

“HE SAW ME RUNNING, AND INSTANTLY CALLED THREE BLOODHOUNDS

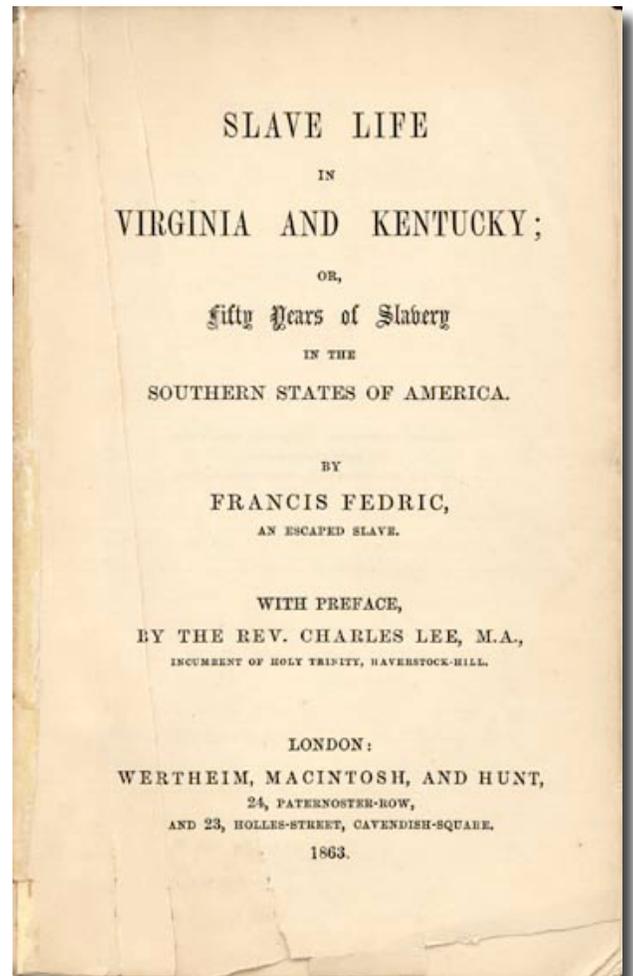
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By FEDRIC, FRANCIS

Excerpted from: *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky; or, Fifty Years of Slavery in the Southern States of America:*

Printed in 1863



CHAPTER VII.

WORK, work, work, one day like another, only I had now been to several prayer-meetings, and had got a knowledge of religion, which comforted me. I thought about the future, when I should be free from my master, when I could join in psalms and hymns and prayers without being afraid of the lash. Such consolation and joy did I receive from these meetings, that I have run the risk over and over again of being flogged for attending them. Thus one weary day, and week, and month, and year passed on with me, being turned out of the kitchen sometimes, when my master was in his drunken fits, to work in the fields. I had been flogged for going to a prayer-meeting, and, before my back was well, my master was going to whip me again. I determined, therefore, to run away. It was in the morning, just after my master had got his breakfast, I was ordered to the back of the premises to strip. My master had got the thong of raw cow's-hide; when off I ran, towards the swamp.

Pursued by Bloodhounds.

He saw me running, and instantly called three bloodhounds, kept for the purpose, and put them on my track. I saw them coming up to me, when, turning round to them, I clapped my hands, and called them by name; for I had been in the habit of feeding them. I urged them on, as if in pursuit of something else. They instantly passed me, and flew upon the cattle. I saw my master calling them

off, and returning. No doubt, he perceived it was useless to pursue me, with dogs which knew me so well.

Reach Bear's Wallow, a dismal Swamp.

I now hurried on further, into a dismal swamp, named the Bear's Wallow; and, at last, wearied and exhausted, I sat down at the foot of a tree, to rest, and think what had best be done. I looked stealthily around, afraid that the dogs and men were still in pursuit. I listened, and listened again, to the slightest sound, made by the flapping of the wings of a bird, or the rustling of the wild animals among the underwood; and then proceeded further into the swamp. My path was interrupted, every now and then, by large sheets of stagnant, putrid, green-looking water, from which a most sickening, fetid smell arose.

Conceal myself in a Cavern.

I came, at length, to an overhanging rock, forming a species of natural cavern, into which I crept, to rest me. I was footsore, and torn by the thorns, and parched with thirst.

