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NARRATIVE OF JAMES WILLIAMS.

AN AMERICAN SLAVE.*

Not long after my master had left us, the overseer ascertained for the first time that some of the hands could read, and that they had brought books with them from Virginia. He compelled them to give up the keys of their chests, and on searching found several Bibles and hymn-books. Uncle Solomon's chest contained quite a library, which he could read at night by the light of knots of the pitchpine. These books he collected together, and in the evening called Uncle Solomon into the house. After jeering him for some time, he gave him one of the Bibles and told him to name his text and preach him a sermon. The old man was silent. He then made him get up on the table, and ordered him to pray. Uncle Solomon meekly replied, that "forced prayer was not good for soul or body." The overseer then knelt down himself and in a blasphemous manner, prayed that the Lord would send his spirit into Uncle Solomon; or else let the old man fall from the table and break his neck, and so have an end of "nigger preaching." On getting up from his knees he went to the cupboard, poured out a glass of brandy for himself, and brought another to the table. "James," said he, addressing me, "Uncle Solomon stands there, for all the world, like a Hickory Quaker. His spirit don't move. I'll see if another spirit wont move it." He compelled the old preacher to swallow the brandy; and then told him to preach and exhort, for the spirit was in him. He set one of the Bibles on fire, and after it was consumed, mixed up the ashes of it in a glass of water, and compelled the old man to drink it, telling him that as the spirit and the word were now both in him, there was no longer any excuse for not preaching. After tormenting the wearied old man in this way until nearly midnight he permitted him to go to his quarters.

The next day I saw Uncle Solomon, and talked with him about his treatment. He said it would not always be so—that slavery was to come to an end, for the Bible said so—that there would then be no more whippings and fightings, but the lion and the lamb would lie down together, and all would be love. He said he prayed for Huckstep—that it was not he but the devil in him who behaved so. At his request, I found means to get him a Bible and a hymn-book from the overseer's room; and the old man ever afterwards kept them concealed in the hen-house.

The weeding season of 1826, was marked by repeated acts of cruelty on the part of Huckstep. One of the hands, Priscilla, was, owing to her delicate situation, unable to perform her daily task. He ordered her to be tied up against a tree, in the same manner that I had been. In this situation she was whipped until she was delivered of a dead infant, at the foot of the tree! Our men took her upon a sheet, and carried her to the house, where she lay sick for several months, but finally recovered. I have heard him repeatedly laugh at this circumstance.

Not long after this, we were suprised, one morning about ten o'clock, by hearing the horn blow at the house. Presently Aunt Polly came screaming into the field. "What is the matter, Aunt?" I inquired. "Oh Lor!" said she, "Old Huckstep's pitched off his horse and broke his head, and is o'en about dead."

"Thank God!" said little Simon. "The devil will have him at last."

"God-a-mighty be praised!" exclaimed half a dozen others.

The hands, with one accord dropped their hoes; and crowded round the old woman, asking questions. "Is he dead?" "Will he die?" "Did you feel of him—was he cold?"

Aunt Polly explained as well as she could, that Huckstep, in a state of partial intoxication had attempted to leap his horse over a fence, had fallen and cut a deep gash in his head, and that he was now lying insensible.

It is impossible to describe the effect produced by this news among the hands. Men, women and children shouted, clapped their hands, and laughed aloud. Some cursed the overseer, and others thanked the Lord for taking him away. Little Simon got down on his knees, and called loudly upon God to finish his work, and never let the overseer again enter a cotton field. "Let him die, Lord," said he, "let him die. He's killed enough of us: Oh, good Lord, let him die and not live."

"Pence, peace! it is a bad spirit," said Uncle Solomon, "God himself willetth not the death of a sinner."

I followed the old woman to the house; and found Huckstep at the foot of one of those trees, so common at the South, called the Pride of China. His face was black, and there was a frightful contusion on the side of his head. He was carried into the

house, where, on my bleeding him he revived. He lay in great pain for several days, and it was nearly three weeks before he was able to come out to the cotton fields.

