



ONE OF THE OLD TIMMERS COMING TO MEETING

BEFO' DE WAR SPIRITUALS

WORDS AND MELODIES

collected by

E. A. McILHENNY

Author of "Bird City," and "The
Wild Turkey and Its Hunting"



BOSTON

The Christopher Publishing House
Boston, U. S. A.

1933

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

McIlhenny, Edward Avery, 1872-1949, comp.
Befo' de war spirituals.

Reprint of the 1933 ed.

1. Negro spirituals. I. Title.

ML670.M15B4 1973 784.7'56 72-1724

ISBN 0-404-08325-9

THIS BOOK
IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED TO
MARY ELIZA McILHENNY

MY MOTHER
WHOSE UNSELFISH CARE AND
DEVOTION TO ME AS A
CHILD HAS BEEN THE
LIGHT OF MY
LIFE.

Reprinted from an original copy in the collections
of the Newark Public Library

From the edition of 1933, Boston
First AMS edition published in 1973
Manufactured in the United States of America

AMS PRESS INC.
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10003

5-22-96 4/25

Befo' De War Spirituals

Having been born during the early reconstruction period following the Civil War, and having spent my entire life on the great sugar plantation of my family, Avery Island, in the extreme south central part of the Sugar-belt of Louisiana, a property covering more than five thousand acres of as fertile land as exists; (the entire Island has belonged to my family for more than a hundred years, the title having come to us as Spanish Grants), it is only natural that I should grow up with an interest in the Negro.

My family prior to the Civil War was a wealthy one with a home in New Orleans as well as their plantation home, and being large land owners and sugar planters possessed many slaves.

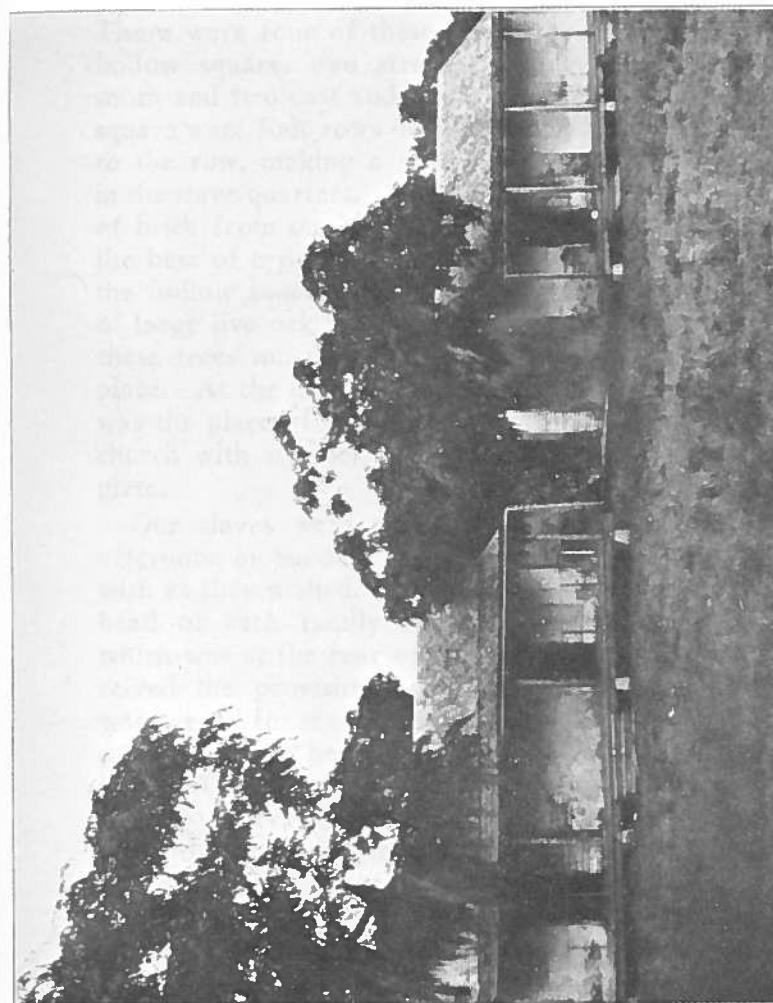
When the Federal troops captured New Orleans my grandfather and father and their families were banished from the State, going to Texas by wagon train as refugees, and my father's house in New Orleans was taken over by General Butler as his headquarters. After peace was declared my people came back to Louisiana, to find all of their property had been confiscated by the Federal Government with the exception of one sugar plantation, Avery Island (where they had two comfortable dwellings) their home and it has been the home of my family ever since.

Previous to the Civil War, Avery Island was used as a sugar plantation, and was visited only occasionally by the members of my family, when

the ladies wished an outing or the men good hunting. The Island being ten miles from the nearest habitation, and four days from New Orleans by boat and team, was not the easiest place to reach or get supplies to. Because of this it soon developed into a self-supporting community, with its own saw mill, its brick kiln, machine shop, mills of various sorts, cotton and wool spinners, salt works, sugar factory and everything necessary to operate a settlement of considerable size. All the work, both skilled and common, was done by slaves.

These slaves were cared for in the most careful and considerate manner, as were the slaves on all large estates. An able man or woman was worth from seven hundred to a thousand dollars, as is shown by the purchase title papers in our records, and as my family owned several hundred of them they represented a considerable investment. The attitude of our slaves to their white owners was one of happy friendliness, without any bitterness, and this is the attitude of their descendants towards my people today.

