

EXTRACTS FROM *The Story of the Negro* · 1909

what, if anything, there was in the life of my people in Africa and America to which I might point with pride and think about with satisfaction.

My curiosity in regard to the origin and history of the dark-skinned people to which I belong, led me at first to listen and observe and then, later, as I got some schooling and a wider knowledge of the world, to inquire and read. What I learned in this way only served, however, to increase my desire to go farther and deeper into the life of my people, and to find out for myself what they had been in Africa as well as in America.

What I was first able to hear and to learn did not, I confess, take me very far or give me very much satisfaction. In the part of the country in which I lived there were very few of my people who pretended to know very much about Africa. I learned, however, that my mother's people had come, like the white people, from across the water, but from a more distant and more mysterious land, where people lived a different life from ours, had different customs and spoke a different language from that I had learned to speak. Of the long and terrible journey by which my ancestors came from their native home in Africa to take up their life again beside the white man and Indian in the New World, I used to hear many and sinister references, but not until I was a man did I meet any one among my people who knew anything definite, either through personal knowledge or through tradition, of the country or the people from whom my people sprang. To most of the slaves the "middle passage," as the journey from the shore of Africa to the shore of America was called, was merely a tradition of a confused and bewildering experience, concerning whose horrors they had never heard any definite details. Nothing but the vaguest notions remained, at the time I was a boy, even among the older people in regard to the mother country of my race.

In slavery days the traditions of the people who lived in the cabins centred almost entirely about the lives and fortunes of the people who lived in the "Big House." The favourite stories around the cabin fireside related to what this or that one had seen on some distant journey with "old master," or perhaps to the adventures they had when master and they were boys together.

Until freedom came the life of the Negro was so intimately inter-