

MADISON BRUIN, 92, spent his early days as a slave on the Curtis farm in the blue grass region of Kentucky, where he had some experience with some of the fine horses for which the state is famous. Here, too, he had certain contacts with soldiers of John Morgan, of Confederate fame. His eyes are keen and his voice mellow and low. His years have not taken a heavy toll of his vitality.

"I's a old Kentucky man. I's born in Fayette County, 'bout five miles from Lexington, right where dere lots of fine hosses. My old massa was name Jack Curtis and de old missus was Miss Addie. My mother name Mary and she die in 1863 and never did see freedom. I don't 'member my daddy a-tall.

"De place was jis' a farm, 'cause dey didn't know nothin' 'bout plantations up dere in Kentucky. Dey raise corn and wheat and garlic and fast hosses. Dey used to have big hoss races and dey had big tracks and I's stood in de middle of dat big track in Lexington and watch dem ex'cise de hosses. Sometimes I got to help dem groom some dem grand hosses and dat was de big day for me. I don't 'member dem hosses names, no, suh, but I knowed one big bay hoss what won de race nearly every time.

"I had two sisters name Jeanette and Fanny and a brother, Henry, and after my daddy die, my mother marries a man name Paris and I had one half-brother call Alfred Paris.

"Old massa was good to us and give us plenty food. He never beat us hard. He had a son what jis' one month older'n me and we run 'round and play lots. Old massa, he whip me and he own son jis' de same when we[Pg 170] bad. He didn't whip us no more'n he ought to, though. Dey was good massas and some mean ones, and some worthless cullud folks, too.

"Durin' de war de cholera broke out 'mongst de people and everybody scairt dey gwine cotch it. Dey say it start with de hurtin' in de stomach and every time us hurt in de stomach, missus make us come quick to de big house. Dat suit us jis' right and when dey sends Willie and me to hoe or do somethin' us didn't want to do, pretty soon I say, 'Willie, I think my stomach 'ginnin to hurt. I think dis mis'ry a sign I gittin' de cholera.' Den him say, 'Us better go to de big house like ma say,' and with dat, us quit workin'. Us git out lots of work dat way, but us ain't ever took de cholera yit.

"Durin' de war John Morgan's men come and took all de hosses. Dey left two and Willie and me took dem to hide in de plum thicket, but us jis' git out de gate when de sojers come 'gain and dey head us off and take de last two hosses.

"My mother she wore de Yankee flag under her dress like a petticoat when de 'federates come raidin'. Other times she wore it top de dress. When dey hears de 'federates comin' de white folks makes us bury all de gold and de silver spoons out in de garden. Old massa, he in de Yankee army, 'cause dey 'script him, but he sons, John and Joe, dey volunteers.

"Old massa he never sold none of he slaves. I used to hear him and missus fussin' 'bout de niggers, 'cause some 'long to her and some to him and dey have de time keepin' dem straighten' out.

Us boys have good time playin'. Us draw de line and some git on one side and some de other. Den one sing out[Pg 171]

"Chickama, Chickama, craney crow,
Went to de well to wash my toe;
When I git back my chicken was gone,
What time, old witch?"

"Den somebody holler out, 'One o'clock' or 'Two o'clock' or any time, and dem on one side try to cotch dem on de other side.

"When I's young I didn't mind plowin', but I didn't like to ride at fust, but dey make me larn anyhow. Course, dat white boy and me, us like most anything what not too much work. Us go down to de watermelon patch and plug dem melons, den us run hide in de woods and eat watermelon. Course, dey lots of time dey 'low us to play jis' by ourselves. Us play one game where us choose sides and den sing:

"Can, can, candio,
Old man Dandio,
How many men you got?
More'n you're able to cotch."

"Endurin' de war us git whip many a time for playin' with shells what us find in de woods. Us heered de cannons shootin' in Lexington and lots of dem shells drap in de woods.

"What did I think when I seed all dem sojers? I wants to be one, too. I didn't care what side, I jis' wants a gun and a hoss and be a sojer. John Morgan, he used to own de hemp factory in Lexington. When young massa jine Woolford's 11th Kentucky Cavalry, dey come to de place and halt befo' de big house in de turnpike. Dey have shotguns and blind bridles on dere hosses, not open bridle like on de race hosses. Dey jis' in reg'lar clothes but next time dey come through dey in blue uniforms. All my white folks come back from de war and didn't git kilt. Nobody ever telt me I's free. I's happy dere and never left dem till 1872. All de others gone befo' dat, but I [Pg 172] gits all I wants and I didn't need no money. I didn't know what paper money was and one time massa's son give me a paper dime to git some squab and I didn't know what money was and I burned it up.

"Dey's jis' one thing I like to do most and dat's eat. Dey allus had plenty of everything and dey had a big, wooden tray, or trough and dey put potlicker and cornbread in dat trough and set it under de big locust tree and all us li' niggers jis' set 'round and eat and eat. Jis' eat all us wants. Den when us git full us fall over and go to sleep. Us jis' git fat and lazy. When us see dat bowl comin', dat bowl call us jis' like hawgs runnin' to de trough.

"Dey was great on gingerbread and us go for dat. Dey couldn't leave it in de kitchen or de pantry so old missus git a big tin box and hide de gingerbread under her bed and kept de switch on us to keep us 'way from it. But sometime us sneak up in de bedroom and git some, even den.

"When I 'bout 17 I left Kentucky and goes to Indiana and white folks sends me to school to larn readin' and writin', but I got tired of dat and run off and jine de army. Dat in 1876 and dey sends me to Arizona. After dat I's at Fort Sill in what used to be Indian Territory and den at Fort Clark and Fort Davis, dat in Garfield's 'ministration, den in Fort Quitman on de Rio Grande. I's in skirmishes with de Indians on Devil's River and in de Brazos Canyon, and in de Rattlesnake Range and in de Guadalupe Mountains. De troops was de Eighth Cavalry and de Tenth Infantry. De white and de cullud folks was altogether and I

have three hosses in de cavalry. De fust one plays out, de next one shot down on campaign and one was condemn. On dat campaign us have de White Mountain 'paches with us for scouts. [Pg 173]

"When I git discharge' from de Army I come to Texas and work on de S.P. Railroad and I been in Texas ever since, and when I's in Dallas I got 'flicted and got de pension 'cause I been in de army. I ain't done much work in ten year.

"I gits married in San Antonio on December 14, 1882 and I marries Dolly Gross and dat her right dere. Us have de nice weddin', plenty to eat and drink. Us have only one chile, a gal, and she dead, but us 'dopt sev'ral chillen.

"Us come to Beaumont in 1903 and I works 'round Spindletop and I works for de gas people and de waterworks people. I's been a carpenter and done lots of common work wherever I could find it.

"It's been long time since slavery and I's old, but me and my old lady's in good health and us manage to git 'long fairly well. Dat's 'bout all I can 'member 'bout de old times. [Pg 174]