The master's home was located on top of quite a high hill (that is for southern Louisiana) being more than one hundred feet above sea level, with a beautiful outlook over the fields and lowlands south to the Gulf. On a lower hill to the Southeast was the house of the head manager, and on a lower hill to the Northeast was the home of the second manager. The village in which the slaves lived was east of the "big house" in a beautiful gently sloping valley with the two managers' homes to the South and to the North. The slave quarters were built in double rows facing each other, six houses to the row with a good



PART OF THE OLD SLAVE QUARTERS ON AVERY ISLAND,
BUILT ABOUT 1820

wide street between the rows and a considerable picket fenced yard at the back of each house. There were four of these streets built around a hollow square, two streets running north and south and two east and west. Facing the hollow square were four rows of houses with four houses to the row, making a total of sixty-four houses in the slave quarters. Many of these houses were of brick from our own kilns and others were of the best of cypress lumber cut on the place. In the hollow square of the village were a number of large live oak and hackberry trees, and under these trees most of the village gatherings took place. At the extreme eastern side of the village was the place of worship—a small but attractive church with steeple, pulpit and benches all complete.

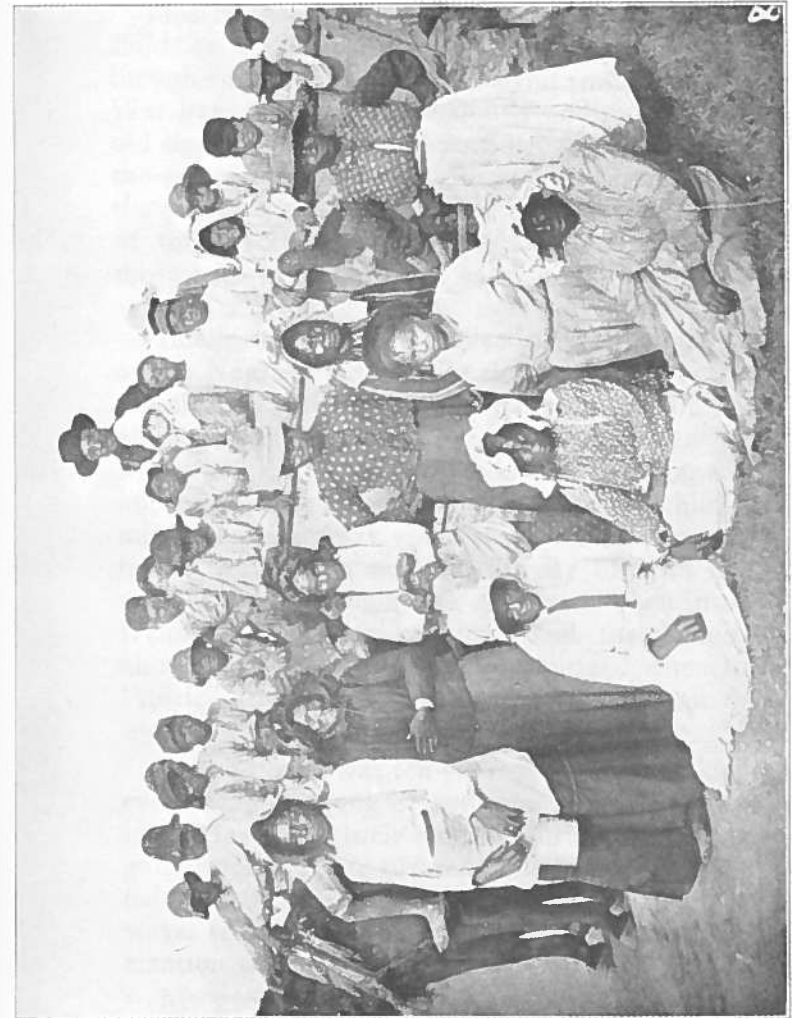
Our slaves were never worked on Saturday afternoon or Sunday; this time being theirs to do with as they wished. On Saturday afternoon the head of each family came to the store house which was at the rear of the "big house" and received the provisions, cloth and whatever else was needed for the coming week. That our slaves were given the best of care is evidenced by one illuminating incident. My grandfather, Judge Daniel Avery, wishing to build a wagon road from the mainland to the Island across a mile and a half of low marsh, and finding that this work could be done only by digging the mud from each side of the proposed road, and building it into a high levee; did in 1852 secure in New Orleans the services of a lot of Irishmen, brought them four days' journey to Avery Island and had the road built. When asked why he did not use his slaves who would have done the work much

more cheaply, his reply was that he would not put his slaves to such heavy work.

At the close of the war my family came to Avery Island to live. They had plenty of land, but no teams or slaves. The Northern soldiers had taken all the mules and horses and freed the slaves. But the slaves had no place to go, and no money to buy food, so they were far worse off than before they were freed.

At the beginning of the Civil War there were in our quarters slaves whose families had come with my great-grandfather from New Jersey to Louisiana just after the close of the Revolutionary War. When my great-grandfather left New Jersey with his slaves, the party went by water to Baltimore, then across country to the Ohio River where they built flat boats for the people and stock; traveling by boat to the Mississippi River they came down the Mississippi to Baton Rouge, Louisiana where the first home of my family in Louisiana was made.

Although freed by legal process, our negroes, many families of whom had belonged to my people for three generations, refused to leave. And then arose what became the greatest problem my people had ever faced; how, without money or work-stock could they take care of several hundred blacks who could not take care of themselves. Fortunately there remained on the place in the wooded and low sections a large number of half wild cattle, these were rounded up and broken to the plow and wagon, and as there was an abundance of sugar cane growing among the weeds in the abandoned fields it was gathered and used for seed for the first crop. The machinery of the sugar house was gotten in order, and in a



SOME OF THE FAITHFUL

year's time our negroes were back at work, had enough to eat and were happy.

