

feeble for work or flight—on these plantations, and the wails we stumbled upon, all belonged to this class. They could not run north for freedom, neither could they fight under the Stars and Stripes, so they clung to the only home they had known for many years, wondering what would be the next change for them.

A motley sight they presented as they came out to look at our men. Most of them were old, bent and toothless, while clinging to the older ones skirts, were a few little children, who were doubtless orphans. They were living on the produce of the fields and gardens, when that was done, they would probably starve, unless the officials attached to the Freedman's Bureau looked after them. There were thousands of slaves in a similar condition after the war; and nothing but the charity and pity of the North saved them "alive in famine."

I had some army biscuits with me. We knew how necessary it was to take rations with us into these now starving solitudes. In many places the estates grew little but cotton or coffee or tobacco, and what cattle or vegetables might have been there had been requisitioned by the soldiery of one side or the other. We generally took some food and restoratives with us whenever we occupied these deserted plantations, for it addition to supporting ourselves, we often had to revive and tend negroes fainting from want or wounds.

I strayed into one hut, while my men were feeding the motley group we first met, and there I saw a sight which made me curse slavery. An old negroess seemed to be in the last agonies of death, and a young negro woman, apparently about eighteen or twenty, knelt over her, weeping.

"What is the matter?" was my first hasty question. "Is the poor old woman dying?"

"Yes, sar," replied the girl; "dis nigger my mother. She hab been ill berry long time, an' ole massa said she only fit for dogs. But he gib me liberty to nurse her, and soon after dat he went of."

"And how do you live now?" I queried.

"We git hardly anything to eat, massa, now, because soldiers hab all de porkers and corn. Just a few sweet potatoes, an' de like o' dat."

"But how do you manage for your mother?"

"She not need much, massa, now. A little coffee or sich-like, is all she can take now."

A look at the invalid confirmed my first idea that the poor old woman would not last much longer.

I put a little brandy and water to her lips, but life had ebbed too far, almost, to be responsive to any stimulant. Just then, however, Nigger Jack, who followed me like a faithful spaniel, came in quietly, unobserved by either of us, and the first intimation I had of his presence, was a wild howl, in which sorrow, surprise, and joy were all strangely mingled. I turned in astonishment, thinking that nigger Jack had gone out of his senses.

The next thing I knew was that Jack was bending over the pile of cotton-waste on which lay the dying negroess, and calling her by every endearing name. "His Polly!" Why, the man must have recognized her!

So he had; for she was his long-lost wife, and the younger woman was his youngest daughter, who had become united to her mother again by a strange jumble of circumstances, such as frequently happened among the ups and downs of plantation life. Death, debt, bankruptcy and gambling, often resulted in either separating slave families, or in unexpectedly bringing scattered members together.

I shall never forget that scene. Jack and Polly recognized each other, and the dying woman opened her eyes, and responded with them to the endearing words and entreaties of her long-lost husband. Bit by bit the whole history, of which I have given a bare outline, came out, and poor old Polly, with the death damp on her brow, listened as in a dream to his protestations and thanksgivings. Each had believed the other to be dead, and had grown resigned to the thought, looking forward with confident faith to the time when they should be reunited in that bright world above, which was the real "Promised Land" of slaves who were condemned on earth to hopeless thralldom. Jack and Polly had always been of that number.

But the strength of their love was manifest at this last extremity. Poor old Jack knelt beside his dying wife, keeping fast hold of her dark, limp hand until she passed away. Then, just before night-fall, he dug a grave for her, and, assisted by his daughter, laid his wife's remains away, until the resurrection morn. I took my stand at the head of the grave, attended by my servant, and read the service for the dead, amid the poor old fellow's sobs and the daughter's exclamations. Then Jack and his daughter filled up the grave, and old Polly was left to sleep in peace beneath the shadow of the magnolia grove. This was another result of our "peculiar institution." You cannot wonder that I was beginning to get more and more sick of it, or that daily I was learning to detest it,

with all the strength of which my nature was capable.

The tide of war rolled on, and we had to be on the move also. We left Nigger Jack's daughter some supplies, promising to recommend all of them to the care of the Freedman's Relief Association, while I decided in my own mind to place old Jack in some little hut near my own home, if ever I lived to see it, and employ him on our own premises. It would then be easy to get his daughter to come to reside with him, and to see the last of her father. She was intelligent for her class, and undertook to communicate with me when any changes took place. In this way we engaged to keep up communications with each other.

