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by Harriet Jacobs (AKA Linda Brent)

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Written by Herself

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Incidents

in the

Life of a Slave Girl.

Written by Herself.

Linda Brent

"Northerners know nothing at all about Slavery. They think it is perpetual

bondage only. They have no conception of the depth of \_degradation\_

involved in that word, SLAVERY; if they had, they would never cease their

efforts until so horrible a system was overthrown."

A Woman Of North Carolina.

"Rise up, ye women that are at ease! Hear my voice, ye careless daughters!

Give ear unto my speech."

Isaiah xxxii. 9.

Edited By L. Maria Child.

Boston: Published For The Author.

1861.

Preface By The Author

Reader be assured this narrative is no fiction. I am aware that some of my

adventures may seem incredible; but they are, nevertheless, strictly true.

I have not exaggerated the wrongs inflicted by Slavery; on the contrary, my

descriptions fall far short of the facts. I have concealed the names of

places, and given persons fictitious names. I had no motive for secrecy on

my own account, but I deemed it kind and considerate towards others to

pursue this course.

I wish I were more competent to the task I have undertaken. But I trust my

readers will excuse deficiencies in consideration of circumstances. I was

born and reared in Slavery; and I remained in a Slave State twenty-seven

years. Since I have been at the North, it has been necessary for me to work

diligently for my own support, and the education of my children. This has

not left me much leisure to make up for the loss of early opportunities to

improve myself; and it has compelled me to write these pages at irregular

intervals, whenever I could snatch an hour from household duties.

When I first arrived in Philadelphia, Bishop Paine advised me to publish a

sketch of my life, but I told him I was altogether incompetent to such an

undertaking. Though I have improved my mind somewhat since that time, I

still remain of the same opinion; but I trust my motives will excuse what

might otherwise seem presumptuous. I have not written my experiences in

order to attract attention to myself; on the contrary, it would have been

more pleasant to me to have been silent about my own history. Neither do I

care to excite sympathy for my own sufferings. But I do earnestly desire to

arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two

millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I

suffered, and most of them far worse. I want to add my testimony to that of

abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really

is. Only by experience can any one realize how deep, and dark, and foul is

that pit of abominations. May the blessing of God rest on this imperfect

effort in behalf of my persecuted people!

--\_Linda Brent\_

Introduction By The Editor

The author of the following autobiography is personally known to me, and

her conversation and manners inspire me with confidence. During the last

seventeen years, she has lived the greater part of the time with a

distinguished family in New York, and has so deported herself as to be

highly esteemed by them. This fact is sufficient, without further

credentials of her character. I believe those who know her will not be

disposed to doubt her veracity, though some incidents in her story are more

romantic than fiction.

At her request, I have revised her manuscript; but such changes as I have

made have been mainly for purposes of condensation and orderly arrangement.

I have not added any thing to the incidents, or changed the import of her

very pertinent remarks. With trifling exceptions, both the ideas and the

language are her own. I pruned excrescences a little, but otherwise I had

no reason for changing her lively and dramatic way of telling her own

story. The names of both persons and places are known to me; but for good

reasons I suppress them.

It will naturally excite surprise that a woman reared in Slavery should be

able to write so well. But circumstances will explain this. In the first

place, nature endowed her with quick perceptions. Secondly, the mistress,

with whom she lived till she was twelve years old, was a kind, considerate

friend, who taught her to read and spell. Thirdly, she was placed in

favorable circumstances after she came to the North; having frequent

intercourse with intelligent persons, who felt a friendly interest in her

welfare, and were disposed to give her opportunities for self-improvement.

I am well aware that many will accuse me of indecorum for presenting these

pages to the public; for the experiences of this intelligent and

much-injured woman belong to a class which some call delicate subjects, and

others indelicate. This peculiar phase of Slavery has generally been kept

veiled; but the public ought to be made acquainted with its monstrous

features, and I willingly take the responsibility of presenting them with

the veil withdrawn. I do this for the sake of my sisters in bondage, who

are suffering wrongs so foul, that our ears are too delicate to listen to

them. I do it with the hope of arousing conscientious and reflecting women

at the North to a sense of their duty in the exertion of moral influence on

the question of Slavery, on all possible occasions. I do it with the hope

that every man who reads this narrative will swear solemnly before God

that, so far as he has power to prevent it, no fugitive from Slavery shall

ever be sent back to suffer in that loathsome den of corruption and

cruelty.

--\_L. Maria Child\_

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I. Childhood

I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood

had passed away. My father was a carpenter, and considered so intelligent

and skilful in his trade, that, when buildings out of the common line were

to be erected, he was sent for from long distances, to be head workman. On

condition of paying his mistress two hundred dollars a year, and supporting

himself, he was allowed to work at his trade, and manage his own affairs.

His strongest wish was to purchase his children; but, though he several

times offered his hard earnings for that purpose, he never succeeded. In

complexion my parents were a light shade of brownish yellow, and were

termed mulattoes. They lived together in a comfortable home; and, though we

were all slaves, I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a

piece of merchandise, trusted to them for safe keeping, and liable to be

demanded of them at any moment. I had one brother, William, who was two

years younger than myself--a bright, affectionate child. I had also a great

treasure in my maternal grandmother, who was a remarkable woman in many

respects. She was the daughter of a planter in South Carolina, who, at his

death, left her mother and his three children free, with money to go to St.

Augustine, where they had relatives. It was during the Revolutionary War;

and they were captured on their passage, carried back, and sold to

different purchasers. Such was the story my grandmother used to tell me;

but I do not remember all the particulars. She was a little girl when she

was captured and sold to the keeper of a large hotel. I have often heard

her tell how hard she fared during childhood. But as she grew older she

evinced so much intelligence, and was so faithful, that her master and

mistress could not help seeing it was for their interest to take care of

such a valuable piece of property. She became an indispensable personage in

the household, officiating in all capacities, from cook and wet nurse to

seamstress. She was much praised for her cooking; and her nice crackers

became so famous in the neighborhood that many people were desirous of

obtaining them. In consequence of numerous requests of this kind, she asked

permission of her mistress to bake crackers at night, after all the

household work was done; and she obtained leave to do it, provided she

would clothe herself and her children from the profits. Upon these terms,

after working hard all day for her mistress, she began her midnight

bakings, assisted by her two oldest children. The business proved

profitable; and each year she laid by a little, which was saved for a fund

to purchase her children. Her master died, and the property was divided

among his heirs. The widow had her dower in the hotel which she continued

to keep open. My grandmother remained in her service as a slave; but her

children were divided among her master's children. As she had five,

Benjamin, the youngest one, was sold, in order that each heir might have an

equal portion of dollars and cents. There was so little difference in our

ages that he seemed more like my brother than my uncle. He was a bright,

handsome lad, nearly white; for he inherited the complexion my grandmother

had derived from Anglo-Saxon ancestors. Though only ten years old, seven

hundred and twenty dollars were paid for him. His sale was a terrible blow

to my grandmother, but she was naturally hopeful, and she went to work with

renewed energy, trusting in time to be able to purchase some of her

children. She had laid up three hundred dollars, which her mistress one day

begged as a loan, promising to pay her soon. The reader probably knows that

no promise or writing given to a slave is legally binding; for, according

to Southern laws, a slave, \_being\_ property, can \_hold\_ no property. When

my grandmother lent her hard earnings to her mistress, she trusted solely

to her honor. The honor of a slaveholder to a slave!

To this good grandmother I was indebted for many comforts. My brother

Willie and I often received portions of the crackers, cakes, and preserves,

she made to sell; and after we ceased to be children we were indebted to

her for many more important services.

Such were the unusually fortunate circumstances of my early childhood. When

I was six years old, my mother died; and then, for the first time, I

learned, by the talk around me, that I was a slave. My mother's mistress

was the daughter of my grandmother's mistress. She was the foster sister of

my mother; they were both nourished at my grandmother's breast. In fact, my

mother had been weaned at three months old, that the babe of the mistress

might obtain sufficient food. They played together as children; and, when

they became women, my mother was a most faithful servant to her whiter

foster sister. On her death-bed her mistress promised that her children

should never suffer for any thing; and during her lifetime she kept her

word. They all spoke kindly of my dead mother, who had been a slave merely

in name, but in nature was noble and womanly. I grieved for her, and my

young mind was troubled with the thought who would now take care of me and

my little brother. I was told that my home was now to be with her mistress;

and I found it a happy one. No toilsome or disagreeable duties were imposed

on me. My mistress was so kind to me that I was always glad to do her

bidding, and proud to labor for her as much as my young years would permit.

I would sit by her side for hours, sewing diligently, with a heart as free

from care as that of any free-born white child. When she thought I was

tired, she would send me out to run and jump; and away I bounded, to gather

berries or flowers to decorate her room. Those were happy days--too happy

to last. The slave child had no thought for the morrow; but there came that

blight, which too surely waits on every human being born to be a chattel.

When I was nearly twelve years old, my kind mistress sickened and died. As

I saw the cheek grow paler, and the eye more glassy, how earnestly I prayed

in my heart that she might live! I loved her; for she had been almost like

a mother to me. My prayers were not answered. She died, and they buried her

in the little churchyard, where, day after day, my tears fell upon her

grave.

I was sent to spend a week with my grandmother. I was now old enough to

begin to think of the future; and again and again I asked myself what they

would do with me. I felt sure I should never find another mistress so kind

as the one who was gone. She had promised my dying mother that her children

should never suffer for any thing; and when I remembered that, and recalled

her many proofs of attachment to me, I could not help having some hopes

that she had left me free. My friends were almost certain it would be so.

They thought she would be sure to do it, on account of my mother's love and

faithful service. But, alas! we all know that the memory of a faithful

slave does not avail much to save her children from the auction block.

After a brief period of suspense, the will of my mistress was read, and we

learned that she had bequeathed me to her sister's daughter, a child of

five years old. So vanished our hopes. My mistress had taught me the

precepts of God's Word: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them."

But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her

neighbor. I would give much to blot out from my memory that one great

wrong. As a child, I loved my mistress; and, looking back on the happy days

I spent with her, I try to think with less bitterness of this act of

injustice. While I was with her, she taught me to read and spell; and for

this privilege, which so rarely falls to the lot of a slave, I bless her

memory.

She possessed but few slaves; and at her death those were all distributed

among her relatives. Five of them were my grandmother's children, and had

shared the same milk that nourished her mother's children. Notwithstanding

my grandmother's long and faithful service to her owners, not one of her

children escaped the auction block. These God-breathing machines are no

more, in the sight of their masters, than the cotton they plant, or the

horses they tend.

II. The New Master And Mistress.

Dr. Flint, a physician in the neighborhood, had married the sister of my

mistress, and I was now the property of their little daughter. It was not

without murmuring that I prepared for my new home; and what added to my

unhappiness, was the fact that my brother William was purchased by the same

family. My father, by his nature, as well as by the habit of transacting

business as a skillful mechanic, had more of the feelings of a freeman than

is common among slaves. My brother was a spirited boy; and being brought up

under such influences, he daily detested the name of master and mistress.

One day, when his father and his mistress both happened to call him at the

same time, he hesitated between the two; being perplexed to know which had

the strongest claim upon his obedience. He finally concluded to go to his

mistress. When my father reproved him for it, he said, "You both called me,

and I didn't know which I ought to go to first."

"You are \_my\_ child," replied our father, "and when I call you, you should

come immediately, if you have to pass through fire and water."

Poor Willie! He was now to learn his first lesson of obedience to a master.

Grandmother tried to cheer us with hopeful words, and they found an echo in

the credulous hearts of youth.

When we entered our new home we encountered cold looks, cold words, and

cold treatment. We were glad when the night came. On my narrow bed I moaned

and wept, I felt so desolate and alone.

I had been there nearly a year, when a dear little friend of mine was

buried. I heard her mother sob, as the clods fell on the coffin of her only

child, and I turned away from the grave, feeling thankful that I still had

something left to love. I met my grandmother, who said, "Come with me,

Linda;" and from her tone I knew that something sad had happened. She led

me apart from the people, and then said, "My child, your father is dead."

Dead! How could I believe it? He had died so suddenly I had not even heard

that he was sick. I went home with my grandmother. My heart rebelled

against God, who had taken from me mother, father, mistress, and friend.

The good grandmother tried to comfort me. "Who knows the ways of God?" said

she. "Perhaps they have been kindly taken from the evil days to come."

Years afterwards I often thought of this. She promised to be a mother to

her grandchildren, so far as she might be permitted to do so; and

strengthened by her love, I returned to my master's. I thought I should be

allowed to go to my father's house the next morning; but I was ordered to

go for flowers, that my mistress's house might be decorated for an evening

party. I spent the day gathering flowers and weaving them into festoons,

while the dead body of my father was lying within a mile of me. What cared

my owners for that? he was merely a piece of property. Moreover, they

thought he had spoiled his children, by teaching them to feel that they

were human beings. This was blasphemous doctrine for a slave to teach;

presumptuous in him, and dangerous to the masters.

The next day I followed his remains to a humble grave beside that of my

dear mother. There were those who knew my father's worth, and respected his

memory.

My home now seemed more dreary than ever. The laugh of the little

slave-children sounded harsh and cruel. It was selfish to feel so about the

joy of others. My brother moved about with a very grave face. I tried to

comfort him, by saying, "Take courage, Willie; brighter days will come by

and by."

"You don't know any thing about it, Linda," he replied. "We shall have to

stay here all our days; we shall never be free."

I argued that we were growing older and stronger, and that perhaps we

might, before long, be allowed to hire our own time, and then we could earn

money to buy our freedom. William declared this was much easier to say than

to do; moreover, he did not intend to \_buy\_ his freedom. We held daily

controversies upon this subject.

Little attention was paid to the slaves' meals in Dr. Flint's house. If

they could catch a bit of food while it was going, well and good. I gave

myself no trouble on that score, for on my various errands I passed my

grandmother's house, where there was always something to spare for me. I

was frequently threatened with punishment if I stopped there; and my

grandmother, to avoid detaining me, often stood at the gate with something

for my breakfast or dinner. I was indebted to \_her\_ for all my comforts,

spiritual or temporal. It was \_her\_ labor that supplied my scanty wardrobe.

I have a vivid recollection of the linsey-woolsey dress given me every

winter by Mrs. Flint. How I hated it! It was one of the badges of slavery.

While my grandmother was thus helping to support me from her hard earnings,

the three hundred dollars she had lent her mistress were never repaid. When

her mistress died, her son-in-law, Dr. Flint, was appointed executor. When

grandmother applied to him for payment, he said the estate was insolvent,

and the law prohibited payment. It did not, however, prohibit him from

retaining the silver candelabra, which had been purchased with that money.

I presume they will be handed down in the family, from generation to

generation.

My grandmother's mistress had always promised her that, at her death, she

should be free; and it was said that in her will she made good the promise.

But when the estate was settled, Dr. Flint told the faithful old servant

that, under existing circumstances, it was necessary she should be sold.

On the appointed day, the customary advertisement was posted up,

proclaiming that there would be a "public sale of negroes, horses, &c." Dr.

Flint called to tell my grandmother that he was unwilling to wound her

feelings by putting her up at auction, and that he would prefer to dispose

of her at private sale. My grandmother saw through his hypocrisy; she

understood very well that he was ashamed of the job. She was a very

spirited woman, and if he was base enough to sell her, when her mistress

intended she should be free, she was determined the public should know it.

She had for a long time supplied many families with crackers and preserves;

consequently, "Aunt Marthy," as she was called, was generally known, and

every body who knew her respected her intelligence and good character. Her

long and faithful service in the family was also well known, and the

intention of her mistress to leave her free. When the day of sale came, she

took her place among the chattels, and at the first call she sprang upon

the auction-block. Many voices called out, "Shame! Shame! Who is going to

sell \_you\_, aunt Marthy? Don't stand there! That is no place for \_you\_."

Without saying a word, she quietly awaited her fate. No one bid for her. At

last, a feeble voice said, "Fifty dollars." It came from a maiden lady,

seventy years old, the sister of my grandmother's deceased mistress. She

had lived forty years under the same roof with my grandmother; she knew how

faithfully she had served her owners, and how cruelly she had been

defrauded of her rights; and she resolved to protect her. The auctioneer

waited for a higher bid; but her wishes were respected; no one bid above

her. She could neither read nor write; and when the bill of sale was made

out, she signed it with a cross. But what consequence was that, when she

had a big heart overflowing with human kindness? She gave the old servant

her freedom.

At that time, my grandmother was just fifty years old. Laborious years had

passed since then; and now my brother and I were slaves to the man who had

defrauded her of her money, and tried to defraud her of her freedom. One of

my mother's sisters, called Aunt Nancy, was also a slave in his family. She

was a kind, good aunt to me; and supplied the place of both housekeeper and

waiting maid to her mistress. She was, in fact, at the beginning and end of

every thing.

Mrs. Flint, like many southern women, was totally deficient in energy. She

had not strength to superintend her household affairs; but her nerves were

so strong, that she could sit in her easy chair and see a woman whipped,

till the blood trickled from every stroke of the lash. She was a member of

the church; but partaking of the Lord's supper did not seem to put her in a

Christian frame of mind. If dinner was not served at the exact time on that

particular Sunday, she would station herself in the kitchen, and wait till

it was dished, and then spit in all the kettles and pans that had been used

for cooking. She did this to prevent the cook and her children from eking

out their meagre fare with the remains of the gravy and other scrapings.

The slaves could get nothing to eat except what she chose to give them.

Provisions were weighed out by the pound and ounce, three times a day. I

can assure you she gave them no chance to eat wheat bread from her flour

barrel. She knew how many biscuits a quart of flour would make, and exactly

what size they ought to be.

Dr. Flint was an epicure. The cook never sent a dinner to his table without

fear and trembling; for if there happened to be a dish not to his liking,

he would either order her to be whipped, or compel her to eat every

mouthful of it in his presence. The poor, hungry creature might not have

objected to eating it; but she did object to having her master cram it

down her throat till she choked.

They had a pet dog, that was a nuisance in the house. The cook was ordered

to make some Indian mush for him. He refused to eat, and when his head was

held over it, the froth flowed from his mouth into the basin. He died a few

minutes after. When Dr. Flint came in, he said the mush had not been well

cooked, and that was the reason the animal would not eat it. He sent for

the cook, and compelled her to eat it. He thought that the woman's stomach

was stronger than the dog's; but her sufferings afterwards proved that he

was mistaken. This poor woman endured many cruelties from her master and

mistress; sometimes she was locked up, away from her nursing baby, for a

whole day and night.

When I had been in the family a few weeks, one of the plantation slaves was

brought to town, by order of his master. It was near night when he arrived,

and Dr. Flint ordered him to be taken to the work house, and tied up to the

joist, so that his feet would just escape the ground. In that situation he

was to wait till the doctor had taken his tea. I shall never forget

that night. Never before, in my life, had I heard hundreds of blows fall;

in succession, on a human being. His piteous groans, and his "O, pray

don't, massa," rang in my ear for months afterwards. There were many

conjectures as to the cause of this terrible punishment. Some said master

accused him of stealing corn; others said the slave had quarrelled with his

wife, in presence of the overseer, and had accused his master of being the

father of her child. They were both black, and the child was very fair.

I went into the work house next morning, and saw the cowhide still wet with

blood, and the boards all covered with gore. The poor man lived, and

continued to quarrel with his wife. A few months afterwards Dr. Flint

handed them both over to a slave-trader. The guilty man put their value

into his pocket, and had the satisfaction of knowing that they were out of

sight and hearing. When the mother was delivered into the trader's hands,

she said. "You \_promised\_ to treat me well." To which he replied, "You have

let your tongue run too far; damn you!" She had forgotten that it was a

crime for a slave to tell who was the father of her child.

From others than the master persecution also comes in such cases. I once

saw a young slave girl dying soon after the birth of a child nearly white.

In her agony she cried out, "O Lord, come and take me!" Her mistress stood

by, and mocked at her like an incarnate fiend. "You suffer, do you?" she

exclaimed. "I am glad of it. You deserve it all, and more too."

The girl's mother said, "The baby is dead, thank God; and I hope my poor

child will soon be in heaven, too."

"Heaven!" retorted the mistress. "There is no such place for the like of

her and her bastard."

The poor mother turned away, sobbing. Her dying daughter called her,

feebly, and as she bent over her, I heard her say, "Don't grieve so,

mother; God knows all about it; and HE will have mercy upon me."

Her sufferings, afterwards, became so intense, that her mistress felt

unable to stay; but when she left the room, the scornful smile was still on

her lips. Seven children called her mother. The poor black woman had but

the one child, whose eyes she saw closing in death, while she thanked God

for taking her away from the greater bitterness of life.

III. The Slaves' New Year's Day.

Dr. Flint owned a fine residence in town, several farms, and about fifty

slaves, besides hiring a number by the year.

Hiring-day at the south takes place on the 1st of January. On the 2d, the

slaves are expected to go to their new masters. On a farm, they work until

the corn and cotton are laid. They then have two holidays. Some masters

give them a good dinner under the trees. This over, they work until

Christmas eve. If no heavy charges are meantime brought against them, they

are given four or five holidays, whichever the master or overseer may think

proper. Then comes New Year's eve; and they gather together their little

alls, or more properly speaking, their little nothings, and wait anxiously

for the dawning of day. At the appointed hour the grounds are thronged with

men, women, and children, waiting, like criminals, to hear their doom

pronounced. The slave is sure to know who is the most humane, or cruel

master, within forty miles of him.

It is easy to find out, on that day, who clothes and feeds his slaves well;

for he is surrounded by a crowd, begging, "Please, massa, hire me this

year. I will work \_very\_ hard, massa."

If a slave is unwilling to go with his new master, he is whipped, or locked

up in jail, until he consents to go, and promises not to run away during

the year. Should he chance to change his mind, thinking it justifiable to

violate an extorted promise, woe unto him if he is caught! The whip is used

till the blood flows at his feet; and his stiffened limbs are put in

chains, to be dragged in the field for days and days!

If he lives until the next year, perhaps the same man will hire him again,

without even giving him an opportunity of going to the hiring-ground. After

those for hire are disposed of, those for sale are called up.

O, you happy free women, contrast \_your\_ New Year's day with that of the

poor bond-woman! With you it is a pleasant season, and the light of the day

is blessed. Friendly wishes meet you every where, and gifts are showered

upon you. Even hearts that have been estranged from you soften at this

season, and lips that have been silent echo back, "I wish you a happy New

Year." Children bring their little offerings, and raise their rosy lips for

a caress. They are your own, and no hand but that of death can take them

from you.

But to the slave mother New Year's day comes laden with peculiar sorrows.

She sits on her cold cabin floor, watching the children who may all be torn

from her the next morning; and often does she wish that she and they might

die before the day dawns. She may be an ignorant creature, degraded by the

system that has brutalized her from childhood; but she has a mother's

instincts, and is capable of feeling a mother's agonies.

On one of these sale days, I saw a mother lead seven children to the

auction-block. She knew that \_some\_ of them would be taken from her; but

they took \_all\_. The children were sold to a slave-trader, and their mother

was bought by a man in her own town. Before night her children were all

far away. She begged the trader to tell her where he intended to take them;

this he refused to do. How \_could\_ he, when he knew he would sell them, one

by one, wherever he could command the highest price? I met that mother in

the street, and her wild, haggard face lives to-day in my mind. She wrung

her hands in anguish, and exclaimed, "Gone! All gone! Why \_don't\_ God kill

me?" I had no words wherewith to comfort her. Instances of this kind are of

daily, yea, of hourly occurrence.

Slaveholders have a method, peculiar to their institution, of getting rid

of \_old\_ slaves, whose lives have been worn out in their service. I knew an

old woman, who for seventy years faithfully served her master. She had

become almost helpless, from hard labor and disease. Her owners moved to

Alabama, and the old black woman was left to be sold to any body who would

give twenty dollars for her.

IV. The Slave Who Dared To Feel Like A Man.

Two years had passed since I entered Dr. Flint's family, and those years

had brought much of the knowledge that comes from experience, though they

had afforded little opportunity for any other kinds of knowledge.

My grandmother had, as much as possible, been a mother to her orphan

grandchildren. By perseverance and unwearied industry, she was now mistress

of a snug little home, surrounded with the necessaries of life. She would

have been happy could her children have shared them with her. There

remained but three children and two grandchildren, all slaves. Most

earnestly did she strive to make us feel that it was the will of God: that

He had seen fit to place us under such circumstances; and though it seemed

hard, we ought to pray for contentment.

It was a beautiful faith, coming from a mother who could not call her

children her own. But I, and Benjamin, her youngest boy, condemned it. We

reasoned that it was much more the will of God that we should be situated

as she was. We longed for a home like hers. There we always found sweet

balsam for our troubles. She was so loving, so sympathizing! She always met

us with a smile, and listened with patience to all our sorrows. She spoke

so hopefully, that unconsciously the clouds gave place to sunshine. There

was a grand big oven there, too, that baked bread and nice things for the

town, and we knew there was always a choice bit in store for us.

But, alas! Even the charms of the old oven failed to reconcile us to our

hard lot. Benjamin was now a tall, handsome lad, strongly and gracefully

made, and with a spirit too bold and daring for a slave. My brother

William, now twelve years old, had the same aversion to the word master

that he had when he was an urchin of seven years. I was his confidant. He

came to me with all his troubles. I remember one instance in particular. It

was on a lovely spring morning, and when I marked the sunlight dancing here

and there, its beauty seemed to mock my sadness. For my master, whose

restless, craving, vicious nature roved about day and night, seeking whom

to devour, had just left me, with stinging, scorching words; words that

scathed ear and brain like fire. O, how I despised him! I thought how glad

I should be, if some day when he walked the earth, it would open and

swallow him up, and disencumber the world of a plague.

When he told me that I was made for his use, made to obey his command in

\_every\_ thing; that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and should

surrender to his, never before had my puny arm felt half so strong.

So deeply was I absorbed in painful reflections afterwards, that I neither

saw nor heard the entrance of any one, till the voice of William sounded

close beside me. "Linda," said he, "what makes you look so sad? I love you.

O, Linda, isn't this a bad world? Every body seems so cross and unhappy. I

wish I had died when poor father did."

I told him that every body was \_not\_ cross, or unhappy; that those who had

pleasant homes, and kind friends, and who were not afraid to love them,

were happy. But we, who were slave-children, without father or mother,

could not expect to be happy. We must be good; perhaps that would bring us

contentment.

"Yes," he said, "I try to be good; but what's the use? They are all the

time troubling me." Then he proceeded to relate his afternoon's difficulty

with young master Nicholas. It seemed that the brother of master Nicholas

had pleased himself with making up stories about William. Master Nicholas

said he should be flogged, and he would do it. Whereupon he went to work;

but William fought bravely, and the young master, finding he was getting

the better of him, undertook to tie his hands behind him. He failed in that

likewise. By dint of kicking and fisting, William came out of the skirmish

none the worse for a few scratches.

He continued to discourse, on his young master's \_meanness\_; how he whipped

the \_little\_ boys, but was a perfect coward when a tussle ensued between

him and white boys of his own size. On such occasions he always took to his

legs. William had other charges to make against him. One was his rubbing up

pennies with quicksilver, and passing them off for quarters of a dollar on

an old man who kept a fruit stall. William was often sent to buy fruit, and

he earnestly inquired of me what he ought to do under such circumstances. I

told him it was certainly wrong to deceive the old man, and that it was his

duty to tell him of the impositions practised by his young master. I

assured him the old man would not be slow to comprehend the whole, and

there the matter would end. William thought it might with the old man, but

not with \_him\_. He said he did not mind the smart of the whip, but he did

not like the \_idea\_ of being whipped.

While I advised him to be good and forgiving I was not unconscious of the

beam in my own eye. It was the very knowledge of my own shortcomings that

urged me to retain, if possible, some sparks of my brother's God-given

nature. I had not lived fourteen years in slavery for nothing. I had felt,

seen, and heard enough, to read the characters, and question the motives,

of those around me. The war of my life had begun; and though one of God's

most powerless creatures, I resolved never to be conquered. Alas, for me!

If there was one pure, sunny spot for me, I believed it to be in Benjamin's

heart, and in another's, whom I loved with all the ardor of a girl's first

love. My owner knew of it, and sought in every way to render me miserable.

He did not resort to corporal punishment, but to all the petty, tyrannical

ways that human ingenuity could devise.

I remember the first time I was punished. It was in the month of February.

My grandmother had taken my old shoes, and replaced them with a new pair. I

needed them; for several inches of snow had fallen, and it still continued

to fall. When I walked through Mrs. Flint's room, their creaking grated

harshly on her refined nerves. She called me to her, and asked what I had

about me that made such a horrid noise. I told her it was my new shoes.

"Take them off," said she; "and if you put them on again, I'll throw them

into the fire."

I took them off, and my stockings also. She then sent me a long distance,

on an errand. As I went through the snow, my bare feet tingled. That night

I was very hoarse; and I went to bed thinking the next day would find me

sick, perhaps dead. What was my grief on waking to find myself quite well!

I had imagined if I died, or was laid up for some time, that my mistress

would feel a twinge of remorse that she had so hated "the little imp," as

she styled me. It was my ignorance of that mistress that gave rise to such

extravagant imaginings.

Dr. Flint occasionally had high prices offered for me; but he always said,

"She don't belong to me. She is my daughter's property, and I have no right

to sell her." Good, honest man! My young mistress was still a child, and I

could look for no protection from her. I loved her, and she returned my

affection. I once heard her father allude to her attachment to me, and his

wife promptly replied that it proceeded from fear. This put unpleasant

doubts into my mind. Did the child feign what she did not feel? or was her

mother jealous of the mite of love she bestowed on me? I concluded it must

be the latter. I said to myself, "Surely, little children are true."

One afternoon I sat at my sewing, feeling unusual depression of spirits. My

mistress had been accusing me of an offence, of which I assured her I was

perfectly innocent; but I saw, by the contemptuous curl of her lip, that

she believed I was telling a lie.

I wondered for what wise purpose God was leading me through such thorny

paths, and whether still darker days were in store for me. As I sat musing

thus, the door opened softly, and William came in. "Well, brother," said I,

"what is the matter this time?"

"O Linda, Ben and his master have had a dreadful time!" said he.

My first thought was that Benjamin was killed. "Don't be frightened,

Linda," said William; "I will tell you all about it."

It appeared that Benjamin's master had sent for him, and he did not

immediately obey the summons. When he did, his master was angry, and began

to whip him. He resisted. Master and slave fought, and finally the master

was thrown. Benjamin had cause to tremble; for he had thrown to the ground

his master--one of the richest men in town. I anxiously awaited the

result.

