



JACOB STROYER _____

_____ MY LIFE IN THE SOUTH

Third edition, 1885. Excerpts.

Ch. I [Personal Memoir]

Ch. II: Sketches

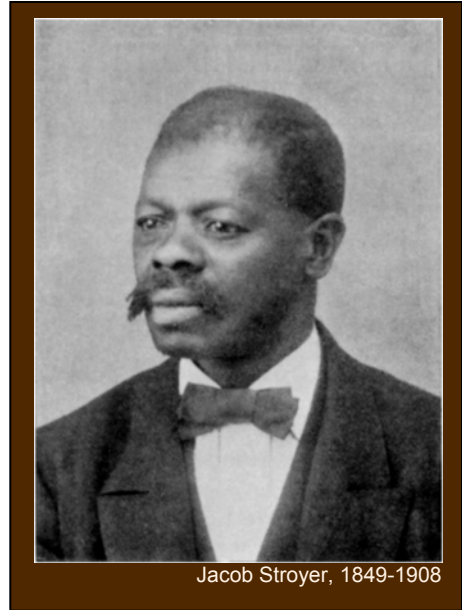
The Sale of My Two Sisters

The Ways the Slaves Lived

The Custom on Christmas

Punishments Inflicted . . .

Runaway Slaves



Jacob Stroyer, 1849-1908

Jacob Stroyer was enslaved in South Carolina from his birth in 1849 until the end of the Civil War. After emancipation in 1865, he moved to Massachusetts and became a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

CHAPTER I

My father was born in Sierra Leone, Africa. Of his parents, and his brothers and sisters, I know nothing, I only remember that it was said that his father's name was Moncoso, and his mother's Mongomo, which names are known only among the native Africans. He was brought from Africa when but a boy, and sold to old Colonel Dick Singleton, who owned a great many plantations in South Carolina, and when the old colonel divided his property among his children, father fell to his second son, Col. M. R. Singleton.

Mother never was sold, but her parents were; they were owned by one Mr. Crough, who sold them and the rest of the slaves, with the plantation, to Col. Dick Singleton, and mother was born on that place. I was born on this extensive plantation twenty-eight miles southeast of Columbia, South Carolina, in the year 1849. I belonged to Col. M[atthew]. R[ichard]. Singleton, and was held in slavery up to the time of the emancipation proclamation issued by President Lincoln.

THE CHILDREN.

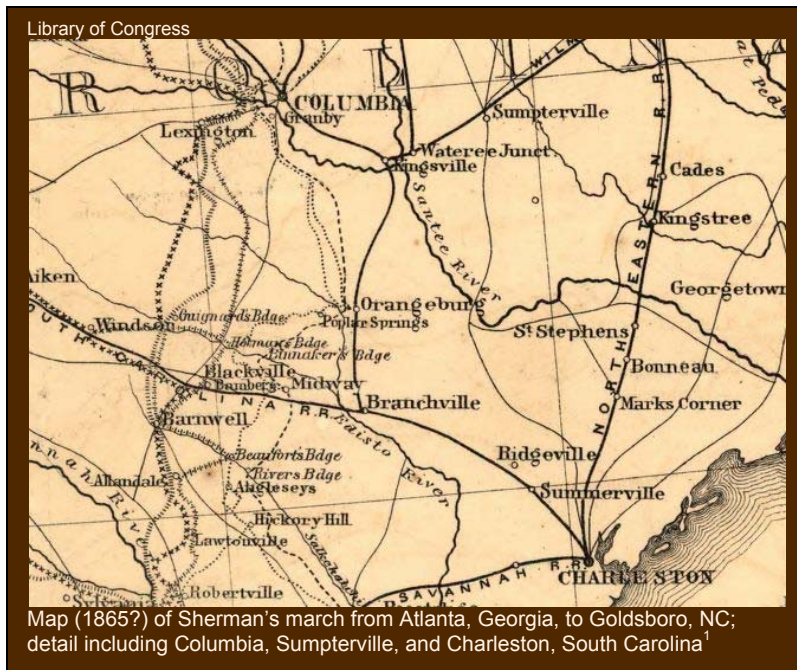
My father had fifteen children: four boys and three girls by his first wife, and eight by his second. Their names were as follows: of the boys, — Toney, Aszerine, Duke and Dezine; of the girls, — Violet, Priscilla, and Lydia. Those of his second wife were as follows: Footy, Embrus, Caleb, Mitchell, Cuffey and Jacob; and of the girls, Catherine and Retta.

SAND-HILL DAYS.

Col. M. R. Singleton was like many other rich slave owners in the South, who had summer seats four, six or eight miles from the plantation, where they carried the little negro boys and girls while they were too small to work.

Our summer seat, or the sand hill, as the slaves used to call it, was four miles from the plantation. Among the four hundred and sixty-five slaves owned by the colonel, there were a great many children. If my readers had visited Col. Singleton's plantation the last of May or the first of June in the days of slavery,

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they would have seen three or four large plantation wagons loaded with little negroes of both sexes, of various complexions and conditions, who were being carried to this summer residence, and among them they would have found the author of this little work, in his sand-hill days.