This is the condition I remember as a small child, as it existed in the early seventies, and although conditions on Avery Island since the Civil War have changed tremendously and most of the old slave quarters have been torn down, and with the sugar house moved to the far eastern side of the place; there are working for us today many of the descendants of our slaves and some of those who were born in slavery.

* * *

Among my earliest recollections is the singing of the Negroes in the little church at the foot of the hill and at baptizings, for my old "Mammy" always took me with her when she went to church, which was every Sunday. The thing that impressed their songs most clearly on my childish mind was the great volumes of voices when the hymns were sung, and the activity of both men and women in jumping up and down when in the frenzy of "getting religion" and the jumping about of those who had been baptized when the "spirit" struck them as they came up from the water.

By the time I was ten years old, I think I knew every religious song of our community, and often joined lustily in their singing during the Sunday gatherings. These old religious songs or "spirituals" as they are now generally termed have always, from my youngest days had for me a fascination quite above any other music.

My greatest ambition as a youngster was to be a hunter and trapper of the things of the wild. The great cypress swamps to the East of Avery Island extended unbroken for more than fifty

miles; while the low wet prairies to the West extended a hundred and fifty miles into Texas. These swamps and wet prairies abounded with deer, bear, and all kinds of lesser animals and untold thousands of game birds. It was indeed—as it is today—a hunter's paradise.

John Goffney, one of our negroes, was a splendid hunter and woodsman; to him was given the task of instructing me in the ways of the wild, and most ably he did so. Many was the day and night we spent in camp, building our own shelter of palm leaves or sleeping under our propped up "Pirogue" (a boat without seam or nail, shaped from a solid cypress log). John, besides being a skillful hunter was a deacon of the church and a famous singer. He possessed one of the finest voices I ever listened to, and knew every spiritual of our section. Many were the nights we two would sit before our camp fire, miles away from any habitation, and sing the now long forgotten spirituals, and it is due largely to the days and nights I spent in camp with John that I now know so many of the old Negro religious songs which even the old slaves have entirely forgotten. Another from whom I learned how to sing spirituals was J. C. Rochell. Rochell is now living, is pastor of two churches, and has been, and is now (although past eighty years) the most magnetic preacher I have ever listened to.

When I decided to write the spirituals contained in this book I had Rochell come to see me a number of times, hoping to have him refresh my memory on some of the old songs I had originally learned from him. To my disappointment he could not recall one of them; he had completely forgotten the old spirituals of his people.

When I would sing one for him his face would light up and he would hum the tune, but of the words his mind was a blank.

* * *

In the United States the attitude of the Whites towards the Negroes had gone to two extremes; first, they were considered as sub-human and as being only fit to be slaves. Second, they were liberated from slavery by legal proclamation, and without preparation given equality with those who had been their masters.

The white ship owners and traders of the North in their eagerness for trade and profit would fill their ships before they left New England with casks of rum, brass ornaments and the cheapest of calico, go to the West Coast of Africa and trade their useless cargo for a load of blacks. Not being able to sell their living merchandise in the Northern States (due to the blacks—coming naked from the heat of the tropics—being unable to survive in the cold climate) they sold hundreds of thousands of these individuals, from many different African tribes, to the people of the Southern States.

Under the slave-system the Negro had no care; they were provided with all the necessities of life—food—clothes—home. Then came their liberation. In a day without—food—clothes or home, or the wherewithal to procure them. They were declared by law Man and Brother, and of full equality with the Northern traders who had bought and sold them, and to the Whites of the South who had owned them. Is it any wonder that chaos reigned in the South where the uncivilized Negro population—(which over large areas outnumbered the Whites thirty or more to

one)—found themselves one day slaves—dependent—clothed—fed and housed—and the next day free—-independent—without clothes—food or home? The wonder is that the white population of the South was not largely exterminated; and but for the fact, that the Negro as a race has a sweet, simple, childlike psychology and outlook towards life, and a happy-go-lucky, kindly disposition, they would have been.

A race without a religion of their own who for centuries has survived the scourge of the witch doctors and the terrors of the slave trade, and retained its sweetness of disposition has some very fine qualities. Theirs is a temperament that looks up to, and heeds one in authority; which reaches for and is satisfied with the simplest joys of life, and takes little account of its hardships and sufferings; forgets past troubles, and has no future worries; they can stand almost unlimited privation and work, and be happy, but if deprived of their pleasures—women, dancing and song—they become restless and dissatisfied. I believe as a race the Negroes are the most easily satisfied and the happiest people in all the world.

In Africa the Negroes were ruled by superstition, and the witch doctors were all powerful, and there were many "spells" and "charms" and "conjures" that held the masses in fear of wrong doing. When they were brought to this country as slaves they were at once free from the influence of their tribal customs, and being a simple trusting people, deprived of their own superstitions, and being obliged to accept the White man's ideas of life, readily, and with joy embraced the religion of the Whites, and before very long had devolved a form of Christian wor-

ship peculiar and all satisfying to themselves; containing many of their African customs and superstitions, some of which are practiced (in the rural sections of the South) today.

After the freedom of the slaves and with the advancement of civilization and education the more progressive blacks looked down on the "spirituals" as being a relic of slavery and slave ignorance, and the singing of their natural, enchanting songs gradually died out and have been forgotten, and in another decade they will be lost forever. For with education the creation of Folk-songs has passed. In their places one hears today in all Negro churches and religious gatherings the book hymns of the Whites, and to some extent reconstructed "spirituals" whose words and music faintly resemble the spirituals of old. These reconstructed spirituals have during the past ten or fifteen years become very popular, due first to their being broadcasted by phonograph records, and more lately through the air by radio, and second, because the white people of the stage have sung them through the length and breadth of the land, and due to their melody they have become very popular.

