

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 Henry Nlue

I learned the trade of a blacksmith in Kentucky. I should have been perfectly miserable to have had to work all my life for another man for nothing. As soon as I had arrived to years of discretion, I felt determined that I would not be a slave all my days. My master was a kind and honorable man; purchased no slaves himself: what he had, came by marriage. He used to say it was wrong to hold slaves, and a good many who hold them say the same. It's a habit-they mean, they say, to set them free at such a time, or such a time,-by and by they die, and the children hold on to the slaves.

I purchased my freedom, and remained in Kentucky awhile; then removed to Cincinnati; thence to Chatham. Every thing goes well with me in Canada; I have no reason to complain.

I think that if a slaveholder offers his servant freedom, on condition that he will earn and pay a certain sum, and the slave accepts freedom on that condition, he is bound in honor to pay the sum promised.

Some poor, ignorant fellows may be satisfied with their condition as slaves, but, as a general thing, they are not satisfied with being slaves.