
A NARRATIVE
OF THE
LIFE AND LABORS
OF THE
REV. G. W. OFFELEY,
A COLORED MAN,
Local Preacher and Missionary.

two kinds of brooms. These articles I used to make nights and sell to get money for myself. When I was sixteen years old I commenced taking contracts of wood-chopping, at fifty cents per cord, and hired slaves to chop for me nights, when the moon shone bright. In the fall and winter we would make our fire and chop until eleven or twelve at night. We used to catch oysters and fish nights, and hire other slaves to peddle them out on Sunday mornings. By this way I have helped some to get their freedom.

EXODUS 20-12: Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

When I was twenty-one years old I gave my father one year's work to buy him a horse. One year's wages for an able bodied man \$50, or \$60, fifty or sixty dollars per year, and two holidays at Easter,—two in June, two in harvest, and six at the end of the year; one

pair shoes, one pair stockings, one pair woolen pants, one coat, two pairs coarse tow linen pants, two shirts, and board, is the law of the State of Maryland allows a man, free or slave, black or white, who hires for one year.

My friends who may read this little work, will make due allowance when they see that I never possessed the advantage of one day's schooling in my life, and only commenced to learn my letters when nineteen years and eight months old.

At one time, when going to my work, I found a piece of a chapter of an old Bible, Genesis 25, concerning Isaac, Jacob, and Esau. At this time there was an old colored man working for my father. He, taking the piece of Bible, and read it to me ; I do not remember ever hearing that much of the Bible read before. I told him I would like to learn to read ; he told me to get a book and he would learn me, while he stayed with us. I bought a little

primer, and Sunday morning he commenced learning me my letters. By Monday morning I could say them all. He would give me lessons nights and Sabbath mornings. He said when he used to take his master's children to school, he would carry his book in his hat and get the children to give him a lesson in the interval of the school. He grew up to be a young man, experienced religion, and joined the M. E. church, and was authorized to preach among his colored brethren, free and slave, and was set free some time before he worked for my father.

After he left our house I was without a teacher, and there was an old man about seventy-five or eighty years old, a slaveholder, owned a small farm and one slave woman married to a slave belonging to another slaveholder. This woman was the mother of two small children. Her old master had five daughters, one son eighteen years of age, a family of ten

in number, to be supported from this little farm,—no one to work except this son and the slave woman, only as I would go and help them occasionally. By this the young man and I became very intimate, and I learned him the art of wrestling, boxing and fighting, and he learned me to read. After that I went to work on a rail road ; then I taught boxing school, and learned to write. After that I went to St. George, Del., to work at a hotel. One day a white boy came to me and said that he was hungry ; his father gambled away his money, and if I would give him and his little sister something to eat occasionally, he would come three nights in the week and set copies for me to write, and learn me to cypher. The landlady was very glad of the opportunity, and gave me the privilege of giving them as much as I pleased, and I used to take them in the kitchen and give them what they could eat, and fill their little basket to take home. He would

stay with me sometimes until 2 or 3 o'clock P. M., and learn me to cypher to the single rule of three.

I arrived at Hartford on the 15th of Nov., 1835. Since that time some of my good white friends have assisted me by referring me to good books, and giving good instruction, of which I have reason to believe some of them are in heaven, and others on earth doing good.

My mother's and father's theology, or the way we children were taught by our parents, neither of them could read; but as mother's master was a member of the M. E. church, and used to read the Bible to his slaves—not learn nor teach them to read, but read the Bible to them.

First, man is a compound being, possessing two natures, a soul and a body; the body is of the earth, and must die and return to the dust from whence it came; but the soul is immortal; that is, will never die, but will live for-

ever in happiness with God, or exist in hell for ever. This theology teaches of two places for the souls of the human family after death, and the condition by which they must go first. If children were obedient to their parents or their owners, and prayed to the Lord to forgive them of their sins and make them good children, and keep them from telling lies, from stealing, from taking the Lord's name in vain, and to keep the Sabbath holy. But above all, never to be saucy to old people, lest our case should be like the forty-two children destroyed by the two she bears—II KINGS, chap. 2-23 : And he went up from thence unto Bethel, and as he was going up by the way there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head, go up thou bald head. Verse 24 : and he turned back and looked on them and cursed them in the name of the Lord ; and there came forth two she-bears out of the wood and tore

forty and two children of them. And I am glad to know that even from the most oppressed slave to the most refined white family's children at the south, are taught to respect the old, white or black. Their children call old colored people aunt and uncle by way of respect. None use the word 'nigger' but the low and vulgar.

