

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE RUNAWAY PLOT.

New Year's thoughts and meditations—Again hired by Freeland—Kindness no compensation for slavery—Incipient steps toward escape—Considerations leading thereto—Hostility to slavery—Solemn vow taken—Plan divulged to slaves—Columbian Orator again—Scheme gains favor—Danger of discovery—Skill of slave-holders—Suspicion and coercion—Hymns with double meaning—Consultation—Pass-word—Hope and fear—Ignorance of Geography—Imaginary difficulties—Patrick Henry—Sandy a dreamer—Route to the north mapped out—Objections—Frauds—Passes—Anxieties—Fear of failure—Strange presentiment—Coincidence—Betrayal—Arrests—Resistance—Mrs. Freeland—Prison—Brutal jests—Passes eaten—Denial—Sandy—Dragged behind horses—Slave-traders—Alone in prison—Sent to Baltimore.

I AM now at the beginning of the year 1836, when the mind naturally occupies itself with the mysteries of life in all its phases—the ideal, the real, and the actual. Sober people look both ways at the beginning of a new year, surveying the errors of the past, and providing against the possible errors of the future. I, too, was thus exercised. I had little pleasure in retrospect, and the future prospect was not brilliant. "Notwithstanding," thought I, "the many resolutions and prayers I have made in behalf of freedom, I am, this first day of the year 1836, still a slave, still wandering in the depths of a miserable bondage. My faculties and powers of body and soul are not my own, but are the property of a fellow-mortal in no sense superior to me, except that he has the physical power to compel me to be owned and controlled by him. By the combined physical force of the community I am his slave—a slave for life." With thoughts like these I was chafed and perplexed, and they rendered me gloomy and disconsolate. The anguish of my mind cannot be written.

At the close of the year, Mr. Freeland renewed the pur-

chase of my services of Mr. Auld for the coming year. His promptness in doing so would have been flattering to my vanity had I been ambitious to win the reputation of being a valuable slave. Even as it was, I felt a slight degree of complacency at the circumstance. It showed him to be as well pleased with me as a slave as I with him as a master. But the kindness of the slave-master only gilded the chain, it detracted nothing from its weight or strength. The thought that men are made for other and better uses than slavery throve best under the gentle treatment of a kind master. Its grim visage could assume no smiles able to fascinate the partially enlightened slave into a forgetfulness of his bondage, or of the desirableness of liberty.

I was not through the first month of my second year with the kind and gentlemanly Mr. Freeland before I was earnestly considering and devising plans for gaining that freedom which, when I was but a mere child, I had ascertained to be the natural and inborn right of every member of the human family. The desire for this freedom had been benumbed while I was under the brutalizing dominion of Covey, and it had been postponed and rendered inoperative by my truly pleasant Sunday-school engagements with my friends during the year at Mr. Freeland's. It had, however, never entirely subsided. I hated slavery *always*, and my desire for freedom needed only a favorable breeze to fan it to a blaze at any moment. The thought of being only a creature of the *present* and the *past* troubled me, and I longed to have a *future*—a future with hope in it. To be shut up entirely to the past and present is to the soul whose life and happiness is unceasing progress—what the prison is to the body—a blight and mildew, a hell of horrors. The dawning of this, another year, awakened me from my temporary slumber, and roused into life my latent but long-cherished aspirations for freedom. I became not only ashamed to be contented in slavery, but ashamed to *seem* to be contented, and in my present favorable condition under the mild rule of Mr. Freeland, I am not sure

that some kind reader will not condemn me for being over-ambitious, and greatly wanting in humility, when I say the truth, that I now drove from me all thoughts of making the best of my lot, and welcomed only such thoughts as led me away from the house of bondage. The intensity of my desire to be free, quickened by my present favorable circumstances, brought me to the determination to *act* as well as to think and speak. Accordingly, at the beginning of this year 1836, I took upon me a solemn vow, that the year which had just now dawned upon me should not close without witnessing an earnest attempt, on my part, to gain my liberty. This vow only bound me to make good my own individual escape, but my friendship for my brother-slaves was so affectionate and confiding that I felt it my duty, as well as my pleasure, to give them an opportunity to share in my determination. Toward Henry and John Harris I felt a friendship as strong as one man can feel for another, for I could have died with and for them. To them, therefore, with suitable caution, I began to disclose my sentiments and plans, sounding them the while on the subject of running away, provided a good chance should offer. I need not say that I did my *very best* to imbue the minds of my dear friends with my own views and feelings. Thoroughly awakened now, and with a definite vow upon me, all my little reading which had any bearing on the subject of human rights was rendered available in my communications with my friends. That gem of a book, the *Columbian Orator*, with its eloquent orations and spicy dialogues denouncing oppression and slavery—telling what had been dared, done, and suffered by men, to obtain the inestimable boon of liberty, was still fresh in my memory, and whirled into the ranks of my speech with the aptitude of well-trained soldiers going through the drill. I here began my public speaking. I canvassed with Henry and John the subject of slavery, and dashed against it the condemning brand of God's eternal justice. My fellow-servants were neither indifferent, dull, nor inapt. Our feelings were more alike

than our opinions. All, however, were ready to act when a feasible plan should be proposed. "Show us how the thing is to be done," said they, "and all else is clear."

