

# Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom

(1897)

Excerpts: Enslavement & Emancipation during the Civil War

by Louis Hughes

## CH. III. SLAVERY AND THE WAR OF THE REBELLION.

### BEGINNING OF THE WAR

I remember well when Abraham Lincoln was elected [Nov. 1860]. Boss and the madam had been reading the papers, when he broke out with the exclamation: "The very idea of electing an old rail splitter to the presidency of the United States! Well, he'll never take his seat." When Lincoln was inaugurated [March 1861], Boss, old Master Jack and a great company of men met at our house to discuss the matter, and they were wild with excitement. Was not this excitement an admission that their confidence in their ability to whip the Yankees, five or six to one, was not so strong as they pretended?

The war had been talked of for some time, but at last it came. When the rebels fired upon Fort Sumter [April 1861], then great excitement arose. The next day when I drove Boss to town, he went into the store of one Williams, a merchant, and when he came out, he stepped to the carriage, and said: "What do you think? Old Abraham Lincoln has called for four hundred thousand men to come to Washington immediately. Well, let them come; we will make a breakfast of them. I can whip a half dozen Yankees with my pocket knife." This was the chief topic everywhere. Soon after this Boss bought himself a six shooter. I had to mold the bullets for him, and every afternoon he would go out to practice. By his direction, I fixed a large piece of white paper on the back fence, and in the center of it put a large black dot. At this mark he would fire away, expecting to hit it; but he did not succeed well. He would some- times miss the fence entirely, the ball going out into the woods beyond. Each time he would shoot I would have to run down to the fence to see how near he came to the mark. When he came very near to it — within an inch or so, he would say laughingly: "Ah! I would have got him that time" (meaning a Yankee soldier.) There was something very ludicrous in this pistol practice of a man who boasted that he could whip half a dozen Yankees with a jackknife. Every day for a month this business, so tiresome to me, went on.

Boss was very brave until it came time for him to go to war, when his courage oozed out, and he sent a substitute; he remaining at home as a "home guard." One day when I came back with the papers from the city, the house was soon ringing with cries of victory. Boss said: "Why, that was a great battle at Bull Run. If our men had only known, at first, what they afterwards found out, they would have wiped all the Yankees out, and succeeded in taking Washington." . . .

### INCIDENTS

Ever since the beginning of the war, and the slaves had heard that possibly they might some time be free, they seemed unspeakably happy. They were afraid to let the masters know that they ever thought of such a thing, and they never dreamed of speaking about it except among themselves. They were a happy race, poor souls! notwithstanding their downtrodden condition. They would laugh and chat about freedom in their cabins; and many a little rhyme about it originated among them, and was softly sung over their work. I remember a song that Aunt Kitty, the cook at Master Jack's, used to sing. It ran something like this:

There'll be no more talk about Monday, by and by, But every day will be Sunday, by and by. The old woman was singing, or rather humming, it one day, and old lady McGee heard her. She was busy getting her dinner, and I suppose never realized she was singing such an incendiary piece, when old Mrs. McGee broke in upon her: "Don't think you are going to be free; you darkies were made by God and ordained to wait upon us."

Those passages of Scripture which refer to master and servants were always cited to us when we heard the Word preached; and they were interpreted as meaning that the relation of master and slave was right and proper — that they were rightly the masters and we the slaves.

I remember, not long after Jeff Davis had been elected president of the Confederacy, that I happened to hear old Master Jack talking to some of the members of the family about the war, etc. All at once the old man broke out: “And what do you think! that rascal, Abraham Lincoln, has called for 300,000 more men. What is Jeff Davis doin’ – doin’?” He talked on, and seemed so angry that he gave no one a dare to answer: “Jeff Davis is a grand rascal – rascal,” said he, “he ought to go into the field himself.” At first all the Southerners were jubilant over Davis; but as they were losing so, and the Unionists gaining, they grew angry and denounced him oftentimes in unsparing terms.

