

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON · *Autobiographical Writings*

schools opened and I was permitted to work in the morning and at night and go to school days. The morning I started to school was the proudest day in my life, although, previous to starting to school, in some way I had learned the alphabet and to read a little. After attending the public schools for awhile, the condition of the family was such that I was compelled to leave school and work during the whole of the day in the coal mines. Notwithstanding this I determined to continue my studies, and in some way got some one to teach me at night, although very often the teacher knew but very little more than I did. Sometimes I had to walk quite a distance to secure a teacher, but very few months passed without my having a lesson under somebody at night.

While working in the coal mines and going to school at night in this way, a Mrs. Ruffner, wife of Gen. Lewis Ruffner, gave me a position to work around her house, and during the winter months she let me go to school in the day for what work I could do in the morning and at night. I lived with her for several years and attended school in this way. While working in the coal mines I heard of Hampton from one of its first graduates, Henry C. Payne, my teacher, and heard at the same time it was a school where a poor boy could go and be given an opportunity to work for his education so far as board was concerned. As soon as I heard of Hampton I made up my mind that I was going to find my way there, so I began at once to save every penny I could get hold of, and with what money myself and brother, John H. Washington, could get together, soon thought I had enough to reach Hampton, though at the time I did not know where Hampton was or what it would take to get there. So I started out one morning and traveled a portion of the distance in a stage coach, walking a part of the way, and in the steam cars a portion of the distance, until I finally found myself one night in the city of Richmond, Va., without money or a place to stay all night. After walking about the streets till it was midnight and I had grown very weary, I crept under the sidewalk and slept under it that night. The next morning, as good fortune would have it, I found myself very near a ship that was unloading pig iron: I went up and asked the captain of the vessel to give me work and he did, and I worked there, sleeping during the night under the sidewalk, until I had earned enough to pay my way to Hampton, and I arrived there with a surplus of 50 cents in my pocket. I at once found General Armstrong and told him what I had come to Hampton for and what