

# The Path Beyond the Levee.

By F.A. CUMMINGS.

### Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Five years before the outbreak of the civil war, a young man, Charles Bradley, a civil engineer, had been sent to Louisiana to become an agent of the underground railroad. He had become acquainted through the smallpox by a young slave, Lucy, belonging to the Covey plantation. He discovered that the Covey family were white and of good family. A secret love match followed, which was broken by the father of the young man, who was a member of the aristocratic society of the city of New Orleans. He could bring north. Returning home, he secured a boat and supplies, engaged a man, Moore, and started on his way. At my wood camp, several miles up the river, and lay over night. The next morning, we carried on a special merchandise business. For two days the Covey family, who were for the north, and immediately a searching party was sent out to find them. We were discovered by the pirates. The venture was a failure. We were driven back to New York and placed in a school at Andover. I was sent to a school in New York, and a second raid. Disguised as a peddler, I arranged with the Raymond negroes for their escape.

### CHAPTER XV.

For two hours or more we waited impatiently before the bayou and saw danger, detected the deadened sound of quick tramping feet on the soft soil as they passed over it.

"Here they come," cried George. "I will creep up near the bayou and see how the thing looks," for it was a veritable column. We were astonished and alarmed. It looked as if Dave had gathered the entire colored population of the four parishes and was taking them in mass, as Moses took the children of Israel to the promised land. I could not see distinctly enough to count them, but George came back as soon as the last one had passed.

"Brad, for heaven's sake hurry up and let's get these people into the bush, here are seventy-three men, women and children all in one drove! There'll be walling and gnashing of teeth in Attakapas tomorrow!"

We made all haste toward the bayou and ran down the bank, all eyes on the column. They were huddled together in the bushes. Dave came out cautiously as soon as he heard our footsteps—indeed most of them did the same, but had we been strangers the whole movement would have been discovered. George darted into the woods on the lower side of the road.

"Out of this, Brad," he cried, "out of this, see the last man in, will you?" I spoke quick and low to Dave. "After him, boy! after him! I'll see to the people, Dave."

Recognizing my voice, he cried: "It's the peddler; it's all right." I spoke two or three words of the west coast idiom to assure him. We were all on our feet, and I saw the negroes. One by one, at intervals of a few feet, they entered the woods and in a very short time were wading ankle deep in swamp mud and water, where no dog could track them, certainly no hunter.

About 1:30 o'clock we were, perhaps, a mile and a half into the swamp, when George, halting the column, came back. "Well, Brad, I must leave you," said he. "I think it best that I take your horse back with me. Both you and the main body are here in the morning. I do not think these people can be tracked; the sun has hardened every bare spot and their feet leave no impression except where it is dusty. I do wish, though, that there were more water in the swamp."

We were standing a few yards from our party. As George ceased his ears detected the sound of approaching footsteps. Wesner covered his eyes with his hands.

"No, George; too much noise—get Dave. In a moment Dave was with us. A little to our right we could hear footsteps. A bright flash shot through the gloom.

"A dark lantern," cried George. "It's Mason and the boys; it is the night they were to arrive. I don't believe there is another dark lantern in Attakapas."

The strangers had certainly heard our movements, for they stopped and were eagerly peering into the darkness. Again they moved forward and the lanterns flashed. This time I recognized the ebony features of Obed.

"Ho, Obed," cried George, but no answer came back. The water splashed close by, the light from the lanterns shone full in my face and the ominous click of a gunlock was anything but welcome to my ears. George spoke, "Obed, is that you?"

"This is me, but who are you?" George replied. "I am the man who knocked you on the head, and it is a hell of a night you run away from Lemmon's. This is the strange nigger with me."

"Good," cried Obed. "I know your voice, but that strange nigger is white tonight. If you were any one else you would 'a' been dead before now, for we has been watching you."

Obed and Mason came up. "Now, boys," said George, as he presented Dave. "Take these people to the rendezvous and lay low. If one attempts to run away, kill him. We will come for you when ready; good-by—and we were on our way back."

"Brad," said George. "Dave tells me that, save one or two, perhaps three, hands too old for work, Covey has not a field hand left, and he has also lost one or two of his house servants. I dread the morning, for I shall have to enact the hypocrite until I fairly loathe myself."

