

Cureton Milling

Interview with Cureton Milling, 80 years old

Winnsboro, S.C.

—*W.W. Dixon, Winnsboro, S.C.*

"I live about ten miles from dis town on de Jim Turner place; though he dead they still calls it de Jim Turner place. My pappy name Jeff, mammy name Dolly. Dat a lovely name in dis old mind yit, please God. Gran'mammy Peggy another good name I's got to recommen' to you, boss.

"Yes, us all b'longs to de same marster, Levi Bolicks. Guess you'd heard tell of dat man. Mistress named Martha, angel of light tied up to de prince of darkness, so it was. They had one child, Little Miss, who growed up and married a Stevenson.

"I was just a little shrimp durin' slavery time; tote water and ride behin' in de buggy to hold marster's hoss when he gits out. My mammy live in a one-room house; it had no flo' but de one de Lord create in de beginnin', de natural born earth, it was.

"What they give us to eat? Us got plenty, sich as it was. Marster Levi kept his niggers fat, just like he keep his hogs and hosses fat, he did. He had a passel of slaves and as his plantation was small he just run four plows, kept a ridin' hoss and a single buggy, and raise slaves to sell.

"He was sellin' de oldest ones away from de younger ones, all time goin' along, 'pears to me. Sometime I think he was de very old Nick turned loose in de earth for a season.

"How I explainin' dat? It's dis way: He take 'vantage of de young gal slaves. 'You go yonder and shell corn in de crib,' he say to one of them. He's de marster so she have to go. Then he send de others to work some other place, then he go to de crib. He did dis to my very aunt and she had a mulatto boy dat took his name and live right in dis town after freedom. Marster was doin' dis devilment all de time and gwine to Presbyterian Church at Salem every Sunday; dat make it look worse to me.

"Outside dis, and sellin' and partin' mothers and chillun, him was a pretty good slave marster. He marry Miss Martha Clark and had nice pretty home. He give us good clothes. Shoes? De shoes was made on de place; they had wooden bottoms, no spring to them. He gave us one day durin' Christmas, for a dance. Us had Doctor Martin to 'tend us. He was son-in-law to old Captain Stitt, another bad man that give trouble just like my marster.

"What about de Yankees? Two come first, and rode up to de kitchen, rode right up to de steps and say: 'Where de silver? Where de gold rings and jewelry you got hid for de white folks? Tell us or us'll beat you worse than you ever get beat from de lash of de patrollers.' They was as good as they words; they gets down and grab us and make us tell all us know.

"Where old marster? He done burnt de wind in his buggy wid de very things de Yankees asked for and refugeed somewhere away, sah. Did he go to war, my old marster? No sirree! He wasn't dat kind; him hire a substitute.

"After de war was over, freedom come, and with it de excitement of white folks comin' down here and havin' us believe us just as good as white folks. I have lived to see it was all a mistake. Then come de Ku Klux and scared some sense into my color. Then come Hampton and de Red Shirts. Had they a black shirt I don't believe niggers would ever have took to it. 'Dog for bread, nigger for red', they likes dat color.

"In them days of parades by day and torch light processions by night, when de niggers was asked to jine, offered a hoss to ride, knowed dere would be a drink of red-eye on de way, and then was handed one of them red shirts. What you 'spect dat nigger to do? I knowed. He's gwine to put on dat red shirt, dat red-eye gwine give him over to de democrats, and dis was de way dat Hampton was 'lected. But it never would have done to have a black shirt, no sir; I's sure of dat. Dat would have had no 'peal to our color. They is too black already to suit de most of them.

"When Hampton was 'lected I git an idea of settlin' down. I picks de plumpest woman I could find and her had a name dat seem music then to me. It was Roxanna. She allow I was a handsome man, and I was fool enough then to believe her. But one day she brung home a ten-cent lookin' glass from Winnsboro. I say to her when I takes a look in it, 'Who dis I see in here?' She says 'Dat's you, honey.' I say: 'No, Roxie, it can't be me. Looks like one of them apes or monkeys I see in John Robinson's circus parade last November.' Dere's been a disapp'intment 'bout my looks ever since, and when my wife die I never marry again.

"All our boys are dead 'cept Laurens. He live in Charlotte, and I got a sister dat marry Ike Austin and live on de Aiken place. I piddles along wid de white folks and live in a little house by myself, waitin' for God to call me home."