

The Path Beyond the Levee.

By F.A. CUMMINGS.

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Many years ago, long before the breaking out of the civil war, the writer of this book was a civil engineer and land surveyor in what was then called the Attakapas country of Louisiana.

I had been sent to Louisiana by my stepfather to learn the business, it being his intention that, after study and experience, I should return to the home in the settlement near the mouth of the Gila river on the west coast of Africa, where he lived.

I left there in the year 1834, being nearly 20 years of age, and having no knowledge or acquaintance with the country, except that gained from books and from the officers and crews of the various vessels that traded at our baraboon.

My stepfather was ambitious and had plenty of money, and it was his darling scheme to lay off the country into farms, colonize them and establish an independent government upon the west coast.

Portugal held nominal possession of the district he wished to locate, and he had obtained a grant of an enormous tract of land for that purpose. This was when the slave trade was flourishing, but the growing pressure of the English and American war vessels crippled him financially, and his baraboon being eventually destroyed he left Africa and settled in Mississippi in 1834.

These changes interfered with his plans for my education and future prospects, and I was obliged to depend upon myself.

The deck of a slave ship was a wild school in which to learn the alphabet, and when George Weener approached me with his extraordinary scheme he little knew the past history of his apt pupil. He often wondered at my easy adaptation to negro character and my knowledge of west coast gibberish.

I commenced this narrative thirteen years ago, before my stepfather's death. Since he died I have obtained possession of his papers and shall soon publish them.

They tell a story of an African slave that rivals the wildest romance in interest and adventure, while dealing in literal facts. Many of the actors are yet living—more are dead and at the bottom of the sea.

CHAPTER I.
The Underground Railroad.

Ten years previous to the outbreak of the late civil war and until the fall of Fort Sumter I was a resident of the state of Louisiana.

During the last five years before the war I was an accredited agent of the then notorious underground railroad, a corporation whose history, written and unwritten, contains enough romantic adventures, hairbreadth escapes, examples of patient endurance and pathetic scenes to furnish the annals of a nation.

The legends of this road are so interwoven with romance that it is difficult to extract the true from the false. In this story, however, I shall endeavor to present a true narrative of events in which I was personally interested, as they occurred in the Dark Belt of Louisiana in the "days before the war."

Five years of my life were passed in the service of this underground railroad, and I was a direct participant in many of the events here chronicled. I had a partner, George L. Weener, a young man about 25 years of age—a born leader of men—and determined, with a warm heart and open hand to the call of the friendship—but as an enemy a man to be feared, for he was a crack shot and reckless as a river pirate, and to his cool courage and resolute energy our success was largely due. He was my ideal then, and although forty years lie between them and now, I thrill with admiration as I think of him.

He was the son of a sugar planter, and born a few miles from the Bayou Teche, parish of St. Mary, Louisiana, the son of a takapas country. His father was dead, but his mother owned and worked about seventy negroes, and until the year before forming my acquaintance George managed the plantation.

He was well educated, spoke English, German and French, and was an accomplished musician, but he was so thoroughly imbued with the love of adventure and danger that it almost unfitted him for business, and interfered with his popularity among the conservative planters, who constituted the bulk of the Attakapas population. But they evinced a wholesome respect for him, founded, I suspect, upon his physical force as his intellectual qualities.

For he stood six feet in his stockings, was well proportioned and an adept in all athletic exercises.

On the 19th day of September, 1855, I was sitting in my doorway, quietly smoking my pipe and enjoying the beauty of a September afternoon. The clear air of the prairie was cool and fragrant, and as I was enjoying its freshness leaning back in my chair I imagined myself the happiest of men. I was young, not 30 years of age, free from debt and owned the pretty place I lived on. My business of land surveying brought me a good income in addition to the profit of my little plantation. This I worked, with the assistance of one or two hands hired from the neighboring plantation.

As my gaze wandered aimlessly around away across the prairie I could faintly discern a speck, just a fleck of moving brown background upon the sea of green that rolled to the edge of the horizon. My eyes, practiced to such exacting targets, and as I was mounted man, and with the aid of my field glass I saw that he was moving.

