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"There was a troop of noisy children, who stopped their play to crowd around their Master, who spoke kindly to all. They seemed delighted at his notice, and handled my watch-chain without fear or hesitation."

DISCLOSURES AND CONFESSIONS

OF

FRANK. A. WILMOT,

THE SLAVE THIEF AND NEGRO RUNNER,

WITH AN ACCURATE ACCOUNT OF THE

UNDER-GROUND RAILROAD!

WHAT IT IS, AND WHERE LOCATED!

BY A LATE CONDUCTOR ON THE SAME.

ALSO—FULL PARTICULARS OF THE

PLANS ADOPTED FOR RUNNING OFF SLAVES

FROM THE

Southern States to the Canadas.

ADDED TO WHICH IS A HISTORY OF THE

Abduction of Miss Lucille Hamet,

THE PLANTER'S DAUGHTER,

AND A TRUE DESCRIPTION OF

SLAVE LIFE ON A PLANTATION.

PHILADELPHIA:
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PUBLISHER'S NOTICE.

Some time in the early part of November last, with the following Book of Disclosures, we received a letter from Kingston, Canada West. The letter purported to be written by one Lawrence Crocker, in which he stated that the manuscript confession sent had been left in his hands by a person named Wilmot, who claimed Philadelphia as his native place. The writer further remarked that we should make inquiry in regard to certain private matters relative to Wilmot's mother. We were at first disposed to disbelieve the whole affair; but on making the inquiry we found that Wilmot was not a *myth*, but a reality; and further that it was well known in this city that he was engaged in running off slaves. A little further inspection satisfied us of the truth of the whole confession, and we therefore give it to the public without comment.

THE PUBLISHERS.

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in the Clerk's Office of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

DISCLOSURES AND CONFESSIONS

OF

FRANKLIN A. WILMOT,

Late Conductor on the "Underground Railroad.'

About ten years ago, while stopping at one of the principal hotels in Boston, I made the acquaintance of a man named John H. Ratlin, who, by his liberal expenditure of money, I was led to believe was extremely wealthy. He claimed to be a Southerner, and hailed from the vicinity of Nashville, Tennessee, where, as he said, he owned a large tract of land, stocked with slaves. He was about forty years old, large in stature, with a broad, wide chest, and light hair; and although apparently possessing many good qualities, among which was an unfeigned generosity, there seemed to be a slyness and cunning about his physiognomy which he but illy concealed.

My intimacy with this personage ripened into a sincere friendship, and several loans of money which he forced upon me, (my finances being low,) added to my admiration of the man.

We had been boarding at the same house for a month, during which time I tried in vain to get employment, when one evening he proposed a walk to the Charlestown navy-yard. Arrived at the yard, we seated ourselves on a piece of timber lying at some distance from where any of the workmen were engaged, when he thus frankly opened his mind, and gave me an idea of his true character.

"Wilmot," said he, "you are too good a young man to be 'hard-up,' as the saying is, and if you would but turn your attention to the proper channel, you could not fail to rise rapidly in the

estimation of a class called good men, and at the same time put money in your pocket. Now, a few years ago, I was about as bad off, in a moneyed point of view, as you seem to be; but I have discovered the 'philosopher's stone,' if it may be so called, and have at present as much wealth as I desire, besides being courted and caressed by what are thought to be our best and most influential citizens. In order to do this, I had to 'turn my coat,' as the politicians say, and do some acts rather desperate in their character, and predatory in their nature. But, my dear man, if we are *too* honest in this country, we'll starve, or have to dig and delve worse than any Louisiana 'coast' nigger on a sugar plantation. Now, my good fellow, let me say something to you in confidence. There is in this land a goodly number of what I call blinded moralists, who imagine that they are doing God's service, and benefiting their enslaved countrymen, (as they choose to style the negroes of the South,) by liberally supplying funds to those who run the risk of carrying them off from the sunny climes of the Southern tropic to the frigid regions of Canada. A society, of which I am a member, was formed some years ago, with the object in view of relieving these sycophantic and blind sympathists of their surplus funds; and the only way we can do it is to actually run the slaves off to Canada, and then leave them there, to manage as best they can. Sometimes, it is true, we run the risk of getting ourselves in trouble, but in nine cases out of ten our plans are so perfect, that we escape without even suspicion. If you are willing to join us, and enter into our solemn compact, I will introduce you to-night at the meeting which comes off at the Rev. Mr. B——'s house. What say you?"

While Ratlin was speaking, I was revolving in my mind the question, "Am I always to labor hard and be poor?" and when he concluded, I answered him that I was quite willing to join in any enterprise which promised me wealth, provided I could obtain it without violating my own sense of right. He then began telling me of the wretchedness of the slave population, the cruelty of their masters, and the tyrannical atrocities practised by the intellectual whites over the backs of the ignorant negroes; and he argued with so much sophistry and eloquence, and painted the deeds of the Southerners in such dark, bloody colors, that my nature, ever free and compassionate, warmed into an ecstacy of delight at the prospect of being able to alleviate the sufferings of

a race of people whom he induced me to believe were naturally far more intellectual and grateful for favors done, than those who held them in bondage. The subject was one about which I had read little, and seen less; and I was easily led away with his glowing account of how grateful the black ever was to him who aided him in obtaining his freedom. Then, too, the prospect of gaining wealth so easily, and in such a noble manner, was fuel to the flame of sympathy which he had kindled in my breast. I therefore agreed to accompany him to the meeting, and when evening arrived, I was introduced and accepted. The next day Ratlin left Boston, and I remained to receive my instructions.

