

The Journal of Negro History, Volume 3, 1918

Carter G. Goodson, Various



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THE STORY OF JOSIAH HENSON[1] No one ever uttered a more forceful truth than Frederika Bremer when she said in speaking to Americans: "The fate of the Negro is the romance of your history." The sketches of heroes showing the life of those once exploited by Christian men must ever be interesting to those who would know the origin and the development of a civilization distinctly American. In no case is this more striking than in that of Josiah Henson, the man who probably was present to Harriet Beecher Stowe's mind when she graphically portrayed slavery in writing "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Josiah Henson was born June 15, 1789, on a farm in Charles County, Maryland, where his mother was hired out. His parents had six children. The only recollection he had of his father was that of seeing his right ear cut off, his head gashed and his back lacerated, as a result of the cruel punishment inflicted upon him because he had dared to beat the overseer of the plantation for brutally assaulting the slave's wife. Because of becoming morose, disobedient and intractable thereafter, Henson's father was sold to a planter in Alabama and his relatives never heard of him[Pg 2] again. His mother was then brought back to the estate of her owner, a Doctor McPherson, who was much kinder to his slaves. Dr. McPherson gave the youth his own name, Josiah, and the family name Henson after Dr. McPherson's uncle, who served in the Revolutionary War. Josiah showed signs of mental and religious development under the pious care of his Christian mother and for that reason became his master's favorite.

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