**from *My Life in the South* by Jacob Stroyer source: http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/stroyer85/stroyer85.html**

Jacob Stroyer (1849-1908) was born a slave on the Singleton plantation near Columbia, South Carolina in 1849, and lived there until he was freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1864. As a child, Stroyer helped care for the plantation's horses and mules, which were sold soon after his master's death. He then worked briefly in a carpenter's shop and as a field hand. During the Civil War, he was sent to Sullivan's Island and Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, where he waited on Confederate officers. While there, Stroyer learned to read. Following his release from slavery, Jacob Stroyer settled in Salem, Massachusetts, and became minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church there.

Stroyer wrote his narrative, *Sketches of My Life in the South* (1879), in order to generate enough income to further his education. The first section of the narrative covers his fifteen years in slavery. It provides information about his family and describes the physical abuse he endured at the hands of the Singleton plantation's overseer. Stroyer also discusses the emotional strain that the slave trade put on his and other slave families. The rest of the narrative is a series of brief anecdotes about slave life, culture, beliefs, and the interactions between masters and slaves. Here he tells about his time working for Boney Young, a groom (someone who takes care of horses) to his experiences in the Civil War and his eventual freedom.

**CHAPTER II.   
MY EXPERIENCE.**

I have said, in the above statements, that I was under the groom, and his name was Boney Young. He had a brother by the name of Charles Young, who used to act as groom to John Singleton, brother of Colonel M. R. Singleton. But Boney Young was the better groom and the meaner fellow. One day, about two weeks after he and mother had the conflict, he called me to him, he was singing as though in a very pleasant mood, and I ran to him as if to say by my actions, I am willing to do 5 anything you bid me, willingly. When I got to him, he said, "go and bring me a switch, sir," I answered, "yes, sir," and off I went and brought him one, then he said, "come in here, sir;" I answered, "yes sir" and went into a horse stall, but while I was going in a thousand thoughts passed through my mind as to what he wanted me to go into that stall for. But when I got in he gave me a severe flogging.

A day or two after that, he called me in the same way, and I went again and he sent me for a switch, but I brought him a 10 short stubble that was worn out, he took it, beat me on the head with it, then said to me, "go and bring me a switch, sir;" I answered, "yes, sir," and off I went the second time, and brought one a very little better than the first, he broke that over my head, saying, "go and bring me a switch, sir;" I answered, "yes, sir," and off I went for the third time, and then he said to me, "come here, sir," I answered, "yes, sir." When I went into the stall he told me to lie down, and I stooped down, when he kicked me around for awhile and then making me lie on my face he whipped me to his satisfaction. That evening when I 15 went home to father and mother, I said to them, "Mr. Young is whipping me too much now, I shall not stand it, I shall fight him," father said to me, "you must not do that, because if you do he will say that your mother and I had advised you to do it, and it will make it hard for your mother and me, as well as for yourself, you must do as I told you my son, do your work the best you can and do not say anything." I said to father, "but I don't know what I have done that he should whip me, he does not tell me what wrong I have done, he simply calls me to him and whips me when he gets ready." Father said, "I can 20 do nothing more than to pray to the Lord to hasten the time when these things shall be done away, that is all I can do."

Then mother stripped me and looked at the wounds that were upon me and she burst into tears and said, "If he were not so small I would not mind it so much, but this will break his constitution, I am going to master about it because I know he will not allow Mr. Young to treat this child so," but father told her that she had better not, because while master might stop him from treating the boy badly, he might revenge himself through the overseer, for he and Mr. Young were very good 25 friends, so she would gain nothing in the end, the best thing he thought was to pray much over it, for he believed the time would come when we all should be free. When father spoke of liberty, his words seemed a great comfort to me, and my heart swelled with the hope of the future and we sat up very late that night talking about it. When the time came for us to go to bed we all knelt down in family prayer, as was our custom.

When morning came father went to his work in the barn-yard and mother to hers on the farm, and I to my work but father 30 was careful to charge me to keep his advice, as he said that would be the easiest way for me to get along.