### **UNION RAID AT MASTER’S FARM**

During the time the Union headquarters were at Helena, a Union gun-boat came down the river as far as Bolivar and stopped at Miles McGee’s. The soldiers made a raid through the farm, taking chickens, turkeys, meat and everything that they could lay hands on. During this raid Miles McGee came out of the house with a gun and shot the commanding officer of the party. He became alarmed over what he had done and hid in the cabin of one of the servants. He never came near the house. The Union soldiers came three different times to catch him, but never succeeded. The last time they came, he made for the canebrake and hid himself there until they were gone. But though he had escaped their righteous vengeance, he became so nervous that he left his hiding place in the canebrake and went to Atlanta, Ga., and stayed there among friends until things became more quiet. At last wearying of this, he determined to return to old Master Jack’s, but not to his own home. Word had been received of his coming, and great preparations were made for his reception. After he had started on his return, he was taken ill on the train, and was left at a small town called Jackson, where he soon died.

I drove the family to the depot upon the day of his expected arrival, and as the train came in, the women waved their handkerchiefs; and, when the conductor stepped off, they asked him if Mr. McGee was aboard. He said no – “I have his remains.” The scene that followed, I can not describe – such wailing and screaming! I could not but feel sad, even though they had treated me so meanly, causing the death of my children<sup>1</sup> and separating me from my wife. Their grief was indeed great. The sad news was conveyed to his mother, old Mrs. Jack McGee, at the house by an advance messenger, and we soon followed with the body. He was the favorite son of his mother, and her grief was very great. But for his wanton shooting of the Union officer, he would probably not have met his death as he did.

### **UNION SOLDIERS PASS THE PANOLA HOME**

One winter night, while I was at old Master Jack’s,<sup>2</sup> I was awakened by a rumbling noise like that of heavy wagons, which continued steadily and so long a time that I finally concluded it must be an army passing, and such I found to be the case, upon getting up and venturing out, the rumbling which had awakened me being caused by the passing artillery.

I was afraid to go out straight to the soldiers, but would take a few steps at a time, then stop and listen behind a tree or the shrubbery. All seemed quiet – there was no talking. I had listened about twenty minutes when there seemed to be a halt at the creek, some distance from the house. Soon afterwards I heard the command given: “Forward!” I at once made up my mind that they were Yankee soldiers. I got on my knees and crawled to the fence, not daring to go openly, fearing that they might hear or see me and shoot, supposing me to be a spy. I went back into the house and told my wife that they were Yankees who had just passed. “Uncle George,” said I, “this would be a good time for us to go.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hughes’s twin infants had died from malnourishment, as Hughes’s wife was overworked as a punishment for escaping and was thus unable to nurse the children sufficiently.

<sup>2</sup> Jack McGee, the slaveholder’s brother, lived near the Edward McGee plantation.

<sup>3</sup> By this time, Hughes had made four unsuccessful escape attempts.

“Oh, no,” said he, “we are not quite ready.” Uncle George’s cabin was where my wife and I stayed

while at old Master Jack's.

In the morning I to carry a parcel to Como, a place not far from home, to Mr. James McGee, who was in the rebel army. It was not quite daylight when I made ready to go on my trip, for I was anxious to find out more about the soldiers. Going to the stable and saddling my horse, I mounted and rode out to the big gate leading to the main road, just as day was dawning. As I dismounted to open the gate, some soldiers were passing and an officer sung out to me, "Hello! which way are you going." I said "to Como, to carry this parcel of clothing to my young master in the war." "You have a fine horse," said the officer, "I guess I will exchange horses with you." He took my package of clothing and some letters which I had to mail and my horse, leaving me his, which was a very poor animal. I was badly scared at this performance, fearing that I would be severely whipped for the loss of the horse and package. Yet how could I help it? We knew nothing but to serve a white man, no matter what he asked or commanded. As a matter of course, I did not go to Como, as I had nothing to take – the officer had everything, but went back to the cabin.