In later years many articles and volumes have been written of the life of the Negro in the "old days." The authors of these were almost exclusively people with but an incomplete knowledge of and but a passing acquaintance with the Negro; therefore their interpretation of their life and music is anything but complete or accurate. Most of the spirituals recorded by them have a strong leaning toward the hymns of the Baptist and Methodist churches; due to the fact that missionaries of these churches were very ac-

tive among the freed slaves shortly after the Civil War, and their religious songs were quickly adopted for all church gatherings in place of the slave time spirituals.

* * *

No more accurate record of the spiritual life of the plantation Negroes of fifty and more years ago can be portrayed than that portrayed by their sympathetic, melodious, rhythmic songs.

These simple uneducated people seem to have stored in their memory all the unusual and most pronounced passages of the scripture as they heard it read from the Bible by some educated member of their race, or by the white missionaries who came among them; then using a few words from some remembered scripture as a theme a "spiritual" would be built. While it is a fact that the words of the old "spirituals" bore rather a low place in the poetic scale, their sung music has real beauty, and is most expressive of their creator's passionate longing for the better things of the hereafter; the expectations of which are very real to these people. In their spirituals there is generally expressed a decided feeling and desire for the uplifting of the spirit, given in a few words not always in rhyme, but in perfect rhythm. This is the reason why it is absolutely necessary to have the music as well as the words of the Negro songs for one to properly interpret their meaning and their feeling.

Spirituals are the creation of intense religious feelings and have their origin usually with an individual who through song and religious fervor becomes completely carried away from things material, and during his singing, being at the moment at a loss for words and notes with which

to express his feelings, chants some religious thought or desire that by chance flashes through his brain. "O Lord, show me de way" or perhaps "I'm boun' fer de promis lan'" or some such thought chanted and rechanted and other lines added in the ecstasy of a spirit filled with religion, and another spiritual is created. There is in these spontaneous songs a wealth of pathos and beauty that appeals to and grips the heart of those who hear them, but they are at their best when sung without music by the untaught simple people who created them. When so heard they cause a lasting impression even on people of the keenest musical culture.

There are three things that make the old spirituals beautiful, and without these three things they would be expressionless and largely meaningless. First, their dialect, which gives them a distinctive charm and quaintness. Second, their perfect rhythm and sweet melody, a like combination of which is heard in no other music. Third, their oft repeated words, which if read seem monotonous, but when properly sung causes, through voice inflections and by the monotony of repetition, a hypnotic effect and spirit exaltation on both singers and listeners quite beyond the power of other music.

There are two distinct types of spirituals; those in which the melody and tempo convey the joyous notes of victory and exaltation and belief in the conquering of sin and of a final home in heaven, and those in which the sadder tones prevail, expressing the wish and hope to lead a better life and obtain by repentance a heavenly home.

Heaven and Hell, God and Jesus, and the Saints of the Bible are very real and personal to

the Negroes, and the old spirituals are full of intimate references such as: "I'm goin' t' chatter wid de Father," "Father Abraham," "When I git to hebben gwin' t' choose ma seat an' er sit right down," in fact in a great many of the Spirituals there is exhibited a personal intimacy with some Biblical character or event, and their church songs are far more personal than imaginative.

It is almost impossible to get an exact wording of a spiritual for even the same singer never sings one twice exactly the same. The singer will vary the words, lines and melody every time the spiritual is sung. The stanzas never occur twice in the same order, but are sung as they come to the mind of the singer, and as the singer will improvise as he sings, the number of stanzas that may be sung is unlimited and is governed solely by the time that particular song is wanted to be sung. There is also great variation in the music to which a spiritual is sung. It may be begun as a simple sweet melody, but as the singer becomes more and more uplifted and enthused by oft repeated lines, all sorts of quavering notes and melodious expressions will be improvised until it becomes quite impossible for the starting notes to be recognized. If there are a number of persons singing each one will be singing the same song, only differently, but the whole is a delightful and thrilling blend of harmony in which the words mean almost nothing.

Music is the natural method of self-expression of these simple uneducated children of nature, and nature having been especially bountiful in bestowing on the Negro the gift of song, and as they had no musical instruments save their voices,

and being unable to read or write, both the words and music of their songs were learned by ear. This is the reason why the music and words of the old spirituals change with almost each singing. The singer or leader of the company of singers, although carrying in a general way the words and music as it was generally sung, modified both to fit his mood and the mood of the audience.

The Negro singer knows nothing of music as written and taught; yet they sing their spirituals with a smooth, swinging chant and voice variation quite beyond imitation by the voice of the Whites.

The theme for most of the spirituals are passages from the Bible, relating usually to the deeds or sayings of some Biblical character. Often the individual desires and expectations of the singer are expressed in relation to the hereafter and heaven in lines of varying length and unequal delivery; making their rendering quite baffling to the white singers.

If one reads the words of the Negro spirituals, not knowing the melodies to which they are sung, they are found to be simple, monotonous and without poetic beauty, but hear these same simple words sung in the melancholy tones of an inspired group of negroes, and the effect is startling; words that seem to be foolish, take on under voice manipulation a beauty and volume of melodious cadence imparting to one an ecstasy of keenest pleasure. One must therefore consider the music and words of the old spirituals as an entirety; one can not be separated from the other without losing the value of both.

