

Kidnaped in Covington Twenty Years Ago,

AND ILLEGALLY SOLD IN THE COTTON STATES.

Horrible Experiences in Mississippi—Recent Suit Against the Kidnapers.

The following interesting narrative was, yesterday evening, related to a Commercial reporter by an old colored woman named Henrietta Woods, who lives in the upper story of a quaint little frame building at No. 15 Harrison street. The story has certainly some intrinsic value, as illustrating the peculiar social condition of a time which could render its most shocking incidents possible. Of course, narratives innumerable of slave life have been written before, and commented upon from every possible point of view. It is not often, however, that facts similar to those contained in the story of Henrietta Woods have obtained publication. Doubtless there are many ex-slaves in this and other cities whose experiences have been not less bitter or less eventful, but these seldom care to speak of their life before freedom, or can remember the incidents of such a life as fully. As many of the parties mentioned in the story are yet living, or are still remembered here and elsewhere, the narrative possesses an interest apart from the mere interest of anecdote. We present it just as it was told, excepting perhaps some fanciful peculiarities. Henrietta is a very tall, powerful woman, probably at least six feet in height, and has features rather regular for one with so large a preponderance of colored blood in her veins.

"I can't quite tell my age, she said, in commencing her story, but I know I must be about fifty-eight or fifty-nine years old. I have heard them tell my age but forget all about it now. I was born on a farm in Boone County, Kentucky, eight or nine miles from Lexington. My father was named Moses Lusk, and I believe was a J. W. He had only a few slaves and used to treat them pretty well. I lived on the farm till I was about fourteen years old, when old Moses Tanner died, and there was a division of the property among the children. Then the old man's son—Homer Lusk, I think his name was—came down from Indianapolis where he had, to see after things, and we were all sold. I was taken together with my brothers and one sister, to Louisville, and sold there to a Mr. Henry Forsyth, for \$700. He did not buy my brothers or sisters, and I never saw them since. Forsyth was a pretty mean man, treated me roughly, and often flogged me. He kept a nautical supply store, and I worked about his house, cooking, washing, scrubbing and general housework, for two years. Then he sold me to a Frenchman named William Tertre, who gave, I think, either \$700 or \$800 for me. He took me at once on the steamer 'William French' to New Orleans, where he kept a retail and wholesale grocery store. I worked for him at cooking and housework seven years, and was pretty well treated. For both the Frenchman and his wife were fair kind, of folks. Somehow or other they quarreled at last, and the old man sold the store, left his wife and went back to France. Before he left he gave his wife some blacks, and she went up the river again to Louisville and from there to Cincinnati. She hired me out at Louisville, first to a man named Lyons, for house work, and afterward to Mr. Bishop who kept the Louisville Hotel. I worked as cook and chambermaid for four years in the hotel, and at the end of that time my mistress came down to Louisville and took me to take her to Cincinnati. Mr. Bishop used to pay her seventy-five dollars a year for my services. I had been pretty well treated in Louisville.

I did not work for some time after I came back to Cincinnati, because I got very ill, and my mistress had to pay out a deal of money to old Dr. Busby for attending me. He got me right well at last, and I went to work for my mistress, Mrs. Jane Corrodo, she was keeping a boarding house then on Sixth street, next to Allen's drug store. Allen's drug store used to be at the northern corner of Sixth and Main and my mistress' boarding house was on the north side, between the drug store and where Judah a barber shop is. After I had worked at cooking and washing in the boarding house for one year, my mistress gave me my freedom, and my papers were recorded. I worked for her two years more, but she would never pay me regular wages—only give me a little money from time to time. So I left her at last.

Then I worked in different boarding houses and families—for Mrs. Tuttle, and Prescher Swanson, and Mrs. Wilcox, who kept a boarding house at Fifth and Broadway. While I was working around, the old Court house was burned down, and I remember seeing the fire. I afterward heard that the big book in which all the freed negroes' papers were recorded was saved and taken to Columbus.

