Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

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The 1845 text

Rendered into modern English with AI (Claude) and edited



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Original text: the first edition (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), with the preface by William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879) and the letter by Wendell Phillips (1811–1884), via the validated page transcription on English Wikisource (en.wikisource.org/wiki/Narrative_of_the_Life_of_Frederick_Douglass,_an_American_Slave) (text public domain; transcription CC BY-SA 4.0). Modern version: rewritten from Douglass's English with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The small numbers set in the text are chapter and paragraph (Pref. = Garrison's preface, Let. = Phillips's letter, App. = the appendix); Douglass's footnotes are numbered by chapter. Where the original uses a slur, including those Douglass quotes from slaveholders, a neutral term is shown in brackets instead.

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INTRODUCTION

Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) was born into slavery on Maryland's Eastern Shore, learned to read in secret in Baltimore, and escaped to the North in 1838. Three years later he spoke at an anti-slavery meeting in Nantucket and was hired as a lecturer; audiences so doubted that a man of his eloquence could ever have been a slave that he wrote this book, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (Boston, 1845), naming names, places and dates. It sold thousands of copies within months, and the risk of recapture it created sent him on a lecture tour of Britain.

In plain, controlled prose Douglass describes his separation from his mother, the whippings he witnessed as a child, the plantation's hunger and cold, his discovery that literacy is "the pathway from slavery to freedom," his breaking by the "slave-breaker" Edward Covey and the fight in which he resisted him —"You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man"—a failed escape, and his life as a caulker in Baltimore. He leaves out how he finally escaped, so as not to close the route to others. An appendix distinguishes "the Christianity of Christ" from "the slaveholding religion of this land."

The book opens, as published, with a preface by the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and a letter from Wendell Phillips. Slurs in the original are replaced by bracketed neutral words. The right-hand column is Douglass in modern English; the left is the first edition of 1845.

Preface and Letter

Garrison recalls hearing Douglass speak at Nantucket in 1841 and vouches for the Narrative; Phillips praises Douglass's courage in naming names.

PREFACE

Garrison recalls hearing Douglass speak at Nantucket in 1841 and urges readers to oppose slavery.

Pref.1 In August 1841 I attended an anti-slavery convention in Nantucket, where I had the happiness of becoming acquainted with Frederick Douglass, the writer of the following Narrative. He was a stranger to nearly every member of that gathering. But he had recently escaped from the southern prison-house of bondage, and he was curious to learn the principles and methods of the abolitionists—of whom he had heard a somewhat vague description while he was a slave. So he was moved to attend on that occasion, though he was living in New Bedford at the time.[1]

Pref.2 Fortunate, most fortunate event!—fortunate for the millions of his shackled brothers, still longing for deliverance from their dreadful bondage!—fortunate for the cause of Black emancipation, and of universal liberty!—fortunate for the land of his birth, which he has already done so much to save and bless!—fortunate for a large circle of friends and acquaintances, whose sympathy and affection he has firmly won by the many sufferings he has endured, by his virtuous character, by his constant

1 The preface is by William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the abolitionist weekly the *Liberator*. At the Nantucket convention of August 1841 Douglass first spoke before a large anti-slavery audience.

remembrance of those who are in bonds, as though bound with them!—fortunate for the multitudes in various parts of our republic whose minds he has enlightened on the subject of slavery, and who have been moved to tears by his pathos, or roused to virtuous indignation by his stirring eloquence against the enslavers of men!—fortunate for himself, since it at once brought him into the field of public usefulness, "gave the world assurance of a man," awakened the slumbering energies of his soul, and dedicated him to the great work of breaking the rod of the oppressor and letting the oppressed go free![2]

Pref.3 I shall never forget his first speech at the convention—the extraordinary emotion it stirred in my own mind—the powerful impression it made on a crowded audience, completely taken by surprise—the applause that followed from the beginning to the end of his well-chosen remarks. I think I never hated slavery so intensely as at that moment. Certainly I saw more clearly than ever before the enormous outrage that slavery inflicts on the godlike nature of its victims. There stood one who was commanding and well proportioned in build and stature—richly gifted in intellect—a prodigy in natural eloquence—in soul plainly "created but a little lower than the angels"—yet a slave, yes, a fugitive slave—trembling for his safety, hardly daring to believe that a single white person could be found on American soil who would befriend him at all risks, for the love of God and humanity! He was capable of high attainments as an intellectual and moral being. He needed nothing but a comparatively small amount of education to make him an ornament to society and a blessing to his race. Yet by the law of the land, by the voice of the people, by the terms of the slave code, he was only a piece of property, a beast of burden, a chattel personal, nevertheless!

Pref.4 A dear friend from New Bedford persuaded Mr. Douglass to address the convention. He came forward to the platform with the hesitation and embarrassment that necessarily accom-

2 "Gave the world assurance of a man" is from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (3.4). "Those who are in bonds, as bound with them" echoes Hebrews 13:3, and "let the oppressed go free" echoes Isaiah 58:6.

pany a sensitive mind in so new a position. He apologized for his ignorance and reminded the audience that slavery was a poor school for the human mind and heart. Then he went on to relate some of the facts of his own history as a slave, and in the course of his speech expressed many noble thoughts and thrilling reflections. As soon as he had sat down, I rose, filled with hope and admiration, and declared that Patrick Henry, of Revolutionary fame, never made a speech more eloquent in the cause of liberty than the one we had just heard from the lips of that hunted fugitive. So I believed then—so I believe now. I reminded the audience of the danger that surrounded this self-emancipated young man in the North—even in Massachusetts, on the soil of the Pilgrim Fathers, among the descendants of Revolutionary forefathers. And I asked them whether they would ever allow him to be carried back into slavery—law or no law, constitution or no constitution.[3] The response was unanimous and thunderous—"NO!" "Will you help and protect him as a fellow man—a resident of the old Bay State?" "YES!" shouted the whole crowd. They shouted with an energy so startling that the ruthless tyrants south of the Mason–Dixon line might almost have heard that mighty outburst of feeling. They might have recognized it as the pledge of an unconquerable determination, on the part of those who gave it, never to betray him who wanders, but to hide the outcast, and firmly to accept the consequences.[4]

Pref.5 It was at once deeply impressed upon my mind that, if Mr. Douglass could be persuaded to devote his time and talents to advancing the anti-slavery cause, it would gain a powerful impetus, and at the same time a stunning blow would be dealt to northern prejudice against a dark skin. I therefore tried to instill hope and courage into him, so that he might dare to take up a calling so unusual and so weighty for a person in his situation. In this effort I was supported by warm-hearted friends, espe-

3 "Law or no law" refers to the federal Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. It allowed slaveholders to reclaim people who had escaped into the free states.

4 "Hide the outcast" and "betray not him who wanders" echo Isaiah 16:3. The "old Bay State" is Massachusetts.

cially by Mr. John A. Collins, formerly General Agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, whose judgment in this case entirely agreed with my own. At first he could give no encouragement. With genuine modesty he said he was convinced he was not equal to so great a task; the path laid out for him had never been walked before; he sincerely feared that he would do more harm than good. After much deliberation, however, he agreed to make a trial. Ever since then he has served as a lecturing agent, under the sponsorship of either the American or the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. He has been most abundant in his labors. His success in combating prejudice, in winning converts, and in stirring the public mind has far surpassed the most hopeful expectations raised at the start of his brilliant career. He has conducted himself with gentleness and meekness, yet with true manliness of character. As a public speaker he excels in pathos, wit, comparison, imitation, strength of reasoning, and fluency of language. There is in him that union of head and heart which is indispensable for enlightening the heads and winning the hearts of others. May his strength continue to be equal to his day! May he continue to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of God," that he may be ever more useful in the cause of bleeding humanity, whether at home or abroad!

Pref.6 It is certainly a very remarkable fact that one of the most effective advocates of the slave population now before the public is a fugitive slave, Frederick Douglass. It is equally remarkable that the free Black population of the United States is just as ably represented by one of their own number, Charles Lenox Remond, whose eloquent appeals have won the highest applause from multitudes on both sides of the Atlantic. Let the slanderers of the Black race despise themselves for their baseness and narrowness of spirit. Let them stop talking from now on about the natural inferiority of those who need nothing but time and opportunity to reach the highest point of human excellence.[5]

5 Charles Lenox Remond (1810–1873), a free-born Black abolitionist from Salem, Massachusetts, lectured widely in the United States and Britain.

Pref.7 It may perhaps fairly be questioned whether any other part of the earth's population could have endured the deprivations, sufferings, and horrors of slavery without sinking lower in the scale of humanity than the slaves of African descent have sunk. Nothing has been left undone to cripple their intellects, darken their minds, debase their moral nature, and wipe out every trace of their kinship with mankind. And yet how wonderfully they have borne the mighty load of a most frightful bondage, under which they have been groaning for centuries! Daniel O'Connell tells an anecdote that illustrates the effect of slavery on the white man and shows that in such a condition he has no greater powers of endurance than his Black brother. O'Connell, the distinguished advocate of universal emancipation and the mightiest champion of prostrate but unconquered Ireland, told it in a speech in Conciliation Hall, Dublin, before the Loyal National Repeal Association, on March 31, 1845. "No matter," said Mr. O'Connell, "under what plausible name it may disguise itself, slavery is still hideous.[6] *It has a natural, an inevitable tendency to brutalize every noble faculty of man.* An American sailor was cast away on the coast of Africa and kept in slavery there for three years. At the end of that time he was found to be brutalized and stupefied—he had lost all power of reasoning; and, having forgotten his native language, he could only utter an unintelligible mixture of Arabic and English, which nobody could understand, and which even he himself found hard to pronounce. So much for the humanizing influence of the domestic institution!" Granting that this was an extraordinary case of mental deterioration, it proves at least that the white slave can sink as low in the scale of humanity as the Black one.[7]

Pref.8 Mr. Douglass has very properly chosen to write his own Narrative, in his own style and to the best of his ability, rather than employ someone else to do it. It is therefore entirely his

6 Daniel O'Connell (1775–1847), Irish political leader, campaigned for Catholic emancipation and for repeal of the union with Britain, and was an outspoken opponent of American slavery.

7 "The domestic institution" is an ironic echo of the euphemisms ("domestic" or "peculiar" institution) used for American slavery.

own work. His career as a slave was long and dark, and he has had few opportunities to improve his mind since he broke his iron fetters. Considering this, the Narrative does great credit, in my judgment, to his head and heart. Whoever can read it without a tearful eye, a heaving breast, an afflicted spirit—without being filled with an unspeakable abhorrence of slavery and all who support it, and fired with a determination to seek the immediate overthrow of that detestable system—without trembling for the fate of this country in the hands of a righteous God, who is always on the side of the oppressed, and whose arm is not shortened that it cannot save—must have a heart of flint, and be fit to play the part of a trafficker "in slaves and the souls of men." I am confident that it is essentially true in all its statements;[8] that nothing has been set down in malice, nothing exaggerated, nothing drawn from the imagination; that it falls short of the reality rather than overstating a single fact about slavery as it is. The experience of Frederick Douglass as a slave was not an unusual one; his lot was not an especially hard one. His case may be regarded as a very fair example of the treatment of slaves in Maryland, a state where it is admitted that they are better fed and less cruelly treated than in Georgia, Alabama, or Louisiana. Many have suffered incomparably more than he did, while very few on the plantations have suffered less. Yet how deplorable was his situation! what terrible punishments were inflicted on his body! what still more shocking outrages were committed against his mind! with all his noble powers and lofty aspirations, how like a brute he was treated, even by those professing to have the same mind in them that was in Christ Jesus! to what dreadful dangers he was continually exposed! how lacking in friendly counsel and help, even in his greatest extremities! how heavy was the midnight of woe that shrouded in blackness the last ray of hope and filled the future with terror and gloom! what longings for freedom took possession of his breast, and how his misery increased as he grew more reflective and

8 "Whose arm is not shortened" echoes Isaiah 59:1. "Slaves and the souls of men" quotes Revelation 18:13.

intelligent— thus demonstrating that a happy slave is an extinct man! how he thought, reasoned, and felt, under the lash of the driver, with the chains upon his limbs! what perils he faced in his attempts to escape from his horrible fate! and how remarkable have been his deliverance and preservation in the midst of a nation of pitiless enemies!

Pref.9 This Narrative contains many moving incidents and many passages of great eloquence and power. But I think the most thrilling of them all is Douglass's description of his feelings as he stood on the banks of the Chesapeake Bay, speaking to himself about his fate and about the chances of his one day being a free man—watching the vessels recede as they flew with their white wings before the breeze, and addressing them as if they were alive with the living spirit of freedom. Who can read that passage and remain unmoved by its pathos and sublimity?[9] Compressed into it is a whole Alexandrian library of thought, feeling, and sentiment—all that can be urged, and all that needs to be urged, by way of protest, entreaty, and rebuke, against that crime of crimes—making man the property of his fellow man! Oh, how accursed is that system, which entombs the godlike mind of man, defaces the divine image, reduces those who by creation were crowned with glory and honor to the level of four-footed beasts, and exalts the dealer in human flesh above all that is called God! Why should its existence be prolonged one hour? Is it not evil, only evil, and that continually?[10] What does its presence imply, if not the absence of all fear of God and all regard for man on the part of the people of the United States? Heaven speed its eternal overthrow!

9 Garrison refers to Douglass's address to the ships on the Chesapeake in chapter 10.

10 The ancient library of Alexandria was proverbial for its vast collection. Garrison echoes Psalm 8:5, 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and Genesis 6:5.

ANSWERING THE DOUBTERS

Garrison argues that the cruelties described follow naturally from slavery and cites a recent killing.

Pref.10 Many people are so profoundly ignorant of the nature of slavery that they stubbornly refuse to believe whatever they read or hear about the cruelties inflicted daily on its victims. They do not deny that the slaves are held as property; but that terrible fact seems to suggest to their minds no idea of injustice, of exposure to outrage, or of brutal barbarity. Tell them of cruel floggings, of mutilations and brandings, of scenes of defilement and blood, of the banishing of all light and knowledge, and they pretend to be greatly indignant at such enormous exaggerations, such wholesale misstatements, such abominable libels on the character of the southern planters! As if all these dreadful outrages were not the natural results of slavery! As if it were less cruel to reduce a human being to the condition of a thing than to give him a severe flogging, or to deprive him of necessary food and clothing! As if whips, chains, thumbscrews, paddles, bloodhounds, overseers, drivers, and patrols were not all indispensable to keep the slaves down and to protect their ruthless oppressors! As if, when the institution of marriage is abolished, concubinage, adultery, and incest must not necessarily abound; as if, when all the rights of humanity are annihilated, any barrier remains to protect the victim from the fury of the plunderer; as if, when absolute power is assumed over life and liberty, it will not be wielded destructively! Skeptics of this kind abound in society. In a few cases their disbelief comes from a lack of reflection. Generally, however, it indicates a hatred of the light, a desire to shield slavery from the attacks of its enemies, and a contempt for the Black race, whether slave or free. Such people will try to discredit the shocking accounts of slaveholding cruelty recorded in this truthful Narrative; but they will labor in vain. Mr. Douglass has frankly disclosed the place of his birth, the names of those who claimed ownership of his body

and soul, and also the names of those who committed the crimes he charges them with. His statements, therefore, can easily be disproved if they are untrue.

Pref.11 In the course of his Narrative he relates two instances of murderous cruelty. In one, a planter deliberately shot a slave belonging to a neighboring plantation who had unintentionally strayed into his lordly domain in search of fish. In the other, an overseer blew out the brains of a slave who had fled to a stream of water to escape a bloody flogging. Mr. Douglass states that in neither case was anything done by way of legal arrest or judicial investigation. The *Baltimore American* of March 17, 1845, reports a similar atrocity, committed with similar impunity, as follows: —"*Shooting a Slave.*—We learn, on the authority of a letter from Charles County, Maryland, received by a gentleman of this city, that a young man named Matthews, a nephew of General Matthews, and whose father, it is believed, holds an office in Washington, killed one of the slaves on his father's farm by shooting him. The letter states that young Matthews had been left in charge of the farm; that he gave an order to the servant, which was disobeyed, whereupon he went to the house, *got a gun, and, coming back, shot the servant.*[11] He immediately, the letter continues, fled to his father's residence, where he still remains undisturbed."—Let it never be forgotten that no slaveholder or overseer can be convicted of any outrage committed on the person of a slave, however diabolical, on the testimony of Black witnesses, whether slave or free. Under the slave code they are judged as incompetent to testify against a white man as if they were indeed part of the animal creation. Hence the slave population has no legal protection in fact, whatever it may have in form, and any amount of cruelty may be inflicted on them with impunity. Can the human mind conceive of a more horrible state of society?

Pref.12 The following Narrative vividly describes the effect of a religious profession on the conduct of southern masters, and shows it to be anything but wholesome. In the nature of the

11 The *Baltimore American* was a Baltimore daily newspaper.

case, it must be pernicious in the highest degree. Mr. Douglass's testimony on this point is supported by a cloud of witnesses whose truthfulness is beyond question. "A slaveholder's profession of Christianity is an obvious fraud. He is a felon of the highest grade. He is a man-stealer. It makes no difference what you put in the other scale."

Pref.13 Reader! are you with the man-stealers in sympathy and purpose, or on the side of their downtrodden victims? If with the former, then you are the enemy of God and man. If with the latter, what are you prepared to do and to dare on their behalf? Be faithful, be vigilant, be untiring in your efforts to break every yoke and let the oppressed go free. Come what may—cost what it may—inscribe on the banner you unfurl to the breeze, as your religious and political motto: "No compromise with Slavery! No Union with Slaveholders!" WM. LLOYD GARRISON. Boston, *May* 1, 1845.[12]

LETTER FROM WENDELL PHILLIPS, ESQ.

Phillips welcomes a slave's own account of slavery and fears for Douglass's safety in naming names.

Let.1 Boston, April 22, 1845. My Dear Friend:[13]

Let.2 You remember the old fable of "The Man and the Lion," in which the lion complained that he would not be so misrepresented "when the lions wrote history."[14]

Let.3 I am glad the time has come when the "lions write history." We have been left long enough to gather the character of slavery from the involuntary evidence of the masters. One might, indeed, rest satisfied enough with what must evidently be, in general, the results of such a relation, without looking fur-

12 The motto expresses the disunionist position adopted in 1844 by Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society: that the free states should leave a Union whose Constitution protected slavery.

13 Wendell Phillips (1811–1884) was a Boston lawyer and one of the leading abolitionist orators.

14 In the Aesopic fable, a man shows a lion a statue of a man overcoming a lion. The lion replies that if lions were sculptors, the picture would be reversed.

ther to find out whether they have followed in every instance. Indeed, those who gape at the half-peck of corn a week, and love to count the lashes on the slave's back, are seldom the "stuff" that reformers and abolitionists are made of. I remember that in 1838 many were waiting for the results of the West India experiment before they could join our ranks.[15] Those "results" came long ago; but, alas! few of that number have come with them as converts. A man must be disposed to judge emancipation by other tests than whether it has increased the production of sugar—and to hate slavery for other reasons than because it starves men and whips women—before he is ready to lay the first stone of his anti-slavery life.

Let.4 I was glad to learn from your story how early the most neglected of God's children awaken to a sense of their rights and of the injustice done them. Experience is a keen teacher. Long before you had mastered your ABCs, or knew where the "white sails" of the Chesapeake were bound, you began, I see, to measure the wretchedness of the slave—not by his hunger and want, not by his lashes and toil, but by the cruel and blighting death that gathers over his soul.

Let.5 In connection with this, one circumstance makes your recollections especially valuable and your early insight all the more remarkable. You come from that part of the country where, we are told, slavery shows its fairest features. Let us hear, then, what it is at its best—gaze on its bright side, if it has one. Then imagination may strain her powers to add dark lines to the picture, as she travels southward to that (for the Black man) Valley of the Shadow of Death, where the Mississippi sweeps along.[16]

Let.6 Again, we have known you long, and can place complete confidence in your truthfulness, candor, and sincerity. Everyone who has heard you speak has felt—and, I am confident, everyone

15 The "West India experiment" was emancipation in the British Caribbean colonies, completed in 1838 when the transitional "apprenticeship" system ended.
16 Maryland, in the upper South, was often said to have the mildest form of slavery. The "Valley of the Shadow of Death" is from Psalm 23:4.

who reads your book will feel—persuaded that you give them a fair sample of the whole truth. No one-sided portrait—no wholesale complaints—but strict justice done whenever individual kindness has neutralized, for a moment, the deadly system with which it was strangely allied. You have also been with us for some years, and can fairly compare the twilight of rights that your race enjoys in the North with that "noon of night" under which they labor south of Mason and Dixon's line.[17] Tell us whether, after all, the half-free Black man of Massachusetts is worse off than the pampered slave of the rice swamps!

Let.7 Reading your life, no one can say that we have unfairly picked out a few rare specimens of cruelty. We know that the bitter drops which even you have drained from the cup are no incidental aggravations, no individual misfortunes. They are such as must always and necessarily mingle in the lot of every slave. They are the essential ingredients, not the occasional results, of the system.