That night I stole to my grandmother's house; and Benjamin also stole

thither from his master's. My grandmother had gone to spend a day or two

with an old friend living in the country.

"I have come," said Benjamin, "to tell you good by. I am going away."

I inquired where.

"To the north," he replied.

I looked at him to see whether he was in earnest. I saw it all in his firm,

set mouth. I implored him not to go, but he paid no heed to my words. He

said he was no longer a boy, and every day made his yoke more galling. He

had raised his hand against his master, and was to be publicly whipped for

the offence. I reminded him of the poverty and hardships he must encounter

among strangers. I told him he might be caught and brought back; and that

was terrible to think of.

He grew vexed, and asked if poverty and hardships with freedom, were not

preferable to our treatment in slavery. "Linda," he continued, "we are dogs

here; foot-balls, cattle, every thing that's mean. No, I will not stay. Let

them bring me back. We don't die but once."

He was right; but it was hard to give him up. "Go," said I, "and break your

mother's heart."

I repented of my words ere they were out.

"Linda," said he, speaking as I had not heard him speak that evening, "how

\_could\_ you say that? Poor mother! be kind to her, Linda; and you, too,

cousin Fanny."

Cousin Fanny was a friend who had lived some years with us.

Farewells were exchanged, and the bright, kind boy, endeared to us by so

many acts of love, vanished from our sight.

It is not necessary to state how he made his escape. Suffice it to say, he

was on his way to New York when a violent storm overtook the vessel. The

captain said he must put into the nearest port. This alarmed Benjamin, who

was aware that he would be advertised in every port near his own town. His

embarrassment was noticed by the captain. To port they went. There the

advertisement met the captain's eye. Benjamin so exactly answered its

description, that the captain laid hold on him, and bound him in chains.

The storm passed, and they proceeded to New York. Before reaching that port

Benjamin managed to get off his chains and throw them overboard. He escaped

from the vessel, but was pursued, captured, and carried back to his master.

When my grandmother returned home and found her youngest child had fled,

great was her sorrow; but, with characteristic piety, she said, "God's will

be done." Each morning, she inquired if any news had been heard from her

boy. Yes, news \_was\_ heard. The master was rejoicing over a letter,

announcing the capture of his human chattel.

That day seems but as yesterday, so well do I remember it. I saw him led

through the streets in chains, to jail. His face was ghastly pale, yet full

of determination. He had begged one of the sailors to go to his mother's

house and ask her not to meet him. He said the sight of her distress would

take from him all self-control. She yearned to see him, and she went; but

she screened herself in the crowd, that it might be as her child had said.

We were not allowed to visit him; but we had known the jailer for years,

and he was a kind-hearted man. At midnight he opened the jail door for my

grandmother and myself to enter, in disguise. When we entered the cell not

a sound broke the stillness. "Benjamin, Benjamin!" whispered my

grandmother. No answer. "Benjamin!" she again faltered. There was a jingle

of chains. The moon had just risen, and cast an uncertain light through the

bars of the window. We knelt down and took Benjamin's cold hands in ours.

We did not speak. Sobs were heard, and Benjamin's lips were unsealed; for

his mother was weeping on his neck. How vividly does memory bring back that

sad night! Mother and son talked together. He asked her pardon for the

suffering he had caused her. She said she had nothing to forgive; she could

not blame his desire for freedom. He told her that when he was captured, he

broke away, and was about casting himself into the river, when thoughts of

\_her\_ came over him, and he desisted. She asked if he did not also think of

God. I fancied I saw his face grow fierce in the moonlight. He answered,

"No, I did not think of him. When a man is hunted like a wild beast he

forgets there is a God, a heaven. He forgets every thing in his struggle to

get beyond the reach of the bloodhounds."

"Don't talk so, Benjamin," said she. "Put your trust in God. Be humble, my

child, and your master will forgive you."

"Forgive me for \_what\_, mother? For not letting him treat me like a dog?

No! I will never humble myself to him. I have worked for him for nothing

all my life, and I am repaid with stripes and imprisonment. Here I will

stay till I die, or till he sells me."

The poor mother shuddered at his words. I think he felt it; for when he

next spoke, his voice was calmer. "Don't fret about me, mother. I ain't

worth it," said he. "I wish I had some of your goodness. You bear every

thing patiently, just as though you thought it was all right. I wish I

could."

She told him she had not always been so; once, she was like him; but when

sore troubles came upon her, and she had no arm to lean upon, she learned

to call on God, and he lightened her burdens. She besought him to do

likewise.

We overstaid our time, and were obliged to hurry from the jail.

Benjamin had been imprisoned three weeks, when my grandmother went to

intercede for him with his master. He was immovable. He said Benjamin

should serve as an example to the rest of his slaves; he should be kept in

jail till he was subdued, or be sold if he got but one dollar for him.

However, he afterwards relented in some degree. The chains were taken off,

and we were allowed to visit him.

As his food was of the coarsest kind, we carried him as often as possible a

warm supper, accompanied with some little luxury for the jailer.

Three months elapsed, and there was no prospect of release or of a

purchaser. One day he was heard to sing and laugh. This piece of indecorum

was told to his master, and the overseer was ordered to re-chain him. He

was now confined in an apartment with other prisoners, who were covered

with filthy rags. Benjamin was chained near them, and was soon covered with

vermin. He worked at his chains till he succeeded in getting out of them.

He passed them through the bars of the window, with a request that they

should be taken to his master, and he should be informed that he was

covered with vermin.

This audacity was punished with heavier chains, and prohibition of our

visits.

My grandmother continued to send him fresh changes of clothes. The old ones

were burned up. The last night we saw him in jail his mother still begged

him to send for his master, and beg his pardon. Neither persuasion nor

argument could turn him from his purpose. He calmly answered, "I am waiting

his time."

Those chains were mournful to hear.

Another three months passed, and Benjamin left his prison walls. We that

loved him waited to bid him a long and last farewell. A slave trader had

bought him. You remember, I told you what price he brought when ten years

of age. Now he was more than twenty years old, and sold for three hundred

dollars. The master had been blind to his own interest. Long confinement

had made his face too pale, his form too thin; moreover, the trader had

heard something of his character, and it did not strike him as suitable for

a slave. He said he would give any price if the handsome lad was a girl. We

thanked God that he was not.

Could you have seen that mother clinging to her child, when they fastened

the irons upon his wrists; could you have heard her heart-rending groans,

and seen her bloodshot eyes wander wildly from face to face, vainly

pleading for mercy; could you have witnessed that scene as I saw it, you

would exclaim, \_Slavery is damnable\_! Benjamin, her youngest, her pet, was

forever gone! She could not realize it. She had had an interview with the

trader for the purpose of ascertaining if Benjamin could be purchased. She

was told it was impossible, as he had given bonds not to sell him till he

was out of the state. He promised that he would not sell him till he

reached New Orleans.

With a strong arm and unvaried trust, my grandmother began her work of

love. Benjamin must be free. If she succeeded, she knew they would still be

separated; but the sacrifice was not too great. Day and night she labored.

The trader's price would treble that he gave; but she was not discouraged.

She employed a lawyer to write to a gentleman, whom she knew, in New

Orleans. She begged him to interest himself for Benjamin, and he willingly

favored her request. When he saw Benjamin, and stated his business, he

thanked him; but said he preferred to wait a while before making the trader

an offer. He knew he had tried to obtain a high price for him, and had

invariably failed. This encouraged him to make another effort for freedom.

So one morning, long before day, Benjamin was missing. He was riding over

the blue billows, bound for Baltimore.

For once his white face did him a kindly service. They had no suspicion

that it belonged to a slave; otherwise, the law would have been followed

out to the letter, and the \_thing\_ rendered back to slavery. The brightest

skies are often overshadowed by the darkest clouds. Benjamin was taken

sick, and compelled to remain in Baltimore three weeks. His strength was

slow in returning; and his desire to continue his journey seemed to retard

his recovery. How could he get strength without air and exercise? He

resolved to venture on a short walk. A by-street was selected, where he

thought himself secure of not being met by any one that knew him; but a

voice called out, "Halloo, Ben, my boy! what are you doing \_here\_!"

His first impulse was to run; but his legs trembled so that he could not

stir. He turned to confront his antagonist, and behold, there stood his old

master's next door neighbor! He thought it was all over with him now; but

it proved otherwise. That man was a miracle. He possessed a goodly number

of slaves, and yet was not quite deaf to that mystic clock, whose ticking

is rarely heard in the slaveholder's breast.

"Ben, you are sick," said he. "Why, you look like a ghost. I guess I gave

you something of a start. Never mind, Ben, I am not going to touch you. You

had a pretty tough time of it, and you may go on your way rejoicing for all

me. But I would advise you to get out of this place plaguy quick, for there

are several gentlemen here from our town." He described the nearest and

safest route to New York, and added, "I shall be glad to tell your mother I

have seen you. Good by, Ben."

Benjamin turned away, filled with gratitude, and surprised that the town he

hated contained such a gem--a gem worthy of a purer setting.

This gentleman was a Northerner by birth, and had married a southern lady.

On his return, he told my grandmother that he had seen her son, and of the

service he had rendered him.

Benjamin reached New York safely, and concluded to stop there until he had

gained strength enough to proceed further. It happened that my

grandmother's only remaining son had sailed for the same city on business

for his mistress. Through God's providence, the brothers met. You may be

sure it was a happy meeting. "O Phil," exclaimed Benjamin, "I am here at

last." Then he told him how near he came to dying, almost in sight of free

land, and how he prayed that he might live to get one breath of free air.

He said life was worth something now, and it would be hard to die. In the

old jail he had not valued it; once, he was tempted to destroy it; but

something, he did not know what, had prevented him; perhaps it was fear. He

had heard those who profess to be religious declare there was no heaven for

self-murderers; and as his life had been pretty hot here, he did not desire

a continuation of the same in another world. "If I die now," he exclaimed,

"thank God, I shall die a freeman!"

He begged my uncle Phillip not to return south; but stay and work with him,

till they earned enough to buy those at home. His brother told him it would

kill their mother if he deserted her in her trouble. She had pledged her

house, and with difficulty had raised money to buy him. Would he be bought?

"No, never!" he replied. "Do you suppose, Phil, when I have got so far out

of their clutches, I will give them one red cent? No! And do you suppose I

would turn mother out of her home in her old age? That I would let her pay

all those hard-earned dollars for me, and never to see me? For you know she

will stay south as long as her other children are slaves. What a good

mother! Tell her to buy \_you\_, Phil. You have been a comfort to her, and I

have been a trouble. And Linda, poor Linda; what'll become of her? Phil,

you don't know what a life they lead her. She has told me something about

it, and I wish old Flint was dead, or a better man. When I was in jail, he

asked her if she didn't want \_him\_ to ask my master to forgive me, and take

me home again. She told him, No; that I didn't want to go back. He got mad,

and said we were all alike. I never despised my own master half as much as

I do that man. There is many a worse slaveholder than my master; but for

all that I would not be his slave."

While Benjamin was sick, he had parted with nearly all his clothes to pay

necessary expenses. But he did not part with a little pin I fastened in his

bosom when we parted. It was the most valuable thing I owned, and I thought

none more worthy to wear it. He had it still.

His brother furnished him with clothes, and gave him what money he had.

They parted with moistened eyes; and as Benjamin turned away, he said,

"Phil, I part with all my kindred." And so it proved. We never heard from

him again.

Uncle Phillip came home; and the first words he uttered when he entered the

house were, "Mother, Ben is free! I have seen him in New York." She stood

looking at him with a bewildered air. "Mother, don't you believe it?" he

said, laying his hand softly upon her shoulder. She raised her hands, and

exclaimed, "God be praised! Let us thank him." She dropped on her knees,

and poured forth her heart in prayer. Then Phillip must sit down and repeat

to her every word Benjamin had said. He told her all; only he forbore to

mention how sick and pale her darling looked. Why should he distress her

when she could do him no good?

The brave old woman still toiled on, hoping to rescue some of her other

children. After a while she succeeded in buying Phillip. She paid eight

hundred dollars, and came home with the precious document that secured his

freedom. The happy mother and son sat together by the old hearthstone that

night, telling how proud they were of each other, and how they would prove

to the world that they could take care of themselves, as they had long

taken care of others. We all concluded by saying, "He that is \_willing\_ to

be a slave, let him be a slave."

V. The Trials Of Girlhood.

During the first years of my service in Dr. Flint's family, I was

accustomed to share some indulgences with the children of my mistress.

Though this seemed to me no more than right, I was grateful for it, and

tried to merit the kindness by the faithful discharge of my duties. But I

now entered on my fifteenth year--a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl.

My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could

not remain ignorant of their import. I tried to treat them with

indifference or contempt. The master's age, my extreme youth, and the fear

that his conduct would be reported to my grandmother, made him bear this

treatment for many months. He was a crafty man, and resorted to many means

to accomplish his purposes. Sometimes he had stormy, terrific ways, that

made his victims tremble; sometimes he assumed a gentleness that he thought

must surely subdue. Of the two, I preferred his stormy moods, although they

left me trembling. He tried his utmost to corrupt the pure principles my

grandmother had instilled. He peopled my young mind with unclean images,

such as only a vile monster could think of. I turned from him with disgust

and hatred. But he was my master. I was compelled to live under the same

roof with him--where I saw a man forty years my senior daily violating the

most sacred commandments of nature. He told me I was his property; that I

must be subject to his will in all things. My soul revolted against the

mean tyranny. But where could I turn for protection? No matter whether the

slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case,

there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or

even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of

men. The mistress, who ought to protect the helpless victim, has no other

feelings towards her but those of jealousy and rage. The degradation, the

wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe.

They are greater than you would willingly believe. Surely, if you credited

one half the truths that are told you concerning the helpless millions

suffering in this cruel bondage, you at the north would not help to tighten

the yoke. You surely would refuse to do for the master, on your own soil,

the mean and cruel work which trained bloodhounds and the lowest class of

whites do for him at the south.

Every where the years bring to all enough of sin and sorrow; but in slavery

the very dawn of life is darkened by these shadows. Even the little child,

who is accustomed to wait on her mistress and her children, will learn,

before she is twelve years old, why it is that her mistress hates such and

such a one among the slaves. Perhaps the child's own mother is among those

hated ones. She listens to violent outbreaks of jealous passion, and cannot

help understanding what is the cause. She will become prematurely knowing

in evil things. Soon she will learn to tremble when she hears her master's

footfall. She will be compelled to realize that she is no longer a child.

If God has bestowed beauty upon her, it will prove her greatest curse. That

which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation

of the female slave. I know that some are too much brutalized by slavery to

feel the humiliation of their position; but many slaves feel it most

acutely, and shrink from the memory of it. I cannot tell how much I

suffered in the presence of these wrongs, nor how I am still pained by the

retrospect. My master met me at every turn, reminding me that I belonged to

him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to

him. If I went out for a breath of fresh air, after a day of unwearied

toil, his footsteps dogged me. If I knelt by my mother's grave, his dark

shadow fell on me even there. The light heart which nature had given me

became heavy with sad forebodings. The other slaves in my master's house

noticed the change. Many of them pitied me; but none dared to ask the

cause. They had no need to inquire. They knew too well the guilty practices

under that roof; and they were aware that to speak of them was an offence

that never went unpunished.

I longed for some one to confide in. I would have given the world to have

laid my head on my grandmother's faithful bosom, and told her all my

troubles. But Dr. Flint swore he would kill me, if I was not as silent as

the grave. Then, although my grandmother was all in all to me, I feared her

as well as loved her. I had been accustomed to look up to her with a

respect bordering upon awe. I was very young, and felt shamefaced about

telling her such impure things, especially as I knew her to be very strict

on such subjects. Moreover, she was a woman of a high spirit. She was

usually very quiet in her demeanor; but if her indignation was once

roused, it was not very easily quelled. I had been told that she once

chased a white gentleman with a loaded pistol, because he insulted one

of her daughters. I dreaded the consequences of a violent outbreak;

and both pride and fear kept me silent. But though I did not confide

in my grandmother, and even evaded her vigilant watchfulness and inquiry,

her presence in the neighborhood was some protection to me. Though she

had been a slave, Dr. Flint was afraid of her. He dreaded her scorching

rebukes. Moreover, she was known and patronized by many people; and he

did not wish to have his villany made public. It was lucky for me that

I did not live on a distant plantation, but in a town not so large that

the inhabitants were ignorant of each other's affairs. Bad as are the

laws and customs in a slaveholding community, the doctor, as a

professional man, deemed it prudent to keep up some outward show of

decency.

O, what days and nights of fear and sorrow that man caused me! Reader, it

is not to awaken sympathy for myself that I am telling you truthfully what

I suffered in slavery. I do it to kindle a flame of compassion in your

hearts for my sisters who are still in bondage, suffering as I once

suffered.

I once saw two beautiful children playing together. One was a fair white

child; the other was her slave, and also her sister. When I saw them

embracing each other, and heard their joyous laughter, I turned sadly away

from the lovely sight. I foresaw the inevitable blight that would fall on

the little slave's heart. I knew how soon her laughter would be changed to

sighs. The fair child grew up to be a still fairer woman. From childhood to

womanhood her pathway was blooming with flowers, and overarched by a sunny

sky. Scarcely one day of her life had been clouded when the sun rose on her

happy bridal morning.

How had those years dealt with her slave sister, the little playmate of her

childhood? She, also, was very beautiful; but the flowers and sunshine of

love were not for her. She drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery,

whereof her persecuted race are compelled to drink.

In view of these things, why are ye silent, ye free men and women of the

north? Why do your tongues falter in maintenance of the right? Would that I

had more ability! But my heart is so full, and my pen is so weak! There are

noble men and women who plead for us, striving to help those who cannot

help themselves. God bless them! God give them strength and courage to go

on! God bless those, every where, who are laboring to advance the cause of

humanity!

VI. The Jealous Mistress.

I would ten thousand times rather that my children should be the

half-starved paupers of Ireland than to be the most pampered among the

slaves of America. I would rather drudge out my life on a cotton

plantation, till the grave opened to give me rest, than to live with an

unprincipled master and a jealous mistress. The felon's home in a

penitentiary is preferable. He may repent, and turn from the error of his

ways, and so find peace; but it is not so with a favorite slave. She is not

allowed to have any pride of character. It is deemed a crime in her to wish

to be virtuous.

Mrs. Flint possessed the key to her husband's character before I was born.

She might have used this knowledge to counsel and to screen the young and

the innocent among her slaves; but for them she had no sympathy. They were

the objects of her constant suspicion and malevolence. She watched her

husband with unceasing vigilance; but he was well practised in means to

evade it. What he could not find opportunity to say in words he manifested

in signs. He invented more than were ever thought of in a deaf and dumb

asylum. I let them pass, as if I did not understand what he meant; and many

were the curses and threats bestowed on me for my stupidity. One day he

caught me teaching myself to write. He frowned, as if he was not well

pleased; but I suppose he came to the conclusion that such an

accomplishment might help to advance his favorite scheme. Before long,

notes were often slipped into my hand. I would return them, saying, "I

can't read them, sir." "Can't you?" he replied; "then I must read them to

you." He always finished the reading by asking, "Do you understand?"

Sometimes he would complain of the heat of the tea room, and order his

supper to be placed on a small table in the piazza. He would seat himself

there with a well-satisfied smile, and tell me to stand by and brush away

the flies. He would eat very slowly, pausing between the mouthfuls. These

intervals were employed in describing the happiness I was so foolishly

throwing away, and in threatening me with the penalty that finally awaited

my stubborn disobedience. He boasted much of the forbearance he had

exercised towards me, and reminded me that there was a limit to his

patience. When I succeeded in avoiding opportunities for him to talk to me

at home, I was ordered to come to his office, to do some errand. When

there, I was obliged to stand and listen to such language as he saw fit to

address to me. Sometimes I so openly expressed my contempt for him that he

would become violently enraged, and I wondered why he did not strike me.

Circumstanced as he was, he probably thought it was better policy to be

forebearing. But the state of things grew worse and worse daily. In

desperation I told him that I must and would apply to my grandmother for

protection. He threatened me with death, and worse than death, if I made

any complaint to her. Strange to say, I did not despair. I was naturally of

a buoyant disposition, and always I had a hope of somehow getting out of

his clutches. Like many a poor, simple slave before me, I trusted that some

threads of joy would yet be woven into my dark destiny.

I had entered my sixteenth year, and every day it became more apparent that

my presence was intolerable to Mrs. Flint. Angry words frequently passed

between her and her husband. He had never punished me himself, and he would

not allow any body else to punish me. In that respect, she was never

satisfied; but, in her angry moods, no terms were too vile for her to

bestow upon me. Yet I, whom she detested so bitterly, had far more pity for

her than he had, whose duty it was to make her life happy. I never wronged

her, or wished to wrong her, and one word of kindness from her would have

brought me to her feet.

After repeated quarrels between the doctor and his wife, he announced his

intention to take his youngest daughter, then four years old, to sleep in

his apartment. It was necessary that a servant should sleep in the same

room, to be on hand if the child stirred. I was selected for that office,

and informed for what purpose that arrangement had been made. By managing

to keep within sight of people, as much as possible, during the day time, I

had hitherto succeeded in eluding my master, though a razor was often held

to my throat to force me to change this line of policy. At night I slept by

the side of my great aunt, where I felt safe. He was too prudent to come

into her room. She was an old woman, and had been in the family many years.

Moreover, as a married man, and a professional man, he deemed it necessary

to save appearances in some degree. But he resolved to remove the obstacle

in the way of his scheme; and he thought he had planned it so that he

should evade suspicion. He was well aware how much I prized my refuge by

the side of my old aunt, and he determined to dispossess me of it. The

first night the doctor had the little child in his room alone. The next

morning, I was ordered to take my station as nurse the following night. A

kind Providence interposed in my favor. During the day Mrs. Flint heard of

this new arrangement, and a storm followed. I rejoiced to hear it rage.

After a while my mistress sent for me to come to her room. Her first

question was, "Did you know you were to sleep in the doctor's room?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Who told you?"

"My master."

"Will you answer truly all the questions I ask?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Tell me, then, as you hope to be forgiven, are you innocent of what I have

accused you?"

"I am."

She handed me a Bible, and said, "Lay your hand on your heart, kiss this

holy book, and swear before God that you tell me the truth."

I took the oath she required, and I did it with a clear conscience.

"You have taken God's holy word to testify your innocence," said she. "If

you have deceived me, beware! Now take this stool, sit down, look me

directly in the face, and tell me all that has passed between your master

and you."

I did as she ordered. As I went on with my account her color changed

frequently, she wept, and sometimes groaned. She spoke in tones so sad,

that I was touched by her grief. The tears came to my eyes; but I was soon

convinced that her emotions arose from anger and wounded pride. She felt

that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had

no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy. She pitied

herself as a martyr; but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of

shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed. Yet

perhaps she had some touch of feeling for me; for when the conference was

ended, she spoke kindly, and promised to protect me. I should have been

much comforted by this assurance if I could have had confidence in it; but

my experiences in slavery had filled me with distrust. She was not a very

refined woman, and had not much control over her passions. I was an object

of her jealousy, and, consequently, of her hatred; and I knew I could not

expect kindness or confidence from her under the circumstances in which I

was placed. I could not blame her. Slaveholders' wives feel as other women

would under similar circumstances. The fire of her temper kindled from

small-sparks, and now the flame became so intense that the doctor was

obliged to give up his intended arrangement.

I knew I had ignited the torch, and I expected to suffer for it afterwards;

but I felt too thankful to my mistress for the timely aid she rendered me

to care much about that. She now took me to sleep in a room adjoining her

own. There I was an object of her especial care, though not to her especial

comfort, for she spent many a sleepless night to watch over me. Sometimes I

woke up, and found her bending over me. At other times she whispered in my

ear, as though it was her husband who was speaking to me, and listened to

hear what I would answer. If she startled me, on such occasions, she would

glide stealthily away; and the next morning she would tell me I had been

talking in my sleep, and ask who I was talking to. At last, I began to be

fearful for my life. It had been often threatened; and you can imagine,

better than I can describe, what an unpleasant sensation it must produce to

wake up in the dead of night and find a jealous woman bending over you.

Terrible as this experience was, I had fears that it would give place to

one more terrible.

My mistress grew weary of her vigils; they did not prove satisfactory. She

changed her tactics. She now tried the trick of accusing my master of

crime, in my presence, and gave my name as the author of the accusation. To

my utter astonishment, he replied, "I don't believe it; but if she did

acknowledge it, you tortured her into exposing me." Tortured into exposing

him! Truly, Satan had no difficulty in distinguishing the color of his

soul! I understood his object in making this false representation. It was

to show me that I gained nothing by seeking the protection of my mistress;

that the power was still all in his own hands. I pitied Mrs. Flint. She was

a second wife, many years the junior of her husband; and the hoary-headed

miscreant was enough to try the patience of a wiser and better woman. She

was completely foiled, and knew not how to proceed. She would gladly have

had me flogged for my supposed false oath; but, as I have already stated,

the doctor never allowed any one to whip me. The old sinner was politic.

The application of the lash might have led to remarks that would have

exposed him in the eyes of his children and grandchildren. How often did I

rejoice that I lived in a town where all the inhabitants knew each other!

If I had been on a remote plantation, or lost among the multitude of a

crowded city, I should not be a living woman at this day.

The secrets of slavery are concealed like those of the Inquisition. My

master was, to my knowledge, the father of eleven slaves. But did the

mothers dare to tell who was the father of their children? Did the other

slaves dare to allude to it, except in whispers among themselves? No,

indeed! They knew too well the terrible consequences.

My grandmother could not avoid seeing things which excited her suspicions.

She was uneasy about me, and tried various ways to buy me; but the

never-changing answer was always repeated: "Linda does not belong to \_me\_.

She is my daughter's property, and I have no legal right to sell her." The

conscientious man! He was too scrupulous to \_sell\_ me; but he had no

scruples whatever about committing a much greater wrong against the

helpless young girl placed under his guardianship, as his daughter's

property. Sometimes my persecutor would ask me whether I would like to be

sold. I told him I would rather be sold to any body than to lead such a

life as I did. On such occasions he would assume the air of a very injured

individual, and reproach me for my ingratitude. "Did I not take you into

the house, and make you the companion of my own children?" he would say.

"Have \_I\_ ever treated you like a negro? I have never allowed you to be

punished, not even to please your mistress. And this is the recompense I

get, you ungrateful girl!" I answered that he had reasons of his own for

screening me from punishment, and that the course he pursued made my

mistress hate me and persecute me. If I wept, he would say, "Poor child!

Don't cry! don't cry! I will make peace for you with your mistress. Only

let me arrange matters in my own way. Poor, foolish girl! you don't know

what is for your own good. I would cherish you. I would make a lady of you.

Now go, and think of all I have promised you."

I did think of it.

Reader, I draw no imaginary pictures of southern homes. I am telling you

the plain truth. Yet when victims make their escape from the wild beast of

Slavery, northerners consent to act the part of bloodhounds, and hunt the

poor fugitive back into his den, "full of dead men's bones, and all

uncleanness." Nay, more, they are not only willing, but proud, to give

their daughters in marriage to slaveholders. The poor girls have romantic

notions of a sunny clime, and of the flowering vines that all the year

round shade a happy home. To what disappointments are they destined! The

young wife soon learns that the husband in whose hands she has placed her

happiness pays no regard to his marriage vows. Children of every shade of

complexion play with her own fair babies, and too well she knows that they

are born unto him of his own household. Jealousy and hatred enter the

flowery home, and it is ravaged of its loveliness.

Southern women often marry a man knowing that he is the father of many

little slaves. They do not trouble themselves about it. They regard such

children as property, as marketable as the pigs on the plantation; and it

is seldom that they do not make them aware of this by passing them into the

slave-trader's hands as soon as possible, and thus getting them out of

their sight. I am glad to say there are some honorable exceptions.

I have myself known two southern wives who exhorted their husbands to free

those slaves towards whom they stood in a "parental relation;" and their

request was granted. These husbands blushed before the superior nobleness

of their wives' natures. Though they had only counselled them to do that

which it was their duty to do, it commanded their respect, and rendered

their conduct more exemplary. Concealment was at an end, and confidence

took the place of distrust.

Though this bad institution deadens the moral sense, even in white women,

to a fearful extent, it is not altogether extinct. I have heard southern

ladies say of Mr. Such a one, "He not only thinks it no disgrace to be the

father of those little niggers, but he is not ashamed to call himself their

master. I declare, such things ought not to be tolerated in any decent

society!"

VII. The Lover.

Why does the slave ever love? Why allow the tendrils of the heart to twine

around objects which may at any moment be wrenched away by the hand of

violence? When separations come by the hand of death, the pious soul can

bow in resignation, and say, "Not my will, but thine be done, O Lord!" But

when the ruthless hand of man strikes the blow, regardless of the misery he

causes, it is hard to be submissive. I did not reason thus when I was a

young girl. Youth will be youth. I loved and I indulged the hope that the

dark clouds around me would turn out a bright lining. I forgot that in the

land of my birth the shadows are too dense for light to penetrate. A land

Where laughter is not mirth; nor thought the mind;

Nor words a language; nor e'en men mankind.

Where cries reply to curses, shrieks to blows,

And each is tortured in his separate hell.

There was in the neighborhood a young colored carpenter; a free born man.

We had been well acquainted in childhood, and frequently met together

afterwards. We became mutually attached, and he proposed to marry me. I

loved him with all the ardor of a young girl's first love. But when I

reflected that I was a slave, and that the laws gave no sanction to the

marriage of such, my heart sank within me. My lover wanted to buy me; but I

knew that Dr. Flint was too willful and arbitrary a man to consent to that

arrangement. From him, I was sure of experiencing all sort of opposition,

and I had nothing to hope from my mistress. She would have been delighted

to have got rid of me, but not in that way. It would have relieved her mind

of a burden if she could have seen me sold to some distant state, but if I

was married near home I should be just as much in her husband's power as I

had previously been,--for the husband of a slave has no power to protect

her. Moreover, my mistress, like many others, seemed to think that slaves

had no right to any family ties of their own; that they were created merely

to wait upon the family of the mistress. I once heard her abuse a young

slave girl, who told her that a colored man wanted to make her his wife. "I

will have you peeled and pickled, my lady," said she, "if I ever hear you

mention that subject again. Do you suppose that I will have you tending

\_my\_ children with the children of that nigger?" The girl to whom she said

this had a mulatto child, of course not acknowledged by its father. The

poor black man who loved her would have been proud to acknowledge his

helpless offspring.