We were all, except Sandy, quite clear from slaveholding priestcraft. It was in vain that we had been taught from the pulpit at St. Michaels the duty of obedience to our masters; to recognize God as the author of our enslavement; to regard running away an offense, alike against God and man; to deem our enslavement a merciful and beneficial arrangement; to esteem our condition in this country a paradise to that from which we had been snatched in Africa; to consider our hard hands and dark color as God's displeasure, and as pointing us out as the proper subjects of slavery; that the relation of master and slave was one of reciprocal benefits; that our work was not more serviceable to our masters than our master's thinking was to us. I say it was in vain that the pulpit of St. Michaels had constantly inculcated these plausible doctrines. Nature laughed them to scorn. For my part, I had become altogether too big for my chains. Father Lawson's solemn words of what I ought to be, and what I might be in the providence of God, had not fallen dead on my soul. I was fast verging toward manhood, and the prophecies of my childhood were still unfulfilled. The thought that year after year had passed away, and my best resolutions to run away had failed and faded, that I was still a slave, with chances for gaining my freedom diminished and still diminishing—was not a matter to be slept over easily. But here came a trouble. Such thoughts and purposes as I now cherished could not agitate the mind long without making themselves manifest to scrutinizing and unfriendly observers. I had reason to fear that my sable face might prove altogether too transparent for the safe concealment of my hazardous enterprise. Plans of great moment have leaked through stone walls, and revealed their projectors. But here was no stone wall to hide my purpose. I would have given my poor tell-tale face for the immovable countenance of an Indian, for it was far from proof against the daily searching glances of those whom I met.

It was the interest and business of slaveholders to study human nature, and the slave nature in particular, with a view to practical results; and many of them attained astonishing proficiency in this direction. They had to deal not with earth, wood, and stone, but with *men*; and by every regard they had for their safety and prosperity they had need to know the material on which they were to work. So much intellect as the slaveholder had round him required watching. Their safety depended on their vigilance. Conscious of the injustice and wrong they were every hour perpetrating, and knowing what they themselves would do if they were victims of such wrongs, they were constantly looking out for the first signs of the dread retribution. They watched, therefore, with skilled and practiced eyes, and learned to read, with great accuracy, the state of mind and heart of the slave through his sable face. Unusual sobriety, apparent abstraction, sullenness, and indifference,—indeed, any mood out of the common way,—afforded ground for suspicion and inquiry. Relying on their superior position and wisdom, they would often hector the slave into a confession by affecting to know the truth of their accusations. “You have got the devil in you, and we’ll whip him out of you,” they would say. I have often been put thus to the torture on bare suspicion. This system had its disadvantages as well as its opposite—the slave being sometimes whipped into the confession of offenses which he never committed. It will be seen that the good old rule, “A man is to be held innocent until proved to be guilty,” did not hold good on the slave plantation. Suspicion and torture were the approved methods of getting at the truth there. It was necessary, therefore, for me to keep a watch over my department, lest the enemy should get the better of me. But with all our caution and studied reserve, I am not sure that Mr. Freeland did not suspect that all was not right with us. It *did* seem that he watched us more narrowly after the plan of escape had been conceived and discussed amongst us. Men seldom see themselves as others see them; and while to ourselves

everything connected with our contemplated escape appeared concealed, Mr. Freeland may, with the peculiar prescience of a slaveholder, have mastered the huge thought which was disturbing our peace. As I now look back, I am the more inclined to think he suspected us, because, prudent as we were, I can see that we did many silly things very well calculated to awaken suspicion. We were at times remarkably buoyant, singing hymns, and making joyous exclamations, almost as triumphant in their tone as if we had reached a land of freedom and safety. A keen observer might have detected in our repeated singing of

"O Canaan, sweet Canaan,  
I am bound for the land of Canaan,"

something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the *North*, and the North was our Canaan.

"I thought I heard them say  
There were lions in the way;  
I don't expect to stay  
Much longer here.  
Run to Jesus, shun the danger—  
I don't expect to stay  
Much longer here,"

was a favorite air, and had a double meaning. In the lips of some it meant the expectation of a speedy summons to a world of spirits; but in the lips of our company, it simply meant a speedy pilgrimage to a free State, and deliverance from all the evils and dangers of slavery.

I had succeeded in winning to my scheme a company of five young men, the very flower of the neighborhood, each one of whom would have commanded one thousand dollars in the home market. At New Orleans they would have brought fifteen hundred dollars apiece, and perhaps more. Their names were as follows: Henry Harris, John Harris, Sandy Jenkins, Charles Roberts, and Henry Bailey. I was the youngest but one of the party. I had, however, the advantage of them all in experience, and in a knowledge of letters. This gave me

a great influence over them. Perhaps not one of them, left to himself, would have dreamed of escape as a possible thing. They all wanted to be free, but the serious thought of running away had not entered into their minds until I won them to the undertaking. They all were tolerably well off—for slaves—and had dim hopes of being set free some day by their masters. If any one is to blame for disturbing the quiet of the slaves and slave-masters of the neighborhood of St. Michaels, I AM THE MAN. I claim to be the instigator of the high crime (as the slaveholders regarded it), and I kept life in it till life could be kept in it no longer.