In the singing of their spirituals the Negroes

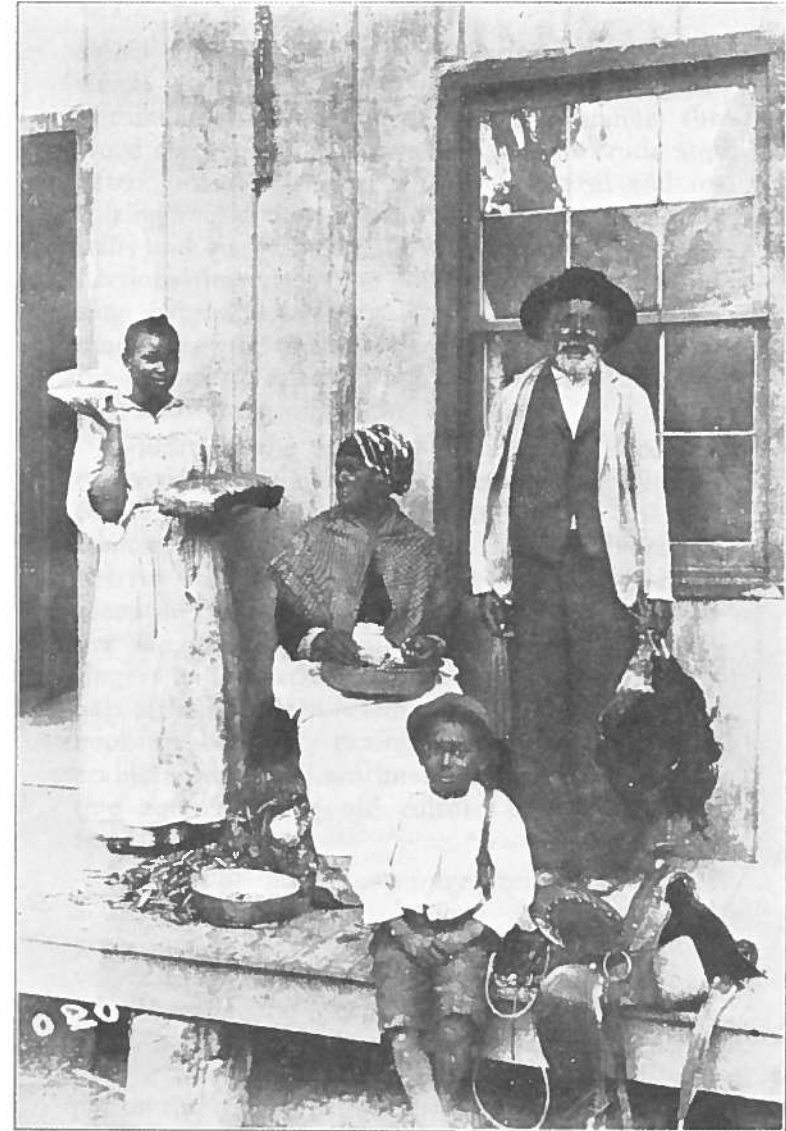
BEFO' DE WAR SPIRITUALS

express their varying emotions, not as much in the words they utter, as in the manner in which the words are uttered, and the tone in which they are sung. By their voice inflections one may know whether the singers are happy or sad, heaven-seeking or content with their spiritual welfare.

The Negroes of the old days (that is before the days of education and migration from the South to the North) had but two pleasures enjoyed by all; group gatherings for simple amusements consisting of dancing and ring plays, and group gatherings for singing of religious thoughts and hearing some exhorter expound the teachings of the Bible in words easily comprehended by their audience.

It is difficult for the Caucasian's brain to at first understand the Negro's religious music or to feel any compelling religious sentiment in the simple and oft repeated words of their spirituals. But let one hear them sung as I have, time after time, in the quiet of some little country church, so small that often not more than half of those attending could get inside, or in the fervor and excitement of camp-meetings, or baptizing, or under some moss hung live-oak grove with only the moon and stars for light, and hear the plaintive crooning echo of their voices come floating back from the mist banks rising in the forests; if one is not then soon entranced by, and eager to hear more of their music, that one has no music in his soul.

To correctly transcribe the tones of the old Negro music to written notes is quite impossible, for knowing no written music and using no musical instruments in their religious meetings they



FOUR GENERATIONS BORN ON AVERY
ISLAND, LOUISIANA

relied solely on the voice to express their devotional songs. Having but a limited English vocabulary and no knowledge of grammar, the word construction of their spirituals is crude and often meaningless, but what a beautiful and inspiring music they produced; full of half notes, trills and quaverings, and with beautiful voice inflections that cause the simple verse and refrain sung over and over again to completely lose its monotony and to impart to those singing and to the listeners pleasure which often excites to shoutings and tears.

