

Follow the Drinkin' Gourd

Source:

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Fol - low the drink - in' gourd! Fol - low the drink - in' gourd.

For the old man is a - wait - in' for to car - ry you to free - dom. If you fol - low the drink - in' gourd.

When the sun comes back and the first quail calls, Fol - low the drink - in' gourd

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fol - low the drink - in' gourd.

Background Information

The purpose of some songs was to alert the slaves that a "conductor" was on the way. Many conductors made trip after trip into the South to personally lead caravans of slaves off the plantations, the white operators posing as slaveholders, slave traders, peddlers, or anyone else they thought could gain the confidence of slaveowners. One of the leading conductors of the organization was the ex-slave Harriet Tubman (1820?-1913), called the "black Moses of her race." After escaping from slavery herself, she made innumerable trips back into the South to help others to escape. It is said that she always used a special song to disclose her presence to the slaves:

Dark and thorny is de pathway
Where de pilgrim makes his ways;
But beyond dis vale of sorrow
Lie de fields of endless days.

Continued...

Background Information (continued)

When the slaves heard this song, whether or not they could see the singer, they knew that their "Moses" had come after them, and they would begin to make their preparations for leaving. Those who were left behind would have been consoled by such songs as *Bound to Go* or *Members, Don't Get Weary*. Many of the old songs that the slaves had been singing for years must have been sung with special meaning when an escape plot was in the air. Such songs as *Steal Away to Jesus*; *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*; *Brother Moses Gone to de Promised Land*; *I Hear from Heaven To-Day*; *Good News, de Chariot's Coming*; *Oh, Sinner, You'd Better Get Ready*; and numbers of others with similar texts undoubtedly served as "alerting" songs. Then there were songs that served as "maps", the best known of which was *Follow the Drinkin' Gourd*, which directed the fugitives to always travel in the direction of the Big Dipper.