But in spite of father's advice I had made up my mind not to be submissive as I was before, seeing that it did not help me any; things went smoothly for a few days until one day the groom called me to him and told me to bring him a switch, I told him that I would bring no more switches for him to whip me with, but that he must get them himself. After repeating the command very impatiently and I refusing, he called to another boy named Hardy, he brought the switch, and taking me into 35 a stall, he whipped me unmercifully. After that he made me run back and forth every morning from a half to three quarters of an hour, about two hundred and fifty yards and every now and then he would run after me and whip me to make me run faster. Besides that, when I was put upon a horse if he threw me he would whip me if it were five times a day. So I did not gain anything by refusing to bring switches for him to whip me with.

One very cold morning in the month of March I came from home without washing my face, and Mr. Young made two of the 40 slave boys take me down to a pond where the horses and mules used to drink, they threw me into the water and rubbed my face with the sand until it bled, then I was made to run all the way to the stable, which was about a quarter of a mile. This cruel treatment soon hardened me so that I did not care for him at all.

A short time after I was sent with the other boys about four or five miles from home, up the public road, to practice the horses, and he gave me a very wild animal to ride which threw me very often. Mr. Young did not go with us but he sent a 45 colored groom every morning, who was very faithful to whatever task was allotted him, he was instructed to whip me every time the horse threw me while away from home. I would get many little floggings by the colored groom as the horse threw me a great many times, but the flogging I got from him would be very feeble compared with that of the white man, and I was better content to go away with the colored groom than to be at home where I would have worse punishment. But the time was coming when they ceased to whip me for being thrown by horses.

50 One day as I was riding along the road the horse that I was upon darted at sight of a bird, which flew across the way, throwing me upon a pile of brush. The horse stepped on my check and the head of a nail in his shoe went through my cheek and broke a tooth, but it was done so quickly that I hardly felt it, it happening that he did not step on me with his whole weight, if he had my jaw would have been broken. When I got up, the colored groom was standing by me, but he could not whip me when he saw the blood flowing from my mouth, so he took me down to the creek, which was but a short distance 55 from the place, and washed me, then taking me home sent for the doctor who dressed the wound. When the white groom saw my condition, he asked how it was done and upon being told, said it ought to have killed me. After the doctor had dressed my face, of course I went home, thinking they would allow me to stay until I got well, but I did not more than get there before the groom sent for me, I did not answer as my jaw pained me very much. When he found that I did not come, he came after me himself, and said if I did not come to the stable right away he would whip me, so I came out with him. He 60 did not whip me while I was in that condition, but he would not let me lie down, so I suffered very much from exposure.

When mother came home that night from the farm and saw my condition, she was overcome with grief, she said to father, "this wound is enough to kill the child and that merciless man will not let him lie down until he gets well, this is too hard." Father said to her, "I know it is very hard, but what can we do? For if we try to keep this boy in the house it will cause us trouble." Mother said, "I wish the Lord would take him out of the world, then he would be out of pain and we should not 65 have to fret about him, for he would be in heaven." Then she would take hold of me and say, "does it hurt you, son," I answered, "yes, mamma," and she would shed tears, but she had no little toys to give me to comfort me, she could only promise such as she had, eggs and chickens. Father did not show his grief for me as mother did, but he tried to comfort mother all he could and at times would say to me, "never mind my son, you will be a man by and by," but he did not know what was passing through my mind at that time.

70 Though I was very small I thought that, if while a boy my treatment was so severe, how heavy it would be when I became a man, and having had a chance to see how men were being punished it was a very poor consolation to me. Finally, the time came for us to go to bed, and we all knelt down in family prayer, father thanked God for having saved me from a worse injury and then he prayed for mother's comfort, and also for the time which he predicted would come, that is the time of freedom, when I and the rest of the children should be our own masters and mistresses, then he commended us to God 75 and we all went to bed.

The next morning I went to my work with a great deal of pain. They did not send me up the road with the horses in that condition, but I had to ride the old horses to water them, and work around the stable until I was well enough to go with the other boys. But I am happy to say, that from the time I got hurt by that horse I was never thrown except through carelessness, neither was I afraid of a horse after that. Notwithstanding mother and father fretted very much about me, 80 they were proud of my success as a rider, but my hardships did not end here.

