

Maria Jenkins

Interview with Maria Jenkins, about 90 years old

64 Montague Street, Charleston, S.C.

—Martha S. Pinckney, Charleston, S.C.

Maria Jenkins, who is about ninety, is very nearly blind, and only by quiet persistence can she be made to hear; once started, her mind is clear. She shows no bitterness. Occasionally there are flashes of humor. Her body is brawny, sturdy and well carried, considering her age.

Maria Jenkins was a daughter of Aaron Grant; her mother's name is Ellen Grant, all of whom were owned by Mr. Hugh Wilson of Wadmalaw Island.

"I b'long Wadmalaw. When de Yankee come I ole 'nuf for mind chillun, and take um to de field. I go up to Maussa' house ebery day for de milk for we; and dey give we clabba (clabber) and cow peas and ting out de garden. We git ebery evening a bushel ob corn grind and hand ober to de nurse, and him sift out de flour. Yes Mam. He done grind in de hand mill in de barn yard—de stone mill. Dat been uh big mill too. And dey gib we uh big piece ob meat—so—(measuring with hands) and sometime chicken. Rachel cook in de big pot for we chillun, and he dip um out. (She here explained the big ladle or dipper.) You know dem big ladle. We put um in we pan. Yes, Ma'am, he name Rachel, and he lick we. We haffa love um or she lick we." Her huge mouth was illumined by a humorous smile.

"He teach me to wash de baby clean and put on he dipa (diaper), and if I ain't do um good he konk my head. When de wah come, my pa put heself free off to New Orleans; I dunno how he look. I dunno if he libbin or dead now. My ma dead fust year ob de wah, I hab twelve chillun, and all dead; I got two grand chillun left—de one in New York—I raise him from baby atter he ma and pa dead."

"Your grand son helps you?"

"Wat dat?", leaning forward with her hand back of her ear. The question was repeated.

"Him ain't no man, him my grand daughter, Ellen Jenkins. I raise him from baby yes, she name Ellen. Him good to me; him help me ebery minute."

"Are all your people dead?"

"De whole nation dead," reflectively, "De whole nation dead—Peggy dead—Toby dead—all leaning on de Lord."

"When dem boat come up de ribber, and he shoot, and shoot, de big gun, dat been de awful time. My ma dead de fust year ob de wah—I dunno if dem big gun kill um. He kill 'nuf people."

"Maussa come and he say: 'Who-na (all of you) nigger take care ob yourself, I must leab to take my fambly away. Will is here; and de cow, and de pig in de pen, and de chicken all ober de place—I gib you your freedom for take care ob yourself.' W'en he gone, dem nigger break for the thick woods. Some dead and some ain't dead."

Later a camp was established for this plantation of Negroes, back in the pine woods. When asked what they did after the war, Maria raised her hands and said:

"After de wah we all come home, tank de Lord! tank de Lord!"

"But your master didn't have any money to care for you."

"Haffa scrabble for yo'self." Said she