Education, the call of the city and its vices, to thousands of country reared negroes, and the reconstructing of their songs and music for the commercialism of the stage, have combined to destroy the old spirituals, and have left in their place the "Blues" and reconstructed spirituals as are sung by the various companies of "Jubilee" singers and minstrels. These reconstructed spirituals although often resembling those given in this book are but sorry examples without any considerable aesthetic or sentimental value of a distinctive and charming old culture that has slowly faded away. * * *

In the old days there were among our slaves a number who were famous as singers and preachers. Three of these whom I remember very clearly, because they were all old, all had grey beards and deep loud voices, were Saul, Sabry and Sawny. These three men had been too old for work before the Civil War, and had been put on the retired list and pensioned. That meant they were for the rest of their life entitled to home, clothes and food without doing work. All three of them had been preaching for a number

of years before the War as a pastime and pleasure, but after the war, having been declared free, they had to earn their own living, and they took up preaching as a business. As there was only one church on the Island and one congregation, the three of them served the one in all matters spiritual. I can remember the three of them sitting, one forward and two back, on the pulpit of the little church and preaching one after the other to a congregation that usually stayed in and around the church from ten in the morning until late afternoon. One would preach and shout until worn out then a hymn would be sung, and while being sung the other two who had not preached would pass among the congregation hat in hand and take up a collection. As the collection proceeded the two passing the hats would signal to the one for whom the collection was being made the amount that was in hand, and the preacher on the pulpit would exhort the brothers and sisters to give more liberally by calling out, "one more dime to make a big round dollar" or "five cents more will make six bits, who gonna give dat nickle?" This would keep up until nothing more could be gotten from the congregation. When after offering thanks for the donation received and pocketing the cash, the preacher would take a back seat and one of the others would start his sermon. The same performance would be gone through with until all three had had their turn and collected what they could. I doubt if the entire collection any Sunday ever amounted to more than three dollars, but what ever it was these earnest old preachers were satisfied.

* * *

When I began assembling these old songs for

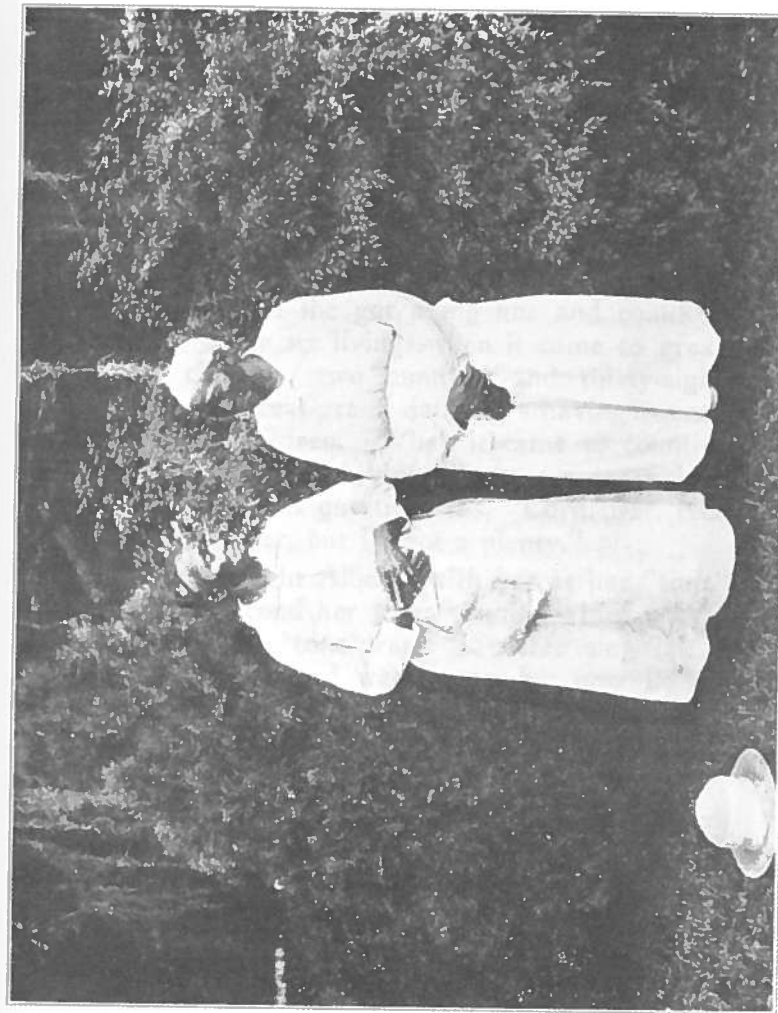


BECKY ILSEY, PAST EIGHTY YEARS AND A LEADER IN HER CHURCH

publication I found in writing down the words that of some of the songs I could remember only a verse or two although the air was perfectly recalled. I had written something over thirty of them and was about at the end of my list, so set about finding some one who could help me. I interviewed a number of the old colored people of the place, but got little or no help, as they just could not remember the songs they had sung fifty or more years ago. They knew many of the newer church hymns, and many of these sung in the Negro dialect sounded like "BEFO' DE WAR" spirituals, but to a trained ear there was a difference. I then turned to the Reverend Rochell, whom I have before mentioned as being one who had taught me many of the spirituals in my youth. I thought, of course, he could tell me all I wanted to know, but I was disappointed for he did not know the words of a single old spiritual. His excuse being that he has sung hymns from the Baptist hymn book for so long, that the old songs had all been forgotten. I asked him if there was not in his congregation some old men or women who knew and sung the old songs, and he told me of an old woman "sister Becky Elzy" of his congregation whom he thought could help me. I sent for Becky who lives on the prairie about six miles from my home and at the first meeting knew I had found a real helper.