I supposed that the soldiers had all passed; but in about half an hour Aunt Kitty, on looking out of her cabin window, exclaimed: "My God! just look at the soldiers!" The yard was covered with the blue coats. Another venerable slave said: "My Lord! de year of jubilee am come." During the excitement I ran to the big house and told the madam that the Yankees were there and had taken my horse and everything I had. Old Master Jack had heard the news but was not able to come out. He had arisen, but, when he knew of the presence of the Yankees, he went back to bed, calling for Kitty to get him a mush poultice. "Tell Kitty-ity-ity to get me a mush poultice-oltice." It was customary, after the beginning of the war, for him to take sick, and call for a poultice to be put upon his stomach whenever he heard of the Yankees being near. He and many like him were especially valorous only when the blue coats were far away. The soldiers went into the dairy and drank all the milk, helped themselves to butter, cheese, meat, bread and everything in sight which they wanted. Nothing was said to them by the white folks, but the slaves were glad, and whispered to each other: "Ah! we's goin' to be free." Old Master Jack, lying on his couch would ask every little while: "Where are they? Are they gone?" After they had all left the premises, he said: "My God! I can't stand it. Them devils-evils are just goin' through the country destroyin' everything." I was sent down to get Uncle Peter for old master, and when Peter came up the old man asked: "Well, did any of the servants go away? And, sir, them devils took Louis' horse and the clothes he had for his young master."

## **HIDING VALUABLES FROM THE YANKEES**

Right after this the McGees commenced planning to put away their valuables, to keep them from the Union soldiers. All the servants had to fill up their bed-ticks with fine gin cotton – the lint part – for safe keeping. Great boxes and barrels were packed full of their best things and put into the cellar under the house. It was not exactly a cellar, but a large shallow excavation which held a great deal. We put all the solid silver ware, such as cake baskets, trays, spoons, forks, dishes, etc., in boxes, and buried them under the hen house. Great packages of the finest clothing I had to make up, and these were given in charge of certain servants whose duty it was to run into the big house and get them, whenever they heard that the Yankees were coming, and take them to their cabins. This was a shrewd arrangement, for the soldiers never went into the cabins to get anything. When the soldiers had passed, these packages were taken back to the house. It speaks well for the honesty and faithfulness of the slaves that such trusts could be devolved upon them, notwithstanding all the cruelties inflicted upon them by their masters.

## **DEATH TO RUNAWAY SLAVES**

It was about this time, that the law or regulation of the rebel government was promulgated, authorizing or directing the shooting or hanging of any slave caught trying to get away to the Union army. This barbarous law was carried out in many cases, for every little while we would hear of some slave who was caught running away, and hung or shot. A slave belonging to Boss ran away and got safely within the Union lines; but he returned to get his sister. They both got away from the house but had gone only a few miles when William McGee overtook them and shot the man dead. William boasted of this but told Uncle Peter, the foreman, that he never wanted it mentioned.

## **SLAVES HUNG AND LEFT TO ROT AS A WARNING**

Two slaves belonging to one Wallace, one of our nearest neighbors, had tried to escape to the Union soldiers, but were caught, brought back and hung. All of our servants were called up, told every detail of the runaway and capture of the poor creatures and their shocking murder, and then compelled to go and see them where they hung. I never shall forget the horror of the scene – it was sickening.

The bodies hung at the roadside, where the execution took place, until the blue flies literally swarmed around them, and the stench was fearful. This barbarous spectacle was for the purpose of showing the passing slaves what would be the fate of those caught in the attempt to escape, and to secure the circulation of the details of the awful affair among them throughout all the neighborhood. It is difficult at this day for those not familiar with the atrocities of the institution of slavery to believe that such scenes could ever have been witnessed in this or any other civilized land, as a result simply of a human being's effort to reach a portion of the country where the freedom of which it was said to be the home, could be enjoyed without molestation. Yet such was the horrible truth in not one case alone, but in many, as I know only too well. . . .

## **CH. IV. REBELLION WEAKENING – SLAVES' HOPES STRENGTHENING.**

### **MY FIFTH STRIKE FOR FREEDOM IS A SUCCESS**

We had remained at old Jack's until June 1865 and had tried to be content. The Union soldiers were still raiding all through that section. Every day some town would be taken, and the slaves would secretly rejoice. After we came back from Alabama<sup>4</sup> we were held with a tighter rein than ever. We were not allowed to go outside of the premises. George Washington, a fellow servant, and Kitty, his wife, and I had talked considerably about the Yankees, and how we might get away. We knew it was our right to be free, for the proclamation had long been issued [Jan. 1863] – yet they still held us. I did not talk much to my wife about going away, as she was always so afraid I would be killed, and did not want me to try any more to escape. But George, his wife, and I continued to discuss the matter whenever we had a chance. We knew that Memphis was headquarters for the Union troops, but how to reach it was the great question.