I next went to work for Mrs. Boyd, who was the first to treat me and mean since I got free. Mrs. Boyd was the wife of a dentist, but she kept a boarding house for steamboatmen on Fourth street, between Main and Cincinnati, and had her from when the St. James is now. I worked for her three months, and she never paid me a cent, although she promised to do so all the time. Just after I had worked about three months for Mrs. Boyd, she came to me one Sunday night, and said, 'Henrietta, I want you to come over the river with me; I have some friends to see, and we can let that be in time for supper.' She also asked me if I wouldn't like a nice cotton trade, and said yes. I never suspected anything. Then she sent for a hack and I got in with her, and she had all the panes of the windows pulled down. Still I never suspected it. Then we drove down to the ferry—just as it was the old ferry that used to run from the foot of Vine street—and we crossed the ferry and drove through Covington away out in the country. Then the hack stopped, and I saw three men standing on the road waiting. Mrs. Boyd got out, and one of the men came up to her and said, kind of roughly, 'What are you doing with my nigger?' She laughed and said, kind of laughing too, like, 'Oh, she's free.' I was then ordered to get out of the hack, and one of the men said to me, 'Now, don't run, or I'll shoot you.' I said, 'I've got nothing to run for,' and one of the men said, 'She talks mighty big, don't she.' Another came up close and looked into my face with a mean sort of look, and said, 'Don't you know me?'—then they all laughed. And while I was looking right at Mr. Boyd, I saw one of the men hand her a roll of money—I didn't look very big, but I couldn't guess how much it was. My freedom papers and my trunk and all my little things were over at Mrs. Boyd's. I think the man who gave the money to Mrs. Boyd was a man called Frank Russ, who I had seen at the boarding house, and who had bumps on his face. The other men, I think, were Willoughby Scott and Jabez Ward. After Mrs. Boyd got the money she got into the hack and drove back to Cincinnati, without saying a word. The three men made me walk back to Covington, one walking on each side of me, and one leading a horse behind. When we got back to Covington, they took me up to a room in the fourth story of a high building, and locked me up in the room. I know the place was a tavern because I saw horses but had around and men drink me, at a bar down stairs. When we got up stairs the men searched my pockets, and asked me 'Where's your papers?' I told them my papers were in my trunk at Mrs. Boyd's house. Then I was locked up in the dark, when the landlady brought me up some tea and crackers. I told her I did not want any supper, and she looked hard at me, and said to her husband, in a sort of whisper, 'Well, I think it's a real shame.' A while later one of the men came up and asked me, 'Don't you want to see Josephine White?' and I said no. Josephine White was the married daughter of my old mistress Jane Corrodo, and she always wanted her mother to sell me. I afterward learned that she and her husband had a hand in stealing me.

Next morning Willoughby Scott and Russ drove me up to daylight, put me in a buggy and drove me to Florence. They said nothing to me except at the start, when they said, 'You'd better know nothing about Cincinnati.' I staid one night at Florence, sleeping on the floor in the same room with the white traders. Next morning they ordered the landlady to keep me locked up while they went to Huntington to get some other slaves they had bought. But while they were out a young man, the son of the landlady came up to my room and asked me where I was from. I said nothing and that he told me about not knowing anything about Cincinnati, and at first was afraid to tell him. He said, 'Don't you be afraid, if I can do you any harm. I will, and if I can't I won't do you any harm.' So I at first took counsel at his kind face and kind words, and I told him all. Then he said, 'I must go away right now, for the men will be here soon, but I'll tell you what you do. Go with the men to Lexington without a word, and as soon as they are gone I'll go over to Cincinnati, and see what I can do for you, and if I find you are a free woman, I'll have you stopped at Lexington.' Then he asked me whom I knew in Cincinnati. I said I knew, besides my old mistress, Preacher Tuttle and Leonard Armstrong. 'Do you know Leonard Armstrong, really?' says he. 'Well, I know Leonard, and I'll see him about you.' Then he went away (the family all said they knew I'd been stole).