My readers would naturally ask, how many seasons these children were taken to the summer seats? I answer, until, in the judgment of the overseer, they were large enough to work; then they were kept at the plantation. How were they fed? There were three or four women who were too old to work on the plantation, who were sent as nurses at the summer seat with the

children; they did the cooking. The way in which these old women cooked for 80, and sometimes 150 children, in my sand-hill days, was this, — they had two or three large pots, which held about a bushel each, in which they used to cook corn flour, stirred with large wooden paddles. The food was dealt out with the paddles into each child's little wooden tray or tin pail, which was furnished by the parents according to their ability. . . .

MASTER AND MISTRESS VISITING . . .

I have said that my father was brought from Africa when but a boy, and was sold to old Col. Dick Singleton; and when his children were of age, he divided his plantations among them, and father fell to Col. M. R. Singleton, who was the second son.

On this large plantation there were 465 slaves; there were not so many when first given to Col. M. R., but increased to the above stated number, up to the time of emancipation.

My father was not a field hand; my first recollection of him was that he used to take care of hogs and cows in the swamp, and when too old for that work he was sent to the plantation, to take care of horses and mules, as master had a great many for the use of his farm.

I have stated that father said that his father's name in Africa was Moncoso, and his mother's Mongomo, but I never learned what name he went by before he was brought to this country. I only know that he stated that Col. Dick Singleton gave him the name of William, by which he was known up to the day of his death. Father had a surname, Stroyer, which he could not use in public, as the surname Stroyer would be against the law; he was known only by the name of William Singleton, because that was his master's name. So the title Stroyer was forbidden him, and could be used only by his children after the emancipation of the slaves.

There were two reasons given by the slave holders why they did not allow a slave to use his own name, but rather that of the master. The first was that if he ran away, he would not be so easily detected by using

¹ Map showing route of marches of the army of Genl. W. T. Sherman from Atlanta, Ga., to Goldsboro, N.C.: to accompany the report of operations from Savannah, Ga., to Goldsboro, N.C., Engineer Bureau, War Department, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, [Washington]: The Bureau, [1865?], detail. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Geography & Map Division, Call No. G3871.S5 1865 .U5 CW 90.2.

his own name, as if he used that of his master instead. The second was, that to allow him to use his own name would be sharing an honor which was due only to his master, and that would be too much for a negro, said they, who was nothing more than a servant. So it was held as a crime for the slave to be caught using his own name, which would expose him to severe punishment. But thanks be to God that those days have passed, and we now live under the sun of liberty.

MOTHER.

Mother's name was Chloe. She belonged to Col. M. R. Singleton too; she was a field hand, and never was sold, but her parents were once. . . .

The family from which mother came, the most of them had trades of some kind; some were carpenters, some blacksmiths, some house servants, and others were made drivers over the other negroes. Of course the negro drivers would be under a white man who was called the overseer. Sometimes the negro drivers were a great deal worse to their fellow negroes than the white men.

Mother had an uncle by the name of Esau, whom master thought more of than he did the overseer. Uncle Esau was more cruel than any white man master ever had on his plantation. Many of the slaves used to run away in the woods from him, instead of from the overseer. I have known some of the negroes to run away from the cruel treatment of Uncle Esau, and to stay off eight or ten months. They were so afraid of him that they used to say that they would rather see the devil than to see him; they were glad when he died. But while so much was said of Uncle Esau, which was also true of many other negro drivers, yet the overseers were not free from their portion of cruelty practised upon the defenceless slaves in gone by days.

I have said that the family from which mother came, most of them had trades of some kind; but she had to take her chance in the field with those who had to weather the storm. But my readers are not to think that those whom I have spoken of as having trades were free from punishment, for they were not; some of them had more troubles than the field hands. At times the overseer, who was a white man, would go to the shop of the blacksmith or carpenter, and would pick a quarrel with him, so as to get an opportunity to punish him. He would say to the negro, "Oh, ye think yourself as good as ye master, ye." Of course he knew what the overseer was after, so he was afraid to speak; the overseer, hearing no answer, would turn to him and cry out, "ye so big ye can't speak to me, ye," and then the conflict would begin, and he would give that man such a punishment as would disable him for two or three months. The merciless overseer would say to him, "Ye think because ye have a trade ye are as good as ye master, ye; but I will show ye that ye are nothing but a nigger." . . .

. . . [father] used to take care of horses and mules. I was around with him in the barn yard when but a very small boy; of course that gave me an early relish for the occupation of hostler [horse groomer], and I soon made known my preference to Col. Singleton, who was a sportsman, and had fine horses. And, although I was too small to work, the Colonel granted my request; hence I was allowed to be numbered among those who took care of the fine horses, and learned to ride. But I soon found that my new occupation demanded a little more than I cared for.

It was not long after I had entered my new work before they put me upon the back of a horse which threw me to the ground almost as soon as I reached his back. It hurt me a little, but that was not the worst of it, for when I got up there was a man standing near with a switch in hand, and he immediately began to beat me. Although I was a very bad boy, this was the first time I had been whipped by any one except father and mother, so I cried out in a tone of voice as if I would say, this is the first and last whipping you will give me when father gets hold of you.

