

The History of George Dale, a native of Africa, 1790

Transcript of the story of George Dale (National Records of Scotland reference GD50/235/6).

The History of George Dale, a native of Africa now in Edin[burgh] as related by himself at Edinburgh 6th Aug. 1790

George Dale originally called Aina, was born in Nago, an Inland nation or Province of Africa (time he does not know) far up the Country, about a months travelling as he himself expresses it - His father, & as he says, most of the inhabitants of that Country do, draws his Livelihood from tillage, or culture of a small spot of Ground - and had a large family.

When about Eleven years of age (as he thinks) he, accompanied with two of his Brothers, one Sister, and a little lassy, a neighbours daughter, had been one day sporting themselves at a little distance from the village or Cots, where there parents lived; there suddenly came, from a thicket that was near them, two or three men of their own Complexion, and as he imagines their own Countrymen, and seized upon them all. The little lassy becoming troublesome by screamings & crying (and perhaps thought less suited to their purpose being but young and a female) they struck off her head and left her there - He, his two brothers, & sister, they led off the common road, into the woods and unfrequented places, travelled with them in that manner till they were out of the reach of their friends researches, and brought them to the side of a large river, which he calls Ossar, crossed it, and travelled over land, through Poppa nation, as he terms it, 'till they came to the Poppa shore or coast, where the ship into which they were put lay - the masters name he does not recollect, only he remembers that during the time they lay on the Coast, the Capt. died, and that the mate succeeded to the charge of the ship - nor can he condescend upon the time - being asked how came he to forget these things, he says, that as he was then an entire stranger to the Language, and so young, and having no motive or inclination to commit them to memory, he had forgot them - They were then thrown into the Ship, like so many Swine, as he himself expresses it, put in irons, and crammed in, with the rest of, now, their fellow slaves.

He relates the following story, which he says he remembers well, and is a fact. While the ship lay at anchor some miles off the coast, one of the slaves a stout young man, who it seems was tired of his situation, had refused to take any sustenance for some days; and seized an opportunity of Jumping over board, in hopes of either regaining his native shore by swimming, or perishing in the attempt; but he was observed, the long boat went after him, and brought back to the ship, when, after being chained, and placed in some Convenient posture for the purpose, the crew flogged and beat him most unmercifully - and after they had sufficiently satiated their own cruelty - they unchained him and let loose a Bull dog upon him, but his strength being already much exhausted, he was not able to grapple long with his fierce antagonist - and when their appeared no signs of life in him, then threw the Mangled Carcass overboard.

In their passage towards the West Indies, he says the ship touched at some port, (the name of which he does not know) where some of the men went on shore and got drunk, when the natives surrounded the ship and would have her, and the cargo

seized as their own; & the crew of the ship being too few to resist them, they loosed some of the slaves, to assist in repelling them. Having got the better of the assailants, they proceeded on their voyage; and soon after, they arrived at Port Royal in Jamaica.

He says they had a great number of slaves on board the ship, but could not condescend upon numbers - that many died on the passage, and were thrown overboard - which was no sooner done than they were devoured, and swallowed by sharks; numbers of which monsters, he says always followed the ship.

When they arrived at Jamaica, he says he was sold to a Mr John William, who sent him to be an apprentice to one Mr Howard, in Kingston, to learn to be a cook - that he lived with Mr William for some time till he died - who he says was very kind to him all the time he was with him.

That soon after Mr William's death he was sold to a Mr McColl - but having the misfortune now, of falling in with a master whose treatment was very different from that he experienced from his former Master - he seized an opportunity of leaving him, and went on Board the Hercules a Merchant Privateer then lying at Port Royal - he went on a cruise with them and had the misfortune of getting his toes and foot crushed, and a hole put into his leg, in an Engagement they had - But the privateer soon after returning to the same port, and Mr McColl having got notice that he was on board of her - he demanded him from the Capt, who accordingly gave him up.

Mr McColl soon after having fallen into a bad state of health, left Jamaica for Greenock in Scotland, and brought him along with him.

On the passage Mr McColl was very badly, being troubled with a very uncommon distemper of an epidemical nature, so that the men on board the ship would not come near him - during which he was of great service to him, dressed him, and took as much care of him as possible he could - when the ship arrived in Greenock port his leg being then very badly, he was under the doctors for sometime there, - when he recovered a little, hearing Mr McColl had gone to Glasgow, he went there to him, but Mr McColl told him [he] had no more use for him - he then knew no [ways] what to do, still very frail, and no lady to apply [to] for a morsel of bread. He was going about the streets and for about two or three days had got nothing to eat, being observed by some Charitable person in a starving condition, he was put in to the charity house there, where he continued for upwards of two years, and had the smallpox there - he then being somewhat better, left the charity house, and tried several shifts for providing for himself by labour, which he did for some years - but his leg turning worse, he could no longer work - When he betook himself to carry some trifling things in a box, about the streets, and working at mills - Sometime after he came to Edinburgh, where he still is, doing his best to procure subsistence by the same occupation -

With respect to his brothers & sister, they had been disposed of to a Mr Galley in King Street, Kingstown, Jamaica, a Gentleman he thinks in the Law line, as he seemed always to have a great deal of business but knows nothing of them since, only he has heard that one of his brothers died since of the small pox.

History of Geo. Dale [] now in Edinburgh, as related by himself at Edinburgh 6th Aug 1790

General Remarks as given by him, in answer to Queries put to him -

He says Nago, the nation he came from, is a good way up the Country - the nations contiguous to it, he calls Poppa, (which it seems extends Between Nago and the Sea Coast), Ibo, Cromanty, Congo etc. He says every Nation is governed by a Prince or King - that the Inhabitants are different, in their manners, language, Worship etc. - that there are a kind of Justices or Magistrates in almost every Town of any note among them, who takes cognisance of the actions of those within their Jurisdictions - that Murderers are always punished with death - that Adulterers are severely punished, generally by selling them for Slaves; tho' Polygamy is tolerated, and common among them - that they have no particular object of adoration, some worshipping one thing, some another - that their houses or huts are built of timber and Clay; and covered with a kind of long grass -

that their food consists of yams, cocoa, plantain, & Rice - He say the Kings or Princes of these nations are often at War with one another, and that the Prisoners taken in these wars are sold as Slaves - being asked what did he think was the cause of these wars? - Answered, he thinks the reasons is more owing to a desire of procuring slaves, than any natural propensity they have to fighting - he says the practice of kidnapping [fragment missing] Children is very Common in [the country] he cam from - that the [fragment missing] Countrymen for the most part [fragment missing] these depredations are owing to [fragment missing] given by Slave Merchants, always ready to [fragment missing] and reward those who bring them slaves.

George Dale appears about 30 years of age - rather above as under - pretty dark in the Complexion, and is lame - speaks very thick and broken English, so much so, that one would think, he had not left his Country at such an early period - seems open and undesigning, tho' not intelligent - and says he would scorn to Exaggerate any Circumstance, from any motive or consideration - from his appearance now, and his age when Carried off, it might have happened, about the Commencement of the American War [about 1775] - or perhaps somewhat Earlier - Edinburgh 6th August 1790.