**from *My Life in the South* by Jacob Stroyer source: http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/stroyer85/stroyer85.html**

Jacob Stroyer (1849-1908) was born a slave on the Singleton plantation near Columbia, South Carolina in 1849, and lived there until he was freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1864. As a child, Stroyer helped care for the plantation's horses and mules, which were sold soon after his master's death. He then worked briefly in a carpenter's shop and as a field hand. During the Civil War, he was sent to Sullivan's Island and Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, where he waited on Confederate officers. While there, Stroyer learned to read. Following his release from slavery, Jacob Stroyer settled in Salem, Massachusetts, and became minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church there.

Stroyer wrote his narrative, *Sketches of My Life in the South* (1879), in order to generate enough income to further his education. The first section of the narrative covers his fifteen years in slavery. It provides information about his family and describes the physical abuse he endured at the hands of the Singleton plantation's overseer. Stroyer also discusses the emotional strain that the slave trade put on his and other slave families. The rest of the narrative is a series of brief anecdotes about slave life, culture, beliefs, and the interactions between masters and slaves. The two chapters excerpted here offer Stroyer's perspective on runaways slaves. He tells the story of a slave, Isom, and the master from which he escaped.

**RUNAWAY SLAVES.** My readers have, no doubt, already heard that there were men in the South who made it their business in the days of slavery to raise and train hound dogs especially to hunt slaves with. Most of the owners hired such men on condition that they were to capture and return their runaway slaves, without being bruised and torn by the dogs. The average sums paid hunters were ten, fifteen and twenty-five dollars for capturing a slave; very many times these sums were 5 taken from the overseer's salary, as they were more or less the cause of slaves running away.

My readers want to know whether the runaway slaves ever returned to the overseers and their masters without being caught by the hunters. Sometimes they did and sometimes they never returned. Some stayed their lifetime; others would have returned, but were taken sick and died in the woods.

My readers ask, how did the slaves at home know when their fellow negroes, the runaways, sickened or died in the woods. 10 In general, someone on the plantation from which they ran away, or confidential friends on some other plantation, had communications with them, so that if anything happened to them the slaves at home would find out through such parties. And sometimes the masters and overseers would find out about their death, but indirectly, however, because if it was known that any one on the plantation had dealings with the runaway he would be punished, even though the information was gladly received by the master and overseer.

15 Sometimes groups of runaway slaves, of eight, ten and even twenty, belonging to different owners, got together in the woods, which made it very difficult and dangerous for slave hunters to capture those whom they were hired to hunt. In such cases sometimes these runaways killed both hunters and dogs. The thick forests in which they lived could not be searched on horseback, neither could man or dog run in them. The only chances the hunters had of catching runaway slaves was either to rout them from those thick forests or attack them when they came out in the opening to seek food.

20 Of course the runaways were mostly armed, and when attacked in the forests they would fight. My readers ask, how had they obtained arms and what were they, since slaves were not allowed to have deadly weapons? Some had large knives made by their fellow negroes who were blacksmiths, others stole guns from white men, who were accustomed to lay them carelessly around when they were out hunting game. The runaways who stole the guns were kept in powder and shot by some of the other slaves at home, who bought such from poor white men who kept little country stores in the different 25 parts of the South.

The runaway slaves generally had fathers, brothers, cousins, or some confidential friends who met them at certain appointed places, and brought them such things as they needed. The most they wanted from their fellow negroes at home was salt and a little corn flour; for they lived principally on beef and swine meat, taken either from their own masters or some other's stock.

30 My readers ask, did not some of the slaves at home betray their fellow negroes, the runaways, to the white man? I answer, they did; but often such were well spotted, and if the runaway slaves got a chance at them while in the woods they would mob or kill them. On the other hand, when they met those whom they could trust, instead of injuring them, they exchanged beef and swine meat with them for bread, corn flour, and salt, such as they needed in the woods.

**THE RUNAWAY SLAVES IN THE HOUSE.** Instead of going into the woods, sometimes runaway slaves lived right around the 35 overseer's and master's houses for months. A slave, named Isom ran away from Thomas Clarkson, his master's son, who was the overseer. Mr. Clarkson was satisfied, as he said, that the unaccustomed runaway, whom he thought was in the woods could not stay from home long, but finding that he stayed longer than expected, Mr. Clarkson hired a slave hunter with his dogs to hunt him.

The hunter came early to the plantation and took breakfast with Mr. Clarkson on the day they began the hunt for the 40 runaway slave. While sitting at breakfast, Mr. Clarkson said to the hunter, "My father brought up that boy as a house servant, and petted him so that it takes all the salt in the country to cure him. Father has too much religion to keep his negroes straight; but I don't believe in that. I think a negro ought to be overhauled every little while to keep him in his place, and that is just the reason why I took the overseership on this plantation."

The Hunter. "Well, what caused your boy to run away, Mr. Clarkson?"

45 Mr. Clarkson. "Well, he ran away because I gave him an overhauling, to keep him in the place of a negro."

Mr. Clarkson's wife. "Well, Thomas, I told you the other day, before you did it, that I didn't see any need of your whipping Isom, because I thought he was a good boy."