Before recording the scenes through which I have passed, I will mention the fact that the meeting which I attended was that of the Aiding and Abetting Society—secret in its organization, and having for its real object the collecting of money from the Northern sympathists, to be used in running off slaves from the South to the Canadas. In this first meeting, the audience was composed of a large number of itinerant, backsliding ministers, worn out tract colporteurs, elderly females, and a few cunning-looking negroes. There was not a single member of it who seemed to care a jot or tittle what became of the slaves after they reached Canada. Many speeches were made, and plans proposed, for the successful carrying out of the enterprise. One of these plans, and that which was finally adopted, was this: agents were appointed to make collections of money throughout the northern country, to be used in purchasing a series of farms or plantations, lying on a line, known as the "Underground Railroad," which ran in a zig-zag course, extending from the northern limits of Alabama, through Tennessee and Kentucky to Ohio. These farms were to be occupied by *northern slaveholders*, and were to be the *depôts* whereat the *trains* of the *Underground Railroad* were to lay-by during the day, all the travelling on the road being done at night. The meeting then adjourned, after appointing a financial and business committee, to receive the moneys collected by the travelling solicitors, and applying it to the purchase of plantations, with their negroes, on the crooked line laid down on the Railroad Map. I, with others, was appointed to the very pleasant position of travelling through the South as an invalid gentleman seeking health, my haggard appearance and unwholesome complexion thus serving me a good turn. I was to make myself "generally useful."

During the year following, I made the tour of the Southern and Southwestern States, seeking whatever information I could obtain, from the various blacks whom I encountered at the hotels whereat I lodged. I also obtained the autographs of all the conspicuous men, judges and lawyers, I could possibly get.

At the selected time I was again in Boston, and learned that sufficient money had been collected, and the sum applied to the purchase of a series of excellent plantations, located at distances of from twenty to thirty-five miles apart, and extending from Alabama to the banks of the Ohio. The slaves on these tracts of land were also purchased and held in bondage; and the parties located on them were in all cases instructed to be as severe on the blacks as possible, in order to induce the belief among the surrounding landholders, that at least, on these farms, there was no sympathy whatever with the negro-worshippers. The cruelties I afterwards saw practised on some of the negroes engaged on these *depôt* plantations, would shock the reader. At times, the indignation of the warm-hearted Southerner himself would be aroused in favor of the bonded slave, and murmurings at the barbarities practised were freely indulged in. But our "Aiding and Abetting Society" soothed itself by the reflection that we were making money, and that it was right and proper that the few should suffer for the sake of the benefits which would eventually be reaped by the many.

The proprietors of these depôt stations were also the most rabid advocates of slavery; and in case one of our agents was found out in tampering with the slaves of a neighboring planter, our *station-house* farmers were the first to propose a coat of tar and feathers, and an order to leave. By this means, the real Southerners were blinded as to the true state of feeling held by the occupants of the depôt farms; and when negroes were missing from the neighborhood, none of the parties losing ever thought of going to one of our stations to find them. Hundreds of slaves have thus, at various times, lain hidden in the upper rooms of a depôt plantation-house, while the apparently revengeful proprietor of it was in company with the losers, scouring the country in search of the thieves.

The farms being bought and paid for, and thus occupied, all our arrangements were complete. Ten of the members of the Society, of which I was one, then received our instructions how to proceed.

Under ground Railroad Conductor taking a free ride:

First, one thousand dollars in Southern bank bills, was given to each man for his expenses, and the route which he was to traverse laid out on a map. The whole of us were furnished with freedom papers, printed in blank, with the forged signatures of the judges of the various judicial districts lying along the line of our "Underground Railway." Our plan of operation was almost similar, and by giving my own experience as an agent and conductor, the reader will have a very fair idea of what my colleagues did.

Leaving Boston in September, 1851, I embarked on board a packet bound for Mobile, where I arrived in due time, without any incident occurring worthy of note. I had been furnished with letters of introduction by Boston merchants, (who knew not of my plans,) and these recommendatory epistles gave me a welcome truly Southern and genial in its character. I was shortly after my arrival, surrounded by a circle of the best of Mobile's citizens, and when they exhibited in so many ways the generous hospitality of their feelings, my conscience almost smote me with the reflection that I was a villain indeed, to try to injure a people who did all in their power to render me exquisitely happy and contented. And here let me take a retrospective view of things, as I saw them in the South—a truthful view, unbiassed and unprejudiced.