When I got away from him I ran to father with all my might, but soon found my expectation blasted, as father very coolly said to me, "go back to your work and be a good boy, for I cannot do anything for you." But that did not satisfy me, so on I went to mother with my complaint and she came out to the man who whipped me; he was a groom, a white man whom master hired to train his horses, as he was a man of

that trade. Mother and he began to talk, then he took a whip and started for her, and she ran from him, talking all the time. I ran back and forth between mother and him until he stopped beating her. After the fight between the groom and mother, he took me back to the stable yard and gave me a severe flogging. And although mother failed to help me at first, still I had faith that when he took me back to the stable yard, and commenced whipping me, that she would come and stop him, but I looked in vain, for she did not come.

Then the idea first came to me that I with my dear father and mother and the rest of my fellow negroes, was doomed to cruel treatment through life, and was defenceless. But when I found that father and mother could not save me from punishment, as they themselves had to submit to the same treatment, I concluded to appeal to the sympathy of the groom, who seemed to have had full control over me; but my pitiful cries never touched his sympathy, for things seemed to grow worse rather than better; so I made up my mind to stem the storm the best I could. . . .



Kensington plantation, main house constructed 1844-1855 by Matthew Richard Singleton, Richland County, South Carolina (photograph after 1933)

I have said that Col. Singleton had fine horses, which he kept for racing, and he owned two very noted ones, named Capt. Miner and Inspector. Perhaps some of my readers have already heard of Capt. Miner, for he was widely known, and won many races in Charleston and Columbia, S. C., also in Augusta, Ga., and New York. He was a dark bay, with short tail. Inspector was a chestnut sorrel, and had the reputation of being a

very great horse. These two horses have won many thousand dollars for the colonel. I rode these two horses a great many times in their practice gallops, but never had the opportunity to ride them in a race before Col. Singleton died, for he did not live long after I had learned so that I could ride for money. . . .

This white man who trained horses for Col. Singleton was named Boney Young; he had a brother named Charles, who trained for the colonel's brother, John Singleton. Charles was a good man, but Boney, our trainer, was as mean as Charles was good; he could smile in the face of one who was suffering the most painful death at his hands.

One day, about two weeks after Boney Young and mother had the conflict, he called me to him, as though he was in his pleasantest mood; he was singing. I ran to him as if to say by action, I will do anything you bid me, willingly. When I got to him he said, "go and bring me a switch, sir." I answered, "yes, sir," and off I went and brought him one; then he said, "come in here, sir;" I answered, "yes, sir;" and I went into a horse's stall, but while I was going in a thousand thoughts passed through my mind as to what he wanted me to go in the stall for, but when I got in I soon learned, for he gave me a first class flogging.

A day or two after that he called me in the same way, and I went again, and he sent me for a switch. I brought him a short stubble that was worn out, which he took, beat me on the head, and then said to me, "go and bring me a switch, sir;" I answered, "yes, sir;" and off I went the second time, and brought him

one very little better than the first; he broke that over my head, also saying, “go and bring me a switch, sir;” I answered, “yes, sir,” and off I went the third time, and brought one which I suppose suited him. Then he said to me, “Come in here, sir,” I answered, “yes, sir.” When I went into the stall, he told me to lie down, and I stooped down; he kicked me around for awhile, then making me lie on my face, he whipped me to his satisfaction.

That evening when I went home to father and mother, I said to them, “Mr. Young is whipping me too much now; I shall not stand it, I shall fight him.” Father said to me, “You must not do that, because if you do he will say that your mother and I advised you to do it, and it will make it hard for your mother and me, as well as for yourself. You must do as I told you, my son: do your work the best you can, and do not say anything.” I said to father, “but I don’t know what I have done that he should whip me; he does not tell me what wrong I have done, he simply calls me to him and whips me when he gets ready.” Father said, “I can do nothing more than to pray to the Lord to hasten the time when these things shall be done away; that is all I can do.” When mother stripped me and looked at the wounds that were upon me, she burst into tears, and said, “if he were not so small I would not mind it so much; this will break his constitution; I am going to master about it, because I know he will not allow Mr. Young to treat this child so.”

And I thought to myself that had mother gone to master about it, it would have helped me some, for he and she grew up together and he thought a great deal of her. But father said to mother, “you better not go to master, for while he might stop the child from being treated badly, Mr. Young may revenge himself through the overseer, for you know that they are very friendly to each other.” So said father to mother, “you would gain nothing in the end; the best thing for us to do is to pray much over it, for I believe that the time will come when this boy with the rest of the children will be free, though we may not live to see it.”

When father spoke of liberty his words were of great comfort to me, and my heart swelled with the hope of a future, which made every moment seem an hour to me.” . . .

Father had a rule, which was strictly carried out as far as possible under the slave law, which was to put his children to bed early; but that night the whole family sat up late, while father and mother talked over the matter. It was a custom among the slaves not to allow their children under certain ages to enter into conversation with them; hence we could take no part with father and mother. As I was the object of their sympathy, I was allowed the privilege of answering the questions about the whipping the groom gave me.

