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Alexander Milton Ross and Abolition of Slavery

(Continued from Page One)

information quietly among their friends and to meet a week later if they desired to make the break for freedom. On the following Sunday night nine young men declared they would gain their freedom or die in the attempt. To each was given a compass, a knife and a supply of food. The routes were again gone over, with directions to travel only by night and rest in some secure spot by day. A few months later Dr. Ross was rewarded by hearing that all nine had safely reached Canada. The wife of one of these men escaped six months later and joined her husband in Chatham, Ont.

Richmond was a dangerous place to stay in after this piece of work had been accomplished, so Dr. Ross went the next day to Nashville, Tenn. Here he worked on exactly the same plan, gathering together the most intelligent Negroes, explaining the way to freedom and then asking those determined on the attempt to meet a week later. Seven men, unmarried, set forth for freedom and that evening Dr. Ross sent letters to friends in Evansville, Cincinnati and Cleveland, to keep a sharp lookout for "packages of hardware." As he was leaving the post office a small printed bill was thrust into his hand detailing the escape of thirteen slaves from Richmond and offering a reward of \$1000 for their recovery. Dr. Ross very prudently decided to leave Nashville and accordingly went to Memphis. Here he found the newspapers full of the abduction of slaves in Nashville, offering a reward of \$1200 for the apprehension of the abolitionist who was said to have aided the run-aways. The description of the "abolitionist" was so accurate that Dr. Ross immediately left the hotel where he was staying, went to the home of a negro where he remained hidden for six hours and then took the night boat for St. Louis. But he did not leave alone. While he was in hiding he heard a conversation in the adjoining room that changed some of his plans. A woman was begging the negro host to ask Dr. Ross to take her to Canada where her husband had gone two years before. She had run away from her master because of cruelty, her back being still raw and seamed with the lash, and was even then a fugitive. Ross determined to make the attempt and ordered her to dress in male attire so that she might pass as a valet. He himself had shaven his beard and changed his clothes so that the risk of detection was lessened, yet it was with beating heart that he set out for the wharf and not until it had moved out into the stream did he feel any relief. St. Louis was reached in safety, and from there he went to Chicago and then to Detroit where the fugitive woman was hidden until an opportunity came to take her over the Detroit river in a small boat and under cover of darkness. Her husband was located working in a barber shop in London, Ont.

and within a few days they were reunited after a separation of two years.

December of 1857 saw Dr. Ross in New Orleans undertaking yet more dangerous efforts on behalf of the slaves. He had decided to make a journey through the whole of the lower south, scattering the seed of knowledge of freedom everywhere and believing that the results would be worth all the risk. Accordingly he went from New Orleans to Vicksburg where he posed as a naturalist collecting birds. Every favorable opportunity was taken to talk to slaves and the slave owners unwittingly threw opportunity in his way by sending out slaves to assist him in his researches and also by allowing him to roam at will over their plantations. In this way he became acquainted with slaves who spread the news of Canada all over the south. From Vicksburg Dr. Ross went to Selma and then to Columbus, Miss., where he had one of his most dangerous adventures. On his trips out from Columbus he was accompanied by a slave who had his master's initials burned into his back. This man confided to Ross that he had determined to run away and asked directions. Two or three days later, while seated at the supper table of the hotel, Dr. Ross suddenly found himself the center of a group of slave-holders and angrily denounced as a "d-d abolitionist" who was assisting slaves to run away. In a twinkling he was manacled. For a moment his life seemed in danger but making the Masonic sign of distress brought a request from a member of the group that he be allowed to speak. His request that he be taken before a magistrate was granted and after a night spent in a filthy cell infested with rats and vermin he was placed on trial. A crowd had gathered and evidence was quickly given that the prisoner had gone out bird-hunting with a slave "Joe" who had failed to return. The epithet "negro thief" was warmly applauded by the crowd. It was a tense moment for Dr. Ross as the judge turned and asked him if he had anything to say. Just at this moment who should enter the court room but "Joe" himself who explained that he had gone to see his brother but had been detained by spraining his ankle. The judge immediately ordered the release of Dr. Ross. Two years later, in Boston, he found "Joe" a waiter in the hotel. He had made his escape within a week after the court episode.

From Columbus Dr. Ross passed on to Iuka, then to Huntsville, Ala., and Augusta, Ga., actively circulating information about Canada among the slaves at each place. At Augusta he resumed his bird-hunting operations and inside of two months equipped and sent a party of eleven slaves, all of whom reached Canada.

"No one, not actually engaged in similar work," he says, "can clearly appreciate the extreme delicacy of my position. There was not a day, in fact scarcely an hour, that I did not live in expectation of exposure."

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