



## My Life as a Slave (1884)

*Charles Stewart*

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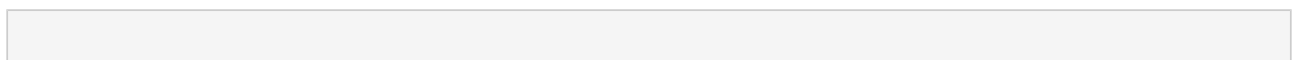
*Charles Stewart*

## **My Life as a Slave (1884)** Charles Stewart

THE following autobiographical narrative has been taken down almost verbatim from the lips of its hero, an old negro man, who has dictated or told the whole of it with absolutely no help but his own memory. He does not read at all or of course, write either, though he once knew his alphabet, and there are none of his contemporaries alive in this part of the country, all the older members of his last owner's family, with whom he still remains, being dead, and none of those among them, to whom old Charles has been a life-long servant and friend, I might almost say necessity, knowing anything about the names and dates of races and race-horses, which are given exactly as he remembers them. Nothing throughout has been altered in any way except to make the details as consecutive the dialect as intelligible as possible, and perhaps it may be as well to add here the acts necessary to complete his story. He does not exaggerate in any way his life in Virginia; he was the favorite and trusted servant of Colonel Johnson during his whole career with him, was in charge of first one training stable, then another, and for several years was employed with the entire care of valuable race-horses and and-horses, which he took from place to place and course to course in Kentucky, among others, as he mentions, Monsieur Tonson and Medley. At such a distance from his master, and unable even to read his letters of instruction himself, he yet discharged his duties excellently, keeping long accounts in his head, and handling the large sums of money which were constantly passing through his hands with scrupulous accuracy and care. All these facts about him are gathered from letters, family tradition, and the direct report of his masters to the writer's mother, all of which confirm his own perfectly literal and impartial statements. When purchased by Judge Porter, of Louisiana, he was at once placed in charge of a racing establishment where there were never less than twelve horses in training, and which kept forty or forty-five men and boys constantly employed. It "was a position of much care and responsibility, for there was a race-course on the plantation which was a favorite centre for turfmen, and Charles was called upon to train horses for this or that gentleman so frequently that he was compelled to establish a system, and undertake so much and no more. After Judge Porter's death, in 1843, Charles remained in his new home in the service of his late owner's brother, who left him where he found him, as head trainer; and in that position, travelling every spring and autumn to one course or another as the horses went to fulfill their engagements, he continued until his master's death, and the consequent breaking up of the racing establishment, reduced him to the less glorious level of family coachman, and general "boss" of everything in the way of horseflesh on the place. During 'the war he never left his mistress, who was alone on the plantation during the whole period, for a single day. and since its close he has been the constant, never-failing factotum, adherent, and. as he calls it 'pendence' of the whole family.

About ten days ago the writer said to him : "Uncle Charles, I want you to come in this evening and tell me all you can remember that ever happened to you, from the very beginning, and let me see if I can not write it down so that people can read it. You have told me so many things about when you were young, I want to put it all down together in black and white. " The old man was deeply interested at once, and when he fully understood the object in view, his pride and delight exceeded all bounds.

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