Mr. Clarkson. "Yes, my dear, if South Carolina had many more such Presbyterians as you and father Boston (he meant old Mr. Clarkson), in a short time there would be no slaves in the state; then who would you have to work for you?"

50 (I wish to state a fact to my readers, that is, while there were cases of exceptions, as a general thing the Presbyterians were better masters than any other denominations among the slave holders in the South.)

Mrs. Clarkson. "Yes, Thomas, if you were such a Presbyterian as you charged father Boston and I with being, you could have saved yourself the trouble and money which it will cost to hunt him."

Mr. Clarkson. "Well, we will not discuss the matter of religion any further." (To the hunter.) "That boy has been away now 55 for several days since I whipped him. I thought that he would have returned home long before this time, as this is the first time he has ever ran away; but I rather conclude that he got with some experienced runaways. Now do you think that you can capture him without being hurt, or torn by your dogs."

Mrs. Clarkson. "That is just what I am afraid will be done to that boy."

The Hunter. "O, no fear of that, madam, I shall use care in hunting him. I have but one dog which is dangerous for tearing 60 runaway negroes; I will chain him here until I capture your boy."

The hunter blew his horn which gathered his dogs, chained the one he spoke of, then he and Mr. Clarkson started on a chase for the runaway slave, who was secreted in the house, and heard every word they had said about him.

After the hunter and Mr. Clarkson went off, Mrs. Clarkson went to her room (as a general thing the southern mistresses hardly ever knew what went on in their dining rooms and kitchens after meal hours), so Isom, the runaway slave, sat at the 65 same table [at which the hunter and Mr. Clarkson had just been sitting] and ate his breakfast.

After two or three days of vain search in the woods for the runaway slave, Mr. Clarkson asked some of the other negroes on the plantation, if they saw him, to tell him if he came home he would not whip him. Of course as a general thing, when they stayed in the woods until they were captured, they were whipped, but they were not when they came home themselves. One morning, after several days of fruitless search in the woods for the runaway slave by the overseer and the hunter, 70 while at breakfast, Isom came up to the door. As soon as Mr. Clarkson learned that the runaway was at the door, he got up from his breakfast and went out.

"Well, Isom," said Mr. Clarkson. "Well, Massa Thomas," said Isom. "Where have you been" said Mr. Clarkson. "I been in the woods, sir," answered Isom. Of course it would not have been well for him to have told Mr. Clarkson that he was hidden and fed right in the house, for it would have made it bad for the other negroes who were house servants, among whom he 75 had a brother and sister.

Mr. Clarkson. "Isom, did you get with some other runaways?" "Yes, sir," said Isom. Of course Isom's answer was in keeping with the belief of Mr. Clarkson that he got with some experienced runaway in the woods. "How many were with you?" asked Mr. Clarkson. "Two," answered Isom. "What are their names, and to whom do they belong?" asked Mr. Clarkson. "I don't know, sir," said Isom. "Didn't you ask their names?" said Mr. Clarkson. "No, sir," said Isom. "Can you describe them?" 80 asked Mr. Clarkson. "One is big like you, and the other was little like the man who was hunting me," said Isom. "Where did you see the hunter?" asked Mr. Clarkson. "In the woods, sir," said Isom. "Isom, do you want something to eat?" asked Mr. Clarkson. "Yes, sir," said Isom. He sent him around to the kitchen and told the cook to give him something to eat.

Mrs. Clarkson thought a great deal of Isom, so while he was in the kitchen eating, she went in and had a long talk with him about how he got along since he had been away, as they supposed.

85  As I have said, in general, when runaway slaves came home themselves, they were not whipped, but were either handcuffed or put in stocks, and locked up for two or three days.

While Isom was eating and talking with Mrs. Clarkson, Mr. Clarkson appeared at the kitchen door with a pistol in one hand and handcuffs in the other. Mrs. Clarkson said, "What are you going to do, Thomas?" "I want Isom as soon as he is through eating," said Mr. Clarkson. "You are not going to lock him up, are you Thomas?" said Mrs. Clarkson. Mrs. Clarkson's name 90 was Henrietta, but her pet name was Henie. Mr. Clarkson said, "Henie, I shan't hurt Isom."

Isom had a smooth, black, round face, full eyes, white teeth, and was a very beautiful negro. When he saw the pistol and handcuffs in Mr. Clarkson's hands, those large eyes of his were stretched so wide, one could see the white, like great sheets in them.

Mrs. Clarkson said, "Thomas, please don't lock up Isom; he won't run away again. You won't, will you Isom?" "No, mamma 95 massie Henie, I won't, said Isom. "Yes, Henie," said Mr. Clarkson, "he says so, but will he not?" "Thomas," said Mrs. Clarkson, "I will take the responsibility if you do as I ask you to; I will keep Isom around the house and will assure you that he will not run away."

Mr. Clarkson wanted to lock up Isom very much, but he knew what a strong will his wife had, and how hard it would be to get her right when she got wrong, hence he complied with her request. So Isom worked around the house for a long time. 100 The hunter was to rest a few days, and then resume his work, but Mr. Clarkson wrote to him that his services would be no longer needed, as the runaway slave whom he was employed to hunt had returned himself. I never learned whether the hunter got paid for what he did or not.