

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON · *Autobiographical Writings*

time a break would come. Everybody would be invited to a grove or some convenient place for supper, which was served in a sumptuous manner. After an hour, perhaps, spent around the table, the corn-shucking, with more music, was begun again, and continued until late into the night, often into the early hours of the morning.

This was one of the incidents which usually preceded a Virginia Christmas time. There is another which I still vividly remember. It was at this season that the year's crop of hogs was killed, and the meat for the ensuing year was cured and stored away in the smoke-house. This came, as a rule, during the week before Christmas, and was, as I recollect it, one of the annual diversions of plantation life. I recall the great blazing fire flaring up in the darkness of the night, and grown men and women moving about in the flickering shadows. I remember with what feelings of mingled horror and hungry anticipation I looked at the long rows of hogs hung on the fence-rail, preparatory to being cut up and salted away for the year. For days after this event every slave cabin was supplied with materials for a sumptuous feast.

Such simple and commonplace diversions as these broke the monotony of plantation life. Coming directly as they did before the Christmas holidays, they served to emphasize in the minds of the slaves the joyous season they ushered in.

Christmas itself, as I have said, meant a cessation of work for a week at least, and often as long as ten days. Christmas day the slaves would each receive something in the way of a present. The master who gave no present to his slaves was looked down upon by his fellow-masters. He was considered unworthy to be classed among slave-holding aristocracy. The presents, in most cases, consisted of a new suit of clothes, or a new pair of shoes. I remember that the first pair of shoes I ever had the opportunity of wearing came to me in the shape of a Christmas present. Later on, when the war was going on between the North and South, we felt the pinch of hard times on our plantation. I received as a Christmas present a pair of wooden shoes — that is, the uppers were composed of leather, but the soles were composed of hickory wood.

In those days, the old people, as well as the young, used to hang up their stockings. The household slaves, and many of those who worked in the field as well, would hang their stockings in their master's or mistress's rooms. The children usually hung their stockings in the