At day-break the traders came back, and a man named Bolton, a trader from Lexington, came with them. I said nothing, and went with them to Lexington, where they put me in the regular nigger pen in the common jail. Nick Roberts kept the pen or the show, as they called it. I was there about two weeks, when one day as I was sitting at the table eating, the same young man who had talked to me at Florence came by without saying a word, and went right out again. I knew him at once, and just when I looked at him I smiled. Nick Roberts, Nick Roberts' wife, saw me smile, and she ran right away to her husband and told him that I hadn't counted at a stranger who had just gone through the show. Roberts got scared, and in five minutes after, he came in and said, 'Get your things ready, and come to Mrs. Tuttle—she wants you to do some sewing.' They put me in a buggy and drove me to Mrs. Tuttle's. She told me to sit down, and she got me some sewing, but before she had got the needle and thread ready, the buggy again drove up, and they said, 'Get your things, and jump in.' That day they drove me three miles away to Harrodsburg. Soon after the young man from Florence came back with two other men. I think the Sheriff's name

was Rhodes. He searched every nook and corner of the jail for me, and the young man from Florence found the stage driver who had driven me to Lexington, and got him to swear that he had brought me there. The end of it all was that the Sheriff compelled Roberts to go after me to Harrodsburg, and bring me back.

He came next evening, at sundown, to Harrodsburg, very mad, and told me roughly to get into the buggy. I was very much afraid that when he got me out in the woods he would kill me. On the way back he asked me if I knew the young man that I had smiled at in the show. I said that I didn't know his name, but had seen him at Florence. 'Well,' said he, 'that man's raising a fuss about you; but he ain't raising a fuss to get you free. He's just raising a fuss to hurt Frank Russ—G—d—n you, he wouldn't care if you never got your freedom.'

We got back to Lexington at midnight, and I was put back in the jail. Next morning Roberts came to me and said, 'You've got to go to the Court house, and you've got to keep your mouth shut, except just to answer what questions you are asked.' Well, I know better than to do any thing else, for they thought nothing there of flogging niggers down in the collar and hanging them to death. I went to the Court house and they asked me my name, and where I had worked, and how long I had been at Mrs. Boyd's. I don't remember exactly what they said, but I remember a lawyer contradicted me, and I was afraid to say anything back. They never let my freedom papers in Court. At last they took me back to jail, among a crowd of white men sitting around and spitting tobacco. I heard a man named Bolton come in and say that he could not hold me. Then Bolton said very angrily, 'I bought that woman and gave \$700 for her, and I don't care nobody to give me a free nigger. By G—d, nobody's got to give me her but my money.' That is how I came to know that my old mistress' daughter had a hand in the stealing of me.

Bolton was a regular blood-thirsty butcher of a man, and when he went back to Covington he got his money back at once without any trouble, for no one cared to take a miss with him. But they still kept me in jail, and I couldn't tell why, till, one day, Jabez Ward came in and said to me, 'Let us see your hand.' Then I knew the real man must have your papers in Mrs. Boyd's house, because in my papers was written some name on my right hand by which I might be known. Then there was also a birth mark. Ward noticed the marks, and was also in the Court house, and that he was a runaway slave from Louisville, and that he remembered I had belonged to him by seeing the scars on my hand. Then he came to me and said, 'Didn't you know that your mistress had no right to set you free?' I said, 'I know nothing about mistress rights.' 'Well,' he said, 'she hadn't, and I bought you from your mistress' children.'

The man was kept in the jail for a whole year, and the man never shined on me all that time—never once. I had to wash and iron, and cook. At last Ward came and took me away to Frankfort, Kentucky, to nurse in his family. Ward had charge of the Penitentiary at Frankfort.

I could not get along with Mrs. Ward, for she used to quarrel with me because I could not keep her little boy from crying, and she could not keep her quiet herself. One day she threatened to whip me. 'G—d, no!' I said, 'It takes men to whip me.' Then I used to weigh 200 pounds, and was strong as most men. But she told her husband, and like all Kentuckians, he thought he must do what his wife wanted. So he took me out in the Penitentiary yard to talk to me, and said, 'I'll have to learn you not to whip me, and I'll keep the child from crying, and how can I do it?' I'm a kind of thought over the matter and let me off. But two weeks after Ward took me back to Lexington and put me in the trading yard, and they sent me to Mississippi on the boat, with two traders called Griffin and Fuller. A big drove of slaves was sent down by the land route at the same time. At Natchez they took me off the boat, and brought me out to the great trading yards at Fork roads, back of Natchez.