Let.8 After all, I shall read your book trembling for you. Some years ago, when you were beginning to tell me your real name and birthplace, you may remember that I stopped you and preferred to remain ignorant of it all. Apart from a vague description, I stayed that way until the other day, when you read me your memoirs. I hardly knew, at the time, whether to thank you or not for letting me see them, when I reflected that it was still dangerous in Massachusetts for honest men to tell their names! They say the fathers in 1776 signed the Declaration of Independence with the noose about their necks. You, too, publish your declaration of freedom with danger surrounding you on every side. In all the broad lands that the Constitution of the United States overshadows, there is no single spot—however narrow or desolate—where a fugitive slave can plant himself and say, "I am safe." The whole armory of Northern law has no shield for you. I

17 Mason and Dixon's line, the Maryland–Pennsylvania boundary, was the customary dividing line between the slave states and the free states.

do not hesitate to say that, in your place, I would throw the manuscript into the fire.[18]

Let.9 You, perhaps, may tell your story in safety, dear as you are to so many warm hearts because of rare gifts and a still rarer devotion of them to the service of others. Some time or other, the humblest may stand in our streets and bear witness in safety against the cruelties of which he has been the victim. If that day comes, it will be owing only to your labors and to the fearless efforts of those who, trampling the laws and Constitution of the country underfoot, are determined that they will "hide the outcast," and that their hearths shall be, in spite of the law, a refuge for the oppressed.[19]

Let.10 Yet it is sad to think that these very throbbing hearts which welcome your story, and form your best safeguard in telling it, are all beating contrary to the "statute in such case made and provided." Go on, my dear friend, until you, and those who like you have been saved, as through fire, from the dark prison house, shall turn these free, illegal pulses into statutes;[20] and New England, cutting loose from a bloodstained Union, shall glory in being the house of refuge for the oppressed—until we no longer merely "*hide* the outcast," or make a merit of standing idly by while he is hunted in our midst. Then, consecrating anew the soil of the Pilgrims as a sanctuary for the oppressed, we shall proclaim our *welcome* to the slave so loudly that the sound shall reach every hut in the Carolinas, and make the broken-hearted bondman leap up at the thought of old Massachusetts. God speed the day! Until then, and always, Yours truly, WENDELL PHILLIPS. Frederick Douglass.

18 Under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, upheld by the Supreme Court in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* (1842), an escaped slave could be seized anywhere in the free states and returned.

19 "Hide the outcast" is from Isaiah 16:3.

20 "Statute in such case made and provided" is a standard legal formula. "Saved, so as by fire" echoes 1 Corinthians 3:15.

Chapter I

Douglass's birth in Talbot County, Maryland; his unknown father and the mother he barely knew; the whipping of his Aunt Hester.

1.1 I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot County, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age, since I have never seen any authentic record of it. By far the greater part of slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs,[1] and most masters I have known wish to keep their slaves this ignorant. I do not remember ever meeting a slave who could tell his birthday. They seldom come closer to it than planting-time, harvest-time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time. Not knowing my own birthday made me unhappy even in childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could not see why I should be denied the same privilege. I was not allowed to ask my master any questions about it. He considered all such questions from a slave improper and impertinent, and a sign of a restless spirit. My closest estimate puts me now between twenty-seven and twenty-eight years old. I arrive at this from hearing my master say, some time in 1835, that I was about seventeen.

1.2 My mother was named Harriet Bailey. She was the daughter of Isaac and Betsey Bailey, both Black, and quite dark. My mother was darker in complexion than either my grandmother or my grandfather.

1.3 My father was a white man. Everyone I ever heard speak of my parentage acknowledged this. It was also whispered that my

master was my father; but whether this is correct I do not know; the means of knowing were kept from me. My mother and I were separated when I was only an infant—before I knew her as my mother. In the part of Maryland I ran away from, it is a common custom to separate children from their mothers at a very early age. Often, before the child is twelve months old, its mother is taken from it and hired out on some farm a considerable distance away, and the child is put in the care of an old woman who is too old for field labor. Why this separation is made I do not know, unless it is to hinder the growth of the child's affection for its mother, and to blunt and destroy the mother's natural affection for the child. This is the inevitable result.

1.4 I never saw my mother, knowing her as my mother, more than four or five times in my life; and each of those times was very brief, and at night. She was hired by a Mr. Stewart, who lived about twelve miles from my home. She made her journeys to see me at night, walking the whole distance on foot, after doing her day's work. She was a field hand, and the penalty for not being in the field at sunrise is a whipping, unless a slave has special permission from his or her master to the contrary—a permission they seldom get, and one that earns the man who gives it the proud name of a kind master. I do not remember ever seeing my mother by daylight. She was with me at night. She would lie down with me and get me to sleep, but long before I woke she was gone. Very little communication ever passed between us. Death soon ended the little we could have while she lived, and with it her hardships and suffering. She died when I was about seven years old, on one of my master's farms, near Lee's Mill. I was not allowed to be present during her illness, at her death, or at her burial. She was gone long before I knew anything about it. Never having known, to any great extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care, I received the

1 Tuckahoe is the district along Tuckahoe Creek on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Records later showed Douglass was born in February 1818.

news of her death with much the same feelings I would probably have had at the death of a stranger.

1.5 Called away so suddenly, she left me without the slightest hint of who my father was. The whisper that my master was my father may or may not be true; and, true or false, it matters little to my purpose, while the fact remains, in all its glaring odiousness, that slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers;[2] and this is done all too obviously to serve their own lusts, and to make the gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable; for by this cunning arrangement the slaveholder, in no small number of cases, stands to his slaves in the double relation of master and father.

1.6 I know of such cases; and it is worth noting that such slaves invariably suffer greater hardships, and have more to contend with, than others. In the first place, they are a constant offense to their mistress. She is always inclined to find fault with them; they can seldom do anything to please her; she is never better pleased than when she sees them under the lash, especially when she suspects her husband of showing his mixed-race children favors he withholds from his Black slaves. The master is often forced to sell this class of his slaves out of deference to the feelings of his white wife; and, cruel as it may strike anyone for a man to sell his own children to dealers in human flesh, it is often humanity itself that tells him to do so; for unless he does, he must not only whip them himself, but must stand by and watch one white son tie up his brother, only a few shades darker in complexion than himself, and lay the gory lash on his naked back; and if he utters one word of disapproval, it is put down to his partiality as a parent, and only makes a bad matter worse, both for himself and for the slave he would protect and defend.

1.7 Every year brings multitudes of this class of slaves. It was doubtless because he knew this fact that one great statesman of the South predicted the downfall of slavery by the inevitable

2 Under Maryland and other slave-state law, a child's status as slave or free followed the mother's (the principle known as *partus sequitur ventrem*).

laws of population. Whether or not this prophecy is ever fulfilled, it is nonetheless plain that a class of people very different in appearance from those originally brought to this country from Africa is springing up in the South and is now held in slavery; and if their increase does no other good, it will destroy the force of the argument that God cursed Ham, and that American slavery is therefore right.[3] If only the direct descendants of Ham may be enslaved according to Scripture, it is certain that slavery in the South must soon become unscriptural; for thousands are brought into the world every year who, like me, owe their existence to white fathers, and those fathers most often their own masters.

CAPTAIN ANTHONY AND AUNT HESTER

Douglass describes his first master and the whipping of his Aunt Hester, which he witnessed as a child.

1.8 I have had two masters. My first master's name was Anthony. I do not remember his first name. He was generally called Captain Anthony—a title which, I presume, he got by sailing a vessel on the Chesapeake Bay. He was not considered a rich slaveholder. He owned two or three farms and about thirty slaves. His farms and slaves were in the charge of an overseer. The overseer's name was Plummer. Mr. Plummer was a miserable drunkard, a profane swearer, and a brutal monster. He always went armed with a cowskin and a heavy club.[4] I have known him to cut and slash the women's heads so horribly that even master would be enraged at his cruelty, and would threaten to whip him if he did not watch himself. Master, however, was not a humane slaveholder. It took extraordinary barbarity on an overseer's part to affect him. He was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slaveholding. At times he seemed to take great pleas-

3 Defenders of slavery cited Noah's curse in Genesis 9 (pronounced on Ham's son Canaan) as a supposed scriptural justification for enslaving Africans.

4 A cowskin was a heavy whip of twisted, dried rawhide. Captain Aaron Anthony also managed Colonel Lloyd's estates (see ch. 2).

ure in whipping a slave. I have often been woken at dawn by the most heart-rending shrieks of my own aunt, whom he used to tie up to a joist and whip on her naked back until she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers from his gory victim seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until he was overcome by fatigue would he stop swinging the blood-clotted cowskin. I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I remember it well. I shall never forget it as long as I remember anything. It was the first of a long series of such outrages, which I was doomed to witness and take part in. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could put on paper the feelings with which I watched it.

1.9 This took place very soon after I went to live with my old master, and under the following circumstances. Aunt Hester went out one night—where or for what I do not know—and happened to be absent when my master wanted her. He had ordered her not to go out in the evenings, and had warned her that she must never let him catch her in the company of a young man belonging to Colonel Lloyd, who was paying attention to her. The young man's name was Ned Roberts, generally called Lloyd's Ned. Why master was so careful of her may safely be left to conjecture. She was a woman of noble form and graceful proportions, with very few equals, and fewer superiors, in personal appearance among the Black or white women of our neighborhood.

1.10 Aunt Hester had not only disobeyed his orders by going out, but had been found in the company of Lloyd's Ned; and this, I gathered from what he said while whipping her, was the chief offense. Had he been a man of pure morals himself, he might have been thought concerned to protect my aunt's innocence;

but those who knew him will not suspect him of any such virtue. Before he began whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into the kitchen and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders, and back entirely naked. He then told her to cross her hands, calling her at the same time a d———d b———h. When she had crossed her hands, he tied them with a strong rope and led her to a stool under a large hook in the joist, put there for the purpose. He made her get up on the stool, and tied her hands to the hook. She now stood ready for his infernal purpose. Her arms were stretched up to their full length, so that she stood on the tips of her toes. He then said to her, "Now, you d— ——d b ———h, I'll learn you to disobey my orders!" and after rolling up his sleeves, he began to lay on the heavy cowskin, and soon the warm, red blood (amid heart-rending shrieks from her and horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor. I was so terrified and horror-stricken at the sight that I hid in a closet, and dared not come out until long after the bloody business was over. I expected it would be my turn next. It was all new to me. I had never seen anything like it before. I had always lived with my grandmother on the outskirts of the plantation, where she was put to raise the children of the younger women. Until now, therefore, I had been out of the way of the bloody scenes that often took place on the plantation.

Chapter II

Colonel Lloyd's great plantation; allowances of food and clothing; the songs of the slaves.

2.1 My master's family consisted of two sons, Andrew and Richard; one daughter, Lucretia; and her husband, Captain Thomas Auld. They lived in one house, on the home plantation of Colonel Edward Lloyd. My master was Colonel Lloyd's clerk and superintendent. He was what might be called the overseer of the overseers. I spent two years of my childhood on this plantation in my old master's family. It was here that I witnessed the bloody transaction recorded in the first chapter; and since I received my first impressions of slavery on this plantation, I will give some description of it, and of slavery as it existed there. The plantation is about twelve miles north of Easton, in Talbot County, and lies on the bank of the Miles River. The principal crops raised on it were tobacco, corn, and wheat. These were raised in great abundance, so that, with the produce of this and the other farms belonging to him, he was able to keep a large sloop in almost constant employment carrying them to market at Baltimore. This sloop was named Sally Lloyd, in honor of one of the colonel's daughters. My master's son-in-law, Captain Auld, was master of the vessel; otherwise she was manned by the colonel's own slaves. Their names were Peter, Isaac, Rich, and Jake. These men were held in very high esteem by the other slaves, and were looked upon as the privileged ones of the plantation; for in the eyes of the slaves it was no small thing to be allowed to see Baltimore.

2.2 Colonel Lloyd kept from three to four hundred slaves on his home plantation, and owned a large number more on the neighboring farms that belonged to him. The farms nearest to the home plantation were called Wye Town and New Design. "Wye Town" was overseen by a man named Noah Willis. New Design was overseen by a Mr. Townsend. The overseers of these, and of all the rest of the farms, which numbered over twenty, received advice and direction from the managers of the home plantation. This was the great center of business. It was the seat of government for all twenty farms. All disputes among the overseers were settled here. If a slave was convicted of any serious offense, became unmanageable, or showed a determination to run away, he was immediately brought here, severely whipped, put on board the sloop, carried to Baltimore, and sold to Austin Woolfolk, or some other slave-trader, as a warning to the slaves who remained.[1]

2.3 Here, too, the slaves of all the other farms received their monthly allowance of food and their yearly clothing. The men and women slaves received, as their monthly allowance of food, eight pounds of pork, or its equivalent in fish, and one bushel of cornmeal. Their yearly clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers like the shirts, one jacket, one pair of trousers for winter made of coarse slave cloth, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes; the whole of which could not have cost more than seven dollars. The allowance of the slave children was given to their mothers, or to the old women who had the care of them. The children who were unable to work in the field were given neither shoes, stockings, jackets, nor trousers; their clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts a year. When these wore out, they went naked until the next allowance-day. Children from seven to ten years old, of both sexes, almost naked, might be seen at all seasons of the year.

2.4 No beds were given to the slaves, unless one coarse blanket can be considered a bed, and only the men and women had

1 Austin Woolfolk was one of the largest slave traders in Baltimore in the 1820s and 1830s, shipping people south to the New Orleans market.

these. This, however, is not considered a very great hardship. They suffer less from the lack of beds than from the lack of time to sleep; for when their day's work in the field is done, most of them having their washing, mending, and cooking to do, and having few or none of the ordinary means for doing any of these, very many of their sleeping hours are used up in getting ready for the field the next day; and when this is done, old and young, male and female, married and single, drop down side by side on one common bed—the cold, damp floor—each covering himself or herself with their miserable blankets; and here they sleep until they are summoned to the field by the driver's horn. At the sound of this, everyone must get up and be off to the field. There must be no delay; everyone must be at his or her post; and woe to those who do not hear this morning summons to the field; for if they are not awakened by the sense of hearing, they are by the sense of feeling: no age or sex finds any favor. Mr. Severe, the overseer, used to stand by the door of the quarter, armed with a large hickory stick and a heavy cowskin, ready to whip anyone who was so unfortunate as not to hear, or who was kept by any other cause from being ready to start for the field at the sound of the horn.

2.5 Mr. Severe was rightly named: he was a cruel man. I have seen him whip a woman so that the blood ran for half an hour at a time; and this, too, in the midst of her crying children, who were pleading for their mother's release. He seemed to take pleasure in displaying his fiendish barbarity. On top of his cruelty, he was a profane swearer. It was enough to chill the blood and make an ordinary man's hair stand on end to hear him talk. Hardly a sentence left his mouth that did not begin or end with some horrid oath. The field was the place to witness his cruelty and profanity. His presence made it at once the field of blood and of blasphemy. From sunrise to sunset, he was cursing, raving, cutting, and slashing among the field slaves in the most frightful manner. His career was short. He died very soon after I went to Colonel Lloyd's; and he died as he had lived, utter-

ing bitter curses and horrid oaths with his dying groans. The slaves regarded his death as the work of a merciful providence.

2.6 Mr. Severe's place was filled by a Mr. Hopkins. He was a very different man. He was less cruel, less profane, and less noisy than Mr. Severe. His conduct was marked by no extraordinary displays of cruelty. He whipped, but seemed to take no pleasure in it. The slaves called him a good overseer.

THE GREAT HOUSE FARM AND ITS SONGS

Slaves sent to the home plantation sing as they go; Douglass explains that their songs express sorrow.

2.7 Colonel Lloyd's home plantation looked like a country village. All the skilled trades for all the farms were carried on here. The shoemaking and shoe-mending, the blacksmithing, cartwrighting, barrel-making, weaving, and grain-grinding were all done by the slaves on the home plantation. The whole place had a businesslike look, very unlike the neighboring farms. The number of buildings, too, combined to give it an advantage over the neighboring farms. The slaves called it the *Great House Farm*. Few privileges were valued more highly by the slaves of the outlying farms than being chosen to run errands at the Great House Farm. In their minds it was associated with greatness. A representative could not be prouder of his election to a seat in the American Congress than a slave on one of the outlying farms would be of his election to run errands at the Great House Farm. They regarded it as proof of the great trust their overseers placed in them; and it was for this reason, as well as from a constant desire to be out of the field and out from under the driver's lash, that they valued it as a high privilege, one worth living carefully for. The one who had this honor conferred on him most often was called the smartest and most trustworthy fellow. The competitors for this office tried as diligently to please their overseers as office-seekers in the political parties try to please and deceive the people. The same traits of character could be

seen in Colonel Lloyd's slaves as are seen in the slaves of the political parties.

2.8 The slaves chosen to go to the Great House Farm for the monthly allowance for themselves and their fellow slaves were especially enthusiastic. On their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, ring with their wild songs, which revealed at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would make up their songs and sing them as they went along, paying no attention to either time or tune. Whatever thought came up came out—if not in the words, then in the sound—and as often in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most mournful sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most mournful tone. Into all their songs they would manage to weave something about the Great House Farm. They would do this especially when leaving home. They would then sing the following words most exultantly:

2.9 "I am going away to the Great House Farm! O, yea! O, yea! O!"

2.10 They would sing this as a chorus to words that to many would seem meaningless jargon, but that were nevertheless full of meaning to themselves. I have sometimes thought that merely hearing those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery than reading whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do.

2.11 When I was a slave, I did not understand the deep meaning of those rough and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself inside the circle, so that I neither saw nor heard as those outside might see and hear. They told a tale of woe that was then entirely beyond my feeble understanding; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. Hearing those wild notes always depressed my spirits and filled me with inexpressible sadness. I have often found myself in tears while hearing them. Merely recalling those

songs, even now, distresses me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek. To those songs I trace my first faint conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, deepening my hatred of slavery and quickening my sympathy for my brethren in bonds. If anyone wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd's plantation, and on allowance-day place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him silently analyze the sounds that will pass through the chambers of his soul—and if he is not impressed in this way, it will only be because "there is no flesh in his obdurate heart."[2]

2.12 Since I came to the North, I have often been utterly astonished to find people who could speak of the singing among slaves as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to imagine a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. At least, that is my experience. I have often sung to drown my sorrow, but seldom to express my happiness. Crying for joy and singing for joy were equally uncommon to me while I was in the jaws of slavery. The singing of a man cast away on a desolate island might as appropriately be considered evidence of contentment and happiness as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same emotion.

2 Adapted from William Cowper, *The Task* (1785), Book II: "There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart, / It does not feel for man."

Chapter III

Colonel Lloyd's garden and stable; the fear of speaking the truth about one's master.

3.1 Colonel Lloyd kept a large and finely cultivated garden, which provided almost constant work for four men besides the chief gardener (Mr. M'Durmond). This garden was probably the greatest attraction of the place. During the summer months, people came from far and near—from Baltimore, Easton, and Annapolis—to see it. It was full of fruits of almost every kind, from the hardy apple of the North to the delicate orange of the South. This garden was not the least source of trouble on the plantation. Its excellent fruit was quite a temptation to the hungry swarms of boys, as well as to the older slaves, belonging to the colonel, few of whom had the virtue or the vice to resist it. Hardly a day passed during the summer without some slave having to take the lash for stealing fruit. The colonel had to resort to all kinds of schemes to keep his slaves out of the garden. The last and most successful was to tar his fence all the way around; after which, if a slave was caught with any tar on his person, it was considered sufficient proof that he had either been in the garden or had tried to get in. In either case, he was severely whipped by the chief gardener. This plan worked well; the slaves became as afraid of tar as of the lash. They seemed to realize that it was impossible to touch *tar* without being defiled.[1]

3.2 The colonel also kept a splendid array of horses and carriages. His stable and carriage house looked like some of our

1 Douglass echoes the proverb "He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled" (Ecclesiasticus 13:1).

large city livery stables. His horses were of the finest form and noblest blood. His carriage house held three splendid coaches, three or four gigs, and dearborns and barouches of the most fashionable style besides.[2]

3.3 This establishment was in the care of two slaves—old Barney and young Barney—father and son. Looking after it was their only work. But it was by no means an easy job, for there was nothing Colonel Lloyd was more particular about than the management of his horses. The slightest inattention to them was unpardonable, and was visited on those in whose care they were placed with the severest punishment. No excuse could shield them if the colonel merely suspected any lack of attention to his horses—a suspicion he frequently indulged, and one which, of course, made the position of old and young Barney a very trying one. They never knew when they were safe from punishment. They were often whipped when they least deserved it, and escaped whipping when they most deserved it. Everything depended on the look of the horses, and on the state of Colonel Lloyd's own mind when his horses were brought to him for use. If a horse did not move fast enough, or hold his head high enough, it was owing to some fault of his keepers. It was painful to stand near the stable door and hear the various complaints against the keepers when a horse was taken out for use. "This horse has not had proper attention. He has not been rubbed and curried enough, or he has not been properly fed; his food was too wet or too dry; he got it too early or too late; he was too hot or too cold; he had too much hay and not enough grain; or he had too much grain and not enough hay; instead of attending to the horse himself, old Barney very improperly left it to his son." To all these complaints, no matter how unjust, the slave must answer not a word. Colonel Lloyd could not tolerate any contradiction from a slave. When he spoke, a slave must stand, listen, and tremble; and that was literally the case. I have seen Colonel

2 A gig was a light two-wheeled, one-horse carriage; a dearborn, a light four-wheeled wagon, often curtained; a barouche, a four-wheeled carriage with a folding top.

Lloyd make old Barney, a man between fifty and sixty years of age, uncover his bald head, kneel down on the cold, damp ground, and receive on his bare and toil-worn shoulders more than thirty lashes at a time. Colonel Lloyd had three sons—Edward, Murray, and Daniel— and three sons-in-law, Mr. Winder, Mr. Nicholson, and Mr. Lowndes. All of these lived at the Great House Farm, and enjoyed the luxury of whipping the servants whenever they pleased, from old Barney down to William Wilkes, the coach driver. I have seen Winder make one of the house servants stand off from him at just the right distance to be reached by the end of his whip, and at every stroke raise great ridges on his back.

3.4 To describe the wealth of Colonel Lloyd would be almost like describing the riches of Job. He kept from ten to fifteen house servants. He was said to own a thousand slaves, and I think this estimate well within the truth. Colonel Lloyd owned so many that he did not know them when he saw them; nor did all the slaves of the outlying farms know him. It is told of him that, while riding along the road one day, he met a Black man and addressed him in the usual way of speaking to Black people on the public roads of the South: "Well, boy, who do you belong to?" "To Colonel Lloyd," replied the slave.[3] "Well, does the colonel treat you well?" "No, sir," was the ready reply. "What, does he work you too hard?" "Yes, sir." "Well, doesn't he give you enough to eat?" "Yes, sir, he gives me enough, such as it is."