While in Mobile, I was introduced to a fine looking planter named Moreland, who owned a large tract of sugar land on the "coast," or lower banks of the Mississippi; and at his especial invitation, I accompanied him to his home, where he intended to show me "Life in the South," as he termed it, "and how sugar was made." His object was, doubtless, to remove any sentiment of abolitionism that I might be the possessor of, for he had understood I was *a Northern man with Southern principles.* Gladly accepting his invitation, we proceeded to New Orleans and from thence took steamboat to the residence of my friend. Arrived at the homestead, I was ushered into the family residence, receiving a cordial greeting from the planter's wife and daughters. The house was built in the old French style. It was supported by brick pillars, and a large and spacious portico ran around it. The roof ran up high, and was crowned with a cupola, surrounded with a heavy balustrade. The yard was ornamented with live-oak trees, affording a grateful shade in summer. To the rear and left of the house, was a grove of orange trees, which ran along by the garden fence. The garden itself was tastefully laid out in plats, and boasted

a fine collection of horticultural treasures. Outside of the yard and beyond the garden, were the negro quarters; the houses ran in four equal rows, at angles from the river. In the midst of them was the overseer's house, which, like the rest, was brilliant with a new coat of whitewash; and the whole were buried in a little forest of shrubby trees. At one end of the quarter was the *hospital*, where the sick daily received the attention of a skilful physician named Morris, a graduate of the Pennsylvania College of Medicine. Near the overseer's house hung a massive bell, at the summons of which the labors of the day were commenced and ended. Beyond the quarters were the negroes' gardens and chicken houses. The stables and corn-houses could be seen through the trees further back; while the tall chimneys of the sugar house overlooked the whole. It was indeed a scene of beauty and good order.

When we were first landed at this delightful Southern home, crowds of negroes, of all ages, sexes and colors, came thronging to meet us, smiling and glad faces were all around, eager and willing to bid a welcome to their kind and indulgent master, whose arrival was expected. I had been taught by Ratlin to look upon the slave-holder as a kind of half-human monster, with no feeling nor sentiment of refinement in his composition; and the life of the slave a dull and continued round of suffering, an eternal groan of agony, with no ray of comfort, and no kind word to cheer thankless labor from one year's end to another. But I now saw before me a sample of the South—a native picture—not flattered or got up for effect. I saw the slaves during their every-day life, a happy, contented and careless race; well fed, as their looks testified; well lodged, and not overtasked. I mentally drew the comparison between the negroes in their happy condition, and the half-starved and poorly-paid laborer at the North. I saw the slave well taken care of, and comprehended that it would be so, if not from philanthrophy, at least for the sake of available labor. I then turned my mind to the North, and thought of the thousands of families in Philadelphia, New York and Boston, who pale and attenuated by want and sickness, are shut up in their narrow and filthy dens, where vice and depravity stalk abroad, and the wretched inmates live and die in a state lower almost than the brutes of the earth; where murder rears its bloody front, and incest and crimes too horrible for even the gaze of unfeeling police officers, are as frequent as the revolutions of our planet; and I mentally cursed the bigoted

fanatics who delight in creating feuds between people who should be on terms of amity.

On the evening of the second day after my arrival, Mr. Moreland invited me to take a stroll through the quarters. We passed to the front, and entered the yard. Groups of negroes were scattered around in different attitudes. There were seated on a bench under the trees, some two or three older ones, whose patriarchal appearance and gray locks attracted my immediate notice. Around them was a group of younger ones, who listened to the conversation of their seniors. There were another set stretched at full length on the green grass,—happy and contented. There was a troop of noisy children, who stopped their gambols on the velvety sward to crowd around their master, who spoke kindly to all. Bursts of laughter, as pleasant as the tinkling of a silver bell, went forth from them when they replied to his questions. They seemed delighted at his notice; but exhibited none of that fright which would be shown by those with whom kindness was not usual. They came around us—a merry, grinning troop; they examined my dress, and handled my watch chain without fear or hesitation. At the doors of some of the houses were seen sitting the inmates, quietly smoking their pipes, while ever and anon a snatch of a hymn would issue from the tenements of the pious. All were free from care, and happy in the possession of enough. As I turned and gazed over the scene, I thought I had never seen a more interesting spectacle. The deep respect paid to myself and their master when we returned to the house; the combined sounds at this lovely hour; the pale blue smoke from the chimneys, as the negroes prepared their evening meal—all formed a picturesque impression which I shall never forget.

It may be asked, "did not your conscience smite you, when you reflected on the nefarious business in which you were engaged?" I reply, it did, and terribly. But the solemn compact I had entered into—the love of money, and a desire to *live easy*, banished the thoughts of goodness propagated in my heart, by what I witnessed. After tarrying a few days with Mr. Moreland, I was about to depart; having during my stay made an experimental proposition to an old black fellow named Sam, (who seemed to be a great favorite among the negroes,) that he should run away. He gruffly refused to accede to it, and I laughed it off.

The day previous to the one I had selected for my journey, Mr.

Moreland asked me to accompany him in a walk to the hospital, saying, "I want you to see the way our negroes are treated, with regard to comfort, food, and sickness." I acquiesced. Stopping in front of the hospital, "here," said he, "let us enter." It was a square building of two rooms, with a gallery in front. One room was destined for the males, and the other for the opposite sex. Everything was scrupulously neat and clean. In the male department there were three patients. They were on cots, a number of which were placed around the room. Mr. Moreland went up to each one. He inquired kindly after their ailments, and after making some gentle remarks, we turned and entered the other room. Here were also several patients. The dispensary was in this room, and fully supplied with medicines. Mr. Moreland rang a small bell, and an old, thin, spare negress, with an intelligent countenance, answered its call. "She is the nurse of the hospital," said he to me, "and can undertake the care of a common case as well as some physicians. She understands all the simple medicines. and their doses, and is always within hearing of the bell."