Mr. Wilson, who lived in Natchez, wanted to buy me the first time he saw me, to do washing and ironing, but the traders wouldn't sell me to him. They said that Ward had told them to get me out on a plantation, and not to sell me to any one in town, because I'd raise another suit in the Courts. So they sold me to an old cotton planter named Gerard Brandon for \$1,000. He bought me at night, and took me out on a wagon to the plantation.

Brandon was a very rich man. He had eight hundred working blacks, and more slave children than I could count. He had seven plantations—four on the Louisiana side of the river, and three on the other side. I was brought to what they called the home plantation, on which Gerard Brandon lived, eleven miles from Natchez. They put me to work at once in the cotton field. I sowed the cotton, hoed the cotton, and picked the cotton. The men ginned it, and worked under the meanest overseers, and got flogged and flogged, until I thought I should die. They used to throw the women down, pull their clothes over their heads, and flog them. That means to tie their legs and arrange four stakes, stuck in the ground. They thought nothing of giving a woman three or four hundred blows with a long, heavy strap, made of harness leather, stuck full of tacks. The straps were fastened to short wooden handles. They had been used to beat the slaves with bull whips, but they killed so many of them that way that they had to use straps instead. One got whipped for not doing the overseer, or pick quite enough cotton, or even looked away from your work, you got whipped. I could not pick cotton to suit, because my fingers were too big, and I was getting whipped almost to death when the boss took me out of the field, and put me to work in the kitchen and laundry, where I got along a little better.

While I was working there one day, I saw a little brown woman whipped to death by Bill Sandford the overseer. She had stolen a yard of muslin to make some dress or something. I saw them take the girl out into the yard, strip her stark naked, and tie her face down to four stakes. Sandford then whipped her with the strap till he got tired, and then hired two of the negro drivers to whip her in turn, when he would again whip her. They began to whip her at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and kept on until after 5. At 6 o'clock she could not even scream, and would only shake and tremble when they struck her. At last one of the drivers said, 'Mr. Sandford, I think she is dying.' 'Go on,' said Sandford, 'give her a little more.' 'I'll tell you when to stop.' Then the colored fellow threw down the strap, and said he'd die rather than hit her again. Sandford had her nailed and told her to get up. But she couldn't move or speak. A field hand lifted her up and carried her up to the quarters and laid her on the bed. Her skin slipped and cracked in parts and fell off as though she had been scalded. She died in a few minutes after.

Sandford flogged so many to death that the boss had at last to get rid of him. Still a good overseer couldn't stay there. Moore and Bill Gates and Tom Lykes were all nearly as bad. One was a rather kind overseer, who wouldn't whip the women except on the shoulders, and never very severely. But one day the mistress sent a girl to him to be whipped, and sent a woman to see that she was whipped. The woman told the mistress that the new overseer wouldn't strip the girl below the waist, and the mistress sent for him. 'When I send a nigger to you to get whipped,' she said, 'I want it done right.' He said he'd whip when it was necessary, 'but my mother,' he said, 'wasn't a G—d dog, and I don't propose to treat any woman like a dog.' He was at once paid off and sent away.

The rest of Henrietta's narrative may be more briefly told, some of her pictures of the plantation life at this point being too horrible for publication. She remained about fifteen years on the plantation, till the war broke out, when old Brandon picked out five hundred of his best slaves and went to Texas for safety. On the way the slaves had to camp out at night in the worst of weather, and when Henrietta arrived at her journey's end her health and strength were gone. For a year she was obliged to walk on crutches.

At the close of the war Brandon offered to take her back to Mississippi if she would promise to work for him three years longer. She promised, and kept the promise. He never paid her a cent for her labor all those three years, but raising hogs and chickens for market, she at last managed to save twenty-five dollars with which she paid her passage, and that of her only child, a boy, back to Cincinnati, after an absence of twenty years. Her boy is now in Chicago, doing well.

Henrietta did not forget who had wronged her, and some three years ago she entered suit at Lexington against her kidnapers. Harvey Myers was to have conducted her case; and after his untimely death the suit was transferred to the hands of Lawyer Smith, of Lincoln & Smith, who are informed it is not yet decided. The suit is for \$25,000, against Jabez Ward.