

# BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

THE STORY OF SLAVERY

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## **The Story of Slavery**

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**BY EMMETT J. SCOTT**

Booker T. Washington, the author of the following sketch of slavery in America, was himself born a slave, and the story of his life begins where "The Story of Slavery" leaves off. He was born about 1858 or 1859 on a plantation near Hales Ford, Va., about twenty-five miles east of the city of Roanoke, in a region which, now almost deserted, was in slavery days a flourishing tobacco country. A few years ago he was invited to speak at the annual fair at Roanoke, and took advantage of the opportunity to drive out to the old plantation to visit again the scene of his childhood. He met there several members of the Burroughs family to which he had formerly belonged, and with them he went through the old Burroughs house, which is standing, and talked over the old days.

It was while he was living there that he was awakened one morning to find his mother kneeling on the earth floor of the little cabin in which they lived, praying that "Lincoln and his armies might be successful and that one day she and her children might be free." It was here a little later on, as he tells us in the book,

"Up From Slavery," in which he has related the story of his life, that he heard the announcement that he and all the other slaves were free.

"I recall," he says, "that some man who seemed to be a stranger and who was undoubtedly a United States official, made a little speech and then read a rather long paper—the Emancipation Proclamation, I think. After the reading we were told that we were all free and could go where we pleased.

"My mother, who was standing by my side, leaned over and kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks. She explained to us what it all meant; that this was the day for which she had so long been praying, but fearing she would never live to see.

"For some minutes," he continues, "there was great rejoicing, and thanksgiving and wild scenes of ecstasy. But there was no feeling of bitterness. In fact, there was pity among the slaves for our former owners. The wild rejoicing of the emancipated colored people lasted but a brief period, for I noticed that by the time they returned to their cabins there was a change in their feelings. The great responsibility of being free, of having charge of themselves and their children, of having to plan for themselves and their children, seemed to take possession of them. To some it seemed, now that they were in actual possession of it, freedom was a more serious thing than they had expected to find. Gradually one by one, stealthily at first, the older slaves began to wander back to the 'big house' to have whispered

conversations with their former owners as to their future."

Thus it was that freedom came to Washington and so it came, perhaps, to some three and one-half millions of others on their plantations throughout the South.

Shortly after the "surrender," as the Southern people say, young Washington made a long journey across the mountains with his mother to West Virginia where his stepfather was then living, and it was in Malden he grew up to young manhood. Malden is situated in the mining region of West Virginia, and after a time young Washington went to work in the mines. It was while he was working down in the coal mines of West Virginia that he one day overheard one of the miners reading from a paper concerning a school at Hampton, Virginia, where a Negro in earnest would be given a chance to work his way through school. He determined at once that he would seek out and find that school. So it was that a few months later he set out afoot across the mountain in the direction of Richmond to find his way to Hampton Institute. In his remarkable biography he has described how he made that journey; how he arrived hungry and penniless in the city of Richmond; how he slept for several nights under the sidewalk in Richmond until he was able to earn enough money to reach the famous school of which he had read.

In this same biography he has told, also, of how the teacher in charge, who was very doubtful about admitting him at first, finally, in place of asking him any questions about what he had learned in school, set him to work sweeping and dusting the

schoolroom.

"I swept that recitation room three times," he said, "then I got a dusting cloth and I dusted it four times. All the woodwork around the walls, every bench, table and desk, I went over four times with my dusting cloth. I had the feeling that my future depended upon the way I dusted that room."

When he had finished the teacher came and looked very critically over the results of his work. Then she said: "I guess you will do," and that was his entrance examination. This rather peculiar entrance examination illustrates the spirit of the institution in which Booker Washington gained his first forward preparation for life.

At the time that young Washington entered Hampton Institute, General Armstrong, the founder of the school, was engaged in a great and interesting experiment. His purpose was to create a school which would give the sons of the freedmen education in character as well as in books. Booker Washington saw that this education was the thing above all others that the masses of the Negro people needed at this time, and realized better than any other of the graduates of the institution the significance and bearing of the work that General Armstrong was trying to do. He made up his mind then that he would go out into some part of the South and establish a school which would do for other members of his race what Hampton had done for him. His opportunity came when a call came to Hampton for a man to take charge of a school at Tuskegee, Alabama. It was thus in

1881 that the famous Tuskegee Institute came to be started.