We now entered several of the houses. These were furnished very plainly, but were clean. A bed in the corner, and perhaps two; clothes hanging on pegs around the room; a pine table, and a few chairs or stools, together with a rude chest, and a plentiful supply of cooking utensils, completed the list.

"How do you feed them?" I asked. "On Sunday morning," replied Mr. Moreland, "the overseer goes to the meat house, and there assemble the negroes; four pounds of pork are weighed out to each one, and they get a peck of meal, and a half gallon of molasses; beans, sweet potatoes, and other vegetables, they raise themselves in great plenty. They are allowed to raise chickens, and always have a supply of eggs."

"What time do they go to work?" inquired I.

"At daylight, and stop at sundown; rest two or three hours during the middle or heat of the day; but have every Saturday afternoon to wash and mend, and cultivate their patches. They always have, too, in this sugar neighborhood, a week's holiday after the cane is gathered," answered Mr. Moreland.

"The negroes look clean," said I, anxious to get what information I could; "is it true they have only one pair of pantaloons a year?"

"Oh! that," laughed Mr. Moreland, is another foolish Northern

"The negro began descending, carrying the girl with him, having tied her hands together around his neck, and placed her on his back. She struggled violently and kept muttering that she was white."

belief. I give my negroes three and sometimes four comfortable suits a year from head to foot; but, generally, the planters around here give but two suits a year."

"Have they any amusements?" continued I.

"Often they have a dance by moonlight," said he, "for there are several fiddlers, and then we give them a big dinner occasionally."

"Do you often punish them?" was my next query.

"Seldom," said he; "sensible planters scarcely ever have a negro struck. They hardly ever require it. A good overseer is all that is wanted. They work cheerfully, and are kindly ruled. Now and then an example has to be made, and a servant punished. But these punishments are few and far between."

Although I after this aided and abetted in running off hundreds of valuable slaves, I felt gratified beyond measure at the time I was on Mr. Moreland's plantation. I had been led to believe, and honestly imagined, that the life of the slave was horrible; that the chain of slavery galled their bodies; that the lash of the overseer was never idle; that not one ray of hope broke through the dark horizon of their life. I found that I, with thousands of others, had been deluded, and that the imaginary chain sits as lightly as the golden one on the bosom of beauty. And I now say that the life of the negro at the South, is in many respects, better than is that of many a white man at the North. I for one, have *felt* the oppression of the rich over the poor, the grinding exaction, the unfeeling disregard of anything but money.

Leaving the hospitable mansion of Mr. Moreland, I turned my attention, with an upbraiding and sickened heart, to the pursuit of my nefarious business. I went up the Mississippi, and crossed over into Alabama, where I commenced operations. This I did, by obtaining board at a small hotel in one of the river towns, and gradually instilling into the minds of the servants the words of treason against their masters, holding out glorious prospects at the North. Quite a number agreed to decamp on evenings I appointed, receiving from me full instructions how to proceed from one station to another. I furnished all with freedom or emancipation papers, and they started singly, travelling from dark until near day's dawn. When they could not reach a station or depôt, (where they were always secreted away, provisioned, and a change of clothing furnished,) before daylight, they laid in the forests and

woods until the shades of night approached. Each one was provided with a pocket compass, and a small whistle, and instructed in their uses. During the night, negro spies in gangs were sent out, extending east and west for three or four miles, by the depôt keepers; and when the runaways heard the peculiar whistle agreed upon, they answered it in turn; by this means they were always found, and snugly stowed away before daylight.

Almost every town and county in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky, was visited by the agents of our Aiding and Abetting Society, and thousands of negroes were run off and passed over the route. But a few were taken at a time from the same neighborhood, and no more than one was allowed to depart on the same night. Alarm and undue excitement was thus kept down. Three or four negroes out of a hundred or so on a plantation, was nothing very serious, and so but little effort was made by the losers to search for them. A reward of a hundred dollars could have frequently been had; but none of our agents would have thought of accepting so trifling a sum, for the reason that when a conductor carried his *train* through safe, and had the written testimonials from the *depôt-keepers* that he did so, it was an easy matter for our collectors to raise three or four hundred dollars from the blinded sympathisers of the North, for every negro who was safely landed in Canada. In this way passed the last nine years of my life.

Constantly at work in my capacity as a conductor, I necessarily met with some terrible adventures, and made some narrow escapes. On one or two occasions I came near shedding human blood, in order to save myself, but Heaven willed it otherwise. In one of my expeditions, in the year 1856, I was saved from a terrible death, in a manner that seemed almost miraculous; and in order that the reader may know the particulars of it, I herewith give it.