When the time came for us to go to bed we all knelt down in family prayer, as was our custom; father’s prayer seemed more real to me that night than ever before, especially in the words, “Lord, hasten the time when these children shall be their own free men and women.”

My faith in father’s prayer made me think that the Lord would answer him at the farthest in two or three weeks, but it was fully six years before it came and father had been dead two years before the war.

After prayer we all went to bed; next morning father went to his work in the barn yard, mother to hers in the field, and I to mine among the horses; before I started, however, father charged me carefully to keep his advice, as he said that would be the easiest way for me to get along.

But in spite of father’s advice, I had made up my mind not to submit to the treatment of Mr. Young as before, seeing that it did not help me any. Things went smoothly for a while, until he called me to him, and ordered me to bring him a switch. I told him that I would bring him no more switches for him to whip me with, but that he must get them himself. After repeating the command very impatiently, and I refusing, he called to another boy named Hardy, who brought the switch, and then taking me into the stall he whipped me unmercifully.

After that he made me run back and forth every morning from a half to three quarters of an hour about two hundred and fifty yards, and every now and then he would run after me, and whip me to make me run

faster. Besides that, when I was put upon a horse, if it threw me he would whip me if it were five times a day. So I did not gain anything by refusing to bring switches for him to whip me with. . . .

Master went away that Spring for the last time, he never returned alive; he died at his summer seat. When they brought his remains home, all of the slaves were allowed to stop at home that day to see the last of



him, and to lament with mistress. After all the slaves who cared to do so had seen his face, they gathered in groups around mistress to comfort her; they shed false tears, saying, “never mind, misses, massa gone home to heaven;” while some were saying this, others said, “Thank God, massa gone home to hell.” Of course the most of them were glad that he was dead; but they were gathered there for the express purpose of comforting mistress. But after master’s death mistress was a great deal worse than he was.

When master died there was a great change of things on the plantation; the creditors came in for settlement, so all of the fine horses, some others, such as carriage horses, and a few mules also were

sold. The slaves whom master bought himself had to be sold, but those who were born on the plantation that were given to him by his father, old Col. Dick Singleton, could not be sold until the grandchildren were of age.

As I stated in a foregoing page, my hardships and trials did not end with the race horses, you will now see them in another form.

After all the fine horses were sold, mistress ordered the men and boys who were taking care of the horses to be put into the field, and I was among them, though small; but I had become so attached to the horses that they could get no work out of me, so they began to whip me, but every time they whipped me I would leave the field and run home to the barnyard.

Finally mistress engaged a very bad man as overseer in place of old Ben Usume, whose name was William Turner; two or three days after he came he took me into the field and whipped me until I was sick, so I went home.

I went to mistress and told her that the overseer whipped me; she asked if I did the work in the field that he gave me. I told her that master promised me that when I got too heavy to ride race horses, he would send me to learn the carpenter’s trade; she asked me if she were to put me to a trade if I would work, and I told her I would, so she did.

But the overseer did not like the idea of having me work at the trade which was my choice. He said to Mistress, “that is the worst thing you can do, madam, to allow a negro to have his choice about what he shall do. I have had some experience as an overseer for many years, and I think I am able to give a correct statement about the nature of negroes in general. I know a gentleman who allowed his negroes to have their own way about things on his plantation, and the result was that they got as high as their master. Beside that, madam, their influence rapidly spreads among the neighbors, and if such should be allowed, South Carolina would have all masters and mistresses and no servants; and, as I have said, I know somewhat about the nature of negroes; I notice, madam, that this boy will put you to a great deal of trouble unless you begin to subdue him now while he is young. A very few years delay will enable him to

have a great influence among his fellow negroes, for that boy can read very well now, and you know, madam, it is against the law for a negro to get an education, and if you allow him to work at the carpenter's trade, it will thus afford him the opportunity of acquiring a better education, because he will not be directly under the eye of one who will see that he makes no further advancement."

Then mistress asked me, "Can you read, Jacob." I did not want her to know that I had taken notice of what they were saying, so I answered, "I don't know, ma'am." The overseer said, "He does not know what is meant, madam, I can make him understand me;" then he took a newspaper from his pocket and said to me, "can you say these words." I took the paper and began to read, then he took it from me.

Mistress asked when I learned to read and who taught me. The overseer did not know, but said he would find out from me. Turning to me he took the paper from his pocket again, and said, "Jacob, who told you to say words in the book." I answered, "nobody, sir, I said them myself." He repeated the question three or four times, and I gave the same answer every time; then mistress said, "I think it would be better to put him to a trade than to have him in the field, because he will be away from his fellow negroes and will be less liable to influence them if we can manage to keep him away." The overseer said, "that might be true, madam, but if we can manage to keep him from gaining any more education he will eventually lose what little he has; and now, madam, if you will allow me to take him in hand, I will bring him out all right without injuring him." Just at this juncture a carriage drove up to the gate, and I ran as usual to open it; the overseer went about his business and mistress went to speak to the persons in the carriage. I never had a chance to hear their conclusion.

