

CHAPTER XIII.

THE VICISSITUDES OF SLAVE LIFE.

Death of old Master's son Richard, speedily followed by that of old Master—Valuation and division of all the property, including the slaves—Sent for to come to Hillsborough to be valued and divided—Sad prospects and grief—Parting—Slaves have no voice in deciding their own destinies—General dread of falling into Master Andrew's hands—His drunkenness—Good fortune in falling to Miss Lucretia—She allows my return to Baltimore—Joy at Master Hugh's—Death of Miss Lucretia—Master Thomas Auld's second marriage—The new wife unlike the old—Again removed from Master Hugh's—Reasons for regret—Plan of escape.

I MUST now ask the reader to go back with me a little in point of time, in my humble story, and notice another circumstance that entered into my slavery experience, and which, doubtless, has had a share in deepening my horror of slavery, and my hostility toward those men and measures that practically uphold the slave system.

It has already been observed that though I was, after my removal from Col. Lloyd's plantation, in *form* the slave of Master Hugh Auld, I was in *fact* and in *law* the slave of my old master, Capt. Anthony. Very well. In a very short time after I went to Baltimore my old master's youngest son, Richard, died; and in three years and six months after my old master himself died, leaving only his daughter Lucretia and his son Andrew to share the estate. The old man died while on a visit to his daughter in Hillsborough, where Capt. Auld and Mrs. Lucretia now lived, Master Thomas having given up the command of Col. Lloyd's sloop and was now keeping store in that town.

Cut off thus unexpectedly, Capt. Anthony died intestate, and his property must be equally divided between his two children, Andrew and Lucretia.

The valuation and division of slaves among contending heirs was a most important incident in slave life. The characters and tendencies of the heirs were generally well understood by the slaves who were to be divided, and all had their aversions and their preferences. But neither their aversions nor their preferences availed anything.

On the death of old master I was immediately sent for to be valued and divided with the other property. Personally, my concern was mainly about my possible removal from the home of Master Hugh, for up to this time there had no dark clouds arisen to darken the sky of that happy abode. It was a sad day to me when I left for the Eastern Shore, to be valued and divided, as it was for my dear mistress and teacher, and for little Tommy. We all three wept bitterly, for we were parting, and it might be we were parting forever. No one could tell amongst which pile of chattels I might be flung. Thus early, I got a foretaste of that painful uncertainty which in one form or another was ever obtruding itself in the pathway of the slave. It furnished me a new insight into the unnatural power to which I was subjected. Sickness, adversity, and death may interfere with the plans and purposes of all, but the slave had the added danger of changing homes, in the separations unknown to other men. Then too, there was the intensified degradation of the spectacle. What an assemblage! Men and women, young and old, married and single; moral and thinking human beings, in open contempt of their humanity, leveled at a blow with horses, sheep, horned cattle, and swine. Horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children—all holding the same rank in the scale of social existence, and all subjected to the same narrow inspection, to ascertain their value in gold and silver—the only standard of worth applied by slaveholders to their slaves. Personality swallowed up in the sordid idea of property! Manhood lost in chattelhood!

The valuation over, then came the division and apportionment. Our destiny was to be *fixed for life*, and we had no

more voice in the decision of the question than the oxen and cows that stood chewing at the hay-mow. One word of the appraisers, against all preferences and prayers, could sunder all the ties of friendship and affection, even to separating husbands and wives, parents and children. We were all appalled before that power which, to human seeming, could bless or blast us in a moment. Added to this dread of separation, most painful to the majority of the slaves, we all had a decided horror of falling into the hands of Master Andrew, who was distinguished for his cruelty and intemperance.

Slaves had a great dread, very naturally, of falling into the hands of drunken owners. Master Andrew was a confirmed sot, and had already by his profligate dissipation wasted a large portion of his father's property. To fall into his hands, therefore, was considered as the first step toward being sold away to the far South. He would no doubt spend his fortune in a few years, it was thought, and his farms and slaves would be sold at public auction, and the slaves hurried away to the cotton-fields and rice-swamps of the burning South. This was cause of deep consternation.