When awake in the morning, I tried to plan out some way of escape, over the Ohio River, which I knew was about thirty miles from where I was. But I could not swim; and I was well aware that my master would set a watch upon every ferry or ford.

I walked for some distance, round about the cavern; having determined to make it my place of abode, until I could hit upon some plan of escape. I was in continual fear, when I plucked the berries, to eat them, lest I should be poisoned; for I had known that slaves, especially children, had been killed by eating some kinds of wild berries. Sometimes I vomited very much, after eating some; at other times, those which I plucked agreed with me better.

One day and night were very much like another, except that I occasionally heard the noise of men and dogs--no doubt, in pursuit of other negroes. My mind, whenever I heard the barking of dogs, was distressed, beyond all description. I felt sure, until the sounds ceased, that they would scent me out; and strange dogs would have torn me to pieces.

At length, driven by hunger and desperation, I approached the edge of the swamp; when I was startled by seeing a young woman ploughing. I knew her, and called her by name. I begged of her to go to get me something to eat. She, at first, expressed her fears, and began to tell me of the efforts which my master was making to capture me. He had offered 500 dollars' reward--had placed a watch all along the Ohio River--had informed all the neighbouring planters, who had cautioned all their slaves not to give me any food or other assistance,--and he had made it known, that, when I should be caught, he would give me a thousand lashes.

The woman went, and fetched me about two ounces of bread, of which I eat a small portion--wishing to keep the rest to eat in the swamp,--husbanding it, as much as possible. When she told me that I should receive a thousand lashes, I felt horrified, and wept bitterly. The girl wept also. I had seen a slave, who had escaped to the Northern States, and, after an absence of four years, had been brought back again, and flogged, in the presence of all the slaves, assembled from the neighbouring plantations. His body was frightfully lacerated. I went to see him, two or three weeks after the flogging. When they were anointing his back, his screams were awful. He died, soon afterwards--a tall, fine young fellow, six feet high, in the prime of life, thus brutally murdered.

A few nights afterwards, driven by hunger, I ventured out again, and, about four miles from the swamp, I came up to where I saw a house. I noticed, on the ground, what I thought was a goose, and, going gently up, I caught hold of it, when instantly it barked, for it was a dog. Having been caught in its sleep, it was evidently frightened, and howled fearfully. I ran back, towards the bush, but had not proceeded many yards, before a shot whistled past me, and I heard the report of a gun. I was running in a stooping position, or I think the shot would have penetrated my head. I regained my hiding-place-- faint, wearied, and disheartened.

Driven almost to desperation, the next night I went again in search of food. I had wandered about for some hours, without finding anything, when I saw a number of stumps of trees, two or three feet high; and about a hundred and fifty yards away from them, I noticed a log hut. I approached it, by degrees, hiding first behind one stump, and then another. I waited for a short time, looking round to spy out something to eat. I observed a white woman, with a basket, come out of the house and walk towards a brick oven at some distance from the house; she opened the oven-door and took some loaves out, until she had filled her basket, and then taking it in her arms she carried it into the house. As soon as she had entered the house I ran to the oven, hoping to pick up a few crumbs, when to my utter surprise I found a loaf; I hastily bit two or three pieces from it, and ran back to a stump. The woman came out of the house again, this time without the basket, and went to the oven, looked into it, and then, as if the devil himself were after her, she ran, as I never saw a woman run before or since, to the house.

I made all the haste I could to the cavern in the swamp. Oh! what a luxury that loaf was! I was afraid to let the mouthfuls go down my throat, it was so pleasant to taste the bread, and I was afraid it would soon be all gone. Never shall I forget that heaven-sent loaf and the prayers of gratitude I offered up to the Giver of all good things for it.

Driven by Hunger, give myself up to my Master.