It was Sunday, and I had driven one portion of the family to church, and George the other. The family was now very large, as the madam and her family were there, in addition to Old Master Jack's, and all could not go in one carriage. On the way back, young William McGee came up through the farm on horseback, a nearer way home from church, and encountered several servants belonging to some of the neighbors. He asked them what they were doing there, and if they had passes. To this last question all answered no. "Well," said he, "never come here again without having passes, all of you." At this they all quickly disappeared. When Old Jack came home, Will told him what had passed, and he immediately called for George and Uncle Peter, the foreman, and told them that no one not belonging there was to come into the quarters without a pass, and any servant with a pass should be brought to the house, that the pass might be inspected. They thought, or feared, that if the servants were permitted to come together freely they might plan ways of escape and communicate to each other what they knew about the war and the Yankees. George came out, and finding me, told me what they had said. "No slave from outside is to be allowed on the place," said he. I replied: "If we listen to them we shall be here until Christmas comes again." "What do you mean?" asked George. "I mean that now, today, is the time to make a start."

So, late in the afternoon, during the servants' prayer meeting, of which I have heretofore spoken, we thought would be a good time to get away, as no one would be likely to see us. We talked with John Smith, another servant, and told him all about our plan, asking him not to say a word about our being gone until he was through feeding the stock. This would give us another hour to advance on our journey, as the feeding usually took about that time – from six o'clock until seven. Our fear was that we might be overtaken by the bloodhounds, and therefore we wished to get as far away as possible before the white people knew we were gone. It was Sunday afternoon, June 26th, 1865, when George and I, having made ready for the start for the Union lines, went to bid our wives good-bye. I told my wife to cheer up, as I was coming again to get her. I said to Kitty, George's wife: "We are going, but look for us again. It will not be with us as with so many others who have gone away, leaving their families and never returning for them. We will be here again."

<sup>4</sup> In 1862 McGee moved his slaves eastward, some (including Hughes) to Alabama and some (including Hughes's wife), to Atlanta, Georgia.

She looked up at me, smiling, and with a look of resolution, said: "I'll be ready." She was of a firm,

daring nature – I did not fear to tell her all my plans. As my wife was so timid, I said as little as possible to her. George and I hurriedly said our farewells to our wives. The parting was heart-rending, for we knew the dangers were great, and the chances were almost even that we should not meet again. I could hardly leave my wife, her agitation and grief were so great. But we were off in a few moments.

We crept through the orchard, passing through farm after farm until we struck the railroad, about seven miles from home. We followed this road until we reached Senatobia, about half past seven in the evening. We felt good, and, stopping all night, we started the next morning for Hernando, Miss., another small town, and reached there at two o'clock in the afternoon. The most of the bridges had been burned by the troops, and there were no regular railroad trains. Fortunately, however, flatcars, drawn by horses were run over the road; and on a train of this kind we took passage. On several occasions, the passengers had to get out, and push the car over a bridge, as it was not made so horses could cross on it, the horses meantime being driven or led through the stream, and then hitched to the car again.

After we had gone through this process repeatedly, we at last reached Memphis, arriving about seven o'clock Monday evening. The city was filled with slaves from all over the south, who cheered and gave us a welcome. I could scarcely recognize Memphis, things were so changed. We met numbers of our fellow servants who had run away before us, when the war began. Tuesday and Wednesday we spent in making inquiries, and I visited our old home at McGee's station. But how different it was from what it had been when the McGees were there. All was changed. Thursday we went to see Col. Walker, a Union officer, who looked after the colored folks, and saw that they had their rights. When we reached his office we found it so filled with people waiting to see him that we were delayed about two hours before we had an opportunity of speaking with him. When our turn came, we went in and told him that we were citizens of Memphis until the fall of Fort Pillow and Donelson, when our master had run us off with a hundred other slaves into Mississippi and thence to the salt works in Alabama. He questioned us as to where we lived in Memphis. I answered: "What is now headquarters of the Union forces was the home of master, Mr. Edmund McGee, who is now dead." After a few minutes, I said: "Colonel, we want protection to go back to Mississippi after our wives, who are still held as slaves." He replied: "You are both free men to go and come as you please." "Why," said I, "Colonel, if we go back to Mississippi they will shoot the gizzards out of us." "Well," said he, "I cannot grant your request. I would be overrun with similar applications, but I will tell you what you can do. There are hundreds of just such men as you want, who would be glad of such a scout." We thanked him and left.