Our family theology teaches that God is no respecter of persons, but gave his son to die for all, bond or free, black or white, rich or poor. If we keep his commandments, we will be happy after death. It also teaches that if God calls and sanctifies a person to do some great work, that person is immortal until his work is done ; that God is able and will protect him from all danger or accident in life if he is faithful to his calling or charge committed by the Lord. This is a borrowed idea from circumstances too numerous to mention. Here is one man we present as a proof of the im-

mortality of man, while in the flesh: Praying Jacob. This man was a slave in the State of Maryland. His master was very cruel to his slaves. Jacob's rule was to pray three times a day, at just such an hour of the day; no matter what his work was or where he might be, he would stop and go and pray. His master has been to him and pointed his gun at him, and told him if he did not cease praying he would blow out his brains. Jacob would finish his prayer and then tell his master to shoot in welcome—your loss will be my gain—I have two masters, one on earth and one in heaven—master Jesus in heaven, and master Saunders on earth. I have a soul and a body; the body belongs to you, master Saunders, and the soul to master Jesus. Jesus says men ought always to pray, but you will not pray, neither do you want to have me pray. This man said in private conversation that several times he went home and drank an unusual

quantity of brandy to harden his heart that he might kill him ; but he never had power to strike nor shoot him, and he would freely give the world, if he had it in his possession for what he believed his Jacob to possess. He also thought that Jacob was as sure of Heaven as the apostle Paul or Peter. Sometimes Mr. S. would be in the field about half drunk, raging like a madman, whipping the other slaves ; and when Jacob's hour would come for prayer, he would stop his horses and plough and kneel down and pray ; but he could not strike the man of God.

The first Methodist minister that ever preached in a certain town in Queen Ann's county, there was a great revival of religion among the rich and poor, black and white, free and slaves. When many of them experienced religion they would disobey their ungodly masters and would go to meetings nights and Sundays. Two rich slaveholders waylaid the

minister at night, and taking him off from his horse and beat him until they thought he was dead. But the Lord saved his life to preach his Word, and many were converted in the same town through his preaching, and many masters, when converted, set their slaves free.

My grandmother died at ninety years of age; my mother at seventy, and my father at eighty years of age. These three friends died in the strongest triumph of faith in Jesus, who when on earth said he would be with his people to the end of the world. Amen.

Perhaps some person will ask why did I teach the art of wrestling, boxing and fighting, when desirous to learn to read the Bible? I answer because no one is so contemptible as a coward. With us a coward is looked upon as the most degraded wretch on earth, and is only worthy to be a slave. My brother's master, Governor R. Right, of Maryland, taught his children never to take an insult from one of

their equals—that is, from the rich and educated. Their domestic slaves were taught not to take an insult from another rich man's domestic slave under any consideration. By this, you perceive, I was trying to be respectable by doing like the rich. Those who read the lives of our great statesmen, know they were duellists. Then I thought he who could control his antagonist by the art of his physical power was a greater man. But I thank the Lord, since the 21st of Feb., 1836, I have been enabled to see things in a different light, and believe the man is greater who can overcome his foes by his Christlike example.

A word to my colored friends. It is often said that we are a degraded people in this country as well as in Africa. Before we consent to the charge, let us look at the word degradation. Walker says it means “deprivation of office or dignity, degeneracy, to lessen, to diminish.” I cannot see that his explanation

has anything to do with the charge against us in a moral sense of the term. When properly taken into consideration, if we only number one-sixth part of the population of the United States. Because we have six men against one to vote us out of office; that is not degrading us, it is oppressing us. If six colored men should take a white child from its parents, and teach it that its highest obligations belong to us, we six men, that we stand in the place of God—this is the kind of education many of our people have at the south. Now I ask if this child should become a sabbath-breaker, or a liar, a thief, or a drunkard, or an adulterer, not having the advantage to know better, I ask who is the degraded man? Paul says, Romans 4; 15: For where there is no law there is no transgression. Then the moral guilt rests on the oppressor and not on the oppressed. We must not feel that we are degraded. The true meaning of the word de-

grade, is to be low, mean, contemptible, willing to do a mean act that we know is displeasing in the sight of God and man. Therefore we may be oppressed by man, but never morally degraded, only as we are made willing subjects to do sinful acts against what we know or have the power to know is wrong in the sight of God and man.

