

Introduction

Benjamin Drew, a Boston abolitionist acting in cooperation with officers of the Canadian Anti-Slavery Society, visited various towns of Upper Canada around the middle 1850's, interviewing scores of refugees from the slave states and copying their words soon after they were spoken. For reasons of safety, he protected the identity of his informants and used fictitious names. There were about 30,000 Negroes at that time in Upper, Canada, mostly adults who had once been slaves. John P. Jewett, the prominent abolitionist-minded publisher of Boston who had unexpectedly reaped a fortune from printing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, vouched for the integrity and intelligence of Drew.

The testimony tends to stress well-known gross abuses, but some of the ex-slaves offer fresh insights into the working of the plantation system.

Testimony of Edward Hicks

I was born and raised in old Virginia, Lunenburg county, and was sold when a well-grown boy-was put on the block at the court house and sold. I was frightened at being up there on the block, and was afraid of being carried out of the country. A trader on his way to New Orleans bought me. He took me to his pen at Brunswick court house. I being very obedient, he thought I wouldn't run; but I determined to run if I could, for I thought if I got to New Orleans, I was at the shutting-up place. He waited a day or two to attend another sale fifty miles off, taking us with him-perhaps forty or fifty. We went by stages. I being so obedient, he turned me out to bring water and do errands in general, while he waited for the sale at Brunswick court house. In this time I thought about my mother and brother in the place where I was raised, and thought 't was about time to run. I ran; but did not know what way to go, and took into the pines. Now, after I had done this, I began to study what I should do for something to eat: then I was in a strange country. I continued there for four days without any food except sassafras leaves, and I found water. After that, I found an old colored man. I told him how the case was with me, and asked for a bit of bread. He told me to come to his house at night, at a certain hour, and he would give me a mouthful to eat. I went to the house, got some food; and, behold, the patrollers were out that night, and they came within one of catching me. Just as I had stepped out of the house, they came right in. The old man came out a little before day and whistled. I went to him, and he put me on the way to Lunenburg.

I travelled on about twelve miles, when it was so dark I dared not walk any further. I made for the bush, and laid a stick with the big end the way I was to go. That night about dark, I got up and started again. I went on, and struck a creek near midnight, called Earn's Creek,-from Earn's Creek, I came to Stony Creek. Day overtaking me, I had to make into the willows on the creek. The bloodhounds that day, of their own accord, having such knowledge, gave me a little race: I went down into the creek, nothing out but my head, among big water moccasin snakes, which I kept off with a stick. The dogs I saw,-they heard me, but there was no one to hearken them on. At night I left the creek, and went up into the neighborhood of the house where I was born and raised: I saw some of my friends and brothers there, and I got something to eat. I was then advised (as the advertisement was just out from the *nigger*-trader) to go on to an old house where cotton was kept, and there stay until the advertisement was over. For they drive for runaways there with bloodhounds, and a great many men moving abreast, so that they will have a man unless he is a long distance under the ground. I went to the cotton house, and got under the cotton, and stayed till the drive was over-some two or three days.

I came out then, and made for the bush. I stayed till that trader went down with that company of colored people, and sold them and came back. I was out all the winter in caves and barns. In the spring the trader came back. There was a white man in Lunenburg, that wanted to buy me. The trader heard of it, and said, "I'll sell him, if you think you can get him: a *nigger* that will stay in the woods all winter, I won't have him. What will you give me for him?" It was settled at eight hundred dollars: then he sent out some of his boys to tell me, and in a few days I went to him.

He had four farms. I commenced to work right at the great house. I stayed there three years, I guess: then he died. Then every man had to come up to be appraised: about sixty of us were appraised. The same old trader (S---- N----) came up to buy me again, chains and handcuffs all in his hand. He swore that the "*nigger*" that ran away from him, was the one he'd have, and the chains should not leave him, till he'd got him to Orleans. At twelve o'clock, I went to the kitchen to get my breakfast, and stepped right on, out into the bush. The sale was coming on in about a week, and the trader had come on to brag what he would do,-I stepped out right in the bush.

I was appraised and given to a young lady who thought it necessary to hire me out, right in the bush, where I was. A man hired me at about half price. He was a good

man,-no bad man will hire one in the bush, because he won't come to him to save his life, and only the big traders can afford to have driving done. After I got to him, he put me to work at the great house, and he liked me so well, he bought me.