3.5 The colonel, after finding out whom the slave belonged to, rode on; the man also went on about his business, never dreaming that he had been talking with his master. He thought, said, and heard nothing more of the matter until two or three weeks later. The poor man was then told by his overseer that, for having found fault with his master, he was now to be sold to a Georgia trader. He was immediately chained and handcuffed;[4] and

3 Job, in the biblical book that bears his name, is described as the greatest of all the men of the East in wealth (Job 1:3).

4 Slave traders bought people in Maryland and the upper South for sale to the cotton and rice plantations of the Deep South, Georgia among them.

so, without a moment's warning, he was snatched away and forever separated from his family and friends by a hand more unrelenting than death. This is the penalty for telling the truth, for telling the simple truth, in answer to a series of plain questions.

3.6 It is partly because of facts like these that slaves, when asked about their condition and the character of their masters, almost universally say they are contented and that their masters are kind. Slaveholders have been known to send spies among their slaves to find out their views and feelings about their condition. The frequency of this has established among the slaves the maxim that a still tongue makes a wise head. They suppress the truth rather than suffer the consequences of telling it, and in doing so prove themselves a part of the human family. If they have anything to say about their masters, it is generally in their masters' favor, especially when speaking to a man they have not yet tested. I was frequently asked, when a slave, whether I had a kind master, and I do not remember ever giving a negative answer; nor, in doing so, did I consider myself to be saying something absolutely false, for I always measured the kindness of my master by the standard of kindness set up among the slaveholders around us. Moreover, slaves are like other people, and absorb prejudices quite common to others. They think their own better than that of others. Many, under the influence of this prejudice, think their own masters are better than the masters of other slaves—and this, too, in some cases, when the very reverse is true. Indeed, it is not uncommon for slaves even to fall out and quarrel among themselves about the relative goodness of their masters, each insisting on the superior goodness of his own over the others'. At the very same time, they all curse their masters when each is considered on his own. It was so on our plantation. When Colonel Lloyd's slaves met the slaves of Jacob Jepson, they seldom parted without a quarrel about their masters, Colonel Lloyd's slaves insisting that he was the richest, and Mr. Jepson's slaves that he was the smartest, and the most of a man. Colonel Lloyd's slaves would boast that he could buy and

sell Jacob Jepson. Mr. Jepson's slaves would boast that he could whip Colonel Lloyd. These quarrels almost always ended in a fight between the two sides, and those who won were supposed to have settled the point at issue. They seemed to think that the greatness of their masters could be transferred to themselves. It was considered bad enough to be a slave; but to be a poor man's slave was thought a disgrace indeed!

Chapter IV

The overseer Austin Gore kills Demby; other killings that go unpunished.

4.1 Mr. Hopkins stayed in the office of overseer only a short time. Why his career was so short I do not know, but I suppose he lacked the severity needed to suit Colonel Lloyd. Mr. Hopkins was succeeded by Mr. Austin Gore, a man who possessed, to an eminent degree, all the traits of character indispensable to what is called a first-rate overseer. Mr. Gore had served Colonel Lloyd as overseer on one of the outlying farms, and had shown himself worthy of the high station of overseer on the home farm, or Great House Farm.

4.2 Mr. Gore was proud, ambitious, and persevering. He was artful, cruel, and obstinate. He was just the man for such a place, and it was just the place for such a man. It gave scope for the full exercise of all his powers, and he seemed perfectly at home in it. He was one of those who could twist the slightest look, word, or gesture of a slave into impudence, and would treat it accordingly. There could be no answering him back; a slave was allowed no explanation, even one showing that he had been wrongly accused. Mr. Gore acted fully up to the maxim laid down by slaveholders—"It is better that a dozen slaves should suffer under the lash than that the overseer should be convicted, in the presence of the slaves, of having been at fault." No matter how innocent a slave might be, it did him no good when Mr. Gore accused him of any misdemeanor. To be accused was to be convicted, and to be convicted was to be punished; the one always followed the other with unchanging certainty. To escape

punishment was to escape accusation; and few slaves had the fortune to do either under Mr. Gore's overseership. He was just proud enough to demand the most degrading homage from the slave, and quite servile enough to crouch, himself, at the feet of the master. He was ambitious enough to be content with nothing short of the highest rank of overseers, and persevering enough to reach the height of his ambition. He was cruel enough to inflict the severest punishment, artful enough to stoop to the lowest trickery, and obstinate enough to be deaf to the voice of a reproving conscience. Of all the overseers, he was the one the slaves dreaded most. His presence was painful; his eye flashed confusion; and his sharp, shrill voice was seldom heard without producing horror and trembling in their ranks.

4.3 Mr. Gore was a grave man, and though he was young, he allowed himself no jokes, said no funny words, and seldom smiled. His words were in perfect keeping with his looks, and his looks were in perfect keeping with his words. Overseers will sometimes indulge in a witty word, even with the slaves; not so Mr. Gore. He spoke only to command, and commanded only to be obeyed; he was sparing with his words and lavish with his whip, never using the former where the latter would serve as well. When he whipped, he seemed to do so from a sense of duty, and he feared no consequences. He did nothing reluctantly, no matter how disagreeable; he was always at his post, never inconsistent. He never promised except to fulfill. He was, in a word, a man of the most inflexible firmness and stone-like coolness.

4.4 His cruel barbarity was equaled only by the consummate coolness with which he committed the grossest and most brutal deeds upon the slaves in his charge. Mr. Gore once set out to whip one of Colonel Lloyd's slaves, named Demby. He had given Demby only a few stripes when Demby, to get away from the scourging, ran and plunged into a creek, and stood there in water up to his shoulders, refusing to come out. Mr. Gore told him that he would give him three calls, and that if he did not come out at the third call, he would shoot him. The first call was

given. Demby made no response, but stood his ground. The second and third calls were given, with the same result. Then Mr. Gore, without consulting or deliberating with anyone, without even giving Demby one more call, raised his musket to his face, took deadly aim at his standing victim, and in an instant poor Demby was no more. His mangled body sank out of sight, and blood and brains marked the water where he had stood.

4.5 A thrill of horror flashed through every soul on the plantation, except Mr. Gore. He alone seemed cool and collected. Colonel Lloyd and my old master asked him why he had resorted to this extraordinary expedient. His reply was (as well as I can remember) that Demby had become unmanageable. He was setting a dangerous example to the other slaves—one which, if it were allowed to pass without some such demonstration on his part, would finally lead to the total overthrow of all rule and order on the plantation. He argued that if one slave refused to be corrected and escaped with his life, the other slaves would soon copy the example, and the result would be the freedom of the slaves and the enslavement of the whites. Mr. Gore's defense was found satisfactory. He was kept on in his post as overseer on the home plantation. His fame as an overseer spread abroad. His horrid crime was not even submitted to judicial investigation. It was committed in the presence of slaves, and they, of course, could neither bring a suit nor testify against him;[1] and thus the guilty perpetrator of one of the bloodiest and foulest murders goes unwhipped of justice, and uncensured by the community in which he lives.[2] Mr. Gore lived in St. Michael's, Talbot County, Maryland, when I left there; and if he is still alive, he very probably lives there now; and if so, he is now, as he was then, as highly esteemed and as much respected as though his guilty soul had not been stained with his brother's blood.

1 Under Maryland law at the time, enslaved people could not testify against white persons, so a crime witnessed only by slaves could not be proved in court.

2 "Unwhipped of justice" echoes Shakespeare's *King Lear* (3.2), turned here against a man who lived by the whip.

4.6 I speak advisedly when I say this—that killing a slave, or any Black person, in Talbot County, Maryland, is not treated as a crime, either by the courts or by the community. Mr. Thomas Lanman, of St. Michael's, killed two slaves, one of them with a hatchet, by knocking his brains out. He used to boast of having committed that awful and bloody deed. I have heard him do so, laughing, saying among other things that he was the only benefactor of his country in the company, and that when others did as much as he had done, we would be rid of "the dead Black people."

4.7 The wife of Mr. Giles Hicks, who lived only a short distance from where I used to live, murdered my wife's cousin, a young girl between fifteen and sixteen years of age, mangling her body in the most horrible manner, breaking her nose and breastbone with a stick, so that the poor girl died a few hours afterward. She was buried immediately, but she had been in her untimely grave only a few hours when she was taken up and examined by the coroner, who decided that she had come to her death by severe beating. The offense for which this girl was murdered in this way was this:— She had been set that night to mind Mrs. Hicks's baby, and during the night she fell asleep, and the baby cried. Having lost her rest for several nights before, she did not hear the crying. They were both in the room with Mrs. Hicks. Mrs. Hicks, finding the girl slow to move, jumped out of bed, seized an oak stick of firewood by the fireplace, and with it broke the girl's nose and breastbone, and so ended her life. I will not say that this most horrid murder produced no sensation in the community. It did produce a sensation, but not enough to bring the murderess to punishment. A warrant was issued for her arrest, but it was never served. So she escaped not only punishment, but even the pain of being arraigned before a court for her horrid crime.

4.8 While I am detailing bloody deeds that took place during my stay on Colonel Lloyd's plantation, I will briefly narrate another, which occurred at about the same time as Mr. Gore's murder of Demby.

4.9 Colonel Lloyd's slaves were in the habit of spending part of their nights and Sundays fishing for oysters, and in this way they made up for the shortfall in their scanty allowance. An old man belonging to Colonel Lloyd, while engaged in this way, happened to go beyond the limits of Colonel Lloyd's property and onto the premises of Mr. Beal Bondly. Mr. Bondly took offense at this trespass, came down to the shore with his musket, and blew its deadly contents into the poor old man.

4.10 Mr. Bondly came over to see Colonel Lloyd the next day—whether to pay him for his property, or to justify himself for what he had done, I do not know. At any rate, this whole fiendish transaction was soon hushed up. Very little was said about it at all, and nothing was done. It was a common saying, even among little white boys, that it was worth a half-cent to kill a "Black person," and a half-cent to bury one.

Chapter V

Douglass's childhood on the plantation; he is sent to Baltimore.

5.1 As for my own treatment while I lived on Colonel Lloyd's plantation, it was very similar to that of the other slave children. I was not old enough to work in the field, and since there was little to do except field work, I had a great deal of free time. The most I had to do was to drive the cows in at evening, keep the chickens out of the garden, keep the front yard clean, and run errands for my old master's daughter, Mrs. Lucretia Auld. Most of my free time I spent helping Master Daniel Lloyd find his birds after he had shot them. My connection with Master Daniel was of some advantage to me. He became quite attached to me, and was a sort of protector to me. He would not let the older boys bully me, and would share his cakes with me.

5.2 I was seldom whipped by my old master, and suffered little from anything except hunger and cold. I suffered much from hunger, but much more from cold. In the hottest summer and the coldest winter, I was kept almost naked—no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow-linen shirt that reached only to my knees. I had no bed. I would have died of cold, except that on the coldest nights I used to steal a bag that was used for carrying corn to the mill. I would crawl into this bag and sleep there on the cold, damp clay floor, with my head in and my feet out.[1] My feet have been so cracked by

1 Tow linen was a cheap, rough cloth woven from the short, coarse fibers of flax or hemp.

the frost that the pen I am writing with could be laid in the gashes.

5.3 We were not given a regular allowance. Our food was coarse cornmeal, boiled. This was called *mush*. It was put into a large wooden tray or trough and set down on the ground. The children were then called, like so many pigs, and like so many pigs they would come and devour the mush; some with oyster shells, others with pieces of shingle, some with their bare hands, and none with spoons. Whoever ate fastest got the most; whoever was strongest secured the best place; and few left the trough satisfied.

5.4 I was probably between seven and eight years old when I left Colonel Lloyd's plantation. I left it with joy. I shall never forget the ecstasy with which I received the news that my old master (Anthony) had decided to let me go to Baltimore, to live with Mr. Hugh Auld, brother of my old master's son-in-law, Captain Thomas Auld. I received this news about three days before I left. They were three of the happiest days I ever had. I spent most of all three days in the creek, washing off the crusted dead skin of the plantation and getting myself ready to leave.

5.5 The pride in appearance that this might suggest was not my own. I spent the time washing, not so much because I wanted to, but because Mrs. Lucretia had told me I must get all the dead skin off my feet and knees before I could go to Baltimore; for the people in Baltimore were very clean, and would laugh at me if I looked dirty. Besides, she was going to give me a pair of trousers, which I was not to put on unless I got all the dirt off me. The thought of owning a pair of trousers was great indeed! It was almost enough of a motive to make me take off not only what pig-drovers would call the mange, but the skin itself. I went at it in good earnest, working for the first time with the hope of reward.

5.6 The ties that usually bind children to their homes were all suspended in my case. I found leaving no severe trial. My home had no charm; it was not home to me; on parting from it, I could not feel that I was leaving anything I could have enjoyed by stay-

ing. My mother was dead, and my grandmother lived far off, so that I seldom saw her. I had two sisters and one brother who lived in the same house with me; but our early separation from our mother had nearly blotted the fact of our relationship from our memories. I looked for a home elsewhere, and was confident I would find none I would like less than the one I was leaving. If, however, I found hardship, hunger, whipping, and nakedness in my new home, I had the consolation that I would not have escaped any one of them by staying. Having already had more than a taste of them in my old master's house, and having endured them there, I quite naturally concluded that I could endure them elsewhere, and especially in Baltimore; for I felt about Baltimore something like what is expressed in the proverb that "being hanged in England is preferable to dying a natural death in Ireland." I had the strongest desire to see Baltimore. Cousin Tom, though not a fluent speaker, had inspired that desire in me by his eloquent descriptions of the place. I could never point out anything at the Great House, no matter how beautiful or powerful, without his having seen something in Baltimore that far surpassed it in both beauty and strength. Even the Great House itself, with all its pictures, was far inferior to many buildings in Baltimore. So strong was my desire that I thought satisfying it would fully make up for whatever loss of comforts I might suffer by the exchange. I left without a regret, and with the highest hopes of future happiness.

5.7 We sailed out of the Miles River for Baltimore on a Saturday morning. I remember only the day of the week, for at that time I had no knowledge of the days of the month or the months of the year. As we set sail, I walked to the stern and gave Colonel Lloyd's plantation what I hoped would be my last look. I then placed myself in the bow of the sloop, and spent the rest of the day there looking ahead, interested in what lay in the distance rather than in things nearby or behind.

5.8 In the afternoon of that day, we reached Annapolis, the capital of the state. We stopped only a few moments, so I had no time to go ashore. It was the first large town I had ever seen, and

though it would look small compared with some of our New England factory villages, I thought it a wonderful place for its size—more imposing even than the Great House Farm!

5.9 We arrived in Baltimore early on Sunday morning, landing at Smith's Wharf, not far from Bowley's Wharf. We had a large flock of sheep on board the sloop; and after helping drive them to Mr. Curtis's slaughterhouse on Louden Slater's Hill, I was taken by Rich, one of the sloop's hands, to my new home on Alliciana Street, near Mr. Gardner's shipyard, in Fells Point.[2]

5.10 Mr. and Mrs. Auld were both at home, and met me at the door with their little son Thomas, whom I had been given to take care of. And here I saw what I had never seen before: a white face beaming with the kindest emotions; it was the face of my new mistress, Sophia Auld. I wish I could describe the rapture that flashed through my soul as I looked at it. It was a new and strange sight to me, brightening my path with the light of happiness. Little Thomas was told that here was his Freddy—and I was told to take care of little Thomas; and so I took up the duties of my new home with the most cheering prospect ahead.

5.11 I look on my departure from Colonel Lloyd's plantation as one of the most interesting events of my life. It is possible, and even quite probable, that but for the mere circumstance of being moved from that plantation to Baltimore, I would today be confined in the galling chains of slavery, instead of sitting here at my own table, in the enjoyment of freedom and the happiness of home, writing this Narrative. Going to live in Baltimore laid the foundation, and opened the gateway, to all my later prosperity. I have always regarded it as the first plain sign of that kind providence which has attended me ever since, and marked my life with so many favors. I regarded my being chosen as somewhat remarkable. There were a number of slave children who might have been sent from the plantation to Baltimore. There were some younger, some older, and some of the same age. I was chosen from among them all, and was the first, last, and only choice.

2 Fells Point was Baltimore's waterfront shipbuilding district.

5.12 I may be thought superstitious, and even egotistical, for regarding this event as a special intervention of divine Providence in my favor. But I would be false to the earliest feelings of my soul if I suppressed this opinion. I prefer to be true to myself, even at the risk of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than be false and incur my own abhorrence. As far back as I can remember, I have held a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me in its foul embrace; and in the darkest hours of my life in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope did not leave me, but remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom. This good spirit was from God, and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise.

Chapter VI

Sophia Auld begins to teach him to read; her husband forbids it, and Douglass sees the pathway from slavery to freedom.

6.1 My new mistress proved to be everything she had seemed when I first met her at the door—a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings. She had never had a slave under her control before me, and before her marriage she had depended on her own industry for a living. She was a weaver by trade; and by constant attention to her work, she had been preserved to a good degree from the blighting and dehumanizing effects of slavery. I was utterly astonished at her goodness. I hardly knew how to behave toward her. She was entirely unlike any other white woman I had ever seen. I could not approach her as I was used to approaching other white ladies. My early training was all out of place. The crouching servility, usually so welcome a quality in a slave, did not work when shown toward her. It did not win her favor; she seemed to be disturbed by it. She did not think it impudent or ill-mannered for a slave to look her in the face. The lowest slave was put fully at ease in her presence, and none left without feeling better for having seen her. Her face was made of heavenly smiles, and her voice of tranquil music.

6.2 But, alas! this kind heart was to remain so for only a short time. The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and it soon began its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet harmony, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave way to that of a demon.

LEARNING THE ALPHABET

Mrs. Auld begins teaching him to read; her husband forbids it, and Douglass resolves to learn.

6.3 Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly began to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she helped me learn to spell words of three or four letters. Just at this point in my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to teach me any further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. To use his own words, he went on: "If you give a Black person an inch, he will take an ell. A Black person should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do.[1] Learning would *spoil* the best Black person in the world. Now," he said, "if you teach that Black boy (speaking of me) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As for himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy." These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up feelings within me that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—namely, the white man's power to enslave the Black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was just what I wanted, and I got it at a time when I least expected it. While I was saddened by the thought of losing the help of my kind mistress, I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by the merest accident, I had received from my master. Though aware of how hard it is to

1 An ell was an old measure of cloth, about forty-five inches; the proverb means that a small concession invites a much larger demand.

learn without a teacher, I set out with high hope and a fixed purpose, whatever trouble it might cost, to learn how to read. The very decided manner in which he spoke, and tried to impress on his wife the evil consequences of teaching me, served to convince me that he was deeply aware of the truth of what he was saying. It gave me the best assurance that I could rely with the utmost confidence on the results which, he said, would follow from teaching me to read. What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully avoided, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument he pressed so warmly against my learning to read only served to inspire in me a desire and determination to learn. In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master as to the kindly help of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both.

6.4 I had lived in Baltimore only a short time before I noticed a marked difference between the treatment of slaves there and what I had witnessed in the country. A city slave is almost a free man, compared with a slave on the plantation. He is much better fed and clothed, and enjoys privileges altogether unknown to the slave on the plantation. There is a trace of decency, a sense of shame, that does much to curb and check those outbreaks of atrocious cruelty so commonly carried out on the plantation. He is a desperate slaveholder who will shock the humanity of his non-slaveholding neighbors with the cries of his lacerated slave. Few are willing to incur the disgrace that goes with a reputation for being a cruel master; and above all things, they would not want to be known for not giving a slave enough to eat. Every city slaveholder is anxious to have it known that he feeds his slaves well; and in fairness to them it must be said that most of them do give their slaves enough to eat. There are, however, some painful exceptions to this rule. Directly across from us, on Philpot Street, lived Mr. Thomas Hamilton. He owned two slaves. Their names were Henrietta and Mary. Henrietta was about twenty-two years old, Mary about fourteen; and of all the mangled and emaciated creatures

I ever looked upon, these two were the most so. His heart must be harder than stone who could look upon them unmoved. Mary's head, neck, and shoulders were literally cut to pieces. I have often felt her head and found it nearly covered with festering sores, caused by the lash of her cruel mistress. I do not know that her master ever whipped her, but I have been an eyewitness to the cruelty of Mrs. Hamilton. I used to be in Mr. Hamilton's house nearly every day. Mrs. Hamilton used to sit in a large chair in the middle of the room, with a heavy cowskin always by her side, and hardly an hour of the day passed that was not marked by the blood of one of these slaves. The girls seldom passed her without her saying, "Move faster, you *girl!*" while at the same time striking them over the head or shoulders with the cowskin, often drawing blood. She would then say, "Take that, you *girl!*" and go on, "If you don't move faster, I'll move you!" On top of the cruel lashings these slaves suffered, they were kept nearly half-starved. They seldom knew what it was to eat a full meal.[2] I have seen Mary fighting with the pigs for the offal thrown into the street. Mary was so kicked and cut to pieces that she was more often called "*pecked*" than by her name.

2 "Gip" was a contemptuous term of abuse.

Chapter VII

Learning to read and write in secret; The Columbian Orator; the meaning of "abolition."

7.1 I lived in Master Hugh's family about seven years. During this time, I succeeded in learning to read and write. To accomplish this, I was forced to resort to various stratagems. I had no regular teacher. My mistress, who had kindly begun to instruct me, had, on her husband's advice and direction, not only stopped instructing me but had set her face against my being instructed by anyone else. It is only fair to my mistress, however, to say that she did not adopt this course of treatment immediately. At first she lacked the depravity indispensable to shutting me up in mental darkness. She needed at least some training in the exercise of irresponsible power to make her equal to the task of treating me as though I were a brute.