Leaving our prospective emigrants in charge of Obed, we hastened to the high road and were but a short time reaching

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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 been suffering from the mental and physical suffering of lost manhood that the institute has decided to distribute this medicine free to all men who write for it. It is a home treatment and all men who suffer with the above mentioned troubles resulting from youthful folly, premature loss of strength and memory, weak back, varicose veins, etc., should at once cure themselves at home. The remedy has a peculiar grateful effect of warming and tonic to all who desire the desired location, giving strength and development. It is a most reliable remedy. It cures all the ills and troubles that come from years of misuse of the natural functions and has been an absolute success in all cases. A request to the State Medical Institute, 305 East Broadway, St. Paul, Minn., stating that you desire the free trial package will be complied with promptly. The medicine is sent in a package 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 and all the troubles that attend it. The Institute makes no restrictions. Any man who writes will be sent a free sample of the medicine. It is a most reliable remedy that its recipient need have no fear of embarrassment or publicity. Readers are requested to write.

our horses; once occupied, we struck a tent and at 3 o'clock arrived home. A few minutes sufficed to rub down our animals and retire for the rest of the night, or rather morning. George slept at the store and I at home.

Next morning business opened as usual. I had no fear of evil results from that transaction; Wesner was a tit nervous.

By and by our people dropping in from the country up north of us brought rumors that Covey had lost more negroes. Flying reports came of Raymond's losses, but no one from either place put in an appearance. The next day the rumors were confirmed. The Willis brothers were on the warpath. We heard from them before noon; they had all the men and dogs they could raise, scouring the country round their plantations. They said they had fifty negroes, but of course, as usual, rumor was mistaken.

I know well enough that, failing to find traces of them near home, they would start for the Yankee brig at Franklin. Thereafter, after a few days, we were informed that the vessel had left with it men and dogs. Wesner and myself were both at the store when they arrived George Willis, Dick Coverly, Mr. James (Raymond's overseer) and two or three planters from above Opelousas. The negroes belonging to some of these men had left the week before, but no great exertion had been made to recover them, as it was no unusual occurrence. The stamped at Raymond's brought the planters together and opened their eyes and with a malodorous air against the abolitionist, it was decided to search the brig, if she had not already sailed.

Wills, a rough, pugnacious and quarrelsome man, was spokesman of the party. Dick Coverly dropped into insignificance and made no attempt to lead. Willis with excitement and some of them pretty well alarmed, the crowd filled the store. They did not know where this would end.

"Is that vessel at Franklin loaded?" cried Willis.

"No," said I. "What is it? Have you anything to ship on her?"

"Ship on her!" he shouted. "Not unless she has shipped my niggers. Twenty-five of them shipped somewhere and we are going to search the vessel."

"Mr. Willis," said I, "that vessel is under charter to Wesner & Bradley, I shall feel it my duty to demand a search, and I shall accompany you, but first send and get a sheriff or constable and have three negroes to accompany me. Willis with excitement and some of them pretty well alarmed, the crowd filled the store. They did not know where this would end.

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Xenophon in six weeks?" I replied. Well, he could not. "I don't know who could," said he, "but there is one of the old man's niggers who can translate Xenophon."

"More than likely the translation was left by some of your schoolmates when visiting you," I replied.

"Possibly, but not probably, for if one of them had had that translation it would have passed around the class until it was 'thumbed, finger-worn and illegible,' answered Dick. "That girl never went with the rest, it's a big mystery."

I succeeded in changing the subject, for I did not want too many falsehoods to answer for.

Dick was not very dangerous, but the Willis brothers were energetic, and if on the right scent would push through and make a thorough search.

Their firm belief was that the captain of the brig was in the scheme.

James was really glad the Obed man was gone, and I think his pleasure at Dave's disappearance more than compensated for the chagrin he felt at the loss of the other negroes.

Raymond was in New Orleans and knew nothing about the affair.

We were joking along slowly, when we met more negro hunters on their way to Franklin. They burst upon us at full gallop, leaving the road behind them at the rate of fifteen miles an hour. Foremost among them was George Wesner, his horse covered with foam and dust.

"Whoa!" they yelled in concert, and George brought his mustang to his haunches.

"What's up?" "What have you shut up shop for, George?" "Some one murdered!" cried I.

"Murdered!" cried Ben Chapman (one of the horsemen). "Murdered—no, but there are fifteen of the old man's niggers gone, all of Covey's and five of Harrison's, a lot from Raymond's and about every planter around has lost from two to ten."

"Boys," said Dick, "where ye going and what for?"

"To Franklin to search the Yankee vessel."

"She has been searched from stem to stern, there are no niggers there."

"What next, then?" I asked George, who was the most eager one of the crowd. "This sort of thing can't go on very long; we shall all be ruined!"

"Well," said Ed Harrison, "we better go back and start fair." They turned back with us.