Pending the time of our contemplated departure out of our Egypt, we met often by night, and on every Sunday. At these meetings we talked the matter over, told our hopes and fears, and the difficulties discovered or imagined; and, like men of sense, we counted the cost of the enterprise to which we were committing ourselves. These meetings must have resembled, on a small scale, the meetings of the revolutionary conspirators in their primary condition. We were plotting against our (so-called) lawful rulers, with this difference—we sought our own good, and not the harm of our enemies. We did not seek to overthrow them, but to escape from them. As for Mr. Freeland, we all liked him, and would gladly have remained with him *as free men*. *Liberty* was our aim, and we had now come to think that we had a right to it against every obstacle, even against the lives of our enslavers.

We had several words, expressive of things important to us, which we understood, but which, even if distinctly heard by an outsider, would have conveyed no certain meaning. I hated this secrecy, but where slavery was powerful, and liberty weak, the latter was driven to concealment or destruction.

The prospect was not always bright. At times we were almost tempted to abandon the enterprise, and to try to get back to that comparative peace of mind which even a man under the gallows might feel when all hope of escape had vanished. We were confident, bold, and determined, at times,

and again doubting, timid, and wavering, whistling, like the boy in the grave-yard, to keep away the spirits.

To look at the map and observe the proximity of Eastern shore, Maryland, to Delaware and Pennsylvania, it may seem to the reader quite absurd to regard the proposed escape as a formidable undertaking. But to *understand*, some one has said, a man must *stand under*. The real distance was great enough, but the imagined distance was, to our ignorance, much greater. Slaveholders sought to impress their slaves with a belief in the boundlessness of slave territory, and of their own limitless power. Our notions of the geography of the country were very vague and indistinct. The distance, however, was not the chief trouble, for the nearer the lines of a slave state to the borders of a free state the greater was the trouble. Hired kidnappers infested the borders. Then, too, we knew that merely reaching a free state did not free us, that wherever caught we could be returned to slavery. We knew of no spot this side the ocean where we could be safe. We had heard of Canada, then the only real Canaan of the American bondman, simply as a country to which the wild goose and the swan repaired at the end of winter to escape the heat of summer, but not as the home of man. I knew something of Theology, but nothing of Geography. I really did not know that there was a state of New York or a state of Massachusetts. I had heard of Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey, and all the southern states, but was utterly ignorant of the free states. New York City was our northern limit, and to go there and to be forever harassed with the liability of being hunted down and returned to slavery, with the certainty of being treated ten times worse than ever before, was a prospect which might well cause some hesitation. The case sometimes, to our excited visions, stood thus: At every gate through which we had to pass we saw a watchman; at every ferry a guard; on every bridge a sentinel, and in every wood a patrol or slave-hunter. We were hemmed in on every side. The good to be sought and the evil to be shunned

were flung in the balance and weighed against each other. On the one hand stood slavery, a stern reality glaring frightfully upon us, with the blood of millions in its polluted skirts, terrible to behold, greedily devouring our hard earnings and feeding it upon our flesh. This was the evil from which to escape. On the other hand, far away, back in the hazy distance, where all forms seemed but shadows under the flickering light of the north star, behind some craggy hill or snow-capped mountain, stood a doubtful freedom, half frozen, beckoning us to her icy domain. This was the good to be sought. The inequality was as great as that between certainty and uncertainty. This in itself was enough to stagger us; but when we came to survey the untrodden road and conjecture the many possible difficulties we were appalled, and at times, as I have said, were upon the point of giving over the struggle altogether. The reader can have little idea of the phantoms which would flit, in such circumstances, before the uneducated mind of the slave. Upon either side we saw grim death, assuming a variety of horrid shapes. Now it was starvation, causing us, in a strange and friendless land, to eat our own flesh. Now we were contending with the waves and were drowned. Now we were hunted by dogs and overtaken, and torn to pieces by their merciless fangs. We were stung by scorpions, chased by wild beasts, bitten by snakes, and worst of all, after having succeeded in swimming rivers, encountering wild beasts, sleeping in the woods, suffering hunger, cold, heat, and nakedness, overtaken by hired kidnappers, who in the name of law and for the thrice-cursed reward would, perchance, fire upon us, kill some, wound others, and capture all. This dark picture, drawn by ignorance and fear, at times greatly shook our determination, and not unfrequently caused us to

“Rather bear the ills we had,

Than flee to others which we knew not of.”

I am not disposed to magnify this circumstance in my experience, and yet I think I shall seem to be so disposed to the

reader, but no man can tell the intense agony which was felt by the slave when wavering on the point of making his escape. All that he has is at stake, and even that which he has not is at stake also. The life which he has may be lost, and the liberty which he seeks may not be gained.

Patrick Henry, to a listening senate which was thrilled by his magic eloquence and ready to stand by him in his boldest flights, could say, "Give me liberty or give me death," and this saying was a sublime one, even for a freeman; but incomparably more sublime is the same sentiment when *practically* asserted by men accustomed to the lash and chain, men whose sensibilities must have become more or less deadened by their bondage. With us it was a doubtful liberty, at best, that we sought, and a certain lingering death in the rice swamps and sugar fields if we failed. Life is not lightly regarded by men of sane minds. It is precious both to the pauper and to the prince, to the slave and to his master; and yet I believe there was not one among us who would not rather have been shot down than pass away life in hopeless bondage.