7.2 My mistress was, as I have said, a kind and tender-hearted woman. In the simplicity of her soul she began, when I first went to live with her, to treat me as she supposed one human being ought to treat another. In taking on the duties of a slaveholder, she did not seem to perceive that I stood to her in the relation of a mere chattel, and that for her to treat me as a human being was not only wrong, but dangerously so. Slavery proved as harmful to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she did not have a tear. She had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner who came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to strip her of these heavenly qualities. Under its influ-

ence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tigerlike fierceness. The first step in her downward course was that she stopped instructing me. She now began to practice her husband's precepts. In the end she became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself. She was not satisfied with simply doing as well as he had commanded; she seemed anxious to do better. Nothing seemed to make her angrier than to see me with a newspaper. She seemed to think that here lay the danger. I have had her rush at me with a face made up entirely of fury and snatch a newspaper from me, in a manner that fully revealed her fear. She was a quick learner, and a little experience soon proved, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other.

7.3 From this time on I was watched most closely. If I was in a separate room for any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book, and was at once called to give an account of myself. All this, however, was too late. The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the *inch*, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the *ell*.[1]

7.4 The plan I adopted, and the one with which I was most successful, was to make friends of all the little white boys I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I turned into teachers. With their kind help, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent on errands, I always took my book with me, and by doing one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before I returned. I also used to carry bread with me, of which there was always enough in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for in this respect I was much better off than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to give to the hungry little urchins, who in return would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. I am strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a testi-

1 Douglass turns back on his masters the proverb Mr. Auld had used against him (ch. 6).

monial of the gratitude and affection I feel for them; but prudence forbids it—not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is an almost unpardonable offense to teach slaves to read in this Christian country. It is enough to say of the dear little fellows that they lived on Philpot Street, very near Durgin and Bailey's shipyard. I used to talk this matter of slavery over with them. I would sometimes tell them I wished I could be as free as they would be when they grew up to be men. "You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, *but I am a slave for life!* Haven't I as good a right to be free as you have?" These words used to trouble them; they would express the liveliest sympathy for me, and console me with the hope that something would happen by which I might be free.

THE COLUMBIAN ORATOR

At about twelve he reads speeches against slavery, learns what "abolition" means, and resolves to run away.

7.5 I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being *a slave for life* began to weigh heavily on my heart. Just about this time, I got hold of a book entitled "The Columbian Orator." Every chance I got, I used to read this book. Among much other interesting material,[2] I found in it a dialogue between a master and his slave. The slave was represented as having run away from his master three times. The dialogue represented the conversation that took place between them when the slave was recaptured the third time. In this dialogue, the master put forward the whole argument in favor of slavery, and the slave disposed of all of it. The slave was made to say some very clever as well as impressive things in reply to his master—things that had the desired though unexpected effect; for the conversation ended with the master voluntarily emancipating the slave.

7.6 In the same book, I came across one of Sheridan's mighty speeches on and in behalf of Catholic emancipation. These were

2 *The Columbian Orator* (1797), compiled by Caleb Bingham, was a widely used schoolbook of speeches, dialogues, and poems for practice in public speaking.

choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with undiminished interest. They gave voice to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had often flashed through my mind and died away for want of utterance. The moral I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder. What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery and a powerful vindication of human rights.[3] Reading these documents enabled me to put my thoughts into words, and to answer the arguments brought forward to support slavery. But while they relieved me of one difficulty, they brought on another even more painful than the one they relieved. The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could see them in no other light than as a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, gone to Africa, stolen us from our homes, and reduced us to slavery in a strange land. I loathed them as being the meanest as well as the most wicked of men. As I read and thought about the subject, behold! that very discontent which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder by which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow slaves their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the lowest reptile to my own. Anything, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking about my condition that tormented me. There was no getting rid of it. It was pressed on me by every object within sight or hearing, living or lifeless. The silver trumpet of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, never again to disappear. It was heard in

3 Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816), Irish-born playwright and parliamentary orator. "Catholic emancipation" was the campaign to remove legal restrictions on Catholics in Britain and Ireland, achieved in 1829. The speech in the *Orator* has since been attributed to the Irish politician Arthur O'Connor.

every sound and seen in everything. It was always present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm.

7.7 I often found myself regretting my own existence and wishing myself dead; and if it had not been for the hope of being free, I have no doubt that I would have killed myself, or done something for which I would have been killed. While in this state of mind, I was eager to hear anyone speak of slavery. I was a ready listener. Every so often I would hear something about the abolitionists. It was some time before I found out what the word meant. It was always used in such connections as to make it an interesting word to me. If a slave ran away and succeeded in getting clear, or if a slave killed his master, set fire to a barn, or did anything very wrong in the mind of a slaveholder, it was spoken of as the fruit of *abolition*. Hearing the word in this connection very often, I set about learning what it meant. The dictionary gave me little or no help. I found that it was "the act of abolishing"; but then I did not know what was to be abolished. Here I was perplexed. I did not dare ask anyone about its meaning, for I was convinced that it was something they wanted me to know very little about. After waiting patiently, I got one of our city papers, containing an account of the number of petitions from the North praying for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and of the slave trade between the states. From this time I understood the words *abolition* and *abolitionist*, and I always drew near when that word was spoken, expecting to hear something of importance to myself and my fellow slaves. The light broke in on me by degrees. One day I went down to Mr. Waters's wharf; and seeing two Irishmen unloading a scow of stone, I went, unasked, and helped them. When we had finished, one of them came to me and asked me whether I was a slave. I told him I was. He asked, "Are ye a slave for life?" I told him that I was. The good Irishman seemed deeply affected by this. He said to the other that it was a pity so fine a little fellow as I

should be a slave for life. He said it was a shame to hold me. They both advised me to run away to the North; they said I would find friends there, and that I would be free. I pretended not to be interested in what they said, and acted as if I did not understand them; for I feared they might be treacherous. White men have been known to encourage slaves to escape, and then, to get the reward, catch them and return them to their masters. I was afraid that these seemingly good men might treat me that way; but I nevertheless remembered their advice, and from that time I resolved to run away. I looked forward to a time when it would be safe for me to escape. I was too young to think of doing so immediately; besides, I wanted to learn how to write, since I might have occasion to write my own pass. I consoled myself with the hope that I would one day find a good chance. Meanwhile, I would learn to write.[4]

LEARNING TO WRITE

He learns letters from the shipyard timbers and copies Master Thomas's old copybooks in secret.

7.8 The idea of how I might learn to write came to me in Durgin and Bailey's shipyard, where I often saw the ship carpenters, after hewing a piece of timber and getting it ready for use, write on it the name of the part of the ship for which it was intended. When a piece of timber was meant for the larboard side, it would be marked thus—"L." When a piece was for the starboard side, it would be marked thus—"S." A piece for the larboard side forward would be marked thus—"L. F." When a piece was for the starboard side forward, it would be marked thus—"S. F." For larboard aft, it would be marked thus—"L. A."[5] For starboard aft, it would be marked thus—"S. A." I soon learned the names of these letters, and what they meant when placed on a piece of timber

4 A pass was a written permit from a slaveholder that a slave traveling alone was required to show on demand.

5 "Larboard" is the older term for the port (left-hand) side of a ship, hence the letter L.

in the shipyard. I immediately began copying them, and in a short time was able to make the four letters named. After that, when I met any boy who I knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he could. The next words would be, "I don't believe you. Let me see you try it." I would then make the letters I had been so fortunate as to learn, and ask him to beat that. In this way I got a good many lessons in writing, which I quite possibly would never have gotten in any other way. During this time, my copybook was the board fence, the brick wall, and the pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk. With these, I mainly learned how to write. I then began copying the italics in Webster's Spelling Book, and kept at it until I could make them all without looking at the book. By this time, my little Master Thomas had gone to school, learned how to write, and filled a number of copybooks. These had been brought home and shown to some of our near neighbors, and then laid aside.[6] My mistress used to go to class meeting at the Wilk Street meeting-house every Monday afternoon and leave me to take care of the house. When I was left in this way, I used to spend the time writing in the spaces left in Master Thomas's copybook, copying what he had written. I kept on doing this until I could write a hand very similar to Master Thomas's. Thus, after a long, tedious effort over years, I finally succeeded in learning how to write.[7]

6 Noah Webster's spelling book (the "blue-backed speller") was the most widely used American schoolbook for teaching reading and spelling.

7 A class meeting was a weekly small-group gathering for prayer and spiritual guidance in the Methodist tradition.

Chapter VIII

The valuation of the property after his master's death; his grandmother left to die; return to St. Michael's.

8.1 Very soon after I went to live in Baltimore, my old master's youngest son, Richard, died; and about three years and six months after his death, my old master, Captain Anthony, died, leaving only his son Andrew and his daughter Lucretia to share his estate. He died while visiting his daughter at Hillsborough. Cut off so unexpectedly, he left no will for the disposal of his property. It was therefore necessary to have the property valued, so that it could be divided equally between Mrs. Lucretia and Master Andrew. I was immediately sent for, to be valued along with the other property. Here again my feelings rose up in detestation of slavery. I now had a new conception of my degraded condition. Before this, I had become, if not insensible to my lot, at least partly so. I left Baltimore with a young heart weighed down by sadness and a soul full of apprehension. I took passage with Captain Rowe in the schooner Wild Cat, and after a sail of about twenty-four hours, I found myself near the place where I was born. I had now been away from it almost, if not quite, five years. I still remembered the place very well, however. I was only about five years old when I left it to go and live with my old master on Colonel Lloyd's plantation; so I was now between ten and eleven years old.

8.2 We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine. There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the

scale of being, and all subjected to the same close examination. Silver-haired age and lively youth, young women and matrons, had to undergo the same indecent inspection. At that moment I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery on both slave and slaveholder.

8.3 After the valuation came the division. I have no words to express the intense excitement and deep anxiety we poor slaves felt during this time. Our fate for life was now to be decided. We had no more voice in that decision than the beasts among whom we were ranked. A single word from the white men was enough —against all our wishes, prayers, and pleading—to separate forever the dearest friends, the dearest relatives, and the strongest ties known to human beings. On top of the pain of separation, there was the horrible dread of falling into the hands of Master Andrew. We all knew him as a most cruel wretch—a common drunkard who, by his reckless mismanagement and dissolute living, had already wasted a large part of his father's property. We all felt that we might as well be sold at once to the Georgia traders as pass into his hands; for we knew that this would be our inevitable condition—a condition we all held in the utmost horror and dread.

8.4 I suffered more anxiety than most of my fellow slaves. I had known what it was to be treated kindly; they had known nothing of the kind. They had seen little or nothing of the world. They were indeed men and women of sorrow, and acquainted with grief.[1] Their backs had grown so familiar with the bloody lash that they had become callous; mine was still tender; for in Baltimore I got few whippings, and few slaves could boast of a kinder master and mistress than I had; and the thought of passing out of their hands into those of Master Andrew—a man who, only a few days before, to give me a sample of his bloody disposition, had seized my little brother by the throat, thrown him on the ground, and stamped on his head with the heel of his boot until the blood gushed from his nose and ears—was well suited to make me anxious about my fate. After he had commit-

1 Echoes Isaiah 53:3: "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

ted this brutal outrage on my brother, he turned to me and said that was how he meant to treat me one of these days—meaning, I suppose, when I came into his possession.

8.5 Thanks to a kind Providence, I fell to Mrs. Lucretia's share, and was sent immediately back to Baltimore to live again in Master Hugh's family. Their joy at my return equaled their sorrow at my departure. It was a glad day for me. I had escaped from worse than a lion's jaws. I was away from Baltimore for the valuation and division just about one month, and it seemed like six.

8.6 Very soon after my return to Baltimore, my mistress, Lucretia, died, leaving her husband and one child, Amanda; and very soon after her death, Master Andrew died. Now all the property of my old master, slaves included, was in the hands of strangers —

HIS GRANDMOTHER TURNED OUT

His grandmother, who served the family all her life, is left alone in a hut in the woods.

strangers who had had nothing to do with accumulating it. Not one slave was freed. All remained slaves, from the youngest to the oldest. If any one thing in my experience, more than any other, served to deepen my conviction of the hellish character of slavery and to fill me with unspeakable loathing for 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 as an infant, cared for him in childhood, served him all his life, and at his death wiped the cold death-sweat from his icy brow and closed his eyes forever. She was nevertheless left 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 granted the small privilege of a

single word about their destiny or her own. And, to crown their base ingratitude and fiendish barbarity: my grandmother was now very old, having outlived my old master and all his children, having seen the beginning and end of all of them; and her present owners, finding she was of little value, her body 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, put up a little mud chimney, and then made her welcome to the privilege of supporting herself there in perfect loneliness—thus virtually turning her out to die! If my poor old grandmother is still alive, she lives to suffer in utter loneliness; she lives to remember and mourn the loss of children, the loss of grandchildren, and the loss of great-grandchildren. They are, in the words of the slave's poet, Whittier—

8.7 "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 hills and waters—
Woe is me, my stolen daughters!"[2]

8.8 The hearth is desolate. The children, the unknowing 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, when she is weighed down by the pains and aches of old age, when the head

2 From John Greenleaf Whittier's abolitionist poem "The Farewell of a Virginia Slave Mother to Her Daughters Sold into Southern Bondage" (1838).

bows toward the feet, when the beginning and the end of human existence meet, and helpless infancy and painful old age combine—at this time, this time of greatest need, the time for the exercise of that tenderness and affection which only children can show toward a declining parent— my poor old grandmother, the devoted mother of twelve children, is left all alone, in that little hut yonder, before a few dim embers. She stands—she sits—she staggers—she falls—she groans—she dies—and none of her children or grandchildren are present to wipe the cold sweat of death from her wrinkled brow, or to lay her fallen remains beneath the sod. Will not a righteous God punish these things?[3]

8.9 About two years after Mrs. Lucretia's death, Master Thomas married his second wife. Her name was Rowena Hamilton. She was the eldest daughter of Mr. William Hamilton. Master now lived in St. Michael's. Not long after his marriage, a misunderstanding arose between him and Master Hugh; and as a way of punishing his brother, he took me from him to live with himself at St. Michael's. Here I went through another very painful separation. It was not, however, as severe as the one I had dreaded at the division of property; for during this interval a great change had taken place in Master Hugh and his once kind and affectionate wife. The influence of brandy on him, and of slavery on her, had brought about a disastrous change in the characters of both; so that, as far as they were concerned, I thought I had little to lose by the change. But it was not to them that I was attached. It was to those little Baltimore boys that I felt the strongest attachment. I had received many good lessons from them, and was still receiving them, and the thought of leaving them was painful indeed. I was leaving, too, without any hope of ever being allowed to return. Master Thomas had said he would never let me come back. He considered the barrier between himself and his brother impassable.

8.10 I then had reason to regret that I had not at least attempted to carry out my resolution to run away; for the chances of success are ten times greater from the city than from the country.

3 Echoes Jeremiah 5:9: "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord."

8.11 I sailed from Baltimore for St. Michael's in the sloop Amanda, Captain Edward Dodson. On the passage, I paid particular attention to the direction the steamboats took to go to Philadelphia. I found that, instead of going down the bay, on reaching North Point they went up the bay, in a northeasterly direction. I considered this knowledge of the utmost importance. My determination to run away was revived once more. I resolved to wait only until a favorable opportunity presented itself. When that came, I was determined to be off.

Chapter IX

Thomas Auld's religion and cruelty; Douglass is hired out to Edward Covey, the "slave-breaker."

9.1 I have now reached a point in my life where I can give dates. I left Baltimore and went to live with Master Thomas Auld at St. Michael's in March 1832. It had now been more than seven years since I lived with him in the family of my old master on Colonel Lloyd's plantation. Naturally, we were now almost complete strangers to each other. He was a new master to me, and I was a new slave to him. I knew nothing of his temper and disposition, and he knew just as little of mine. A very short time, however, made us fully acquainted with each other. I came to know his wife no less than him. They were well matched, being equally mean and cruel. Now, for the first time in more than seven years, I was made to feel the painful gnawing of hunger— something I had not experienced since I left Colonel Lloyd's plantation. It had been hard enough for me then, when I could look back on no time at which I had had enough. It was ten times harder after living in Master Hugh's family, where I had always had enough to eat, and good food at that. I have said that Master Thomas was a mean man. He was. Not to give a slave enough to eat is regarded, even among slaveholders, as the most extreme form of meanness. The rule is: no matter how coarse the food, just let there be enough of it. That is the theory, and in the part of Maryland I came from it is the general practice—though there are many exceptions. Master Thomas gave us enough of neither coarse nor fine food. There were four of us slaves in the kitchen —my sister Eliza, my aunt Priscilla, Henny, and myself—and we

were allowed less than half a bushel of cornmeal a week, and very little else in the way of meat or vegetables. It was not enough to live on. We were therefore reduced to the wretched necessity of living at our neighbors' expense. This we did by begging and stealing, whichever was handier in time of need, the one being considered as legitimate as the other. Many, many times we poor creatures were nearly dying of hunger while food in abundance lay rotting in the safe and the smokehouse, and our pious mistress knew it; and yet that mistress and her husband would kneel every morning and pray that God would bless them in basket and store![1]

9.2 Bad as all slaveholders are, we seldom meet one lacking every trait of character that commands respect. My master was one of this rare sort. I do not know of a single noble act he ever performed. The leading trait of his character was meanness, and if there was any other element in his nature, it was subordinate to this. He was mean; and, like most other mean men, he lacked the ability to hide his meanness. Captain Auld was not born a slaveholder. He had been a poor man, master only of a small vessel on the Bay. He came into possession of all his slaves through marriage, and of all men, adopted slaveholders are the worst. He was cruel, but cowardly. He gave orders without firmness. In enforcing his rules he was sometimes rigid and sometimes lax. At times he spoke to his slaves with the firmness of Napoleon and the fury of a demon; at other times he might well have been mistaken for a man who had lost his way and was asking for directions. He did nothing on his own. He might have passed for a lion, but for his ears. In every noble thing he attempted, his own meanness showed most conspicuously. His airs, words, and actions were the airs, words, and actions of born slaveholders, and, being put on, they were awkward enough. He was not even a good imitator. He had every inclination to deceive, but lacked the power.[2] Having no resources

1 "Bless them in basket and store" echoes Deuteronomy 28:5. A "safe" was a ventilated cupboard for storing food.

2 The lion with telltale ears alludes to Aesop's fable of the donkey in a lion's skin.

within himself, he was forced to copy many others, and, being a copyist, he was forever the victim of inconsistency; and consequently he was an object of contempt, and was held in contempt even by his slaves. The luxury of having slaves of his own to wait on him was something new, and something he was unprepared for. He was a slaveholder without the ability to hold slaves. He found himself unable to manage his slaves by force, fear, or fraud. We seldom called him "master"; we generally called him "Captain Auld," and were hardly inclined to give him any title at all. I have no doubt that our conduct had much to do with making him seem awkward, and consequently irritable.

CAPTAIN AULD'S CONVERSION

Thomas Auld joins the Methodists and grows crueler; he hires Douglass out to Edward Covey.

Our lack of reverence for him must have greatly perplexed him. He wanted us to call him master, but lacked the firmness needed to order us to do so. His wife used to insist that we call him that, but to no purpose. In August 1832 my master attended a Methodist camp meeting held at the Bay-side, in Talbot County, and there experienced religion. I cherished a faint hope that his conversion would lead him to free his slaves, and that, if it did not, it would at least make him kinder and more humane. I was disappointed on both counts. It neither made him humane to his slaves nor led him to free them.[3] If it had any effect on his character, it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways; for I believe he was a much worse man after his conversion than before. Before his conversion, he relied on his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his cruel barbarity; but after his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty. He made the greatest show of piety. His house was the house of prayer. He prayed morning, noon, and night. He very soon distinguished himself among his brethren, and

3 A camp meeting was an outdoor revival lasting several days; to "experience religion" meant to undergo conversion.

was soon made a class leader and exhorter.[4] He was very active in revivals, and proved himself an instrument in the hands of the church in converting many souls. His house was the preachers' home. They used to take great pleasure in coming there to stay; for while he starved us, he stuffed them. We have had three or four preachers there at a time. The ones who came most often while I lived there were Mr. Storks, Mr. Ewery, Mr. Humphry, and Mr. Hickey. I have also seen Mr. George Cookman at our house. We slaves loved Mr. Cookman. We believed him to be a good man. We thought he had been instrumental in getting Mr.[5] Samuel Harrison, a very rich slaveholder, to free his slaves, and somehow we got the impression that he was working to bring about the emancipation of all the slaves. When he was at our house, we were sure to be called in to prayers. When the others were there, we were sometimes called in and sometimes not. Mr. Cookman took more notice of us than any of the other ministers. He could not come among us without showing his sympathy for us, and, stupid as we were, we had the sense to see it.

9.3 While I lived with my master in St. Michael's, a young white man, a Mr. Wilson, proposed to hold a Sabbath school to teach any slaves who might wish to learn to read the New Testament. We had met only three times when Mr. West and Mr. Fairbanks, both class leaders, along with many others, came at us with sticks and other missiles, drove us off, and forbade us to meet again. So ended our little Sabbath school in the pious town of St. Michael's.

9.4 I have said that my master found religious sanction for his cruelty. As an example, I will state one of many facts that prove the charge. I have seen him tie up a lame young woman and whip her with a heavy cowskin on her bare shoulders, making the warm red blood drip; and, to justify the bloody deed, he would quote this passage of Scripture—"He that knoweth his

4 In Methodism a class leader supervised a small group of members, and an exhorter was a layman licensed to address religious meetings.

5 George Grimston Cookman (1800–1841), an English-born Methodist preacher, later served as chaplain of the U.S. Senate; he was lost at sea in 1841.

master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."[6]

9.5 Master would keep this lacerated young woman tied up in this horrible position for four or five hours at a time. I have known him to tie her up early in the morning and whip her before breakfast; leave her, go to his store, come back at dinner-time, and whip her again, cutting her in the places already made raw by his cruel lash. The secret of master's cruelty toward "Henny" lies in the fact that she was almost helpless. When she was quite a small child, she fell into the fire and burned herself horribly. Her hands were so badly burned that she never got the use of them. She could do very little except carry heavy loads. To master she was simply an expense, and since he was a mean man, she was a constant offense to him. He seemed eager to get the poor girl out of existence. He once gave her away to his sister; but, as she was a poor gift, his sister was not inclined to keep her. Finally my benevolent master, to use his own words, "set her adrift to take care of herself." Here was a recently converted man holding on to the mother, and at the same time turning out her helpless child to starve and die! Master Thomas was one of the many pious slaveholders who hold slaves for the very charitable purpose of taking care of them.