Many and anxious were the thoughts I revolved in my mind. I was at a loss

what to do. Above all things, I was desirous to spare my lover the insults

that had cut so deeply into my own soul. I talked with my grandmother about

it, and partly told her my fears. I did not dare to tell her the worst. She

had long suspected all was not right, and if I confirmed her suspicions I

knew a storm would rise that would prove the overthrow of all my hopes.

This love-dream had been my support through many trials; and I could not

bear to run the risk of having it suddenly dissipated. There was a lady in

the neighborhood, a particular friend of Dr. Flint's, who often visited the

house. I had a great respect for her, and she had always manifested a

friendly interest in me. Grandmother thought she would have great influence

with the doctor. I went to this lady, and told her my story. I told her I

was aware that my lover's being a free-born man would prove a great

objection; but he wanted to buy me; and if Dr. Flint would consent to that

arrangement, I felt sure he would be willing to pay any reasonable price.

She knew that Mrs. Flint disliked me; therefore, I ventured to suggest that

perhaps my mistress would approve of my being sold, as that would rid her

of me. The lady listened with kindly sympathy, and promised to do her

utmost to promote my wishes. She had an interview with the doctor, and I

believe she pleaded my cause earnestly; but it was all to no purpose.

How I dreaded my master now! Every minute I expected to be summoned to his

presence; but the day passed, and I heard nothing from him. The next

morning, a message was brought to me: "Master wants you in his study." I

found the door ajar, and I stood a moment gazing at the hateful man who

claimed a right to rule me, body and soul. I entered, and tried to appear

calm. I did not want him to know how my heart was bleeding. He looked

fixedly at me, with an expression which seemed to say, "I have half a mind

to kill you on the spot." At last he broke the silence, and that was a

relief to both of us.

"So you want to be married, do you?" said he, "and to a free nigger."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll soon convince you whether I am your master, or the nigger

fellow you honor so highly. If you \_must\_ have a husband, you may take up

with one of my slaves."

What a situation I should be in, as the wife of one of \_his\_ slaves, even

if my heart had been interested!

I replied, "Don't you suppose, sir, that a slave can have some preference

about marrying? Do you suppose that all men are alike to her?"

"Do you love this nigger?" said he, abruptly.

"Yes, sir."

"How dare you tell me so!" he exclaimed, in great wrath. After a slight

pause, he added, "I supposed you thought more of yourself; that you felt

above the insults of such puppies."

I replied, "If he is a puppy, I am a puppy, for we are both of the negro

race. It is right and honorable for us to love each other. The man you call

a puppy never insulted me, sir; and he would not love me if he did not

believe me to be a virtuous woman."

He sprang upon me like a tiger, and gave me a stunning blow. It was the

first time he had ever struck me; and fear did not enable me to control my

anger. When I had recovered a little from the effects, I exclaimed, "You

have struck me for answering you honestly. How I despise you!"

There was silence for some minutes. Perhaps he was deciding what should be

my punishment; or, perhaps, he wanted to give me time to reflect on what I

had said, and to whom I had said it. Finally, he asked, "Do you know what

you have said?"

"Yes, sir; but your treatment drove me to it."

"Do you know that I have a right to do as I like with you,--that I can kill

you, if I please?"

"You have tried to kill me, and I wish you had; but you have no right to do

as you like with me."

"Silence!" he exclaimed, in a thundering voice. "By heavens, girl, you

forget yourself too far! Are you mad? If you are, I will soon bring you to

your senses. Do you think any other master would bear what I have borne

from you this morning? Many masters would have killed you on the spot. How

would you like to be sent to jail for your insolence?"

"I know I have been disrespectful, sir," I replied; "but you drove me to

it; I couldn't help it. As for the jail, there would be more peace for me

there than there is here."

"You deserve to go there," said he, "and to be under such treatment, that

you would forget the meaning of the word \_peace\_. It would do you good. It

would take some of your high notions out of you. But I am not ready to send

you there yet, notwithstanding your ingratitude for all my kindness and

forbearance. You have been the plague of my life. I have wanted to make you

happy, and I have been repaid with the basest ingratitude; but though you

have proved yourself incapable of appreciating my kindness, I will be

lenient towards you, Linda. I will give you one more chance to redeem your

character. If you behave yourself and do as I require, I will forgive you

and treat you as I always have done; but if you disobey me, I will punish

you as I would the meanest slave on my plantation. Never let me hear that

fellow's name mentioned again. If I ever know of your speaking to him, I

will cowhide you both; and if I catch him lurking about my premises, I will

shoot him as soon as I would a dog. Do you hear what I say? I'll teach you

a lesson about marriage and free niggers! Now go, and let this be the last

time I have occasion to speak to you on this subject."

Reader, did you ever hate? I hope not. I never did but once; and I trust I

never shall again. Somebody has called it "the atmosphere of hell;" and I

believe it is so.

For a fortnight the doctor did not speak to me. He thought to mortify me;

to make me feel that I had disgraced myself by receiving the honorable

addresses of a respectable colored man, in preference to the base proposals

of a white man. But though his lips disdained to address me, his eyes were

very loquacious. No animal ever watched its prey more narrowly than he

watched me. He knew that I could write, though he had failed to make me

read his letters; and he was now troubled lest I should exchange letters

with another man. After a while he became weary of silence; and I was sorry

for it. One morning, as he passed through the hall, to leave the house, he

contrived to thrust a note into my hand. I thought I had better read it,

and spare myself the vexation of having him read it to me. It expressed

regret for the blow he had given me, and reminded me that I myself was

wholly to blame for it. He hoped I had become convinced of the injury I was

doing myself by incurring his displeasure. He wrote that he had made up his

mind to go to Louisiana; that he should take several slaves with him, and

intended I should be one of the number. My mistress would remain where she

was; therefore I should have nothing to fear from that quarter. If I

merited kindness from him, he assured me that it would be lavishly

bestowed. He begged me to think over the matter, and answer the following

day.

The next morning I was called to carry a pair of scissors to his room. I

laid them on the table, with the letter beside them. He thought it was my

answer, and did not call me back. I went as usual to attend my young

mistress to and from school. He met me in the street, and ordered me to

stop at his office on my way back. When I entered, he showed me his letter,

and asked me why I had not answered it. I replied, "I am your daughter's

property, and it is in your power to send me, or take me, wherever you

please." He said he was very glad to find me so willing to go, and that we

should start early in the autumn. He had a large practice in the town, and

I rather thought he had made up the story merely to frighten me. However

that might be, I was determined that I would never go to Louisiana with

him.

Summer passed away, and early in the autumn Dr. Flint's eldest son was sent

to Louisiana to examine the country, with a view to emigrating. That news

did not disturb me. I knew very well that I should not be sent with \_him\_.

That I had not been taken to the plantation before this time, was owing to

the fact that his son was there. He was jealous of his son; and jealousy of

the overseer had kept him from punishing me by sending me into the fields

to work. Is it strange, that I was not proud of these protectors? As for

the overseer, he was a man for whom I had less respect than I had for a

bloodhound.

Young Mr. Flint did not bring back a favorable report of Louisiana, and I

heard no more of that scheme. Soon after this, my lover met me at the

corner of the street, and I stopped to speak to him. Looking up, I saw my

master watching us from his window. I hurried home, trembling with fear. I

was sent for, immediately, to go to his room. He met me with a blow. "When

is mistress to be married?" said he, in a sneering tone. A shower of oaths

and imprecations followed. How thankful I was that my lover was a free man!

that my tyrant had no power to flog him for speaking to me in the street!

Again and again I revolved in my mind how all this would end. There was no

hope that the doctor would consent to sell me on any terms. He had an iron

will, and was determined to keep me, and to conquer me. My lover was an

intelligent and religious man. Even if he could have obtained permission to

marry me while I was a slave, the marriage would give him no power to

protect me from my master. It would have made him miserable to witness the

insults I should have been subjected to. And then, if we had children, I

knew they must "follow the condition of the mother." What a terrible blight

that would be on the heart of a free, intelligent father! For \_his\_ sake, I

felt that I ought not to link his fate with my own unhappy destiny. He was

going to Savannah to see about a little property left him by an uncle; and

hard as it was to bring my feelings to it, I earnestly entreated him not to

come back. I advised him to go to the Free States, where his tongue would

not be tied, and where his intelligence would be of more avail to him. He

left me, still hoping the day would come when I could be bought. With me

the lamp of hope had gone out. The dream of my girlhood was over. I felt

lonely and desolate.

Still I was not stripped of all. I still had my good grandmother, and my

affectionate brother. When he put his arms round my neck, and looked into

my eyes, as if to read there the troubles I dared not tell, I felt that I

still had something to love. But even that pleasant emotion was chilled by

the reflection that he might be torn from me at any moment, by some sudden

freak of my master. If he had known how we loved each other, I think he

would have exulted in separating us. We often planned together how we could

get to the north. But, as William remarked, such things are easier said

than done. My movements were very closely watched, and we had no means of

getting any money to defray our expenses. As for grandmother, she was

strongly opposed to her children's undertaking any such project. She had

not forgotten poor Benjamin's sufferings, and she was afraid that if

another child tried to escape, he would have a similar or a worse fate. To

me, nothing seemed more dreadful than my present life. I said to myself,

"William \_must\_ be free. He shall go to the north, and I will follow him."

Many a slave sister has formed the same plans.

VIII. What Slaves Are Taught To Think Of The North.

Slaveholders pride themselves upon being honorable men; but if you were to

hear the enormous lies they tell their slaves, you would have small respect

for their veracity. I have spoken plain English. Pardon me. I cannot use a

milder term. When they visit the north, and return home, they tell their

slaves of the runaways they have seen, and describe them to be in the most

deplorable condition. A slaveholder once told me that he had seen a runaway

friend of mine in New York, and that she besought him to take her back to

her master, for she was literally dying of starvation; that many days she

had only one cold potato to eat, and at other times could get nothing at

all. He said he refused to take her, because he knew her master would not

thank him for bringing such a miserable wretch to his house. He ended by

saying to me, "This is the punishment she brought on herself for running

away from a kind master."

This whole story was false. I afterwards staid with that friend in New

York, and found her in comfortable circumstances. She had never thought of

such a thing as wishing to go back to slavery. Many of the slaves believe

such stories, and think it is not worth while to exchange slavery for such

a hard kind of freedom. It is difficult to persuade such that freedom could

make them useful men, and enable them to protect their wives and children.

If those heathen in our Christian land had as much teaching as some

Hindoos, they would think otherwise. They would know that liberty is more

valuable than life. They would begin to understand their own capabilities,

and exert themselves to become men and women.

But while the Free States sustain a law which hurls fugitives back into

slavery, how can the slaves resolve to become men? There are some who

strive to protect wives and daughters from the insults of their masters;

but those who have such sentiments have had advantages above the general

mass of slaves. They have been partially civilized and Christianized by

favorable circumstances. Some are bold enough to \_utter\_ such sentiments to

their masters. O, that there were more of them!

Some poor creatures have been so brutalized by the lash that they will

sneak out of the way to give their masters free access to their wives and

daughters. Do you think this proves the black man to belong to an inferior

order of beings? What would \_you\_ be, if you had been born and brought up a

slave, with generations of slaves for ancestors? I admit that the black man

\_is\_ inferior. But what is it that makes him so? It is the ignorance in

which white men compel him to live; it is the torturing whip that lashes

manhood out of him; it is the fierce bloodhounds of the South, and the

scarcely less cruel human bloodhounds of the north, who enforce the

Fugitive Slave Law. \_They\_ do the work.

Southern gentlemen indulge in the most contemptuous expressions about the

Yankees, while they, on their part, consent to do the vilest work for them,

such as the ferocious bloodhounds and the despised negro-hunters are

employed to do at home. When southerners go to the north, they are proud to

do them honor; but the northern man is not welcome south of Mason and

Dixon's line, unless he suppresses every thought and feeling at variance

with their "peculiar institution." Nor is it enough to be silent. The

masters are not pleased, unless they obtain a greater degree of

subservience than that; and they are generally accommodated. Do they

respect the northerner for this? I trow not. Even the slaves despise "a

northern man with southern principles;" and that is the class they

generally see. When northerners go to the south to reside, they prove very

apt scholars. They soon imbibe the sentiments and disposition of their

neighbors, and generally go beyond their teachers. Of the two, they are

proverbially the hardest masters.

They seem to satisfy their consciences with the doctrine that God created

the Africans to be slaves. What a libel upon the heavenly Father, who "made

of one blood all nations of men!" And then who \_are\_ Africans? Who can

measure the amount of Anglo-Saxon blood coursing in the veins of American

slaves?

I have spoken of the pains slaveholders take to give their slaves a bad

opinion of the north; but, notwithstanding this, intelligent slaves are

aware that they have many friends in the Free States. Even the most

ignorant have some confused notions about it. They knew that I could read;

and I was often asked if I had seen any thing in the newspapers about white

folks over in the big north, who were trying to get their freedom for them.

Some believe that the abolitionists have already made them free, and that

it is established by law, but that their masters prevent the law from going

into effect. One woman begged me to get a newspaper and read it over. She

said her husband told her that the black people had sent word to the queen

of 'Merica that they were all slaves; that she didn't believe it, and went

to Washington city to see the president about it. They quarrelled; she drew

her sword upon him, and swore that he should help her to make them all

free.

That poor, ignorant woman thought that America was governed by a Queen, to

whom the President was subordinate. I wish the President was subordinate to

Queen Justice.

IX. Sketches Of Neighboring Slaveholders.

There was a planter in the country, not far from us, whom I will call Mr.

Litch. He was an ill-bred, uneducated man, but very wealthy. He had six

hundred slaves, many of whom he did not know by sight. His extensive

plantation was managed by well-paid overseers. There was a jail and a

whipping post on his grounds; and whatever cruelties were perpetrated

there, they passed without comment. He was so effectually screened by his

great wealth that he was called to no account for his crimes, not even for

murder.

Various were the punishments resorted to. A favorite one was to tie a rope

round a man's body, and suspend him from the ground. A fire was kindled

over him, from which was suspended a piece of fat pork. As this cooked, the

scalding drops of fat continually fell on the bare flesh. On his own

plantation, he required very strict obedience to the eighth commandment.

But depredations on the neighbors were allowable, provided the culprit

managed to evade detection or suspicion. If a neighbor brought a charge of

theft against any of his slaves, he was browbeaten by the master, who

assured him that his slaves had enough of every thing at home, and had no

inducement to steal. No sooner was the neighbor's back turned, than the

accused was sought out, and whipped for his lack of discretion. If a slave

stole from him even a pound of meat or a peck of corn, if detection

followed, he was put in chains and imprisoned, and so kept till his form

was attentuated by hunger and suffering.

A freshnet once bore his wine cellar and meat house miles away from the

plantation. Some slaves followed, and secured bits of meat and bottles of

wine. Two were detected; a ham and some liquor being found in their huts.

They were summoned by their master. No words were used, but a club felled

them to the ground. A rough box was their coffin, and their interment was a

dog's burial. Nothing was said.

Murder was so common on his plantation that he feared to be alone after

nightfall. He might have believed in ghosts.

His brother, if not equal in wealth, was at least equal in cruelty. His

bloodhounds were well trained. Their pen was spacious, and a terror to the

slaves. They were let loose on a runway, and, if they tracked him, they

literally tore the flesh from his bones. When this slaveholder died, his

shrieks and groans were so frightful that they appalled his own friends.

His last words were, "I am going to hell; bury my money with me."

After death his eyes remained open. To press the lids down, silver dollars

were laid on them. These were buried with him. From this circumstance, a

rumor went abroad that his coffin was filled with money. Three times his

grave was opened, and his coffin taken out. The last time, his body was

found on the ground, and a flock of buzzards were pecking at it. He was

again interred, and a sentinel set over his grave. The perpetrators were

never discovered.

Cruelty is contagious in uncivilized communities. Mr. Conant, a neighbor of

Mr. Litch, returned from town one evening in a partial state of

intoxication. His body servant gave him some offence. He was divested of

his clothes, except his shirt, whipped, and tied to a large tree in front

of the house. It was a stormy night in winter. The wind blew bitterly cold,

and the boughs of the old tree crackled under falling sleet. A member of

the family, fearing he would freeze to death, begged that he might be taken

down; but the master would not relent. He remained there three hours; and,

when he was cut down, he was more dead than alive. Another slave, who stole

a pig from this master, to appease his hunger, was terribly flogged. In

desperation, he tried to run away. But at the end of two miles, he was so

faint with loss of blood, he thought he was dying. He had a wife, and he

longed to see her once more. Too sick to walk, he crept back that long

distance on his hands and knees. When he reached his master's, it was

night. He had not strength to rise and open the gate. He moaned, and tried

to call for help. I had a friend living in the same family. At last his cry

reached her. She went out and found the prostrate man at the gate. She ran

back to the house for assistance, and two men returned with her. They

carried him in, and laid him on the floor. The back of his shirt was one

clot of blood. By means of lard, my friend loosened it from the raw flesh.

She bandaged him, gave him cool drink, and left him to rest. The master

said he deserved a hundred more lashes. When his own labor was stolen from

him, he had stolen food to appease his hunger. This was his crime.

Another neighbor was a Mrs. Wade. At no hour of the day was there cessation

of the lash on her premises. Her labors began with the dawn, and did not

cease till long after nightfall. The barn was her particular place of

torture. There she lashed the slaves with the might of a man. An old slave

of hers once said to me, "It is hell in missis's house. 'Pears I can never

get out. Day and night I prays to die."

The mistress died before the old woman, and, when dying, entreated her

husband not to permit any one of her slaves to look on her after death. A

slave who had nursed her children, and had still a child in her care,

watched her chance, and stole with it in her arms to the room where lay her

dead mistress. She gazed a while on her, then raised her hand and dealt two

blows on her face, saying, as she did so, "The devil is got you \_now\_!" She

forgot that the child was looking on. She had just begun to talk; and she

said to her father, "I did see ma, and mammy did strike ma, so," striking

her own face with her little hand. The master was startled. He could not

imagine how the nurse could obtain access to the room where the corpse lay;

for he kept the door locked. He questioned her. She confessed that what the

child had said was true, and told how she had procured the key. She was

sold to Georgia.

In my childhood I knew a valuable slave, named Charity, and loved her, as

all children did. Her young mistress married, and took her to Louisiana.

Her little boy, James, was sold to a good sort of master. He became

involved in debt, and James was sold again to a wealthy slaveholder, noted

for his cruelty. With this man he grew up to manhood, receiving the

treatment of a dog. After a severe whipping, to save himself from further

infliction of the lash, with which he was threatened, he took to the woods.

He was in a most miserable condition--cut by the cowskin, half naked, half

starved, and without the means of procuring a crust of bread.

Some weeks after his escape, he was captured, tied, and carried back to his

master's plantation. This man considered punishment in his jail, on bread

and water, after receiving hundreds of lashes, too mild for the poor

slave's offence. Therefore he decided, after the overseer should have

whipped him to his satisfaction, to have him placed between the screws of

the cotton gin, to stay as long as he had been in the woods. This wretched

creature was cut with the whip from his head to his feet, then washed with

strong brine, to prevent the flesh from mortifying, and make it heal sooner

than it otherwise would. He was then put into the cotton gin, which was

screwed down, only allowing him room to turn on his side when he could not

lie on his back. Every morning a slave was sent with a piece of bread and

bowl of water, which was placed within reach of the poor fellow. The slave

was charged, under penalty of severe punishment, not to speak to him.

Four days passed, and the slave continued to carry the bread and water. On

the second morning, he found the bread gone, but the water untouched. When

he had been in the press four days and five night, the slave informed his

master that the water had not been used for four mornings, and that

horrible stench came from the gin house. The overseer was sent to examine

into it. When the press was unscrewed, the dead body was found partly eaten

by rats and vermin. Perhaps the rats that devoured his bread had gnawed him

before life was extinct. Poor Charity! Grandmother and I often asked each

other how her affectionate heart would bear the news, if she should ever

hear of the murder of her son. We had known her husband, and knew that

James was like him in manliness and intelligence. These were the qualities

that made it so hard for him to be a plantation slave. They put him into a

rough box, and buried him with less feeling than would have been manifested

for an old house dog. Nobody asked any questions. He was a slave; and the

feeling was that the master had a right to do what he pleased with his own

property. And what did \_he\_ care for the value of a slave? He had hundreds

of them. When they had finished their daily toil, they must hurry to eat

their little morsels, and be ready to extinguish their pine knots before

nine o'clock, when the overseer went his patrol rounds. He entered every

cabin, to see that men and their wives had gone to bed together, lest the

men, from over-fatigue, should fall asleep in the chimney corner, and

remain there till the morning horn called them to their daily task. Women

are considered of no value, unless they continually increase their owner's

stock. They are put on a par with animals. This same master shot a woman

through the head, who had run away and been brought back to him. No one

called him to account for it. If a slave resisted being whipped, the

bloodhounds were unpacked, and set upon him, to tear his flesh from his

bones. The master who did these things was highly educated, and styled a

perfect gentleman. He also boasted the name and standing of a Christian,

though Satan never had a truer follower.

I could tell of more slaveholders as cruel as those I have described. They

are not exceptions to the general rule. I do not say there are no humane

slaveholders. Such characters do exist, notwithstanding the hardening

influences around them. But they are "like angels' visits--few and far

between."

I knew a young lady who was one of these rare specimens. She was an orphan,

and inherited as slaves a woman and her six children. Their father was a

free man. They had a comfortable home of their own, parents and children

living together. The mother and eldest daughter served their mistress

during the day, and at night returned to their dwelling, which was on the

premises. The young lady was very pious, and there was some reality in her

religion. She taught her slaves to lead pure lives, and wished them to

enjoy the fruit of their own industry. \_Her\_ religion was not a garb put on

for Sunday, and laid aside till Sunday returned again. The eldest daughter

of the slave mother was promised in marriage to a free man; and the day

before the wedding this good mistress emancipated her, in order that her

marriage might have the sanction of \_law\_.

Report said that this young lady cherished an unrequited affection for a

man who had resolved to marry for wealth. In the course of time a rich

uncle of hers died. He left six thousand dollars to his two sons by a

colored woman, and the remainder of his property to this orphan niece. The

metal soon attracted the magnet. The lady and her weighty purse became his.

She offered to manumit her slaves--telling them that her marriage might

make unexpected changes in their destiny, and she wished to insure their

happiness. They refused to take their freedom, saying that she had always

been their best friend, and they could not be so happy any where as with

her. I was not surprised. I had often seen them in their comfortable home,

and thought that the whole town did not contain a happier family. They had

never felt slavery; and, when it was too late, they were convinced of its

reality.

When the new master claimed this family as his property, the father became

furious, and went to his mistress for protection. "I can do nothing for you

now, Harry," said she. "I no longer have the power I had a week ago. I have

succeeded in obtaining the freedom of your wife; but I cannot obtain it for

your children." The unhappy father swore that nobody should take his

children from him. He concealed them in the woods for some days; but they

were discovered and taken. The father was put in jail, and the two oldest

boys sold to Georgia. One little girl, too young to be of service to her

master, was left with the wretched mother. The other three were carried to

their master's plantation. The eldest soon became a mother; and when the

slaveholder's wife looked at the babe, she wept bitterly. She knew that her

own husband had violated the purity she had so carefully inculcated. She

had a second child by her master, and then he sold her and his offspring to

his brother. She bore two children to the brother and was sold again. The

next sister went crazy. The life she was compelled to lead drove her mad.

The third one became the mother of five daughters. Before the birth of the

fourth the pious mistress died. To the last, she rendered every kindness to

the slaves that her unfortunate circumstances permitted. She passed away

peacefully, glad to close her eyes on a life which had been made so

wretched by the man she loved.

This man squandered the fortune he had received, and sought to retrieve his

affairs by a second marriage; but, having retired after a night of drunken

debauch, he was found dead in the morning. He was called a good master; for

he fed and clothed his slaves better than most masters, and the lash was

not heard on his plantation so frequently as on many others. Had it not

been for slavery, he would have been a better man, and his wife a happier

woman.

No pen can give an adequate description of the all-pervading corruption

produced by slavery. The slave girl is reared in an atmosphere of

licentiousness and fear. The lash and the foul talk of her master and his

sons are her teachers. When she is fourteen or fifteen, her owner, or his

sons, or the overseer, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with

presents. If these fail to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or

starved into submission to their will. She may have had religious

principles inculcated by some pious mother or grandmother, or some good

mistress; she may have a lover, whose good opinion and peace of mind are

dear to her heart; or the profligate men who have power over her may be

exceedingly odious to her. But resistance is hopeless.

The poor worm

Shall prove her contest vain. Life's little day

Shall pass, and she is gone!

The slaveholder's sons are, of course, vitiated, even while boys, by the

unclean influences every where around them. Nor do the master's daughters

always escape. Severe retributions sometimes come upon him for the wrongs

he does to the daughters of the slaves. The white daughters early hear

their parents quarrelling about some female slave. Their curiosity is

excited, and they soon learn the cause. They are attended by the young

slave girls whom their father has corrupted; and they hear such talk as

should never meet youthful ears, or any other ears. They know that the

woman slaves are subject to their father's authority in all things; and in

some cases they exercise the same authority over the men slaves. I have

myself seen the master of such a household whose head was bowed down in

shame; for it was known in the neighborhood that his daughter had selected

one of the meanest slaves on his plantation to be the father of his first

grandchild. She did not make her advances to her equals, nor even to her

father's more intelligent servants. She selected the most brutalized, over

whom her authority could be exercised with less fear of exposure. Her

father, half frantic with rage, sought to revenge himself on the offending

black man; but his daughter, foreseeing the storm that would arise, had

given him free papers, and sent him out of the state.

In such cases the infant is smothered, or sent where it is never seen by

any who know its history. But if the white parent is the \_father\_, instead

of the mother, the offspring are unblushingly reared for the market. If

they are girls, I have indicated plainly enough what will be their

inevitable destiny.

You may believe what I say; for I write only that whereof I know. I was

twenty-one years in that cage of obscene birds. I can testify, from my own

experience and observation, that slavery is a curse to the whites as well

as to the blacks. It makes white fathers cruel and sensual; the sons

violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters, and makes the wives

wretched. And as for the colored race, it needs an abler pen than mine to

describe the extremity of their sufferings, the depth of their degradation.

Yet few slaveholders seem to be aware of the widespread moral ruin

occasioned by this wicked system. Their talk is of blighted cotton

crops--not of the blight on their children's souls.

If you want to be fully convinced of the abominations of slavery, go on a

southern plantation, and call yourself a negro trader. Then there will be

no concealment; and you will see and hear things that will seem to you

impossible among human beings with immortal souls.

X. A Perilous Passage In The Slave Girl's Life.

After my lover went away, Dr. Flint contrived a new plan. He seemed to have

an idea that my fear of my mistress was his greatest obstacle. In the

blandest tones, he told me that he was going to build a small house for me,

in a secluded place, four miles away from the town. I shuddered; but I was

constrained to listen, while he talked of his intention to give me a home

of my own, and to make a lady of me. Hitherto, I had escaped my dreaded

fate, by being in the midst of people. My grandmother had already had high

words with my master about me. She had told him pretty plainly what she

thought of his character, and there was considerable gossip in the

neighborhood about our affairs, to which the open-mouthed jealousy of Mrs.

Flint contributed not a little. When my master said he was going to build a

house for me, and that he could do it with little trouble and expense, I

was in hopes something would happen to frustrate his scheme; but I soon

heard that the house was actually begun. I vowed before my Maker that I

would never enter it: I had rather toil on the plantation from dawn till

dark; I had rather live and die in jail, than drag on, from day to day,

through such a living death. I was determined that the master, whom I so

hated and loathed, who had blighted the prospects of my youth, and made my

life a desert, should not, after my long struggle with him, succeed at last

in trampling his victim under his feet. I would do any thing, every thing,

for the sake of defeating him. What \_could\_ I do? I thought and thought,

till I became desperate, and made a plunge into the abyss.

And now, reader, I come to a period in my unhappy life, which I would

gladly forget if I could. The remembrance fills me with sorrow and shame.

It pains me to tell you of it; but I have promised to tell you the truth,

and I will do it honestly, let it cost me what it may. I will not try to

screen myself behind the plea of compulsion from a master; for it was not

so. Neither can I plead ignorance or thoughtlessness. For years, my master

had done his utmost to pollute my mind with foul images, and to destroy the

pure principles inculcated by my grandmother, and the good mistress of my

childhood. The influences of slavery had had the same effect on me that

they had on other young girls; they had made me prematurely knowing,

concerning the evil ways of the world. I knew what I did, and I did it with

deliberate calculation.

But, O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who

have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are

protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely!

If slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my

choice; I could have had a home shielded by the laws; and I should have

been spared the painful task of confessing what I am now about to relate;

but all my prospects had been blighted by slavery. I wanted to keep myself

pure; and, under the most adverse circumstances, I tried hard to preserve

my self-respect; but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the

demon Slavery; and the monster proved too strong for me. I felt as if I was

forsaken by God and man; as if all my efforts must be frustrated; and I

became reckless in my despair.

I have told you that Dr. Flint's persecutions and his wife's jealousy had

given rise to some gossip in the neighborhood. Among others, it chanced

that a white unmarried gentleman had obtained some knowledge of the

circumstances in which I was placed. He knew my grandmother, and often

spoke to me in the street. He became interested for me, and asked questions

about my master, which I answered in part. He expressed a great deal of

sympathy, and a wish to aid me. He constantly sought opportunities to see

me, and wrote to me frequently. I was a poor slave girl, only fifteen years

old.

So much attention from a superior person was, of course, flattering; for

human nature is the same in all. I also felt grateful for his sympathy, and

encouraged by his kind words. It seemed to me a great thing to have such a

friend. By degrees, a more tender feeling crept into my heart. He was an

educated and eloquent gentleman; too eloquent, alas, for the poor slave

girl who trusted in him. Of course I saw whither all this was tending. I

knew the impassable gulf between us; but to be an object of interest to a

man who is not married, and who is not her master, is agreeable to the

pride and feelings of a slave, if her miserable situation has left her any

pride or sentiment. It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to

submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover

who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and

attachment. A master may treat you as rudely as he pleases, and you dare

not speak; moreover, the wrong does not seem so great with an unmarried

man, as with one who has a wife to be made unhappy. There may be sophistry

in all this; but the condition of a slave confuses all principles of

morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible.