In the progress of our preparations Sandy (the root man) became troubled. He began to have distressing dreams. One of these, which happened on a Friday night, was to him of great significance, and I am quite ready to confess that I felt somewhat damped by it myself. He said, "I dreamed last night that I was roused from sleep by strange noises like the noises of a swarm of angry birds that caused a roar as they passed, and which fell upon my ear like a coming gale over the tops of the trees. Looking up to see what it could mean I saw you, Frederick, in the claws of a huge bird, surrounded by a large number of birds of all colors and sizes. These were all pecking at you, while you, with your arms, seemed to be trying to protect your eyes. Passing over me, the birds flew in a southwesterly direction, and I watched them until they were clean out of sight. Now I saw this as plainly as I now see you; and furder, honey, watch de Friday

night dream; dare is sumpson in it shose you born; dare is indeed, honey." I did not like the dream, but I showed no concern, attributing it to the general excitement and perturbation consequent upon our contemplated plan to escape. I could not, however, shake off its effect at once. I felt that it boded no good. Sandy was unusually emphatic and oracular, and his manner had much to do with the impression made upon me.

The plan which I recommended, and to which my comrades consented, for our escape, was to take a large canoe owned by Mr. Hamilton, and on the Saturday night previous to the Easter holidays launch out into the Chesapeake bay and paddle for its head, a distance of seventy miles, with all our might. On reaching this point we were to turn the canoe adrift and bend our steps toward the north star till we reached a free state.

There were several objections to this plan. In rough weather the waters of the Chesapeake are much agitated, and there would be danger, in a canoe, of being swamped by the waves. Another objection was that the canoe would soon be missed, the absent slaves would at once be suspected of having taken it, and we should be pursued by some of the fast-sailing craft out of St. Michaels. Then again, if we reached the head of the bay and turned the canoe adrift, she might prove a guide to our track and bring the hunters after us.

These and other objections were set aside by the stronger ones, which could be urged against every other plan that could then be suggested. On the water we had a chance of being regarded as fishermen, in the service of a master. On the other hand, by taking the land route, through the counties adjoining Delaware, we should be subjected to all manner of interruptions, and many disagreeable questions, which might give us serious trouble. Any white man, if he pleased, was authorized to stop a man of color on any road, and examine and arrest him. By this arrangement many abuses (considered such even by slaveholders) occurred. Cases have been

known where freemen, being called upon to show their free papers by a pack of ruffians, and on the presentation of the papers, the ruffians have torn them up, and seized the victim and sold him to a life of endless bondage.

The week before our intended start, I wrote a pass for each of our party, giving them permission to visit Baltimore during the Easter holidays. The pass ran after this manner:

“This is to certify that I, the undersigned, have given the bearer, my servant John, full liberty to go to Baltimore to spend the Easter holidays.

W. H.

NEAR ST. MICHAELS, Talbot Co., Md.”

Although we were not going to Baltimore, and were intending to land east of North Point, in the direction I had seen the Philadelphia steamers go, these passes might be useful to us in the lower part of the bay, while steering towards Baltimore. These were not, however, to be shown by us, until all other answers failed to satisfy the inquirer. We were all fully alive to the importance of being calm and self-possessed when accosted, if accosted we should be; and we more than once rehearsed to each other how we should behave in the hour of trial.

Those were long, tedious days and nights. The suspense was painful in the extreme. To balance probabilities, where life and liberty hang on the result, requires steady nerves. I panted for action, and was glad when the day, at the close of which we were to start, dawned upon us. Sleeping the night before was out of the question. I probably felt more deeply than any of my companions, because I was the instigator of the movement. The responsibility of the whole enterprise rested on my shoulders. The glory of success, and the shame and confusion of failure, could not be matters of indifference to me. Our food was prepared, our clothes were packed; we were all ready to go, and impatient for Saturday morning—considering *that* the last of our bondage.

I cannot describe the tempest and tumult of my brain that morning. The reader will please bear in mind that in a slave

State an unsuccessful runaway was not only subjected to cruel torture, and sold away to the far South, but he was frequently execrated by the other slaves. He was charged with making the condition of the other slaves intolerable by laying them all under the suspicion of their masters—subjecting them to greater vigilance, and imposing greater limitations on their privileges. I dreaded murmurs from this quarter. It was difficult, too, for a slave-master to believe that slaves escaping had not been aided in their flight by some one of their fellow-slaves. When, therefore, a slave was missing, every slave on the place was closely examined as to his knowledge of the undertaking.