SENT FREE TO MEN.
A Most Remarkable Remedy That Quickly Restores Lost Vigor To Men.
A Free Trial Package Sent By Mail To All Who Write.

Free trial package of a most remarkable remedy are being mailed to all who write the State Medical Institute. They cured so many men who had battled for years against the marital and family troubles of their kind. The Institute has decided to distribute free trial packages to all who write. It is a home treatment, and men who suffer with any form of sexual weakness resulting from youthful folly, premature loss of strength and memory, weak back, varicocele or emaciation of parts can cure themselves at home.

The remedy has a peculiarly grateful effect of warmth and seems to act direct to the desired location, giving strength and development just where it is needed. It cures all the great ills of men who, from years of misuse of the natural functions have had an absolute success in all cases. A request for the State Medical Institute, 306 Eleventh Building, St. Wayne, Ind., stating that you desire a free trial package will be promptly furnished. The Institute is desirous of reaching that great class of men who are unable to leave home to be treated and the free sample will enable them to see how easy it is to be cured of sexual weakness when the proper remedies are employed. The Institute makes no inquiries of any man who writes what he has, and a free sample, carefully sealed in a plain package, so that its recipient need have no fear of embarrassment or publicity. Readers are requested to write without delay.

down the trail that led to my home with his horse at a breakneck gallop. It was George Weener, and as he came nearer I could see that he was excited, an unusual state for him. He rode straight toward the hitching post as his horse slipped the bridle through the hole and over the end, and came toward me biting savagely at the end of his cigarette; he then threw himself down under the shade of a large live oak that grew a few yards from the house, beckoning me to come out under the tree. I did so and sat down beside him.

"Charlie," said he, after we had smoked awhile, "I want your assistance in an affair that it is more than likely you will not meddle with. Because, if you assist, your neck will be in equal danger with my own."

I was a little curious to know what the reserved, quiet George Weener had in view that menaced the anatomy of a person's neck, and luxuriously inquired, "What is it, George, steal a mule or rob a bank?"

"Stop your chaffing, Charlie! It is—steal a nigger—and that in our criminal calendar is the greatest crime."

"So, is it, is it?" I replied. "You had better buy one if you are in want."

"Can't do it, Charlie. I've tried and Coveny won't sell her."

"Coveny won't sell her! Ah! I understand. When the nigger is a woman and belongs to Coveny?" "I've got the whole story."

"No, you haven't, but you shall if you have patience to listen. What I have to tell you happened before you came to Attakapas, and when you have the story, you shall be able to learn the alphabet in a minute."

"In September, 1850, I came home from New Orleans sick; there was no physician to be had this side of the city. The disease developed and my own medical knowledge was never better tested. That was enough; every living soul fled in terror and I was alone—no, not alone—although whites and negroes fled in terror. One bit of a chattel, one child remained—Coveny's Lucy. You have seen her?"

I nodded assent.

"Mama George had been very good to her and she refused to leave him."

"This girl remained true, forgetting self in her anxiety for me. Her master sent for her, knowing how fatal the disease was among negroes and he feared for his property. She still refused to leave."

"Dreading the contagion, he dared not send his other negroes for her. Negroes being cash in Attakapas, he naturally wanted to keep her property. Lucy was valued at \$1,000 and she gave promise of future beauty. Smallpox scars would not contribute to the market value of a girl like her."

"I had studied medicine and had a very good idea of the disease and its method of treatment. I expected that if very sick I should lose it, a small thing. That was enough; every living soul fled in terror and I was alone—no, not alone—although whites and negroes fled in terror. One bit of a chattel, one child remained—Coveny's Lucy. You have seen her?"

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"Of course, I could not be as sure as Weener that Coveny's Lucy was a pure white, but still, even with no romantic sentiments to warm my judgment, I thought it possible enough that his surmise was correct. As he said, such things had happened in the south, and his own theory in this case was plausible enough. As he talked a wild notion had come into my head; it attracted me by its daredevil quality, and I knew, too, that rightly put through it could be made profitable. When he stopped speaking without entering on the question of Lucy's race, I said:

"You know that it is you and not I who have fallen in love with Coveny's Lucy, but I honor you and will enter into an agreement with you to devote our time to running negroes from this country into free states. Lucy included, I will assist you to do it."