I had made the acquaintance of a quadroon negro, named Bill Lake, a cunning and intelligent boy-waiter at a hotel in one of the upper towns of Alabama, and through him quite a number of the slaves had been induced to leave their masters. It was no easy matter for a white man to convince a slave that he would be better off in the North. One of their own color was always used to urge them on. They all know, whether by *instinct* or not, I cannot tell, that it is cold in the north and the winters long, and if there is anything a negro dreads it is cold weather. This being

the case, one may paint freedom in all its heavenly beauty, and the only answer he is likely to get is, "Massa, ain't it debilish cold out dar?" Often indeed has this simple query made me feel for my neck, while the pulsations of my heart would cease for an instant with dread. But to my story. Bill informed me, that the negroes who had agreed to decamp, were prepared to start as I should direct, and through him at various times, I run them off. He wished, as did I, to go in the *last train;* and when the night approached on which we were to start, he apprised me he had a half-sister, a very beautiful girl, whom he intended to carry off with him. This I opposed, for the reason, that he said she would have to be *forced* to go. Nevertheless, as a word from the scoundrel would have hung me, I was fain to give way to his plan. Noticing that I appeared to fear him, he actually told me *I should* do as he said. I was on the point of pistolling him on the spot, for his audacity, but recollecting that he had some of my papers in his possession, which I did not wish to come to light, I desisted, advising him to use milder words in future. Night came on, and the place where we were to meet—a wood about three miles from the town—was selected. Bill was to have two horses, one of which would carry him and his sister. I arrived at the place and I found them, and we were soon on the march. I spoke several times to the girl who sat behind him, but received no reply from her, he always speaking in her stead. In answer to my question, why she did not speak, he said he had blindfolded and gagged her, the latter, to prevent her hallooing and alarming the people who resided along the road over which we were passing. We rode thus for several hours, when day began to dawn. We were near our first rendezvous or stopping place, which Bill said he formerly had visited. It was a cave, on the side of a perpendicular precipice, and could only be reached by descending by a rope ladder, which he had procured for the purpose. We soon came to the spot. It was a frightful place indeed. The cave was about twenty-five feet below the verge of the precipice, and the mouth or entrance opened on a projecting shelf of rock, not more than two feet in width. Below the cave, at a distance of at least two hundred feet, was a deep ravine, the bed of which was covered with sharp, loose stones, which had at various times fallen from the top of the immense ridges which enclosed the rugged valley. We dismounted and turned the horses loose. While I steadied the

ladder, Bill began to descend, carrying the female with him, having tied her hands together around his neck, and placed her on his back. She struggled violently, but this did not disconcert the black, who resolutely undertook his perilous descent.

Three or four steps had been taken downward by Bill, while I stood gazing in affright at the danger to him and his burden, when suddenly I felt a jerk! Looking downward I perceived that half the strands of one side of the rope composing the ladder had broken! I remained for a moment immovable, and my eyes then closed with terror. A cold shudder passed through my veins, and I thought they must both be dashed to pieces. When Bill reached the shelf of rock on which the mouth of the cave opened, my heart beat violently with joy. I eagerly hallooed to him, inquiring if he was safe. He replied that he was, but that I should not come down immediately, as he had heard the sound of men's voices coming up through the valley as he was descending. He asked me to keep a strict look-out until I ascertained from whence the sounds proceeded.

I sat down by the edge of the precipice, not liking to venture down if I could avoid it, on account of the insecure state of the ladder, when of a sudden I heard a long, desperate scream of agony from the cave. My suspicions had been aroused at the singular conduct of Bill towards the woman he represented as his sister, and I determined to go down to the cavern at once, not doubting but that he was cruelly beating her. I hastily descended, my progress being hurried by the appearance of a body of armed men, who just then emerged into view at one end of the ravine, a few hundred rods distant. I was satisfied they had not seen me, as they came to a stand, and appeared to be holding a consultation.

The screaming from the cave now became heart-rending, and I descended with alacrity. Arrived at the entrance and looking in, what was my horror to observe, crouching in one corner of it, a beautiful girl, whose eyes were flashing fire, whilst in her upraised hand she held a gleaming dagger! Bill, who was gazing on her like a tiger, and foaming at the mouth with rage, stood with his back toward me, and did not notice my approach.

"What do you mean, you black-hearted villain?" I cried, seizing him by the throat. He at once turned upon me without speaking,

and our struggle was a desperate one. He caught hold of my arms and with the strength of a lion tried to disengage my hands from his throat. But I held on, well knowing that unless I could choke him senseless, he would overpower me. We struggled from one end of the cave to the other, until we got at the very mouth of it! It was now for life or death, and I cried to the young lady to get me a pistol out of my pocket. She rushed to my assistance and got hold of the weapon, but the black was then so near falling over the ledge, that I feared to let go of him, lest he should grasp me tighter, and in his death-struggle drag me with him to the bottom of the abyss. I was almost exhausted and had given up all hope. Death, in its most horrid form, was staring me in the face. I began to mutter a prayer, still grasping the negro tightly by the throat. The report of the pistol, at that opportune moment fired by the lady, caused him to utter a fearful cry of despair, and make a frightful spring upwards. I let go my hold and he fell with a terrific crash to the bottom, carrying with him a piece of cord with which he became entangled. I tottered into the cave and fainted.