Our anxiety grew more and more intense, as the time of our intended departure drew nigh. It was truly felt to be a matter of life and death with us, and we fully intended to *fight*, as well as *run*, if necessity should occur for that extremity. But the trial hour had not yet come. It was easy to resolve, but not so easy to act. I expected there might be some drawing back at the last; it was natural there should be; therefore, during the intervening time, I lost no opportunity to explain away difficulties, remove doubts, dispel fears, and inspire all with firmness. It was too late to look back, and now was the time to go forward. I appealed to the pride of my comrades by telling them that if after having solemnly promised to go, as they had done, they now failed to make the attempt, they would in effect brand themselves with cowardice, and might well sit down, fold their arms, and acknowledge themselves fit only to be slaves. This detestable character all were unwilling to assume. Every man except Sandy (he, much to our regret, withdrew) stood firm, and at our last meeting we pledged ourselves afresh, and in the most solemn manner, that at the time appointed we *would* certainly start on our long journey for a free country. This meeting was in the middle of the week, at the end of which we were to start.

Early on the appointed morning we went as usual to the field, but with hearts that beat quickly and anxiously. Any

one intimately acquainted with us might have seen that all was not well with us, and that some monster lingered in our thoughts. Our work that morning was the same as it had been for several days past—drawing out and spreading manure. While thus engaged, I had a sudden presentiment, which flashed upon me like lightning in a dark night, revealing to the lonely traveler the gulf before and the enemy behind. I instantly turned to Sandy Jenkins, who was near me, and said: "*Sandy, we are betrayed!* something has just told me so." I felt as sure of it as if the officers were in sight. Sandy said: "Man, dat is strange; but I feel just as you do." If my mother—then long in her grave—had appeared before me and told me that we were betrayed, I could not at that moment have felt more certain of the fact.

In a few minutes after this, the long, low, and distant notes of the horn summoned us from the field to breakfast. I felt as one may be supposed to feel before being led forth to be executed for some great offense. I wanted no breakfast, but I went with the other slaves toward the house for form's sake. My feelings were not disturbed as to the right of running away; on that point I had no misgiving whatever, but from a sense of the consequences of failure.

In thirty minutes after that vivid impression came the apprehended crash. On reaching the house, and glancing my eye toward the lane gate, the worst was at once made known. The lane gate to Mr. Freeland's house was nearly half a mile from the door, and much shaded by the heavy wood which bordered the main road. I was, however, able to descry four white men and two colored men approaching. The white men were on horseback, and the colored men were walking behind, and seemed to be tied. "*It is indeed all over with us; we are surely betrayed,*" I thought to myself. I became composed, or at least comparatively so, and calmly awaited the result. I watched the ill-omened company entering the gate. Successful flight was impossible, and I made up my mind to stand and meet the evil, whatever it might be, for I was not altogether

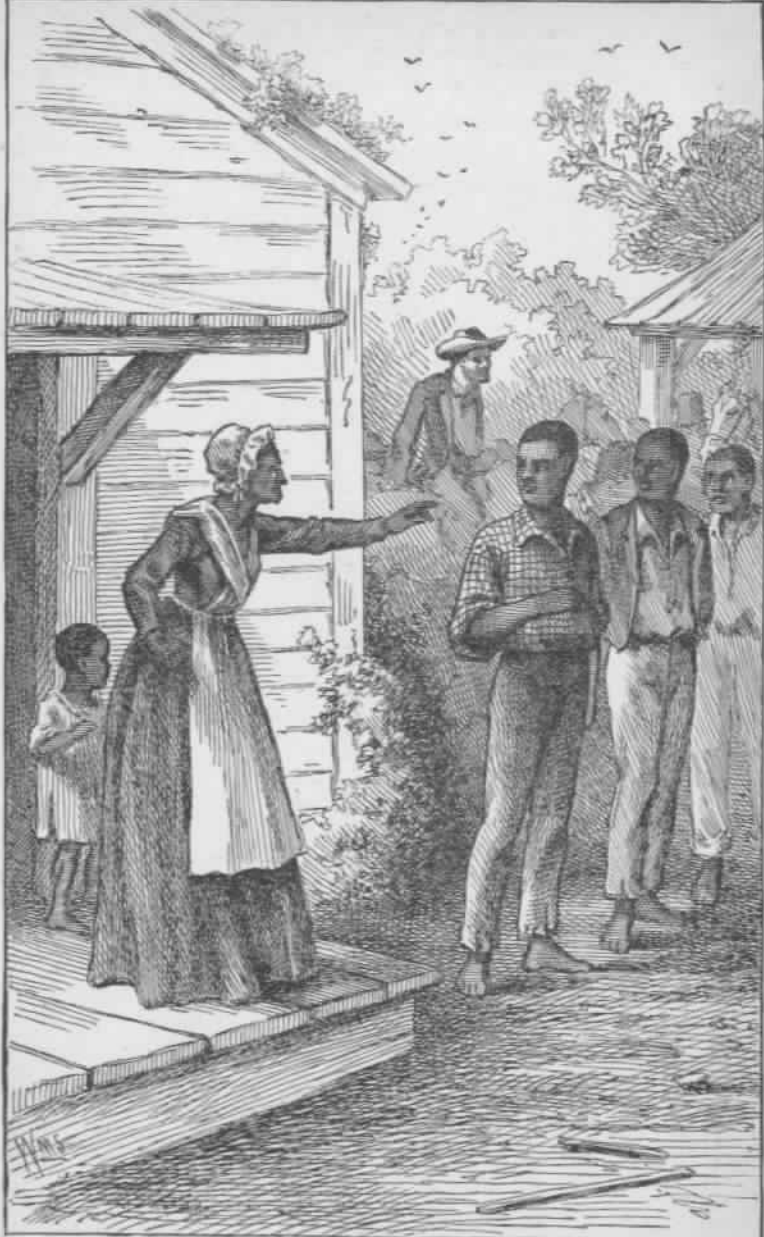
without a slight hope that things might turn differently from what I had at first feared. In a few moments in came Mr. William Hamilton, riding very rapidly and evidently much excited. He was in the habit of riding very slowly, and was seldom known to gallop his horse. This time his horse was nearly at full speed, causing the dust to roll thick behind him. Mr. Hamilton, though one of the most resolute men in the whole neighborhood, was, nevertheless, a remarkably mild-spoken man, and, even when greatly excited, his language was cool and circumspect. He came to the door, and inquired if Mr. Freeland was in? I told him that Mr. Freeland was at the barn. Off the old gentleman rode toward the barn, with unwonted speed. In a few moments Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Freeland came down from the barn to the house, and just as they made their appearance in the front-yard three men, who proved to be constables, came dashing into the lane on horse-back, as if summoned by a sign requiring quick work. A few seconds brought them into the front-yard, where they hastily dismounted and tied their horses. This done, they joined Mr. Freeland and Mr. Hamilton, who were standing a short distance from the kitchen. A few moments were spent as if in consulting how to proceed, and then the whole party walked up to the kitchen door. There was now no one in the kitchen but myself and John Harris; Henry and Sandy were yet in the barn. Mr. Freeland came inside the kitchen door, and with an agitated voice called me by name, and told me to come forward, that there were some gentlemen who wished to see me. I stepped toward them at the door, and asked what they wanted; when the constables grabbed me, and told me that I had better not resist; that I had been in a scrape, or was said to have been in one; that they were merely going to take me where I could be examined; that they would have me brought before my master at St. Michaels, and if the evidence against me was not proved true I should be acquitted. I was now firmly tied, and completely at the mercy of my captors. Resistance was idle. They were five in number, armed to the