The people of the North, and free people generally, I think, have less attachment to the places where they are born and brought up, than had the slaves. Their freedom to come and go, to be here or there, as they list, prevents any extravagant attachment to any one particular place. On the other hand, the slave was a fixture; he had no choice, no goal, but was pegged down to one single spot, and must take root there or nowhere. The idea of removal elsewhere came generally in shape of a threat, and in punishment for crime. It was therefore attended with fear and dread. The enthusiasm which animates the bosoms of young freemen, when they contemplate a life in the far West, or in some distant country, where they expect to rise to wealth and distinction, could have no place in the thought of the slave; nor could those from whom they separated know anything of that cheerfulness with which friends and relations yield each other up, when they feel that

it is for the good of the departing one that he is removed from his native place. Then, too, there is correspondence and the hope of reunion, but with the slaves all these mitigating circumstances were wanting. There was no improvement in condition *probable*—no correspondence *possible*—no reunion attainable. His going out into the world was like a living man going into the tomb, who with open eyes, sees himself buried out of sight and hearing of wife, children, and friends of kindred tie.

In contemplating the likelihoods and possibilities of our circumstances, I probably suffered more than most of my fellow-servants. I had known what it was to experience kind and even tender treatment; they had known nothing of the sort. Life to them had been rough and thorny, as well as dark. They had—most of them—lived on my old master's farm in Tuckahoe, and had felt the rigors of Mr. Plummer's rule. He had written his character on the living parchment of most of their backs, and left them seamed and callous; my back (thanks to my early removal to Baltimore) was yet tender. I had left a kind mistress in tears when we parted, and the probability of ever seeing her again, trembling in the balance as it were, could not fail to excite in me alarm and agony. The thought of becoming the slave of Andrew Anthony—who but a few days before the division had in my presence seized my brother Perry by the throat, dashed him on the ground, and with the heel of his boot stamped him on the head, until the blood gushed from his nose and ears—was terrible! This fiendish proceeding had no better apology than the fact that Perry had gone to play when Master Andrew wanted him for some trifling service. After inflicting this cruel treatment on my brother, observing me, as I looked at him in astonishment, he said: "*That's* the way I'll serve you, one of these days"; meaning, probably, when I should come into his possession. This threat, the reader may well suppose, was not very tranquilizing to my feelings.

At last the anxiety and suspense were ended; and ended,

thanks to a kind Providence, in accordance with my wishes. I fell to the portion of Mrs. Lucretia, the dear lady who bound up my head in her father's kitchen, and shielded me from the maledictions of Aunt Katy.

Capt. Thomas Auld and Mrs. Lucretia at once decided on my return to Baltimore. They knew how warmly Mrs. Hugh Auld was attached to me, and how delighted Tommy would be to see me, and withal, having no immediate use for me, they willingly concluded this arrangement.

I need not stop to narrate my joy on finding myself back in Baltimore. I was just one month absent, but the time seemed fully six months.

I had returned to Baltimore but a short time when the tidings reached me that my kind friend, Mrs. Lucretia, was dead. She left one child, a daughter, named Amanda, of whom I shall speak again. Shortly after the death of Mrs. Lucretia, Master Andrew died, leaving a wife and one child. Thus the whole family of Anthonys, as it existed when I went to Col. Lloyd's place, was swept away during the first five years' time of my residence at Master Hugh Auld's in Baltimore.

No especial alteration took place in the condition of the slaves, in consequence of these deaths, yet I could not help the feeling that I was less secure now that Mrs. Lucretia was gone. While she lived, I felt that I had a strong friend to plead for me in any emergency.

In a little book which I published six years after my escape from slavery, entitled, "Narrative of Frederick Douglass,"—when the distance between the past then described, and the present was not so great as it is now,—speaking of these changes in my master's family, and their results, I used this language: "Now all the property of my old master, slaves included, was in the hands of strangers—strangers who had nothing to do in accumulating it. Not a slave was left free. All remained slaves, from the youngest to the oldest. If any one thing in my experience, more than another, has served to deepen my conviction of the infernal character of slavery,

and to fill me with unutterable loathing of slaveholders, it was their base ingratitude to my poor old grandmother. She had served my old master faithfully from youth to old age. She had been the source of all his wealth; she had peopled his plantation with slaves; she had become a great-grandmother in his service. She had rocked him in his infancy, attended him in his childhood, served him through life, and at his death wiped from his icy brow the cold death-sweat, and closed his eyes forever. She was nevertheless a slave—a slave for life—a slave in the hands of strangers; and in their hands she saw her children, her grandchildren, and her great-grandchildren, divided like so many sheep, without being gratified with the small privilege of a single word as to their or her own destiny. And to cap the climax of their base ingratitude, my grandmother, who was now very old, having outlived my old master and all his children, having seen the beginning and end of them, and her present owner—his grandson—finding she was of but little value—her frame already racked with the pains of old age, and complete helplessness fast stealing over her once active limbs—took her to the woods, built her a little hut with a mud chimney, and then gave her the *bounteous* privilege of supporting herself there in utter loneliness: thus virtually turning her out to die. If my poor, dear old grandmother now lives, she lives to remember and mourn over the loss of children, the loss of grandchildren, and the loss of great-grandchildren. They are, in the language of Whittier, the slave's poet:

