

“CHRISTMAS DAYS
IN OLD VIRGINIA,” DECEMBER 1907

IN VIRGINIA, where I was born, Christmas lasts not one day but a week, sometimes longer — at least, that is the way it was in the old slave days. Looking back to those days, when Christmas, for me, was a much more momentous event than it is now, it seems to me that there was a certain charm about that Virginia Christmas time, a peculiar fragrance in the atmosphere, a something which I cannot define, and which does not exist elsewhere in the same degree, where it has been my privilege to spend the Christmas season.

In the first place, more is made of the Christmas season in Virginia, or used to be, than in most other states. Furthermore, at the time to which I refer, people lived more in the country than they do now; and the country, rather than the city, is the place for one to get real wholesome enjoyment out of the Christmas season. There is nothing in a crowded city life that can approach the happiness and general good feeling which one may have in the country, especially when the snow is upon the ground, the trees are glittering with icicles, and the Christmas odors are in the air.

Christmas was the great event of the whole year to the slaves throughout the South, and in Virginia, during the days of slavery, the colored people used to begin getting ready for Christmas weeks beforehand. It was the season when, in many cases, the slaves who had been hired out to other masters came home to visit their families. Perhaps the husband had been away from his wife for twelve months; he was permitted on Christmas to come home. Perhaps children had been hired out in another part of the state, or another part of the

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