9.6 My master and I had quite a number of disagreements. He found me unsuited to his purposes. My city life, he said, had had a very harmful effect on me. It had almost ruined me for every good purpose and fitted me for everything bad. One of my greatest faults was letting his horse run away and go down to his father-in-law's farm, about five miles from St. Michael's. I would then have to go after it. My reason for this kind of carelessness, or carefulness, was that I could always get something to eat when I went there. Master William Hamilton, my master's father-in-law, always gave his slaves enough to eat. I never left there hungry, no matter how urgently I needed to hurry back. At length Master Thomas said he would stand it no longer. I had lived with him nine months, during which he had given me a

6 The verse is Luke 12:47 (King James Version).

number of severe whippings, all to no good purpose. He resolved to put me out, as he said, to be broken; and for this purpose he hired me out for one year to a man named Edward Covey. Mr. Covey was a poor man, a tenant farmer. He rented the place he lived on, as well as the hands with which he worked it. Mr. Covey had acquired a very high reputation for breaking young slaves, and this reputation was of immense value to him. It enabled him to get his farm worked at much less expense to himself than he could have without such a reputation. Some slaveholders thought it no great loss to let Mr. Covey have their slaves for a year, with no other compensation, for the sake of the training they would be put through. Because of this reputation, he could hire young help with great ease. Added to Mr. Covey's natural good qualities, he was a professing Christian—a pious soul—a member and a class leader in the Methodist church. All of this added weight to his reputation as a "slave-breaker." I knew all these facts, having been told them by a young man who had lived there. I nevertheless made the change gladly; for I was sure of getting enough to eat, which is no small consideration to a hungry man.

Chapter X

Broken by Covey, Douglass fights back; the holidays; a failed escape plan; Baltimore shipyards and the caulker's trade.

10.1 I left Master Thomas's house and went to live with Mr. Covey on January 1, 1833. I was now, for the first time in my life, a field hand. In my new work I found myself even more awkward than a country boy seems in a large city. I had been at my new home only one week when Mr. Covey gave me a very severe whipping, cutting my back, making the blood run, and raising welts on my flesh as large as my little finger. The details of this affair are as follows: Mr. Covey sent me, very early in the morning on one of our coldest days in January, to the woods to get a load of wood. He gave me a team of unbroken oxen. He told me which was the in-hand ox and which the off-hand one. He then tied the end of a large rope around the horns of the in-hand ox, gave me the other end, and told me that if the oxen started to run, I must hold on to the rope. I had never driven oxen before, and of course I was very awkward.[1] I managed, however, to reach the edge of the woods with little difficulty; but I had gone only a few rods into the woods when the oxen took fright and bolted at full speed, carrying the cart against trees and over stumps in the most frightening way. I expected every moment that my brains would be dashed out against the trees. After running like this for a considerable distance, they finally overturned the cart, smashing it with great force against a tree, and threw themselves into a dense thicket. How I escaped death, I do not know. There I was,

1 The "in-hand" (near) ox walked on the driver's left; the "off-hand" ox walked on the right.

entirely alone, in a thick wood, in a place new to me.[2] My cart was overturned and shattered, my oxen were tangled among the young trees, and there was no one to help me. After a long spell of effort, I managed to get my cart upright and my oxen untangled and yoked to the cart again. I now went on with my team to the place where I had been chopping wood the day before, and loaded my cart quite heavily, thinking in this way to tame my oxen. Then I set out for home. By now I had used up half the day. I got out of the woods safely and now felt out of danger. I stopped my oxen to open the woods gate; and just as I did, before I could get hold of my ox-rope, the oxen started again, rushed through the gate, caught it between the wheel and the body of the cart, tore it to pieces, and came within a few inches of crushing me against the gatepost. So twice in one short day I escaped death by the merest chance. When I got back, I told Mr. Covey what had happened and how it had happened. He ordered me to go back to the woods immediately. I did, and he followed after me. Just as I got into the woods, he came up and told me to stop my cart, and said he would teach me to trifle away my time and break gates. He then went to a large gum tree, cut three large switches with his axe, and, after trimming them neatly with his pocketknife, ordered me to take off my clothes. I gave him no answer, but stood there with my clothes on. He repeated his order. I still gave him no answer, nor did I move to undress. At this he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me until he had worn out his switches, cutting me so brutally that the marks remained visible long afterward. This whipping was the first of a number just like it, and for similar offenses.

10.2 I lived with Mr. Covey one year. During the first six months of that year, hardly a week went by without his whipping me. My back was seldom free from soreness. My awkwardness was almost always his excuse for whipping me. We were worked right up to the limit of endurance. Long before daybreak we were up and our horses fed, and at the first approach of day we

2 A rod is a measure of length of 16½ feet (about 5 meters).

were off to the field with our hoes and plowing teams. Mr. Covey gave us enough to eat, but hardly time to eat it. We often took less than five minutes over our meals. We were often in the field from the first approach of day until its last lingering ray had left us; and at fodder-saving time, midnight often found us in the field binding blades.[3]

10.3 Covey would be out with us. The way he used to stand it was this. He would spend most of his afternoons in bed. Then he would come out fresh in the evening, ready to urge us on with his words, his example, and frequently the whip. Mr. Covey was one of the few slaveholders who could and did work with his hands. He was a hard-working man. He knew from his own experience just what a man or a boy could do. There was no deceiving him. His work went on in his absence almost as well as in his presence; and he had the knack of making us feel that he was always present with us. This he did by surprising us. He seldom approached the spot where we were working openly, if he could do it secretly. He always aimed to take us by surprise. Such was his cunning that among ourselves we used to call him "the snake." When we were working in the cornfield, he would sometimes crawl on his hands and knees to avoid being seen, and all at once he would rise up almost in our midst and scream out, "Ha, ha! Come, come! Dash on, dash on!" This being his mode of attack, it was never safe to stop for a single minute. His comings were like a thief in the night. He seemed to us to be always at hand.[4] He was under every tree, behind every stump, in every bush, and at every window on the plantation. He would sometimes mount his horse as if headed for St. Michael's, seven miles away, and half an hour later you would see him coiled up in the corner of the wood fence, watching every move of the slaves. For this purpose he would leave his horse tied up in the woods. Again, he would sometimes walk up to us and give us orders as though he were on the point of setting out on a long

3 At "saving-fodder" time the leaves ("blades") were stripped from the corn stalks and bound into bundles as winter feed for livestock.

4 "Like a thief in the night" echoes a biblical phrase (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

journey, turn his back on us, and make as if he were going to the house to get ready; and before he had gone halfway there, he would turn sharply and crawl into a fence corner, or behind some tree, and there watch us until the sun went down.

COVEY'S PIETY

Douglass describes Covey's deceit, his family prayers, and his purchase of a woman as "a breeder."

10.4 Mr. Covey's *forte* lay in his power to deceive. His life was devoted to planning and carrying out the grossest deceptions. Everything he possessed in the way of learning or religion, he made serve his disposition to deceive. He seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the Almighty. He would make a short prayer in the morning and a long prayer at night; and, strange as it may seem, few men would at times appear more devout than he. His family devotions always began with singing; and since he was a very poor singer himself, the duty of raising the hymn generally fell to me. He would read out his hymn and nod at me to begin. Sometimes I would; at other times I would not. My refusal would almost always cause much confusion. To show himself independent of me, he would start up and stagger through his hymn in the most discordant way. In this state of mind he prayed with more than ordinary spirit. Poor man! Such was his disposition to deceive, and his success at it, that I truly believe he sometimes deceived himself into the solemn belief that he was a sincere worshipper of the most high God; and this, too, at a time when he may be said to have been guilty of compelling his woman slave to commit the sin of adultery. The facts in the case are these: Mr. Covey was a poor man; he was just starting out in life; he was able to buy only one slave; and, shocking as the fact is, he bought her, as he said, for *a breeder*. This woman was named Caroline. Mr. Covey bought her from Mr. Thomas Lowe, about six miles from St. Michael's. She was a large, able-bodied woman, about twenty years old. She had already given birth to one child, which proved her to be just

what he wanted. After buying her, he hired a married man from Mr. Samuel Harrison to live with him for one year; and this man he used to lock up with her every night! The result was that at the end of the year the miserable woman gave birth to twins. At this result Mr. Covey seemed highly pleased, both with the man and with the wretched woman. Such was his joy, and his wife's, that nothing they could do for Caroline during her confinement was too good or too hard to be done. The children were regarded as quite an addition to his wealth.

10.5 If at any one time of my life more than another I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was the first six months of my stay with Mr. Covey. We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail, or snow too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work was hardly more the order of the day than of the night. The longest days were too short for him, and the shortest nights too long for him. I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural resilience was crushed, my intellect languished, the desire to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered in my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!

10.6 Sunday was my only leisure time. I spent it in a sort of beastlike stupor, between sleep and waking, under some large tree. At times I would rise up; a flash of energetic freedom would dart through my soul, accompanied by a faint beam of hope that flickered for a moment and then vanished. I sank down again, mourning over my wretched condition. I was sometimes prompted to take my own life, and Covey's, but was prevented by a combination of hope and fear. My sufferings on this plantation now seem more like a dream than a stern reality.

THE SHIPS ON THE CHESAPEAKE

Watching sails on the bay, Douglass pours out his despair and vows to escape.

10.7 Our house stood within a few rods of the Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was always white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eyes of free men, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition. Often, in the deep stillness of a summer Sabbath, I have stood all alone on the high banks of that noble bay and followed, with saddened heart and tearful eye, the countless sails moving off toward the mighty ocean. The sight of them always affected me powerfully. My thoughts would force their way into speech; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in my rough way, in an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships:—

10.8 "You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly around the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! Alas! between me and you the troubled waters roll. Go on, go on. O that I could also go! If only I could swim! If I could fly! O, why was I born a man, only to be made a brute! The glad ship is gone; she hides in the dim distance. I am left in the hottest hell of unending slavery. O God, save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave? I will run away. I will not stand it. Get caught or get clear, I'll try it. I may as well die of the chills as of the fever. I have only one life to lose. I may as well be killed running as die standing. Only think of it;[5] one hundred miles straight north, and I am free! Try it? Yes! God

5 A proverbial saying: "ague" was the shaking chill of malaria, so dying of the chills or of the fever amounts to the same thing.

helping me, I will. It cannot be that I shall live and die a slave. I will take to the water. This very bay shall yet bear me into freedom. The steamboats steered a northeast course from North Point. I will do the same; and when I get to the head of the bay, I will turn my canoe adrift and walk straight through Delaware into Pennsylvania. When I get there, I shall not be required to have a pass; I can travel without being bothered. Let the first opportunity only come, and, come what may, I am off. Meanwhile, I will try to bear up under the yoke. I am not the only slave in the world. Why should I fret? I can bear as much as any of them. Besides, I am only a boy, and all boys are bound to someone.[6] It may be that my misery in slavery will only increase my happiness when I get free. There is a better day coming."

10.9 So I used to think, and so I used to speak to myself; goaded almost to madness one moment, and the next reconciling myself to my wretched lot.

THE FIGHT WITH COVEY

Beaten when he collapses, Douglass appeals to his master in vain, then fights Covey and is never whipped again.

10.10 I have already suggested that my condition was much worse during the first six months of my stay at Mr. Covey's than during the last six. The circumstances that led to the change in Mr. Covey's treatment of me form an epoch in my humble history. You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man. On one of the hottest days of August 1833, Bill Smith, William Hughes, a slave named Eli, and I were at work fanning wheat. Hughes was clearing the fanned wheat away from the front of the fan. Eli was turning, Smith was feeding, and I was carrying wheat to the fan.[7] The work was simple, requiring strength rather than intelligence; yet to someone

6 Pennsylvania was a free state.

7 Fanning: winnowing grain with a hand-cranked fan that blew the chaff away from the wheat.

entirely unused to such work, it came very hard. At about three o'clock that day, I broke down; my strength failed me; I was seized with a violent headache, accompanied by extreme dizziness; I trembled in every limb. Seeing what was coming, I steeled myself, feeling that it would never do to stop work. I kept on as long as I could stagger to the hopper with grain. When I could stand no longer, I fell, and felt as if I were held down by an immense weight. The fan of course stopped; everyone had his own work to do, and no one could do another's work and keep his own going at the same time.

10.11 Mr. Covey was at the house, about a hundred yards from the treading-yard where we were fanning. On hearing the fan stop, he left at once and came to the spot where we were. He hastily asked what the matter was. Bill answered that I was sick, and there was no one to bring wheat to the fan. By this time I had crawled away under the side of the post-and-rail fence that enclosed the yard, hoping to find relief by getting out of the sun. He then asked where I was. One of the hands told him. He came to the spot and, after looking at me for a while, asked me what was the matter. I told him as well as I could, for I scarcely had the strength to speak. He then gave me a brutal kick in the side and told me to get up. I tried to, but fell back in the attempt. He gave me another kick and again told me to rise. I tried again, and managed to get to my feet; but stooping to get the tub with which I was feeding the fan, I staggered again and fell. While I was down in this condition, Mr. Covey picked up the hickory slat that Hughes had been using to level off the half-bushel measure, and with it gave me a heavy blow on the head, making a large wound, and the blood ran freely; and with this he again told me to get up. I made no effort to obey, having now made up my mind to let him do his worst. Shortly after receiving this blow, my head felt better. Mr. Covey had now left me to my fate. At this moment I resolved, for the first time, to go to my master, make a complaint, and ask his protection. To do this, I would have to walk seven miles that afternoon; and under the circumstances, this was truly a hard undertaking. I was extremely

weak, made so as much by the kicks and blows I had received as by the severe fit of sickness I had suffered. I watched my chance, however, while Covey was looking the other way, and set out for St. Michael's. I had made it a considerable distance toward the woods when Covey spotted me and called after me to come back, threatening what he would do if I did not. I ignored both his calls and his threats, and made my way to the woods as fast as my weak state allowed; and thinking he might overtake me if I kept to the road, I walked through the woods, keeping far enough from the road to avoid being seen, and near enough not to lose my way. I had not gone far before my little strength failed me again. I could go no farther. I fell down and lay there for a considerable time. Blood was still oozing from the wound on my head. For a time I thought I would bleed to death; and I think now that I would have, had the blood not matted my hair so thickly as to stop the wound. After lying there about three quarters of an hour, I steeled myself again and set off, through bogs and briers, barefoot and bareheaded, tearing my feet sometimes at nearly every step; and after a journey of about seven miles, which took some five hours, I arrived at my master's store. By then I presented a sight that would have moved any heart but one of iron. From the top of my head to my feet, I was covered with blood. My hair was all clotted with dust and blood; my shirt was stiff with blood. I suppose I looked like a man who had escaped a den of wild beasts, and barely escaped them. In this state I appeared before my master, humbly begging him to use his authority to protect me. I told him all the circumstances as well as I could, and as I spoke it seemed at times to move him. Then he would pace the floor and try to justify Covey by saying he expected I had deserved it. He asked me what I wanted. I told him: to let me have a new home; that as surely as I lived with Mr. Covey again, I would live with him only to die with him; that Covey would surely kill me—he was well on the way to it. Master Thomas ridiculed the idea that there was any danger of Mr. Covey's killing me, and said that he knew Mr. Covey; that he was a good man, and that he could not think of taking me away from

him; that if he did, he would lose the whole year's wages; that I belonged to Mr. Covey for one year, and must go back to him, come what might; and that I must not trouble him with any more stories, or he would *get hold of me* himself. After threatening me in this way, he gave me a very large dose of salts, telling me that I could stay in St. Michael's that night (it being quite late), but that I must be off back to Mr. Covey's early in the morning; and that if I did not go, he would *get hold of me*—which meant that he would whip me. I stayed the night and, following his orders, set out for Covey's in the morning (Saturday morning), worn out in body and broken in spirit. I got no supper that night, and no breakfast that morning. I reached Covey's at about nine o'clock; and just as I was climbing over the fence that divided Mrs.[8] Kemp's fields from ours, out ran Covey with his cowskin to give me another whipping. Before he could reach me, I managed to get into the cornfield; and as the corn was very high, it gave me a place to hide. He seemed very angry, and searched for me a long time. My behavior was altogether inexplicable. He finally gave up the chase, thinking, I suppose, that I would have to come home for something to eat; he would give himself no more trouble looking for me. I spent most of that day in the woods, with this choice before me—to go home and be whipped to death, or stay in the woods and be starved to death. That night I ran into Sandy Jenkins, a slave I knew somewhat. Sandy had a free wife who lived about four miles from Mr. Covey's; and as it was Saturday, he was on his way to see her. I told him my situation, and he very kindly invited me to go home with him. I went home with him, talked the whole matter over, and got his advice about the best course for me to take. I found Sandy an experienced adviser. He told me, with great solemnity, that I must go back to Covey; but that before I went, I must go with him into another part of the woods, where there was a certain *root*. If I would take some of it with me, carrying it *always on my right side*, it would make it impossible for Mr. Covey, or any other white man, to whip me. He said he had carried it for years;

8 Salts: Epsom salts, a purgative then commonly given as an all-purpose remedy.

and since he had done so, he had never received a blow, and never expected to while he carried it. At first I rejected the idea that simply carrying a root in my pocket would have any such effect as he said, and was not inclined to take it; but Sandy urged its necessity with great earnestness, telling me it could do no harm, if it did no good. To please him, I finally took the root and, as he directed, carried it on my right side. This was Sunday morning. I immediately set out for home; and as I came in through the yard gate, out came Mr. Covey on his way to meeting. He spoke to me very kindly, told me to drive the pigs out of a lot nearby, and went on toward the church. Now, this strange conduct of Mr.[9] Covey really made me begin to think that there was something in the *root* Sandy had given me; and had it been any other day than Sunday, I could have attributed his conduct to no other cause than the influence of that root; and as it was, I was half inclined to think the *root* was something more than I had at first taken it to be. All went well until Monday morning. That morning the power of the root was fully tested. Long before daylight, I was called to go and rub down, curry, and feed the horses. I obeyed, and was glad to obey. But while I was doing this—while in the act of throwing down some corn blades from the loft—Mr. Covey came into the stable with a long rope; and just as I was half out of the loft, he caught hold of my legs and was about to tie me. As soon as I saw what he was up to, I gave a sudden spring, and as I did so, with him holding on to my legs, I was brought sprawling onto the stable floor. Mr. Covey seemed now to think he had me and could do as he pleased; but at this moment—where the spirit came from I don't know—I resolved to fight; and, suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose. He held on to me, and I to him. My resistance was so entirely unexpected that Covey seemed completely taken aback. He trembled like a leaf. This gave me confidence, and I kept him uneasy, making the blood run where I touched him with the ends of my fingers. Mr. Covey soon called out to Hughes for help. Hughes came and, while

9 Meeting: the Sunday church service.

Covey held me, tried to tie my right hand. While he was doing this, I watched my chance and gave him a heavy kick just under the ribs. This kick fairly sickened Hughes, so that he left me in Mr. Covey's hands. The kick had the effect of weakening not only Hughes but Covey too. When he saw Hughes doubled over in pain, his courage failed. He asked me if I meant to keep up my resistance. I told him I did, come what might; that he had treated me like a brute for six months, and that I was determined to be treated so no longer. With that, he tried to drag me to a stick that was lying just outside the stable door. He meant to knock me down. But just as he was leaning over to get the stick, I seized him by the collar with both hands and, with a sudden jerk, brought him to the ground. By this time Bill had come. Covey called on him for help. Bill wanted to know what he could do. Covey said, "Take hold of him, take hold of him!" Bill said his master had hired him out to work, not to help whip me; so he left Covey and me to fight our own battle out. We were at it for nearly two hours. Covey finally let me go, puffing and blowing hard, and saying that if I had not resisted, he would not have whipped me half so much. The truth was that he had not whipped me at all. I considered that he had got entirely the worst of the bargain; for he had drawn no blood from me, but I had from him. In all the six months afterward that I spent with Mr. Covey, he never laid so much as a finger on me in anger. He would occasionally say that he didn't want to get hold of me again. "No," I thought, "you need not; for you will come off worse than you did before."

10.12 This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few dying embers of freedom, and revived in me a sense of my own manhood. It brought back my lost self-confidence, and inspired me once again with a determination to be free. The satisfaction of that triumph was full compensation for whatever else might follow, even death itself. Only he who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery can understand the deep satisfaction I felt. I felt as I had never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the

tomb of slavery to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose; cowardice departed; bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known about me that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping me must also succeed in killing me.

10.13 From this time on I was never again what could fairly be called whipped, though I remained a slave for four years afterward. I had several fights, but was never whipped.

10.14 For a long time I was puzzled as to why Mr. Covey did not immediately have me taken by the constable to the whipping post, and there formally whipped for the crime of raising my hand against a white man in my own defense. And the only explanation I can think of now does not entirely satisfy me; but such as it is, I will give it. Mr. Covey enjoyed a boundless reputation as a first-rate overseer and slave-breaker. It was of considerable importance to him. That reputation was at stake; and had he sent me—a boy about sixteen years old—to the public whipping post, his reputation would have been lost; so, to save his reputation, he let me go unpunished.

THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS

Douglass explains how the holiday week and its drinking help slaveholders keep slaves submissive.

10.15 My term of actual service to Mr. Edward Covey ended on Christmas Day, 1833. The days between Christmas and New Year's Day are allowed as holidays, so we were not required to do any work beyond feeding and caring for the livestock. We regarded this time as our own, by the grace of our masters, and so we used or abused it nearly as we pleased. Those of us who had families at a distance were generally allowed to spend the whole six days with them. This time, however, was spent in various ways. The steady, sober, thoughtful, and industrious among us would occupy themselves making corn-brooms, mats, horse-

collars, and baskets, and another group of us would spend the time hunting opossums, hares, and raccoons. But by far the larger part engaged in such sports and merriment as playing ball, wrestling, running foot-races, fiddling, dancing, and drinking whiskey. This last way of spending the time was by far the most agreeable to the feelings of our masters. A slave who would work during the holidays was considered by our masters as hardly deserving them. He was regarded as one who rejected his master's favor. It was considered a disgrace not to get drunk at Christmas. A man was regarded as lazy indeed if he had not provided himself, during the year, with the means to get enough whiskey to last him through Christmas.