When I found that my master had actually begun to build the lonely cottage,

other feelings mixed with those I have described. Revenge, and calculations

of interest, were added to flattered vanity and sincere gratitude for

kindness. I knew nothing would enrage Dr. Flint so much as to know that I

favored another, and it was something to triumph over my tyrant even in

that small way. I thought he would revenge himself by selling me, and I was

sure my friend, Mr. Sands, would buy me. He was a man of more generosity

and feeling than my master, and I thought my freedom could be easily

obtained from him. The crisis of my fate now came so near that I was

desperate. I shuddered to think of being the mother of children that should

be owned by my old tyrant. I knew that as soon as a new fancy took him, his

victims were sold far off to get rid of them; especially if they had

children. I had seen several women sold, with babies at the breast. He

never allowed his offspring by slaves to remain long in sight of himself

and his wife. Of a man who was not my master I could ask to have my

children well supported; and in this case, I felt confident I should obtain

the boon. I also felt quite sure that they would be made free. With all

these thoughts revolving in my mind, and seeing no other way of escaping

the doom I so much dreaded, I made a headlong plunge. Pity me, and pardon

me, O virtuous reader! You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be

entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the laws reduce you to the

condition of a chattel, entirely subject to the will of another. You never

exhausted your ingenuity in avoiding the snares, and eluding the power of a

hated tyrant; you never shuddered at the sound of his footsteps, and

trembled within hearing of his voice. I know I did wrong. No one can feel

it more sensibly than I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt

me to my dying day. Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my

life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same

standard as others.

The months passed on. I had many unhappy hours. I secretly mourned over the

sorrow I was bringing on my grandmother, who had so tried to shield me from

harm. I knew that I was the greatest comfort of her old age, and that it

was a source of pride to her that I had not degraded myself, like most of

the slaves. I wanted to confess to her that I was no longer worthy of her

love; but I could not utter the dreaded words.

As for Dr. Flint, I had a feeling of satisfaction and triumph in the

thought of telling \_him\_. From time to time he told me of his intended

arrangements, and I was silent. At last, he came and told me the cottage

was completed, and ordered me to go to it. I told him I would never enter

it. He said, "I have heard enough of such talk as that. You shall go, if

you are carried by force; and you shall remain there."

I replied, "I will never go there. In a few months I shall be a mother."

He stood and looked at me in dumb amazement, and left the house without a

word. I thought I should be happy in my triumph over him. But now that the

truth was out, and my relatives would hear of it, I felt wretched. Humble

as were their circumstances, they had pride in my good character. Now, how

could I look at them in the face? My self-respect was gone! I had resolved

that I would be virtuous, though I was a slave. I had said, "Let the storm

beat! I will brave it till I die." And now, how humiliated I felt!

I went to my grandmother. My lips moved to make confession, but the words

stuck in my throat. I sat down in the shade of a tree at her door and began

to sew. I think she saw something unusual was the matter with me. The

mother of slaves is very watchful. She knows there is no security for her

children. After they have entered their teens she lives in daily

expectation of trouble. This leads to many questions. If the girl is of a

sensitive nature, timidity keeps her from answering truthfully, and this

well-meant course has a tendency to drive her from maternal counsels.

Presently, in came my mistress, like a mad woman, and accused me concerning

her husband. My grandmother, whose suspicions had been previously awakened,

believed what she said. She exclaimed, "O Linda! Has it come to this? I had

rather see you dead than to see you as you now are. You are a disgrace to

your dead mother." She tore from my fingers my mother's wedding ring and

her silver thimble. "Go away!" she exclaimed, "and never come to my house,

again." Her reproaches fell so hot and heavy, that they left me no chance

to answer. Bitter tears, such as the eyes never shed but once, were my only

answer. I rose from my seat, but fell back again, sobbing. She did not

speak to me; but the tears were running down her furrowed cheeks, and they

scorched me like fire. She had always been so kind to me! \_So\_ kind! How I

longed to throw myself at her feet, and tell her all the truth! But she had

ordered me to go, and never to come there again. After a few minutes, I

mustered strength, and started to obey her. With what feelings did I now

close that little gate, which I used to open with such an eager hand in my

childhood! It closed upon me with a sound I never heard before.

Where could I go? I was afraid to return to my master's. I walked on

recklessly, not caring where I went, or what would become of me. When I had

gone four or five miles, fatigue compelled me to stop. I sat down on the

stump of an old tree. The stars were shining through the boughs above me.

How they mocked me, with their bright, calm light! The hours passed by, and

as I sat there alone a chilliness and deadly sickness came over me. I sank

on the ground. My mind was full of horrid thoughts. I prayed to die; but

the prayer was not answered. At last, with great effort I roused myself,

and walked some distance further, to the house of a woman who had been a

friend of my mother. When I told her why I was there, she spoke soothingly

to me; but I could not be comforted. I thought I could bear my shame if I

could only be reconciled to my grandmother. I longed to open my heart to

her. I thought if she could know the real state of the case, and all I had

been bearing for years, she would perhaps judge me less harshly. My friend

advised me to send for her. I did so; but days of agonizing suspense passed

before she came. Had she utterly forsaken me? No. She came at last. I knelt

before her, and told her the things that had poisoned my life; how long I

had been persecuted; that I saw no way of escape; and in an hour of

extremity I had become desperate. She listened in silence. I told her I

would bear any thing and do any thing, if in time I had hopes of obtaining

her forgiveness. I begged of her to pity me, for my dead mother's sake. And

she did pity me. She did not say, "I forgive you;" but she looked at me

lovingly, with her eyes full of tears. She laid her old hand gently on my

head, and murmured, "Poor child! Poor child!"

XI. The New Tie To Life.

I returned to my good grandmother's house. She had an interview with Mr.

Sands. When she asked him why he could not have left her one ewe

lamb,--whether there were not plenty of slaves who did not care about

character,--he made no answer, but he spoke kind and encouraging words. He

promised to care for my child, and to buy me, be the conditions what they

might.

I had not seen Dr. Flint for five days. I had never seen him since I made

the avowal to him. He talked of the disgrace I had brought on myself; how I

had sinned against my master, and mortified my old grandmother. He

intimated that if I had accepted his proposals, he, as a physician, could

have saved me from exposure. He even condescended to pity me. Could he have

offered wormwood more bitter? He, whose persecutions had been the cause of

my sin!

"Linda," said he, "though you have been criminal towards me, I feel for

you, and I can pardon you if you obey my wishes. Tell me whether the fellow

you wanted to marry is the father of your child. If you deceive me, you

shall feel the fires of hell."

I did not feel as proud as I had done. My strongest weapon with him was

gone. I was lowered in my own estimation, and had resolved to bear his

abuse in silence. But when he spoke contemptuously of the lover who had

always treated me honorably; when I remembered that but for \_him\_ I might

have been a virtuous, free, and happy wife, I lost my patience. "I have

sinned against God and myself," I replied; "but not against you."

He clinched his teeth, and muttered, "Curse you!" He came towards me, with

ill-suppressed rage, and exclaimed, "You obstinate girl! I could grind your

bones to powder! You have thrown yourself away on some worthless rascal.

You are weak-minded, and have been easily persuaded by those who don't care

a straw for you. The future will settle accounts between us. You are

blinded now; but hereafter you will be convinced that your master was your

best friend. My lenity towards you is a proof of it. I might have punished

you in many ways. I might have whipped till you fell dead under the lash.

But I wanted you to live; I would have bettered your condition. Others

cannot do it. You are my slave. Your mistress, disgusted by your conduct,

forbids you to return to the house; therefore I leave you here for the

present; but I shall see you often. I will call to-morrow."

He came with frowning brows, that showed a dissatisfied state of mind.

After asking about my health, he inquired whether my board was paid, and

who visited me. He then went on to say that he had neglected his duty; that

as a physician there were certain things that he ought to have explained to

me. Then followed talk such as would have made the most shameless blush. He

ordered me to stand up before him. I obeyed. "I command you," said he, "to

tell me whether the father of your child is white or black." I hesitated.

"Answer me this instant!" he exclaimed. I did answer. He sprang upon me

like a wolf, and grabbed my arm as if he would have broken it. "Do you love

him?" said he, in a hissing tone.

"I am thankful that I do not despise him," I replied.

He raised his hand to strike me; but it fell again. I don't know what

arrested the blow. He sat down, with lips tightly compressed. At last he

spoke. "I came here," said he, "to make you a friendly proposition; but

your ingratitude chafes me beyond endurance. You turn aside all my good

intentions towards you. I don't know what it is that keeps me from killing

you." Again he rose, as if he had a mind to strike me.

But he resumed. "On one condition I will forgive your insolence and crime.

You must henceforth have no communication of any kind with the father of

your child. You must not ask any thing from him, or receive any thing from

him. I will take care of you and your child. You had better promise this at

once, and not wait till you are deserted by him. This is the last act of

mercy I shall show towards you."

I said something about being unwilling to have my child supported by a man

who had cursed it and me also. He rejoined, that a woman who had sunk to my

level had no right to expect any thing else. He asked, for the last time,

would I accept his kindness? I answered that I would not.

"Very well," said he; "then take the consequences of your wayward course.

Never look to me for help. You are my slave, and shall always be my slave.

I will never sell you, that you may depend upon."

Hope died away in my heart as he closed the door after him. I had

calculated that in his rage he would sell me to a slave-trader; and I knew

the father of my child was on the watch to buy me.

About this time my uncle Phillip was expected to return from a voyage. The

day before his departure I had officiated as bridesmaid to a young friend.

My heart was then ill at ease, but my smiling countenance did not betray

it. Only a year had passed; but what fearful changes it had wrought! My

heart had grown gray in misery. Lives that flash in sunshine, and lives

that are born in tears, receive their hue from circumstances. None of us

know what a year may bring forth.

I felt no joy when they told me my uncle had come. He wanted to see me,

though he knew what had happened. I shrank from him at first; but at last

consented that he should come to my room. He received me as he always had

done. O, how my heart smote me when I felt his tears on my burning cheeks!

The words of my grandmother came to my mind,--"Perhaps your mother and

father are taken from the evil days to come." My disappointed heart could

now praise God that it was so. But why, thought I, did my relatives ever

cherish hopes for me? What was there to save me from the usual fate of

slave girls? Many more beautiful and more intelligent than I had

experienced a similar fate, or a far worse one. How could they hope that I

should escape?

My uncle's stay was short, and I was not sorry for it. I was too ill in

mind and body to enjoy my friends as I had done. For some weeks I was

unable to leave my bed. I could not have any doctor but my master, and I

would not have him sent for. At last, alarmed by my increasing illness,

they sent for him. I was very weak and nervous; and as soon as he entered

the room, I began to scream. They told him my state was very critical. He

had no wish to hasten me out of the world, and he withdrew.

When my babe was born, they said it was premature. It weighed only four

pounds; but God let it live. I heard the doctor say I could not survive

till morning. I had often prayed for death; but now I did not want to die,

unless my child could die too. Many weeks passed before I was able to leave

my bed. I was a mere wreck of my former self. For a year there was scarcely

a day when I was free from chills and fever. My babe also was sickly. His

little limbs were often racked with pain. Dr. Flint continued his visits,

to look after my health; and he did not fail to remind me that my child was

an addition to his stock of slaves.

I felt too feeble to dispute with him, and listened to his remarks in

silence. His visits were less frequent; but his busy spirit could not

remain quiet. He employed my brother in his office; and he was made the

medium of frequent notes and messages to me. William was a bright lad, and

of much use to the doctor. He had learned to put up medicines, to leech,

cup, and bleed. He had taught himself to read and spell. I was proud of my

brother, and the old doctor suspected as much. One day, when I had not seen

him for several weeks, I heard his steps approaching the door. I dreaded

the encounter, and hid myself. He inquired for me, of course; but I was

nowhere to be found. He went to his office, and despatched William with a

note. The color mounted to my brother's face when he gave it to me; and he

said, "Don't you hate me, Linda, for bringing you these things?" I told him

I could not blame him; he was a slave, and obliged to obey his master's

will. The note ordered me to come to his office. I went. He demanded to

know where I was when he called. I told him I was at home. He flew into a

passion, and said he knew better. Then he launched out upon his usual

themes,--my crimes against him, and my ingratitude for his forbearance. The

laws were laid down to me anew, and I was dismissed. I felt humiliated that

my brother should stand by, and listen to such language as would be

addressed only to a slave. Poor boy! He was powerless to defend me; but I

saw the tears, which he vainly strove to keep back. The manifestation of

feeling irritated the doctor. William could do nothing to please him. One

morning he did not arrive at the office so early as usual; and that

circumstance afforded his master an opportunity to vent his spleen. He was

put in jail. The next day my brother sent a trader to the doctor, with a

request to be sold. His master was greatly incensed at what he called his

insolence. He said he had put him there, to reflect upon his bad conduct,

and he certainly was not giving any evidence of repentance. For two days he

harassed himself to find somebody to do his office work; but every thing

went wrong without William. He was released, and ordered to take his old

stand, with many threats, if he was not careful about his future behavior.

As the months passed on, my boy improved in health. When he was a year old,

they called him beautiful. The little vine was taking deep root in my

existence, though its clinging fondness excited a mixture of love and pain.

When I was most sorely oppressed I found a solace in his smiles. I loved to

watch his infant slumbers; but always there was a dark cloud over my

enjoyment. I could never forget that he was a slave. Sometimes I wished

that he might die in infancy. God tried me. My darling became very ill. The

bright eyes grew dull, and the little feet and hands were so icy cold that

I thought death had already touched them. I had prayed for his death, but

never so earnestly as I now prayed for his life; and my prayer was heard.

Alas, what mockery it is for a slave mother to try to pray back her dying

child to life! Death is better than slavery. It was a sad thought that I

had no name to give my child. His father caressed him and treated him

kindly, whenever he had a chance to see him. He was not unwilling that he

should bear his name; but he had no legal claim to it; and if I had

bestowed it upon him, my master would have regarded it as a new crime, a

new piece of insolence, and would, perhaps, revenge it on the boy. O, the

serpent of Slavery has many and poisonous fangs!

XII. Fear Of Insurrection.

Not far from this time Nat Turner's insurrection broke out; and the news

threw our town into great commotion. Strange that they should be alarmed,

when their slaves were so "contented and happy"! But so it was.

It was always the custom to have a muster every year. On that occasion

every white man shouldered his musket. The citizens and the so-called

country gentlemen wore military uniforms. The poor whites took their places

in the ranks in every-day dress, some without shoes, some without hats.

This grand occasion had already passed; and when the slaves were told there

was to be another muster, they were surprised and rejoiced. Poor creatures!

They thought it was going to be a holiday. I was informed of the true state

of affairs, and imparted it to the few I could trust. Most gladly would I

have proclaimed it to every slave; but I dared not. All could not be relied

on. Mighty is the power of the torturing lash.

By sunrise, people were pouring in from every quarter within twenty miles

of the town. I knew the houses were to be searched; and I expected it would

be done by country bullies and the poor whites. I knew nothing annoyed them

so much as to see colored people living in comfort and respectability; so I

made arrangements for them with especial care. I arranged every thing in my

grandmother's house as neatly as possible. I put white quilts on the beds,

and decorated some of the rooms with flowers. When all was arranged, I sat

down at the window to watch. Far as my eye could reach, it rested on a

motley crowd of soldiers. Drums and fifes were discoursing martial music.

The men were divided into companies of sixteen, each headed by a captain.

Orders were given, and the wild scouts rushed in every direction, wherever

a colored face was to be found.

It was a grand opportunity for the low whites, who had no negroes of their

own to scourge. They exulted in such a chance to exercise a little brief

authority, and show their subserviency to the slaveholders; not reflecting

that the power which trampled on the colored people also kept themselves in

poverty, ignorance, and moral degradation. Those who never witnessed such

scenes can hardly believe what I know was inflicted at this time on

innocent men, women, and children, against whom there was not the slightest

ground for suspicion. Colored people and slaves who lived in remote parts

of the town suffered in an especial manner. In some cases the searchers

scattered powder and shot among their clothes, and then sent other parties

to find them, and bring them forward as proof that they were plotting

insurrection. Every where men, women, and children were whipped till the

blood stood in puddles at their feet. Some received five hundred lashes;

others were tied hands and feet, and tortured with a bucking paddle, which

blisters the skin terribly. The dwellings of the colored people, unless

they happened to be protected by some influential white person, who was

nigh at hand, were robbed of clothing and every thing else the marauders

thought worth carrying away. All day long these unfeeling wretches went

round, like a troop of demons, terrifying and tormenting the helpless. At

night, they formed themselves into patrol bands, and went wherever they

chose among the colored people, acting out their brutal will. Many women

hid themselves in woods and swamps, to keep out of their way. If any of the

husbands or fathers told of these outrages, they were tied up to the public

whipping post, and cruelly scourged for telling lies about white men. The

consternation was universal. No two people that had the slightest tinge of

color in their faces dared to be seen talking together.

I entertained no positive fears about our household, because we were in the

midst of white families who would protect us. We were ready to receive the

soldiers whenever they came. It was not long before we heard the tramp of

feet and the sound of voices. The door was rudely pushed open; and in they

tumbled, like a pack of hungry wolves. They snatched at every thing within

their reach. Every box, trunk, closet, and corner underwent a thorough

examination. A box in one of the drawers containing some silver change was

eagerly pounced upon. When I stepped forward to take it from them, one of

the soldiers turned and said angrily, "What d'ye foller us fur? D'ye s'pose

white folks is come to steal?"

I replied, "You have come to search; but you have searched that box, and I

will take it, if you please."

At that moment I saw a white gentleman who was friendly to us; and I called

to him, and asked him to have the goodness to come in and stay till the

search was over. He readily complied. His entrance into the house brought

in the captain of the company, whose business it was to guard the outside

of the house, and see that none of the inmates left it. This officer was

Mr. Litch, the wealthy slaveholder whom I mentioned, in the account of

neighboring planters, as being notorious for his cruelty. He felt above

soiling his hands with the search. He merely gave orders; and, if a bit of

writing was discovered, it was carried to him by his ignorant followers,

who were unable to read.

My grandmother had a large trunk of bedding and table cloths. When that was

opened, there was a great shout of surprise; and one exclaimed, "Where'd

the damned niggers git all dis sheet an' table clarf?"

My grandmother, emboldened by the presence of our white protector said,

"You may be sure we didn't pilfer 'em from \_your\_ houses."

"Look here, mammy," said a grim-looking fellow without any coat, "you seem

to feel mighty gran' 'cause you got all them 'ere fixens. White folks

oughter have 'em all."

His remarks were interrupted by a chorus of voices shouting, "We's got 'em!

We's got 'em! Dis 'ere yaller gal's got letters!"

There was a general rush for the supposed letter, which, upon examination,

proved to be some verses written to me by a friend. In packing away my

things, I had overlooked them. When their captain informed them of their

contents, they seemed much disappointed. He inquired of me who wrote them.

I told him it was one of my friends. "Can you read them?" he asked. When I

told him I could, he swore, and raved, and tore the paper into bits. "Bring

me all your letters!" said he, in commanding tone. I told him I had none.

"Don't be afraid," he continued, in an insinuating way. "Bring them all to

me. Nobody shall do you any harm." Seeing I did not move to obey him, his

pleasant tone changed to oaths and threats. "Who writes to you? half free

niggers?" inquired he. I replied, "O, no; most of my letters are from white

people. Some request me to burn them after they are read, and some I

destroy without reading."

An exclamation of surprise from some of the company put a stop to our

conversation. Some silver spoons which ornamented an old-fashioned buffet

had just been discovered. My grandmother was in the habit of preserving

fruit for many ladies in the town, and of preparing suppers for parties;

consequently she had many jars of preserves. The closet that contained

these was next invaded, and the contents tasted. One of them, who was

helping himself freely, tapped his neighbor on the shoulder, and said, "Wal

done! Don't wonder de niggers want to kill all de white folks, when dey

live on 'sarves" [meaning preserves]. I stretched out my hand to take the

jar, saying, "You were not sent here to search for sweetmeats."

"And what \_were\_ we sent for?" said the captain, bristling up to me. I

evaded the question.

The search of the house was completed, and nothing found to condemn us.

They next proceeded to the garden, and knocked about every bush and vine,

with no better success. The captain called his men together, and, after a

short consultation, the order to march was given. As they passed out of the

gate, the captain turned back, and pronounced a malediction on the house.

He said it ought to be burned to the ground, and each of its inmates

receive thirty-nine lashes. We came out of this affair very fortunately;

not losing any thing except some wearing apparel.

Towards evening the turbulence increased. The soldiers, stimulated by

drink, committed still greater cruelties. Shrieks and shouts continually

rent the air. Not daring to go to the door, I peeped under the window

curtain. I saw a mob dragging along a number of colored people, each white

man, with his musket upraised, threatening instant death if they did not

stop their shrieks. Among the prisoners was a respectable old colored

minister. They had found a few parcels of shot in his house, which his wife

had for years used to balance her scales. For this they were going to shoot

him on Court House Green. What a spectacle was that for a civilized

country! A rabble, staggering under intoxication, assuming to be the

administrators of justice!

The better class of the community exerted their influence to save the

innocent, persecuted people; and in several instances they succeeded, by

keeping them shut up in jail till the excitement abated. At last the white

citizens found that their own property was not safe from the lawless rabble

they had summoned to protect them. They rallied the drunken swarm, drove

them back into the country, and set a guard over the town.

The next day, the town patrols were commissioned to search colored people

that lived out of the city; and the most shocking outrages were committed

with perfect impunity. Every day for a fortnight, if I looked out, I saw

horsemen with some poor panting negro tied to their saddles, and compelled

by the lash to keep up with their speed, till they arrived at the jail

yard. Those who had been whipped too unmercifully to walk were washed with

brine, tossed into a cart, and carried to jail. One black man, who had not

fortitude to endure scourging, promised to give information about the

conspiracy. But it turned out that he knew nothing at all. He had not even

heard the name of Nat Turner. The poor fellow had, however, made up a

story, which augmented his own sufferings and those of the colored people.

The day patrol continued for some weeks, and at sundown a night guard was

substituted. Nothing at all was proved against the colored people, bond or

free. The wrath of the slaveholders was somewhat appeased by the capture of

Nat Turner. The imprisoned were released. The slaves were sent to their

masters, and the free were permitted to return to their ravaged homes.

Visiting was strictly forbidden on the plantations. The slaves begged the

privilege of again meeting at their little church in the woods, with their

burying ground around it. It was built by the colored people, and they had

no higher happiness than to meet there and sing hymns together, and pour

out their hearts in spontaneous prayer. Their request was denied, and the

church was demolished. They were permitted to attend the white churches, a

certain portion of the galleries being appropriated to their use. There,

when every body else had partaken of the communion, and the benediction had

been pronounced, the minister said, "Come down, now, my colored friends."

They obeyed the summons, and partook of the bread and wine, in

commemoration of the meek and lowly Jesus, who said, "God is your Father,

and all ye are brethren."

XIII. The Church And Slavery.

After the alarm caused by Nat Turner's insurrection had subsided, the

slaveholders came to the conclusion that it would be well to give the

slaves enough of religious instruction to keep them from murdering their

masters. The Episcopal clergyman offered to hold a separate service on

Sundays for their benefit. His colored members were very few, and also very

respectable--a fact which I presume had some weight with him. The

difficulty was to decide on a suitable place for them to worship. The

Methodist and Baptist churches admitted them in the afternoon; but their

carpets and cushions were not so costly as those at the Episcopal church.

It was at last decided that they should meet at the house of a free colored

man, who was a member.

I was invited to attend, because I could read. Sunday evening came, and,

trusting to the cover of night, I ventured out. I rarely ventured out by

daylight, for I always went with fear, expecting at every turn to encounter

Dr. Flint, who was sure to turn me back, or order me to his office to

inquire where I got my bonnet, or some other article of dress. When the

Rev. Mr. Pike came, there were some twenty persons present. The reverend

gentleman knelt in prayer, then seated himself, and requested all present,

who could read, to open their books, while he gave out the portions he

wished them to repeat or respond to.

His text was, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters

according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your

heart, as unto Christ."

Pious Mr. Pike brushed up his hair till it stood upright, and, in deep,

solemn tones, began: "Hearken, ye servants! Give strict heed unto my words.

You are rebellious sinners. Your hearts are filled with all manner of evil.

'Tis the devil who tempts you. God is angry with you, and will surely

punish you, if you don't forsake your wicked ways. You that live in town

are eyeservants behind your master's back. Instead of serving your masters

faithfully, which is pleasing in the sight of your heavenly Master, you are

idle, and shirk your work. God sees you. You tell lies. God hears you.

Instead of being engaged in worshipping him, you are hidden away somewhere,

feasting on your master's substance; tossing coffee-grounds with some

wicked fortuneteller, or cutting cards with another old hag. Your masters

may not find you out, but God sees you, and will punish you. O, the

depravity of your hearts! When your master's work is done, are you quietly

together, thinking of the goodness of God to such sinful creatures? No; you

are quarrelling, and tying up little bags of roots to bury under the

doorsteps to poison each other with. God sees you. You men steal away to

every grog shop to sell your master's corn, that you may buy rum to drink.

God sees you. You sneak into the back streets, or among the bushes, to

pitch coppers. Although your masters may not find you out, God sees you;

and he will punish you. You must forsake your sinful ways, and be faithful

servants. Obey your old master and your young master--your old mistress and

your young mistress. If you disobey your earthly master, you offend your

heavenly Master. You must obey God's commandments. When you go from here,

don't stop at the corners of the streets to talk, but go directly home, and

let your master and mistress see that you have come."

The benediction was pronounced. We went home, highly amused at brother

Pike's gospel teaching, and we determined to hear him again. I went the

next Sabbath evening, and heard pretty much a repetition of the last

discourse. At the close of the meeting, Mr. Pike informed us that he found

it very inconvenient to meet at the friend's house, and he should be glad

to see us, every Sunday evening, at his own kitchen.

I went home with the feeling that I had heard the Reverend Mr. Pike for the

last time. Some of his members repaired to his house, and found that the

kitchen sported two tallow candles; the first time, I am sure, since its

present occupant owned it, for the servants never had any thing but pine

knots. It was so long before the reverend gentleman descended from his

comfortable parlor that the slaves left, and went to enjoy a Methodist

shout. They never seem so happy as when shouting and singing at religious

meetings. Many of them are sincere, and nearer to the gate of heaven than

sanctimonious Mr. Pike, and other long-faced Christians, who see wounded

Samaritans, and pass by on the other side.

The slaves generally compose their own songs and hymns; and they do not

trouble their heads much about the measure. They often sing the following

verses:

Old Satan is one busy ole man;

He rolls dem blocks all in my way;

But Jesus is my bosom friend;

He rolls dem blocks away.

If I had died when I was young,

Den how my stam'ring tongue would have sung;

But I am ole, and now I stand

A narrow chance for to tread dat heavenly land.

I well remember one occasion when I attended a Methodist class meeting. I

went with a burdened spirit, and happened to sit next a poor, bereaved

mother, whose heart was still heavier than mine. The class leader was the

town constable--a man who bought and sold slaves, who whipped his brethren

and sisters of the church at the public whipping post, in jail or out of

jail. He was ready to perform that Christian office any where for fifty

cents. This white-faced, black-hearted brother came near us, and said to

the stricken woman, "Sister, can't you tell us how the Lord deals with your

soul? Do you love him as you did formerly?"

She rose to her feet, and said, in piteous tones, "My Lord and Master, help

me! My load is more than I can bear. God has hid himself from me, and I am

left in darkness and misery." Then, striking her breast, she continued, "I

can't tell you what is in here! They've got all my children. Last week they

took the last one. God only knows where they've sold her. They let me have

her sixteen years, and then--O! O! Pray for her brothers and sisters! I've

got nothing to live for now. God make my time short!"

She sat down, quivering in every limb. I saw that constable class leader

become crimson in the face with suppressed laughter, while he held up his

handkerchief, that those who were weeping for the poor woman's calamity

might not see his merriment. Then, with assumed gravity, he said to the

bereaved mother, "Sister, pray to the Lord that every dispensation of his

divine will may be sanctified to the good of your poor needy soul!"

The congregation struck up a hymn, and sung as though they were as free as

the birds that warbled round us,--

Ole Satan thought he had a mighty aim;

He missed my soul, and caught my sins.

Cry Amen, cry Amen, cry Amen to God!

He took my sins upon his back;

Went muttering and grumbling down to hell.

Cry Amen, cry Amen, cry Amen to God!

Ole Satan's church is here below.

Up to God's free church I hope to go.

Cry Amen, cry Amen, cry Amen to God!

Precious are such moments to the poor slaves. If you were to hear them at

such times, you might think they were happy. But can that hour of singing

and shouting sustain them through the dreary week, toiling without wages,

under constant dread of the lash?

The Episcopal clergyman, who, ever since my earliest recollection, had been

a sort of god among the slaveholders, concluded, as his family was large,

that he must go where money was more abundant. A very different clergyman

took his place. The change was very agreeable to the colored people, who

said, "God has sent us a good man this time." They loved him, and their

children followed him for a smile or a kind word. Even the slaveholders

felt his influence. He brought to the rectory five slaves. His wife taught

them to read and write, and to be useful to her and themselves. As soon as

he was settled, he turned his attention to the needy slaves around him. He

urged upon his parishioners the duty of having a meeting expressly for them

every Sunday, with a sermon adapted to their comprehension. After much

argument and importunity, it was finally agreed that they might occupy the

gallery of the church on Sunday evenings. Many colored people, hitherto

unaccustomed to attend church, now gladly went to hear the gospel preached.

The sermons were simple, and they understood them. Moreover, it was the

first time they had ever been addressed as human beings. It was not long

before his white parishioners began to be dissatisfied. He was accused of

preaching better sermons to the negroes than he did to them. He honestly

confessed that he bestowed more pains upon those sermons than upon any

others; for the slaves were reared in such ignorance that it was a

difficult task to adapt himself to their comprehension. Dissensions arose

in the parish. Some wanted he should preach to them in the evening, and to

the slaves in the afternoon. In the midst of these disputings his wife

died, after a very short illness. Her slaves gathered round her dying bed

in great sorrow. She said, "I have tried to do you good and promote your

happiness; and if I have failed, it has not been for want of interest in

your welfare. Do not weep for me; but prepare for the new duties that lie

before you. I leave you all free. May we meet in a better world." Her

liberated slaves were sent away, with funds to establish them comfortably.