A few days after the conversation between the overseer and mistress, I was informed by one of the slaves who was a carpenter, that she had ordered that I should go to work at the trade with him; this gave me great joy, as I was very anxious to know what they had decided to do with me. I went to my new trade with great delight, and soon began to imagine what a famous carpenter I should make, and what I should say and do when I had learned the trade. Everything seemed to run smoothly with me for about two months, when suddenly I was told one morning that I must go into the field to drop cotton seed, but I did not heed the call, as mistress was not at home, and I knew she had just put me to the trade, also that the overseer was trying to get mistress's consent to have me work out in the field.

The next morning the overseer came into the carpenter's shop, and said, "did I not order ye into the field, sir." I answered, "yes, sir." "Well, why did ye not go." I answered, "Mistress has put me here to learn the trade." He said, "I will give ye trade." So he stripped me and gave me a severe whipping and told me that was the kind of trade I needed, and said he would give me many of them. The next day I went into the field, and he put me to drop cotton seed, as I was too small to do anything else. I would have made further resistance, but mistress was very far away from home, and I had already learned the lesson that father and mother could render me no help, so I thought submission to him was the easiest for me.

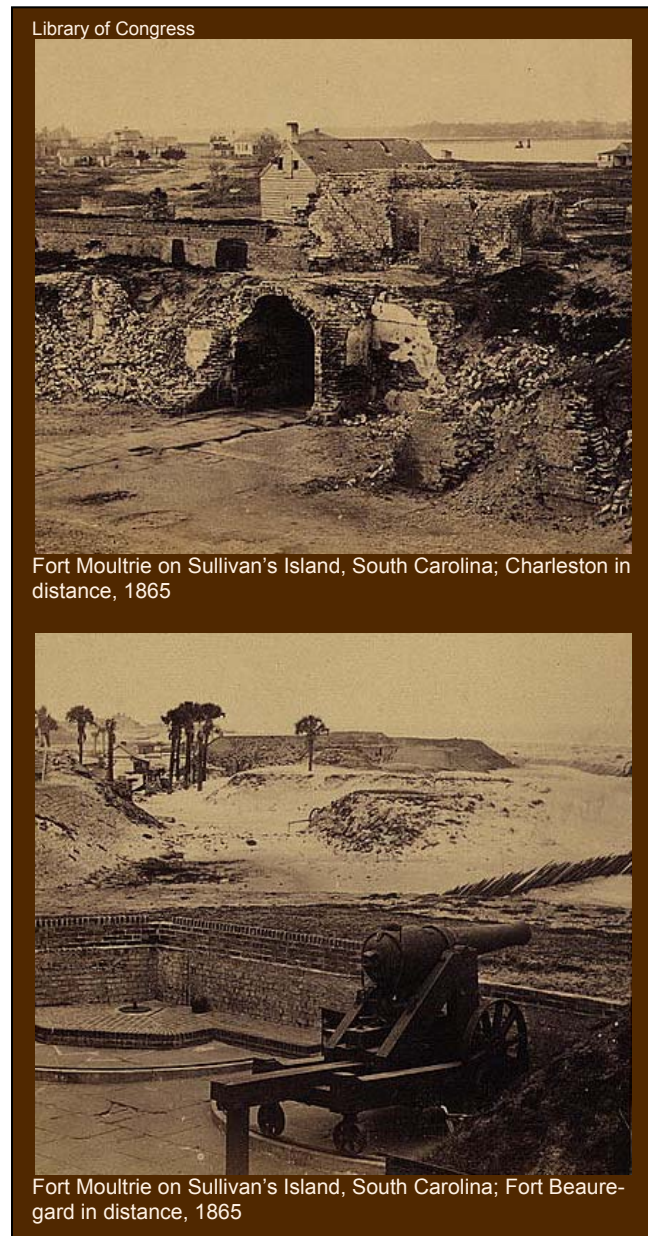
When I got through with the cotton seed, which was about three weeks, I went back to the carpenter's shop to work; so he came there and gave me another severe whipping, and said to me, "ye want to learn the carpenter's trade, but I will have ye to the trade of the field." But that was the last whipping he gave me and the last of his whip.

A few days after my last whipping, the slaves were ordered down into the swamp across the river to clear up new grounds, while the already cleared lands were too wet from rain which fell that night. Of course I was among them to do my part, that is, while the men quartered up dried trees, which had been already felled in the winter, and rolled the logs together, the women, boys and girls piled the brushes on the logs and burned them.

We had to cross the river in a flat boat, which was too small to carry over all the slaves at once, so they had to make several trips.

Mr. Turner, the overseer, went across in the first flat; he did not ride down to the work place, but went on foot, while his horse which was trained to stand alone without being hitched, was left at the landing place.

