

## George Gray, Jefferson

George Gray was whipped by his master and decided it was the last whipping he was going to endure. He made a plan of escape which made his mother his accomplice. He told her he was going to take a skiff across the river, run through the swamp and then return to her cabin and hide under her bed. George's mother said the plan would never work but he told her that when the master came looking for him, she should be praying for him to be caught. Her love for him was so great that she agreed to do it.

The master of George was Samuel Jones who lived on the James River in Virginia. He inherited the plantation from his father including the slave family of John Gray which included John, his wife and eight children. Jones treated the men very badly and look on the young girls with lechery. Because they had some Caucasian characteristics, John and the seven older children were sold south. Hannah, the wife, and George the infant, were kept because she was a good and obedient worker.

Just as George had guessed, as soon as Samuel Jones heard that George was missing, he hastened to Hannah's cabin. He did not enter because he heard her at prayer saying that George had probably drowned and he had been a very bad boy causing his master so much trouble. When he entered he learned that George had been there the night before and she had urged him to be a good boy and go to his cabin.

A search was begun, the skiff was found down river and a three day search began with no success. An add was run in the paper offering a \$500 reward. George remained under his mother's bed during this time and the cabin was filled with his mother's prayers and hymn singing. On the fourth night a terrible storm was raging and the search was called off. George came from his hiding place, embraced his mother, took a bundle of clothes and three days rations and headed up the south side of the James River. By midnight he was able to cross the James River and hide himself in bushes on the mountain which came close to the river. The rain had washed away his scent so the dogs could not follow him. The next night he headed off toward the Ohio River which he finally reached weeks into his travels. Unfortunately word of his escaped had reached those along the river, a fact which he learned from colored men who he chance to meet. One of these, a conductor on the U. G. R. R., safely ferried him across the river one stormy night.

The slave catchers were close behind him but he was conducted safely to Gustavus, Ohio. There he was put in the care of Parson Fenn who took him to George Hezlip's store to hide. It was here, with the slave catchers in town, that a young Universalist named Shipman, took George from his hiding place in a hogshead and headed north on hands and knees through the potato patch. Shipman, who was one-fourth American Indian, had been given a note from the Pastor Fenn which directed him to take the "white rabbit" north by a secret code.

5—9—081—1001—S—s---g.

XXX. In Rome where the white rabbit hangs high the Proctor leads the vestal band by linden fields, that he may hear the tuning of the great profaner's voice ere the game goes to Quintus Anno Mundi.

49—1001—U. G. R. R.

When handed this note by a trusty boy, the reply was "When the stars are out." When the slave catchers arrived at George Hezlip's, the passenger on the U. G. R. R. was gone

although the place where he had hid was still warm from his body heat.

While the slave catchers were fuming over the loss of their prey, Shipman was taking the passenger on the path indicated by the note. They ventured through miles of woods, skirted the hamlet of Lindenville and reached a barn on the Pymatuning flats probably belonging to Ansil Garlick. The message left by way of the bedroom window was, "Feed the yearling calf." Shipman returned home by midnight.

When the slavecatchers arrived in Jefferson and at the American House where their presence was duly notice and reported. Shipman was also present and observed their presence. He took to the woods to do some hunting and arrived at the farm where the escaping slave was secreted about sunset. As soon as it was safe to move, the farmer, Shipman and the slave started out in the wagon, the slave covered with straw. A mile from Jefferson, the wagon stopped, the slave taken out and Shipman and the slave started on foot the last mile. Arriving at the home of the Ben Wade, a rap at the back door brought a response from an upper window, "Who the d-l is there? The answer, Thribble X from 'A Thousand and One.'

"What the h-ll do you want at this hour of night."

"I have a white rabbit."

"Take the black k-ss to Atkins; he'll stuff his hide."

Shortly after, George Gray was secreted in the garret of "Anno Mundi" and Shipman was headed back to Trumble County.

The sequel to this story has Shipman getting on a train and taking a seat several rows in front of a negro man. The negro came forward and looked Shipman who had a full white beard. Concerned about this scrutiny, Shipman arose and approach the negro. Although Shipman did not remember George Gray, George remembered his benefactor and reminded him of crawling through the potato patch. George related that he had been to Canada, worked to free his mother from bondage but found that she had died. Now that the war was over and all the negroes were free he was going back home to see if the master had ever found that dear child who had drowned or run away. (Johnsons's Lake Shore Home Magazine, Vol. V, July, 1885, No. 7, July, 1885. pgs. 211-217.)