The colored people will long bless the memory of that truly Christian

woman. Soon after her death her husband preached his farewell sermon, and

many tears were shed at his departure.

Several years after, he passed through our town and preached to his former

congregation. In his afternoon sermon he addressed the colored people. "My

friends," said he, "it affords me great happiness to have an opportunity of

speaking to you again. For two years I have been striving to do something

for the colored people of my own parish; but nothing is yet accomplished. I

have not even preached a sermon to them. Try to live according to the word

of God, my friends. Your skin is darker than mine; but God judges men by

their hearts, not by the color of their skins." This was strange doctrine

from a southern pulpit. It was very offensive to slaveholders. They said he

and his wife had made fools of their slaves, and that he preached like a

fool to the negroes.

I knew an old black man, whose piety and childlike trust in God were

beautiful to witness. At fifty-three years old he joined the Baptist

church. He had a most earnest desire to learn to read. He thought he should

know how to serve God better if he could only read the Bible. He came to

me, and begged me to teach him. He said he could not pay me, for he had no

money; but he would bring me nice fruit when the season for it came. I

asked him if he didn't know it was contrary to law; and that slaves were

whipped and imprisoned for teaching each other to read. This brought the

tears into his eyes. "Don't be troubled, uncle Fred," said I. "I have no

thoughts of refusing to teach you. I only told you of the law, that you

might know the danger, and be on your guard." He thought he could plan to

come three times a week without its being suspected. I selected a quiet

nook, where no intruder was likely to penetrate, and there I taught him his

A, B, C. Considering his age, his progress was astonishing. As soon as he

could spell in two syllables he wanted to spell out words in the Bible. The

happy smile that illuminated his face put joy into my heart. After spelling

out a few words, he paused, and said, "Honey, it 'pears when I can read dis

good book I shall be nearer to God. White man is got all de sense. He can

larn easy. It ain't easy for ole black man like me. I only wants to read

dis book, dat I may know how to live; den I hab no fear 'bout dying."

I tried to encourage him by speaking of the rapid progress he had made.

"Hab patience, child," he replied. "I larns slow."

I had no need of patience. His gratitude, and the happiness imparted, were

more than a recompense for all my trouble.

At the end of six months he had read through the New Testament, and could

find any text in it. One day, when he had recited unusually well, I said,

"Uncle Fred, how do you manage to get your lessons so well?"

"Lord bress you, chile," he replied. "You nebber gibs me a lesson dat I

don't pray to God to help me to understan' what I spells and what I reads.

And he \_does\_ help me, chile. Bress his holy name!"

There are thousands, who, like good uncle Fred, are thirsting for the water

of life; but the law forbids it, and the churches withhold it. They send

the Bible to heathen abroad, and neglect the heathen at home. I am glad

that missionaries go out to the dark corners of the earth; but I ask them

not to overlook the dark corners at home. Talk to American slaveholders as

you talk to savages in Africa. Tell \_them\_ it was wrong to traffic in men.

Tell them it is sinful to sell their own children, and atrocious to violate

their own daughters. Tell them that all men are brethren, and that man has

no right to shut out the light of knowledge from his brother. Tell them

they are answerable to God for sealing up the Fountain of Life from souls

that are thirsting for it.

There are men who would gladly undertake such missionary work as this; but,

alas! their number is small. They are hated by the south, and would be

driven from its soil, or dragged to prison to die, as others have been

before them. The field is ripe for the harvest, and awaits the reapers.

Perhaps the great grandchildren of uncle Fred may have freely imparted to

them the divine treasures, which he sought by stealth, at the risk of the

prison and the scourge.

Are doctors of divinity blind, or are they hypocrites? I suppose some are

the one, and some the other; but I think if they felt the interest in the

poor and the lowly, that they ought to feel, they would not be so \_easily\_

blinded. A clergyman who goes to the south, for the first time, has usually

some feeling, however vague, that slavery is wrong. The slaveholder

suspects this, and plays his game accordingly. He makes himself as

agreeable as possible; talks on theology, and other kindred topics. The

reverend gentleman is asked to invoke a blessing on a table loaded with

luxuries. After dinner he walks round the premises, and sees the beautiful

groves and flowering vines, and the comfortable huts of favored household

slaves. The southerner invites him to talk with those slaves. He asks them

if they want to be free, and they say, "O, no, massa." This is sufficient

to satisfy him. He comes home to publish a "South Side View of Slavery,"

and to complain of the exaggerations of abolitionists. He assures people

that he has been to the south, and seen slavery for himself; that it is a

beautiful "patriarchal institution;" that the slaves don't want their

freedom; that they have hallelujah meetings and other religious privileges.

What does \_he\_ know of the half-starved wretches toiling from dawn till

dark on the plantations? of mothers shrieking for their children, torn from

their arms by slave traders? of young girls dragged down into moral filth?

of pools of blood around the whipping post? of hounds trained to tear human

flesh? of men screwed into cotton gins to die? The slaveholder showed him

none of these things, and the slaves dared not tell of them if he had asked

them.

There is a great difference between Christianity and religion at the south.

If a man goes to the communion table, and pays money into the treasury of

the church, no matter if it be the price of blood, he is called religious.

If a pastor has offspring by a woman not his wife, the church dismiss him,

if she is a white woman; but if she is colored, it does not hinder his

continuing to be their good shepherd.

When I was told that Dr. Flint had joined the Episcopal church, I was much

surprised. I supposed that religion had a purifying effect on the character

of men; but the worst persecutions I endured from him were after he was a

communicant. The conversation of the doctor, the day after he had been

confirmed, certainly gave \_me\_ no indication that he had "renounced the

devil and all his works." In answer to some of his usual talk, I reminded

him that he had just joined the church. "Yes, Linda," said he. "It was

proper for me to do so. I am getting in years, and my position in society

requires it, and it puts an end to all the damned slang. You would do well

to join the church, too, Linda."

"There are sinners enough in it already," rejoined I. "If I could be

allowed to live like a Christian, I should be glad."

"You can do what I require; and if you are faithful to me, you will be as

virtuous as my wife," he replied.

I answered that the Bible didn't say so.

His voice became hoarse with rage. "How dare you preach to me about your

infernal Bible!" he exclaimed. "What right have you, who are my negro, to

talk to me about what you would like and what you wouldn't like? I am your

master, and you shall obey me."

No wonder the slaves sing,--

Ole Satan's church is here below;

Up to God's free church I hope to go.

XIV. Another Link To Life.

I had not returned to my master's house since the birth of my child. The

old man raved to have me thus removed from his immediate power; but his

wife vowed, by all that was good and great, she would kill me if I came

back; and he did not doubt her word. Sometimes he would stay away for a

season. Then he would come and renew the old threadbare discourse about his

forbearance and my ingratitude. He labored, most unnecessarily, to convince

me that I had lowered myself. The venomous old reprobate had no need of

descanting on that theme. I felt humiliated enough. My unconscious babe was

the ever-present witness of my shame. I listened with silent contempt when

he talked about my having forfeited \_his\_ good opinion; but I shed bitter

tears that I was no longer worthy of being respected by the good and pure.

Alas! slavery still held me in its poisonous grasp. There was no chance for

me to be respectable. There was no prospect of being able to lead a better

life.

Sometimes, when my master found that I still refused to accept what he

called his kind offers, he would threaten to sell my child. "Perhaps that

will humble you," said he.

Humble \_me\_! Was I not already in the dust? But his threat lacerated my

heart. I knew the law gave him power to fulfil it; for slaveholders have

been cunning enough to enact that "the child shall follow the condition of

the \_mother\_," not of the \_father\_, thus taking care that licentiousness

shall not interfere with avarice. This reflection made me clasp my innocent

babe all the more firmly to my heart. Horrid visions passed through my mind

when I thought of his liability to fall into the slave trader's hands. I

wept over him, and said, "O my child! perhaps they will leave you in some

cold cabin to die, and then throw you into a hole, as if you were a dog."

When Dr. Flint learned that I was again to be a mother, he was exasperated

beyond measure. He rushed from the house, and returned with a pair of

shears. I had a fine head of hair; and he often railed about my pride of

arranging it nicely. He cut every hair close to my head, storming and

swearing all the time. I replied to some of his abuse, and he struck me.

Some months before, he had pitched me down stairs in a fit of passion; and

the injury I received was so serious that I was unable to turn myself in

bed for many days. He then said, "Linda, I swear by God I will never raise

my hand against you again;" but I knew that he would forget his promise.

After he discovered my situation, he was like a restless spirit from the

pit. He came every day; and I was subjected to such insults as no pen can

describe. I would not describe them if I could; they were too low, too

revolting. I tried to keep them from my grandmother's knowledge as much as

I could. I knew she had enough to sadden her life, without having my

troubles to bear. When she saw the doctor treat me with violence, and heard

him utter oaths terrible enough to palsy a man's tongue, she could not

always hold her peace. It was natural and motherlike that she should try to

defend me; but it only made matters worse.

When they told me my new-born babe was a girl, my heart was heavier than it

had ever been before. Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more

terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, \_they\_ have

wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own.

Dr. Flint had sworn that he would make me suffer, to my last day, for this

new crime against \_him\_, as he called it; and as long as he had me in his

power he kept his word. On the fourth day after the birth of my babe, he

entered my room suddenly, and commanded me to rise and bring my baby to

him. The nurse who took care of me had gone out of the room to prepare some

nourishment, and I was alone. There was no alternative. I rose, took up my

babe, and crossed the room to where he sat. "Now stand there," said he,

"till I tell you to go back!" My child bore a strong resemblance to her

father, and to the deceased Mrs. Sands, her grandmother. He noticed this;

and while I stood before him, trembling with weakness, he heaped upon me

and my little one every vile epithet he could think of. Even the

grandmother in her grave did not escape his curses. In the midst of his

vituperations I fainted at his feet. This recalled him to his senses. He

took the baby from my arms, laid it on the bed, dashed cold water in my

face, took me up, and shook me violently, to restore my consciousness

before any one entered the room. Just then my grandmother came in, and he

hurried out of the house. I suffered in consequence of this treatment; but

I begged my friends to let me die, rather than send for the doctor. There

was nothing I dreaded so much as his presence. My life was spared; and I

was glad for the sake of my little ones. Had it not been for these ties to

life, I should have been glad to be released by death, though I had lived

only nineteen years.

Always it gave me a pang that my children had no lawful claim to a name.

Their father offered his; but, if I had wished to accept the offer, I dared

not while my master lived. Moreover, I knew it would not be accepted at

their baptism. A Christian name they were at least entitled to; and we

resolved to call my boy for our dear good Benjamin, who had gone far away

from us.

My grandmother belonged to the church; and she was very desirous of having

the children christened. I knew Dr. Flint would forbid it, and I did not

venture to attempt it. But chance favored me. He was called to visit a

patient out of town, and was obliged to be absent during Sunday. "Now is

the time," said my grandmother; "we will take the children to church, and

have them christened."

When I entered the church, recollections of my mother came over me, and I

felt subdued in spirit. There she had presented me for baptism, without any

reason to feel ashamed. She had been married, and had such legal rights as

slavery allows to a slave. The vows had at least been sacred to \_her\_, and

she had never violated them. I was glad she was not alive, to know under

what different circumstances her grandchildren were presented for baptism.

Why had my lot been so different from my mother's? \_Her\_ master had died

when she was a child; and she remained with her mistress till she married.

She was never in the power of any master; and thus she escaped one class of

the evils that generally fall upon slaves.

When my baby was about to be christened, the former mistress of my father

stepped up to me, and proposed to give it her Christian name. To this I

added the surname of my father, who had himself no legal right to it; for

my grandfather on the paternal side was a white gentleman. What tangled

skeins are the genealogies of slavery! I loved my father; but it mortified

me to be obliged to bestow his name on my children.

When we left the church, my father's old mistress invited me to go home

with her. She clasped a gold chain round my baby's neck. I thanked her for

this kindness; but I did not like the emblem. I wanted no chain to be

fastened on my daughter, not even if its links were of gold. How earnestly

I prayed that she might never feel the weight of slavery's chain, whose

iron entereth into the soul!

XV. Continued Persecutions.

My children grew finely; and Dr. Flint would often say to me, with an

exulting smile. "These brats will bring me a handsome sum of money one of

these days."

I thought to myself that, God being my helper, they should never pass into

his hands. It seemed to me I would rather see them killed than have them

given up to his power. The money for the freedom of myself and my children

could be obtained; but I derived no advantage from that circumstance. Dr.

Flint loved money, but he loved power more. After much discussion, my

friends resolved on making another trial. There was a slaveholder about to

leave for Texas, and he was commissioned to buy me. He was to begin with

nine hundred dollars, and go up to twelve. My master refused his offers.

"Sir," said he, "she don't belong to me. She is my daughter's property, and

I have no right to sell her. I mistrust that you come from her paramour. If

so, you may tell him that he cannot buy her for any money; neither can he

buy her children."

The doctor came to see me the next day, and my heart beat quicker as he

entered. I never had seen the old man tread with so majestic a step. He

seated himself and looked at me with withering scorn. My children had

learned to be afraid of him. The little one would shut her eyes and hide

her face on my shoulder whenever she saw him; and Benny, who was now nearly

five years old, often inquired, "What makes that bad man come here so many

times? Does he want to hurt us?" I would clasp the dear boy in my arms,

trusting that he would be free before he was old enough to solve the

problem. And now, as the doctor sat there so grim and silent, the child

left his play and came and nestled up by me. At last my tormentor spoke.

"So you are left in disgust, are you?" said he. "It is no more than I

expected. You remember I told you years ago that you would be treated so.

So he is tired of you? Ha! ha! ha! The virtuous madam don't like to hear

about it, does she? Ha! ha! ha!" There was a sting in his calling me

virtuous madam. I no longer had the power of answering him as I had

formerly done. He continued: "So it seems you are trying to get up another

intrigue. Your new paramour came to me, and offered to buy you; but you may

be assured you will not succeed. You are mine; and you shall be mine for

life. There lives no human being that can take you out of slavery. I would

have done it; but you rejected my kind offer."

I told him I did not wish to get up any intrigue; that I had never seen the

man who offered to buy me.

"Do you tell me I lie?" exclaimed he, dragging me from my chair. "Will you

say again that you never saw that man?"

I answered, "I do say so."

He clinched my arm with a volley of oaths. Ben began to scream, and I told

him to go to his grandmother.

"Don't you stir a step, you little wretch!" said he. The child drew nearer

to me, and put his arms round me, as if he wanted to protect me. This was

too much for my enraged master. He caught him up and hurled him across the

room. I thought he was dead, and rushed towards him to take him up.

"Not yet!" exclaimed the doctor. "Let him lie there till he comes to."

"Let me go! Let me go!" I screamed, "or I will raise the whole house." I

struggled and got away; but he clinched me again. Somebody opened the door,

and he released me. I picked up my insensible child, and when I turned my

tormentor was gone. Anxiously, I bent over the little form, so pale and

still; and when the brown eyes at last opened, I don't know whether I was

very happy. All the doctor's former persecutions were renewed. He came

morning, noon, and night. No jealous lover ever watched a rival more

closely than he watched me and the unknown slaveholder, with whom he

accused me of wishing to get up an intrigue. When my grandmother was out of

the way he searched every room to find him.

In one of his visits, he happened to find a young girl, whom he had sold to

a trader a few days previous. His statement was, that he sold her because

she had been too familiar with the overseer. She had had a bitter life with

him, and was glad to be sold. She had no mother, and no near ties. She had

been torn from all her family years before. A few friends had entered into

bonds for her safety, if the trader would allow her to spend with them the

time that intervened between her sale and the gathering up of his human

stock. Such a favor was rarely granted. It saved the trader the expense of

board and jail fees, and though the amount was small, it was a weighty

consideration in a slavetrader's mind.

Dr. Flint always had an aversion to meeting slaves after he had sold them.

He ordered Rose out of the house; but he was no longer her master, and she

took no notice of him. For once the crushed Rose was the conqueror. His

gray eyes flashed angrily upon her; but that was the extent of his power.

"How came this girl here?" he exclaimed. "What right had you to allow it,

when you knew I had sold her?"

I answered, "This is my grandmother's house, and Rose came to see her. I

have no right to turn any body out of doors, that comes here for honest

purposes."

He gave me the blow that would have fallen upon Rose if she had still been

his slave. My grandmother's attention had been attracted by loud voices,

and she entered in time to see a second blow dealt. She was not a woman to

let such an outrage, in her own house, go unrebuked. The doctor undertook

to explain that I had been insolent. Her indignant feelings rose higher and

higher, and finally boiled over in words. "Get out of my house!" she

exclaimed. "Go home, and take care of your wife and children, and you will

have enough to do, without watching my family."

He threw the birth of my children in her face, and accused her of

sanctioning the life I was leading. She told him I was living with her by

compulsion of his wife; that he needn't accuse her, for he was the one to

blame; he was the one who had caused all the trouble. She grew more and

more excited as she went on. "I tell you what, Dr. Flint," said she, "you

ain't got many more years to live, and you'd better be saying your prayers.

It will take 'em all, and more too, to wash the dirt off your soul."

"Do you know whom you are talking to?" he exclaimed.

She replied, "Yes, I know very well who I am talking to."

He left the house in a great rage. I looked at my grandmother. Our eyes

met. Their angry expression had passed away, but she looked sorrowful and

weary--weary of incessant strife. I wondered that it did not lessen her

love for me; but if it did she never showed it. She was always kind, always

ready to sympathize with my troubles. There might have been peace and

contentment in that humble home if it had not been for the demon Slavery.

The winter passed undisturbed by the doctor. The beautiful spring came; and

when Nature resumes her loveliness, the human soul is apt to revive also.

My drooping hopes came to life again with the flowers. I was dreaming of

freedom again; more for my children's sake than my own. I planned and I

planned. Obstacles hit against plans. There seemed no way of overcoming

them; and yet I hoped.

Back came the wily doctor. I was not at home when he called. A friend had

invited me to a small party, and to gratify her I went. To my great

consternation, a messenger came in haste to say that Dr. Flint was at my

grandmother's, and insisted on seeing me. They did not tell him where I

was, or he would have come and raised a disturbance in my friend's house.

They sent me a dark wrapper, I threw it on and hurried home. My speed did

not save me; the doctor had gone away in anger. I dreaded the morning, but

I could not delay it; it came, warm and bright. At an early hour the doctor

came and asked me where I had been last night. I told him. He did not

believe me, and sent to my friend's house to ascertain the facts. He came

in the afternoon to assure me he was satisfied that I had spoken the truth.

He seemed to be in a facetious mood, and I expected some jeers were coming.

"I suppose you need some recreation," said he, "but I am surprised at your

being there, among those negroes. It was not the place for \_you\_. Are you

\_allowed\_ to visit such people?"

I understood this covert fling at the white gentleman who was my friend;

but I merely replied, "I went to visit my friends, and any company they

keep is good enough for me."

He went on to say, "I have seen very little of you of late, but my interest

in you is unchanged. When I said I would have no more mercy on you I was

rash. I recall my words. Linda, you desire freedom for yourself and your

children, and you can obtain it only through me. If you agree to what I am

about to propose, you and they shall be free. There must be no

communication of any kind between you and their father. I will procure a

cottage, where you and the children can live together. Your labor shall be

light, such as sewing for my family. Think what is offered you, Linda--a

home and freedom! Let the past be forgotten. If I have been harsh with you

at times, your willfulness drove me to it. You know I exact obedience from

my own children, and I consider you as yet a child."

He paused for an answer, but I remained silent. "Why don't you speak?"

said he. "What more do you wait for?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Then you accept my offer?"

"No, sir."

His anger was ready to break loose; but he succeeded in curbing it, and

replied, "You have answered without thought. But I must let you know there

are two sides to my proposition; if you reject the bright side, you will be

obliged to take the dark one. You must either accept my offer, or you and

your children shall be sent to your young master's plantation, there to

remain till your young mistress is married; and your children shall fare

like the rest of the negro children. I give you a week to consider it."

He was shrewd; but I knew he was not to be trusted. I told him I was ready

to give my answer now.

"I will not receive it now," he replied. "You act too much from impulse.

Remember that you and your children can be free a week from to-day if you

choose."

On what a monstrous chance hung the destiny of my children! I knew that my

master's offer was a snare, and that if I entered it escape would be

impossible. As for his promise, I knew him so well that I was sure if he

gave me free papers, they would be so managed as to have no legal value.

The alternative was inevitable. I resolved to go to the plantation. But

then I thought how completely I should be in his power, and the prospect

was appalling. Even if I should kneel before him, and implore him to spare

me, for the sake of my children, I knew he would spurn me with his foot,

and my weakness would be his triumph.

Before the week expired, I heard that young Mr. Flint was about to be

married to a lady of his own stamp. I foresaw the position I should occupy

in his establishment. I had once been sent to the plantation for

punishment, and fear of the son had induced the father to recall me very

soon. My mind was made up; I was resolved that I would foil my master and

save my children, or I would perish in the attempt. I kept my plans to

myself; I knew that friends would try to dissuade me from them, and I would

not wound their feelings by rejecting their advice.

On the decisive day the doctor came, and said he hoped I had made a wise

choice.

"I am ready to go to the plantation, sir," I replied.

"Have you thought how important your decision is to your children?" said

he.

I told him I had.

"Very well. Go to the plantation, and my curse go with you," he replied.

"Your boy shall be put to work, and he shall soon be sold; and your girl

shall be raised for the purpose of selling well. Go your own ways!" He left

the room with curses, not to be repeated.

As I stood rooted to the spot, my grandmother came and said, "Linda, child,

what did you tell him?"

I answered that I was going to the plantation.

"\_Must\_ you go?" said she. "Can't something be done to stop it?"

I told her it was useless to try; but she begged me not to give up. She

said she would go to the doctor, and remind him how long and how faithfully

she had served in the family, and how she had taken her own baby from her

breast to nourish his wife. She would tell him I had been out of the family

so long they would not miss me; that she would pay them for my time, and

the money would procure a woman who had more strength for the situation

than I had. I begged her not to go; but she persisted in saying, "He will

listen to \_me\_, Linda." She went, and was treated as I expected. He coolly

listened to what she said, but denied her request. He told her that what he

did was for my good, that my feelings were entirely above my situation, and

that on the plantation I would receive treatment that was suitable to my

behavior.

My grandmother was much cast down. I had my secret hopes; but I must fight

my battle alone. I had a woman's pride, and a mother's love for my

children; and I resolved that out of the darkness of this hour a brighter

dawn should rise for them. My master had power and law on his side; I had a

determined will. There is might in each.

XVI. Scenes At The Plantation.

Early the next morning I left my grandmother's with my youngest child. My

boy was ill, and I left him behind. I had many sad thoughts as the old

wagon jolted on. Hitherto, I had suffered alone; now, my little one was to

be treated as a slave. As we drew near the great house, I thought of the

time when I was formerly sent there out of revenge. I wondered for what

purpose I was now sent. I could not tell. I resolved to obey orders so far

as duty required; but within myself, I determined to make my stay as short

as possible. Mr. Flint was waiting to receive us, and told me to follow him

up stairs to receive orders for the day. My little Ellen was left below in

the kitchen. It was a change for her, who had always been so carefully

tended. My young master said she might amuse herself in the yard. This was

kind of him, since the child was hateful to his sight. My task was to fit

up the house for the reception of the bride. In the midst of sheets,

tablecloths, towels, drapery, and carpeting, my head was as busy planning,

as were my fingers with the needle. At noon I was allowed to go to Ellen.

She had sobbed herself to sleep. I heard Mr. Flint say to a neighbor, "I've

got her down here, and I'll soon take the town notions out of her head. My

father is partly to blame for her nonsense. He ought to have broke her in

long ago." The remark was made within my hearing, and it would have been

quite as manly to have made it to my face. He \_had\_ said things to my face

which might, or might not, have surprised his neighbor if he had known of

them. He was "a chip of the old block."

I resolved to give him no cause to accuse me of being too much of a lady,

so far as work was concerned. I worked day and night, with wretchedness

before me. When I lay down beside my child, I felt how much easier it would

be to see her die than to see her master beat her about, as I daily saw him

beat other little ones. The spirit of the mothers was so crushed by the

lash, that they stood by, without courage to remonstrate. How much more

must I suffer, before I should be "broke in" to that degree?

I wished to appear as contented as possible. Sometimes I had an opportunity

to send a few lines home; and this brought up recollections that made it

difficult, for a time, to seem calm and indifferent to my lot.

Notwithstanding my efforts, I saw that Mr. Flint regarded me with a

suspicious eye. Ellen broke down under the trials of her new life.

Separated from me, with no one to look after her, she wandered about, and

in a few days cried herself sick. One day, she sat under the window where I

was at work, crying that weary cry which makes a mother's heart bleed. I

was obliged to steel myself to bear it. After a while it ceased. I looked

out, and she was gone. As it was near noon, I ventured to go down in search

of her. The great house was raised two feet above the ground. I looked

under it, and saw her about midway, fast asleep. I crept under and drew her

out. As I held her in my arms, I thought how well it would be for her if

she never waked up; and I uttered my thought aloud. I was startled to hear

some one say, "Did you speak to me?" I looked up, and saw Mr. Flint

standing beside me. He said nothing further, but turned, frowning, away.

That night he sent Ellen a biscuit and a cup of sweetened milk. This

generosity surprised me. I learned afterwards, that in the afternoon he had

killed a large snake, which crept from under the house; and I supposed that

incident had prompted his unusual kindness.

The next morning the old cart was loaded with shingles for town. I put

Ellen into it, and sent her to her grandmother. Mr. Flint said I ought to

have asked his permission. I told him the child was sick, and required

attention which I had no time to give. He let it pass; for he was aware

that I had accomplished much work in a little time.

I had been three weeks on the plantation, when I planned a visit home. It

must be at night, after every body was in bed. I was six miles from town,

and the road was very dreary. I was to go with a young man, who, I knew,

often stole to town to see his mother. One night, when all was quiet, we

started. Fear gave speed to our steps, and we were not long in performing

the journey. I arrived at my grandmother's. Her bed room was on the first

floor, and the window was open, the weather being warm. I spoke to her and

she awoke. She let me in and closed the window, lest some late passer-by

should see me. A light was brought, and the whole household gathered round

me, some smiling and some crying. I went to look at my children, and

thanked God for their happy sleep. The tears fell as I leaned over them. As

I moved to leave, Benny stirred. I turned back, and whispered, "Mother is

here." After digging at his eyes with his little fist, they opened, and he

sat up in bed, looking at me curiously. Having satisfied himself that it

was I, he exclaimed, "O mother! you ain't dad, are you? They didn't cut off

your head at the plantation, did they?"

My time was up too soon, and my guide was waiting for me. I laid Benny back

in his bed, and dried his tears by a promise to come again soon. Rapidly we

retraced our steps back to the plantation. About half way we were met by a

company of four patrols. Luckily we heard their horse's hoofs before they

came in sight, and we had time to hide behind a large tree. They passed,

hallooing and shouting in a manner that indicated a recent carousal. How

thankful we were that they had not their dogs with them! We hastened our

footsteps, and when we arrived on the plantation we heard the sound of the

hand-mill. The slaves were grinding their corn. We were safely in the house

before the horn summoned them to their labor. I divided my little parcel of

food with my guide, knowing that he had lost the chance of grinding his

corn, and must toil all day in the field.

Mr. Flint often took an inspection of the house, to see that no one was

idle. The entire management of the work was trusted to me, because he knew

nothing about it; and rather than hire a superintendent he contented

himself with my arrangements. He had often urged upon his father the

necessity of having me at the plantation to take charge of his affairs, and

make clothes for the slaves; but the old man knew him too well to consent

to that arrangement.

When I had been working a month at the plantation, the great aunt of Mr.

Flint came to make him a visit. This was the good old lady who paid fifty

dollars for my grandmother, for the purpose of making her free, when she

stood on the auction block. My grandmother loved this old lady, whom we all

called Miss Fanny. She often came to take tea with us. On such occasions

the table was spread with a snow-white cloth, and the china cups and silver

spoons were taken from the old-fashioned buffet. There were hot muffins,

tea rusks, and delicious sweetmeats. My grandmother kept two cows, and the

fresh cream was Miss Fanny's delight. She invariably declared that it was

the best in town. The old ladies had cosey times together. They would work

and chat, and sometimes, while talking over old times, their spectacles

would get dim with tears, and would have to be taken off and wiped. When

Miss Fanny bade us good by, her bag was filled with grandmother's best

cakes, and she was urged to come again soon.

There had been a time when Dr. Flint's wife came to take tea with us, and

when her children were also sent to have a feast of "Aunt Marthy's" nice

cooking. But after I became an object of her jealousy and spite, she was

angry with grandmother for giving a shelter to me and my children. She

would not even speak to her in the street. This wounded my grandmother's

feelings, for she could not retain ill will against the woman whom she had

nourished with her milk when a babe. The doctor's wife would gladly have

prevented our intercourse with Miss Fanny if she could have done it, but

fortunately she was not dependent on the bounty of the Flints. She had

enough to be independent; and that is more than can ever be gained from

charity, however lavish it may be.

Miss Fanny was endeared to me by many recollections, and I was rejoiced to

see her at the plantation. The warmth of her large, loyal heart made the

house seem pleasanter while she was in it. She staid a week, and I had many

talks with her. She said her principal object in coming was to see how I

was treated, and whether any thing could be done for me. She inquired

whether she could help me in any way. I told her I believed not. She

condoled with me in her own peculiar way; saying she wished that I and all

my grandmother's family were at rest in our graves, for not until then

should she feel any peace about us. The good old soul did not dream that I

was planning to bestow peace upon her, with regard to myself and my

children; not by death, but by securing our freedom.

Again and again I had traversed those dreary twelve miles, to and from the

town; and all the way, I was meditating upon some means of escape for

myself and my children. My friends had made every effort that ingenuity

could devise to effect our purchase, but all their plans had proved

abortive. Dr. Flint was suspicious, and determined not to loosen his grasp

upon us. I could have made my escape alone; but it was more for my helpless

children than for myself that I longed for freedom. Though the boon would

have been precious to me, above all price, I would not have taken it at the

expense of leaving them in slavery. Every trial I endured, every sacrifice

I made for their sakes, drew them closer to my heart, and gave me fresh

courage to beat back the dark waves that rolled and rolled over me in a

seemingly endless night of storms.