Becky was not one of the old people of my family, but had belonged to the Morse Family who had owned a sugar plantation on Cotté Jellé only about twenty miles from my home. The Morses had been close friends of my people in before the war days. Becky was sixteen years

old when the slaves were freed, and married. She and her husband took up a small piece of land on the prairie about six miles north of Avery Island and have lived there ever since, and she has never been ten miles away from home. Up to the time of her coming to my house she had never been close to an electric light, had never listened at a telephone nor ridden on a train and never heard a radio and had been in an automobile only once. In spite of her eighty years she is active, quick witted, intelligent and as fine a specimen of the old type Negro as I have ever seen. She is, of course, entirely unreconstructed and uneducated. She marveled at my illuminating several electric lights in a room at one time and without striking a match or going near them, and vigorously tried to blow one out when asked to put it out, and on my putting them all out at one time without going near them she was greatly impressed, and thought I was certainly a "hoodoo." On examining an electric light closely she wondered, "how you gits de ile in dar?" Becky told me she had no use for "de new fangled fister hymns what dey sings now" and although she "jine in de chorus wen dey sings dem in church" she would rather sing the old songs of her young days, and always did so while at her work and in the evenings at home. Becky told me that one of our old people, Alberta Bradford, who had moved off our place a number of years ago lived near her, and knew many of the old songs, and often came to the house and sang with her; so I told her to bring Alberta with her the next day. I sent an automobile for them the next morning at nine o'clock. The twenty minutes' ride from her house to mine proved a very exciting one for Becky, as it was



BERTA AND BECKY — THE TWO SWEET SINGERS

"de fus time I was eber in one dem tings" and she marveled at the speed. When I asked her how she liked the ride her answer was, "didn' lak hit, die kum quick in dem tings. I aint wanten die."

If all the liberated slaves had followed Becky's example I doubt if North America could hold all their progeny. When questioned about her offsprings, Becky named ten; five sons and five daughters that had grown to maturity, and all living but one. When she tried to name her grand children she got along fine and could remember forty six living, when it came to great-grand children, two hundred and thirty-eight. One of the great-grand daughters having twenty-one living children. When it came to counting great-great-grand children Becky was at a loss, her reply to this question was, "Lord, Mr. Ned I kant 'member, but I's got a plenty."

Becky brought Alberta with her as her "tone" that is to second her when singing. Her reason for needing a tone was, "I useter sing lak a mockin' bird wen I was young, but now I's ole I's gettin win' broke an' I can't carry hit lak I wants, so I needs 'Berta to secon' me." And this 'Berta did in a most effective way.

Alberta Bradford was born in September 1861, on Avery Island. Her father, Robert Johnson, and her mother, Betsy Ann, were our slaves and Alberta was reared with the children of the "Big House." She was a bright little "nig" and enjoyed many of the privileges of the place. I remember one of my aunts telling a story of Alberta's unrighteousness in her childhood. My aunt was holding Sunday-school for the young members of the family, and 'Berta

being a privileged character was included, the delights of Heaven and the terrors of Hell were being explained. When the heavenly food was mentioned as being milk and honey there was a snort from Alberta, and on being asked if she did not want to go to heaven and feast like the angels on milk and honey, he reply was, "no m'am I'd ruther stay here an' eat corn-bread an' 'lasses."

I have spent many enjoyable days with these good old souls singing over the old time songs and talking of the days and people and ways now long gone. They brought back to me many of the songs I had forgotten, and I was able to do the same for them. They would be greatly pleased when I would sing spirituals they used to know but had forgotten, and would recognize them instantly and generally name some one of the old people whose special song it was, long ago. Both of them have fine voices and sang for me by the hours and it was a rare privilege to hear their melodious voices, sweet and soothing giving expression to music now a long time forgotten.

In singing they harmonized perfectly. Becky singing alto with a deep rich tone and Berta soprano, her voice sweet and soothing. Becky knew far more of the old spirituals than Berta, and never having been away from the immediate locality of her birth, and having been very religious all her life, she has a wealth of information about the early religious customs of her people in this part of the country. When I asked Becky what she called the songs she sang, her answer was, "spiritual and jubilee hymns." When asked the difference between the two she said, "de spiritual cums frum yo' spirit an' goes

to de spirit an' yo' spirit praises de Lord. De jubilee cums frum de heart when you's happy an' you sings to de Lord how happy you is. 'Fo' de war when we'd have a meetin' at night, wuz mos' always 'way in de woods or de bushes some whar so de white folks couldn't hear, an' when dey'd sing a spiritual an' de spirit 'gin to shout some de elders would go 'mongst de folks an' put dey han' over dey mouf an' some times put a clof in dey mouf an' say: "Spirit don talk so loud or de patterol break us up." You know dey had white patterols what went 'roun' at night to see de niggers didn't cut up no devilment, an' den de meetin' would break up an' some would go to one house an' some to er nudder an' dey would groan er w'ile, den go home."

There was a chant used by the Negroes during worship in the old days that was begun by some one of the brothers or sisters who was called on by the preacher to make a "praise" the individual called on would say a few words, usually from ten to twenty, then pause, and the entire congregation would in the form of a chant repeat the same words, then the leader would say more words and pause, the congregation chanting them, and this would continue until the preacher held up his hand for a halt.

Knowing Becky was a great "praiser" I asked her to say a praise for me, and she spoke the following:

Fum hebben,
O Lord!
Look down,
Right now.

Alright,

O Lord!
 Look down,
 Little mo'.

On high,
 O Lord!
 Save me,
 When I die.

When I die,
 O Lord!
 Take me,
 Up home.

After each pause she and Berta repeated the words in a "sing song" chant. I suppose she would have kept this up indefinitely if I had not held up my hand for a halt.

It is a shame that the real old music of these simple highly religious people should be so nearly lost, for there is beauty in its composition, and it carries an individuality in both melody and rhythm not found in other music.

