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Annie Stanton

Personal interview with "Aunt Annie" Stanton

Rylands Lane, Mobile, Alabama

—*Ila B. Prine, Mobile, Alabama*

Out on Ryland's Lane is an old negro woman 84 years of age who is totally blind, but whose mind is clear in regards to things pertaining to the long ago.

"Aunt Annie" says that things that happened when she was a child are much more vivid in her mind than are things of today. She said "Sumtimes I now starts tuh do dumpin' an' fogits what I wants tuh do, den I ahs tuh go bac' tuh de place whar I started from so I kin 'member whats I started tuh do".

"Aunt Annie" was born on Knight's Place on the Alabama River, June 2nd., 1853. This place is now known as Finchburg, in Monroe County, Alabama. Her mother's name was Mary Knight and her father's name was Atlas Williams, who had the same name as his owner, Mr. Offord Williams. "Aunt Annie's" mother's people were owned first by Mr. Cullen Knight and after his death, were owned by Mr. John Marshall.

"Aunt Annie" was seven years old then the Civil War started, and that she had "nursed two cullered chillun afore de war."

When asked by the writer about nursing these children, so as to be sure she said colored children, she replied, "dat de slaves lived on de plantation, and dey had an overseer who libed on dis place, an' she neber seed de Marshall's place 'til after dey was freed. As I growed bigger into a big yearlin' gal I was tuk intuh de oversee'rs home to 'tend tuh de dinin' room table sich as settin' hit an' washin' de dishes an' cleanin' up, an' later on I was showed how to iron, spin thread, weave cloth, and make candles. Honey, folks talkin' 'bout depression now don't kno' nothin' 'bout hard times. In dem days folks didn't hab nothin' 'ceptin' what dey made. Eben if yo' had a mint ob money, dere was nothin' to buy. We made de candles to burn by tying strings on the stick and puttin' dem down in melted tallow in moulds. In dem times we had no matches, folks made fire by strikin' flint rocks together an' de fire droppin' on cotton. I don't know whether dese rocks were ones dat de Indians lef' or no, but day was dif'rent from other rocks. People usta carry dem an' de cotton roun' in boxes sumtin lak snuff boxes tuh keep de cotton dry. Sumtimes when dey could'nt get de fire no odder way, dey would put de cotton in de fireplace and shoot up in dere an' set hit on fire."

"Aunt Annie" said she never could start a fire with the flint rock and cotton, and she said, "de fust matches and lantern I'se eber seed was when de Yankees cum tuh dere place, I th'ot dey was two

officers, 'couse dey had de matches and lantern. Two years a'ter I was freed, an' twar den I seed mah first lamp.

"De men did mos' ob de farm wurk, dey planted cotton, corn, potatoes, cane, peas and pumpkins, an' dey ginned de cotton by hitching four horses tuh de gin, and dey run hit dat way."

When asked if they had plenty to eat when they were slaves, "Aunt Annie" said:

"Lor', yes I guess we had 'nough, but, 'tearn't much, c'ase I 'members when we was li'l chillun we had a big wooden tray dat dey put de food in and we all set 'round dat an' et like li'l pigs. De rations for a week was 3 lbs of meat a week, 1 peck ob meal, potatoes an' syrup. At Christmas times de overseer called all de men an' women in an' gib each woman a dress, a head handkerchief, an' tuh de men he gave a hat, knife, an' a bottle of whiskey. De overseer also gib tuh us flour and sugar fo' Christmas, an' I 'members one Christmas when I was a li'l gal, a'ter de overseer gib all de women a dress dere was a short piece ob cloth lef' an' he gib dat tuh me." "Aunt Annie" said "dat de slaves went tuh de white folks church, an' sot on de seats on de outside ob de church, an' dat church was a hewed log building. Atter de white folks got thro' preachin', den de culled preacher would preach. Sumtimes de culled folks would hab church when de white folks didn't an' den de slaves would hab tuh get a pass from his owner, 'ca'se dere would be some mean folks what would beat de niggers ef dey didn't hab a pass from dere owners or bosses."

"Aunt Annie" also said, "I'se neber hyeard of no hoodoo stuff 'til in late years, dey's mo' ob dat foolishness now dan I'se ebber hyeard of in mah life. Nowadays de hoodoos doctors, what is allus agoin' 'round foolin' folks out ob dey money, looks lack de dogs might ob and' dem, dey is so turrible lookin'. I don't believes in dem. Us folks a long time ago neber hab no money fo' dem to git. Us had tuh make own medicine. When de babies had de colic us wud tie soot up in a rag an' boil it, and den gib dem de water, an' tuh ease de prickly heat us used cotton wood powdered up fine, and fo' de yellow thrash us would boil de sheep thrash an' gib em de tea."

"Aunt Annie" has been married twice, her first husband left her years ago, when she married Louis Stanton and had five children by him. Louis was killed in a hailstorm, April 13, 1903, and all of her children are dead. She is now being cared for by friends, and she said, "that ef I's didn't git a li'l he'p from de Government tuh gib dis frien'" she didn't know what she would do as she has been totally blind for two years.