My cousin and I crossed in the last boat. When we got across we lingered behind the crowd at the landing; when they all were gone, we went near the horse and saw the whip with which I was whipped a few days before, fastened to the saddle. I said to him, "Here is the whip old Turner whipped me with the other day." He said, "It ought to be put where he will never get it to whip anybody with again." I answered my cousin, "If you will keep the secret I will put it where old Bill, as we used to call Mr. Turner, will never use it any more;" he agreed to keep the secret, and then asked me how I would put the whip away. I told him if he would find me a string and a piece of iron, I would show him how. He ran down to the swamp barn, which was a short distance from the margin of the river, and soon returned with the string and iron exactly suited for the work. I tied the iron to the whip, went into the flat boat, and threw it as far as I could into the river. My cousin and I watched it until it went out of sight under water; then, as guilty boys generally do after mischievous deeds, we dashed off in a run, hard as we could among the other negroes, and acted as harmless as possible. Mr. Turner made several inquiries, but never learned what became of his whip from that day to this.



A short time after this, which was in the time of the war, in the year 1863, when a man was going around to the different plantations, gathering slaves from their masters to carry off to work on fortifications, and to wait on officers; there were ten slaves sent from Mrs. Singleton's plantation and I was among them. They carried us to Sullivan's Island at Charleston, S. C., and I was there all of that year; I thanked God that it afforded me a better chance for an education than I had at home, and so I was glad to be on the island. Though I had no one to teach me, as I was thrown among those of my fellow negroes who were fully as lame as I was in letters, yet I felt greatly relieved from being under the eye of the overseer, whose intention was to keep me from further advancement. The next year after I went home, I was sent back to Fort Sumpter, in the year 1864. I carried my spelling book with me, and although the northerners were firing upon us I tried to keep up my study.

In July of the same year, I was wounded by the Union soldiers, on a Wednesday evening. I was taken to the city of Charleston, to Dr. Ragg's hospital, and there I stayed until I got well enough to travel, and was sent to Columbia, where I was when the hour of liberty was proclaimed to me in 1865. This was the year of jubilee, the year which my father spoke of in the dark days of slavery, when he and mother sat up late talking of it. He said to mother, "the time will come when this boy and the rest of the children will be their own masters and mistresses." He died six years before that day came, but mother is still enjoying liberty with her children.

And no doubt my readers would like to know how I was wounded in the war. We were obliged to do our work in the night, as they were firing on us in the day, and on a Wednesday night just as we went out we heard the cry of the watchman, "look out;" there was a little lime house near the southwest corner of the fort, and some twelve or thirteen of us ran into it, and all were killed but two; a shell came down on the lime house and burst, and a piece cut my face open. But as it was not my time to die, I lived to enjoy freedom.

I said that when I got so I could travel, I was sent from Dr. Ragg's hospital in Charleston, to Col. Singleton's plantation near Columbia, in the last part of the year 1864. I did not do any work during the remainder of that year because I was unwell from my wound received in the fort.

About that time, Gen. Sherman came through Georgia with his hundred thousand men, and camped at Columbia, S.C. The slave holders were very uneasy as to how they should save other valuables, as they saw that slavery was a hopeless case. Mistress had some of her horses, mules, cows and hogs carried down into the swamp, while the others which were left on the plantation were divided out to the negroes for safe keeping, as she heard that the Yankees would not take anything belonging to the slaves. A little pig of about fifty or sixty pounds was given to me for safe keeping. A few of the old horses and mules were taken from the plantation by the Union soldiers, but they did not trouble anything else. . . .

When the yoke was taken from my neck [after emancipation] I went to school in Columbia, S. C., awhile, then to Charleston. Afterward I came to Worcester, Mass., in February, 1869. I studied quite awhile in the evening schools at Worcester, and also a while in the Academy of the same place. During this time I was licensed a local preacher of the African Methodist Episcopal church, and sometime after was ordained Deacon at Newport, R. I.

A short time after my ordination I was sent to Salem, Mass., where I have been off and on, carrying on religious work among my people, trying in my feeble way to preach that gospel which our blessed Saviour intended for the redemption of all mankind, when he proclaimed, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel." In the mean time I have been striking steady blows toward the improvement of my education, in preparing myself for a field of work among my more unfortunate brethren in the South.

I must say that I have been surrounded by many good friends, including the clergy, since I have been in Salem, whose aid enabled me to serve a short term of studies in the Wesleyan school at Wilbraham, Mass., also to have begun a course of Theological studies at Talladega college in Alabama, which I am endeavoring to complete by the sale of this publication.

CHAPTER II – SKETCHES

THE SALE OF MY TWO SISTERS. . . .

John Singleton had a place about twenty miles from master's, who used to send him slaves to pick cotton. At one time my master, Col. M. R. Singleton, sent my two sisters, Violet and Priscilla, to his brother John, and while they were there they married two of the men on his place; by mutual consent master allowed them to remain on his brother's place. But sometime after this, John Singleton had some of his property destroyed by water as is often the case in the South at the time of May freshets, what is known in the North as high tides.

One of these freshets swept away John Singleton's slave houses, his barns with horses, mules and cows; these caused his death by a broken heart, and owing a great deal of money, his slaves had to be sold. A Mr. Manning bought a portion of them and Charles Login the rest; these two men were known as the greatest slave traders in the South, my sisters were among the number that Mr. Manning bought.

