

Amy Chapman

Interview with Amy Chapman

—*Ruby F. Tartt, Livingston, Alabama*

DE MASTERS GOOD, BUT OVERSEERS MEAN

Aunt Amy paused as she worked among the small plants in her garden, removing a weed here and there. She pushed back the sunbonnet that shaded her eyes and began:

"I was bawn on Governor Reuben Chapman's place five miles north of Livingston on May 14, 1843. My name is Amy Chapman. My mother was Clary Chapman an' my pappy was Bob Chapman. Dey both come from Virginny; my mammy from Petersburg an' my pappy f'um Richmond. Dey was driv' down to Alabamy lak cattle an' Marse Reuben bought 'em. He had a lot of slaves caze he had a heap of plantations, but him an' his wife stay most of de time in Huntsville an' dey had a heap of white overseers. I had a plenty of chilluns but not as many as my mammy.

"Who was my husban'? Law chile, I ain't never had no special husban'. I even forgits who was de pappy of some of dese chilluns of mine.

"Us had a mean oberseer, an' since Marse Reuben warn't never at home, dem oberseers useter treat us somp'n awful. One day Marse Reuben come home an' when he foun' out dat de oberseer was mean to de slaves he commence to give him a lecture, but when Miss Ferlicia tuk a han' in de business, she didn't stop at no lecture, she tol' dat oberseer dis: 'I hear you take my women an' turn dere clothes ober dere haids an' whup 'em. Any man dat's got a family an' would do sich a thing oughter be sham' of hisself, an' iffen Gov. Chapman can't make you leave, I kin, so you see dat road dere? Well, make tracks den.' An' Mistis, he lef' raght den. He didn't wait for no coaxin'. He was de meanes' oberseer us ever had. He tuk my ol'est brother an' had him stretched out jus' lak you see Christ on de cross; had him chained, an' I sot down on de groun' by him an' cried all night lack Mary an' dem done. Dat oberseer was de fus' one dat ever putt me in de fiel', an' he whupped me wid de cat er nine tails when I was starknaked.

"Den dere was anudder mean man named [...] who was always a-beatin' nigger women caze dey wouldn't mind him.

"Us warn't learned to read an' write, but Mr. Jerry Brown's slaves were. He owned a big plantation. Us didn't go to no nigger church, caze dere warn't none. I was babtized in Jones Creek, an' Dr. Edmon's a white preacher, j'ined me to de Jones Creek Babtist Church long fo' de war, an' de song I lacked bes' was a white folks song. Twarn't no nigger song. It was lack dey sing it now, 'cep' mo' lovely, Miss, mo' lovely.

Dark was de night

Col' was de groun'

On which my Savior lay

Blood in draps of sweat run down
In agony he pray.

Lawd, move did bitter cup
If sich dy sacred will
If not content I'll drink it up
Whose pleasure I'll fullfil.

"An' anudder one us niggers useter sing was might pretty:
In evil long I tuk de light
An' led by shame an' fear
When a new object stopped my flight
An' stopped my wild career.

I saw him hangin' on a tree
In agony an' blood
He fixed his languid eyes on me
As near his cross I stood.

Sho' never till my latter breath
Kin I forgit dat look
He seemed to change me wid his death
Yit not a word he spoke.

My conscience felt an' owned de quilt
An' plunged me in despair
I saw my sins his blood had spilt
An' helped to nail him dere.

"Yassum, I kin tell you things about slavery times dat would make yo' blood bile, but dey's too turrible. I jus' tries to forgit.



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"I could tell you 'bout bein' run myself wid dem nigger dogs, but I ain't gwinter do it. I will tell you dough 'bout a mean man who whupped a cullid woman near 'bout to death. She got so mad at him dat she tuk his baby chile what was playin' roun' de yard and grab him up an' th'owed it in a pot of lye dat she was usin' to wash wid. His wife come a-hollin' an' run her arms down in de boilin' lye to git de chile out, an' she near 'bout burnt her arms off, but it didn't do no good 'caze when she jerked de chile out he was daid.

"One day I seed ole Unker Tip Toe all bent over a-comin' down de road an' I ax him whut ail him an' he say: 'I's been in de stocks an' been beat till de blood come. Den ole Massa 'ninted my flesh wid red papper an' turpentine an' I's been most dead but I is somewhat better now.' Unker Tiptoe belonged to de meanes' ol' marster around here.

"But, honey, I ain't never tol' nobody all dis an' ain't gwine tell you no mo'. Ride me home now, caze I's cripple; a cow was de cause of it. She drug me roun' dat new orchard whut I planted las' fall. She done run away wid me. Mistis I wished you would do me a favor an' write my son in Texas an' tell him dat I say, iffen he 'specks me to make him anymo' of dem star quilts, he better come on here an' kiver my house. De roof sho' does leak bad.