

**NARRATIVE OF  
HENRY WATSON, A  
FUGITIVE SLAVE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649319152

Narrative of Henry Watson, a Fugitive Slave by Henry Watson

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A FUGITIVE SLAVE.

THIRD EDITION.

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BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY BELA MARCH, 35 CORNHILL.  
1850.

~~885, 49~~

~~U.S. 5274.60.3~~

U.S. 5274.60.3

1850 Dec 6 ✓

date of the Publication

DEDICATION.

MR. HENRY HOLT:

DEAR SIR,—

WILL you allow me, from feelings of sincere gratitude, to dedicate to you my little Narrative, which, had it not been for you, I never should have been able to have published? and let me assure you that I shall ever entertain the most devoted feelings of gratitude, for your kind and humane interference in my behalf, when I was a hopeless slave.

I remain yours, most gratefully,

H. WATSON.



A. J. WESGOT, PRINTER,  
8 WATER ST., BOSTON.

## P R E F A C E .

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It is not to be expected that one who has passed through slavery's fiery ordeal as I have done, can entertain the reader with as exquisite touches of sensibility, in giving my experience, as the subject would warrant. A Hogarth's pen would scarcely suffice to correctly delineate all the terrific scenes of slavery. Mortal man never yet fully conceived of the whole of its horrors, and never will be able thoroughly to understand its enormities, until the arrival of that day, when the deeds of man shall be accurately portrayed by Him whose eye only penetrates the dark recesses of slavery's prison-house, and whose ear is the only hearer of all of the words of anguish which ascend from its gloomy caverns. I have not attempted in this narrative to embellish or to exaggerate. My aim has been simply to present a faithful record of a few only of the transactions I have been eye-witness of, hoping that a perusal of them might add something to the already abundant testimony of the horrors of the slave system.

Reader, I have been a slave ; for twenty-six long years did the cruel iron of slavery enter my soul. I know no good in the execrable system. If you think there is any, my place is vacant, and you can go and fill it ; but before you venture upon this step, let me tell you that the hundredth part of the cruelties of slavery are not specified here. Whatever may be said of its beauties, I am assured of this truth, that "Slavery, disguise thyself as thou wilt, still thou art a bitter cup."

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## NARRATIVE OF HENRY WATSON.

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I WAS born in Virginia, about thirteen miles from Fredericksburg, as near as I can now recollect, in the year 1813. Mother was a slave, and belonged to a man by the name of Bibb, whose Christian name I cannot remember. My mother was called Letty. Slaves seldom have but one name; and I never heard her called by any other. I was at that time called Bill. I never had any brother or sister, that I know of. Like the most of my brothers in bondage, I have no correct account of my age. Slaves keep the birth of their children by the different seasons of the year. Children often ask their parents their age. The answer is, "this planting corn time, you are six, eight, or ten," just as it may happen to be; but even this knowledge was I deprived of by my master, who was one of those proud Virginians, whose principal business was to raise slaves for the market; though I was permitted to remain with my mother on his plantation until I was about eight years of age. My mother was the cook at what slaves call the great house. I was allowed to remain with her at the house. The last time I saw her, she placed me on the bed, which was in a room adjoining the kitchen, and bid me go to sleep, saying that she would be back again in a few

moments. I did so; and when I awoke in the morning I found myself in the great house, wrapped up in a blanket, before the fire. I could not account for this change that had been made with me through the night. I asked for my mother, but no one spoke. I went out into the kitchen, where she used to work. She was not there, and it was evident to me that she was gone; where, I knew not. I returned to the house, and implored my mistress, with tears in my eyes, to tell me where my mother had gone. She refused, though a mother herself, to give me any satisfaction whatever. Every exertion was made on my part to find her, or hear some tidings of her; but all my efforts were unsuccessful; and from that day I have never seen or heard from her. This cruel separation brought on a fit of sickness, from which they did not expect I would recover. The old slave-woman who took care of me during my sickness, by way of consolation, gave me as much information as she could about my mother's being taken away. She told me that a slave-dealer drove to the door in a buggy, and my mother was sent for to come into the house; when, getting inside, she was knocked down, tied, and thrown into the buggy, and carried away. As the old woman related these things to me, I felt as if all hope was gone; that I was forsaken and alone in this world. More forcibly did I then feel the galling chains of slavery, the cruelty and barbarism arising from it, than I ever have since. I resolved, however, to bear with all patiently, till I became large enough to run away, and search for my mother.

I had recovered from my sickness but a few months, when one day, looking up the road, I saw a man riding towards the house; I ran with the rest of the children to

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hide ourselves until the man had gone. When I had remained concealed some time, I ventured out again, and found Mr. Bibb, my master, looking for me, who ordered me into the house; and when I got there, to my astonishment, I found the man whom we had hid ourselves from, sitting in the room. After he had inspected me to his satisfaction, I was ordered out of the room, and went to play, and had forgotten the whole affair, when my master called me again, and ordered me to hold the stranger's horse. I did so, and in a few minutes he came forth and ordered me to mount behind him. This, with his assistance, I did; but rode only a short distance, when I jumped from the horse and ran for the house as fast as I could. He succeeded, however, in overtaking me, and I was again put on the horse, this time in front of him; and in this way was I carried to Fredericksburg. I was then placed in the possession of Mr. Janer, better known as Parson Janer; the man that had bought me being the son of Mr. Janer, who was one of those jolly, good-natured clergymen, who, while he feasted his numerous guests in the parlor, starved his slaves in the kitchen. After remaining there awhile, it was determined to send me to Richmond. The same man that brought me, came for me and ordered me to take a seat on the stage-coach, and the next day I found myself in Richmond, and stopped at the Eagle Hotel, kept by Mr. Holman, where I remained two or three days, and then was carried to the auction room; entering which, I found several slaves, seated around the room waiting for the hour of sale. Some were in tears; others were apparently cheerful. This brought to my mind my mother, and caused me to shed many tears; but they fell unheeded.