The six weeks were nearly completed, when Mr. Flint's bride was expected to

take possession of her new home. The arrangements were all completed, and

Mr. Flint said I had done well. He expected to leave home on Saturday, and

return with his bride the following Wednesday. After receiving various

orders from him, I ventured to ask permission to spend Sunday in town. It

was granted; for which favor I was thankful. It was the first I had ever

asked of him, and I intended it should be the last. I needed more than one

night to accomplish the project I had in view; but the whole of Sunday

would give me an opportunity. I spent the Sabbath with my grandmother. A

calmer, more beautiful day never came down out of heaven. To me it was a

day of conflicting emotions. Perhaps it was the last day I should ever

spend under that dear, old sheltering roof! Perhaps these were the last

talks I should ever have with the faithful old friend of my whole life!

Perhaps it was the last time I and my children should be together! Well,

better so, I thought, than that they should be slaves. I knew the doom that

awaited my fair baby in slavery, and I determined to save her from it, or

perish in the attempt. I went to make this vow at the graves of my poor

parents, in the burying-ground of the slaves. "There the wicked cease from

troubling, and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest

together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor; the servant is free

from his master." I knelt by the graves of my parents, and thanked God, as

I had often done before, that they had not lived to witness my trials, or

to mourn over my sins. I had received my mother's blessing when she died;

and in many an hour of tribulation I had seemed to hear her voice,

sometimes chiding me, sometimes whispering loving words into my wounded

heart. I have shed many and bitter tears, to think that when I am gone from

my children they cannot remember me with such entire satisfaction as I

remembered my mother.

The graveyard was in the woods, and twilight was coming on. Nothing broke

the death-like stillness except the occasional twitter of a bird. My spirit

was overawed by the solemnity of the scene. For more than ten years I had

frequented this spot, but never had it seemed to me so sacred as now. A

black stump, at the head of my mother's grave, was all that remained of a

tree my father had planted. His grave was marked by a small wooden board,

bearing his name, the letters of which were nearly obliterated. I knelt

down and kissed them, and poured forth a prayer to God for guidance and

support in the perilous step I was about to take. As I passed the wreck of

the old meeting house, where, before Nat Turner's time, the slaves had been

allowed to meet for worship, I seemed to hear my father's voice come from

it, bidding me not to tarry till I reached freedom or the grave. I rushed

on with renovated hopes. My trust in God had been strengthened by that

prayer among the graves.

My plan was to conceal myself at the house of a friend, and remain there a

few weeks till the search was over. My hope was that the doctor would get

discouraged, and, for fear of losing my value, and also of subsequently

finding my children among the missing, he would consent to sell us; and I

knew somebody would buy us. I had done all in my power to make my children

comfortable during the time I expected to be separated from them. I was

packing my things, when grandmother came into the room, and asked what I

was doing. "I am putting my things in order," I replied. I tried to look

and speak cheerfully; but her watchful eye detected something beneath the

surface. She drew me towards her, and asked me to sit down. She looked

earnestly at me, and said, "Linda, do you want to kill your old

grandmother? Do you mean to leave your little, helpless children? I am old

now, and cannot do for your babies as I once did for you."

I replied, that if I went away, perhaps their father would be able to

secure their freedom.

"Ah, my child," said she, "don't trust too much to him. Stand by your own

children, and suffer with them till death. Nobody respects a mother who

forsakes her children; and if you leave them, you will never have a happy

moment. If you go, you will make me miserable the short time I have to

live. You would be taken and brought back, and your sufferings would be

dreadful. Remember poor Benjamin. Do give it up, Linda. Try to bear a

little longer. Things may turn out better than we expect."

My courage failed me, in view of the sorrow I should bring on that

faithful, loving old heart. I promised that I would try longer, and that I

would take nothing out of her house without her knowledge.

Whenever the children climbed on my knee, or laid their heads on my lap,

she would say, "Poor little souls! what would you do without a mother? She

don't love you as I do." And she would hug them to her own bosom, as if to

reproach me for my want of affection; but she knew all the while that I

loved them better than my life. I slept with her that night, and it was the

last time. The memory of it haunted me for many a year.

On Monday I returned to the plantation, and busied myself with preparations

for the important day. Wednesday came. It was a beautiful day, and the

faces of the slaves were as bright as the sunshine. The poor creatures were

merry. They were expecting little presents from the bride, and hoping for

better times under her administration. I had no such hopes for them. I knew

that the young wives of slaveholders often thought their authority and

importance would be best established and maintained by cruelty; and what I

had heard of young Mrs. Flint gave me no reason to expect that her rule

over them would be less severe than that of the master and overseer. Truly,

the colored race are the most cheerful and forgiving people on the face of

the earth. That their masters sleep in safety is owing to their

superabundance of heart; and yet they look upon their sufferings with less

pity than they would bestow on those of a horse or a dog.

I stood at the door with others to receive the bridegroom and bride. She

was a handsome, delicate-looking girl, and her face flushed with emotion at

sight of her new home. I thought it likely that visions of a happy future

were rising before her. It made me sad; for I knew how soon clouds would

come over her sunshine. She examined every part of the house, and told me

she was delighted with the arrangements I had made. I was afraid old Mrs.

Flint had tried to prejudice her against me, and I did my best to please

her.

All passed off smoothly for me until dinner time arrived. I did not mind

the embarrassment of waiting on a dinner party, for the first time in my

life, half so much as I did the meeting with Dr. Flint and his wife, who

would be among the guests. It was a mystery to me why Mrs. Flint had not

made her appearance at the plantation during all the time I was putting the

house in order. I had not met her, face to face, for five years, and I had

no wish to see her now. She was a praying woman, and, doubtless, considered

my present position a special answer to her prayers. Nothing could please

her better than to see me humbled and trampled upon. I was just where she

would have me--in the power of a hard, unprincipled master. She did not

speak to me when she took her seat at table; but her satisfied, triumphant

smile, when I handed her plate, was more eloquent than words. The old

doctor was not so quiet in his demonstrations. He ordered me here and

there, and spoke with peculiar emphasis when he said "your \_mistress\_." I

was drilled like a disgraced soldier. When all was over, and the last key

turned, I sought my pillow, thankful that God had appointed a season of

rest for the weary.

The next day my new mistress began her housekeeping. I was not exactly

appointed maid of all work; but I was to do whatever I was told. Monday

evening came. It was always a busy time. On that night the slaves received

their weekly allowance of food. Three pounds of meat, a peck of corn, and

perhaps a dozen herring were allowed to each man. Women received a pound

and a half of meat, a peck of corn, and the same number of herring.

Children over twelve years old had half the allowance of the women. The

meat was cut and weighed by the foreman of the field hands, and piled on

planks before the meat house. Then the second foreman went behind the

building, and when the first foreman called out, "Who takes this piece of

meat?" he answered by calling somebody's name. This method was resorted to

as a means of preventing partiality in distributing the meat. The young

mistress came out to see how things were done on her plantation, and she

soon gave a specimen of her character. Among those in waiting for their

allowance was a very old slave, who had faithfully served the Flint family

through three generations. When he hobbled up to get his bit of meat, the

mistress said he was too old to have any allowance; that when niggers were

too old to work, they ought to be fed on grass. Poor old man! He suffered

much before he found rest in the grave.

My mistress and I got along very well together. At the end of a week, old

Mrs. Flint made us another visit, and was closeted a long time with her

daughter-in-law. I had my suspicions what was the subject of the

conference. The old doctor's wife had been informed that I could leave the

plantation on one condition, and she was very desirous to keep me there. If

she had trusted me, as I deserved to be trusted by her, she would have had

no fears of my accepting that condition. When she entered her carriage to

return home, she said to young Mrs. Flint, "Don't neglect to send for them

as quick as possible." My heart was on the watch all the time, and I at

once concluded that she spoke of my children. The doctor came the next day,

and as I entered the room to spread the tea table, I heard him say, "Don't

wait any longer. Send for them to-morrow." I saw through the plan. They

thought my children's being there would fetter me to the spot, and that it

was a good place to break us all in to abject submission to our lot as

slaves. After the doctor left, a gentleman called, who had always

manifested friendly feelings towards my grandmother and her family. Mr.

Flint carried him over the plantation to show him the results of labor

performed by men and women who were unpaid, miserably clothed, and half

famished. The cotton crop was all they thought of. It was duly admired, and

the gentleman returned with specimens to show his friends. I was ordered to

carry water to wash his hands. As I did so, he said, "Linda, how do you

like your new home?" I told him I liked it as well as I expected. He

replied, "They don't think you are contented, and to-morrow they are going

to bring your children to be with you. I am sorry for you, Linda. I hope

they will treat you kindly." I hurried from the room, unable to thank him.

My suspicions were correct. My children were to be brought to the

plantation to be "broke in."

To this day I feel grateful to the gentleman who gave me this timely

information. It nerved me to immediate action.

XVII. The Flight.

Mr. Flint was hard pushed for house servants, and rather than lose me he

had restrained his malice. I did my work faithfully, though not, of course,

with a willing mind. They were evidently afraid I should leave them. Mr.

Flint wished that I should sleep in the great house instead of the

servants' quarters. His wife agreed to the proposition, but said I mustn't

bring my bed into the house, because it would scatter feathers on her

carpet. I knew when I went there that they would never think of such a

thing as furnishing a bed of any kind for me and my little ones. I

therefore carried my own bed, and now I was forbidden to use it. I did as I

was ordered. But now that I was certain my children were to be put in their

power, in order to give them a stronger hold on me, I resolved to leave

them that night. I remembered the grief this step would bring upon my dear

old grandmother, and nothing less than the freedom of my children would

have induced me to disregard her advice. I went about my evening work with

trembling steps. Mr. Flint twice called from his chamber door to inquire

why the house was not locked up. I replied that I had not done my work.

"You have had time enough to do it," said he. "Take care how you answer

me!"

I shut all the windows, locked all the doors, and went up to the third

story, to wait till midnight. How long those hours seemed, and how

fervently I prayed that God would not forsake me in this hour of utmost

need! I was about to risk every thing on the throw of a die; and if I

failed, O what would become of me and my poor children? They would be made

to suffer for my fault.

At half past twelve I stole softly down stairs. I stopped on the second

floor, thinking I heard a noise. I felt my way down into the parlor, and

looked out of the window. The night was so intensely dark that I could see

nothing. I raised the window very softly and jumped out. Large drops of

rain were falling, and the darkness bewildered me. I dropped on my knees,

and breathed a short prayer to God for guidance and protection. I groped my

way to the road, and rushed towards the town with almost lightning speed. I

arrived at my grandmother's house, but dared not see her. She would say,

"Linda, you are killing me;" and I knew that would unnerve me. I tapped

softly at the window of a room, occupied by a woman, who had lived in the

house several years. I knew she was a faithful friend, and could be trusted

with my secret. I tapped several times before she heard me. At last she

raised the window, and I whispered, "Sally, I have run away. Let me in,

quick." She opened the door softly, and said in low tones, "For God's sake,

don't. Your grandmother is trying to buy you and de chillern. Mr. Sands was

here last week. He tole her he was going away on business, but he wanted

her to go ahead about buying you and de chillern, and he would help her all

he could. Don't run away, Linda. Your grandmother is all bowed down wid

trouble now."

I replied, "Sally, they are going to carry my children to the plantation

to-morrow; and they will never sell them to any body so long as they have

me in their power. Now, would you advise me to go back?"

"No, chile, no," answered she. "When dey finds you is gone, dey won't want

de plague ob de chillern; but where is you going to hide? Dey knows ebery

inch ob dis house."

I told her I had a hiding-place, and that was all it was best for her to

know. I asked her to go into my room as soon as it was light, and take all

my clothes out of my trunk, and pack them in hers; for I knew Mr. Flint and

the constable would be there early to search my room. I feared the sight of

my children would be too much for my full heart; but I could not go into

the uncertain future without one last look. I bent over the bed where lay

my little Benny and baby Ellen. Poor little ones! fatherless and

motherless! Memories of their father came over me. He wanted to be kind to

them; but they were not all to him, as they were to my womanly heart. I

knelt and prayed for the innocent little sleepers. I kissed them lightly,

and turned away.

As I was about to open the street door, Sally laid her hand on my shoulder,

and said, "Linda, is you gwine all alone? Let me call your uncle."

"No, Sally," I replied, "I want no one to be brought into trouble on my

account."

I went forth into the darkness and rain. I ran on till I came to the house

of the friend who was to conceal me.

Early the next morning Mr. Flint was at my grandmother's inquiring for me.

She told him she had not seen me, and supposed I was at the plantation. He

watched her face narrowly, and said, "Don't you know any thing about her

running off?" She assured him that she did not. He went on to say, "Last

night she ran off without the least provocation. We had treated her very

kindly. My wife liked her. She will soon be found and brought back. Are her

children with you?" When told that they were, he said, "I am very glad to

hear that. If they are here, she cannot be far off. If I find out that any

of my niggers have had any thing to do with this damned business, I'll give

'em five hundred lashes." As he started to go to his father's, he turned

round and added, persuasively, "Let her be brought back, and she shall have

her children to live with her."

The tidings made the old doctor rave and storm at a furious rate. It was a

busy day for them. My grandmother's house was searched from top to bottom.

As my trunk was empty, they concluded I had taken my clothes with me.

Before ten o'clock every vessel northward bound was thoroughly examined,

and the law against harboring fugitives was read to all on board. At night

a watch was set over the town. Knowing how distressed my grandmother would

be, I wanted to send her a message; but it could not be done. Every one who

went in or out of her house was closely watched. The doctor said he would

take my children, unless she became responsible for them; which of course

she willingly did. The next day was spent in searching. Before night, the

following advertisement was posted at every corner, and in every public

place for miles round:--

$300 REWARD! Ran away from the subscriber, an intelligent, bright, mulatto

girl, named Linda, 21 years of age. Five feet four inches high. Dark eyes,

and black hair inclined to curl; but it can be made straight. Has a decayed

spot on a front tooth. She can read and write, and in all probability will

try to get to the Free States. All persons are forbidden, under penalty of

law, to harbor or employ said slave. $150 will be given to whoever takes

her in the state, and $300 if taken out of the state and delivered to me,

or lodged in jail.

Dr. Flint.

XVIII. Months Of Peril.

The search for me was kept up with more perseverence than I had

anticipated. I began to think that escape was impossible. I was in great

anxiety lest I should implicate the friend who harbored me. I knew the

consequences would be frightful; and much as I dreaded being caught, even

that seemed better than causing an innocent person to suffer for kindness

to me. A week had passed in terrible suspense, when my pursuers came into

such close vicinity that I concluded they had tracked me to my

hiding-place. I flew out of the house, and concealed myself in a thicket of

bushes. There I remained in an agony of fear for two hours. Suddenly, a

reptile of some kind seized my leg. In my fright, I struck a blow which

loosened its hold, but I could not tell whether I had killed it; it was so

dark, I could not see what it was; I only knew it was something cold and

slimy. The pain I felt soon indicated that the bite was poisonous. I was

compelled to leave my place of concealment, and I groped my way back into

the house. The pain had become intense, and my friend was startled by my

look of anguish. I asked her to prepare a poultice of warm ashes and

vinegar, and I applied it to my leg, which was already much swollen. The

application gave me some relief, but the swelling did not abate. The dread

of being disabled was greater than the physical pain I endured. My friend

asked an old woman, who doctored among the slaves, what was good for the

bite of a snake or a lizard. She told her to steep a dozen coppers in

vinegar, over night, and apply the cankered vinegar to the inflamed

part.[1]

[Footnote 1: The poison of a snake is a powerful acid, and is counteracted

by powerful alkalies, such as potash, ammonia, &c. The Indians are

accustomed to apply wet ashes, or plunge the limb into strong lie. White

men, employed to lay out railroads in snaky places, often carry ammonia

with them as an antidote.--EDITOR.]

I had succeeded in cautiously conveying some messages to my relatives. They

were harshly threatened, and despairing of my having a chance to escape,

they advised me to return to my master, ask his forgiveness, and let him

make an example of me. But such counsel had no influence with me. When I

started upon this hazardous undertaking, I had resolved that, come what

would, there should be no turning back. "Give me liberty, or give me

death," was my motto. When my friend contrived to make known to my

relatives the painful situation I had been in for twenty-four hours, they

said no more about my going back to my master. Something must be done, and

that speedily; but where to return for help, they knew not. God in his

mercy raised up "a friend in need."

Among the ladies who were acquainted with my grandmother, was one who had

known her from childhood, and always been very friendly to her. She had

also known my mother and her children, and felt interested for them. At

this crisis of affairs she called to see my grandmother, as she not

unfrequently did. She observed the sad and troubled expression of her face,

and asked if she knew where Linda was, and whether she was safe. My

grandmother shook her head, without answering. "Come, Aunt Martha,"

said the kind lady, "tell me all about it. Perhaps I can do something

to help you." The husband of this lady held many slaves, and bought and

sold slaves. She also held a number in her own name; but she treated

them kindly, and would never allow any of them to be sold. She was

unlike the majority of slaveholders' wives. My grandmother looked

earnestly at her. Something in the expression of her face said

"Trust me!" and she did trust her. She listened attentively to

the details of my story, and sat thinking for a while. At last she said,

"Aunt Martha, I pity you both. If you think there is any chance of Linda's

getting to the Free States, I will conceal her for a time. But first you

must solemnly promise that my name shall never be mentioned. If such a

thing should become known, it would ruin me and my family. No one in my

house must know of it, except the cook. She is so faithful that I would

trust my own life with her; and I know she likes Linda. It is a great risk;

but I trust no harm will come of it. Get word to Linda to be ready as soon

as it is dark, before the patrols are out. I will send the housemaids on

errands, and Betty shall go to meet Linda." The place where we were to meet

was designated and agreed upon. My grandmother was unable to thank the lady

for this noble deed; overcome by her emotions, she sank on her knees and

sobbed like a child.

I received a message to leave my friend's house at such an hour, and go to

a certain place where a friend would be waiting for me. As a matter of

prudence no names were mentioned. I had no means of conjecturing who I was

to meet, or where I was going. I did not like to move thus blindfolded, but

I had no choice. It would not do for me to remain where I was. I disguised

myself, summoned up courage to meet the worst, and went to the appointed

place. My friend Betty was there; she was the last person I expected to

see. We hurried along in silence. The pain in my leg was so intense that it

seemed as if I should drop but fear gave me strength. We reached the house

and entered unobserved. Her first words were: "Honey, now you is safe. Dem

devils ain't coming to search \_dis\_ house. When I get you into missis' safe

place, I will bring some nice hot supper. I specs you need it after all dis

skeering." Betty's vocation led her to think eating the most important

thing in life. She did not realize that my heart was too full for me to

care much about supper.

The mistress came to meet us, and led me up stairs to a small room over her

own sleeping apartment. "You will be safe here, Linda," said she; "I keep

this room to store away things that are out of use. The girls are not

accustomed to be sent to it, and they will not suspect any thing unless

they hear some noise. I always keep it locked, and Betty shall take care of

the key. But you must be very careful, for my sake as well as your own; and

you must never tell my secret; for it would ruin me and my family. I will

keep the girls busy in the morning, that Betty may have a chance to bring

your breakfast; but it will not do for her to come to you again till night.

I will come to see you sometimes. Keep up your courage. I hope this state

of things will not last long." Betty came with the "nice hot supper," and

the mistress hastened down stairs to keep things straight till she

returned. How my heart overflowed with gratitude! Words choked in my

throat; but I could have kissed the feet of my benefactress. For that deed

of Christian womanhood, may God forever bless her!

I went to sleep that night with the feeling that I was for the present the

most fortunate slave in town. Morning came and filled my little cell with

light. I thanked the heavenly Father for this safe retreat. Opposite my

window was a pile of feather beds. On the top of these I could lie

perfectly concealed, and command a view of the street through which Dr.

Flint passed to his office. Anxious as I was, I felt a gleam of

satisfaction when I saw him. Thus far I had outwitted him, and I triumphed

over it. Who can blame slaves for being cunning? They are constantly

compelled to resort to it. It is the only weapon of the weak and oppressed

against the strength of their tyrants.

I was daily hoping to hear that my master had sold my children; for I knew

who was on the watch to buy them. But Dr. Flint cared even more for revenge

than he did for money. My brother William and the good aunt who had served

in his family twenty years, and my little Benny, and Ellen, who was a

little over two years old, were thrust into jail, as a means of compelling

my relatives to give some information about me. He swore my grandmother

should never see one of them again till I was brought back. They kept these

facts from me for several days. When I heard that my little ones were in a

loathsome jail, my first impulse was to go to them. I was encountering

dangers for the sake of freeing them, and must I be the cause of their

death? The thought was agonizing. My benefactress tried to soothe me by

telling me that my aunt would take good care of the children while they

remained in jail. But it added to my pain to think that the good old aunt,

who had always been so kind to her sister's orphan children, should be shut

up in prison for no other crime than loving them. I suppose my friends

feared a reckless movement on my part, knowing, as they did, that my life

was bound up in my children. I received a note from my brother William. It

was scarcely legible, and ran thus: "Wherever you are, dear sister, I beg

of you not to come here. We are all much better off than you are. If you

come, you will ruin us all. They would force you to tell where you had

been, or they would kill you. Take the advice of your friends; if not for

the sake of me and your children, at least for the sake of those you would

ruin."

Poor William! He also must suffer for being my brother. I took his advice

and kept quiet. My aunt was taken out of jail at the end of a month,

because Mrs. Flint could not spare her any longer. She was tired of being

her own housekeeper. It was quite too fatiguing to order her dinner and eat

it too. My children remained in jail, where brother William did all he

could for their comfort. Betty went to see them sometimes, and brought me

tidings. She was not permitted to enter the jail; but William would hold

them up to the grated window while she chatted with them. When she repeated

their prattle, and told me how they wanted to see their ma, my tears would

flow. Old Betty would exclaim, "Lors, chile! what's you crying 'bout? Dem

young uns vil kill you dead. Don't be so chick'n hearted! If you does, you

vil nebber git thro' dis world."

Good old soul! She had gone through the world childless. She had never had

little ones to clasp their arms round her neck; she had never seen their

soft eyes looking into hers; no sweet little voices had called her mother;

she had never pressed her own infants to her heart, with the feeling that

even in fetters there was something to live for. How could she realize my

feelings? Betty's husband loved children dearly, and wondered why God had

denied them to him. He expressed great sorrow when he came to Betty with

the tidings that Ellen had been taken out of jail and carried to Dr.

Flint's. She had the measles a short time before they carried her to jail,

and the disease had left her eyes affected. The doctor had taken her home

to attend to them. My children had always been afraid of the doctor and his

wife. They had never been inside of their house. Poor little Ellen cried

all day to be carried back to prison. The instincts of childhood are true.

She knew she was loved in the jail. Her screams and sobs annoyed Mrs.

Flint. Before night she called one of the slaves, and said, "Here, Bill,

carry this brat back to the jail. I can't stand her noise. If she would be

quiet I should like to keep the little minx. She would make a handy

waiting-maid for my daughter by and by. But if she staid here, with her

white face, I suppose I should either kill her or spoil her. I hope the

doctor will sell them as far as wind and water can carry them. As for their

mother, her ladyship will find out yet what she gets by running away. She

hasn't so much feeling for her children as a cow has for its calf. If she

had, she would have come back long ago, to get them out of jail, and save

all this expense and trouble. The good-for-nothing hussy! When she is

caught, she shall stay in jail, in irons, for one six months, and then be

sold to a sugar plantation. I shall see her broke in yet. What do you stand

there for, Bill? Why don't you go off with the brat? Mind, now, that you

don't let any of the niggers speak to her in the street!"

When these remarks were reported to me, I smiled at Mrs. Flint's saying

that she should either kill my child or spoil her. I thought to myself

there was very little danger of the latter. I have always considered it as

one of God's special providences that Ellen screamed till she was carried

back to jail.

That same night Dr. Flint was called to a patient, and did not return till

near morning. Passing my grandmother's, he saw a light in the house, and

thought to himself, "Perhaps this has something to do with Linda." He

knocked, and the door was opened. "What calls you up so early?" said he. "I

saw your light, and I thought I would just stop and tell you that I have

found out where Linda is. I know where to put my hands on her, and I shall

have her before twelve o'clock." When he had turned away, my grandmother

and my uncle looked anxiously at each other. They did not know whether or

not it was merely one of the doctor's tricks to frighten them. In their

uncertainty, they thought it was best to have a message conveyed to my

friend Betty. Unwilling to alarm her mistress, Betty resolved to dispose of

me herself. She came to me, and told me to rise and dress quickly. We

hurried down stairs, and across the yard, into the kitchen. She locked the

door, and lifted up a plank in the floor. A buffalo skin and a bit of

carpet were spread for me to lie on, and a quilt thrown over me. "Stay

dar," said she, "till I sees if dey know 'bout you. Dey say dey vil put

thar hans on you afore twelve o'clock. If dey \_did\_ know whar you are, dey

won't know \_now\_. Dey'll be disapinted dis time. Dat's all I got to say. If

dey comes rummagin 'mong \_my\_ tings, de'll get one bressed sarssin from dis

'ere nigger." In my shallow bed I had but just room enough to bring my

hands to my face to keep the dust out of my eyes; for Betty walked over me

twenty times in an hour, passing from the dresser to the fireplace. When

she was alone, I could hear her pronouncing anathemas over Dr. Flint and

all his tribe, every now and then saying, with a chuckling laugh, "Dis

nigger's too cute for 'em dis time." When the housemaids were about, she

had sly ways of drawing them out, that I might hear what they would say.

She would repeat stories she had heard about my being in this, or that, or

the other place. To which they would answer, that I was not fool enough to

be staying round there; that I was in Philadelphia or New York before this

time. When all were abed and asleep, Betty raised the plank, and said,

"Come out, chile; come out. Dey don't know nottin 'bout you. Twas only

white folks' lies, to skeer de niggers."

Some days after this adventure I had a much worse fright. As I sat very

still in my retreat above stairs, cheerful visions floated through my mind.

I thought Dr. Flint would soon get discouraged, and would be willing to

sell my children, when he lost all hopes of making them the means of my

discovery. I knew who was ready to buy them. Suddenly I heard a voice that

chilled my blood. The sound was too familiar to me, it had been too

dreadful, for me not to recognize at once my old master. He was in the

house, and I at once concluded he had come to seize me. I looked round in

terror. There was no way of escape. The voice receded. I supposed the

constable was with him, and they were searching the house. In my alarm I

did not forget the trouble I was bringing on my generous benefactress. It

seemed as if I were born to bring sorrow on all who befriended me, and that

was the bitterest drop in the bitter cup of my life. After a while I heard

approaching footsteps; the key was turned in my door. I braced myself

against the wall to keep from falling. I ventured to look up, and there

stood my kind benefactress alone. I was too much overcome to speak, and

sunk down upon the floor.

"I thought you would hear your master's voice," she said; "and knowing you

would be terrified, I came to tell you there is nothing to fear. You may

even indulge in a laugh at the old gentleman's expense. He is so sure you

are in New York, that he came to borrow five hundred dollars to go in

pursuit of you. My sister had some money to loan on interest. He has

obtained it, and proposes to start for New York to-night. So, for the

present, you see you are safe. The doctor will merely lighten his pocket

hunting after the bird he has left behind."

XIX. The Children Sold.

The Doctor came back from New York, of course without accomplishing his

purpose. He had expended considerable money, and was rather disheartened.

My brother and the children had now been in jail two months, and that also

was some expense. My friends thought it was a favorable time to work on his

discouraged feelings. Mr. Sands sent a speculator to offer him nine hundred

dollars for my brother William, and eight hundred for the two children.

These were high prices, as slaves were then selling; but the offer was

rejected. If it had been merely a question of money, the doctor would have

sold any boy of Benny's age for two hundred dollars; but he could not bear

to give up the power of revenge. But he was hard pressed for money, and he

revolved the matter in his mind. He knew that if he could keep Ellen till

she was fifteen, he could sell her for a high price; but I presume he

reflected that she might die, or might be stolen away. At all events, he

came to the conclusion that he had better accept the slave-trader's offer.

Meeting him in the street, he inquired when he would leave town. "To-day,

at ten o'clock," he replied. "Ah, do you go so soon?" said the doctor. "I

have been reflecting upon your proposition, and I have concluded to let you

have the three negroes if you will say nineteen hundred dollars." After

some parley, the trader agreed to his terms. He wanted the bill of sale

drawn up and signed immediately, as he had a great deal to attend to during

the short time he remained in town. The doctor went to the jail and told

William he would take him back into his service if he would promise to

behave himself but he replied that he would rather be sold. "And you

\_shall\_ be sold, you ungrateful rascal!" exclaimed the doctor. In less than

an hour the money was paid, the papers were signed, sealed, and delivered,

and my brother and children were in the hands of the trader.

It was a hurried transaction; and after it was over, the doctor's

characteristic caution returned. He went back to the speculator, and said,

"Sir, I have come to lay you under obligations of a thousand dollars not to

sell any of those negroes in this state." "You come too late," replied the

trader; "our bargain is closed." He had, in fact, already sold them to Mr.

Sands, but he did not mention it. The doctor required him to put irons on

"that rascal, Bill," and to pass through the back streets when he took his

gang out of town. The trader was privately instructed to concede to his

wishes. My good old aunt went to the jail to bid the children good by,

supposing them to be the speculator's property, and that she should never

see them again. As she held Benny in her lap, he said, "Aunt Nancy, I want

to show you something." He led her to the door and showed her a long row of

marks, saying, "Uncle Will taught me to count. I have made a mark for every

day I have been here, and it is sixty days. It is a long time; and the

speculator is going to take me and Ellen away. He's a bad man. It's wrong

for him to take grandmother's children. I want to go to my mother."

My grandmother was told that the children would be restored to her, but she

was requested to act as if they were really to be sent away. Accordingly,

she made up a bundle of clothes and went to the jail. When she arrived, she

found William handcuffed among the gang, and the children in the trader's

cart. The scene seemed too much like reality. She was afraid there might

have been some deception or mistake. She fainted, and was carried home.

When the wagon stopped at the hotel, several gentlemen came out and

proposed to purchase William, but the trader refused their offers, without

stating that he was already sold. And now came the trying hour for that

drove of human beings, driven away like cattle, to be sold they knew not

where. Husbands were torn from wives, parents from children, never to look

upon each other again this side the grave. There was wringing of hands and

cries of despair.

Dr. Flint had the supreme satisfaction of seeing the wagon leave town, and

Mrs. Flint had the gratification of supposing that my children were going

"as far as wind and water would carry them." According to agreement, my

uncle followed the wagon some miles, until they came to an old farm house.