No difference how poor we are, if we are respectable, honest, and upright, with God, ourselves, and our fellow man. For St. Peter declares, Acts 10, 34-35, that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. And if any man is accepted with his God, then oppression, nor prejudice, or prisons, or chains, or whips, or anything formed by man, cannot degrade us. No, we must voluntarily subscribe to some mean act before we can be mean or low in the sight of our dear Lord and Master.

My dear and much beloved friends, allow me to say to one and all, be sure to send your children to the day and sabbath school.

Yours in love,

G. W. OFFLEY.

WHAT A MERCY.

What a mercy, a mercy is this!

What a mercy, a mercy is this!

What a mercy is this, what heavenly bliss,
Jesus died to redeem a lost race.

What will, oh, what will become of me,
What will, oh, what will become of me,
What will become of me when death approaches me,
If the Saviour is not found in my heart.

It is awful, 'tis awful to relate,
It is awful, 'tis awful to relate,
'Tis awful to relate, if death should be my fate,
If the Saviour is not found in my heart.

But welcome, but welcome death to me,
But welcome, but welcome death to me,
But welcome death to me, if Christ should set me free,
If my Saviour is found in my heart.

Adieu and adieu to you all,
Adieu and adieu to you all,
Adieu to you all, my Saviour doth me call,
He hath promised to make me anew.

Adieu to affliction and pain,
Adieu to affliction and pain.

Adieu to all pain, for dying is gain,
If my Saviour is found in my heart.

How reviving and cheering to my mind,
How reviving and cheering to my mind,
How cheering to my mind the friends I left behind,
If my Saviour is found in my heart.

But we hope and we hope for to meet,
But we hope and we hope for to meet,
But we hope for to meet, and worship at his feet,
And reign with our Saviour above.

JACOB'S LADDER.

As Jacob on travels was wearied by day,
At night on a stone for a pillow he lay,
A vision appeared—a ladder so high,
With its foot on the earth, and the top in the sky.

CHORUS—Hallelujah to Jesus who died on the tree,
To raise up his ladder of Mercy for me.
Press forward! press forward! the prize is in
view,
And a crown of bright glory is waiting for you.

This ladder is long—it's strong and well made—
Stood thousands of years, and is not decayed;
It's so free of access, all the world may get up,
And angels will guard you from bottom to top.—CHORUS.

This ladder is Jesus, the glorious God-man,
 Whose blood rightly streaming from Calvary ran,
 On his perfect atonement to heaven we rise,
 And sing in the mansions prepared in the skies.—CHORUS.

Come let us ascend—behold! never fear—
 It stood every tempest and always will bear;
 Millions have tried it, and reached Zion's hill,
 And thousands by faith are climbing it still.—CHORUS.

Our fathers upon it have mounted to God,
 Have finished their labors and reach'd their abode,
 And we are a climbing, and soon will be there,
 To join in their raptures, their happiness share.—CHORUS.

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 Offley, G. W. (Greensbury Washington)
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 [Harper]

A NARRATIVE
OF THE
LIFE AND LABORS
OF THE
REV. G. W. OFFLEY,
A COLORED MAN,
Local Preacher and Missionary,

WHO LIVED TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS AT THE SOUTH AND TWENTY-THREE
AT THE NORTH ; WHO NEVER WENT TO SCHOOL A DAY IN HIS LIFE,
AND ONLY COMMENCED TO LEARN HIS LETTERS WHEN NINETEEN
YEARS AND EIGHT MONTHS OLD ; THE EMANCIPATION OF
HIS MOTHER AND HER THREE CHILDREN ; HOW HE
LEARNED TO READ WHILE LIVING IN A SLAVE
STATE, AND SUPPORTED HIMSELF FROM THE
TIME HE WAS NINE YEARS OLD
UNTIL HE WAS TWENTY-ONE.

