

## CHAPTER I

### DIAMOND GROVE

On an early autumn morning, <sup>about</sup> ~~some~~ <sup>a decade</sup> ten years after the close of the Civil War, a <sup>strong little</sup> tiny figure in jeans and homespun came trudging along a hilly country road near the village of Diamond Grove, Missouri. The little bundle he carried slung over his shoulder gave a certain pathetic emphasis to the <sup>his</sup> indefinable air of purpose and eagerness there seemed to be about him. But for this, the incident gave no outward sign, no prophetic hint of <sup>any</sup> ~~its~~ ultimate far-flung culmination and achievement. <sup>dismissed it with the remark:</sup>

Neighbors, watching, might have said, "They goes Little George Carver, leaving home and going off on his own. And he's not much more than ten years old; so little for his age, too."

It was true. Little George Carver was starting off on his own. Not very far off, as miles are usually measured, for he meant to go no farther than Neosho, a little town eight miles distant from Diamond Grove. But for him it was a long journey, especially long on that particular day when he was leaving home for the first time alone... and to stay.

He had had a pleasant home these ten years, living there on the farm with Mr. and Mrs. Moses Carver, to whom his mother had belonged in the days before the War had come and given the slaves their freedom. The Carvers were the only parents he could remember. His father, a slave on an adjoining farm, had died before George was born, trampled to death by an ox team he was working. And his mother, Mary Carver, had been <sup>scalawag</sup> stolen by raiders during the closing days of the War. George himself had been stolen with her. He had often <sup>been told</sup> heard the story of that terrible happening.

<sup>Hearing</sup> When he learned that raiders were coming, Mr. Carver had



my mother and I was left on his hands. It is also reported that mother was run afterward <sup>p-2</sup> going north with some soldiers. He reported to me, <sup>Carver</sup> that mother had died, when he returned me. hidden away his money and George's older brother, James. He had tried to <sup>get</sup> snatch Little George, too-- then a baby in his mother's arms-- when the raiders appeared and grabbed her and made ready to carry her off. But the frantic woman held her baby tight in her arms, and the two were carried off together. Little George had seen the tree on which the raiders had strung up Mr. Carver and burned his feet in an unsuccessful effort to torture him into revealing the hiding place of the money and James.

A Rider<sup>as</sup> were sent out after the rading party with money and a horse valued at three hundred dollars which ~~they~~ <sup>as</sup> were to try to use as ransom for the baby and his mother. After a long search ~~they~~ <sup>he</sup> found the baby with a family in Arkansas. ~~He had been left~~ there by the raiders when he developed whooping cough and appeared about to die. ~~Mary Carver they could not find.~~ She was never heard from again. Bartering with the Arkansas family, the rescuers swapped the horse for the baby and took him home again. He and his brother James then had lived in the Carver home, more as children of the household than as sons of a former slave.

Little George-- as he was always called by Mr. Carver -- was a frail, weakly, stunted-looking little fellow. Perhaps the terrible shock and lack of care he suffered at the hands of the raiders had something to do with it, or it may have been the whooping cough. At any rate, he failed to grow and develop normally. He had no voice but a shrill sort of whisper, and even with that he stammered under the stress of the least excitement. His laughter and songs were of the same fashion-- in part a shrill falsetto, in part a stage whisper. And he was always having the croup, keeping Mrs. Carver anxious all <sup>during the winters, but he got too cold or wet.</sup>

(It is said this man sold my mother and I being so nearly dead with the whooping cough, it ruined the value



He himself never seemed to share her anxiety, however, at least not to the point of prudence. He and his brother James delighted to run out in all sorts of weather. One evening in early winter he<sup>y</sup> was being kept indoors out of a light snow that had fallen during the day. Suddenly he saw James outside the window, beckoning to him. Mrs. Carver's back was turned. Mr. Carver, who always went to bed <sup>with</sup> ~~about~~ the chickens ~~went~~, lay asleep on the big bed in the corner. Little George sneaked out the door and was gone, scuttling down the road with James to a nearby persimmon tree. When they returned, filled with luscious persimmons ~~but~~ and a certain amount of apprehension, Mrs. Carver, made stern by anxiety, reached for the hickory switch which, in her hands, was always much more dreadful in its promise than ~~in~~ its reality. Little George, dancing about before the fire and contriving to make his shrill cries sound as if he<sup>y</sup> were actually being severely used, soon awakened Mr. Carver-- as he had intended to do. Here was a friend unfailing.

