

subjects."¹ This position was taken by all of the later governors and on the very eve of the Civil War Sir Edmund Walker Head declared that "Canada could still afford homes to the fugitives."²

From a very early period there had been those in the northern free states who felt it their duty to give aid and comfort to the blacks making their way north. This was particularly true of the Quakers who at all times were friends of freedom. Gradually there grew up a strangely organized system of aiding the fugitives and to this was given the name of the Underground Railroad. As the slave owners remarked, the slave disappeared at some point in the south and reappeared only in Canada as if he had gone through a long tunnel. The underground is the most romantic highway this new world has known. It followed certain definite routes that have been charted by Prof. Siebert, and the small army of people that were engaged in its operations formed a sort of freemasonry of freedom that brings them the tribute of all who love liberty and hate oppression. A railroad "jargon" grew up. The places where fugitives making their way north could obtain temporary shelter, food and clothing were known as the "stations." Those living there and aiding the runaways were "station agents." More daring individuals travelling with the runaways and guiding them to freedom were "conductors," while in Canada, ready to receive the new comers were "freight agents." A code for messages was used. An innocent telegram, stating that two cases of hardware were being forwarded, meant to the recipient that two slave men were on the way, while reference to cases of dry goods referred to women. Sometimes these phrases had very special meaning, for there are instances where men and women were actually boxed up and shipped in freight cars to the north.³

With a Fugitive Slave Law that made freedom impossible even in Boston there was danger for the fugitive after 1850 except in Canada. From 1850 to 1860, therefore, the negro immigration that had been a trickling stream ever since the war of 1812 became a regular torrent and thousands of coloured people crossed the border every year. Prof. Siebert has charted the main routes by which the fugitives made their way to Canada and his map shows most clearly the important influence which the free British provinces exerted upon slavery through their geographical location. Along the northern boundaries of the states of New York and Pennsylvania there were ten main points from which the runaways crossed into Canada, the more important of these being on the Niagara frontier. On Lake Erie and the Detroit River there were eight points at which entry was made into Canada, the Detroit River, of course taking first place. At Fort Malden (Amherstburg) as many as thirty a day entered in the period after 1850.⁴ On Lake Erie proper, a considerable number seem to have come in by Kettle Creek (Port Stanley), thence making their way to London or Ingersoll.

Slavery had scarcely disappeared in Canada before runaways from the southern states began to make their appearance, and that in considerable numbers. Isolated instances of negroes reaching Canada can be found, of

¹ Drew. *North Side View of Slavery*, pp. 244-245.

² Mitchell. *Underground Railroad*, pp. 150-151.

³ The best account of the workings of the underground system is Prof. W. H. Siebert's "Underground Railroad," New York, 1899. He has an excellent chapter on the life of the negro refugees in Canada before the outbreak of the Civil War.

⁴ Siebert: *Underground Railroad*, p. 194.