10.16 From what I know of the effect of these holidays on the slave, I believe them to be among the most effective means the slaveholder has for keeping down the spirit of insurrection. If the slaveholders were to abandon this practice all at once, I have not the slightest doubt that it would lead to an immediate insurrection among the slaves. These holidays serve as conductors, or safety-valves, to carry off the rebellious spirit of enslaved humanity. Without them, the slave would be driven to the wildest desperation. And woe to the slaveholder on the day he ventures to remove or obstruct the working of those conductors! I warn him that, in that event, a spirit will go forth among them more to be dreaded than the most appalling earthquake.

10.17 The holidays are part and parcel of the gross fraud, wrong, and inhumanity of slavery. They are supposedly a custom established by the benevolence of the slaveholders, but I venture to say that it is the result of selfishness, and one of the grossest frauds committed upon the downtrodden slave. They do not give the slaves this time because they would not like to have their work while it lasts, but because they know it would be unsafe to deprive them of it. This can be seen from the fact that the slaveholders like to have their slaves spend those days in just such a way as to make them as glad when the holidays end as when they begin. Their object seems to be to disgust their slaves with freedom by plunging them into the lowest depths of

dissipation. For instance, the slaveholders not only like to see the slave drink of his own accord, but will adopt various schemes to make him drunk. One scheme is to make bets on their slaves as to who can drink the most whiskey without getting drunk, and in this way they succeed in getting whole crowds to drink to excess. Thus, when the slave asks for virtuous freedom, the cunning slaveholder, knowing his ignorance, cheats him with a dose of vicious dissipation, artfully labeled with the name of liberty. Most of us used to drink it down, and the result was just what might be expected: many of us were led to think that there was little to choose between liberty and slavery. We felt, and quite rightly too, that we might almost as well be slaves to man as to rum. So, when the holidays ended, we staggered up out of the filth we had wallowed in, took a long breath, and marched to the field—feeling, on the whole, rather glad to go from what our master had deceived us into believing was freedom, back to the arms of slavery.

10.18 I have said that this mode of treatment is part of the whole system of fraud and inhumanity of slavery. It is. The method adopted here to disgust the slave with freedom, by allowing him to see only the abuse of it, is carried out in other things. For instance, a slave loves molasses, and he steals some. His master, in many cases, goes off to town and buys a large quantity. He returns, takes his whip, and orders the slave to eat the molasses until the poor fellow is made sick at the very mention of it. The same method is sometimes used to make the slaves refrain from asking for more food than their regular allowance. A slave runs through his allowance and asks for more. His master is enraged at him. But, not willing to send him off without food, he gives him more than is necessary and forces him to eat it within a set time. Then, if the slave complains that he cannot eat it, he is said to be satisfied neither full nor fasting, and is whipped for being hard to please! I have plenty of such illustrations of the same principle, drawn from my own observation, but I think the cases I have cited are enough. The practice is a very common one.

AT WILLIAM FREELAND'S

His new master is fairer; Douglass condemns religious slaveholders such as the Rev. Rigby Hopkins.

10.19 On the first of January, 1834, I left Mr. Covey and went to live with Mr. William Freeland, who lived about three miles from St. Michael's. I soon found Mr. Freeland a very different man from Mr. Covey. Though not rich, he was what would be called an educated Southern gentleman. Mr. Covey, as I have shown, was a well-trained slave-breaker and slave-driver. The former (slaveholder though he was) seemed to have some regard for honor, some reverence for justice, and some respect for humanity. The latter seemed totally insensible to all such feelings. Mr. Freeland had many of the faults peculiar to slaveholders, such as being very quick-tempered and fretful. But I must do him the justice of saying that he was remarkably free from those degrading vices to which Mr. Covey was constantly addicted. The one was open and frank, and we always knew where we stood with him. The other was a most artful deceiver, and could be understood only by those skillful enough to detect his cunningly devised frauds. Another advantage I gained in my new master was that he made no pretension to, or profession of, religion; and this, in my opinion, was truly a great advantage. I assert most unhesitatingly that the religion of the South is a mere cover for the most horrid crimes—a justifier of the most appalling barbarity—a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds—and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. If I were again reduced to the chains of slavery, I would regard being the slave of a religious master as the greatest calamity that could befall me, next to that enslavement itself. For of all the slaveholders I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have always found them the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all.[10] It

10 In the Appendix Douglass explains that he means "the slaveholding religion of this land," which he distinguishes from "the Christianity of Christ."

was my unhappy lot not only to belong to a religious slaveholder, but to live in a community of such religionists. Very near Mr. Freeland lived the Rev. Daniel Weeden, and in the same neighborhood lived the Rev. Rigby Hopkins. These were members and ministers in the Reformed Methodist Church. Mr. Weeden owned, among others, a woman slave whose name I have forgotten. This woman's back was kept literally raw for weeks, made so by the lash of this merciless, *religious* wretch. He used to hire hands. His maxim was: Behave well or behave badly, it is the duty of a master occasionally to whip a slave, to remind him of his master's authority. Such was his theory, and such his practice.

10.20 Mr. Hopkins was even worse than Mr. Weeden. His chief boast was his ability to manage slaves. The distinctive feature of his rule was whipping slaves in advance of their deserving it. He always contrived to have one or more of his slaves to whip every Monday morning. He did this to work on their fears and strike terror into those who escaped. His plan was to whip for the smallest offenses, to prevent the commission of large ones. Mr. Hopkins could always find some excuse for whipping a slave. It would astonish anyone unaccustomed to slaveholding life to see with what wonderful ease a slaveholder can find things to make into an occasion for whipping a slave. A mere look, word, or motion—a mistake, an accident, or a lack of strength—are all matters for which a slave may be whipped at any time. Does a slave look dissatisfied? It is said that he has the devil in him, and it must be whipped out. Does he speak loudly when spoken to by his master? Then he is getting high-minded and should be taken down a peg. Does he forget to take off his hat when a white person approaches? Then he is lacking in reverence, and should be whipped for it. Does he ever venture to defend his conduct when he is censured for it? Then he is guilty of impudence—one of the greatest crimes a slave can be guilty of. Does he ever venture to suggest a different way of doing things from the one his master pointed out? He is presumptuous indeed, and getting above himself, and nothing less than a flogging will do for him. Does he,

while plowing, break a plow—or, while hoeing, break a hoe? It is owing to his carelessness, and for that a slave must always be whipped. Mr. Hopkins could always find something of this sort to justify the use of the lash, and he seldom failed to seize such opportunities. There was not a man in the whole county whom the slaves who had the choosing of their own home would not prefer to live with, rather than with this Rev. Mr. Hopkins. And yet there was not a man anywhere around who made higher professions of religion, or was more active in revivals—more attentive to the class, love-feast, prayer, and preaching meetings, or more devout in his family—who prayed earlier, later, louder, and longer—than this same reverend slave-driver, Rigby Hopkins.[11]

10.21 But to return to Mr. Freeland, and to my experience while in his employment. He, like Mr. Covey, gave us enough to eat. But, unlike Mr. Covey, he also gave us enough time to eat our meals. He worked us hard, but always between sunrise and sunset. He required a good deal of work to be done, but gave us good tools to work with. His farm was large, but he employed enough hands to work it, and to work it with ease, compared with many of his neighbors. My treatment while in his employment was heavenly compared with what I experienced at the hands of Mr. Edward Covey.

A SECRET SABBATH SCHOOL

Douglass teaches fellow slaves to read on Sundays at the house of a free Black man.

10.22 Mr. Freeland himself owned only two slaves. Their names were Henry Harris and John Harris. The rest of his hands he

11 Class meetings and love-feasts were regular gatherings of Methodist congregations for fellowship, testimony, and prayer.

hired. These were myself, Sandy Jenkins,[12] and Handy Caldwell. Henry and John were quite intelligent, and very shortly after I went there I succeeded in creating in them a strong desire to learn to read. This desire soon sprang up in the others as well. They very soon scraped together some old spelling-books, and nothing would do but that I must keep a Sabbath school. I agreed to do so, and accordingly devoted my Sundays to teaching these beloved fellow slaves of mine how to read. Not one of them knew his letters when I went there. Some of the slaves on the neighboring farms found out what was going on, and they also took advantage of this little opportunity to learn to read. It was understood among all who came that there must be as little show about it as possible. It was necessary to keep our religious masters at St. Michael's from learning that, instead of spending the Sabbath wrestling, boxing, and drinking whiskey, we were trying to learn how to read the will of God. They would much rather see us engaged in those degrading sports than see us behaving like intellectual, moral, and accountable beings. My blood boils as I think of the bloody manner in which Messrs. Wright Fairbanks and Garrison West, both class leaders, along with many others, rushed in upon us with sticks and stones and broke up our virtuous little Sabbath school at St. Michael's—all of them calling themselves Christians! humble followers of the Lord Jesus Christ! But I am digressing again.[13]

10.23 I held my Sabbath school at the house of a free Black man whose name I think it unwise to mention. If it were known, it might cause him great trouble, even though the crime of hold-

12 DOUGLASS'S NOTE. This is the same man who gave me the roots to keep me from being whipped by Mr. Covey. He was "a clever soul." We often used to talk about the fight with Covey, and every time we did, he would claim my success as the result of the roots he had given me. This superstition is very common among the more ignorant slaves. A slave seldom dies without his death being attributed to trickery.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. In nineteenth-century American usage "clever" often meant good-natured or kindly. "Trickery" here means conjuring, the casting of spells.

13 This refers to the earlier Sabbath school in St. Michael's, broken up while Douglass lived with Thomas Auld (ch. 9).

ing the school was committed ten years ago. At one time I had over forty pupils, and of the right sort, eager to learn. They were of all ages, though mostly men and women. I look back on those Sundays with more pleasure than I can express. They were great days for my soul. The work of teaching my dear fellow slaves was the sweetest occupation with which I was ever blessed. We loved each other, and leaving them at the close of the Sabbath was a heavy cross indeed. When I think that these precious souls are today shut up in the prison-house of slavery, my feelings overcome me, and I am almost ready to ask, "Does a righteous God govern the universe? And for what does he hold the thunders in his right hand, if not to strike the oppressor, and deliver the robbed out of the hand of the robber?" These dear souls did not come to Sabbath school because it was popular to do so, nor did I teach them because it was respectable to be so engaged.[14] Every moment they spent in that school, they were liable to be seized and given thirty-nine lashes. They came because they wanted to learn. Their minds had been starved by their cruel masters. They had been shut up in mental darkness. I taught them because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like bettering the condition of my race. I kept up my school nearly the whole year I lived with Mr. Freeland. Besides my Sabbath school, I devoted three evenings a week, during the winter, to teaching the slaves at home.[15] And I have the happiness of knowing that several of those who came to Sabbath school learned to read, and that one, at least, is now free through my agency.

10.24 The year passed smoothly. It seemed only about half as long as the year before it. I went through it without receiving a single blow. I will give Mr. Freeland the credit of being the best master I ever had, *until I became my own master*. For the ease with which I got through the year, however, I was somewhat

14 The closing words echo Jeremiah 21:12 and 22:3, "deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor."

15 Thirty-nine lashes was a customary legal maximum in many slave codes, echoing the biblical limit of forty stripes.

indebted to the company of my fellow slaves. They were noble souls; they had not only loving hearts, but brave ones. We were linked and interlinked with each other. I loved them with a love stronger than anything I have experienced since. It is sometimes said that we slaves do not love and trust each other. In answer to this claim, I can say that I never loved or trusted any people more than my fellow slaves, and especially those with whom I lived at Mr. Freeland's. I believe we would have died for each other. We never undertook to do anything of any importance without consulting one another. We never moved separately. We were one; and we were so as much by our tempers and dispositions as by the shared hardships to which our condition as slaves necessarily subjected us.

THE ESCAPE PLAN

Douglass and five companions plan to escape by canoe up the Chesapeake at Easter, 1835.

10.25 At the close of the year 1834, Mr. Freeland again hired me from my master, for the year 1835. But by this time I began to want to live *upon free land* as well as *with Freeland;* and so I was no longer content to live with him or any other slaveholder. At the beginning of the year I began to prepare myself for a final struggle, which would decide my fate one way or the other. My tendency was upward. I was fast approaching manhood, and year after year had passed, and I was still a slave. These thoughts roused me—I must do something. I therefore resolved that 1835 should not pass without witnessing an attempt, on my part, to secure my liberty. But I was not willing to cherish this resolution alone. My fellow slaves were dear to me. I was anxious to have them share with me in this, my life-giving resolution. So, though with great caution, I began early to find out their views and feelings about their condition, and to fill their minds with thoughts of freedom. I set myself to devising ways and means for our escape, and meanwhile tried, on every suitable occasion, to impress on them the gross fraud and inhumanity of slavery. I

went first to Henry, next to John, then to the others. I found warm hearts and noble spirits in them all. They were ready to listen, and ready to act whenever a workable plan should be proposed. This was what I wanted. I talked to them of how lacking in manhood we would be if we submitted to our enslavement without at least one noble effort to be free. We met often, consulted frequently, told our hopes and fears, and went over the difficulties, real and imagined, that we would be called on to meet. At times we were almost inclined to give up and try to content ourselves with our wretched lot; at others, we were firm and unbending in our determination to go. Whenever we suggested any plan, there was shrinking—the odds were fearful. Our path was beset with the greatest obstacles; and if we succeeded in reaching the end of it, our right to be free was still questionable—we were still liable to be returned to bondage. We could see no spot, on this side of the ocean, where we could be free. We knew nothing about Canada. Our knowledge of the North extended no farther than New York; and to go there, and be forever harassed by the frightful liability of being returned to slavery—with the certainty of being treated ten times worse than before—the thought was truly a horrible one, and one that was not easy to overcome. The case sometimes stood like this: at every gate we had to pass through, we saw a watchman—at every ferry a guard—on every bridge a sentinel—and in every wood a patrol. We were hemmed in on every side. Here were the difficulties, real or imagined—the good to be sought, and the evil to be shunned. On the one hand there stood slavery, a stern reality, glaring frightfully at us,— its robes already crimsoned with the blood of millions, and even now feasting greedily on our own flesh. On the other hand, far back in the dim distance, under the flickering light of the North Star, behind some craggy hill or snow-covered mountain, stood a doubtful freedom—half frozen—beckoning us to come and share its hospitality. This in itself was sometimes enough to stagger us; but when we let ourselves survey the road, we were often appalled. On either side we saw grim death, taking the most horrid shapes. Now it

was starvation, causing us to eat our own flesh;—now we were struggling with the waves, and were drowned;—now we were overtaken, and torn to pieces by the fangs of the terrible blood-hound. We were stung by scorpions, chased by wild beasts, bitten by snakes, and finally, after having nearly reached the desired spot,—after swimming rivers, encountering wild beasts, sleeping in the woods, suffering hunger and nakedness,—we were overtaken by our pursuers, and, in resisting, we were shot dead on the spot! I say, this picture sometimes appalled us, and made us

10.26 "rather bear those ills we had, / Than fly to others that we knew not of."[16]

10.27 In coming to a fixed determination to run away, we did more than Patrick Henry when he resolved upon liberty or death. With us it was a doubtful liberty at most, and almost certain death if we failed. For my part, I would prefer death to hopeless bondage.[17]

10.28 Sandy, one of our number, gave up the idea, but still encouraged us. Our company then consisted of Henry Harris, John Harris, Henry Bailey, Charles Roberts, and myself. Henry Bailey was my uncle, and belonged to my master. Charles married my aunt; he belonged to my master's father-in-law, Mr. William Hamilton.

10.29 The plan we finally settled on was to take a large canoe belonging to Mr. Hamilton, and on the Saturday night before the Easter holidays, paddle straight up the Chesapeake Bay. On arriving at the head of the bay, seventy or eighty miles from where we lived, we meant to turn our canoe adrift and follow the guidance of the North Star until we got beyond the limits of Maryland. Our reason for taking the water route was that we were less likely to be suspected as runaways; we hoped to be taken for fishermen; whereas, if we took the land route, we

16 Adapted from Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 1).

17 Patrick Henry, the Virginia patriot, is remembered for the words "Give me liberty, or give me death!" in a speech of 1775.

would be subjected to interruptions of almost every kind. Anyone with a white face, who was so inclined, could stop us and subject us to examination.

10.30 The week before our intended start, I wrote several protections, one for each of us. As well as I can remember, they read as follows:—[18]

10.31 "This is to certify that I, the undersigned, have given the bearer, my servant, full liberty to go to Baltimore and spend the Easter holidays. Written in my own hand, etc., 1835. "William Hamilton, "Near St. Michael's, in Talbot County, Maryland."

10.32 We were not going to Baltimore; but in going up the bay we were heading toward Baltimore, and these protections were only meant to protect us while we were on the bay.

10.33 As the time for our departure drew near, our anxiety became more and more intense. It was truly a matter of life and death for us. The strength of our determination was about to be fully tested. At this time I was very active in explaining every difficulty, removing every doubt, dispelling every fear, and inspiring all with the firmness indispensable to the success of our undertaking; assuring them that half was gained the instant we made the move; we had talked long enough; we were now ready to move; if not now, we never would be; and if we did not intend to move now, we might as well fold our arms, sit down, and acknowledge ourselves fit only to be slaves. This none of us was prepared to acknowledge. Every man stood firm; and at our last meeting we pledged ourselves afresh, in the most solemn manner, that at the appointed time we would certainly set out in pursuit of freedom. This was in the middle of the week, at the end of which we were to be off. We went, as usual, to our various fields of work, but with hearts deeply agitated by thoughts of our truly hazardous undertaking. We tried to conceal our feelings as much as possible; and I think we succeeded very well.

18 "Protections" were written passes from a slaveholder permitting an enslaved person to travel.

BETRAYED

The plan is betrayed; the men are seized and jailed, and Douglass is sent back to Baltimore.

10.34 After a painful wait, the Saturday morning came whose night was to witness our departure. I greeted it with joy, whatever sadness it might bring. Friday night was a sleepless one for me. I probably felt more anxious than the rest, because I was, by common consent, at the head of the whole affair. The responsibility for success or failure lay heavily on me. The glory of the one, and the shame of the other, were alike mine. The first two hours of that morning were such as I had never experienced before, and hope never to again. Early in the morning we went, as usual, to the field. We were spreading manure; and all at once, while we were at it, I was overwhelmed with an indescribable feeling, in the fullness of which I turned to Sandy, who was nearby, and said, "We are betrayed!" "Well," he said, "that thought has just this moment struck me." We said no more. I was never more certain of anything.

10.35 The horn was blown as usual, and we went up from the field to the house for breakfast. I went for the sake of form, more than for want of anything to eat that morning. Just as I got to the house, looking out at the lane gate, I saw four white men, with two Black men. The white men were on horseback, and the Black men were walking behind, as if tied. I watched them for a few moments until they reached our lane gate. Here they halted, and tied the Black men to the gatepost. I was not yet certain what the matter was. In a few moments, in rode Mr. Hamilton, at a speed that showed great excitement. He came to the door and asked if Master William was in. He was told he was at the barn. Mr. Hamilton, without dismounting, rode up to the barn at extraordinary speed. In a few moments he and Mr. Freeland returned to the house. By this time the three constables had ridden up, and in great haste dismounted, tied their horses, and met Master William and Mr. Hamilton coming back from the

barn; and after talking awhile, they all walked up to the kitchen door. There was no one in the kitchen but John and me. Henry and Sandy were up at the barn. Mr. Freeland put his head in at the door and called me by name, saying there were some gentlemen at the door who wished to see me. I stepped to the door and asked what they wanted. They at once seized me and, without giving me any explanation, tied me—lashing my hands tightly together. I insisted on knowing what the matter was. At length they said that they had learned I had been in a "scrape," and that I was to be examined before my master; and if their information proved false, I would not be hurt.

10.36 In a few moments they succeeded in tying John. They then turned to Henry, who had by this time come back, and ordered him to cross his hands. "I won't!" said Henry, in a firm tone that showed his readiness to meet the consequences of his refusal. "Won't you?" said Tom Graham, the constable. "No, I won't!" said Henry, in a still stronger tone. At this, two of the constables pulled out their shining pistols and swore by their Creator that they would make him cross his hands or kill him. Each cocked his pistol and, with his finger on the trigger, walked up to Henry, saying at the same time that if he did not cross his hands, they would blow his damned heart out. "Shoot me, shoot me!" said Henry; "you can't kill me but once. Shoot, shoot,—and be damned! *I won't be tied!*" This he said in a tone of loud defiance; and at the same moment, with a motion quick as lightning, he dashed the pistols from the hand of each constable with one single stroke. As he did this, everyone fell on him, and after beating him for some time, they finally overpowered him and got him tied.

10.37 During the scuffle I managed, I don't know how, to get my pass out and, without being discovered, put it into the fire. We were all tied now; and just as we were about to leave for Easton jail, Betsy Freeland, mother of William Freeland, came to the door with her hands full of biscuits, and divided them between Henry and John. She then delivered herself of a speech to the following effect—addressing herself to me, she said, "*You devil!*

You wretch! it was you that put it into the heads of Henry and John to run away. But for you, you long-legged mixed-race devil! [19] Henry nor John would never have thought of such a thing." I made no reply, and was immediately hurried off toward St. Michael's. Just a moment before the scuffle with Henry, Mr. Hamilton had suggested that it would be proper to search for the protections which he understood Frederick had written for himself and the rest. But just as he was about to carry out his proposal, his help was needed in tying Henry; and the excitement of the scuffle caused them either to forget, or to judge it unsafe under the circumstances, to search. So we were not yet convicted of the intention to run away.

