

OLIVIER BLANCHARD, 95 years old, was a slave of Clairville La San, who owned a large plantation in Martinville Parish, Louisiana. His father was a Frenchman and Olivier speaks rather haltingly, as though it is difficult for him to express his thoughts in English, for he has talked a species of French all his life. He lives in Beaumont, Texas.

"I was plowing and hoeing before the freedom and I talk more of the French 'cause I comes from St. Martinville Parish. I was born there in Louisiana and my mama was Angeline Jean Pierre and she was slave born. My papa was Olivier Blanchard and he white man carpenter on old plantation. We belong to Clairville La San and all live on that place. My papa just plain carpenter but could draw patterns for houses. I don't know where he larn that work.

"I was count freeborn and still have one white half sister alive. When freedom come my mama and papa split up and mama get marry.

"I pick cotton and mama cook. She make koosh-koosh and cyayah—that last plain clabber. Mama cook lots of gaspergou and carp and the poisson ami fish, with the long snout—what they call gar now. I think it eel fish they strip the skin off and wrapround the hair and make it curly.

"The Bayou Teche, it run close by and the women do all the clothes with a big paddle with holes in it to clean them in the bayou. They paddle them clean on the rocks and then wash them in the water. [Pg 91]

"One time one big bayou 'gator come up and bite a woman's arm off. She my sister in law. But they keep on washing the clothes in the bayou just the same.

"We have plenty to eat and peaches and muscadines and pecans, 'cause there right smart woods and swamp there. We play in the woods and most time in the bayou on boats with planks what would float. We had the good time and had a little pet coon. You know, the coon like sweet things and he steal our syrup and when we chase him with the switch he hide under the bed.

"My old missus was good Catholic and she have us christened and make the first communion. That not registered, 'cause it before the freedom, but it were in old St. Martin's church, same old church what stand now. There was a statue of Pere Jean, the old priest, in front the church and one of St. Martin, too.

"Plenty men from St. Martinville go to the war and Archie DeBlieu, he go to Virginia and fight. The first one to pass our place was John Well Banks and he was a Yankee going up the Red River.

"The yellow fever came durin' that war and kill lots. All the big plantation have the graveyard for the cullud people. That fever so bad they get the coffin ready before they dead and they so scared that some weren't dead but they think they are and bury them. There was a white girl call Colene Sonnier what was to marry Sunday and she take sick Friday before. She say not to bury her in the ground but they put her there while they got the tomb ready. When they open the ground grave to put her in the tomb they find she buried alive and she eat all her own shoulder and hand away. Her sweetheart, Gart Berrild, he see that corpse, [Pg 92] and he go home and get took with yellow fever and die.

"They was the old lady what die. She was a terrible soul. One time after she die I go to get water out of her rain barrel and I had a lamp in one hand. That old lady's ghost blowed out the lamp and slapped the pitcher out my hand. After she first die her husband put black dress on her and tie up the jaw with a rag and my girl look in the room and there that old lady, Liza Lee, sittin' by the fire. My girl tell her mama and after three day she go back, and Liza Lee buried but my wife see her sittin' by the fire. Then she sorry she whip the chile for sayin' she saw Liza Lee. That old lady, Liza Lee, was a tart and she stay a tart for a long time.

"I marry 72 year ago in the Catholic Church in St. Martinville. My wife call Adeline Chretien and she dead 37 year. We have seven children but four live now. Frank my only boy live now, in Iowa, in Louisiana, and my two girls live, Enziede De Querive and Rose Baptiste. [Pg 93]