A short time after, I was taken to Columbia and Charleston, S. C., where they used to have the races.

That year Col. Singleton won a large sum of money by the well-known horse Capt. Miner, and that was the same season that I rode my trial race. The next year, before the time of racing, Col. Singleton died at his country seat.

A short time before master's death, he stood security for a northern man who was cashier of one of the largest banks in the 85 city of Charleston, he ran away with a large sum of money and left the Colonel embarrassed, which made him very fretful and peevish, he was none too good before to his slaves and that made him worse, as you know the slave holders would revenge themselves on the slaves whenever they became angry. I have seen master whip his slaves a great many times, but never so severely as he did that spring before he died.

 One day before he went to his country seat, he called a man to him, stripped him and whipped him so that the blood ran 90 down from his body like water thrown upon him in cupfuls, and when the man stepped from the place where he was tied, the blood ran out of his shoes. He said to the man, "you will remember me now, sir, as long as you live." The man answered, "yes master, I will."

Master went away that spring for the last time, he never returned alive. When they brought his remains home all of the slaves were allowed to stop at home that day, to see the last of him and to lament with mistress. After all the slaves who 95 cared to do so had seen his face, they gathered in groups around mistress to comfort her, they shed false tears saying, "never mind misses, massa gone home to heaven," while some were saying this, others said, "thank God, massa gone home to hell, massa gone home to hell." Of course they all were to comfort mistress, but after his death mistress was a great deal harder than master.

The creditors came in for settlement so all of the fine horses, some others such as carriage horses and a few of the mules, 100 had to be sold; the slaves could not be sold, because they were given to him by his father, until the grandchildren (that is master's children) were of age. What master bought himself could be sold after his death, and it was.

After all the fine horses were sold, mistress ordered that the men and boys who were taking care of the horses should be put into the field, and I was among them, though small; but I had become so attached to the horses that they could get no work out of me, so they began to whip me but every time they whipped me I would leave the field and run home to the 105 barn yard. Finally mistress engaged a very bad man as overseer whose name was William Turner, two or three days after he came he took me into the field and whipped me until I was sick, so I went home. I went to mistress and told her that the overseer whipped me, she asked me if I did the work in the field that he gave me, I told her that master promised me that when I got too heavy to ride race horses he would send overseer did not like the idea of having me work at the trade which was my choice. He said to mistress, "that is the worst thing you can do, madam, to allow a negro to have his choice about 110 what he shall do, I have had some experience as an overseer for many years, and I am able to give a correct statement about the nature of negroes in general, I know a gentleman who allowed his negroes to have their own way about things on his plantation and the result was that they got as high as their master. Beside that, madam, their influence rapidly spread among the neighbors and if such should be allowed South Carolina would have all masters and mistresses, and no servants, and as I have said, I know somewhat about the nature of negroes, I notice madam, that this boy will put you to a great deal 115 of trouble unless you begin to subdue him now while he is young. A very few years' delay will enable him to have a great influence among his fellow negroes, for that boy can read very well now, and you know madam, it is against the law for a negro to get an education and if you allow him to work at the carpenter's trade it will thus afford him the opportunity of acquiring a better education, because he will not be directly under the eye of one who will see that he makes no further advancement." Then mistress asked me, "can you read, Jacob?" I did not want her to know that I had taken notice of what 120 they were saying, so I answered, "I don't know, ma'am." The overseer said, "he does not know what is meant, madam, I can make him understand me," then he took a newspaper from his pocket and said to me, "can you say these words," I took the paper and began to read, then he took it from me. Mistress asked when I learned to read and who taught me, the overseer did not know, but said he would find out from me. Turning to me he took the paper from his pocket again, and said, "Jacob who told you to say words in the book," I answered "nobody sir, I said them myself." He repeated the question three or 125 four times and I gave the same answer every time, then the mistress said, "I think it would be better to put him to the trade than to have him in the field, because he will be away from his fellow negroes and will be less liable to influence them, we can manage to keep him away." The overseer said "that might be true, madam, but if we can manage to keep him from gaining any more education he will eventually lose what little he has, and now, madam, if you will allow me to take him in hand, I will bring him out all right without injuring him." Just at this juncture a carriage drove up to the gate and I ran as 130 usual to open it, the overseer went about his business and mistress went to speak to the persons in the carriage. I never had a chance to hear their conclusion.