Among the crowd were Ed Harrison, Henry Chapman, George Wesner and a Frenchman, by name Dubois, a careless young fellow, ripe for any sort of fun, and who would not go two rods into a swamp for 500 negroes. He was pretty quick and a good partner in a frolic, but not a very reliable companion on a negro hunt. Dubois was only 18 years old and had little reverence for the "peculiar institution," although he owned a few negroes, but he was such a kind master that they could not be driven away, and again, as regarded as he was, he had free papers recorded for every one of them, valid, in case he should die. He rode up by my side.

"Mr. Bradley," said he, "if these people would use their negroes better they wouldn't use us. I can give more cotton and make more sugar to the hand than any man in this section of the country, and none of my negroes run off; why do they? I will help them find their property, for I do not think the example would be a good one to inaugurate, but it will not be many years before the whole system will be blown to atoms, if they do not use their slaves better. The northern people had and began another heated argument. Some were for continuing on the vessel, and others for returning. George did not express his opinion, or join in the clamor.

The corn juice had circulated freely, and to use Jack Forrester's expression, they "argued the pint explicitly and explosively," finally they turned their horses toward home, and, with another square drink all around, gave a Comanche yell for a prelude, and driving the spurs into their mustangs broke into a wild race to the store.

**CHAPTER XVI.**

Every road, lane and path leading to the vessel would be patrolled, and well we knew it. The magnitude of this unparalleled robbery and the astounding assurance of its authors, had aroused the whole country, so our original intention was abandoned. Sunday I visited the brig and talked to the captain.

"You must get them to the Atchafalaya then; I came for them niggers," said he, "and I am going to have 'em. Can't you find them and hide them somewhere around the Grand lake? I'll lay the brig down the bay and run a boat up there."

"Captain," said I, "go ashore and ride back with me."

The captain hired a pony and rode back to the store with me.

Our original plan had been to take the negroes to the brig by boat or to take them by night down some of the byroads and across one of the creeks. Now, however, a constant danger threat and act quickly; my hand was on the butt of my revolver.

"Halt! Throw up your hands, or you are a dead man!" he cried, and brought his gun to his shoulder, the muzzle not twenty feet from my face. As I obeyed him, my right hand brought up my 44-caliber Colt's navy, my finger pressed the trigger, and the crack of the pistol mingled with the report of his shotgun, his bullet whizzing disagreeably near my ear. My aim was true, and he dropped in his track, his gun rattling on the ground as he fell.

Mason, hearing the firing, ran out of the bushes toward us. "For God's sake go back," cried I, "or you will have the whole crowd stampeded. The man is dead."

Mason turned back. I could hear a horse rapidly approaching, evidently urged at his best gallop. Again I secreted myself. I had a good view of the bridge from my hiding place, and recognized the rider. It was Wesner!

"Now," said Captain Harris, "I have some repairs to make on my vessel, and will be here as long as possible. If I drop down here long enough, I will drop down at Atchafalaya. I'll be there tomorrow night, do you start? Don't fear me—I won't leave

you; and you can understand clearly that it is an unperson's business, except her owners, how long the Fillmore live at Franklin. I should not be surprised if the crew were so drunk tomorrow they could not work."

The captain was right; Monday they were drunk and did nothing. Monday afternoon I started for the rendezvous. The next afternoon, very early, we made our final start, and at 8 p. m. were at the base of the high ground, where I silently gathered my band together. We were now two miles from the main road and about five from our half-way place. We had one bridge about 200 feet long to cross. This I did not consider dangerous, as the road was seldom traveled at night. One thing did trouble me very badly, though. We were pretty well aware that the Copeland road, as this was called, would be probably patrolled by mounted horsemen, for the country around was arid.

George was to meet me at 9 o'clock that evening, in the edge of the woods, at a spot previously agreed upon. From thence we were to start about midnight, giving us about three hours to accomplish the five miles. At 8 o'clock George arrived. He was not drunk, I cautioned him about it. "Why, Brad," said he, "I am on patrol. I agreed to take this road from here to the bridge for my share tonight."

"Ed Harrison meets me here and gives the word to Clark's three miles farther. You must bring the people up and lie low until we are well separated. Ed will be here about 10, and by 10:30 you must be in the boat."

"The interruption delayed us one day. This was unfortunate, as there was more or less danger of some stranger running across the party. Captain Harris had cautioned himself that the Fillmore would be watched day and night. For this reason he was determined to take them from Grand lake. Wesner knew the shore of the lake and was well acquainted with the country lying between the bayous. I was not, therefore it fell upon him to take them through. Meanwhile we must wait until the Fillmore was ready.

**CHAPTER XVII.**

The time passed very quickly, but we were

down to the particular planters interested. Wesner and myself concluded that for a few months we would give the emancipation business a rest.