teeth. When they had secured me, they turned to John Harris, and in a few moments succeeded in tying him as firmly as they had tied me. They next turned toward Henry Harris, who had now returned from the barn. "Cross your hands," said the constable to Henry. "I won't," said Henry, in a voice so firm and clear, and in a manner so determined, as for a moment to arrest all proceedings. "Won't you cross your hands?" said Tom Graham, the constable. "*No, I won't,*" said Henry, with increasing emphasis. Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Freeland, and the officers now came near to Henry. Two of the constables drew out their shining pistols, and swore, by the name of God, that he should cross his hands or they would shoot him down. Each of these hired ruffians now cocked their pistols, and, with fingers apparently on the triggers, presented their deadly weapons to the breast of the unarmed slave, saying, if he did not cross his hands, they would "blow his d——d heart out of him." "*Shoot me, shoot me,*" said Henry; "you can't kill me but once. *Shoot, shoot,* and be damned! I won't be tied!" This the brave fellow said in a voice as defiant and heroic in its tone as was the language itself; and at the moment of saying this, with the pistols at his very breast, he quickly raised his arms, and dashed them from the puny hands of his assassins, the weapons flying in all directions. Now came the struggle. All hands rushed upon the brave fellow, and after beating him for some time they succeeded in overpowering and tying him. Henry put me to shame; he fought, and fought bravely. John and I had made no resistance. The fact is, I never saw much use of fighting where there was no reasonable probability of whipping anybody. Yet there was something almost providential in the resistance made by Henry. But for that resistance every soul of us would have been hurried off to the far South. Just a moment previous to the trouble with Henry, Mr. Hamilton *mildly* said,—and this gave me the unmistakable clue to the cause of our arrest,—“Perhaps we had now better make a search for those protections, which we under-

stand Frederick has written for himself and the rest." Had these passes been found, they would have been point-blank proof against us, and would have confirmed all the statements of our betrayer. Thanks to the resistance of Henry, the excitement produced by the scuffle drew all attention in that direction, and I succeeded in flinging my pass, unobserved, into the fire. The confusion attendant on the scuffle, and the apprehension of still further trouble, perhaps, led our captors to forego, for the time, any search for "*those protections* which Frederick was said to have written for his companions;" so we were not yet convicted of the purpose to run away, and it was evident that there was some doubt on the part of all whether we had been guilty of such purpose.

Just as we were all completely tied, and about ready to start toward St. Michaels, and thence to jail, Mrs. Betsey Freeland (mother to William, who was much attached, after the Southern fashion, to Henry and John, they having been reared from childhood in her house) came to the kitchen door with her hands full of biscuits, for we had not had our breakfast that morning, and divided them between Henry and John. This done, the lady made the following parting address to me, pointing her bony finger at me: "You devil! you yellow devil! It was you who put it into the heads of Henry and John to run away. But for *you, you long-legged, yellow devil*, Henry and John would never have thought of running away." I gave the lady a look which called forth from her a scream of mingled wrath and terror, as she slammed the kitchen door and went in, leaving me, with the rest, in hands as harsh as her own broken voice.

