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CHAPTER VI MY MARRIAGE. MY WIFE AND CHILDREN

After I obtained my freedom I felt at liberty to marry if I could find a suitable companion to take with me upon the matrimonial voyage. As some vessels have stranded on that sea, matrimony, because the second mate was not well suited for the place occupied, I did not want a mate who could not be trusted at the helm in my absence.

In my search for a suitable mate I came to Westminster, where I met Miss Margaret Coone, a young woman of much force of character and real worth. After becoming well acquainted we concluded that we would be companions for life, and on the 15th day of May, 1831, we were joined together in the holy bonds of matrimony and lived happily together till the 13th of February, 1870, when the union was broken by the cruel hand of death.

My wife was born a slave in Westminster, Carroll county, Maryland, June 3, 1809. Her mistress was Mrs. Grand Adams, a German lady of considerable wealth. She had no children or relatives in this country, and at her death my wife and her mother were set free and all of her personal property left to them, and eight hundred dollars were left so the interest went to my wife's mother as long as she lived, and at her death to my wife as long as she lived.

The balance of Mrs. Grand Adams' money and real estate was left to the Catholic Church. I think that my wife's mother had a life interest in the real estate, but was cheated out of it, as she was defrauded of the most of her personal property by persons who took the advantage of her ignorance.

My wife was only eight years old when set free, yet she remembered how her mother was deceived by would-be friends, who would come to her with a bill or agreement for her to sign, saying that it would be to her interest to sign the paper. Soon after that act a horse or a cow would be sold from her or some other property, till all had been taken from an illiterate ex-slave by satan's tools.

The great number of wrongs that have been heaped upon my people in this line and is still being done in free America will never be known in this world, but thank God, when all shall appear before a just Judge at the bar of justice the wrongdoers will receive their due reward, the eternal punishment which they richly deserve.

My wife not having any schooling never learned to read and write, but she had a very strong memory and good natural ability. She could calculate quickly and accurately any amount that came in her line of business. Those who could use the pencil had to be very swift if she did not calculate sooner than they.

She often carried our produce to Baltimore, and at the same time take a number of articles for our neighbors, which she would sell wherever she thought she could do the best. She would bring the things we needed and what the neighbors desired from the city. She would then tell what she got for each article sold, what she paid for each article bought, then I would help to count the receipts, expenditures and money in hand, and the account would always prove correct.

Her memory was simply phenomenal. She was a woman of good judgment and great push and energy, and when she made up her mind to do anything she generally did it.

As a housekeeper she had but few equals. She usually made and cut everything I and the children wore, except shoes and hats. She could shear the sheep, card the wool, spin the yarn and knit the socks. She could plow the ground, sow the flaxseed, pull the flax, thresh it, put it out to rot, break the flax and spin it. She was a splendid cook and baker. Her ginger and sugar cakes were known far and wide. She was very fond of good eatings, and would have them if planning and hard work would bring them.

She was a good nurse and midwife, and in later years did much in that line. My wife was a very kind and peaceable neighbor, and would deny herself in order to oblige a friend. It was her aim to make others happy. But she seldom forgave the injuries of others done to her or her friends, and had no more use for anyone whom she had befriended and refused to do likewise to her.

She could speak German as fluently as English, that being her first language, and could talk Pennsylvania Dutch readily.

Our German neighbors delighted in coming to our house, because they found one with whom they could talk with pleasure. I learned some words in German, but not enough to be of service to me.

My wife did outdoor work as well as housework. I used to cut wood by the cord, and would go to the woods before daylight and have my wife to bring my breakfast to me. While I ate wife would cord up the wood I had cut, and many cords did she put up for me in that way.

When I went to farming she helped me and the boys in many lines of farmwork. She made a hand in the hayfield or grainfield with the ease of a man. She could plow corn, plant corn, top corn, strip blades, husk corn, haul corn or anything else needed to be done she did not turn her back upon it.

I might write a book of my wife's life that might interest many, but I did not start to do that, and must desist.

We were blessed with many children, fourteen in number, eight boys and six girls. Six have died and eight still live. Four—three boys and one girl—died while very young, and the two youngest boys died while young men, the one nearly fifteen years old and the other nearly twenty.