes and you'll git dem. Eat black-eyed peas on New Year and have luck all dat year:

"'Dose black-eyed peas is lucky,  
When et on New Year's Day;  
You'll allus have sweet 'taters  
And possum come you way.'

"When anybody git cut I allus burns woolen rags and smokes de wound or burns a piece fat pine and drops tar from it on scorched wool and bind it on de wound. For headache put a horseradish poultice on de head, or wear a nutmeg on [Pg 245] a string round you neck.

If you kills de first snake you sees in spring, you enemies ain't gwine git de best of you dat year. For a sprain, git a dirt dauber's nest and put de clay with vinegar and bind round de sprain. De dime on de string round my ankle keeps cramps out my leg, and tea from red coon-root good, too. All dese doctorin' things come clear from Africy, and dey allus worked for mammy and for me, too