On returning to the field after Huckstep had revived, I found the hands sadly disappointed to hear that he was still living. Some of them fell to cursing and swearing, and were enraged with me for trying to save his life. Little Simon said I was a fool; if he had bled him he would have done it to some purpose. He would at least, have so disabled his arm that he would never again try to swing a whip. Uncle Solomon remonstrated with Simon, and told me that I had done right.

The neighbouring overseers used frequently to visit Huckstep, and he, in turn, visited them. I was sometimes present during their interviews, and heard them tell each other stories of horse-racing, negro-hunting, etc. Some time during this season, Ludlow, who was overseer of a plantation about eight miles from ours, told of a slave of his named Thornton, who had twice attempted to escape with his wife and one child. The first time he was caught without much difficulty, chained to the overseer's horse, and in that way brought back. The poor man, to save his wife from a beating, laid all the blame upon himself; and said that his wife had no wish to escape, and tried to prevent him from attempting it. He was severely whipped; but soon ran away again, and was again arrested. The overseer, Ludlow, said he was determined to put a stop to the runaway, and accordingly had resort to a somewhat unusual method of punishment.

There is a great scarcity of good water in that section of Alabama; and you will generally see a large cistern attached to the corners of the houses to catch water for washing, etc. Underneath this cistern is frequently a tank from eight to ten feet deep, into which, when the former is full, the water is permitted to run. From this tank the water is pumped out for use. Into one of these tanks the unfortunate slave was placed, and confined by one of his ankles to the bottom of it; and the water was suffered to flow in from above. He was compelled to pump out the water as fast as it came in, by means of a long rod or handle connected with the pump above ground. He was not allowed to begin until the water had risen to his middle. Any pause or delay after this, from weakness and exhaustion, would have been fatal, as the water would have risen above his head. In this horrible dungeon, toiling for his life, he was kept for twenty-four hours without any sustenance. Even Huckstep said that this was too bad—that he had himself formerly punished runaways in that way—but should not do it again.

I rejoice to be able to say that this sufferer has at last escaped with his wife and child, into a free state. He was assisted by some white men, but I do not know all the particulars of his escape.

Our overseer had not been long able to ride about the plantation after his accident, before his life was again endangered. He found two of the hands, Little Jarret and Simon, fighting with each other, and attempted to chastise both of them. Jarret bore it patiently, but Simon turned upon him, seized a stake or pin from a cart near by, and felled him to the ground. The overseer got up—went to the house, and told aunt Polly that he had nearly been killed by the 'niggers,' and requested her to tie up his head, from which the blood was streaming. As soon as this was done, he took down his gun, and went out in pursuit of Simon, who had fled to his cabin, to get some things which he supposed necessary previous to attempting his escape from the plantation. He was just stepping out of the door, when he met the enraged overseer with his gun in his hand. Not a word was spoken by either. Huckstep raised his gun and fired. The man fell without a groan across the door-sill. He rose up twice on his hands and knees, but died in a few minutes. He was dragged off and buried. The overseer told me that there was no other way to deal with such a fellow. It was Alabama law, if a slave resisted to shoot him at once. He told me of a case which occurred in 1834, on a plantation about ten miles distant, and adjoining that where Crop, the negro hunter, boarded with his hounds. The overseer had bought some slaves at Selma, from a drove or coffee passing through the place. They proved very refractory. He whipped three of them, and undertook to whip a fourth who was from Maryland. The man raised his hoe in a threatening manner, and the overseer fired upon him. The slave fell, but instantly rose up on his hands and knees, and was beaten down again by the stock of the overseer's gun. The wounded wretch raised himself once more, drew a knife from the waistband of his pantaloons, and catching hold of the overseer's coat, raised himself high enough to inflict a fatal wound upon the latter. Both fell together, and died immediately after.

