



**Tempie Cummins**

**TEMPIE CUMMINS was born at Brookeland, Texas, sometime before the Civil War, but does not know her exact age. William Neyland owned Tempie and her parents. She now lives alone in a small, weather-beaten shack in the South Quarters, a section of Jasper, Tex.**

"They call me Tempie Cummins and I was born at Brookeland but I don' know jus' the 'xact date. My father's name was Jim Starkins and my mother's name was Charlotte Brooks and both of 'em come from Alabama. I had jus' one brudder, Bill, and four sisters named Margaret and Hannah and Mary and 'Liza. Life was good when I was with them and us play round. Miss Fannie Neyland, she Mis' Phil Scarborough now, she raise me, 'cause I was give to them when I was eight year old.

"I slep' on a pallet on the floor. They give me a homespun dress onct a year at Christmas time. When company come I had to run and slip on that dress. At other time I wore white chillens' cast-off clothes so wore they was ready to throw away. I had to pin them up with red horse thorns to hide my nakedness. My dress was usually split from hem to neck and I had to wear them till they was strings. Went barefoot summer and winter till the feets crack open.

"I never seed my grandparents 'cause my mother she sold in Alabama when she's 17 and they brung her to Texas and treat her rough. At mealtime they hand me a piece of cornbread and tell me [Pg 264] 'Run 'long.' Sometime I git little piece of meat and biscuit, 'bout onct a month. I gathered up scraps the white chillens lef'.

"Marster was rough. He take two beech switches and twist them together and whip 'em to a stub. Many's the time I's bled from them whippin's. Our old mistus, she try to be good to us, I reckon, but she was turrible lazy. She had two of us to wait on her and then she didn' treat us good.

"Marster had 30 or 40 acres and he raise cotton, and corn and 'tatoes. He used to raise 12 bales cotton a year and then drink it all up. We work from daylight till dark, and after. Marster punish them what didn' work hard enough.

"The white chillen tries teach me to read and write but I didn' larn much, 'cause I allus workin'. Mother was workin' in the house, and she cooked too. She say she used to hide in the chimney corner and listen to what the white folks say. When freedom was 'clared, marster wouldn' tell 'em, but mother she hear him tellin' mistus that the slaves was free but they didn' know it and he's not gwineter tell 'em till he makes another crop or two. When mother hear that she say she slip out the chimney corner and crack her heels together four times and shouts, 'I's free, I's free.' Then she runs to the field, 'gainst marster's will and tol' all the other slaves and they quit work. Then she run away and in the night she slip into a big ravine near the house and have them bring me to her. Marster, he come out with his gun and shot at mother but she run down the ravine and gits away with me. [Pg 265]

"I seed lots of ghosties when I's young. I couldn' sleep for them. I's kind of outgrewed them now. But one time me and my younges' chile was comin' over to church and right near the dippin' vat is two big gates and when we git to them, out come a big old white ox, with long legs and horns and when he git 'bout halfway, he turns into a man with a Panama hat on. He follers us to Sandy Creek bridge. Sometimes at night I sees that same spirit sittin' on that bridge now.

"My old man say, in slavery time, when he's 21, he had to pass a place where patterroles whipped slaves and had kilt some. He was sittin' on a load of fodder and there come a big light wavin' down the road and scarin' the team and the hosses drag him and near kilt him. [Pg 266]