He was to take them into the state of Louisiana for sale, but some of the men did not want to go with him, and he put those in prison until he was ready to start. My sisters' husbands were among the prisoners in the Sumterville Jail which was about twenty-five or thirty miles across the river from master's place.

Those who did not show any unwillingness to go were allowed to visit their relatives and friends for the last time. So my sisters with the rest of their unfortunate companions came to master's place to visit us. When the day came for them to leave, some, who seemed to have been willing to go at first, refused, and were handcuffed together and guarded on their way to the cars by white men. The women and children were driven to the depot in crowds, like so many cattle, and the sight of them caused great excitement among master's negroes. Imagine a mass of uneducated people shedding tears and yelling at the tops of their voices in anguish and grief.

The victims were to take the cars from a station called Clarkson turnout, which was about four miles from master's place. The excitement was so great that the overseer and driver could not control the relatives and friends of those that were going away, as a large crowd of both old and young went down to the depot to see them off. Louisiana was considered by the slaves as a place of slaughter, so those who were going did not expect to see their friends again. While passing along, many of the negroes left their masters' fields and joined us as we marched to the cars; some were yelling and wringing their hands while others were singing little hymns that they were accustomed to for the consolation of those that were going away, such as,

“When we all meet in heaven,
There is no parting there;
When we all meet in heaven,
There is parting no more.”

We arrived at the depot and had to wait for the cars to bring the others from the Sumterville Jail, but they soon came in sight, and when the noise of the cars died away we heard wailing and shrieks from those in the cars. While some were weeping, others were fiddling, picking banjo, and dancing as they used to do in their cabins on the plantations. Those who were so merry had very bad masters, and even though they stood a chance of being sold to one as bad or even worse, yet they were glad to be rid of the one they knew.

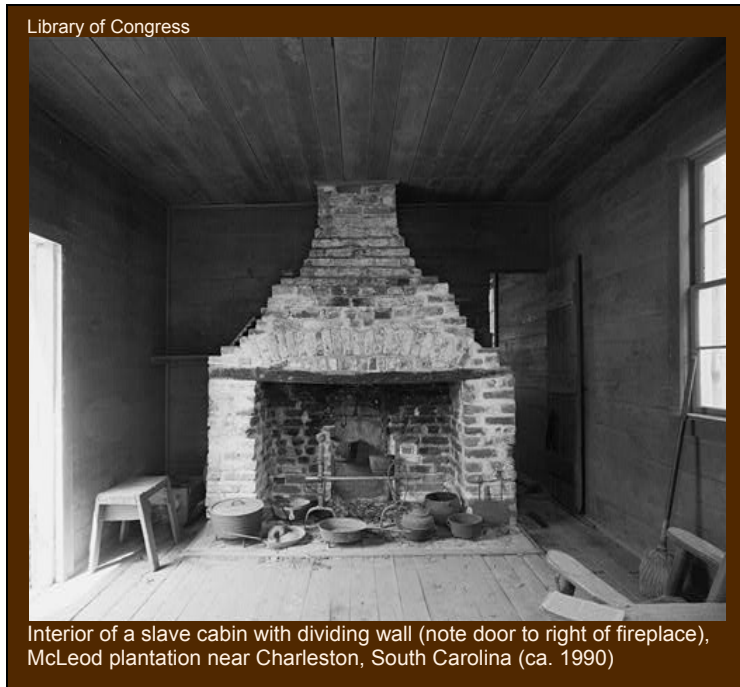
While the cars were at the depot, a large crowd of white people gathered, and were laughing and talking about the prospect of negro traffic; but when the cars began to start and the conductor cried out, “all who are going on this train must get on board without delay,” the colored people cried out with one voice as



though the heavens and earth were coming together, and it was so pitiful, that those hard hearted white men who had been accustomed to driving slaves all their lives, shed tears like children. As the cars moved away we heard the weeping and wailing from the slaves, as far as human voice could be heard; and from that time to the present I have neither seen nor heard from my two sisters, nor any of those who left Clarkson depot on that memorable day.

THE WAY THE SLAVES LIVED.

Most of the cabins in the time of slavery were built so as to contain two families; some had partitions while others had none. When there were no partitions, each family would fit up its own part as it could; sometimes they got old board and nailed them up, stuffing the cracks with old rags; when they could not get boards they hung up old clothes. When the family increased, the children all slept together, both boys and girls, until either got married, then a part of another cabin was assigned to the one that was married, but the rest would have to remain with their mother and father as they did when children, unless they could get with some



Library of Congress
 Interior of a slave cabin with dividing wall (note door to right of fireplace), McLeod plantation near Charleston, South Carolina (ca. 1990)

of their relatives or friends who had small families, or when they were sold; but of course the rules of modesty were held in some degree by the slaves, while it could not be expected that they could entertain the highest degree of it on account of their condition. A portion of the time the young men slept in the apartment known as the kitchen and the young women slept in the room with their mother and father. The two families had to use one fireplace. One, who was accustomed to the way in which the slaves lived in their cabins, could tell as soon as they entered whether they were friendly or not, for when they did not agree the fires of the two families did not meet on the hearth, but there was a vacancy between them, that was a sign of disagreement. In a case of this kind when either of the

families stole a hog, cow or sheep from the master, he had to carry it to some of his friends for fear of being betrayed by the other family . . .