When consciousness again returned, I found the lady bathing my temples with liquor, a bottle of which Bill had previously placed in the cavern. I soon revived, and in a few words she told me her tale of woe. Her name was Lucille Hamet. She was an only child, and the daughter of the planter to whom Bill belonged, he having hired him to the keeper of the hotel at which I was stopping. On many occasions Bill had attempted to gain her favor, by performing deeds of daring, to show his devotion to her. He had dared on one occasion to say that *he loved her*, but as she had often heard such language from both the female and male servants about the house, she paid no attention to it, it being a common expression among the slaves to say that they dearly loved their young mistress or young master.

On the night of our departure, Bill rode out to the mansion of his owner, (who was absent in New Orleans on business,) and hastily informed the daughter that his master had just arrived at the hotel, and was very sick, and that he sent him out for her to come to him. She little suspected the villainy of the slave, and hurriedly departed in his company. As soon as a copse of wood was reached, which intervened between the plantation and the town, the treacherous scoundrel dragged her to the ground, bound

and gagged her. Then tying her fast to the saddle's bow, he hastily placed her on the horse, and brought her to the spot where we were to meet. After he descended with her into the cave, he unloosed the cords and gag, and told her with much audacity, that *he* was now master, and that she should be his mistress, or wife, just as she chose to term it. Springing forward, she snatched the dagger from his leathern belt, and with it kept him at bay, until my opportune arrival.

I was much shocked at the recital of this young girl's wrongs, who assured me that she, as well as her father, had ever used him and all their other servants, most kindly. I promised her *my* protection, and asked of her to keep quiet until I reconnoitred the party whom I had seen on horseback. This she promised to do; but I had not to leave the cave to observe our pursuers, (for such they were,) they being now in the ravine directly below us. They halted around the dead and mangled body of the negro, and after a few curses against him, departed, one of them, on picking up the piece of rope he had carried with him in his dreadful fall, observing, that he had doubtless tried to lower himself from the brink of the precipice to the valley, and the rope breaking, caused him to fall.

We continued in the cave until evening, fasting the while, for we found no provisions, as Bill had informed me we would. Just before dark, I persuaded the lady to ascend. She went up with great agility, and I followed. Making for the highway, we soon espied the mail stage, and in it she took passage for the town from which I had taken my departure the night previous.

I had so stated the case to the young lady as to gain her favor, and she assured me she would keep a profound secret the part I had taken in the matter, only mentioning the fact that I, hearing her screams, had rescued her. I afterwards heard she reached home in safety.

After this narrow escape, I did not again visit Alabama, but continued my operations in the western parts of North and South Carolina, and the eastern counties of Tennessee and Kentucky.

Our depôt-farm system worked to a charm; and we extended branches of the Underground Railroad both east and west. If I am right in my memory, we ran off some thirty-two hundred slaves, during the years 1856, '57, and '58. In no case was there any detection. As soon as a slave reached our crossing-place, a little

"Bill, the negro, was gazing on her like a tiger, and foaming at the mouth with rage. Seizing him by the throat I cried to the young lady to get a pistol out of my pocket. She rushed to my assistance, and at the report of the pistol he uttered a fearful cry of despair.

above Maysville, Kentucky, he was taken in hand by the agents of the road in Ohio, who pushed bodies of them rapidly to Cleveland and Toledo, where they were delivered to the agents of the British Colonial Abolition Society. Our duty was then done, and we troubled ourselves no more about them.

Prior to my removing to Canada, in August last, I became the head of a company of four conductors, who desired me to aid them in carrying off three Creole girls, owned by a man in one of the southern counties of Kentucky. For the part I was to perform, I was to receive $3000. These girls had just been purchased from a slave dealer in New Orleans, and were considered by my comrades to be very handsome. Their object in obtaining the girls was a dishonorable one. Although I had seen them, I was not smitten with their beauty, and only looked upon the enterprise as one of profit, money being, during these ten horrid years of my life, an idol which I worshipped. On the night we selected for our foray on the house of the planter, we repaired to the spot. One of our party, rapping at the door, the planter opened it, and remarked, that if we were benighted, he took pleasure in affording us a shelter. We entered, with seeming gratitude, and partook of a pleasant supper, which was already on the table. Conversation being opened, he alluded to the recent purchase he had made of the three girls, stating that they were sisters. They were intended, he remarked, as house servants, to wait upon his daughters and wife, the latter being in delicate health. At a given signal, we seized and bound him hand and foot. The females screamed, and several of the negroes from the slave quarters rushed in. Seeing their master bound, and learning from what we said, that we wished to take them north, a scene followed, the recollection of which thrills me with horror. Every one seized upon the first thing at hand, and making at us, a terrible combat commenced. Knives were freely used, pistols fired, and it was with the greatest difficulty we made our escape out of the windows and doors. I really thought my time had come, for we were hotly pursued by the excited negroes, only keeping them at bay by occasionally firing a shot from our pistols. They lighted pine torches and followed in our wake, shouting after us with demoniac yells. Our ammunition began to run short, and we were determining whether to separate or remain together, when we struck upon a cow path. This we rapidly followed, but it shortly led us into a rugged defile;

a number of trees had here fallen across it, and stopped our further progress. The blacks, with their blazing brands, rushed upon us, whooping like so many devils, the crackling and blazing of the torches rendering the scene the most awful and terrific I had ever witnessed. Horrid thoughts of approaching death crowded on my excited and fevered brain; and when I saw my three companions slaughtered in the most dreadful manner by my side, I sank into a state of utter unconsciousness.