This school, which was started on July 4, 1881, in a little shanty church, with one teacher and thirty students, has grown until it now has a student body of 1600, with 165 teachers and officers, 103 buildings and property to the value of \$1,500,000.

In 1895 Mr. Washington was invited to speak at the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition on Negroes Day. In that speech he made an appeal for peace between the races, and formulated a program for mutual cooperation between black and white which has been the basis of all his efforts since that time.

From that time on his fame has grown steadily, both in this country and abroad. In 1896 Harvard University conferred upon him the honorary degree of Master of Arts for service in the education of his race. He has received numerous other honors since that time and has spoken in every state of the Union in favor of Negro education. A few years ago when he went abroad he was invited to dinner by the King of Denmark. In April, 1912, there was held under his leadership at Tuskegee an international conference on the Negro to which representatives came from many parts of Africa as well as the West Indies and South America. The result of this was a plan to form a permanent international organization to study the Negro problem in all parts of the world and hold meetings triennially.

Mr. Washington is the author of several books in addition to his autobiography, "Up From Slavery," which has been translated into every civilized language in the world, including Japanese.

The most noted of these books are, "Working with the Hands," "The Story of the Negro," in two volumes, "My Larger Education," and "The Man Farthest Down," which is a record of a journey of observation and study of the working and peasant peoples of Europe.

# I

It was one hot summer's day in the month of August 1619, as the story goes, that a Dutch man-of-war entered the mouth of the James River, in what is now the State of Virginia, and, coming in with the tide, dropped anchor opposite the little settlement of Jamestown. Ships were rare enough to be remembered in that day, even when there was nothing especially remarkable about them, as there was about this one. But this particular ship was so interesting at the time, and so important because of what followed in the wake of its coming, that it has not been forgotten to this day. The reason for this is that it brought the first slaves to the first English settlement in the New World. It is with the coming of these first African slaves to Jamestown that the story of slavery, so far as our own country is concerned, begins.

Although the coming of the first slave ship to what is now the United States is still remembered, the name of the ship and almost everything else concerning the vessel and its strange merchandise has been forgotten. Almost all that is known about it is told in the diary of John Rolfe, who will be remembered as the man who married the Indian girl, Pocahontas. He says, "A Dutch man-of-war that sold us twenty Negars came to Jamestown late in August, 1619." An old record has preserved some of the names of those first twenty slaves, and from other sources it is known that the ship sailed from Flushing, Holland. But that is

almost all that is definitely known about the first slave ship and the first slaves that were brought from Africa to the United States.

The first slaves landed in Virginia were not, by any means, the first slaves that were brought to the New World. Fifty years before Columbus landed on the island of San Salvador, the first African slaves were brought from the West Coast of Africa to Spain, and we know from historical references and records that Negro slavery had become firmly established in Spain before Columbus made his first voyage. It was, therefore, natural enough that the Spanish explorers and adventurers, following close upon the heels of Columbus in search of gold, should bring their Negro servants with them.

It seems likely, from all that we can learn, that a few Negroes were sent out to the West Indies as early as 1501, only eleven years after the discovery of America and one hundred and twenty years before the first cargo of slaves was landed in Jamestown. Four years later, in a letter dated September 15, 1505, written by King Ferdinand to one of his officials in Hispaniola, which we now call Hayti, he says among other things: "I will send you more Negro slaves as you request. I think there be an hundred."

Thus early was Negro slavery introduced into the New World and what do you suppose was the reason, or rather the excuse, for bringing black men to America at this time?

It was to save from slavery the native Indians. A good priest by the name of Las Casas, who accompanied the first Spanish explorers and conquerors, found that the native people, the

Indians, were fast dying out under the cruel tasks put upon them by their Spanish conquerors. Unaccustomed to labor, they could not endure the hardships of working in the mines. The Negroes, on the contrary, had, in many cases, been slaves in their own country, and had been accustomed to labor. At the same time it was said that one Negro could do the work of four Indians. So it was that this good man, out of pity for the enslaved Americans, proposed that the black people of Africa should be brought over to take their places.

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