A few days after the conversation between the overseer and mistress, I was informed by one of the slaves who was a carpenter, that she had ordered that I should go to work at the trade with him; this gave me great joy, as I was very anxious to know what they had decided to do with me. I went to my new trade with great delight, and soon began to imagine what 135 a famous carpenter I should make and what I should say and do when I had learned the trade. Everything seemed to run smoothly with me for about two months, when suddenly I was told one morning that I must go into the field to drop cotton seed, but I did not heed the call as mistress was not at home, and I knew she had just put me to the trade, also, that the overseer was trying to get mistress' consent to have me work out in the field. The next morning the overseer came into the carpenter's shop, and said, "did I not order ye into the fields, sir," I answered "yes, sir," "well, why did ye not go," I 140 answered, "mistress has put me here to learn the trade," he said, "I will give ye trade." So he stripped me and gave me a severe whipping and told me that was the kind of trade I needed, and said he would give me many of them. The next day, I went into the field and he put me to drop cotton seed, as I was too small to do anything else, and mistress was very far away from home.

When I got through with the cotton seed, which was in three weeks, I went back to the carpenter's shop to work; so he 145 came there and gave me another severe whipping and said to me, "ye want to learn the carpenter's trade but I will have ye to the trade in the field." This was in the time of the war, in the year 1863, when a man was going around to the different plantations, gathering slaves from their masters to carry off to work on fortifications and to wait on officers; there were ten slaves sent from Mrs. Singleton's plantation and I was among them. They carried us to Sullivan's Island at Charleston, S. C., and I was there all of that year; I thanked God that it afforded me a better chance for an education that I had at home and 150 so was glad to be on the Island.

The next year after I went home I was sent back to Fort Sumter (in the year 1864); I carried my spelling book with me, and although the Northerners were firing upon us I tried to keep up my study. In July of the same year I was wounded by the Union soldiers, on a Wednesday evening; I was taken to the city of Charleston, to Dr. Ragg's hospital, and there I stayed until I got well and was sent to Columbia where I was, when the horn of liberty was proclaimed to me in 1865; this was the 155 year of jubilee, the year which my father spoke of in the dark days of slavery when he and mother sat up late talking of it. He said to mother, "the time will come when this boy and the rest of the children will be their own masters and mistresses." He did not live to see it, but mother enjoyed a portion of it with her children.

I have said that I fell from a horse and he stepped on my face cutting it and breaking a tooth, the scar of which is still visible. And no doubt my readers would like to know how I was wounded in the war. We were obliged to do our work in the night 160 as they were firing on us in the day, and on this Wednesday night just as we went out we heard the cry of the watchman "look out," there was a little lime house near the southwest corner of the fort, and some twelve or thirteen of us ran into that and all were killed but two, a shell came down on the lime house and burst and a piece cut my face open. But as it was not my time to die I lived to enjoy freedom.

When the yoke was taken from my neck I went to school in Columbia, S. C., awhile, then to Charleston, afterward I came to 165 Worcester, Mass., in February, 1870. I studied quite awhile in the evening schools at Worcester, and after that I got a little money and went to the Worcester Academy and studied nearly two years. During this time I was licensed a local preacher of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, sometime after this was ordained Deacon at Newport, R. I.

Shortly after I was sent to the city of Salem, Mass., where I have remained for the last fifteen months, trying in my feeble way to preach that gospel which our blessed Savior intended for the redemption of all mankind when he proclaimed; "Go 170 ye into all the world and preach the gospel."

  I must say I have been surrounded during my stay in Salem by many good friends, including many of the clergy, who have always been willing to aid me in the great and good work. My intention at this time is to pursue a course of study in order that I may be better prepared to do the labor required of me in the Master's great vineyard.