When I awoke it was dark, and no one was visible. The cold and stiff arm of one of my dead comrades was lying across my breast. The blood from his wounds had run down my bosom, and was now thick and clotty. My feelings were awful. My heart almost ceased to beat, but with a great effort I arose to my feet. The moon was just rising, and shed her soft, ambient rays on the scene of carnage. I seemed to have escaped any serious wound, except what appeared to be the cut of a knife on my right arm. It was painful and stiffened. I gazed upon the bodies of my dead comrades, and then turned away with a sickening sensation. I slowly made my way through the brushwood, and over the trunks of the fallen trees, and after walking a few miles, came to the Mississippi river. Here I bathed myself, and by the moon's light washed my bloody garments as well as I could. Discarding my shirt and vest, I buttoned my coat close to my neck, listening patiently for the puff of a steamboat. One of these, the "Signet," in a short time made its appearance, and as soon as she was near enough to hear me, I hailed her. A boat was sent ashore, and I took passage for St. Louis, whither I informed the captain I was bound. In answer to the questions asked me, as to how I came in so deplorable a condition, I replied, that I had been waylaid, and almost murdered, and that the robbers who attacked me, were frightened away before they obtained my money, by one of them thinking there were horsemen approaching. My replies to the queries seemed satisfactory, and a suit of the captain's clothing was loaned me. I threw my bloody garments overboard, at a moment when no one was observing.

The boat sped along very swiftly. It was just the dawn of day, when one of the firemen darted past me like an arrow, shouting "fire! fire! fire!" In a moment all was bustle and confusion. The pilot seemed seized with a panic, and instead of running the boat on shore, he kept her in the middle of the river. Ultimately,

wrapped in flames, she was run on the foot of an island. But few reached the shore at that time, as she swung round and floated off. At this instant the boilers exploded, tearing away all the forward part of the cabin. The yawl was soon filled with terrified people, leaving myself almost alone on the deck. The flames were wrapping everything in their destructive embrace; and there seemed nothing but certain death for me. The explosion of the boilers had scattered around a thousand fragments, and many torn and mangled human beings lay about. The scene was appalling, and even now as I write, it makes me shudder. There I stood on the deck, almost alone. I could not swim, and I felt my fate fast closing around me. In a moment I was seized in the arms by a sturdy negro, who leaping into the boiling, muddy water, gallantly battled among the floating fragments and reached the shore in safety. I was as helpless as an infant, and when I turned my eyes to my preserver, what was my surprise and astonishment, to see old black Sam, and his master, Mr. Moreland, standing over me. I arose to my feet, and undertook to thank them. Words failed me, and I burst into tears.

"I will give you, Mr. Moreland, any price you may demand for Sam," said I, after I had somewhat composed myself, "so that I can set him free."

"Ah!" replied he, "Mr. Wilmot, Sam wouldn't leave me for the world. If he had wanted his freedom he would have long since had it. I have offered repeatedly to set him free, but he would never accept the boon."

Another packet approaching our now burnt boat, the saved passengers were taken aboard; and without anything occurring worthy of record, we reached Cairo in the course of the following day. Here I parted company with Mr. Moreland and the noble slave, Sam, on whom I lavished several hundred dollars as a present. From Cairo I journeyed to Cincinnati, and from that city to Boston, where I tendered my resignation as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, which was received graciously, after my taking a solemn oath that I would not, on pain of death, disclose the names of the parties who are the keepers of the *depôt* or *station plantations* in the Southern States. I would like to violate that oath which has been wrung from me; but were the facts known in these exciting times, I fear much blood would be spilled; and, heaven knows, I wish to be no more a party to such scenes.

Before concluding this work, I cannot help saying, that from my experience in the South I have ever found the negroes to be better treated than they deserve; they are a degraded race and *are not* susceptible of the finer feelings of love and gratitude. You may take your most intelligent negro slave, whose master is kind, feeds, clothes, and indulges him, and you will find that if you talk with him about his owner, and be a little credulous, he will tell you that that very master ought to have been in the penitentiary ten years since. There are honorable exceptions to the rule, but they are very few. The negro seems to be coarse in his feelings, and totally incapable of having a real affection for his superior, the white. He may have a preference, but it is all a habit. Whip a dog, and he will love you, is an old saying, and in nine cases out of ten it will apply to the negro. Many persons suppose this gross feeling in the negro is the result of slavery, but it is a mistake. I have aided to make free some thousands of negroes, and in all cases I have found that as soon as the restraints imposed upon them by their masters are removed, they inclined to barbarism. This I have seen exemplified in some parts of Upper Canada, where I am now residing. Large fields, once made to teem with golden crops by the energy of the white man, are now yielding to the inroads of a rank and unwholesome vegetation, grown up in bushes, and the dwelling place of the viper and the scorpion. Costly dwellings and barns, with comfortable outhouses, are going to decay, doors off their hinges, the grass growing rank and luxuriant around them. Expensive and elegant farming utensils, which have been furnished them, are being eaten up with rust. The condition of a Southern slave in Canada is indeed deplorable. Poor, degraded, pilfering wretches, they drag out a miserable existence. Every inducement is offered to them to improve their condition—work and plenty—good wages and rewards. At work you do not find them, but go to the crowded hospitals, the grog-shops and other scenes of debauchery, there they flourish in all their glory. These things are the effects of a mistaken system, and all any one has to do to satisfy himself of the fact, is to pay a visit first to the South, the land of the slave, and then to Canada, the land wherein he is free.