This book will perpetuate the words and music of the "BEFO' DE WAR" Negro religious songs of this section, but there is no possibility of a written record illustrating how these songs should be sung, for the peculiar chanting tones and quavering half and quarter notes can not be written. There are only two people today who can sing all these songs as they should be sung, old Becky who due to her eighty years is bound soon to pass from the picture, and Julia Latula, the young girl who has typed these songs for me, and taken the interest to learn and sing all of them as Becky sings them. With the passing of

these two the knowledge of how to sing these BEFO' DE WAR SPIRITUALS will be forever lost.

In transcribing the music of these spirituals I have been assisted by Mr. Henri Whermann of New Orleans, one of the foremost musicians of the South. Mr. Whermann is a past-master of music and has written the notes exactly as they were sung or as near exact as the harmonies and rhythmic tones of the Negro voice can be represented by written notes. It was often necessary to sing an air over and over again, very many times, before it was written correctly, and no air was considered finished until it was sung back to the original singers and approval given as to its correctness. No attempt has been made to modernize a single air, and as they are herein presented they were sung before the Civil War.

The words are spelled euphonicly in the Negro dialect, and when sung should not be changed into more correct English, or their picturesque quality will be entirely lost.

E. A. McIlhenny.

INDEX

Adam In De Garden Pinnin' Leaves	37
Aint Dat Good News	59
Aint Goin' Er Tarry Here	47
All-er Ma Sins Are Taken Away	67
All Ober Dis Worl'	51
Angel Dun Change-er Ma Name	45
Are You Ready?	53
Arkangel	49
Baptizin'	57
Been Wash In De Blood Ob De Lamb	61
Boun' Fer Canaan Lan'	42
Come An' Go Wit' Me	44
Comin' Ag'in By An' By	64
Comin' Down De Line	71
Cross-er Me Over	75
Cruel Jews	38
Daniel's In De Lion's Den	77
Dat Same Train	79
Death Goin' T' Lay His Col' Icy Han' On Me	73
De Bell Dun Ring	85
De Gif' Ob Gawd Is Eternal Life	81
Dere Is A Mighty Shoutin'	225
Dere's A Mighty War In De Hebben	86
Dese All-er Ma Father's Chillun	88
Do Lord, Remember Me	82
Don't You Grieve After Me	90
Don't You Wish You Were In Hebben?	97
Dry Bones Goin' T' Rise Ag'in	62
Dun Found De Way At Las'	92
Father Abraham	93
Free At Las'	95
Git On De Boat Little Chillun	69
Give-er Me Jesus	102
Give-er Me Jesus W'en I Die	115
Glory An' Honor	104
Goin' Away To See-er Ma Lord	65

Good Lord Dun Been Here	54
Gospel Train	107
Hail John's Army Ben' Down An' Die	99
Halleluiah To De Lamb	110
Hard Trials	105
Hebben Is A Shinin'	109
Hol' Out To De En'	112
Hope I Jine De Ban'	117
House What's Built Wit'out Han's	114
I Aint Gwine Er Trus' Nobody	118
I Am De Truth An' De Light	120
I Am Free	124
I Been A Listenin'	126
I Can't Stay Away	133
I Feel Like Dyin' In Dis Army	131
I Got Ma 'Ligion On De Way	149
I Heard A Voice Couldn't Tell Where	135
I'm A Solger In De Army Ob De Lord	55
I'm Goin' T' Stay In De Battle Fiel'	122
I'm Goin' Where Dere Aint No Mo' Dyin'	127
I'm M'os' Dun Travelin'	137
I'm So Glad	139
In De Mornin'	140
I've A Message F'om Ma Lord	146
I Want To See Jesus In De Mornin'	144
I Won't Die No Mo'	142
Jes Like John	147
Jesus Rollin' In-er His Arms	150
Jine De Army Ob De Lord	152
John Saw De Holy Number	157
John's On De Island On His Knees	154
Judgment Day is Tryin' Time	158
Keep De Ark A Movin'	159
King Jesus Sittin' On De Water Side	167
Lamb Blood Dun Wash Me Clean	163
Let De Church Roll On	161
Let Us Go Down To Jerden	164
Little Chillun You Better Believe	170
Little David	58
Little David Play On Yo' Harp	172
Lord I Can Not Stay Here By Mase'f	178
Lord Is Dis Hebben?	174

Ma Sister You'll Be Called On	168
Ma Soul's Determin'	181
'Member Me	186
No Devil In Our Lan'	129
No I Aint Ashame	191
No Liar Can Stan'	193
Oh Lord Answer Ma Prayer	183
Oh Ma Lord What Shall I Do?	187
Oh Lord Have Mercy On Me	189
Oh Zion Halleluiah	199
Po' Sinner Fare You Well	194
Praise De Lamb	202
Prancin' Horses	204
Pure Religion	206
Remember De Dyin' Lamb	208
Ring Jerusalem	210
Rock-er Ma Soul	196
Roll An' Rock	222
Rollin' In Jesus' Arms	224
Run Here Jeremiah	220
Run Mo'ner Run	213
Sailin' Over Yonder	215
Sen' Dem Angels Down	216
Sen' Er One Angel Down	207
Shout Jerusalem	228
Standin' On De Sea Ob Glass	226
Sund'y Mornin' Ban'	230
Sweet Hebben	237
Tone De Bell	217
Trubble Dun Bore Me Down	238
Turn Sinner	232
Two Wings	233
Walk Gawd's Hebbenly Road	244
W'at Harm Has Jesus Dun?	246
'Way Down In Hell	241
We'll March Down Jerden	243
W'en I'm Gone	40
W'en Israel Was In Egypt's Lan'	235
Who Love Ma Lord	247
Why Don't You Cum Along?	242
Why Don't You Let Gawd's People Go?	250
Why Don't You 'L'aver Me?	248