Could the kind reader have been riding along the main road to or from Easton that morning, his eye would have met a painful sight. He would have seen five young men, guilty of no crime save that of preferring *liberty to slavery*, drawn along the public highway—firmly bound together, tramping through dust and heat, bare-footed and bare-headed—fastened to three strong horses, whose riders were armed with pistols and dag-



DRIVEN TO JAIL FOR RUNNING AWAY.

gers, on their way to prison like felons, and suffering every possible insult from the crowds of idle, vulgar people, who clustered round, and heartlessly made their failure to escape the occasion for all manner of ribaldry and sport. As I looked upon this crowd of vile persons, and saw myself and friends thus assailed and persecuted, I could not help seeing the fulfilment of Sandy's dream. I was in the hands of moral vultures, and held in their sharp talons, and was being hurried away toward Easton, in a southeasterly direction, amid the jeers of new birds of the same feather, through every neighborhood we passed. It seemed to me that everybody was out, and knew the cause of our arrest, and awaited our passing in order to feast their vindictive eyes on our misery.

Some said "*I ought to be hanged;*" and others, "*I ought to be burned;*" others I ought to have the "hide" taken off my back; while no one gave us a kind word or sympathizing look, except the poor slaves who were lifting their heavy hoes, and who cautiously glanced at us through the post-and-rail fences, behind which they were at work. Our sufferings that morning can be more easily imagined than described. Our hopes were all blasted at one blow. The cruel injustice, the victorious crime, and the helplessness of innocence, led me to ask in my ignorance and weakness: Where is now the God of justice and mercy? and why have these wicked men the power thus to trample upon our rights, and to insult our feelings? and yet in the next moment came the consoling thought, "the day of the oppressor will come at last." Of one thing I could be glad: not one of my dear friends upon whom I had brought this great calamity, either by word or look, reproached me for having led them into it. We were a band of brothers, and never dearer to each other than now. The thought which gave us the most pain was the probable separation which would now take place in case we were sold off to the far South, as we were likely to be. While the constables were looking forward, Henry and I, being fastened together, could occasionally exchange a word without being observed by the kidnap-

pers who had us in charge. "What shall I do with my pass?" said Henry. "Eat it with your biscuit," said I; "it won't do to tear it up." We were now near St. Michaels. The direction concerning the passes was passed around, and executed. "Own nothing," said I. "Own nothing" was passed round, enjoined, and assented to. Our confidence in each other was unshaken, and we were quite resolved to succeed or fail together; as much after the calamity which had befallen us as before.

On reaching St. Michaels we underwent a sort of examination at my master's store, and it was evident to my mind that Master Thomas suspected the truthfulness of the evidence upon which they had acted in arresting us, and that he only affected, to some extent, the positiveness with which he asserted our guilt. There was nothing said by any of our company which could, in any manner, prejudice our cause, and there was hope yet that we should be able to return to our homes, if for nothing else, at least to find out the guilty man or woman who betrayed us.

To this end we all denied that we had been guilty of intended flight. Master Thomas said that the evidence he had of our intention to run away was strong enough to hang us in a case of murder. "But," said I, "the cases are not equal; if murder were committed,—the thing is done! but we have not run away. Where is the evidence against us? We were quietly at our work." I talked thus, with unusual freedom, to bring out the evidence against us, for we all wanted, above all things, to know who had betrayed us, that we might have something tangible on which to pour our execrations. From something which dropped, in the course of the talk, it appeared that there was but one witness against us, and that that witness could not be produced. Master Thomas would not tell us who his informant was, but we suspected, and suspected *one* person only. Several circumstances seemed to point Sandy out as our betrayer. His entire knowledge of our plans, his participation in them, his

withdrawal from us, his dream and his simultaneous presentment that we were betrayed, the taking us and the leaving him, were calculated to turn suspicion toward him, and yet we could not suspect him. We all loved him too well to think it possible that he could have betrayed us. So we rolled the guilt on other shoulders.

We were literally dragged, that morning, behind horses, a distance of fifteen miles, and placed in the Easton jail. We were glad to reach the end of our journey, for our pathway had been full of insult and mortification. Such is the power of public opinion that it is hard, even for the innocent, to feel the happy consolations of innocence when they fall under the maledictions of this power. How could we regard ourselves as in the right, when all about us denounced us as criminals, and had the power and the disposition to treat us as such.

In jail we were placed under the care of Mr. Joseph Graham, the sheriff of the county. Henry and John and myself were placed in one room, and Henry Bailey and Charles Roberts in another by themselves. This separation was intended to deprive us of the advantage of concert, and to prevent trouble in jail.

Once shut up, a new set of tormentors came upon us. A swarm of imps in human shape,—the slave-traders and agents of slave-traders—who gathered in every country town of the state watching for chances to buy human flesh (as buzzards watch for carrion), flocked in upon us to ascertain if our masters had placed us in jail to be sold. Such a set of debased and villainous creatures I never saw before and hope never to see again. I felt as if surrounded by a pack of *fiends* fresh from *perdition*. They laughed, leered, and grinned at us, saying, "Ah, boys, we have got you, haven't we? So you were about to make your escape? Where were you going to?" After taunting us in this way as long as they liked they one by one subjected us to an examination, with a view to ascertain our value, feeling our arms and legs and shaking us by

the shoulders, to see if we were sound and healthy, impudently asking us, "how we would like to have them for masters?" To such questions we were quite dumb (much to their annoyance). One fellow told me, "if he had me he would cut the devil out of me pretty quick."