Thus I planned for the happiness of two lowly souls. It would have been better, could I have foreseen the end, to have insisted on Nigger Jack's remaining with Dinah. I tried to persuade him, but the old fellow would not leave me. It seemed as if he felt that he must wait upon me, and help to take care of me. After the war was over, he promised to settle down when and where I liked. Dinah too fell in with this scheme, so what could I say?

Our next encampment was in Lawrenceville, Virginia, where we turned the deserted court-house into barracks. The struggle grew fiercer and still more fierce. Jeff Davis and his Confederate hordes saw that it was a matter of life and death—so did we; and, knowing this, you can well imagine how we fought. American blood was "riled," and we all proved ourselves anything but cowards. Beside, we were getting tired of the fray, and wanted to see it over.

One night, when everybody but the sentry was fast asleep, a fire broke out. Not one fire, but many; for the old court-house seemed to dart forth the flames simultaneously from end to end. It must have been the work of Confederate sympathisers; for no fire which had an accidental origin could have burnt with such fury and from so many points. I was sound asleep at the extreme end of the building, and, being far away from all the din, and very fatigued, slept on, never dreaming of my danger.

And nobody else dreamt of it, save Nigger Jack, who had been accommodated somewhere in the basement, and whose first waking thoughts were of me. My own servant had fled from the flames half dressed, and, amid the hubbub, the frantic howls of the Confederate sympathisers, and the no less frantic efforts of our own men, seemed quite to have lost his senses. He told all that happened afterwards.

Nigger Jack came up to him, and asked for me. He replied that he supposed I was out safe; that I had been sleeping in the far end of the building; and, although he hoped I was safe, yet he had to acknowledge that he had not seen anything of me.

"Does you tink Massa Armstrong still sleeping in dat end?" Nigger Jack demanded, pointing to the part of the building in which he knew I was quartered.

"Of course not," replied my man. "The Lieutenant has cleared out of there before this time; if he hasn't, there's precious small chance for him."

Bystanders averred that Nigger Jack's dusky visage grew perceptibly a shade paler, and, without a moment's hesitation he said, "Den I go to look for him. My life not much good widout him, anyway."

"You go to look for him? Why, you must be mad! You stop where you are, or you'll perish."

But Nigger Jack had vanished with the words, and those who saw him depart held their breath, as they felt he went to certain death.

I must have been senseless at the time Nigger Jack found me. All I knew was that somebody or something had got hold of me, dragging me along. Then the next I knew was that I was in the midst of a crowd, on the ground outside, and that somebody was giving me something to bring me round.

But Nigger Jack had met with injuries which finished up his little strength. He had put on a sort of superhuman energy on my behalf, and had succeeded in attracting help, so that I was saved, comparatively unharmed, from the burning pile, just at the moment that he himself fell into a heap of blazing woodwork. He, too, was dragged out as quick as could be, but he had received terrible burns.

These burns were the poor old negro's sentence of death. He only lingered a day or two; and I dragged myself to his side, weak and hurt as I was, determined to see the last of him. Could I do less when, had it not been for him, my body would have then burnt to a cinder?

"Massa Armstrong, nebber mind me," said he, as I bent over him, endeavouring to assuage his pain. "Nebber mind poor old Jack! It could't hab been much longer anyhow, yo know, for I'se a poor old feller now—not much good to anybody. And Polly is gone up yonder fast—afore me; but I'se going to jine her. But, massa, I'se glad I could do somethin' for you afore I died."

"You've saved my life, Jack," I said. "You are dying in my place—dying for me, that's what it is." Perhaps I was weak, anyhow my tears rained down over the poor old fellow's bandaged hands as I spoke, and I am not ashamed to own it.

"It's no hardship to me, Lieutenant, but a real joy to die for you," replied my faithful deliverer, "cause you saved me!" and almost directly he was "in the land of the dead," with his Polly, and with the Saviour who had so long cheered and strengthened his heart.

We buried him in one corner of the cemetery, for nobody dared say nay, now that the power of Lincoln's arms was being asserted; and I erected a rude cross over his grave, giving just his initials and the date of his death. After that I arranged with the Freedman's Relief Association on behalf of the daughter, Dinah, who eventually became a respectable servant, and soon married one of her own dusky race.