"I'm agreed," he replied.

"You sat down together, and in an hour-

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He took me to the back office of a building situated on a little court, a few steps from Broadway. I have forgotten the street; I was only there once.

In that office I met Horace Greeley, Gerrit Smith, a member of congress from the state of New York (whose name I will not mention, as he is still living), and a gentleman whom they introduced as Mr. Samuel Entwistle.

That night's interview it was Mr. Entwistle with whom I chiefly dealt. From words inadvertently spoken and allusions made I do not think that was his real name, but all checks and drafts were drawn and signed or indorsed by Samuel Entwistle.

Later in the evening another gentleman made his appearance. This was Mr. Birney of Philadelphia, a former abolition candidate for president. Mr. Greeley briefly stated to the other gentlemen my proposition and called upon me to explain it, which I did recapitulating to them all the reader knows and fully explaining my views.

The proposition advanced by me and accepted by them was:

For every negro man or woman delivered to the agent of the underground railroad at any point in Indiana, Illinois, Ohio or any other free state where they could be best delivered we were to receive a sum of \$300, and for all children less than 6 years of age \$150 (all over 6 years to count as men or women). A sum sufficient to cover the expenses to be paid by eight States, drawn by myself upon some financial agent of the Anti-Slavery Society at New York, the report of the agent who received the fugitive being deemed sufficient voucher for our part.

The Anti-Slavery Society was also to pay for such material and outfit as I then wanted to enable us to begin operations, which would amount to about \$1,500. Some hesitations being shown on their part regarding this item I cut it short by agreeing to furnish the money myself, leaving them the receipts bills and drawing for the amount if we were successful in our first venture.

We intended to use two avenues for transportation, one by vessel or steamer from New Orleans to the Atchafalaya river, the other across the six States via the tributaries of the Red and Arkansas rivers, following the different bayous, to us well known, and coming out on the bank of the Mississippi at my woodyard. Here we could keep a party of 200 men, each with a hundred, or more, as the country around was swamp and wilderness, and no person except the deckhands of steamers calling for wood, and they seldom left the bank where the wood was piled.

CHAPTER III.

What we most needed was a couple of boats or canoes capable of carrying ten men each and built so as to be folded and put into a box or trunk, for transportation.

I already had a plan for their construction and had the drawings of an ideal boat, but neither these would develop into anything practical or useful, unless critiqued by a mechanic or an actual trial was yet to be demonstrated.

The next day I called upon Mr. Wilson and told him my plans. Together we went to a blacksmith's shop, where I showed the smith my drawings, but he was thick-headed and totally devoid of mechanical ideas, so I wasted no time with him, but went to a manufacturer of small machinery, one Matthew Colson, an Irishman, and a very ingenious man, who comprehended the idea as soon as I explained the drawing. I made a bargain with him to construct two canoes. These were a marvel of simplicity, strength, carrying capacity and lightness. One was twenty feet long, six feet wide and built about two feet deep and would carry twelve men (we have had fifteen in it); the other was about eighteen feet long, four feet wide and sixteen inches deep and was to be used more for exploring and working.

When the boats were completed we carried the box containing them to the river bank, opened it, and in just twenty-eight minutes I stepped into the canoe, ready to

risk my life; others must bear the expense. If you can give me encouragement, say so. Name your time and place. Bring your company. I will unfold the plans. Bring whom you can trust, for if this conspiracy is made public I am an exile from home or my angry townsmen will suspend me from the nearest tree, and as I am worth a fine little property in Louisiana, I do not wish to be exiled; liking life pretty well, I do not care to be hanged."

"What is your object? Nothing but money?"

"Yes," said I. "Love of adventure and desire to destroy the whole slave system."

"What is your address?" he asked. This I gave him, and promising to write me a day or two when he should be in the country, he bowed me out and this ended my first interview with Horace Greeley.

I took a long walk after the interview and half determined to retreat, content with assisting Weener to abduct Lucy, but in after cases I was risking my neck, and I concluded I should prefer to be hanged as a great rascal rather than a petty one, and continued my preparations.

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