These negro-buyers were very offensive to the genteel southern Christian public. They were looked upon in respectable Maryland society as necessary but detestable characters. As a class, they were hardened ruffians, made such by nature and by occupation. Yes, they were the legitimate fruit of slavery, and were second in villainy only to the slaveholders themselves who made such a class *possible*. They were mere hucksters of the slave produce of Maryland and Virginia—coarse, cruel, and swaggering bullies, whose very breathing was of blasphemy and blood.

Aside from these slave-buyers who infested the prison from time to time, our quarters were much more comfortable than we had any right to expect them to be. Our allowance of food was small and coarse, but our room was the best in the jail—neat and spacious, and with nothing about it necessarily reminding us of being in prison but its heavy locks and bolts and the black iron lattice work at the windows. We were prisoners of state compared with most slaves who were put into that Easton jail. But the place was not one of contentment. Bolts, bars, and grated windows are not acceptable to freedom-loving people of any color. The suspense, too, was painful. Every step on the stairway was listened to, in the hope that the comer would cast a ray of light on our fate. We would have given the hair of our heads for half a dozen words with one of the waiters in Sol. Lowe's hotel. Such waiters were in the way of hearing, at the table, the probable course of things. We could see them flitting about in their white jackets in front of this hotel, but could speak to none of them.

Soon after the holidays were over, contrary to all our expectations, Messrs. Hamilton and Freeland came up to Easton;

not to make a bargain with the "Georgia traders," nor to send us up to Austin Woldfolk, as was usual in the case of runaway-slaves, but to release Charles Henry Harris, Henry Bailey, and John Harris from prison, and this, too, without the infliction of a single blow. I was left alone in prison. The innocent had been taken and the guilty left. My friends were separated from me, and apparently forever. This circumstance caused me more pain than any other incident connected with our capture and imprisonment. Thirty-nine lashes on my naked and bleeding back would have been joyfully borne, in preference to this separation from these, the friends of my youth. And yet I could not but feel that I was the victim of something like justice. Why should these young men, who were led into this scheme by me, suffer as much as the instigator? I felt glad that they were released from prison, and from the dread prospect of a life (or death I should rather say) in the rice swamps. It is due to the noble Henry to say that he was almost as reluctant to leave the prison with me in it as he had been to be tied and dragged to prison. But he and we all knew that we should, in all the likelihoods of the case, be separated, in the event of being sold; and since we were completely in the hands of our owners they concluded it would be best to go peaceably home.

Not until this last separation, dear reader, had I touched those profounder depths of desolation which it is the lot of slaves often to reach. I was solitary and alone within the walls of a stone prison, left to a fate of life-long misery. I had hoped and expected much, for months before, but my hopes and expectations were now withered and blasted. The ever dreaded slave life in Georgia, Louisiana, and Alabama,—from which escape was next to impossible—now in my loneliness stared me in the face. The possibility of ever becoming anything but an abject slave, a mere machine in the hands of an owner, had now fled, and it seemed to me it had fled forever. A life of living death, beset with the innumerable horrors of the cotton field and the sugar plantation, seemed to be my

doom. The fiends who rushed into the prison when we were first put there continued to visit me and ply me with questions and tantalizing remarks. I was insulted, but helpless; keenly alive to the demands of justice and liberty, but with no means of asserting them. To talk to those imps about justice or mercy would have been as absurd as to reason with bears and tigers. Lead and steel were the only arguments that they were capable of appreciating, as the events of the subsequent years have proved.

After remaining in this life of misery and despair about a week, which seemed a month, Master Thomas, very much to my surprise and greatly to my relief, came to the prison and took me out, for the purpose, as he said, of sending me to Alabama with a friend of his, who would emancipate me at the end of eight years. I was glad enough to get out of prison, but I had no faith in the story that his friend would emancipate me. Besides, I had never heard of his having a friend in Alabama, and I took the announcement simply as an easy and comfortable method of shipping me off to the far south. There was a little scandal, too, connected with the idea of one Christian selling another to the Georgia traders, while it was deemed every way proper for them to sell to others. I thought this friend in Alabama was an invention to meet this difficulty, for Master Thomas was quite jealous of his religious reputation, however unconcerned he might have been about his real Christian character. In these remarks it is possible I do him injustice. He certainly did not exert his power over me as he might have done in the case, but acted, upon the whole, very generously, considering the nature of my offense. He had the power and the provocation to send me, without reserve, into the very everglades of Florida, beyond the remotest hope of emancipation; and his refusal to exercise that power must be set down to his credit.

After lingering about St. Michaels a few days and no friend from Alabama appearing, Master Thomas decided to send me

back again to Baltimore, to live with his brother Hugh, with whom he was now at peace; possibly he became so by his profession of religion at the camp-meeting in the Bay side. Master Thomas told me he wished me to go to Baltimore and learn a trade; and that if I behaved myself properly he would *emancipate me at twenty-five*. Thanks for this one beam of hope in the future. The promise had but one fault—it seemed too good to be true.