My loaf was soon gone, and I was in the same state of hunger and desperation as before, when driven almost to my wits' end, and seeing no possible mode of escape (not being able to swim, I could not cross the Ohio River), I resolved to go to a Methodist preacher of the name of Brush, whom I knew, and entreat him to intercede with my master for me. At length I knocked at the door, he came and looked at me, I spoke a few words to him, when he asked me who I was. I told him; he said he only knew me by my voice. His wife came to me, and wanted to give me some food, for she seemed shocked at my appearance. Her husband insisted that she should not, since, he said, I was hungered, and the food would perhaps kill me, and he should be blamed. However, she gave me one cup of tea and a slice of bread. Mr. Brush had promised to ask forgiveness for me, but he did not speak kindly to me. He put his hat on to go, and I followed him across the street, when a crowd of thoughts rushed across my mind,--the 1,000 lashes, the poor man whom I had seen flogged to death, the threats the woman ploughing in the fields had told me my master had made. I felt my strength gone, I stood, my brain swimming round, I thought I should fall; when Mr. Brush, turning suddenly round, in a sharp tone said, "Come on! Come on! Quick!" I followed him; we had ten or twelve miles to walk; he said but very little, and that not kindly, all the way. He seemed sullen. He said I should not have run away. At length, wearied and ready to drop, we got to my master's house. Mr. Brush entered, and I heard him say, "I have brought your slave Francis." My master exclaimed, "What! You have! Well, I will do for him." I heard his footsteps, he came and looked at me, but said nothing. My mistress came, and said, "Francis! is that you?" I said, "Yes, missis, I have been longing to see you." "Come in," she said, "you are very bad for running away; now you must promise me only to eat just what I shall give you." I was weak, and sat down in the kitchen. A black woman was doing my work. Small portions of food were given me at a time each

day. A little tea and dry toast, then a little milk, then a little bread and butter. I remained in the kitchen assisting, as my strength returned, the black woman. In about three weeks I found my former strength returning. During the three weeks, I had from time to time begged of my mistress not to have me whipped. She said she would do all she could if I would be a good slave in future. She spoke and treated me kindly.

Receive 107 Lashes.

At the end of about a month my master, one morning, came into the kitchen; he had a rope and a cow-hide whip in his hands. "Francis!" he said. "Yes, massa," I answered. "Come this way, I will now settle with you; you have been away nine weeks, and I will now reckon with you." I dropped on my knees, and begged hard for mercy. But all in vain. He produced a revolver, and said, "Look here, if you attempt to run away, I will shoot you as sure as you are alive. Strip instantly." I took my clothes off, and he fastened me to an apple-tree behind the house, and flogged me until he was tired. I could not cry any more. The slaves who were watching me told me afterwards that I had received 107 Lashes. He untied me. I could scarcely walk. For one cent he swore he would shoot me. He threatened, if ever I attempted to do so again, he would certainly do for me. I crawled into the kitchen. I thought I should die. After dinner was over in the parlour, the servants looked at my back, which was frightfully lacerated, and rubbed it with something. Generally before this, after I had had a whipping, my master had ordered my back to be attended to, and salt to be applied, but this time he did not seem to care whether I recovered or not. In the evening my mistress came into the kitchen, and said, "Francis, you have had a very severe flogging. I could not prevent it. I hope you will never attempt to run away again. I thought your master would have killed you (she had been watching the flogging from a window); you must not be sullen or sulky to him in any way, or he will flog you again. I shall send you something into the kitchen to rub your back with," and after some more advice and cautions she went away.

Brutally Treated by my Master.

Slowly I began to recover; but now, after about fourteen years, I feel the effects of it, especially in bad weather. I was dreadfully frightened of my master ever after this flogging. Whenever he had been whipping any of the slaves in the fields, and came into the kitchen, he would cut at me, or when drunk would make me stand with my hands down, and strike me in the face and ribs, and threaten, if I got out of his way, to shoot me with his revolver, which he always carried with him. "Blast the lot of them," he used to say; "when I begin, if I had strength, I would flog the whole plantation round." When he had been in the fields flogging the slaves for anything or nothing, and was returning home, he would stop to scratch his pet pig, which would stretch itself out, evidently enjoying life. He would call it master's pig, master's pig. He would then pat his favourite dog, which had run to meet him, and was gambolling about him, calling it master's dog, master's dog. Then coming into the kitchen he would make a dash at me, striking and lashing me several times, not caring whether he hit me on the head or elsewhere. The girl would rush out of the kitchen, but calling her back, he would curse her, and ask her "what the h---- she was screaming for," and threaten to give her a whipping. After having lashed her two or three times he would then pass upstairs. Oh, how often have I looked at that pig and dog and wished I was either rather than a black man!