## **GOING BACK FOR OUR WIVES**

After carefully considering the matter, we concluded to go back to Senatobia and see the captain of the Union troops there. The next day, Friday, we hired a two-horse wagon and made preparations to start on our perilous undertaking Saturday morning. It was our hope to find someone at Senatobia to go with us to Panola and protect us in the effort to bring away our wives. So, early in the morning, we set out. Our first stop was at Big Springs camping ground, where we made preparations for refreshing ourselves and spending the night. Just as we had finished building a fire, for cooking and keeping off the mosquitoes, two soldiers came riding up to the spring. "Hello," said one, "which way are you traveling?" "We are just from Memphis," said George. "Have you any whisky?" asked one of them. We replied "yes." "Will you give a fellow a horn?" We answered the question by handing them the bottle.

While they were drinking, George and I stepped aside, and, after a few moments talk, we decided to put the question to them of going with us to get our wives. I asked: "Where are you from?" "Senatobia," replied one. We at once laid our cause before them, telling them what Col. Walker had said regarding our getting someone to go with us on our enterprise. They listened attentively, and when we had finished, one of them asked: "How much whisky have you?" George answered: "Two bottles." "What do you intend to do when you see the captain at Senatobia?" "Lay our complaint before him," said I. "Now my friend," said one of the soldiers, "I am afraid if you go to the captain you will be defeated. But I'll tell you what I'll do. Give my comrade and me one of your bottles of whisky, and we will put you on a straight track. The reason why I say this is that our captain has been sweetened by the rebel farmers. He is invited out to tea by them every evening. I know he will put you off. But I will write a note to some comrades of mine who, I know, will bring you out safe." We agreed at once to this proposition, and gave them the whisky. He wrote the note, and gave it to us, telling us to go to the last tent on the line in the camp, where we would find two

boys to whom we should give it. "They are brave," said he, "and the only two I know of that can help you. If they are not there don't give the note to anyone else, but wait till they come back on Tuesday night. I feel satisfied that they will go and help you out." With these words, they rode off. George and I felt good over our prospects.

## **A HAZARDOUS TRIP**

The next morning was Sunday, and we started on, reaching Senatobia about eleven o'clock. We went into the camp, following the directions given us, to go to the last tent in the line; but, when we reached there, the soldiers were out. We lingered around the grounds a short time, then went back, and found them there. We gave them the note; and, after reading it, they simply asked us where we had stopped our wagon. I told them outside the village. "Go there," said one of them, "and remain until we come out to see you." Shortly they came out; and, after we had told them what we wanted, the distance to McGee's, which was about nineteen miles from Senatobia, and had given them such other information as they desired, they concluded that they would go. "We want to be back," said I, "before daylight Monday morning, because we must not be seen on the road; for we are well known in that section, and, if discovered, would be captured and killed." "Well," said one of the soldiers, "we will have to go back to camp, and arrange to be excused from roll call this evening, before we can make the trip." They went back to camp; and, in about ten minutes they came out again saying: "All is right; we will go." We gave them each ten dollars; and promised, if they brought us out safely, to give each ten dollars more. It was now about half- past eleven o'clock. They had to go to camp and slip their horses out cautiously, so as not to be seen by the captain. In half an hour we were on our way, and, after we had ridden some two miles, we were overtaken by the two soldiers. It was Sunday afternoon; and our having a wagon attracted much attention from the farmers as we passed along. They looked at us so sharply that George and I felt decidedly uneasy, yet we kept up courage and pressed steadily on.

