

# ALMOST A HUNDRED YEARS HAS THIS NEGRESS LIVED.

## A Pathetic Story of the Slave Life of Mrs. Harriet Mitchell Who Lives Now in New Philadelphia with Grandchildren.

The accompanying picture represents Mrs. Harriet Mitchell, believed to be the oldest inhabitant of Tuscarawas county. Mrs. Mitchell was born, grew to womanhood, was twice married and her children were born to her—a slave. She came into this world at least a century ago, possibly longer, she herself, is unable to say, only replying to the question of age that the 24th of the coming August she will be 95 years old, at least, she knows not how much older as she has no record. Her grandchildren say "Grandmother isn't at all sure of her age, for several years ago she believed herself to be 97, as she grows older she gets younger it seems." This failing isn't to be wondered at when we consider that the aged woman is utterly unlearned, never having been taught to read or count although at this extreme age displaying remarkable intelligence in conversation. In a cabin set apart for the house slaves on the "Knutt plantation" near Heathville in Northumberland county, Virginia, the wee black



baby gladdened the heart and added to the family cares of a busy "mammy" whose treasures numbered ten. The "mammy" was a gift by legacy and could not be sold neither could she be separated from her children, the conditions of the will having been that when the final division of slaves was made the heir who elected to take the mother was obliged to accept amongst his allotment of slaves her children also, they being favored house servants exempt from sale.

On the same plantation was a likely young colored man named Isaac. As the slaves took the family name of their masters Isaac, although of another slave family was Isaac Knutt and when Harriet was married to him she did not change her name. But the master wasn't restricted from selling Isaac and he being a marketable chattel was one day sold to a trader from farther south and Harriet was left a widow, or worse a wife and mother without a husband. The slaves accustomed to these indignities accepted the situation as best they could and Harriet some time after losing her husband married a man owned by a neighboring planter, Mitchell. The second husband, Vincent Mitchell, was afterward taken up the peninsula to Richmond and sold but not until their children five in number were well grown. By the death of "Massa" Knutt, a division of the slaves was made, Harriet and her children finding themselves owned by a young master much given to drunkenness and whose great delight seemed to be trading in slaves. Here Harriet's heart was wrung with keenest anguish and suffering for the young master disregarding the conditions of the bequest took Harriet's only son and one of her sisters to Richmond to the slave market to sell them if he could without the fact being known that they were property strictly entailed and which he could not legally transfer to another. In some way the would-be purchasers doubted his right to sell the boy and woman so he returned home alone but in a fearful temper. He said the woman had died in Richmond and that he had turned the boy loose or he had escaped him.

The old woman's eyes fill with tears as she says "My only son never came back to me, he was lost in Richmond, God only knows what became of him, I

have never heard from him and he may have died years ago—that was soon after the breaking out of the Civil War and before we were freed." In the heart of the withered old colored woman the mother-love lives through all these years, her voice trembles with plaintive sadness and the interviewer feels inclined to a mistiness before the eyes as the old mother recounts in broken sentences the story of her lost boy. Only a slave boy left to wander in the streets of a strange city during troublous times of war, his fate uncertain—lost some fifty years ago—yet the homely tragedy will appeal to the sympathies of every mother who reads these lines. The "master" who wrought this suffering has long been dead yet the sorrow he caused lives on and will never cease until the feeble old negress has closed her eyes in death.

Asked if the slaves were not treated kindly, grandmother replied that she almost always had good treatment, in fact had nothing to complain of until the young master took her sister and her son away. She added that "young missus" proffered to teach her to read but she was so busy with her work and with her own children that she thought she did not have the time. The "missus" would say. "Harriet you will regret this some day, I wish you would try to learn, I am willing to teach you anything if you will put your mind to learning."

The old woman will shake her head sadly and say "I have lived to regret that I can not read my own letters from my grandson John who is in the army—how I wish I could."

After the emancipation with a large company of her race she says she was taken to Washington, the cry of "On to Washington" had given way to extravagant tales of what the government meant to do for the freed people; they were promised shelter and care and a forty acre tract of land each. Somehow to the mind of the old woman this unfulfilled promise has never been explained away and she does not know that unscrupulous persons not connected with the government talked without authority. She adds "I never saw my forty acres and now it would be no use to me—'twould be more trouble than good." Then showing her misconception of numbers she said—"no matter now, maby after I's dead I'll be allowed forty feet to rest in. What interests me most is whether I's prepared to go—if I's all right before God where or how I's buried will make no difference."

From Washington she went to Baltimore and something more than thirty years ago came to New Philadelphia, where she has since lived.

A daughter had married "Uncle Ned" Hunt a colored man of local celebrity, who was eighty two years old past when he married Grandmother Mitchell's daughter his third wife, then only twenty three years old. Mr. and Mrs. Hunt lived here. Grandmother's daughter died leaving several small children. "Uncle Ned" married again, but Mrs. Mitchell remained with her grandchildren. Two grand daughters live with her in the little brown cottage on S. Seventh street. The grandson John Hunt, an officer in the 25th regiment of regulars stationed at Reno, Ok. contributes regularly to her support. John is an honorable and highly esteemed young man, and his care for the grandmother is highly commended here where he was reared from infancy to manhood.

Mrs. Mitchell worked by the day in the homes in this city until age and infirmities caused her to cease from hard labor. She is an interesting relic of the past, a living link from the historical times before the advent of railways, steamboats, electricity, kerosene lamps or any of the modern inventions now accepted as the common necessities of life.

Coal had never been used for fuel in the "Old South" when "grandmother" was young and she remembers vividly that the black stone was broken on the highways its value as fuel all undreamed of. The method of travel was the stage coach or "Flying Dutchman". Forty-five years ago, at least, grandmother saw her first electric light. Now her tiny cottage is illuminated with a drop incandescent.

Like a peep into romance—a chapter from "The South before the War", is a talk with this interesting, intelligent old woman who has out lived all her children, some of her grand children and even a few great grand children and bids fair to live in remarkable preservation some years to come. This picture is the first and only one "grandmother" ever had taken.