

Lancaster

HANNAH GIBBONS

PART I

One evening, we heard a tap at the window and knew immediately what the sound meant. Our home was one of the first stations of the Railroad, east of Columbia. A group of fugitives had been sent to us by the Columbia colored merchant, William Whipper.

The fugitives were taken to the barn, and in the morning were brought to the house separately, where Daniel, my husband, asked of each one his name, that of his master, and what new name he proposed to take. The answers, I recorded in a book that gradually swelled into quite a large volume. If we had reason to suspect their masters would come looking for them soon, we moved them on to Philadelphia or to Harrisburg. If possible, we found them work in the area.

One poor soul was so weakened and unfocused, he could not answer any questions. I took charge of him. I administered to his wants, and in a few days there developed upon the surface of his body the unmistakable appearance of that loathsome disease, small-pox. For six weeks, until he was restored, I attended to him faithfully, deeming it advisable that none other should have access to him. This I did for eighteen months.

PART II

My husband was engaged in assisting fugitives from the time he arrived at manhood's estate until his death in 1853, a period of fifty-six years. I did not begin to keep a record of the number he passed on until 1824, but I am supposing the number totaled over two hundred, and up to the time of his death he aided about 1,000. Out of the whole number he succored, but one or two were taken from his house.

One Abraham Boston was kidnapped, and his absence from wrenched Daniel. Abraham was an excellent man, and Daniel grew to love him like a brother. When the kidnappers carried him away, Daniel could do nothing. As Quakers, we could not resist, only try to

outwit. On this day, we were not even aware Abraham had been captured, until after dark. Daniel knew only that the kidnappers had taken him to Baltimore, and to that city Daniel went in search of Abraham—an endeavor of certain risk to a Railroad agent so widely and openly known as Daniel. But for some reason, Daniel could find no traces of Abraham, and reluctantly concluded Abraham had been quickly sold further south.

At Daniel's funeral, we turned to each other and mingled our voices with the voices of the earth and air, and bade him "Hail" and "Farewell." Farewell, kind and brave old man. The voices of those whom thou hast redeemed welcome you to the Eternal City.