After a long and weary ride we reached old Master Jack's a little after sundown. The soldiers rode into the yard ahead of us, and the first person they met was a servant (Frank) at the woodpile. They said to him: "Go in and tell your master, Mr. McGee, to come out, we want to see him," at the same time asking for Louis' and George's wives. Young William McGee came out and the soldiers said to him: "We want feed for seventy-five head of horses." McGee said: "We have not got it." Just then George and I were coming up. We drove in at the gate, through the grove, and passed the woodpile where McGee and the soldiers were talking. McGee had just replied: "We have not got that much feed to spare – we are almost out." "Well," said the soldiers, "we must have it," and they followed on right after the wagons. As we drove past them, young McGee went running into the house, saying to his mother: "It is Louis and George, and I'll kill one of them to- night." This raised quite an alarm, and the members of the family told him not to do that, as it would ruin them.

As soon as George and I drove up to the first cabin, which was my wife's and Kitty's, we ran in. Kitty met us at the door and said: "I am all ready." She was looking for us. We commenced loading our wagon with our few things. Meanwhile the soldiers had ridden around a few rods and came upon old Master Jack and the minister of the parish, who were watching as guards to keep the slaves from running away to the Yankees. Just think of the outrage upon those poor creatures in forcibly retaining them in slavery long after the proclamation making them free had gone into effect beyond all question! As the soldiers rode up to the two men they said: "Hello! what are you doing here? Why have you not told these two men, Louis and George, that they are free men – that they can go and come as they like?" By this time all the family were aroused, and great excitement prevailed. The soldiers' presence drew all the servants near. George and I hurried to fill up our wagon, telling our wives to get in, as there was no time to lose – we must go at once. In twenty minutes we were all loaded. My wife, Aunt Kitty, and nine other servants followed the wagon. I waited for a few moments for Mary Ellen, sister of my wife, and as she came running out of the white folks' house, she said to her mistress, Mrs. Farrington: "Good-bye; I wish you good luck." "I wish you all the bad luck," said she in a rage. But Mary did not stop to notice her mistress further, and, joining me, we were soon on the road following the wagon.

## **TWO BRAVE MEN**

Those soldiers were brave indeed. Think of the courage and daring involved in this scheme – only two soldiers going into a country of which they knew nothing except that every white man living in it was their enemy. The demand which they made for food for seventy-five horses was a clever ruse, invented by them to alarm the McGees and make them think that there was a troop of horses near by, and that it would not be safe for them to offer any resistance to our going away with our wives. Had they thought that there were but two soldiers, it is certain that they would have endeavored to prevent us getting away again, and one or more of us would undoubtedly have been killed.

As already stated, nine other slaves followed our wagon as it moved off. They had no hats on; some were bare-footed – they had not stopped to get anything, but as soon as they saw a chance to get away they went just as they were at the moment. Aunt Kitty was brave and forethoughtful, for during the week we were gone she had baked and cooked a large amount of substantial food that would keep us from starving while on our journey.

At the first road crossing, the two soldiers thought they saw a large troop of soldiers in the distance, and they galloped ahead of us at full speed, but on arriving at the spot they found that what they had thought soldiers were only a herd of cattle. They rode on to the next crossing; we following as we conveniently could. Each poor slave was busy with his thoughts and his prayers. Now and then one would hear a moan or a word from some of the party. All were scared, even though the soldiers were with us.

We came to the next crossroad and passed that safely. Our fear was that the McGees might get the neighborhood to join them and pursue us, or send the home guards after us, but Providence was seemingly smiling upon us at last, for no one followed or molested us.

We moved on all night until we came to a creek at four o'clock in the morning of Monday. The banks of the creek were very steep, and as the horses and wagon went down into the stream, the mattress on top of the wagon, upon which my wife and her sister's children were sitting, was thrown off into the water. Immediately the horses stopped and became balky. It was such a warm night that they did not want to move on out of the water, and would not start, either, until they got ready. As soon as the soldiers saw the mattress slide off with my wife and the children, one of them plunged into the water with his horse, and, in a minute, brought them all out. All had a good ducking – indeed it seemed like a baptism by immersion. The drenched ones were wrapped in old blankets, and after an hour's delay we were again on our way. The soldiers said: "Now we must leave you; the time is coming when we must be in camp for roll call. If you are not at our camp when roll call is over, we will come back and see about you." We gave them each the second ten dollars, as agreed upon, and just as they rode to the top of the hill they left us.

