

BILL and ELLEN THOMAS live in the Old Slave Settlement, 3 miles north of Hondo. Bill is 88 and Ellen is 81. They seem to be happy; their fields are tilled, a horse and a cow graze near the house; a kitchen garden is under way and several broods of baby chicks are in the yard. They were dressed in simple, clean clothes, and Ellen wears a string of nutmegs around her neck, to 'make yer eyes strong.'

Uncle Bill's Story.

"Does you want me to start right at the beginnin'?" Well, I'll tell you jes' how I went to this country. I left Falls County where I belonged to the man there that kept the post office. He was named Chamlin. He had lots of land, I reckon about 50 acres. They kep' us in a little house right in their yard. Reckin how old I was when he bought me? Jus' five years old! He give \$500 for me, but he bought my mother and my sisters, too. He had to buy me, 'cause my mother, she wouldn't go without me. No, suh, she tol' 'em she wouldn't go if they didn' buy me, too. An' the man he bought us f'om, he wanted to keep me, so he wouldn't take less than \$500 for me. Massa Chamblin bought the whole family, 'cept my father. They sold him and we never laid eyes on him again.

"My mother cooked. Massa Chamlin, he always fed us plenty, an' whatever they had, we had. If he cooked sausage, you had it too; if he cooked ham, you got it too; if he cooked lye hominy, you got it; an' if he had puddin', you got some.

"When I was 6 or 7 years old I chopped cotton and I plowed too, and I could lay as straight rows with oxen as any you ever saw.

"The massa whipped me with a dogwood switch, but he never did

bring no blood. But it taken 7 men to whip my father.

"I'll tell you how I got away f'om there. Massa bought cotton and carried it to Mexico. He taken his 2 boys with him and we had 3 wagons and I drove one. I had 4 oxen and I had 3 bales of cotton on my wagon; he had 6 oxen and 6 bales of cotton, and the last wagon, it had 10 bales on it and 6 oxen. He had to ship it acrost the Rio Grande. If a Mexican bought it, he come across and took it over hissself. Reckin how much he got for that cotton? He got 60¢ a pound. Yes'm, he sho' did. Cotton was bringin' that then.

"I was freed over there in Mexico. I was about 14 years old. Massa Chamlin, he stayed over there till the country was free. He didn't believe in that fightin'.

"I cooked in a hotel over there in Mexico. I cooked two years at \$1.00 a day.

"When Massa owned me, he always give us good clothes. Our pants was made out of duckin' like wagon sheets, but my mother took some kind of bark and dyed 'em. I think it was blackjack bark. He give us shoes, too. They was half-tan leather brogans."

"I used to play the fiddle for dances when I was young, but not after I joined the church. I played for the whitepeople. Oh, yes'm, the cullud folks had dances, they sho' did dance.

"Yes'm, I saw a ghost onct. One night after I was livin' down here, I was goin' to Sabinal, me and another man, and a great long thing passed right in front of us. It was the blackest thing you ever saw. It was about six feet long. Yes'm, it sho' was a ghost or sumpin; it disappeared, and me lookin' at it. The other fellow that was with me, he seen it, too.

"Yes, they was lots of panthers and bears here. If this ghost was a bear, he sho' was a big 'un. We had a ghost down here on the creek we called the 'Ball Water Hole Ghost.' He was seen lots of times. He used to stay down there, but he ain't been seen lately. My wife, she seen him."

Aunt Ellen's Story

"Yes'm, I seen him walkin' 'long the trail ahead of us. He had on a black hat, like a tall stovepipe hat, and a long black coat, and when we got up close he jes' disappeared. He was a big man, and tall, too. We didn' know which way he went; he jes' seemed to disappear. My oldest daughter saw him too. Lots of folks did. He was always seen down at that water hole somewhere.

"Another time, I was stayin' with Mrs. Reedes. Mr. Reedes was killed and all night long he'd come back and grind coffee and sprinkle it all over us. I was so bad scared I nearly died. Next mornin' there'd be coffee all over the floor. We supposed it was Mr. Reede's ghost. They say if a person was wicked they come back like that. Onct he pulled Mrs. Reedes outta bed and pitched her on the floor, and he would take the dishes out of the shelves and throw 'em down. I couldn't stand it but a night or two and I said I was goin' home. Yes, ma'am, it sho' was a ghost. He sho' did tear up that house every night. Why, they'd be a light shine in that room just as plain as daylight, nearly. They say ghosties will run you, but I never had any to run me."

"I was born in Mississippi. We come to Texas and my mother died, so grandma raised me. I was jes' a baby when we come to Texas. Mr. Harper owned us. I remember the war, but it's so long ago I don't remember much. I remember when John Harper read the free paper to us. He had a big lot of slaves, but

when he read the free papers they jes' flew out like birds. But I didn't. I was stickin' to my grandmother. She was on crutches and she stayed on at the Harper place.

"After we was free I worked for them a long time. I cooked, washed, ironed, milked the cows. He was pretty good to us, Judge Harper was. I went along with him when he went to war, his wife and chillen did too, and I nursed them. I'd give a young baby shuck tea to break him out with the hives. For chills and fever I give quinine weed. It don't grow here.

"When Judge Harper went up to Hondo my grandma grabbed me and kept me. So I stayed and worked. I was still a young girl, but I plowed, hauled and grubbed. I used to wear 'cotton stripes.' I remember 'em well. It was a homespun cloth. I knew how to spin and weave and I could knit a pair of socks in two nights.

"I never did hear much about hard times. I was treated good but I got switched many a time. Oh, yes'm, I've been whipped, but not like some of 'em was. They used to tie some of 'em down. I've heered tell, they shore whopped 'em. They used to be a runaway that got away and went to Mexico now and then, and if they caught him they shore whopped him awful.

"That old piano in there, my daughter bought a long time ago. The varnish is off, but a man tol' us it could be sandpapered and refinished and it would be a beautiful thing. It's about 75 years old."
