



American slaves endured long work hours, bad living conditions and whippings. This image, from William Still's book about the *Underground Railroad*, depicts a slave whose name was George Law. He is about to be beat.

We learn his story from the book:

One day, while hauling dirt with a fractious horse, the animal manifested an unwillingness to perform his duty satisfactorily. At this procedure the master charged George with provoking the beast to do wickedly, and in a rage he collared George and bade him accompany him "up stairs" (of the soap house).

Not daring to resist, George went along with him. Ropes being tied around both his wrists, the block and tackle were fastened thereto, and George soon found himself hoisted on tip-toe with his feet almost clear of the floor.

The "kind-hearted master" then tore all the poor fellow's old shirt off his back, and addressed him thus: "You son of a b—h, I will give you pouting around me; stay there till I go up town for my cowhide."

George begged piteously, but in vain. The fracas caused some excitement, and it so happened that a show was to be exhibited that day in the town, which, as is usual in the country, brought a great many people from a distance; so, to his surprise, when the master returned with his cowhide, he found that a large number of curiosity-seekers had been attracted to the soap house to see Mr. Denny perform with his cowhide on George's back, as he was stretched up by his hands. Many had evidently made up their minds that it would be more amusing to see the cowhiding than the circus.

The spectators numbered about three hundred. This was a larger number than Mr. Denny had been accustomed to perform before, consequently he was seized with embarrassment; looking confused he left the soap house and went to his office, to await the dispersion of the crowd.

The throng finally retired, and left George hanging in mortal agony. Human nature here made a death-struggle; the cords which bound his wrists were unloosed, and George was then prepared to strike for freedom at the mouth of the cannon or point of the bayonet. How Denny regarded the matter when he found that George had not only cheated him out of the anticipated delight of cowhiding him, but had also cheated him out of himself is left for the imagination to picture.

George fled from Kent; he was accompanied by a comrade whose name inadvertently was not recorded; he, however, was described as a dark, round, and full-faced, stout-built man, with bow legs, and bore the appearance of having been used hard and kept down, and in ignorance, &c. Hard usage constrained him to flee from his sore oppression.

Such could be the life of human beings during America's years of chattle slavery.

Credits:

Image and narrative, from William Still's book, [online courtesy Project Gutenberg](#).

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

Media Stream

470

THE UNDERGROUND RAIL ROAD.

will send him on for I had a place for him if he ant will please dont send him for this as no place for a six passen. The way I got this place I went to see a frim of ayen from Washington. Dun al will send he give me writin. Please write this so soon as you get it you must excuse this bad string for my chance were bet weak to hit this mark.

JAMES H. BARR.

If you had to send for my trunk to Washington send the name of John Trowlart. Sir please write as soon as you get this fir et as expotes.

JAMES H. BARR.

ARRIVAL FROM DELAWARE, 1858.

GEORGE LAWS AND COMPANIES—TIED AND ROPEDED WITH SHACK AND TACKLE, TO HIS COVERSINGS.

GEORGE represented the ordinary young slave man of Delaware. He was of mixed blood, medium size and of humble appearance. He was destitute of the knowledge of spelling, to say nothing of reading. Slavery had stamped him unmistakably for life. To be scantily fed and clothed, and compelled to work without hire, George did not admire, but had to submit without murmuring; indeed, he knew that his so-called master, whose name was Denny, would not be likely to hear complaints from a slave; he therefore dragged his chain and yielded to his daily task.

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Preparing for Punishment - Story of George Law

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