10.38 When we were about halfway to St. Michael's, while the constables in charge of us were looking ahead, Henry asked me what he should do with his pass. I told him to eat it with his biscuit, and own nothing; and we passed the word around, "*Own nothing;*" and "*Own nothing!*" we all said. Our confidence in each other was unshaken. We were resolved to succeed or fail together, after the calamity had befallen us as much as before. We were now prepared for anything. We were to be dragged fifteen miles behind horses that morning, and then placed in the Easton jail. When we reached St. Michael's, we underwent a sort of examination.[20] We all denied that we had ever intended to run away. We did this more to bring out the evidence against us than from any hope of escaping being sold; for, as I have said, we were ready for that. The fact was, we cared little where we went, so long as we went together. Our greatest concern was separation. We dreaded that more than anything this side of death. We found that the evidence against us was the testimony of one person; our master would not tell who it was; but we came to a unanimous decision among ourselves as to who their informant was. We were sent off to the jail at Easton. When we got there, we were handed over to the sheriff, Mr. Joseph Graham, and placed in jail by him. Henry, John, and I were put in one room

19 Easton was the county seat of Talbot County, Maryland.
20 "Own nothing" means "admit nothing."

together—Charles and Henry Bailey in another. Their object in separating us was to prevent our acting in concert.

10.39 We had been in jail scarcely twenty minutes when a swarm of slave traders, and agents for slave traders, flocked into the jail to look at us and to find out whether we were for sale. I had never seen such a set of beings before! I felt surrounded by so many fiends from hell. A band of pirates never looked more like their father, the devil. They laughed and grinned over us, saying, "Ah, my boys! We've got you, haven't we?" And after taunting us in various ways, they went one by one into an examination of us, intending to find out our value. They would impudently ask us whether we wouldn't like to have them for our masters. We would give them no answer, and leave them to find out as best they could. Then they would curse and swear at us, telling us that they could take the devil out of us in very little time, if only we were in their hands.

10.40 While in jail, we found ourselves in much more comfortable quarters than we had expected when we went there. We did not get much to eat, nor was what we got very good; but we had a good clean room, from whose windows we could see what was going on in the street, which was very much better than if we had been put in one of the dark, damp cells. On the whole, we got along very well, so far as the jail and its keeper were concerned. Immediately after the holidays were over, contrary to all our expectations, Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Freeland came up to Easton, took Charles, the two Henrys, and John out of jail, and carried them home, leaving me alone. I regarded this separation as final. It caused me more pain than anything else in the whole affair. I was ready for anything rather than separation. I supposed that they had consulted together and decided that, since I was the whole cause of the others' intention to run away, it was hard to make the innocent suffer with the guilty; and that they had therefore concluded to take the others home and sell me, as a warning to the others who remained. It is due to the noble Henry to say that he seemed almost as reluctant to leave the prison as he had been to leave home to come to the prison. But

we knew we would in all probability be separated if we were sold; and since he was in their hands, he concluded to go home peaceably.

10.41 I was now left to my fate. I was all alone, within the walls of a stone prison. Only a few days before, I had been full of hope. I had expected to be safe in a land of freedom; but now I was covered in gloom, sunk to the depths of despair. I thought the possibility of freedom was gone. I was kept this way for about a week, at the end of which Captain Auld, my master, to my surprise and utter astonishment, came up and took me out, intending to send me, with a gentleman he knew, into Alabama. But, for some reason or other, he did not send me to Alabama, but decided to send me back to Baltimore, to live again with his brother Hugh and to learn a trade.

10.42 Thus, after an absence of three years and one month, I was once more allowed to return to my old home in Baltimore. My master sent me away because there was a very great prejudice against me in the community, and he feared I might be killed.

THE BALTIMORE SHIPYARDS

White apprentices attack him at Gardner's shipyard; he then learns caulking and must hand his wages to Master Hugh.

10.43 A few weeks after I went to Baltimore, Master Hugh hired me out to Mr. William Gardner, a large-scale shipbuilder on Fell's Point. I was put there to learn how to caulk. It proved, however, a very unfavorable place for accomplishing this. That spring Mr. Gardner was engaged in building two large man-of-war brigs, supposedly for the Mexican government. The vessels were to be launched in July of that year, and if they were not, Mr. Gardner would lose a considerable sum;[21] so that when I arrived, everything was in a hurry. There was no time to learn anything. Every man had to do what he already knew how to do. On enter-

21 Caulking meant driving oakum or other fiber into the seams of a wooden hull and sealing them with pitch to make it watertight.

ing the shipyard, my orders from Mr. Gardner were to do whatever the carpenters told me to do. This put me at the beck and call of about seventy-five men. I was to regard all of them as masters. Their word was to be my law. My situation was an extremely trying one. At times I needed a dozen pairs of hands. I was called a dozen ways in the space of a single minute. Three or four voices would strike my ear at the same moment. It was —"Fred, come help me cant this timber here."—"Fred, come carry this timber over there."—"Fred, bring that roller here."—"Fred, go get a fresh can of water."—"Fred, come help saw off the end of this timber."—"Fred, go quick and get the crowbar."—"Fred, hold on to the end of this fall."—"Fred, go to the blacksmith's shop and get a new punch."—"Hurrah, Fred! Run and bring me a cold chisel."—[22] "I say, Fred, lend a hand, and get a fire going as quick as lightning under that steam-box."—"Hey, Black man! Come turn this grindstone."—"Come, come! Move, move! And haul this timber forward."—"I say, Black man, blast your eyes, why don't you heat up some pitch?"—"Hey! Hey! Hey!" (Three voices at the same time.) "Come here!—Go there!—Stay where you are! Damn you, if you move, I'll knock your brains out!"

10.44 This was my school for eight months; and I might have stayed there longer, but for a most horrible fight I had with four of the white apprentices, in which my left eye was nearly knocked out and I was horribly mangled in other ways. The facts of the case were these: until a very short while after I went there, white and Black ship carpenters worked side by side, and no one seemed to see anything improper in it. All hands seemed to be quite satisfied. Many of the Black carpenters were free men. Things seemed to be going along very well. All at once the white carpenters walked off the job and said they would not work with free Black workmen. Their alleged reason was that if free Black carpenters were encouraged, they would soon take the trade into their own hands, and poor white men would be

22 Shipyard terms: to "cant" a timber is to tip it onto its side; a "fall" is the hauling rope of a hoisting tackle.

thrown out of work. They therefore felt called upon to put a stop to it at once. And, taking advantage of Mr. Gardner's urgent needs, they quit, swearing they would work no longer unless he discharged his Black carpenters. Now, though this did not apply to me in form, it did reach me in fact. My fellow apprentices very soon began to feel it degrading to work with me. They began to put on airs and talk about the "Black people" taking over the country, saying we all ought to be killed; and, encouraged by the journeymen, they set about making my condition as hard as they could, bullying me around and sometimes striking me. I, of course, kept the vow I had made after the fight with Mr. Covey, and struck back, regardless of the consequences; and as long as I kept them from combining, I did very well; for I could beat every one of them, taken separately. At length, however, they combined and came at me, armed with sticks, stones, and heavy handspikes. One came at me from the front with half a brick. There was one on each side of me, and one behind me. While I was dealing with those in front and on either side, the one behind ran up with the handspike and struck me a heavy blow on the head. It stunned me. I fell, and at this they all ran at me and fell to beating me with their fists. I let them lay on for a while, gathering strength. In an instant I gave a sudden surge and rose to my hands and knees. Just as I did, one of them gave me a powerful kick in the left eye with his heavy boot. My eyeball seemed to have burst. When they saw my eye closed and badly swollen, they left me. At this I seized the handspike and chased them for a time. But here the carpenters intervened, and I thought I might as well give it up. It was impossible to hold my own against so many. All this took place in sight of no fewer than fifty white ship carpenters, and not one put in a friendly word; but some cried, "Kill the damned Black man! Kill him! Kill him! He struck a white person." I found my only chance for life was in flight. I managed to get away without another blow, and only barely; for to strike a white man is death by lynch law—and that was the law in Mr. Gardner's shipyard; nor is there much of any other law outside Mr. Gardner's shipyard.

10.45 I went straight home and told the story of my wrongs to Master Hugh; and I am happy to say of him, irreligious as he was, that his conduct was heavenly compared with that of his brother Thomas in similar circumstances. He listened attentively to my account of the circumstances leading up to the brutal outrage, and gave many proofs of his strong indignation at it. The heart of my once overkind mistress was again melted into pity. My puffed-up eye and blood-covered face moved her to tears. She took a chair beside me, washed the blood from my face, and, with a mother's tenderness, bandaged my head, covering the wounded eye with a lean piece of fresh beef. It was almost compensation for my suffering to see, once more, a display of kindness from this once affectionate old mistress of mine. Master Hugh was very much enraged. He gave vent to his feelings by pouring curses on the heads of those who had done the deed. As soon as I had recovered a little from my bruises, he took me with him to Esquire Watson's on Bond Street, to see what could be done about the matter. Mr. Watson asked who had seen the assault committed. Master Hugh told him it was done in Mr. Gardner's shipyard at midday, where a large company of men were at work. "As to that," he said, "the deed was done, and there was no question as to who did it." His answer was that he could do nothing in the case unless some white man would come forward and testify. He could issue no warrant on my word. If I had been killed in the presence of a thousand Black people, their combined testimony would not have been enough to arrest a single one of the murderers. Master Hugh, for once, was forced to say that this state of things was too bad. Of course, it was impossible to get any white man to volunteer his testimony on my behalf and against the white young men. Even those who may have sympathized with me were not prepared to do this. It required a degree of courage unknown to them; for just at that time the slightest show of humanity toward a Black person was denounced as abolitionism, and that name exposed its bearer to frightful dangers. The watchwords of the bloody-minded in that region, in those days, were "Damn the abolition-

ists!" and "Damn the Black people!" Nothing was done, and probably nothing would have been done if I had been killed. Such was, and such remains, the state of things in the Christian city of Baltimore.

10.46 Master Hugh, finding he could get no redress, refused to let me go back to Mr. Gardner. He kept me himself, and his wife dressed my wound until I was restored to health. He then took me into the shipyard of which he was foreman, in the employment of Mr. Walter Price. There I was immediately set to caulking, and very soon learned the art of using my mallet and irons. Within one year of leaving Mr. Gardner's, I was able to command the highest wages paid to the most experienced caulkers. I was now of some importance to my master. I was bringing him six to seven dollars a week. I sometimes brought him nine dollars a week: my wages were a dollar and a half a day. After learning how to caulk, I found my own employment, made my own contracts, and collected the money I earned. My path became much smoother than before; my condition was now much more comfortable. When I could get no caulking to do, I did nothing. During these idle times, those old notions about freedom would steal over me again. When I was in Mr. Gardner's employment, I was kept in such a constant whirl of excitement that I could think of scarcely anything but my life; and in thinking of my life, I almost forgot my liberty. I have observed this in my experience of slavery—that whenever my condition was improved, instead of increasing my contentment, it only increased my desire to be free, and set me thinking of plans to gain my freedom. I have found that to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision and, as far as possible, to destroy the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be made to feel that slavery is right; and he can be brought to that only when he ceases to be a man.

10.47 I was now getting, as I have said, one dollar and fifty cents a day. I contracted for it; I earned it; it was paid to me; it was

rightfully my own; yet every Saturday night, as it came round, I was compelled to hand over every cent of that money to Master Hugh. And why? Not because he earned it—not because he had any hand in earning it—not because I owed it to him—nor because he had the slightest shadow of a right to it; but solely because he had the power to force me to give it up. The right of the grim-faced pirate on the high seas is exactly the same.

Chapter XI

His escape to New York in 1838; marriage; New Bedford; his first anti-slavery speech at Nantucket.

11.1 I now come to that part of my life during which I planned, and finally succeeded in making, my escape from slavery. But before narrating any of the particular circumstances, I think it proper to make known my intention not to state all the facts connected with the affair. My reasons for taking this course may be understood from the following. First, were I to give a detailed statement of all the facts, it is not only possible but quite probable that others would thereby be involved in the most serious difficulties. Secondly, such a statement would most undoubtedly lead slaveholders to greater vigilance than they have shown before; and this would, of course, be the means of guarding a door through which some dear brother bondman might escape his galling chains. I deeply regret the necessity that compels me to suppress anything of importance connected with my experience in slavery. It would give me great pleasure indeed, and would add materially to the interest of my narrative, if I were free to satisfy a curiosity, which I know exists in the minds of many, by an accurate statement of all the facts pertaining to my most fortunate escape. But I must deny myself this pleasure, and deny the curious the satisfaction that such a statement would give. I would allow myself to suffer under the worst accusations that evil-minded men might suggest, rather than clear myself, and thereby run the risk of closing the slightest avenue by which a brother slave might free himself from the chains and fetters of slavery.

11.2 I have never approved of the very public manner in which some of our western friends have conducted what they call the *underground railroad*, but which, I think, their open declarations have made most emphatically the *upperground railroad*. I honor those good men and women for their noble daring, and applaud them for willingly subjecting themselves to bloody persecution by openly avowing their part in the escape of slaves. I, however, can see very little good resulting from such a course, either to themselves or to the slaves escaping. On the other hand, I see, and am assured, that those open declarations are a positive evil to the slaves who remain and are seeking to escape.[1] They do nothing toward enlightening the slave, while they do much toward enlightening the master. They stimulate him to greater watchfulness, and increase his power to capture his slave. We owe something to the slave south of the line as well as to those north of it; and in aiding the latter on their way to freedom, we should be careful to do nothing that would be likely to hinder the former from escaping from slavery. I would keep the merciless slaveholder profoundly ignorant of the means of flight adopted by the slave. I would leave him to imagine himself surrounded by myriads of invisible tormentors, ever ready to snatch his trembling prey from his infernal grasp. Let him be left to feel his way in the dark; let darkness equal to his crime hover over him; and let him feel that at every step he takes in pursuit of the fleeing bondman, he runs the frightful risk of having his hot brains dashed out by an invisible agency. Let us give the tyrant no aid; let us not hold the light by which he can trace the footprints of our fleeing brother. But enough of this. I will now proceed to the statement of those facts connected with my escape for which I alone am responsible, and for which no one can be made to suffer but myself.

1 The Underground Railroad was the informal network of people, Black and white, who sheltered and guided fugitive slaves northward. Some of its organizers in the western free states spoke of their work openly.

HIRING HIS TIME

Douglass pays Master Hugh weekly for the right to find his own work, then loses the privilege.

11.3 In the early part of the year 1838, I became quite restless. I could see no reason why I should, at the end of each week, pour the reward of my toil into my master's purse. When I carried my weekly wages to him, he would count the money, look me in the face with a robber-like fierceness, and ask, "Is this all?" He was satisfied with nothing less than the last cent. He would, however, when I made him six dollars, sometimes give me six cents, to encourage me. It had the opposite effect. I regarded it as a sort of admission of my right to the whole. The fact that he gave me any part of my wages was proof, to my mind, that he believed me entitled to all of them. I always felt worse for having received anything, for I feared that giving me a few cents would ease his conscience and make him feel himself to be a pretty honorable sort of robber. My discontent grew upon me. I was always on the lookout for means of escape; and, finding no direct means, I determined to try to hire my time, with a view to getting money with which to make my escape. In the spring of 1838, when Master Thomas came to Baltimore to buy his spring goods, I got an opportunity, and asked him to allow me to hire my time. He refused my request without hesitation, and told me this was another scheme to escape. He told me I could go nowhere but he could get me; and that, in the event of my running away, he would spare no pains in his efforts to catch me. He urged me to content myself and be obedient. He told me that, if I would be happy, I must lay out no plans for the future. He said that if I behaved myself properly, he would take care of me. Indeed, he advised me to complete thoughtlessness about the future, and taught me to depend solely upon him for happiness. He seemed to see fully the pressing necessity of setting aside my intellectual nature in order to make me content in slavery. But in spite of him, and even in spite of myself, I continued to think,

and to think about the injustice of my enslavement and the means of escape.

11.4 About two months after this, I applied to Master Hugh for the privilege of hiring my time. He did not know that I had applied to Master Thomas and been refused. He too seemed inclined to refuse at first; but, after some reflection, he granted me the privilege and proposed the following terms. I was to be allowed all my time, make all contracts with those for whom I worked, and find my own employment. In return for this liberty, I was to pay him three dollars at the end of each week, and provide my own caulking tools, board, and clothing. My board was two dollars and a half per week. This, with the wear and tear on clothing and caulking tools, made my regular expenses about six dollars per week. This amount I was compelled to make up, or give up the privilege of hiring my time. Rain or shine, work or no work, at the end of each week the money must be forthcoming, or I must give up my privilege. This arrangement, it will be seen, was decidedly in my master's favor. It relieved him of all need of looking after me. His money was sure. He received all the benefits of slaveholding without its evils, while I endured all the evils of a slave and suffered all the care and anxiety of a free man. I found it a hard bargain. But, hard as it was, I thought it better than the old way of getting along. It was a step toward freedom to be allowed to bear the responsibilities of a free man, and I was determined to hold on to it. I bent myself to the work of making money. I was ready to work at night as well as by day, and by the most untiring perseverance and industry, I made enough to meet my expenses and lay up a little money every week. I went on this way from May till August. Master Hugh then refused to allow me to hire my time any longer. The ground for his refusal was my failure, one Saturday night, to pay him for my week's time. This failure was caused by my attending a camp meeting about ten miles from Baltimore. During the week, I had made an arrangement with a number of young friends to start from Baltimore for the camp ground early Saturday evening; and being detained by my

employer, I was unable to get down to Master Hugh's without disappointing the group. I knew that Master Hugh was in no special need of the money that night. I therefore decided to go to the camp meeting, and on my return pay him the three dollars. I stayed at the camp meeting one day longer than I had intended when I left. But as soon as I returned, I called on him to pay him what he considered his due. I found him very angry; he could scarcely restrain his wrath. He said he had a good mind to give me a severe whipping. He wanted to know how I dared go out of the city without asking his permission. I told him I hired my time, and while I paid him the price he asked for it, I did not know that I was bound to ask him when and where I should go. This reply troubled him; and, after reflecting a few moments, he turned to me and said I should hire my time no longer, for the next thing he would hear of, I would be running away. On the same plea, he told me to bring my tools and clothing home at once. I did so; but instead of looking for work, as I had been accustomed to do before hiring my time, I spent the whole week without doing a single stroke of work. I did this in retaliation. Saturday night, he called on me as usual for my week's wages. I told him I had no wages; I had done no work that week. Here we were on the point of coming to blows. He raved, and swore his determination to get hold of me. I did not allow myself a single word, but I was resolved that, if he laid the weight of his hand upon me, it should be blow for blow. He did not strike me, but told me that he would keep me in constant employment in the future. I thought the matter over during the next day, Sunday, and finally settled upon the third day of September as the day on which I would make a second attempt to secure my freedom. I now had three weeks in which to prepare for my journey. Early on Monday morning, before Master Hugh had time to make any arrangement for me, I went out and got employment with Mr. Butler, at his shipyard near the drawbridge, on what is called the City Block, thus making it unnecessary for him to look for employment for me. At the end of the week, I brought him between eight and nine dollars. He seemed very well pleased,

and asked why I had not done the same the week before. He little knew what my plans were. My object in working steadily was to remove any suspicion he might have of my intent to run away, and in this I succeeded admirably. I suppose he thought I was never better satisfied with my condition than at the very time when I was planning my escape. The second week passed, and again I carried him my full wages. He was so well pleased that he gave me twenty-five cents (quite a large sum for a slaveholder to give a slave), and told me to make good use of it. I told him I would.

THE ESCAPE

On September 3, 1838, Douglass escapes to New York, but he will not say how.

11.5 On the outside things went on very smoothly indeed, but within there was trouble. It is impossible for me to describe my feelings as the time of my planned departure drew near. I had a number of warmhearted friends in Baltimore—friends I loved almost as I did my life— and the thought of being separated from them forever was painful beyond expression. It is my opinion that thousands who now remain in slavery would escape from it, were it not for the strong cords of affection that bind them to their friends. The thought of leaving my friends was decidedly the most painful thought I had to contend with. My love for them was my tender point, and shook my decision more than all else. Besides the pain of separation, the dread and apprehension of failure exceeded what I had experienced at my first attempt. The appalling defeat I suffered then returned to torment me. I felt sure that, if I failed in this attempt, my case would be a hopeless one— it would seal my fate as a slave forever. I could not hope to get off with anything less than the severest punishment, and being placed beyond all means of escape. It required no very vivid imagination to picture the most frightful scenes through which I would have to pass if I failed. The wretchedness of slavery and the blessedness of freedom were perpetually

before me. It was life and death with me. But I remained firm, and, according to my resolution, on the third day of September, 1838, I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind. How I did so—what means I adopted—what direction I traveled, and by what mode of conveyance—I must leave unexplained, for the reasons mentioned before.[2]

11.6 I have often been asked how I felt when I found myself in a free state. I have never been able to answer the question to my own satisfaction. It was a moment of the highest excitement I ever experienced. I suppose I felt as one may imagine the unarmed sailor feels when a friendly warship rescues him from the pursuit of a pirate. Writing to a dear friend immediately after my arrival in New York, I said I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions. This state of mind, however, very soon subsided, and I was again seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness. I was still liable to be taken back and subjected to all the tortures of slavery. This in itself was enough to dampen the ardor of my enthusiasm. But the loneliness overcame me. There I was in the midst of thousands, and yet a perfect stranger; without home and without friends, in the midst of thousands of my own brethren—children of a common Father—and yet I did not dare to reveal my sad condition to any one of them. I was afraid to speak to anyone for fear of speaking to the wrong one, and thereby falling into the hands of money-loving kidnappers, whose business it was to lie in wait for the panting fugitive, as the ferocious beasts of the forest lie in wait for their prey. The motto I adopted when I started from slavery was this —"Trust no man!" I saw in every white man an enemy, and in almost every Black man cause for distrust. It was a most painful situation; and, to understand it, one must experience it, or imagine himself in similar circumstances. Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land—a land given up to be the hunting ground

2 In his later autobiography (1881), Douglass revealed that he had traveled by train and ferry dressed as a sailor, carrying a free Black seaman's papers lent by a friend.

of slaveholders—whose inhabitants are legalized kidnappers—where he is every moment subject to the terrible risk of being seized by his fellow men, as the hideous crocodile seizes its prey!—I say, let him place himself in my situation—without home or friends—without money or credit—needing shelter, and no one to give it—needing bread, and no money to buy it—and at the same time let him feel that he is pursued by merciless man-hunters, and in total darkness as to what to do, where to go,[3] or where to stay—perfectly helpless as to both the means of defense and the means of escape—in the midst of plenty, yet suffering the terrible gnawings of hunger—in the midst of houses, yet having no home—among fellow men, yet feeling as if in the midst of wild beasts, whose greed to swallow up the trembling and half-starved fugitive is equaled only by that with which the monsters of the deep swallow up the helpless fish on which they live—I say, let him be placed in this most trying situation—the situation in which I was placed—then, and not till then, will he fully appreciate the hardships of the toil-worn and whip-scarred fugitive slave, and know how to sympathize with him.