'Gone, gone, sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone;
Where the slave-whip ceaseless swings,
Where the noisome insect stings,
Where the fever-demon strews
Poison with the falling dews,
Where the sickly sunbeams glare
Through the hot and misty air:—

Gone, gone, sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp, dank and lone,
From Virginia's hills and waters—
Wee is me, my stolen daughters!

The hearth is desolate. The unconscious children who once sang and danced in her presence are gone. She gropes her way, in the darkness of age, for a drink of water. Instead of the voices of her children, she hears by day the moans of the dove, and by night the screams of the hideous owl. All is gloom. The grave is at the door; and now, weighed down by the pains and aches of old age, when the head inclines to the feet, when the beginning and ending of human existence meet, and helpless infancy, and painful old age combine together, at this time,—this most needed time for the exercise of that tenderness and affection which children only can bestow on a declining parent,—my poor old grandmother, the devoted mother of twelve children, is left all alone, in yonder little hut, before a few dim cinders.”

Two years after the death of Mrs. Lucretia, Master Thomas married his second wife. Her name was Rowena Hamilton, the eldest daughter of Mr. William Hamilton, a rich slaveholder on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, who lived about five miles from St. Michaels, the then place of Master Thomas Auld's residence.

Not long after his marriage, Master Thomas had a misunderstanding with Master Hugh, and as a means of punishing him, he ordered him to send me home. As the ground of the misunderstanding will serve to illustrate the character of Southern chivalry and Southern humanity, fifty years ago, I will relate it.

Among the children of my Aunt Milly, was a daughter named Henny. When quite a child, Henny had fallen into the fire and had burnt her hands so badly that they were of very little use to her. Her fingers were drawn almost into the palms of her hands. She could make out to do something, but she was considered hardly worth the having—of little more value than a horse with a broken leg. This unprofitable piece of property, ill-shapen and disfigured, Capt. Auld sent off to Baltimore.

After giving poor Henny a fair trial, Master Hugh and his wife came to the conclusion that they had no use for the poor cripple, and they sent her back to Master Thomas. This the latter took as an act of ingratitude on the part of his brother, and as a mark of his displeasure, he required him to send me immediately to St. Michaels, saying, "if he cannot keep Hen., he shan't have Fred."

Here was another shock to my nerves, another breaking up of my plans, and another severance of my religious and social alliances. I was now a big boy. I had become quite useful to several young colored men, who had made me their teacher. I had taught some of them to read, and was accustomed to spend many of my leisure hours with them. Our attachment was strong, and I greatly dreaded the separation. But regrets with slaves were unavailing: my wishes were nothing; my happiness was the sport of my master.

My regrets at leaving Baltimore now were not for the same reasons as when I before left the city to be valued and handed over to a new owner.

A change had taken place, both in Master Hugh and in his once pious and affectionate wife. The influence of brandy and bad company on him, and of slavery and social isolation on her, had wrought disastrously upon the characters of both. Thomas was no longer "little Tommy," but was a big boy, and had learned to assume the airs of his class towards me. My condition, therefore, in the house of Master Hugh was not by any means so comfortable as in former years. My attachments were now outside of our family. They were to those to whom I imparted instruction, and to those little white boys, from whom I received instruction. There, too, was my dear old father, the pious Lawson, who was in all the Christian graces the very counterpart of "Uncle Tom"—the resemblance so perfect that he might have been the original of Mrs. Stowe's Christian hero. The thought of leaving these dear friends greatly troubled me, for I was going without the hope of ever returning again; the feud being most bitter, and apparently wholly irreconcilable.

In addition to the pain of parting from friends, as I supposed, forever, I had the added grief of neglected chances of escape to brood over. I had put off running away until I was now to be placed where opportunities for escape would be much more difficult, and less frequent.

As we sailed down the Chesapeake bay, on board the sloop *Amanda*, to St. Michaels, and were passed by the steamers plying between Baltimore and Philadelphia, I formed many a plan for my future, beginning and ending in the same determination—yet to find some way of escape from slavery.