

Interview with Cane Cook, African-American Sharecropper, with Reverend H.W. Pierson, 1870

STATEMENT OF CANE COOK.

Cane Cook now lives near Americus, Sumter County, Georgia. I heard through the colored people of the inhuman outrages committed upon him, and sent word to him to come to me if possible, that I might get a statement of the facts from his own lips. With the greatest difficulty he got into the cars at Americus, and came here to-day. He says:

"I worked for Robert Hodges, last year, who lives about two and-a-half miles from Andersonville, Georgia. I had my own stock, and rented land from him, agreeing to give him one-third of the corn, and one-fourth of the cotton for rent. We divided the corn by the wagon load, and had no trouble about that I made three bags of cotton, weighing 506, 511, and 479 pounds when it was packed. Mr. Hodges weighed it again, and I don't know what he has got it down, but that was the right weight; one-fourth was his, and three-fourths mine.

He told me he would buy my cotton and pay me the market price, which was twenty-one cents that day, and I told him he might have it. I got some meat and corn and other things from him during the year, and he paid me \$50 in cash Christmas. I went to him last Friday a week ago, (January 29th, 1869) for a settlement. When he read over his account he had a gallon of syrup charged to me, and I told him I had not had any syrup of him. He asked me if I disputed his word I told him that I did not want to dispute his word, but I had not had any syrup from him. He got up very angry, and took a large hickory stick and came towards me. I went backwards towards the door, and he followed me.

He is a strong man and I did not want to have any trouble with him, and I gave him no impudence. I had a small piece of clap-board in my hand, that I had walked with. He told me to throw it down. I made no attempt to strike him, but held it up to keep off his blow. I went backwards to the door and to the edge of the porch, and he followed me. As I turned to go down the steps--there are four steps--he struck me a powerful blow on the back of my head, and I fell from the porch to the ground I was not entirely senseless, but I was stiff and could not move hand or foot. I lay a long time--I do not know how long--but he did not touch me. Jolly Low was at work upon the house, and he came down where I was, and Mr. Hodges told him he might lift me up if he was a mind to. He lifted me up and set me on the steps.

Mr. Hodges then sent about three miles for Dr. Westbrook, and he came and bled me in both arms; but I was so cold my left arm would not bleed at all, and my right arm bled but a very little. The Doctor then told me to go to my friend's house and let him take care of me. Two colored men--Anthony Dukes and Edward Corrillus--took me under each arm and carried me to Burrell Corrillus' house, about one hundred and fifty yards. I could not bear my weight upon my feet or stand at all. The Doctor rode by and told Mrs. Corrillus to take good care of me and keep me there a couple of days. I staid there until Sunday afternoon, when two men lifted me into a buggy and Mr. Corrillus carried me to my wife near Americus. My hands, arms, back, and legs are almost useless. I have not been able to lift a bit of food

to my mouth. I have to be fed like a baby. I have not gone before any of the courts I have no money to pay a lawyer, and I know it would do no good. Mr. Hodges has not paid me for my cotton, and says he will not settle with me, but will settle with any man I will send him. While I lay before his door he told me that if I died he would pay my wife \$50. I hope there will be some law sometime for us poor oppressed people. If we could only get land and have homes we could get along; but they won't sell us any land."

Andersonville, Ga., Feb. 7, 1869.

Mr. Cook is about fifty years old, has a large frame, has been an industrious, hard-working man, but is now almost entirely paralyzed and helpless. He is the most shattered, complete, and pitiable wreck from human violence I have ever seen. Mr. Hedges, I am told, owns about six thousand acres of land, and is one of the most prominent and respected citizens of Sumter county. He is a Methodist preacher, and Mr. Reese informs me, as I write, that he has heard him preach a great many times in the last twenty years to both white and colored people at camp-meetings and different meeting-houses in this region. He refuses to sell any of his land to the colored people, and will not allow them to build a school-house on it.