

course, at a very early date. As early as 1705 an act was passed in New York, and renewed in 1715, to prevent slaves running away to Canada from frontier towns like Albany,⁵ and there was also frequent trouble between the French and the English or the French and the Dutch over the runaways who came to Canada. It was not, however, until the beginning of the 19th century that Canada began to be known to any degree among the negroes in the southern states. It was really the period of the discovery of Canada to the negro mind. The War of 1812 exercised powerful influence in directing negro thought to the free country to the north. Kentuckians and others who fought in the War of 1812 must have been surprised to encounter negroes among the Canadian forces opposed to them. But back in the south, when the news of the war began to penetrate there, the negro might fairly conclude that his master's enemy was likely to be his friend, and it was not long before the fact that Canada offered real asylum to the runaway had permeated the slave population throughout the border states at least. As early as 1815 negroes were reported crossing the western reserve in Ohio in large numbers, and one group of underground railroad workers in Southern Ohio is stated to have passed on more than 1000 fugitives before 1817.⁶ Dr. S. G. Howe, who made one of the best investigations of the condition of the refugees in Canada, states that the arrivals, few in number at the start, increased rapidly early in the century, with special activity between 1830 and 1840, and greatest activity of all between 1850 and 1860, when the drastic Fugitive Slave Law was in operation.⁷

There were many ways in which the reputation of Canada was spread abroad among the negroes. The effect of the war of 1812 has already been noted. In this connection the slaveholders themselves probably helped to make Canada known by spreading the most foolish stories with regard to its cold climate and the hardships that were endured by the people there.⁸ The shrewd negro mind saw through this, and was the more determined to reach the place that his master derided. Black men from Canada were a second influence in making the country known. Many a refugee slave, successful in his break for liberty, would afterwards return to the slave states to assist relatives or friends to freedom. Such an one would serve to plant the germ of freedom in the minds of those with whom he came in contact and thereby increase the number of runaways. White men, too, went from Canada to spread the news of freedom and to aid slaves in reaching their Canaan. James Redpath, the biographer of John Brown, writing in 1860, said that five hundred men went south from Canada annually to assist others in securing their freedom.⁹ Slaves who were sent from the south into the border states to work would likely hear of Canada there and so in many and devious ways there was a certain amount of acquaintance with Canada all through the slavery area.

By 1826 the South was feeling the loss of its human property to such an extent that an effort was made to reach an agreement with Great Britain on the subject. But Britain was not responsive. In the troubles of 1837-8 the citizens of the U. S. who tried to create trouble along the border received

⁵ Northrup: *Slavery in New York*, pp. 258-259.

⁶ Birney: *James G. Birney and His Times*, p. 435.

⁷ Howe: *Refugees from Slavery in Canada West*, pp. 11-12.

⁸ In a speech in the U.S. Senate on May 5, 1858, Senator Mason, of Virginia, said of the fugitives, "They perish with cold in Canada." See also Ward: *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, p. 161.

⁹ Redpath: *Public Life of Captain John Brown*, p. 229.