Nothing more of special importance occurred until July, of last year, when one of our men named John, was whipped three times for not performing his task. On the last day of the month, after his third whipping, he ran away. On the following morning, I found that he was missing at his row. The overseer said we must hunt him up; and he blew the "nigger horn," as it is called, for the dogs. This horn was only used when we went out in pursuit of fugitives. It is a cow's horn, and makes a short, loud sound. We crossed Flincher's and Goldsby's plantations, as the dogs had got upon John's track, and went off barking in that direction, and the two overseers joined us in the chase. The dogs soon caught sight of the runaway, and compelled him to climb a tree. We came up; Huckstep ordered him down, and secured him upon my horse by tying him to my back. On reaching home he was stripped entirely naked and lashed up to a tree. Flincher then volunteered to whip him on one side of his legs, and Goldsby on the other. I had, in the meantime, been ordered to prepare a wash of salt and pepper, and wash his wounds with it. The poor fellow groaned, and his flesh shrunk and quivered as the burning solution was applied to it. This wash, while it adds to the immediate torment of the sufferer, facilitates the cure of the wounded parts. Huckstep then whipped him from his neck down to his thighs, making the cuts lengthwise of his back. He was very expert with the whip, and could strike at any time, within an inch of his mark. He then gave the whip to me, and told me to strike directly across his back. When I had finished, the miserable sufferer, from his neck to his heels, was covered with blood and bruises. Goldsby and Flincher now turned to Huckstep, and told him, that I deserved a whipping as much as John did; that they had known me frequently disobey his orders; and that I was partial to the "Virginia ladies," and didn't whip them as I did the men. They said if it was a driver of theirs they would know what to do with me. Huckstep agreed with them; and after directing me to go to the house and prepare more of the wash for John's back, he called after me, with an oath, to see to it that I had some for myself, for he meant to give me, at least, two hundred and fifty lashes. I returned to the house, and scarcely conscious of what I was doing, filled an iron vessel with water, put in the salt and pepper; and placed it over the embers.

As I stood by the fire watching the boiling of the mixture, and reflecting upon the dreadful torture to which I was about to be subjected, the thought of escape flashed upon my mind. The chance was a desperate one; but I resolved to attempt it. I ran up stairs, tied my shirt in a handkerchief, and stepped out of the back door of the house, telling Aunt Polly to take care of the wash at the fire until I returned. The sun was about one hour high, but luckily for me the hands as well as the three overseers, were on the other side of the house. I kept the house between them and myself, and ran as fast as I could for the woods. On reaching them I found myself obliged to proceed slowly, as there was a thick undergrowth of cane and reeds. Night came on. I straggled forward by a dim star-light, amidst vines and reed beds. About midnight the horizon began to be overcast; and the darkness increased, until, in the thick forest, I could scarcely see a yard before me. Fearing that I might lose my way and wander towards the plantation, instead of from it, I resolved to wait until day. I laid down upon a little hillock, and fell asleep.

When I awoke it was broad day. The clouds had vanished, and the hot sunshine fell through the trees upon my face. I started up, realizing my situation, and darted onward. My object was to reach the great road by which we had travelled when we came out from Virginia. I had, however, very little hope of escape. I knew that a hot pursuit would be made after me, and what I most dreaded was, that the overseer would procure Crop's bloodhounds to follow my track. If only the hounds of our plantation were sent after me, I had hopes of being able to make friends of them, as they were always good-natured and obedient to me. I travelled until, as near as I could judge, about ten o'clock, when a distant sound startled me. I stopped and listened. It was the deep bay of the bloodhound, apparently at a great distance. I hurried on until I came to a creek about fifteen yards wide, skirted by an almost impenetrable growth of reeds and cane. Plunging into it, I swam across and ran down by the side of it a short distance, and, in order to baffle the dogs, swam back to the other side again. I stopped in the reed-bed and listened. The dogs seemed close at hand, and by the loud barking I felt persuaded that Crop's hounds were with them. I thought of the fate of Little John, who had been torn in pieces by the hounds, and of the scarcely less dreadful condition of those who had escaped the

* Concluded from our last.