There the trader took the irons from William, and as he did so, he said,

"You are a damned clever fellow. I should like to own you myself. Them

gentlemen that wanted to buy you said you was a bright, honest chap, and I

must git you a good home. I guess your old master will swear to-morrow, and

call himself an old fool for selling the children. I reckon he'll never git

their mammy back again. I expect she's made tracks for the north. Good by,

old boy. Remember, I have done you a good turn. You must thank me by

coaxing all the pretty gals to go with me next fall. That's going to be my

last trip. This trading in niggers is a bad business for a fellow that's

got any heart. Move on, you fellows!" And the gang went on, God alone knows

where.

Much as I despise and detest the class of slave-traders, whom I regard as

the vilest wretches on earth, I must do this man the justice to say that he

seemed to have some feeling. He took a fancy to William in the jail, and

wanted to buy him. When he heard the story of my children, he was willing

to aid them in getting out of Dr. Flint's power, even without charging the

customary fee.

My uncle procured a wagon and carried William and the children back to

town. Great was the joy in my grandmother's house! The curtains were

closed, and the candles lighted. The happy grandmother cuddled the little

ones to her bosom. They hugged her, and kissed her, and clapped their

hands, and shouted. She knelt down and poured forth one of her heartfelt

prayers of thanksgiving to God. The father was present for a while; and

though such a "parental relation" as existed between him and my children

takes slight hold on the hearts or consciences of slaveholders, it must be

that he experienced some moments of pure joy in witnessing the happiness he

had imparted.

I had no share in the rejoicings of that evening. The events of the day had

not come to my knowledge. And now I will tell you something that happened

to me; though you will, perhaps, think it illustrates the superstition of

slaves. I sat in my usual place on the floor near the window, where I could

hear much that was said in the street without being seen. The family had

retired for the night, and all was still. I sat there thinking of my

children, when I heard a low strain of music. A band of serenaders were

under the window, playing "Home, sweet home." I listened till the sounds

did not seem like music, but like the moaning of children. It seemed as if

my heart would burst. I rose from my sitting posture, and knelt. A streak

of moonlight was on the floor before me, and in the midst of it appeared

the forms of my two children. They vanished; but I had seen them

distinctly. Some will call it a dream, others a vision. I know not how to

account for it, but it made a strong impression on my mind, and I felt

certain something had happened to my little ones.

I had not seen Betty since morning. Now I heard her softly turning the key.

As soon as she entered, I clung to her, and begged her to let me know

whether my children were dead, or whether they were sold; for I had seen

their spirits in my room, and I was sure something had happened to them.

"Lor, chile," said she, putting her arms round me, "you's got de

high-sterics. I'll sleep wid you to-night, 'cause you'll make a noise, and

ruin missis. Something has stirred you up mightily. When you is done cryin,

I'll talk wid you. De chillern is well, and mighty happy. I seed 'em

myself. Does dat satisfy you? Dar, chile, be still! Somebody vill hear

you." I tried to obey her. She lay down, and was soon sound asleep; but no

sleep would come to my eyelids.

At dawn, Betty was up and off to the kitchen. The hours passed on, and the

vision of the night kept constantly recurring to my thoughts. After a while

I heard the voices of two women in the entry. In one of them I recognized

the housemaid. The other said to her, "Did you know Linda Brent's children

was sold to the speculator yesterday. They say ole massa Flint was mighty

glad to see 'em drove out of town; but they say they've come back agin. I

'spect it's all their daddy's doings. They say he's bought William too.

Lor! how it will take hold of ole massa Flint! I'm going roun' to aunt

Marthy's to see 'bout it."

I bit my lips till the blood came to keep from crying out. Were my children

with their grandmother, or had the speculator carried them off? The

suspense was dreadful. Would Betty \_never\_ come, and tell me the truth

about it? At last she came, and I eagerly repeated what I had overheard.

Her face was one broad, bright smile. "Lor, you foolish ting!" said she.

"I'se gwine to tell you all 'bout it. De gals is eating thar breakfast, and

missus tole me to let her tell you; but, poor creeter! t'aint right to keep

you waitin', and I'se gwine to tell you. Brudder, chillern, all is bought

by de daddy! I'se laugh more dan nuff, tinking 'bout ole massa Flint. Lor,

how he \_vill\_ swar! He's got ketched dis time, any how; but I must be

getting out o' dis, or dem gals vill come and ketch \_me\_."

Betty went off laughing; and I said to myself, "Can it be true that my

children are free? I have not suffered for them in vain. Thank God!"

Great surprise was expressed when it was known that my children had

returned to their grandmother's. The news spread through the town, and many

a kind word was bestowed on the little ones.

Dr. Flint went to my grandmother's to ascertain who was the owner of my

children, and she informed him. "I expected as much," said he. "I am glad

to hear it. I have had news from Linda lately, and I shall soon have her.

You need never expect to see \_her\_ free. She shall be my slave as long as I

live, and when I am dead she shall be the slave of my children. If I ever

find out that you or Phillip had anything to do with her running off I'll

kill him. And if I meet William in the street, and he presumes to look at

me, I'll flog him within an inch of his life. Keep those brats out of my

sight!"

As he turned to leave, my grandmother said something to remind him of his

own doings. He looked back upon her, as if he would have been glad to

strike her to the ground.

I had my season of joy and thanksgiving. It was the first time since my

childhood that I had experienced any real happiness. I heard of the old

doctor's threats, but they no longer had the same power to trouble me. The

darkest cloud that hung over my life had rolled away. Whatever slavery

might do to me, it could not shackle my children. If I fell a sacrifice, my

little ones were saved. It was well for me that my simple heart believed

all that had been promised for their welfare. It is always better to trust

than to doubt.

XX. New Perils.

The doctor, more exasperated than ever, again tried to revenge himself on

my relatives. He arrested uncle Phillip on the charge of having aided my

flight. He was carried before a court, and swore truly that he knew nothing

of my intention to escape, and that he had not seen me since I left my

master's plantation. The doctor then demanded that he should give bail for

five hundred dollars that he would have nothing to do with me. Several

gentlemen offered to be security for him; but Mr. Sands told him he had

better go back to jail, and he would see that he came out without giving

bail.

The news of his arrest was carried to my grandmother, who conveyed it to

Betty. In the kindness of her heart, she again stowed me away under the

floor; and as she walked back and forth, in the performance of her culinary

duties, she talked apparently to herself, but with the intention that I

should hear what was going on. I hoped that my uncle's imprisonment would

last but few days; still I was anxious. I thought it likely Dr. Flint would

do his utmost to taunt and insult him, and I was afraid my uncle might lose

control of himself, and retort in some way that would be construed into a

punishable offence; and I was well aware that in court his word would not

be taken against any white man's. The search for me was renewed. Something

had excited suspicions that I was in the vicinity. They searched the house

I was in. I heard their steps and their voices. At night, when all were

asleep, Betty came to release me from my place of confinement. The fright I

had undergone, the constrained posture, and the dampness of the ground,

made me ill for several days. My uncle was soon after taken out of prison;

but the movements of all my relatives, and of all our friends, were very

closely watched.

We all saw that I could not remain where I was much longer. I had already

staid longer than was intended, and I knew my presence must be a source of

perpetual anxiety to my kind benefactress. During this time, my friends had

laid many plans for my escape, but the extreme vigilance of my persecutors

made it impossible to carry them into effect.

One morning I was much startled by hearing somebody trying to get into my

room. Several keys were tried, but none fitted. I instantly conjectured it

was one of the housemaids; and I concluded she must either have heard some

noise in the room, or have noticed the entrance of Betty. When my friend

came, at her usual time, I told her what had happened. "I knows who it

was," said she. "Tend upon it, 'twas dat Jenny. Dat nigger allers got de

debble in her." I suggested that she might have seen or heard something

that excited her curiosity.

"Tut! tut! chile!" exclaimed Betty, "she ain't seen notin', nor hearn

notin'. She only 'spects something. Dat's all. She wants to fine out who

hab cut and make my gownd. But she won't nebber know. Dat's sartin. I'll

git missis to fix her."

I reflected a moment, and said, "Betty, I must leave here to-night."

"Do as you tink best, poor chile," she replied. "I'se mighty 'fraid dat

'ere nigger vill pop on you some time."

She reported the incident to her mistress, and received orders to keep

Jenny busy in the kitchen till she could see my uncle Phillip. He told her

he would send a friend for me that very evening. She told him she hoped I

was going to the north, for it was very dangerous for me to remain any

where in the vicinity. Alas, it was not an easy thing, for one in my

situation, to go to the north. In order to leave the coast quite clear for

me, she went into the country to spend the day with her brother, and took

Jenny with her. She was afraid to come and bid me good by, but she left a

kind message with Betty. I heard her carriage roll from the door, and I

never again saw her who had so generously befriended the poor, trembling

fugitive! Though she was a slaveholder, to this day my heart blesses her!

I had not the slightest idea where I was going. Betty brought me a suit of

sailor's clothes,--jacket, trowsers, and tarpaulin hat. She gave me a small

bundle, saying I might need it where I was going. In cheery tones, she

exclaimed, "I'se \_so\_ glad you is gwine to free parts! Don't forget ole

Betty. P'raps I'll come 'long by and by."

I tried to tell her how grateful I felt for all her kindness. But she

interrupted me. "I don't want no tanks, honey. I'se glad I could help you,

and I hope de good Lord vill open de path for you. I'se gwine wid you to de

lower gate. Put your hands in your pockets, and walk ricketty, like de

sailors."

I performed to her satisfaction. At the gate I found Peter, a young colored

man, waiting for me. I had known him for years. He had been an apprentice

to my father, and had always borne a good character. I was not afraid to

trust to him. Betty bade me a hurried good by, and we walked off. "Take

courage, Linda," said my friend Peter. "I've got a dagger, and no man shall

take you from me, unless he passes over my dead body."

It was a long time since I had taken a walk out of doors, and the fresh air

revived me. It was also pleasant to hear a human voice speaking to me above

a whisper. I passed several people whom I knew, but they did not recognize

me in my disguise. I prayed internally that, for Peter's sake, as well as

my own, nothing might occur to bring out his dagger. We walked on till we

came to the wharf. My aunt Nancy's husband was a seafaring man, and it had

been deemed necessary to let him into our secret. He took me into his boat,

rowed out to a vessel not far distant, and hoisted me on board. We three

were the only occupants of the vessel. I now ventured to ask what they

proposed to do with me. They said I was to remain on board till near dawn,

and then they would hide me in Snaky Swamp, till my uncle Phillip had

prepared a place of concealment for me. If the vessel had been bound north,

it would have been of no avail to me, for it would certainly have been

searched. About four o'clock, we were again seated in the boat, and rowed

three miles to the swamp. My fear of snakes had been increased by the

venomous bite I had received, and I dreaded to enter this hiding place. But

I was in no situation to choose, and I gratefully accepted the best that my

poor, persecuted friends could do for me.

Peter landed first, and with a large knife cut a path through bamboos and

briers of all descriptions. He came back, took me in his arms, and carried

me to a seat made among the bamboos. Before we reached it, we were covered

with hundreds of mosquitos. In an hour's time they had so poisoned my flesh

that I was a pitiful sight to behold. As the light increased, I saw snake

after snake crawling round us. I had been accustomed to the sight of snakes

all my life, but these were larger than any I had ever seen. To this day I

shudder when I remember that morning. As evening approached, the number of

snakes increased so much that we were continually obliged to thrash them

with sticks to keep them from crawling over us. The bamboos were so high

and so thick that it was impossible to see beyond a very short distance.

Just before it became dark we procured a seat nearer to the entrance of the

swamp, being fearful of losing our way back to the boat. It was not long

before we heard the paddle of oars, and the low whistle, which had been

agreed upon as a signal. We made haste to enter the boat, and were rowed

back to the vessel. I passed a wretched night; for the heat of the swamp,

the mosquitos, and the constant terror of snakes, had brought on a burning

fever. I had just dropped asleep, when they came and told me it was time to

go back to that horrid swamp. I could scarcely summon courage to rise. But

even those large, venomous snakes were less dreadful to my imagination than

the white men in that community called civilized. This time Peter took a

quantity of tobacco to burn, to keep off the mosquitos. It produced the

desired effect on them, but gave me nausea and severe headache. At dark we

returned to the vessel. I had been so sick during the day, that Peter

declared I should go home that night, if the devil himself was on patrol.

They told me a place of concealment had been provided for me at my

grandmother's. I could not imagine how it was possible to hide me in her

house, every nook and corner of which was known to the Flint family. They

told me to wait and see. We were rowed ashore, and went boldly through the

streets, to my grandmother's. I wore my sailor's clothes, and had blackened

my face with charcoal. I passed several people whom I knew. The father of

my children came so near that I brushed against his arm; but he had no idea

who it was.

"You must make the most of this walk," said my friend Peter, "for you may

not have another very soon."

I thought his voice sounded sad. It was kind of him to conceal from me what

a dismal hole was to be my home for a long, long time.

XXI. The Loophole Of Retreat.

A small shed had been added to my grandmother's house years ago. Some

boards were laid across the joists at the top, and between these boards and

the roof was a very small garret, never occupied by any thing but rats and

mice. It was a pent roof, covered with nothing but shingles, according to

the southern custom for such buildings. The garret was only nine feet long

and seven wide. The highest part was three feet high, and sloped down

abruptly to the loose board floor. There was no admission for either light

or air. My uncle Phillip, who was a carpenter, had very skilfully made a

concealed trap-door, which communicated with the storeroom. He had been

doing this while I was waiting in the swamp. The storeroom opened upon a

piazza. To this hole I was conveyed as soon as I entered the house. The air

was stifling; the darkness total. A bed had been spread on the floor. I

could sleep quite comfortably on one side; but the slope was so sudden that

I could not turn on my other without hitting the roof. The rats and mice

ran over my bed; but I was weary, and I slept such sleep as the wretched

may, when a tempest has passed over them. Morning came. I knew it only by

the noises I heard; for in my small den day and night were all the same. I

suffered for air even more than for light. But I was not comfortless. I

heard the voices of my children. There was joy and there was sadness in the

sound. It made my tears flow. How I longed to speak to them! I was eager to

look on their faces; but there was no hole, no crack, through which I could

peep. This continued darkness was oppressive. It seemed horrible to sit or

lie in a cramped position day after day, without one gleam of light. Yet I

would have chosen this, rather than my lot as a slave, though white people

considered it an easy one; and it was so compared with the fate of others.

I was never cruelly overworked; I was never lacerated with the whip from

head to foot; I was never so beaten and bruised that I could not turn from

one side to the other; I never had my heel-strings cut to prevent my

running away; I was never chained to a log and forced to drag it about,

while I toiled in the fields from morning till night; I was never branded

with hot iron, or torn by bloodhounds. On the contrary, I had always been

kindly treated, and tenderly cared for, until I came into the hands of Dr.

Flint. I had never wished for freedom till then. But though my life in

slavery was comparatively devoid of hardships, God pity the woman who is

compelled to lead such a life!

My food was passed up to me through the trap-door my uncle had contrived;

and my grandmother, my uncle Phillip, and aunt Nancy would seize such

opportunities as they could, to mount up there and chat with me at the

opening. But of course this was not safe in the daytime. It must all be

done in darkness. It was impossible for me to move in an erect position,

but I crawled about my den for exercise. One day I hit my head against

something, and found it was a gimlet. My uncle had left it sticking there

when he made the trap-door. I was as rejoiced as Robinson Crusoe could have

been at finding such a treasure. It put a lucky thought into my head. I

said to myself, "Now I will have some light. Now I will see my children." I

did not dare to begin my work during the daytime, for fear of attracting

attention. But I groped round; and having found the side next the street,

where I could frequently see my children, I stuck the gimlet in and waited

for evening. I bored three rows of holes, one above another; then I bored

out the interstices between. I thus succeeded in making one hole about an

inch long and an inch broad. I sat by it till late into the night, to enjoy

the little whiff of air that floated in. In the morning I watched for my

children. The first person I saw in the street was Dr. Flint. I had a

shuddering, superstitious feeling that it was a bad omen. Several familiar

faces passed by. At last I heard the merry laugh of children, and presently

two sweet little faces were looking up at me, as though they knew I was

there, and were conscious of the joy they imparted. How I longed to \_tell\_

them I was there!

My condition was now a little improved. But for weeks I was tormented by

hundreds of little red insects, fine as a needle's point, that pierced

through my skin, and produced an intolerable burning. The good grandmother

gave me herb teas and cooling medicines, and finally I got rid of them. The

heat of my den was intense, for nothing but thin shingles protected me from

the scorching summer's sun. But I had my consolations. Through my

peeping-hole I could watch the children, and when they were near enough, I

could hear their talk. Aunt Nancy brought me all the news she could hear at

Dr. Flint's. From her I learned that the doctor had written to New York to

a colored woman, who had been born and raised in our neighborhood, and had

breathed his contaminating atmosphere. He offered her a reward if she could

find out any thing about me. I know not what was the nature of her reply;

but he soon after started for New York in haste, saying to his family that

he had business of importance to transact. I peeped at him as he passed on

his way to the steamboat. It was a satisfaction to have miles of land and

water between us, even for a little while; and it was a still greater

satisfaction to know that he believed me to be in the Free States. My

little den seemed less dreary than it had done. He returned, as he did from

his former journey to New York, without obtaining any satisfactory

information. When he passed our house next morning, Benny was standing at

the gate. He had heard them say that he had gone to find me, and he called

out, "Dr. Flint, did you bring my mother home? I want to see her." The

doctor stamped his foot at him in a rage, and exclaimed, "Get out of the

way, you little damned rascal! If you don't, I'll cut off your head."

Benny ran terrified into the house, saying, "You can't put me in jail

again. I don't belong to you now." It was well that the wind carried the

words away from the doctor's ear. I told my grandmother of it, when we had

our next conference at the trap-door, and begged of her not to allow the

children to be impertinent to the irascible old man.

Autumn came, with a pleasant abatement of heat. My eyes had become

accustomed to the dim light, and by holding my book or work in a certain

position near the aperture I contrived to read and sew. That was a great

relief to the tedious monotony of my life. But when winter came, the cold

penetrated through the thin shingle roof, and I was dreadfully chilled. The

winters there are not so long, or so severe, as in northern latitudes; but

the houses are not built to shelter from cold, and my little den was

peculiarly comfortless. The kind grandmother brought me bedclothes and warm

drinks. Often I was obliged to lie in bed all day to keep comfortable; but

with all my precautions, my shoulders and feet were frostbitten. O, those

long, gloomy days, with no object for my eye to rest upon, and no thoughts

to occupy my mind, except the dreary past and the uncertain future! I was

thankful when there came a day sufficiently mild for me to wrap myself up

and sit at the loophole to watch the passers by. Southerners have the habit

of stopping and talking in the streets, and I heard many conversations not

intended to meet my ears. I heard slave-hunters planning how to catch some

poor fugitive. Several times I heard allusions to Dr. Flint, myself, and

the history of my children, who, perhaps, were playing near the gate. One

would say, "I wouldn't move my little finger to catch her, as old Flint's

property." Another would say, "I'll catch \_any\_ nigger for the reward. A

man ought to have what belongs to him, if he \_is\_ a damned brute." The

opinion was often expressed that I was in the Free States. Very rarely did

any one suggest that I might be in the vicinity. Had the least suspicion

rested on my grandmother's house, it would have been burned to the ground.

But it was the last place they thought of. Yet there was no place, where

slavery existed, that could have afforded me so good a place of

concealment.

Dr. Flint and his family repeatedly tried to coax and bribe my children to

tell something they had heard said about me. One day the doctor took them

into a shop, and offered them some bright little silver pieces and gay

handkerchiefs if they would tell where their mother was. Ellen shrank away

from him, and would not speak; but Benny spoke up, and said, "Dr. Flint, I

don't know where my mother is. I guess she's in New York; and when you go

there again, I wish you'd ask her to come home, for I want to see her; but

if you put her in jail, or tell her you'll cut her head off, I'll tell her

to go right back."

XXII. Christmas Festivities.

Christmas was approaching. Grandmother brought me materials, and I busied

myself making some new garments and little playthings for my children. Were

it not that hiring day is near at hand, and many families are fearfully

looking forward to the probability of separation in a few days, Christmas

might be a happy season for the poor slaves. Even slave mothers try to

gladden the hearts of their little ones on that occasion. Benny and Ellen

had their Christmas stockings filled. Their imprisoned mother could not

have the privilege of witnessing their surprise and joy. But I had the

pleasure of peeping at them as they went into the street with their new

suits on. I heard Benny ask a little playmate whether Santa Claus brought

him any thing. "Yes," replied the boy; "but Santa Claus ain't a real man.

It's the children's mothers that put things into the stockings." "No, that

can't be," replied Benny, "for Santa Claus brought Ellen and me these new

clothes, and my mother has been gone this long time."

How I longed to tell him that his mother made those garments, and that many

a tear fell on them while she worked!

Every child rises early on Christmas morning to see the Johnkannaus.

Without them, Christmas would be shorn of its greatest attraction. They

consist of companies of slaves from the plantations, generally of the lower

class. Two athletic men, in calico wrappers, have a net thrown over them,

covered with all manner of bright-colored stripes. Cows' tails are fastened

to their backs, and their heads are decorated with horns. A box, covered

with sheepskin, is called the gumbo box. A dozen beat on this, while other

strike triangles and jawbones, to which bands of dancers keep time. For a

month previous they are composing songs, which are sung on this occasion.

These companies, of a hundred each, turn out early in the morning, and are

allowed to go round till twelve o'clock, begging for contributions. Not a

door is left unvisited where there is the least chance of obtaining a penny

or a glass of rum. They do not drink while they are out, but carry the rum

home in jugs, to have a carousal. These Christmas donations frequently

amount to twenty or thirty dollars. It is seldom that any white man or

child refuses to give them a trifle. If he does, they regale his ears with

the following song:--

Poor massa, so dey say;

Down in de heel, so dey say;

Got no money, so dey say;

Not one shillin, so dey say;

God A'mighty bress you, so dey say.

Christmas is a day of feasting, both with white and colored people. Slaves,

who are lucky enough to have a few shillings, are sure to spend them for

good eating; and many a turkey and pig is captured, without saying, "By

your leave, sir." Those who cannot obtain these, cook a 'possum, or a

raccoon, from which savory dishes can be made. My grandmother raised

poultry and pigs for sale and it was her established custom to have both a

turkey and a pig roasted for Christmas dinner.

On this occasion, I was warned to keep extremely quiet, because two guests

had been invited. One was the town constable, and the other was a free

colored man, who tried to pass himself off for white, and who was always

ready to do any mean work for the sake of currying favor with white people.

My grandmother had a motive for inviting them. She managed to take them all

over the house. All the rooms on the lower floor were thrown open for them

to pass in and out; and after dinner, they were invited up stairs to look

at a fine mocking bird my uncle had just brought home. There, too, the

rooms were all thrown open that they might look in. When I heard them

talking on the piazza, my heart almost stood still. I knew this colored man

had spent many nights hunting for me. Every body knew he had the blood of a

slave father in his veins; but for the sake of passing himself off for

white, he was ready to kiss the slaveholders' feet. How I despised him! As

for the constable, he wore no false colors. The duties of his office were

despicable, but he was superior to his companion, inasmuch as he did not

pretend to be what he was not. Any white man, who could raise money enough

to buy a slave, would have considered himself degraded by being a

constable; but the office enabled its possessor to exercise authority. If

he found any slave out after nine o'clock, he could whip him as much as he

liked; and that was a privilege to be coveted. When the guests were ready

to depart, my grandmother gave each of them some of her nice pudding, as a

present for their wives. Through my peep-hole I saw them go out of the

gate, and I was glad when it closed after them. So passed the first

Christmas in my den.

XXIII. Still In Prison.

When spring returned, and I took in the little patch of green the aperture

commanded, I asked myself how many more summers and winters I must be

condemned to spend thus. I longed to draw in a plentiful draught of fresh

air, to stretch my cramped limbs, to have room to stand erect, to feel the

earth under my feet again. My relatives were constantly on the lookout for

a chance of escape; but none offered that seemed practicable, and even

tolerably safe. The hot summer came again, and made the turpentine drop

from the thin roof over my head.

During the long nights I was restless for want of air, and I had no room to

toss and turn. There was but one compensation; the atmosphere was so

stifled that even mosquitos would not condescend to buzz in it. With all my

detestation of Dr. Flint, I could hardly wish him a worse punishment,

either in this world or that which is to come, than to suffer what I

suffered in one single summer. Yet the laws allowed \_him\_ to be out in the

free air, while I, guiltless of crime, was pent up here, as the only means

of avoiding the cruelties the laws allowed him to inflict upon me! I don't

know what kept life within me. Again and again, I thought I should die

before long; but I saw the leaves of another autumn whirl through the air,

and felt the touch of another winter. In summer the most terrible thunder

storms were acceptable, for the rain came through the roof, and I rolled up

my bed that it might cool the hot boards under it. Later in the season,

storms sometimes wet my clothes through and through, and that was not

comfortable when the air grew chilly. Moderate storms I could keep out by

filling the chinks with oakum.

But uncomfortable as my situation was, I had glimpses of things out of

doors, which made me thankful for my wretched hiding-place. One day I saw a

slave pass our gate, muttering, "It's his own, and he can kill it if he

will." My grandmother told me that woman's history. Her mistress had that

day seen her baby for the first time, and in the lineaments of its fair

face she saw a likeness to her husband. She turned the bondwoman and her

child out of doors, and forbade her ever to return. The slave went to her

master, and told him what had happened. He promised to talk with her

mistress, and make it all right. The next day she and her baby were sold to

a Georgia trader.

Another time I saw a woman rush wildly by, pursued by two men. She was a

slave, the wet nurse of her mistress's children. For some trifling offence

her mistress ordered her to be stripped and whipped. To escape the

degradation and the torture, she rushed to the river, jumped in, and ended

her wrongs in death.

Senator Brown, of Mississippi, could not be ignorant of many such facts as

these, for they are of frequent occurrence in every Southern State. Yet he

stood up in the Congress of the United States, and declared that slavery

was "a great moral, social, and political blessing; a blessing to the

master, and a blessing to the slave!"

I suffered much more during the second winter than I did during the first.

My limbs were benumbed by inaction, and the cold filled them with cramp. I

had a very painful sensation of coldness in my head; even my face and

tongue stiffened, and I lost the power of speech. Of course it was

impossible, under the circumstances, to summon any physician. My brother

William came and did all he could for me. Uncle Phillip also watched

tenderly over me; and poor grandmother crept up and down to inquire whether

there were any signs of returning life. I was restored to consciousness by

the dashing of cold water in my face, and found myself leaning against my

brother's arm, while he bent over me with streaming eyes. He afterwards

told me he thought I was dying, for I had been in an unconscious state

sixteen hours. I next became delirious, and was in great danger of

betraying myself and my friends. To prevent this, they stupefied me with

drugs. I remained in bed six weeks, weary in body and sick at heart. How to

get medical advice was the question. William finally went to a Thompsonian

doctor, and described himself as having all my pains and aches. He returned

with herbs, roots, and ointment. He was especially charged to rub on the

ointment by a fire; but how could a fire be made in my little den? Charcoal

in a furnace was tried, but there was no outlet for the gas, and it nearly

cost me my life. Afterwards coals, already kindled, were brought up in an

iron pan, and placed on bricks. I was so weak, and it was so long since I

had enjoyed the warmth of a fire, that those few coals actually made me

weep. I think the medicines did me some good; but my recovery was very

slow. Dark thoughts passed through my mind as I lay there day after day. I

tried to be thankful for my little cell, dismal as it was, and even to love

it, as part of the price I had paid for the redemption of my children.

Sometimes I thought God was a compassionate Father, who would forgive my

sins for the sake of my sufferings. At other times, it seemed to me there

was no justice or mercy in the divine government. I asked why the curse of

slavery was permitted to exist, and why I had been so persecuted and

wronged from youth upward. These things took the shape of mystery, which is

to this day not so clear to my soul as I trust it will be hereafter.

In the midst of my illness, grandmother broke down under the weight and

anxiety and toil. The idea of losing her, who had always been my best

friend and a mother to my children, was the sorest trial I had yet had. O,

how earnestly I prayed that she might recover! How hard it seemed, that I

could not tend upon her, who had so long and so tenderly watched over me!

One day the screams of a child nerved me with strength to crawl to my

peeping-hole, and I saw my son covered with blood. A fierce dog, usually

kept chained, had seized and bitten him. A doctor was sent for, and I heard

the groans and screams of my child while the wounds were being sewed up. O,

what torture to a mother's heart, to listen to this and be unable to go to

him!

But childhood is like a day in spring, alternately shower and sunshine.

Before night Benny was bright and lively, threatening the destruction of

the dog; and great was his delight when the doctor told him the next day

that the dog had bitten another boy and been shot. Benny recovered from his

wounds; but it was long before he could walk.

When my grandmother's illness became known, many ladies, who were her

customers, called to bring her some little comforts, and to inquire whether

she had every thing she wanted. Aunt Nancy one night asked permission to

watch with her sick mother, and Mrs. Flint replied, "I don't see any need

of your going. I can't spare you." But when she found other ladies in the

neighborhood were so attentive, not wishing to be outdone in Christian

charity, she also sallied forth, in magnificent condescension, and stood by

the bedside of her who had loved her in her infancy, and who had been

repaid by such grievous wrongs. She seemed surprised to find her so ill,

and scolded uncle Phillip for not sending for Dr. Flint. She herself sent

for him immediately, and he came. Secure as I was in my retreat, I should

have been terrified if I had known he was so near me. He pronounced my

grandmother in a very critical situation, and said if her attending

physician wished it, he would visit her. Nobody wished to have him coming

to the house at all hours, and we were not disposed to give him a chance to

make out a long bill.

As Mrs. Flint went out, Sally told her the reason Benny was lame was, that

a dog had bitten him. "I'm glad of it," replied she. "I wish he had killed

him. It would be good news to send to his mother. \_Her\_ day will come. The

dogs will grab \_her\_ yet." With these Christian words she and her husband

departed, and, to my great satisfaction, returned no more.

I learned from uncle Phillip, with feelings of unspeakable joy and

gratitude, that the crisis was passed and grandmother would live. I could

now say from my heart, "God is merciful. He has spared me the anguish of

feeling that I caused her death."