THE CUSTOM ON CHRISTMAS.

Both masters and slaves regarded Christmas as a great day. When the slaveholders made a large crop they were pleased, and gave the slaves from five to six days, which was much enjoyed by the negroes, especially by those who could dance. Christmas morning was held sacred both by master and slave, but in the afternoon, or in a part of the next day, the slaves were required to devote themselves to the pleasure of their masters. Some of the masters would buy presents for the slaves, such as hats and tobacco for the men, handkerchiefs and little things for the women; these things were given after they had been pleased with them, after either dancing or something for their amusement.

When the slaves came up to their master and mistress, the latter would welcome them, the men would take off their hats and bow and the women would make a low courtesy. There would be two or three large pails filled with sweetened water with a gallon or two of whiskey in each; this was dealt out to them until they were partly drunk; while this was going on, those who could talk very well would give tokens of well wishing to their master and mistress, and some who were born in Africa, would sing some of their songs, or tell different stories of the customs in Africa. After this they would spend half a day in dancing in some large cotton house or on a scaffold, the master providing fiddlers who came from other plantations if there were none on the place, and who received from fifteen to twenty dollars on these occasions. . . .

PUNISHMENTS INFLICTED ON DIFFERENT ONES.

One of my fellow negroes, who belonged to Col. M. R. Singleton, visited the plantation of the Col.'s sister; the overseer of that plantation had forbidden strangers to go there, but this man whose name was Harry, would go. The overseer heard of him but could not catch him, but the overseer of master's place sent him to Mr. Jackson (the overseer of master's sister's place). Mr. Jackson tied him and hit him three hundred lashes and then said to him "Harry, if you were not such a good nigger I should have given you a first class whipping, but as you are a good fellow, and I like you so well, I thought I would give you a light flogging now; you must be a good nigger and behave yourself, for if I ever have to take hold of you

again, I shall give you a good whipping.” When Mr. Jackson loosed him from where he had tied him, he was so exhausted that he fell down, so Mr. Jackson sent him home in a cart, and he had to stay at home from work a month or two, and was never the same man again. . . .

RUNAWAY SLAVES.

My readers have, no doubt, already heard that there were men in the South who made it their business in the days of slavery to raise and train hound dogs especially to hunt slaves with. Most of the owners hired such men on condition that they were to capture and return their runaway slaves, without being bruised and torn by the dogs. The average sums paid hunters were ten, fifteen and twenty-five dollars for capturing a slave; very many times these sums were taken from the overseer’s salary, as they were more or less the cause of slaves running away.

My readers want to know whether the runaway slaves ever returned to the overseers and their masters without being caught by the hunters. Sometimes they did and sometimes they never returned. Some stayed their lifetime; others would have returned, but were taken sick and died in the woods.

My readers ask, how did the slaves at home know when their fellow negroes, the runaways, sickened or died in the woods. In general, some one on the plantation from which they ran away, or confidential friends on some other plantation, had communications with them, so that if anything happened to them the slaves at home would find out through such parties. And sometimes the masters and overseers would find out about their death, but indirectly, however, because if it was known that any one on the plantation had dealings with the runaway he would be punished, even though the information was gladly received by the master and overseer.

Sometimes groups of runaway slaves, of eight, ten and even twenty, belonging to different owners, got together in the woods, which made it very difficult and dangerous for slave hunters to capture those whom they were hired to hunt. In such cases some times these runaways killed both hunters and dogs. The thick forests in which they lived could not be searched on horseback, neither could man or dog run in them. The only chances the hunters had of catching runaway slaves was either to rout them from those thick forests or attack them when they came out in the opening to seek food.

Of course the runaways were mostly armed, and when attacked in the forests they would fight. My readers ask, how had they obtained arms and what were they, since slaves were not allowed to have deadly weapons? Some had large knives made by their fellow negroes who were blacksmiths, others stole guns from white men, who were accustomed to lay them carelessly around when they were out hunting game. The runaways who stole the guns were kept in powder and shot by some of the other slaves at home, who bought such from poor white men who kept little country stores in the different parts of the South.

The runaway slaves generally had fathers, brothers, cousins, or some confidential friends who met them at certain appointed places, and brought them such things as they needed. The most they wanted from their fellow negroes at home was salt and a little corn flour; for they lived principally on beef and swine meat, taken either from their own masters or some other’s stock.

My readers ask, did not some of the slaves at home betray their fellow negroes, the runaways, to the white man? I answer, they did; but often such were well spotted, and if the runaway slaves got a chance at them while in the woods they would mob or kill them. On the other hand, when they met those whom they could trust, instead of injuring them, they exchanged beef and swine meat with them for bread, corn flour, and salt, such as they needed in the woods. . . .

In bringing this work to a close, I wish to say to my readers that I have but touched upon this great subject of the experience and observation of my slave life; it has made a lasting impression upon my mind. But however lasting, I make no complaint against those who held me in slavery. My war is upon ignorance, which has been and is the curse of my race. _____