We had a clear sweep from this point, and we came into Senatobia about nine o'clock in the forenoon. Our two soldier friends, who had brought us out so safely, came out of camp to see us. They cheered us and seemed glad that they had rendered us service. We stopped at the camp until we had dried our clothes and had some breakfast, and then we made our way to Memphis.

## **OUT OF BONDAGE AT LAST**

My wife and her sister were shoeless, and the latter had no hat on – she had hurried out of the house in such excitement that she thought of nothing but getting away. Having to walk some of the way, as all could not ride in the wagon at the same time, we were all tired, dirty and rest-broken, and, on the whole, a pitiful crowd to look at as we came into the city. One venerable old man, bent with age, whose ebony face shone with delight, came running out into the road as we appeared, exclaiming: "Oh! here dey come, God bless 'em! Poor chil'en! they come fannin." We used large palm leaves to fan ourselves with, as we were so warm. Those nine souls that followed us walked the whole distance, arriving shortly after we did.

Thousands of others, in search of the freedom of which they had so long dreamed, flocked into the city of refuge, some having walked hundreds of miles.

It was appropriately the 4th of July [1865] when we arrived, and, aside from the citizens of Memphis, hundreds of colored refugees thronged the streets. Everywhere you looked you could see soldiers. Such a day I don't believe Memphis will ever see again – when so large and so motley a crowd will come together. Our two soldier rescuers looked us up after we were in Memphis and seemed truly glad that we had attained our freedom, and that they had been instrumental in it. Only one thing we regret, and that is that we did not learn their names, but we were in so much trouble and so absorbed in the business which we had in hand – so excited by the perils of our undertaking, that we never thought to ask them their

names, or to what regiment they belonged. Then, after we got to Memphis, though we were most grateful for the service which they had rendered us, we were still so excited by our new condition and surroundings that we thought of little else, and forgot that we had no means of establishing, at a later time, the identity of those to whom we owed so much.

Freedom, that we had so long looked for, had come at last, and we gave praise to God, blessing the day when we met those two heroes. It is true that we should have been free sooner or later; still, but for their assistance, my wife and I might never have met again. If I could not have gone back, which I could never have done alone, until long after, such changes might have occurred as would have separated us for years, if not forever. Thousands were separated in this manner – men escaping to the Union lines, hoping to make a way to return for their families; but, failing in this, and not daring to return alone, never saw their wives or children more. Thanks to God, we were guided to these brave soldiers, and so escaped from so cruel a fate.

## **CH. V. FREEDOM AFTER SLAVERY.**

### **COMING NORTH**

As before stated, we arrived in Memphis on the Fourth of July, 1865. My first effort as a freeman was to get something to do to sustain myself and wife and a babe of a few months, that was born at the salt works. I succeeded in getting a room for us, and went to work the second day driving a public carriage. I made enough to keep us and pay our room rent. By our economy we managed to get on very well. I worked on, hoping to go further north, feeling somehow that it would be better for us there, when one day I ran across a man who knew my wife's mother. He said to me: "Why, your wife's mother went back up the river to Cincinnati. I knew her well and the people to whom she belonged." This information made us eager to take steps to find her. My wife was naturally anxious to follow the clue thus obtained, in hopes of finding her mother, whom she had not seen since the separation at Memphis years before. We therefore concluded to go as far as Cincinnati, at any rate, and endeavor to get some further information of mother.

My wife seemed to gather new strength in learning this news of her mother, meager though it was. After a stay in Memphis of six weeks we went on to Cincinnati, hopeful of meeting some, at least, of the family that, though free, in defiance of justice, had been consigned to cruel and hopeless bondage – bondage in violation of civil as well as moral law. We felt it was almost impossible that we should see anyone that we ever knew; but the man had spoken so earnestly and positively regarding my mother-in-law that we were not without hope. On arriving at Cincinnati, our first inquiry was about her, my wife giving her name and description, and fortunately we came upon a colored man who said he knew of a woman answering to the name and description which my wife gave of her mother, and he directed us to the house where she was stopping. When we reached the place to which we had been directed, my wife not only found her mother but one of her sisters. The meeting was a joyful one to us all. No mortal who has not experienced it can imagine the feeling of those who meet again after long years of enforced separation and hardship and utter ignorance of one another's condition and place of habitation. <sup>(29)</sup>



## Attributions

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