Our supply of goods was running quite low, and as we could purchase to better advantage in New York than New Orleans, I thought it would do no better than to visit the former place.

When the brig had been gone a couple of weeks I started north via New Orleans and Cincinnati, thence by rail to New York, a journey of about two weeks' duration.

Upon looking over the shipping news in the daily papers I learned that the Fillmore had not arrived, so I employed my time in purchasing goods. On the street I met Mr. Ed Harrison. He did not know me at first, but recognized me as I spoke. He was expecting the Fillmore every day, as it had been passed off Havana by a Savannah steamer and reported all well. The captain had instructions that the vessel must be anchored in the stream and its live cargo landed at night, as we might as well be discovered in Attakapas as in New York.

One Sunday afternoon the telegraph reported "Brig Fillmore" inside Sandy Hook and Mr. Ed Harrison, myself took the tug and went down to meet it. This was a man named by three men, all belonging to the U. S. R. R. Ed was a man of few words and made no blunders. We ran alongside the brig, as it was becalmed, and had anchored near the Jersey shore. Captain Harris was on the quarter-deck—not an African in sight! "All well!"

The captain nodded and we climbed aboard. I was pretty well disguised by a beard and eye glasses, as even the captain, shrewd observer as he was, did not recognize me.

"So, captain, you don't know your old friends?"

Your voice sounds familiar, but really I don't recognize your countenance," replied he.

I had to tell who I was, and raise my false whiskers before he was convinced.

"I owe you one," said he.

We went below and took a look at our cargo. They were closely stowed, but were all there, and well.

Entwistle looked grave as he came on deck.

"I will never do land all that crowd in Jersey," said he. "The whole country would be in arms. No, sir! When these boys land, Johnnie Bull's soil must hold them."

Inquired of the captain, in the afternoon, for the prisoner, and learned that he was still on board. A stateroom in the cabin had been assigned him, and he had never been allowed to leave it, so did not even know the name of the vessel. That night the captain filled him full of whiskey, put \$50 in his pocket and left him senseless on board a Stenington steamer. We heard no more of him until Wesner met him, long afterward, at a landing on the Mississippi.

The most difficult problem was how to land our cargo without the knowledge of the authorities; we did not know but were watched at this end of the route, and the idea of landing 100 plantation negroes and turning them loose in New York was not held by a moment's consideration.

At Philadelphia arrangements could be made for their reception, as there was the principal depot for escaped slaves, and the officers of the Underground railroad had a hall for that purpose. That night a tug-boat, with a negro character better than the negroes were transferred to her, and the next night but one were landed in Philadelphia. My connection with the negroes ceased when the Anti-Slavery society took possession.

I had examined the registers at a hotel, to find, if possible, the name of some acquaintance from Teche county that knew of the Fillmore being at Franklin. I found two following names: "All right, gentlemen!" We shook hands heartily.

This was Saturday night and we had concluded to spend Sunday with the boys, to get in their eyes, they were down at the rendezvous after the excitement and busy caused by the other stampees we felt that this, to be successful, must be managed with as much skill and prudence as boldness.

Our plans so suddenly from our next venture, first to go to Laumans' plantation and there make such arrangements as were necessary to secure Jim's wife's escape. This he had committed to me, and he felt obliged to make his word good. We also thought perhaps quite a number might be obtained there. Twenty were as many as we dared to take and Lauman could spare ten of them.

(To be Continued.)

"He's only stunned, your bullet glanced from his forehead," was his verdict. "What shall we do with him?" That was soon answered. Beside the bridge and fastened to a wall was an old dug-out. Wesner slipped the handcuffs on our prisoner and, statted as he was, tumbled him into the boat, called Obed and with him I entered the cabin. That night we pushed down the bayou fifteen miles and stopped in a place secure from observation. Meantime my prisoner had recovered his senses. He said nothing and could see nothing, for I had taken the precaution to tie a handkerchief over his eyes.

All that day we lay by and the next morning before daylight we were alongside the Fillmore. Captain Harris knew of the adventure from Wesner. My prisoner was hustled into a stateroom, we split the dug-out into kindling wood and poor Obed, for once had a safe chance, for there was no other place to hide him except in the captain's cabin.

The interruption delayed us one day. This was unfortunate, as there was more or less danger of some stranger running across the party. Captain Harris had cautioned himself that the Fillmore would be watched day and night. For this reason he was determined to take them from Grand lake. Wesner knew the shore of the lake and was well acquainted with the country lying between the bayous. I was not, therefore it fell upon him to take them through. Meanwhile we must wait until the Fillmore was ready.

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