"What in the world are you doing to Little George? Let the child alone", came the expected command from the big bed, and both the situation and the hickory were saved.

Only once in all the ten years did old Mr. Carver become so exasperated with the antics of the irrepressible little boy that he actually applied the switch himself. But he simply could not have even Little George riding his sheep. He had sent James and Little George down to the barn ~~but~~ to shuck corn for the livestock. Nearby sheep were grazing-- too near. Their broad backs were too inviting. The corn forgotten, the two boys turned to sheep-riding, a much more exciting occupation. James could mount the sheeps' backs unaided; Little George had to be helped on.



They never could manage to stay on for more than two or three minutes at the time, but what a glorious two or three minutes. <sup>and</sup> His suspicions aroused by the noises issuing from the ~~barn~~ lot, Mr. Carver came down to investigate.

Advancing with hickory in hand, he promised each of the culprits, now busily shucking corn, a sound thrashing. But wise Little George immediately put on an acrobatic performance, tumbling and somersaulting about the lot in such comical contortions that Mr. Carver soon was too convulsed with laughter to carry out his dire intention. He turned and started back to the house. And here Little George miscalculated. Before Mr. Carver was safely out of sight, he was back on a sheep again, riding as gaily as before. Such defiance was too much. Mr. Carver came back and this time there was no escape. The hickory came down three times upon the young sheep-rider's shoulders, leaving both the punished and the punisher considerably surprised and shaken.

Being so undersized and weak, and thus unable to help much with the outside work of the farm, Little George spent a good bit of his time helping Mrs. Carver around the house, learning some valuable lessons in cooking and cleaning and in the various <sup>aspects</sup> ~~angles~~ of house keeping. His mother had been a house servant. Little George gathered that she must have been a very unusual, extraordinary woman in many ways, and that Mrs. Carver must have loved her a lot. Sometimes he would ask Mrs. Carver to tell him about his mother, but she was never able to say very much for she always ~~knocked down~~ and cried whenever she began to talk about Mary. After a time Little George stopped asking her any more. There was a spinning wheel in the house that they told him had belonged to his mother. Sometimes he would look at that a long time, and turn its wheel around, thinking about his



mother and wishing he could remember how she looked; wondering if she would ever be found and brought back home again.

When his daily tasks about the house were done-- and often when they were not-- he spent many long, happy hours roaming the nearby woods and rock-strewn hills. There were so many beautiful, fascinating, curious things to be found all about him there. He never tired of going to hunt for them. He played in caves, and discovered bubbly springs, and picked up hickory nuts, hazlenuts, and walnuts to take to the house to eat. It seemed that he simply could not resist the rocks and pebbles, especially the colored ones. They were too beautiful to leave lying there in the woods; he had to carry them home with him. So, in time, his rocks and stones piled about the house and yard came to be such a nuisance that Mrs. Carver laid down a law about them: He would have to get rid of them. They were too much in the way. But there was one he had to keep. One day he had found a rainbow colored rock, broken in two pieces, with the lovely colors showing all through the broken edges. Nothing could bring him to part with that, at least, not with all of it. He decided to throw away just one of the pieces-- but which one? There was no answer in his mind. Finally he took one piece in each hand, went out to a clear space, shut his eyes, and threw one of the pieces as far away as he could, then turned and ran in the opposite direction as fast as his legs could carry him. Somehow he knew that if he saw where that beautiful piece of rock fell to the ground, he would have to go and get it again. After that, he was careful to put his rocks in tiny piles in the chimney corners outside, where they would not be so easily noticed.