HARTFORD, CONN., 1859.

NAMES OF GENTLEMEN WHO SPEAK IN HIGH TERMS OF
HIS MORAL WORTH :

Ware, Mass., Feb., 1852.

REV. W. WARD.

Hartford, Conn., 1854.

REV. DR. J. HAWES.

“ DR. H. BUSHNELL.

Worcester, Mass., 1854.

REV. O. SWEETSER.

“ E. SMALLEY.

“ GEO. BUSHNELL.

“ DR. A. HILL.

HON. JOHN DAVIS.

REV. O. H. TILLOTSON.

Boston, Mass., 1859.

REV. JOHN W. DADMAN.

REV. E. E. HALL.

NARRATIVE

OF THE LIFE OF

REV. G. W. OFFLEY.

My mother was born a slave in the State of Virginia, and sold in the State of Maryland, and there remained until married, and became the mother of three children. She was willed free at the death of her master ; her three children were also willed free at the age of twenty-five. But my youngest brother was put on a second will, which was destroyed by the widow and the children, and he was subjected to bondage for life. My father was a free man, and therefore bought him as a slave for life and

give him his freedom at the age of twenty years. He also bought my sister for a term of years, say until she was twenty-five years old. He gave her her freedom at the age of sixteen years. He bought my grand-mother, who was too old to set free, that she might be exempted from hard servitude in her old age.

Previous to the sale of this family, my mother was living with her master's children, and they persuaded mother to not consent to father's buying the children, and told father if he attempted to buy one of them they would shoot him dead on the auction ground; that they would buy the children themselves, and they should have their freedom according to their father's will. Mother told them they might buy them and welcome, but you had better throw your money in the fire, for if you buy one of my children I will cut all three of their throats while they are asleep, and your money will do you no good. Her young mas-

ters were afraid that she meant what she said, and they concluded that it would bring a disgrace upon the family to prohibit a man from buying his own children, though mother had no intention of doing as she said.

The auctioneer was a true friend to father, and used great deception in making the purchaser believe that the two children would die unless they could have their mother's care, so that father bought them at his own price, as no person bid against him. They wanted to have mother and father to work for them, and they would bring up the two children as mother had ; neither had any care of a family, and they was afraid the children would suffer. Mother said if they did suffer they would not be accountable for it,—that she had two hands, and she could work and take care of her own children without their help. But when she became the mother of eight children, and father working for twenty-five or fifty cents

per day, she often would think of her old master's kitchen and wish for some of the good victuals she had given to the poor whites, and the field slaves. But little did they think they would ever be poor. One of her young mistresses married a miserable young man and she went blind and died heart-broken. Her young master's daughter married a similar kind of wretch, and died young, as thousands of the wicked do.

I was born Dec. 18th, 1808, in the State of Maryland, Queen Ann's County, Centerville. My mother and father were illiterate, and kept no record of their children's births, only referring to circumstances. But when I was seven years old I heard mother say that her young master's daughter Ann was two weeks older than myself, and I got a stick, or piece of wood, and made 11111111 notches, and at the end of every year would add another 1 notch until I was twenty-one years old. At that time there

was a dispute between mother and father about my age. Mother said I was twenty-one, and father thought I was only twenty, and I went to Centerville and saw Miss Ann, who was born two weeks before me. I asked her if she was twenty-one, and she said yes she was just twenty-one years old, and I returned from my ten miles walk, but dare not name it to father until he mentioned it, and I told him I had been to see Miss Ann and she said I was twenty-one years old; then said he you are free from me. During my boyhood father hired me to a slaveholder for a term of four years to pay his house rent. From the time I was nine years old I worked and supported myself until I was twenty-one years old, and never received one dollar of my wages. When I was ten years old I sat down and taking an old basket to pieces, learned myself to make baskets. After that I learned to make foot mats and horse collars, not of leather but of corn husks; also