He got a man to oversee at the great house, who was determined to make more than any farmer in that country. He began to fight, kick, and knock over. We were going along, suckering tobacco one day; a couple of worms were found -these big, horned worms- lying on the ground in the rows: we had not seen them as we were breaking the suckers. He called the two men who went by them, and made each take one of the worms and bite its head off. I passed a small worm,- "G- d- you," says he, "you bite the worm's head, and suck the stuff out of him: you may run away,-you've got to a place now, where if you run nine miles into h-, we'll go in for you up to our armpits. You've made three runs, now you've made a bad stand." I told him I shouldn't bite the worm's head off: it was a thing I never had done, and I wasn't used to it, and wouldn't do it. He made to me with his bull whip, very long, and struck me three or four times; the third or fourth time, I got hold of it. He then turned to strike me with the butt,-but being too ar:xious, he let too much of it go over my shoulder, and I caught the other part, that he was going to knock me down with. S--- H---,if he gets hold of that paper, he'll know all about it. He hollowed for help,- he wanted the other colored people to help him. They all passed on with their rows, but would not. I then having hold of both ends of the whip, jerked it out of his hands and ran. I did not intend to carry the whip far, but there was no stop for *me* then. I went on to the bush; he mounted his horse, and started off for men and bloodhounds. He then came back with the company and the hounds, stripped the head man and whipped him, because he did not help take me. I was then preparing to keep the bloodhounds from following me. I had gathered up some wild onions, and knew what to do.

The master now came home. He tells the overseers, that he shall pay a dollar a day for every day that I was gone, for he had no business to make that disturbance among the people. They chased me that day, but could not follow me beyond the place where I had put on the onions. It takes a mighty old hound to follow that track. I stayed three weeks, and then went in home. When I got home, the old man got hold of it then, and I was not flogged. At the end of the year, my lost time was brought against the overseer. The overseer left, and went to oversee for another man, named S---- S----, at the edge of Brunswick Co. My master being sickly, in some way, his boys being sportsmen, and gambled, got involved, and had to sell part of his hands, at sheriff's

sale I suppose. I was again put on the block and sold, and that overseer, S- H----, persuaded his employer, S----, to buy me, so he could get his spite of me. S--- bought me and sent me on to the quarter: put on leg goggles, a band of thin iron round each ankle, with a piece of wood, banded with iron, sticking from each with a rivet. A man cannot run with them on: the iron plays round and the long piece whips his legs as he runs. Each goggle weighs about three pounds. The overseer put them right on, as soon as I got there.

The master had plenty of dogs, four of which were regular "nigger bloodhounds," worth one hundred dollars or more apiece. That was the first time I began studying head-work. I had been running about in the bush without much object, but now I began studying head-work: while in this condition, it put my mind off to study what to do now. Every day I was sure of my whipping though-that was sure-with the loaded bull whip-loaded at both ends: every blow would cut through the skin. I could n't run-would n't get away. I lay down studying, and got up studying, how to get out of the condition I was placed in.

One night it came to my mind that I would go to the blacksmith's shop. After every person was asleep, and every thing appeared still, I got into the window and got a rasp. I put it away where I could get hold of it, knowing that if I cut it part through, they would see it, and band me stronger. That night I studied that I would go down deep, right there in the yard, where they machine cotton and pack cotton right down among the seeds-way down-five feet I guess I went down,-and that the bloodhounds would not find me, as they would look round for me outside. I studied that as hard as a Philadelphia lawyer ever studied a case: if he studies as hard as I studied that, he'll give a right judgment.

I went down the night after I got the rasp, taking the rasp with me. The cotton seed and motes tumbled in after me as I went down, and buried me up entirely. They walked over me: I could feel the rattling over me. I could not rifle in there. The next night I came out, and commenced rifling to get off the goggles. They had been out all day with some drivers and the bloodhounds, expecting, as I had the goggles on, to catch me directly. I sat up on the upper floor, where I could see by the light of the moon or stars, and there I rifled away; I rifled faithfully, and got one off that night,- but I had to break it away some, and got the skin off my leg. Before day I went down into the hole again.

The next night I came out and rifled off the other: it came off easier than the other. Now I've got to go down again. Into the same hole I went-'t would n't do to come out yet. They had driven the second day, and I was afraid they would the third. I had eaten nothing all this time, nor drank a drop. The next night about dark, I jumped out and went into the bush. I knew all about that neighborhood, and which way to go. I got me an old scythe-blade, and broke off a piece and made me a knife. This I found at the machine as I was on the way to the bush. Then I killed me a pig, took him on my back and walked five miles. I dressed him, singed off the hair, and before he was fairly dressed, I had his ears on the coals broiling.

Another consideration struck me now. It would be death to go back to that place: I must get to a free land now. I had got the irons off-that I knew. I came out of that county, went into a neighboring county, into the bush, and staid out six months. I heard of some free people coming on to the Ohio, and I thought I would get in the crowd. We came on with a white man who had formed an attachment to a colored girl, and as she was coming, he determined to leave too, although he was a regular patroller. I came on with him as a waiter and servant, and very faithfully I worked too. We travelled with horses and wagons, but some had to walk. I had to pull at the baggage,-I would have pulled a wagon all through myself but what I'd have come. I was concealed the first part of the way; all the food and clothes piled on me in the wagon, which was very uncomfortable. You do n't know how much I endured. At night I would get out and walk. We succeeded until we got to Point Pleasant; within three or four miles of the ferry, we met men at different times, telling this tale- "If you take your slaves this way they'll all get free,-for you'll get 'em on the Ohio side: I would n't take that man; if you want to sell him, you can get your money right in this place," etc.