Another difficulty arose over his frogs. He loved animals as he loved his rocks; in some ways, even more. They were alive and would move around and do such queer things. For a while he had a way of carrying his frogs around in his pockets. Once, with a true collector's instinct, he searched until he had collected a group of them in graduated sizes, each one varying slightly in size from any of the others. It was an enviable collection, of which he felt quite proud. But Mrs. Carver did not share his enthusiasm for having frogs hopping about the room, and finally was forced to make it a rule that Little George must always turn his pockets out before entering the house.

After these experiences with his rocks and his frogs, Little George made a <sup>secret</sup> ~~little~~ garden down in the woods where he might keep his plants and flowers. He was always finding one he loved and wanted to keep. So to the little secret garden he brought all sorts of plants, transplanting and caring for them with a tenderness born of his intense love for them and a wisdom not-to-be-explained by any human reasoning. In bitter cold weather, he covered them with dirt to keep off the cold. When it was warm again, he took away the dirt to let them feel the warm rays of the sun.

His brain was constantly a-buzz with amazing questions about them. Why was one like this and another like this ? What had made this flower pink and that one blue ? How was this little bud put together ,and what made it come open as it did ? And Who had made them all anyway....and Why ? He asked everyone he knew, and no one seemed able to tell him. They could not tell even so much as the names of some of the plants and flowers he was most curious about. Mr. and Mrs. Carver had taught him to read and to write, and had given him a book, a Webster's Blueback Speller. Eagerly he searched



its pages for information about his strange plants and their puzzling questions, but found no adequate answers. And this was his only book.

Few strangers or visitors whom he might ask ever came to Diamond Grove, and there was no school to go to. His Blueback Speller had failed him; and all the people he knew had, too. Where should he find the solutions for the many, many problems that these things he found in the woods and fields were always bringing to his mind? Sometimes he almost believed that the little plants or the colored rocks were trying to tell him themselves, only he could not quite understand them. He felt that he could, perhaps, if he <sup>could learn</sup> ~~only knew~~ their language. He was certain that somewhere he could find the answer if he kept on looking long enough... But where?

His yearning curiosity grew until he had to do something about it. His brother James had <sup>been going</sup> ~~been~~ gone for several years. He had left to go to school at Neosho ~~Mo.~~ <sup>James had a horse, and so</sup> ~~.....~~, for James, too, had a mind that was incessantly curious about things. Little George decided <sup>had stayed on at home, riding the 5 miles to Neosho.</sup> that he would go ~~away~~ to school, too. He would go to Neosho.

<sup>there</sup> ~~There was a school there, he knew, for he had been to Neosho~~ with Mr. Carver. Twice each year the horses were hitched to the wagon for the trip eight miles to town, the purpose of the journey being to purchase a half year's supply of the household necessities that could not be made at home. It was always a great day. James always went with Mr. Carver on one of these trips each year, ~~as long as he stayed at home~~, and Little George went on the other. Mrs. Carver would never go with them. As long as she lived she never went out of the county in which she was born. So Little George had been to Neosho and <sup>had seen the house</sup> ~~knew that a school was there~~. He made up his mind to go. <sup>Not having a home, and being so small, he could not stay at home.</sup> How he would live or what he would do he did not know. That would



take care of itself when the time came. All that he knew for certain was that he was going.

Mr. and Mrs. Carver gave their permission. If he wanted to go to school they had no objections to raise, only he was mighty little to be leaving home like this. If he wanted to try it, though, he could. They would not try to keep him.

So it was that he made his plans, and the day for going finally came. Mrs. Carver helped him tie up his clothes and his Blueback Speller and some food in a little bundle. He put in some of his precious plants, too, carefully wrapped, and his beloved piece of rainbow-tinted rock. Then he was ready to go.

Taking up his bundle, he said good-by, and his diminutive figure was soon lost to the sight of the Carvers <sup>and James</sup> as they watched him go trudging down the road <sup>and</sup> ~~xxx~~ disappear over the hill. Droll little George Carver, a little, stunted, strangely gifted but strangely handicapped son of two slaves, <sup>and ages</sup> had left his childhood home for good. .... That Great Something which, in all generations and among all races of men, reaches out to claim and use its mysteriously chosen own, had laid its mystic mighty hand upon George Washington Carver.