REFUGE WITH DAVID RUGGLES

David Ruggles shelters him; he marries Anna Murray and they travel on to New Bedford.

11.7 Thank Heaven, I remained only a short time in this distressing situation. I was rescued from it by the humane hand of Mr. David Ruggles, whose vigilance, kindness, and perseverance I shall never forget. I am glad of an opportunity to express, as far as words can, the love and gratitude I feel for him. Mr. Ruggles is now afflicted with blindness, and is himself in need of the same kind services that he was once so eager to perform for others. I had been in New York only a few days when Mr. Ruggles sought me out and very kindly took me to his boarding-house at the

3 Free Black people in the North were also at risk of being kidnapped and sold south.

corner of Church and Lespenard Streets.[4] Mr. Ruggles was then very deeply engaged in the memorable *Darg* case, as well as attending to a number of other fugitive slaves and devising ways and means for their successful escape; and though he was watched and hemmed in on almost every side, he seemed to be more than a match for his enemies.[5]

11.8 Very soon after I went to Mr. Ruggles, he wanted to know where I wished to go, since he thought it unsafe for me to remain in New York. I told him I was a caulker and would like to go where I could get work. I thought of going to Canada; but he decided against it, and in favor of my going to New Bedford, thinking I would be able to get work there at my trade. At this time Anna,[6] my intended wife, came on; for I had written to her immediately after my arrival in New York (in spite of my homeless, houseless, and helpless condition), telling her of my successful escape and asking her to come on at once. A few days after her arrival, Mr. Ruggles called in the Rev. J. W. C. Pennington, who, in the presence of Mr. Ruggles, Mrs. Michaels, and two or three others, performed the marriage ceremony and gave us a certificate, of which the following is an exact copy:—[7]

11.9 "This is to certify that I joined together in holy matrimony Frederick Johnson[8] and Anna Murray, as man and wife, in the presence of Mr. David Ruggles and Mrs. Michaels. "James W. C. Pennington. "*New York, Sept.* 15, 1838."

11.10 On receiving this certificate and a five-dollar bill from Mr. Ruggles, I shouldered one part of our baggage and Anna took up the other, and we set out at once to take passage on the steamboat John W. Richmond for Newport, on our way to New Bed-

4 David Ruggles (1810–1849), a Black abolitionist and secretary of the New York Committee of Vigilance, helped hundreds of fugitive slaves pass through New York.

5 The Darg case (1838) followed the escape in New York of Thomas Hughes from the Virginia slaveholder John P. Darg. Ruggles was arrested and prosecuted in connection with it.

6 DOUGLASS'S NOTE. She was free.

7 James W. C. Pennington (1807–1870) had himself escaped from slavery in Maryland and became a minister, author, and abolitionist.

8 DOUGLASS'S NOTE. I had changed my name from Frederick *Bailey* to *Johnson.*

ford. Mr. Ruggles gave me a letter to a Mr. Shaw in Newport, and told me that, if my money did not carry me as far as New Bedford, I should stop in Newport and get further help. But when we arrived at Newport, we were so anxious to get to a place of safety that, although we lacked the money needed to pay our fare, we decided to take seats in the stagecoach and promise to pay when we got to New Bedford. We were encouraged to do this by two excellent gentlemen, residents of New Bedford, whose names I afterward learned were Joseph Ricketson and William C. Taber. They seemed at once to understand our circumstances, and assured us of their friendliness in a way that put us fully at ease in their presence. It was good indeed to meet such friends at such a time. On reaching New Bedford, we were directed to the house of Mr. Nathan Johnson, who received us kindly and provided for us hospitably. Both Mr. and Mrs. Johnson took a deep and lively interest in our welfare. They proved themselves quite worthy of the name of abolitionists. When the stage-driver found that we could not pay our fare, he held onto our baggage as security for the debt. I had only to mention the fact to Mr. Johnson, and he immediately advanced the money.[9]

A NEW NAME IN NEW BEDFORD

Nathan Johnson names him Douglass; he finds the North prosperous and works at any job he can get.

11.11 We now began to feel a degree of safety, and to prepare ourselves for the duties and responsibilities of a life of freedom. On the morning after our arrival in New Bedford, while we were at the breakfast table, the question arose of what name I should be called by. The name given me by my mother was "Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey." I had, however, dropped the two middle names long before I left Maryland, so that I was generally known as "Frederick Bailey." I left Baltimore bearing the name "Stanley." When I got to New York, I changed my name

9 Nathan and Mary (Polly) Johnson were Black abolitionists in New Bedford, Massachusetts, whose house sheltered many fugitives.

again, to "Frederick Johnson," and thought that would be the last change. But when I got to New Bedford, I found it necessary to change my name once more. The reason was that there were so many Johnsons in New Bedford that it was already quite difficult to tell them apart. I gave Mr. Johnson the privilege of choosing a name for me, but told him he must not take from me the name "Frederick." I had to hold on to that, to preserve a sense of my identity. Mr. Johnson had just been reading *The Lady of the Lake*, and at once suggested that my name be "Douglass." From that time until now I have been called "Frederick Douglass"; and as I am more widely known by that name than by either of the others, I shall continue to use it as my own.[10]

11.12 I was quite disappointed at the general appearance of things in New Bedford. The impression I had received of the character and condition of the people of the North turned out to be singularly mistaken. While in slavery, I had very strangely supposed that few of the comforts, and scarcely any of the luxuries, of life were enjoyed in the North, compared with those enjoyed by the slaveholders of the South. I probably came to this conclusion from the fact that Northern people owned no slaves. I supposed that they were about on a level with the non-slaveholding population of the South. I knew *they* were exceedingly poor, and I had been used to regarding their poverty as the necessary consequence of their not being slaveholders. I had somehow absorbed the opinion that, without slaves, there could be no wealth and very little refinement. And on coming to the North, I expected to meet a rough, hard-handed, and uncultivated population, living in the most Spartan simplicity, knowing nothing of the ease, luxury, pomp, and grandeur of Southern slaveholders. Such being my conjectures, anyone acquainted with the appearance of New Bedford can very readily infer how plainly I must have seen my mistake.

11.13 On the afternoon of the day I reached New Bedford, I visited the wharves to take a look at the shipping. Here I found

10 *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) is a narrative poem by Walter Scott whose heroes include members of the Scottish Douglas clan.

myself surrounded by the strongest proofs of wealth. Lying at the wharves and riding at anchor in the stream, I saw many ships of the finest design, in the best order, and of the largest size. On the right and left, I was walled in by granite warehouses of the widest dimensions, stocked to their utmost capacity with the necessaries and comforts of life. Added to this, almost everybody seemed to be at work, but quietly, compared with what I had been used to in Baltimore. There were no loud songs heard from those loading and unloading ships. I heard no deep oaths or horrid curses on the laborer. I saw no whipping of men; everything seemed to go smoothly on. Every man appeared to understand his work, and went at it with a sober yet cheerful earnestness, which showed the deep interest he felt in what he was doing, as well as a sense of his own dignity as a man. To me this looked exceedingly strange. From the wharves I strolled around and through the town, gazing with wonder and admiration at the splendid churches, beautiful houses, and finely cultivated gardens, which displayed an amount of wealth, comfort, taste, and refinement such as I had never seen in any part of slaveholding Maryland.

11.14 Everything looked clean, new, and beautiful. I saw few or no dilapidated houses with poverty-stricken occupants; no half-naked children and barefoot women, such as I had been used to seeing in Hillsborough, Easton, St. Michael's, and Baltimore. The people looked more capable, stronger, healthier, and happier than those of Maryland. For once I was made glad by the sight of extreme wealth without being saddened by the sight of extreme poverty. But the most astonishing as well as the most interesting thing to me was the condition of the Black people, a great many of whom, like me, had escaped there as a refuge from the hunters of men. I found many who had not been seven years out of their chains living in finer houses, and evidently enjoying more of the comforts of life, than the average slaveholder in Maryland. I will venture to assert that my friend Mr. Nathan Johnson (of whom I can say with a grateful heart, "I was hungry,

and he gave me meat;[11] I was thirsty, and he gave me drink; I was a stranger, and he took me in") lived in a neater house, dined at a better table, took, paid for, and read more newspapers, and better understood the moral, religious, and political character of the nation than nine tenths of the slaveholders in Talbot County, Maryland. Yet Mr. Johnson was a working man. His hands were hardened by toil, and not his alone, but Mrs. Johnson's as well. I found the Black people much more spirited than I had supposed they would be. I found among them a determination to protect each other from the bloodthirsty kidnapper, at all costs. Soon after my arrival, I was told of an incident that illustrated their spirit. A Black man and a fugitive slave were on unfriendly terms. The former was heard to threaten the latter with informing his master of his whereabouts. At once a meeting was called among the Black people, under the standard notice, "Business of importance!" The betrayer was invited to attend. The people came at the appointed hour and organized the meeting by appointing a very religious old gentleman as president, who, I believe, offered a prayer, after which he addressed the meeting as follows: "*Friends, we have got him here, and I would recommend that you young men just take him outside the door, and kill him!*" With this, a number of them rushed at him; but they were held back by some more timid than themselves, and the betrayer escaped their vengeance, and has not been seen in New Bedford since. I believe there have been no more such threats, and should there be any in future, I have no doubt that death would be the consequence.

11.15 On the third day after my arrival, I found employment loading a sloop with a cargo of oil. It was new, dirty, and hard work for me; but I went at it with a glad heart and a willing hand. I was now my own master. It was a happy moment, the rapture of which can be understood only by those who have been slaves. It was the first work whose reward was to be entirely my own. There was no Master Hugh standing ready, the

11 Douglass quotes Matthew 25:35 in the King James wording, where "meat" means food.

moment I earned the money, to rob me of it. I worked that day with a pleasure I had never experienced before. I was at work for myself and my newly married wife. It was to me the starting point of a new existence. When I had finished that job, I went looking for caulking work; but such was the strength of prejudice against color among the white caulkers that they refused to work with me, and of course I could get no employment.[12] Finding my trade of no immediate use, I threw off my caulking clothes and prepared myself to do any kind of work I could get. Mr. Johnson kindly let me have his sawhorse and saw, and I very soon found myself plenty of work. There was no work too hard—none too dirty. I was ready to saw wood, shovel coal, carry wood, sweep chimneys, or roll oil casks—all of which I did for nearly three years in New Bedford, before I became known to the anti-slavery world.

THE LIBERATOR AND NANTUCKET

He reads the Liberator and in 1841 speaks at the anti-slavery convention in Nantucket.

11.16 About four months after I went to New Bedford, a young man came to me and asked whether I would like to take the *Liberator*. I told him I would; but, having just escaped from slavery, I said that I was unable to pay for it then. In the end, however, I became a subscriber. The paper came, and I read it from week to week with feelings that it would be quite useless for me to try to describe. The paper became my meat and drink. My soul was set all on fire.[13] Its sympathy for my brothers in bonds—its scathing denunciations of slaveholders—its faithful exposures of slavery—and its powerful attacks on the upholders of the institution—sent a thrill of joy through my soul such as I had never felt before!

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12 DOUGLASS'S NOTE. I am told that Black people can now get employment caulking in New Bedford—a result of anti-slavery effort.

13 The *Liberator* was William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist weekly, published in Boston from 1831 to 1865.

11.17 I had not been a reader of the *Liberator* long before I got a fairly accurate idea of the principles, measures, and spirit of the anti-slavery reform. I took right hold of the cause. I could do only a little; but what I could, I did with a joyful heart, and I never felt happier than when at an anti-slavery meeting. I seldom had much to say at the meetings, because what I wanted to say was said so much better by others. But while attending an anti-slavery convention at Nantucket on the 11th of August, 1841, I felt strongly moved to speak, and was at the same time strongly urged to do so by Mr. William C. Coffin,[14] a gentleman who had heard me speak at the Black people's meeting in New Bedford. It was a heavy cross, and I took it up reluctantly. The truth was, I felt myself a slave, and the idea of speaking to white people weighed me down. I had spoken only a few moments when I felt a degree of freedom, and said what I wanted to say with considerable ease. From that time until now, I have been engaged in pleading the cause of my brothers—with what success, and with what devotion, I leave those acquainted with my labors to decide.

14 At this convention of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society on Nantucket, Douglass's speech led to his being engaged as a lecturer for the society.

Appendix

Douglass distinguishes the Christianity of Christ from the slaveholding religion of the land; a parody hymn.

App.1 Since reading over the foregoing Narrative, I find that in several places I have spoken about religion in a tone and manner that may lead those who do not know my religious views to suppose that I oppose all religion. To prevent any such misunderstanding, I think it proper to add the following brief explanation. What I have said about religion, and against it, I mean to apply strictly to the *slaveholding religion* of this land, and not in any way to Christianity proper. Between the Christianity of this land and the Christianity of Christ I recognize the widest possible difference—so wide that to accept the one as good, pure, and holy is necessarily to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked. To be the friend of the one is necessarily to be the enemy of the other. I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed, I can see no reason, except the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I regard it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels. Never was there a clearer case of "stealing the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in." I am filled with unspeakable loathing when I consider the religious pomp and show,[1] together with the horrible inconsistencies, that surround me everywhere. We have men-stealers

1 The quoted line is from Robert Pollok's poem *The Course of Time* (1827).

for ministers, women-whippers for missionaries, and cradle-plunderers for church members. The man who wields the blood-clotted cowskin during the week fills the pulpit on Sunday, and claims to be a minister of the meek and lowly Jesus. The man who robs me of my earnings at the end of each week meets me as a class leader on Sunday morning, to show me the way of life and the path of salvation. He who sells my sister into prostitution stands forth as the pious advocate of purity. He who proclaims it a religious duty to read the Bible denies me the right to learn to read the name of the God who made me. He who is the religious advocate of marriage robs whole millions of its sacred influence, and leaves them to the ravages of wholesale pollution. The warm defender of the sacredness of the family is the same man who scatters whole families—tearing apart husbands and wives, parents and children, sisters and brothers— leaving the hut empty and the hearth desolate. We see the thief preaching against theft, and the adulterer against adultery. We have men sold to build churches, women sold to support the gospel, and babies sold to buy Bibles for the *poor heathen! all for the glory of God and the good of souls!* The slave auctioneer's bell and the church bell chime together, and the bitter cries of the heart-broken slave are drowned out by the religious shouts of his pious master. Revivals of religion and revivals in the slave trade go hand in hand. The slave prison and the church stand near each other. The clanking of fetters and the rattling of chains in the prison, and the pious psalm and solemn prayer in the church, may be heard at the same time. The dealers in the bodies and souls of men set up their stand in front of the pulpit, and they help each other. The dealer gives his blood-stained gold to support the pulpit, and the pulpit in return covers his infernal business with the garb of Christianity. Here we have religion and robbery allied with each other—devils dressed in angels' robes, and hell wearing the appearance of paradise.

App.2 "Just God! and these are they
Who minister at your altar, God of right!
Men who their hands, with prayer and blessing, lay
On Israel's ark of light[2]

App.3 "What! preach, and kidnap men?
Give thanks, and rob your own afflicted poor?
Talk of your glorious liberty, and then
Bolt hard the captive's door?

App.4 "What! servants of your own
Merciful Son, who came to seek and save
The homeless and the outcast, fettering down
The overworked and plundered slave!

App.5 "Pilate and Herod friends!
Chief priests and rulers, as of old, combine!
Just God and holy! is that church which lends
Strength to the plunderer yours?"

App.6 The Christianity of America is a Christianity of whose followers it may be said, as truly as it was said of the ancient scribes and Pharisees, "They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. All their works they do to be seen by men.—They love the best places at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and to be called by men, Rabbi, Rabbi.—But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor allow those who are entering to go in.[3] You devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers; therefore you shall receive the greater damnation. You travel over sea and land to make one convert, and when he is made, you make him twice as much the child of hell as yourselves.—

2 Stanzas from John Greenleaf Whittier's antislavery poem "Clerical Oppressors" (1836).

3 Douglass quotes Jesus's denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 (King James Version), with omissions.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these you ought to have done, and not left the others undone. You blind guides! who strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you make clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and excess. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed look beautiful outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

App.7 Dark and terrible as this picture is, I hold it to be strictly true of the overwhelming mass of professed Christians in America. They strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Could anything be more true of our churches? They would be shocked at the proposal to admit a *sheep*-stealer to fellowship; and at the same time they hug a *man*-stealer to their communion, and brand me an infidel if I find fault with them for it. They attend with Pharisaical strictness to the outward forms of religion, and at the same time neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. They are always ready to sacrifice, but seldom to show mercy. They are the ones described as professing to love God, whom they have not seen, while they hate their brother, whom they have seen. They love the heathen on the other side of the globe. They can pray for him, pay money to have the Bible put into his hand and missionaries sent to instruct him, while they despise and totally neglect the heathen at their own doors.[4]

App.8 Such, very briefly, is my view of the religion of this land; and to avoid any misunderstanding arising from the use of general terms, I mean by the religion of this land that which is revealed in the words, deeds, and actions of those bodies, North and South, that call themselves Christian churches and yet are

4 Douglass echoes 1 John 4:20 and, in the previous paragraph, Hosea 6:6 ("I desired mercy, and not sacrifice").

in union with slaveholders. It is against religion as presented by these bodies that I have felt it my duty to testify.

A PARODY HYMN

Douglass closes with a parody of a hymn, mocking slaveholders who sing of "heavenly union."

App.9 I conclude these remarks by copying the following portrait of the religion of the South (which is, by communion and fellowship, the religion of the North), which I soberly affirm is "true to life," without caricature or the slightest exaggeration. It is said to have been drawn, several years before the present anti-slavery agitation began, by a Northern Methodist preacher who, while living in the South, had the chance to see slaveholding morals, manners, and piety with his own eyes. "Shall I not punish them for these things? says the Lord. Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"[5]

App.10 "A PARODY. "Come, saints and sinners, hear me tell
How pious priests whip Jack and Nell,
And women buy and children sell,
And preach all sinners down to hell,
And sing of heavenly union.

App.11 "They'll bleat and baa like goats,
Gorge down black sheep, and strain at motes,
Array their backs in fine black coats,
Then seize their enslaved people by their throats,
And choke, for heavenly union.[6]

App.12 "They'll throw you out of church if you sip a dram,
And damn you if you steal a lamb;
Yet rob old Tony, Doll, and Sam
Of human rights, and bread and ham;
Kidnapper's heavenly union.

5 The closing quotation is from Jeremiah 5:9. The parody that follows imitates a popular camp-meeting hymn on "heavenly union."
6 The 1845 text has an obscure word, "dona," after "baa"; its meaning is uncertain, and it is left out here.

App.13 "They'll loudly talk of Christ's reward,
And bind his image with a cord,
And scold, and swing the lash abhorred,
And sell their brother in the Lord
To handcuffed heavenly union.

App.14 "They'll read and sing a sacred song,
And make a prayer both loud and long,
And teach the right and do the wrong,
Hailing the brother, sister throng,
With words of heavenly union.

App.15 "We wonder how such saints can sing,
Or praise the Lord upon the wing,
Who roar, and scold, and whip, and sting,
And to their slaves and mammon cling,
In guilty conscience union.

App.16 "They'll raise tobacco, corn, and rye,
And drive, and thieve, and cheat, and lie,
And lay up treasures in the sky,
By making switch and cowskin fly,
In hope of heavenly union.

App.17 "They'll crack old Tony on the skull,
And preach and roar like Bashan bull,
Or braying ass, of mischief full,
Then seize old Jacob by the hair,
And pull for heavenly union.[7]

App.18 "A roaring, ranting, sleek man-thief,
Who lived on mutton, veal, and beef,
Yet never would afford relief
To needy Black sons of grief,
Was big with heavenly union.

7 The "bulls of Bashan" are proverbial for their roaring, from Psalm 22:12–13.

App.19 "'Love not the world,' the preacher said,
And winked his eye, and shook his head;
He seized on Tom, and Dick, and Ned,
Cut short their meat, and clothes, and bread,
Yet still loved heavenly union.

App.20 "Another preacher, whining, spoke
Of One whose heart for sinners broke:
He tied old Nanny to an oak,
And drew the blood at every stroke,
And prayed for heavenly union.

App.21 "Two others opened their iron jaws,
And waved their child-stealing paws;
There sat their children in gewgaws;
By stinting enslaved people's backs and maws,
They kept up heavenly union.[8]

App.22 "All good from Jack another takes,
And entertains their flirts and rakes,
Who dress as sleek as glossy snakes,
And cram their mouths with sweetened cakes;
And this goes down for union."

App.23 Sincerely and earnestly hoping that this little book may do something toward throwing light on the American slave system, and hastening the glad day of deliverance for the millions of my brethren in bonds—faithfully relying on the power of truth, love, and justice for success in my humble efforts—and solemnly pledging myself anew to the sacred cause—I sign myself, FREDERICK DOUGLASS. Lynn, *Massachusetts*, *April* 28, 1845. THE END.

8 Gewgaws: showy trinkets. Maws: stomachs.