He began to fear that they'd think he was running away slaves. "Look here," says he, "to-night you'd better take a skiff and cross the river-these folks have got passes to show, and you have not." This made me uneasy-I knew nothing about padding a skiff: I might get off into the middle of the river, and then paddle back to the same shore. I then said to him, "It is a matter of course that we go on, and I go on as you said, and you've a right to take your slave wherever you please." Now he told me, "Do you go off, and come up to us when we get to the ferry-place." I said, "That won't do." We reasoned considerably about it: he was a man that would hear to a little reason, and so we reasoned. Now he told me, "Suppose I sell you, and I come back and steal you,

and we divide the money?" He was turning now; he'd been into the town that day: enough wanted to buy me, but they did n't want the women. I told him, that would n't do-that was n't our bargain-I had worked for him all the way, and his agreement was to take me over the ferry, and go on to the farm he was to take, and work for him one year at clearing, etc. We came on, all hands, down to the ferry at Point Pleasant,-some were for putting me in the wagon, and covering me; but they would search the wagon. So I walked with the rest.

At the ferry, the guard who watches all who cross the ferry -a great, big white man, who looked rather severe, quizzed my master, whether I was his slave, and questioned so close, that the white man began to grow weak in the knees, and I saw it: he trembled. I was scared for him, and I was scared about being taken myself - it was a scaring time. The guard told him the consequence-of going to the penitentiary, if he were going off with another man's slave. He trembled, and got weak, so that he did not get over it, till he got way out into the Ohio. We were commanded to get aboard the ferry-boat, and over we went. I walked on behind him, as he went up the hill: he yet trembled, and so did I, not knowing what might take place yet. I felt joyful that I had got over, but it was no time to rejoice there. We put the man in the wagon, and dragged him: he was more scared than he ought to have been.

I went to work with him in Ohio, according to promise. After we had begun, it got clear back to where I started from, that I was in Ohio. I made out that I was a man from Cincinnati, and was hired for money: but it got back home, that I was in Ohio. He then told me to leave. I understood that there was a reward of five hundred dollars offered to any one who would take me over the river to the Kentucky side. I had been there as near as I can tell about six months when I got this news. I left him and was concealed at Gallipolis, at old man Isaac Browner's house-he is dead now, and 't wont do any hurt to mention his name. He put me in a bedtick on which he placed his children, who were sick of measles. I was in the straw-tick, the feather-bed was above me, and then the children. This was so, that if they came to search for the sake of the reward, they might not move the sick. I stayed there one day: I cared nothing for the heat, discomfort, nor sickness. All I thought of was to get off clear. At night-fall, I all alone came to the wharf to hail a boat-he told me how-to hollow "passenger." The boat was for the salt-works at Kanawha. If I had gone on board they would have taken me sure, because the boat was going to the place I did not want to go. The boat did not, however, put in for me, and I had to go back and get concealed

again. The next day, they disguised me,-I went down to the wharf-a boat was coming which was bound for Pittsburg: it touched the wharf-boat, -there was no freight and only three passengers; a gentleman and a lady, and myself; they stepped aboard, and so did I, -a little bell rung, and away went the boat: when, looking back, I saw two men whom I knew, standing on a place, where they could see every man who came down to the boat. But they did not know me and the boat came on.

The river was high, and we came on slowly. I did not sleep for four nights at all-dozed a little in daytime. There was another boat coming behind,-"Clipper, No. 2,"-and I was afraid she was in pursuit of me. I fired up harder on that account: although I expected to get nothing for my work, I worked sharp. After we had started out, the clerk came round with his book and pen. I tried to dodge, but when he touched me, I thought I was gone. But he only wanted the money: I gave him all I had, and he returned me ten cents. I had my victuals for my work. At Pittsburg, I left a handkerchief of victuals, which I had put up, I was in such a hurry. I went up into the town, and inquired for the country, where I could get work. I worked not many miles from Pittsburg, and got a little money, and then concluded to come to Canada, where I would be safe.

I have been here about six years. I like Canada well,-I am satisfied with it. I have got a little property together, worth some two thousand dollars.

Liquor is right along the road here, and some make fools of themselves: but I mind my business, and am doing well.

My opinion of slavery is, that it ought to be broken down. If the white people were to set the slaves free, and offer to hire them, they would jump at the chance: they would n't cut throats.

We have got some good white friends in the United States. If it had not been for them, I would not have got here.