Before concluding, I will mention a real fact, not a fancy sketch, in proof of my assertion that the negroes, as a class, are ungrateful to those who benefit them. In 1852, a gentleman from Cambria

County, Pennsylvania, a lawyer of ability, settled in one of the lower parishes of Louisiana, a few miles south of the plantation of Mr. Moreland, of whom I have previously spoken. He very soon commanded a share of business, and finally married the daughter of a respectable old planter in an adjoining parish. The planter owned negroes, and, of course, at his death, (which took place a few weeks after the marriage of the daughter,) the son-in-law inherited through his wife. He was strongly imbued with the notion of emancipation. Conversations with his wife tinctured her mind with the doctrine, and he then formed a plan for the ultimate emancipation of their slaves.

About this time he acquired, by the successful defence of a suit, a large tract of land in the state of Illinois, and he then determined to carry into practice his idea of establishing a colony of free negroes on the land, and for himself to play the patriarch to his flock.

In accordance with these feelings he visited Illinois, had the land surveyed; and after making his final arrangements, returned and removed all his negroes and family thither. He built a dwelling, and houses for the negroes, and furnished them comfortably. He emancipated all his slaves, and put his theory to the test of practice. Upon the principle of community farms, he laid out his fields, and gave the negroes an interest in the crop. The first year they did tolerably well, but grumbled a good deal on the division. During the spring of the second year several left him, and by the time the crop was ready for harvest he had scarcely half of his original force. Those who remained were given to intoxication, insubordination and idleness, and he then began to see into the effects of his system. At the end of the second year all of them had gone except a few of the superannuated. That year 1856, was remarkable unhealthy, and his family were exceedingly sickly. Ultimately he himself was taken ill. His wife sent to the negro house to request some one to attend on them. Latterly the negroes' services had been grudgingly and reluctantly given; and now he and his family received nothing but impertinence and insult, and an absolute refusal to assist them. What a commentary on the pretended gratitude of the black is this; servants who had been raised and kindly treated by her father, and put upon terms of equality by her own act, and upon whose breasts she had often, probably when a child, been lulled to sleep, thus showed their gratitude!

There is a characteristic in the negro which I have ever noticed, and if the reader of these pages will examine some of them himself, he will find the truth of my assertion,—they never confess they are perfectly well. Ask one if he is well, and he will commence complaining. Tell him he is a splendid fellow and looks strong, and he will say he is not much now, but that he has seen the time he was strong.

And with the hope that these rudely penned disclosures and facts may prove alike beneficial to the honest sympathiser with the slave, as well as to the latter himself, I now draw them to a close. Bad as I have been, I can see no better way to make a reparation, than by making known facts gathered from my own observation, during my ten years' engagement in a dishonorable, rascally business, as a Conductor on the Underground Railroad.

The wealth I gained in this nefarious business did me no good. It came easy and went quickly; and could I repay those Southerners whom I aided in robbing, I would feel happy. I was drawn into the business by my poverty, as are hundreds of others. All, I may say, or nearly all, who are actually engaged in the practical operation of running off the slaves, care no more for their future benefit and welfare, than did I. And those who, in the charitableness of their hearts, advance or subscribe money for such purposes, are simply filling the pockets of a mischievous set of men, too lazy to work, and who wish to live easy, having but few scruples as to the manner whereby they obtain that living.

Many persons residing in the South are disposed to look upon pedlars and other dealers in trifling articles, as dangerous persons; and many of these poor men have been subject to insult and injury on mere suspicion. This is wrong, because this class of travellers in the South *never* tamper with the slaves, their sole object being to earn a livelihood. The agents of the Society of which I was a member, invariably travelled with full pockets, and stopped at the best hotels, to elude suspicion. As invalids, we travelled during the winter, and as capitalists looking for investments in Southern lands, during the summer. Often, when in Southern towns, has my heart upbraided me, when I have had to condemn a poor pedlar to screen myself. I merely mention this, that Southerners may know the class they so often unjustly punish.

The public's obedient servant,

FRANKLIN A. WILMOT.

"The blacks, with their torches, rushed upon us, whooping like so many devils, the crackling and blazing of the torches rendering the scene the most awful and terrific I had ever beheld."

"There was a troop of noisy children, who stopped their play to crowd around their Master, who spoke kindly to all. They seemed delighted at his notice, and handled my watch-chain without fear or hesitation."

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