



Preely Coleman

PREELY COLEMAN was born in 1852 on the Souba farm, near New Berry, South Carolina, but he and his mother were sold and brought to Texas when Preely was a month old. They settled near Alto, Texas. Preely now lives in Tyler.

"I'm Preely Coleman and I never gits tired of talking. Yes, ma'am, it am Juneteenth, but I'm home, 'cause I'm too old now to go on them celerabrations. Where was I born? I knows that 'zactly, 'cause my mammy tells me that a thousand times. I was born down on the old Souba place, in South Carolina, 'bout ten mile from New Berry. My mammy belonged to the Souba family, but its a fact one of the Souba boys was my pappy and so the Soubas sells my mammy to Bob and Dan Lewis and they brung us to Texas 'long with a big bunch of other slaves. Mammy tells me it was a full month 'fore they gits to Alto, their new home.

"When I was a chile I has a purty good time, 'cause there was plenty chillen on the plantation. We had the big races. Durin' the war the sojers stops by on the way to Mansfield, in Louisiana, to git somethin' to eat and stay all night, and then's when we had the races. There was a mulberry tree we'd run to and we'd line up and the sojers would say, 'Now the first one to slap that tree gits a quarter,' and I nearly allus gits there first. I made plenty quarters slappin' that old mulberry tree!

"So the chillen gits into their heads to fix me, 'cause I wins all the quarters. They throws a rope over my head and started draggin down the road, and down the hill, and I was nigh 'bout choked to [Pg 241] death. My only friend was Billy and he was a-fightin', tryin' to git me loose. They was goin' to throw me in the big spring at the foot of that hill, but we meets Capt. Berryman, a white man, and he took his knife and cut the rope from my neck and took me by the heels and soused me up and down in the spring till I come to. They never tries to kill me any more.

"My mammy done married John Selman on the way to Texas, no cere'mony, you knows, but with her massa's consent. Now our masters, the Lewises, they loses their place and then the Selman's buy me and mammy. They pays \$1,500 for my mammy and I was throwed in.

"Massa Selman has five cabins in he backyard and they's built like half circle. I grows big 'nough to hoe and den to plow. We has to be ready for the field by daylight and the conk was blowed, and massa call out, 'All hands ready for the field.' At 11:30 he blows the conk, what am the mussel shell, you knows, 'gain and we eats dinner, and at 12:30 we has to be back at work. But massa wouldn't 'low no kind of work on Sunday.

"Massa Tom made us wear the shoes, 'cause they's so many snags and stumps our feets gits sore, and they was red russet shoes. I'll never forgit 'em, they was so stiff at first we could hardly stand 'em. But Massa Tom was a good man, though he did love he dram. He kep' the bottle in the center of the dining table all the time and every meal he'd have the toddy. Us slaves et out under the trees in summer and in the kitchen in winter and most gen'rally we has bread in pot liquor or milk, but sometimes honey.

"I well 'members when freedom come. We was in the field and massa comes up and say, 'You all is free as I is.' There was shoutin' and singin' and 'fore night us was all 'way to freedom.