



**Sylvester Brooks**

**SYLVESTER BROOKS, 87, was born in Green County, Alabama, a slave of Josiah Collier. The old Negro's memory is poor, but he managed to recall a few incidents of slave days. He lives in Mart, Texas.**

"I's born 'bout de year 1850, near de Tom Bigbee river in Alabama, on a plantation own by Marse Josiah Collier. My folks was Henderson and Martha Brooks and I's de only child den.

"Marse Collier owned seventy fam'lies of slaves and dey all lived in dey quarters 'bout a mile from de big house. When freedom come Marse Collier sent for all de slaves and lines us up in a row, two deep, and helt up he hands and say, 'Boys, you is free as I is. All of you what wants to can go, and all of you what wants to can work for me on wages dis year. Next year I'll give you a crop or work for wages.' Dey all stays but two, and one of dem two my daddy, and he lef' mammy and six chillen and never come back.

"Us stays on till Marse Collier and Missus both dies, and den stays with he oldes' gal, and didn't go 'way till we's growed and has fam'lies of our own.

"I 'members best de Fourth of July. De white folks have lots to eat for dem and us and we plays games and goes swimmin'.

"Next thing I 'members is de patterrollers, 'cause dey whip me every time dey cotches me without my pass. Dat de way dey make us stay home at night, and it made good niggers out of us, 'cause we couldn't chase round and git in no meanness.

"Old Marse often told me 'bout de stars fallin'. It was 'long 'bout sundown and growed dark all a sudden and de chickens goes to roost. Den some stars with [Pg 150] long tails 'gins to shoot, den it look like all de stars had come out of Heaven, and did dey fall! De stars not all what fell. De white folks and de niggers fell on dere knees, prayin' to Gawd to save dem iffen de world comin' to a end, and de women folks all

run down in de cellar and stayed till mornin'. Old Marse say it was in 1833, and he say dem stars fall awhile and quit awhile, like de showers when it rains.

"'Bout a year after freedom Old Marse give us a piece of land for a church and dis was de school, too. De preacher's name was Christmas Crawford, and dat de reason I 'members it, it so funny to us. De nigger teacher named Nimron. De niggers has de blueback spellers and larns 'rithmetic, too.

"On Thanksgivin' Day de niggers goes round to de white folks houses and gives a ser'nade, like dis:

"'De old bee make de honeycomb,  
De young bee make de honey—  
De nigger make de cotton and corn,  
And de white folks git de money.

"'De raccoon he a curious man,  
He never works till dark;  
Nothin' ever 'sturbs he mind,  
Till he hear old Towser bark.'

"Den de white folks asks us in and help ourselves to de cake or wine or whatever dey has, and we does dis on Christmas, too.

"We had a song we'd sing when we's thinkin' of comin' to Texas:

"'We'll put for de South, for seven-up and loo,  
Chime in, niggers, won't you come 'long, too?  
No use talkin' when de nigger wants to go,  
Where de corn top blossoms and canebrakes grow.  
Come 'long, Cuba, and dance de polka juba,  
Way down South, where de corn tops grow.'

"I'd like to be in old Alabama to die, but Old Marse and Missus gone, and it ain't no use goin' dere no more. [Pg 151]