XXIV. The Candidate For Congress.

The summer had nearly ended, when Dr. Flint made a third visit to New York,

in search of me. Two candidates were running for Congress, and he returned

in season to vote. The father of my children was the Whig candidate. The

doctor had hitherto been a stanch Whig; but now he exerted all his energies

for the defeat of Mr. Sands. He invited large parties of men to dine in the

shade of his trees, and supplied them with plenty of rum and brandy. If any

poor fellow drowned his wits in the bowl, and, in the openness of his

convivial heart, proclaimed that he did not mean to vote the Democratic

ticket, he was shoved into the street without ceremony.

The doctor expended his liquor in vain. Mr. Sands was elected; an event

which occasioned me some anxious thoughts. He had not emancipated my

children, and if he should die they would be at the mercy of his heirs. Two

little voices, that frequently met my ear, seemed to plead with me not to

let their father depart without striving to make their freedom secure.

Years had passed since I had spoken to him. I had not even seen him since

the night I passed him, unrecognized, in my disguise of a sailor. I

supposed he would call before he left, to say something to my grandmother

concerning the children, and I resolved what course to take.

The day before his departure for Washington I made arrangements, toward

evening, to get from my hiding-place into the storeroom below. I found

myself so stiff and clumsy that it was with great difficulty I could hitch

from one resting place to another. When I reached the storeroom my ankles

gave way under me, and I sank exhausted on the floor. It seemed as if I

could never use my limbs again. But the purpose I had in view roused all

the strength I had. I crawled on my hands and knees to the window, and,

screened behind a barrel, I waited for his coming. The clock struck nine,

and I knew the steamboat would leave between ten and eleven. My hopes were

failing. But presently I heard his voice, saying to some one, "Wait for me

a moment. I wish to see aunt Martha." When he came out, as he passed the

window, I said, "Stop one moment, and let me speak for my children." He

started, hesitated, and then passed on, and went out of the gate. I closed

the shutter I had partially opened, and sank down behind the barrel. I had

suffered much; but seldom had I experienced a keener pang than I then felt.

Had my children, then, become of so little consequence to him? And had he

so little feeling for their wretched mother that he would not listen a

moment while she pleaded for them? Painful memories were so busy within me,

that I forgot I had not hooked the shutter, till I heard some one opening

it. I looked up. He had come back. "Who called me?" said he, in a low tone.

"I did," I replied. "Oh, Linda," said he, "I knew your voice; but I was

afraid to answer, lest my friend should hear me. Why do you come here? Is

it possible you risk yourself in this house? They are mad to allow it. I

shall expect to hear that you are all ruined," I did not wish to implicate

him, by letting him know my place of concealment; so I merely said, "I

thought you would come to bid grandmother good by, and so I came here to

speak a few words to you about emancipating my children. Many changes may

take place during the six months you are gone to Washington, and it does

not seem right for you to expose them to the risk of such changes. I want

nothing for myself; all I ask is, that you will free my children, or

authorize some friend to do it, before you go."

He promised he would do it, and also expressed a readiness; to make any

arrangements whereby I could be purchased.

I heard footsteps approaching, and closed the shutter hastily. I wanted to

crawl back to my den, without letting the family know what I had done; for

I knew they would deem it very imprudent. But he stepped back into the

house, to tell my grandmother that he had spoken with me at the storeroom

window, and to beg of her not to allow me to remain in the house over night.

He said it was the height of madness for me to be there; that we should

certainly all be ruined. Luckily, he was in too much of a hurry to wait for

a reply, or the dear old woman would surely have told him all.

I tried to go back to my den, but found it more difficult to go up than I

had to come down. Now that my mission was fulfilled, the little strength

that had supported me through it was gone, and I sank helpless on the

floor. My grandmother, alarmed at the risk I had run, came into the

storeroom in the dark, and locked the door behind her. "Linda," she

whispered, "where are you?"

"I am here by the window," I replied. "I \_couldn't\_ have him go away

without emancipating the children. Who knows what may happen?"

"Come, come, child," said she, "it won't do for you to stay here another

minute. You've done wrong; but I can't blame you, poor thing!" I told her

I could not return without assistance, and she must call my uncle. Uncle

Phillip came, and pity prevented him from scolding me. He carried me back

to my dungeon, laid me tenderly on the bed, gave me some medicine, and

asked me if there was any thing more he could do. Then he went away, and I

was left with my own thoughts--starless as the midnight darkness around me.

My friends feared I should become a cripple for life; and I was so weary of

my long imprisonment that, had it not been for the hope of serving my

children, I should have been thankful to die; but, for their sakes, I was

willing to bear on.

XXV. Competition In Cunning.

Dr. Flint had not given me up. Every now and then he would say to my

grandmother that I would yet come back, and voluntarily surrender myself;

and that when I did, I could be purchased by my relatives, or any one who

wished to buy me. I knew his cunning nature too well not to perceive that

this was a trap laid for me; and so all my friends understood it. I

resolved to match my cunning against his cunning. In order to make him

believe that I was in New York, I resolved to write him a letter dated from

that place. I sent for my friend Peter, and asked him if he knew any

trustworthy seafaring person, who would carry such a letter to New York,

and put it in the post office there. He said he knew one that he would

trust with his own life to the ends of the world. I reminded him that it

was a hazardous thing for him to undertake. He said he knew it, but he was

willing to do any thing to help me. I expressed a wish for a New York

paper, to ascertain the names of some of the streets. He run his hand into

his pocket, and said, "Here is half a one, that was round a cap I bought of

a pedler yesterday." I told him the letter would be ready the next evening.

He bade me good by, adding, "Keep up your spirits, Linda; brighter days

will come by and by."

My uncle Phillip kept watch over the gate until our brief interview was

over. Early the next morning, I seated myself near the little aperture to

examine the newspaper. It was a piece of the New York Herald; and, for

once, the paper that systematically abuses the colored people, was made to

render them a service. Having obtained what information I wanted concerning

streets and numbers, I wrote two letters, one to my grandmother, the other

to Dr. Flint. I reminded him how he, a gray-headed man, had treated a

helpless child, who had been placed in his power, and what years of misery

he had brought upon her. To my grandmother, I expressed a wish to have my

children sent to me at the north, where I could teach them to respect

themselves, and set them a virtuous example; which a slave mother was not

allowed to do at the south. I asked her to direct her answer to a certain

street in Boston, as I did not live in New York, though I went there

sometimes. I dated these letters ahead, to allow for the time it would take

to carry them, and sent a memorandum of the date to the messenger. When my

friend came for the letters, I said, "God bless and reward you, Peter, for

this disinterested kindness. Pray be careful. If you are detected, both you

and I will have to suffer dreadfully. I have not a relative who would dare

to do it for me." He replied, "You may trust to me, Linda. I don't forget

that your father was my best friend, and I will be a friend to his children

so long as God lets me live."

It was necessary to tell my grandmother what I had done, in order that she

might be ready for the letter, and prepared to hear what Dr. Flint might

say about my being at the north. She was sadly troubled. She felt sure

mischief would come of it. I also told my plan to aunt Nancy, in order that

she might report to us what was said at Dr. Flint's house. I whispered it

to her through a crack, and she whispered back, "I hope it will succeed. I

shan't mind being a slave all \_my\_ life, if I can only see you and the

children free."

I had directed that my letters should be put into the New York post office

on the 20th of the month. On the evening of the 24th my aunt came to say

that Dr. Flint and his wife had been talking in a low voice about a letter

he had received, and that when he went to his office he promised to bring

it when he came to tea. So I concluded I should hear my letter read the

next morning. I told my grandmother Dr. Flint would be sure to come, and

asked her to have him sit near a certain door, and leave it open, that I

might hear what he said. The next morning I took my station within sound of

that door, and remained motionless as a statue. It was not long before I

heard the gate slam, and the well-known footsteps enter the house. He

seated himself in the chair that was placed for him, and said, "Well,

Martha, I've brought you a letter from Linda. She has sent me a letter,

also. I know exactly where to find her; but I don't choose to go to Boston

for her. I had rather she would come back of her own accord, in a

respectable manner. Her uncle Phillip is the best person to go for her.

With \_him\_, she would feel perfectly free to act. I am willing to pay his

expenses going and returning. She shall be sold to her friends. Her

children are free; at least I suppose they are; and when you obtain her

freedom, you'll make a happy family. I suppose, Martha, you have no

objection to my reading to you the letter Linda has written to you."

He broke the seal, and I heard him read it. The old villain! He had

suppressed the letter I wrote to grandmother, and prepared a substitute of

his own, the purport of which was as follows:--

Dear Grandmother: I have long wanted to write to you; but the

disgraceful manner in which I left you and my children made me

ashamed to do it. If you knew how much I have suffered since I

ran away, you would pity and forgive me. I have purchased freedom

at a dear rate. If any arrangement could be made for me to return

to the south without being a slave, I would gladly come. If not,

I beg of you to send my children to the north. I cannot live any

longer without them. Let me know in time, and I will meet them in

New York or Philadelphia, whichever place best suits my uncle's

convenience. Write as soon as possible to your unhappy daughter,

Linda.

"It is very much as I expected it would be," said the old hypocrite, rising

to go. "You see the foolish girl has repented of her rashness, and wants to

return. We must help her to do it, Martha. Talk with Phillip about it. If

he will go for her, she will trust to him, and come back. I should like an

answer to-morrow. Good morning, Martha."

As he stepped out on the piazza, he stumbled over my little girl. "Ah,

Ellen, is that you?" he said, in his most gracious manner. "I didn't see

you. How do you do?"

"Pretty well, sir," she replied. "I heard you tell grandmother that my

mother is coming home. I want to see her."

"Yes, Ellen, I am going to bring her home very soon," rejoined he; "and you

shall see her as much as you like, you little curly-headed nigger."

This was as good as a comedy to me, who had heard it all; but grandmother

was frightened and distressed, because the doctor wanted my uncle to go for

me.

The next evening Dr. Flint called to talk the matter over. My uncle told

him that from what he had heard of Massachusetts, he judged he should be

mobbed if he went there after a runaway slave. "All stuff and nonsense,

Phillip!" replied the doctor. "Do you suppose I want you to kick up a row

in Boston? The business can all be done quietly. Linda writes that she

wants to come back. You are her relative, and she would trust \_you\_. The

case would be different if I went. She might object to coming with \_me\_;

and the damned abolitionists, if they knew I was her master, would not

believe me, if I told them she had begged to go back. They would get up a

row; and I should not like to see Linda dragged through the streets like a

common negro. She has been very ungrateful to me for all my kindness; but I

forgive her, and want to act the part of a friend towards her. I have no

wish to hold her as my slave. Her friends can buy her as soon as she

arrives here."

Finding that his arguments failed to convince my uncle, the doctor "let the

cat out of the bag," by saying that he had written to the mayor of Boston,

to ascertain whether there was a person of my description at the street and

number from which my letter was dated. He had omitted this date in the

letter he had made up to read to my grandmother. If I had dated from New

York, the old man would probably have made another journey to that city.

But even in that dark region, where knowledge is so carefully excluded from

the slave, I had heard enough about Massachusetts to come to the conclusion

that slaveholders did not consider it a comfortable place to go in search

of a runaway. That was before the Fugitive Slave Law was passed; before

Massachusetts had consented to become a "nigger hunter" for the south.

My grandmother, who had become skittish by seeing her family always in

danger, came to me with a very distressed countenance, and said, "What will

you do if the mayor of Boston sends him word that you haven't been there?

Then he will suspect the letter was a trick; and maybe he'll find out

something about it, and we shall all get into trouble. O Linda, I wish you

had never sent the letters."

"Don't worry yourself, Grandmother," said I. "The mayor of Boston won't

trouble himself to hunt niggers for Dr. Flint. The letters will do good in

the end. I shall get out of this dark hole some time or other."

"I hope you will, child," replied the good, patient old friend. "You have

been here a long time; almost five years; but whenever you do go, it will

break your old grandmother's heart. I should be expecting every day to hear

that you were brought back in irons and put in jail. God help you, poor

child! Let us be thankful that some time or other we shall go 'where the

wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.'" My heart

responded, Amen.

The fact that Dr. Flint had written to the mayor of Boston convinced me

that he believed my letter to be genuine, and of course that he had no

suspicion of my being any where in the vicinity. It was a great object to

keep up this delusion, for it made me and my friends feel less anxious, and

it would be very convenient whenever there was a chance to escape. I

resolved, therefore, to continue to write letters from the north from time

to time.

Two or three weeks passed, and as no news came from the mayor of Boston,

grandmother began to listen to my entreaty to be allowed to leave my cell,

sometimes, and exercise my limbs to prevent my becoming a cripple. I was

allowed to slip down into the small storeroom, early in the morning, and

remain there a little while. The room was all filled up with barrels,

except a small open space under my trap-door. This faced the door, the

upper part of which was of glass, and purposely left uncurtained, that the

curious might look in. The air of this place was close; but it was so much

better than the atmosphere of my cell, that I dreaded to return. I came

down as soon as it was light, and remained till eight o'clock, when people

began to be about, and there was danger that some one might come on the

piazza. I had tried various applications to bring warmth and feeling into

my limbs, but without avail. They were so numb and stiff that it was a

painful effort to move; and had my enemies come upon me during the first

mornings I tried to exercise them a little in the small unoccupied space of

the storeroom, it would have been impossible for me to have escaped.

XXVI. Important Era In My Brother's Life.

I missed the company and kind attentions of my brother William, who had

gone to Washington with his master, Mr. Sands. We received several letters

from him, written without any allusion to me, but expressed in such a

manner that I knew he did not forget me. I disguised my hand, and wrote to

him in the same manner. It was a long session; and when it closed, William

wrote to inform us that Mr. Sands was going to the north, to be gone some

time, and that he was to accompany him. I knew that his master had promised

to give him his freedom, but no time had been specified. Would William

trust to a slave's chances? I remembered how we used to talk together, in

our young days, about obtaining our freedom, and I thought it very doubtful

whether he would come back to us.

Grandmother received a letter from Mr. Sands, saying that William had

proved a most faithful servant, and he would also say a valued friend; that

no mother had ever trained a better boy. He said he had travelled through

the Northern States and Canada; and though the abolitionists had tried to

decoy him away, they had never succeeded. He ended by saying they should be

at home shortly.

We expected letters from William, describing the novelties of his journey,

but none came. In time, it was reported that Mr. Sands would return late in

the autumn, accompanied by a bride. Still no letters from William. I felt

almost sure I should never see him again on southern soil; but had he no

word of comfort to send to his friends at home? to the poor captive in her

dungeon? My thoughts wandered through the dark past, and over the uncertain

future. Alone in my cell, where no eye but God's could see me, I wept

bitter tears. How earnestly I prayed to him to restore me to my children,

and enable me to be a useful woman and a good mother!

At last the day arrived for the return of the travellers. Grandmother had

made loving preparations to welcome her absent boy back to the old

hearthstone. When the dinner table was laid, William's place occupied its

old place. The stage coach went by empty. My grandmother waited dinner. She

thought perhaps he was necessarily detained by his master. In my prison I

listened anxiously, expecting every moment to hear my dear brother's voice

and step. In the course of the afternoon a lad was sent by Mr. Sands to

tell grandmother that William did not return with him; that the

abolitionists had decoyed him away. But he begged her not to feel troubled

about it, for he felt confident she would see William in a few days. As

soon as he had time to reflect he would come back, for he could never

expect to be so well off at the north as he had been with him.

If you had seen the tears, and heard the sobs, you would have thought the

messenger had brought tidings of death instead of freedom. Poor old

grandmother felt that she should never see her darling boy again. And I was

selfish. I thought more of what I had lost, than of what my brother had

gained. A new anxiety began to trouble me. Mr. Sands had expended a good

deal of money, and would naturally feel irritated by the loss he had

incurred. I greatly feared this might injure the prospects of my children,

who were now becoming valuable property. I longed to have their

emancipation made certain. The more so, because their master and father was

now married. I was too familiar with slavery not to know that promises made

to slaves, though with kind intentions, and sincere at the time, depend

upon many contingencies for their fulfillment.

Much as I wished William to be free, the step he had taken made me sad and

anxious. The following Sabbath was calm and clear; so beautiful that it

seemed like a Sabbath in the eternal world. My grandmother brought the

children out on the piazza, that I might hear their voices. She thought it

would comfort me in my despondency; and it did. They chatted merrily, as

only children can. Benny said, "Grandmother, do you think uncle Will has

gone for good? Won't he ever come back again? May be he'll find mother. If

he does, \_won't\_ she be glad to see him! Why don't you and uncle Phillip,

and all of us, go and live where mother is? I should like it; wouldn't you,

Ellen?"

"Yes, I should like it," replied Ellen; "but how could we find her? Do you

know the place, grandmother? I don't remember how mother looked--do you,

Benny?"

Benny was just beginning to describe me when they were interrupted by an

old slave woman, a near neighbor, named Aggie. This poor creature had

witnessed the sale of her children, and seen them carried off to parts

unknown, without any hopes of ever hearing from them again. She saw that my

grandmother had been weeping, and she said, in a sympathizing tone, "What's

the matter, aunt Marthy?"

"O Aggie," she replied, "it seems as if I shouldn't have any of my children

or grandchildren left to hand me a drink when I'm dying, and lay my old

body in the ground. My boy didn't come back with Mr. Sands. He staid at the

north."

Poor old Aggie clapped her hands for joy. "Is \_dat\_ what you's crying fur?"

she exclaimed. "Git down on your knees and bress de Lord! I don't know whar

my poor chillern is, and I nebber 'spect to know. You don't know whar poor

Linda's gone to; but you \_do\_ know whar her brudder is. He's in free parts;

and dat's de right place. Don't murmur at de Lord's doings but git down on

your knees and tank him for his goodness."

My selfishness was rebuked by what poor Aggie said. She rejoiced over the

escape of one who was merely her fellow-bondman, while his own sister was

only thinking what his good fortune might cost her children. I knelt and

prayed God to forgive me; and I thanked him from my heart, that one of my

family was saved from the grasp of slavery.

It was not long before we received a letter from William. He wrote that Mr.

Sands had always treated him kindly, and that he had tried to do his duty

to him faithfully. But ever since he was a boy, he had longed to be free;

and he had already gone through enough to convince him he had better not

lose the chance that offered. He concluded by saying, "Don't worry about

me, dear grandmother. I shall think of you always; and it will spur me on

to work hard and try to do right. When I have earned money enough to give

you a home, perhaps you will come to the north, and we can all live happy

together."

Mr. Sands told my uncle Phillip the particulars about William's leaving

him. He said, "I trusted him as if he were my own brother, and treated him

as kindly. The abolitionists talked to him in several places; but I had no

idea they could tempt him. However, I don't blame William. He's young and

inconsiderate, and those Northern rascals decoyed him. I must confess the

scamp was very bold about it. I met him coming down the steps of the Astor

House with his trunk on his shoulder, and I asked him where he was going.

He said he was going to change his old trunk. I told him it was rather

shabby, and asked if he didn't need some money. He said, No, thanked me,

and went off. He did not return so soon as I expected; but I waited

patiently. At last I went to see if our trunks were packed, ready for our

journey. I found them locked, and a sealed note on the table informed me

where I could find the keys. The fellow even tried to be religious. He

wrote that he hoped God would always bless me, and reward me for my

kindness; that he was not unwilling to serve me; but he wanted to be a free

man; and that if I thought he did wrong, he hoped I would forgive him. I

intended to give him his freedom in five years. He might have trusted me.

He has shown himself ungrateful; but I shall not go for him, or send for

him. I feel confident that he will soon return to me."

I afterwards heard an account of the affair from William himself. He had

not been urged away by abolitionists. He needed no information they could

give him about slavery to stimulate his desire for freedom. He looked at

his hands, and remembered that they were once in irons. What security had

he that they would not be so again? Mr. Sands was kind to him; but he might

indefinitely postpone the promise he had made to give him his freedom. He

might come under pecuniary embarrassments, and his property be seized by

creditors; or he might die, without making any arrangements in his favor.

He had too often known such accidents to happen to slaves who had kind

masters, and he wisely resolved to make sure of the present opportunity to

own himself. He was scrupulous about taking any money from his master on

false pretences; so he sold his best clothes to pay for his passage to

Boston. The slaveholders pronounced him a base, ungrateful wretch, for thus

requiting his master's indulgence. What would \_they\_ have done under

similar circumstances?

When Dr. Flint's family heard that William had deserted Mr. Sands, they

chuckled greatly over the news. Mrs. Flint made her usual manifestations of

Christian feeling, by saying, "I'm glad of it. I hope he'll never get him

again. I like to see people paid back in their own coin. I reckon Linda's

children will have to pay for it. I should be glad to see them in the

speculator's hands again, for I'm tired of seeing those little niggers

march about the streets."

XXVII. New Destination For The Children.

Mrs. Flint proclaimed her intention of informing Mrs. Sands who was the

father of my children. She likewise proposed to tell her what an artful

devil I was; that I had made a great deal of trouble in her family; that

when Mr. Sands was at the north, she didn't doubt I had followed him in

disguise, and persuaded William to run away. She had some reason to

entertain such an idea; for I had written from the north, from time to

time, and I dated my letters from various places. Many of them fell into

Dr. Flint's hands, as I expected they would; and he must have come to the

conclusion that I travelled about a good deal. He kept a close watch over

my children, thinking they would eventually lead to my detection.

A new and unexpected trial was in store for me. One day, when Mr. Sands and

his wife were walking in the street, they met Benny. The lady took a fancy

to him, and exclaimed, "What a pretty little negro! Whom does he belong

to?"

Benny did not hear the answer; but he came home very indignant with the

stranger lady, because she had called him a negro. A few days afterwards,

Mr. Sands called on my grandmother, and told her he wanted her to take the

children to his house. He said he had informed his wife of his relation to

them, and told her they were motherless; and she wanted to see them.

When he had gone, my grandmother came and asked what I would do. The

question seemed a mockery. What \_could\_ I do? They were Mr. Sands's slaves,

and their mother was a slave, whom he had represented to be dead. Perhaps

he thought I was. I was too much pained and puzzled to come to any

decision; and the children were carried without my knowledge. Mrs. Sands

had a sister from Illinois staying with her. This lady, who had no children

of her own, was so much pleased with Ellen, that she offered to adopt her,

and bring her up as she would a daughter. Mrs. Sands wanted to take

Benjamin. When grandmother reported this to me, I was tried almost beyond

endurance. Was this all I was to gain by what I had suffered for the sake

of having my children free? True, the prospect \_seemed\_ fair; but I knew

too well how lightly slaveholders held such "parental relations." If

pecuniary troubles should come, or if the new wife required more money than

could conveniently be spared, my children might be thought of as a

convenient means of raising funds. I had no trust in thee, O Slavery! Never

should I know peace till my children were emancipated with all due

formalities of law.

I was too proud to ask Mr. Sands to do any thing for my own benefit; but I

could bring myself to become a supplicant for my children. I resolved to

remind him of the promise he had made me, and to throw myself upon his

honor for the performance of it. I persuaded my grandmother to go to him,

and tell him I was not dead, and that I earnestly entreated him to keep the

promise he had made me; that I had heard of the recent proposals concerning

my children, and did not feel easy to accept them; that he had promised to

emancipate them, and it was time for him to redeem his pledge. I knew there

was some risk in thus betraying that I was in the vicinity; but what will

not a mother do for her children? He received the message with surprise,

and said, "The children are free. I have never intended to claim them as

slaves. Linda may decide their fate. In my opinion, they had better be sent

to the north. I don't think they are quite safe here. Dr. Flint boasts that

they are still in his power. He says they were his daughter's property, and

as she was not of age when they were sold, the contract is not legally

binding."

So, then, after all I had endured for their sakes, my poor children were

between two fires; between my old master and their new master! And I was

powerless. There was no protecting arm of the law for me to invoke. Mr.

Sands proposed that Ellen should go, for the present, to some of his

relatives, who had removed to Brooklyn, Long Island. It was promised that

she should be well taken care of, and sent to school. I consented to it, as

the best arrangement I could make for her. My grandmother, of course,

negotiated it all; and Mrs. Sands knew of no other person in the

transaction. She proposed that they should take Ellen with them to

Washington, and keep her till they had a good chance of sending her, with

friends, to Brooklyn. She had an infant daughter. I had had a glimpse of

it, as the nurse passed with it in her arms. It was not a pleasant thought

to me, that the bondwoman's child should tend her free-born sister; but

there was no alternative. Ellen was made ready for the journey. O, how it

tried my heart to send her away, so young, alone, among strangers! Without

a mother's love to shelter her from the storms of life; almost without

memory of a mother! I doubted whether she and Benny would have for me the

natural affection that children feel for a parent. I thought to myself that

I might perhaps never see my daughter again, and I had a great desire that

she should look upon me, before she went, that she might take my image with

her in her memory. It seemed to me cruel to have her brought to my dungeon.

It was sorrow enough for her young heart to know that her mother was a

victim of slavery, without seeing the wretched hiding-place to which it had

driven her. I begged permission to pass the last night in one of the open

chambers, with my little girl. They thought I was crazy to think of

trusting such a young child with my perilous secret. I told them I had

watched her character, and I felt sure she would not betray me; that I was

determined to have an interview, and if they would not facilitate it, I

would take my own way to obtain it. They remonstrated against the rashness

of such a proceeding; but finding they could not change my purpose, they

yielded. I slipped through the trap-door into the storeroom, and my uncle

kept watch at the gate, while I passed into the piazza and went up stairs,

to the room I used to occupy. It was more than five years since I had seen

it; and how the memories crowded on me! There I had taken shelter when my

mistress drove me from her house; there came my old tyrant, to mock,

insult, and curse me; there my children were first laid in my arms; there I

had watched over them, each day with a deeper and sadder love; there I had

knelt to God, in anguish of heart, to forgive the wrong I had done. How

vividly it all came back! And after this long, gloomy interval, I stood

there such a wreck!

In the midst of these meditations, I heard footsteps on the stairs. The

door opened, and my uncle Phillip came in, leading Ellen by the hand. I put

my arms round her, and said, "Ellen, my dear child, I am your mother." She

drew back a little, and looked at me; then, with sweet confidence, she laid

her cheek against mine, and I folded her to the heart that had been so long

desolated. She was the first to speak. Raising her head, she said,

inquiringly, "You really \_are\_ my mother?" I told her I really was; that

during all the long time she had not seen me, I had loved her most

tenderly; and that now she was going away, I wanted to see her and talk

with her, that she might remember me. With a sob in her voice, she said,

"I'm glad you've come to see me; but why didn't you ever come before? Benny

and I have wanted so much to see you! He remembers you, and sometimes he

tells me about you. Why didn't you come home when Dr. Flint went to bring

you?"

I answered, "I couldn't come before, dear. But now that I am with you, tell

me whether you like to go away." "I don't know," said she, crying.

"Grandmother says I ought not to cry; that I am going to a good place,

where I can learn to read and write, and that by and by I can write her a

letter. But I shan't have Benny, or grandmother, or uncle Phillip, or any

body to love me. Can't you go with me? O, \_do\_ go, dear mother!"

I told her I couldn't go now; but sometime I would come to her, and then

she and Benny and I would live together, and have happy times. She wanted

to run and bring Benny to see me now. I told her he was going to the north,

before long, with uncle Phillip, and then I would come to see him before he

went away. I asked if she would like to have me stay all night and sleep

with her. "O, yes," she replied. Then, turning to her uncle, she said,

pleadingly, "\_May\_ I stay? Please, uncle! She is my own mother." He laid

his hand on her head, and said, solemnly, "Ellen, this is the secret you

have promised grandmother never to tell. If you ever speak of it to any

body, they will never let you see your grandmother again, and your mother

can never come to Brooklyn." "Uncle," she replied, "I will never tell." He

told her she might stay with me; and when he had gone, I took her in my

arms and told her I was a slave, and that was the reason she must never say

she had seen me. I exhorted her to be a good child, to try to please the

people where she was going, and that God would raise her up friends. I told

her to say her prayers, and remember always to pray for her poor mother,

and that God would permit us to meet again. She wept, and I did not check

her tears. Perhaps she would never again have a chance to pour her tears

into a mother's bosom. All night she nestled in my arms, and I had no

inclination to slumber. The moments were too precious to lose any of them.

Once, when I thought she was asleep, I kissed her forehead softly, and she

said, "I am not asleep, dear mother."

Before dawn they came to take me back to my den. I drew aside the window

curtain, to take a last look of my child. The moonlight shone on her face,

and I bent over her, as I had done years before, that wretched night when I

ran away. I hugged her close to my throbbing heart; and tears, too sad for

such young eyes to shed, flowed down her cheeks, as she gave her last kiss,

and whispered in my ear, "Mother, I will never tell." And she never did.

When I got back to my den, I threw myself on the bed and wept there alone

in the darkness. It seemed as if my heart would burst. When the time for

Ellen's departure drew nigh, I could hear neighbors and friends saying to

her, "Good by, Ellen. I hope your poor mother will find you out. \_Won't\_

you be glad to see her!" She replied, "Yes, ma'am;" and they little dreamed

of the weighty secret that weighed down her young heart. She was an

affectionate child, but naturally very reserved, except with those she

loved, and I felt secure that my secret would be safe with her. I heard the

gate close after her, with such feelings as only a slave mother can

experience. During the day my meditations were very sad. Sometimes I feared

I had been very selfish not to give up all claim to her, and let her go to

Illinois, to be adopted by Mrs. Sands's sister. It was my experience of

slavery that decided me against it. I feared that circumstances might arise

that would cause her to be sent back. I felt confident that I should go to

New York myself; and then I should be able to watch over her, and in some

degree protect her.

Dr. Flint's family knew nothing of the proposed arrangement till after

Ellen was gone, and the news displeased them greatly. Mrs. Flint called on

Mrs. Sands's sister to inquire into the matter. She expressed her opinion

very freely as to the respect Mr. Sands showed for his wife, and for his

own character, in acknowledging those "young niggers." And as for sending

Ellen away, she pronounced it to be just as much stealing as it would be

for him to come and take a piece of furniture out of her parlor. She said

her daughter was not of age to sign the bill of sale, and the children were

her property; and when she became of age, or was married, she could take

them, wherever she could lay hands on them.

Miss Emily Flint, the little girl to whom I had been bequeathed, was now in

her sixteenth year. Her mother considered it all right and honorable for

her, or her future husband, to steal my children; but she did not

understand how any body could hold up their heads in respectable society,

after they had purchased their own children, as Mr. Sands had done. Dr.

Flint said very little. Perhaps he thought that Benny would be less likely

to be sent away if he kept quiet. One of my letters, that fell into his

hands, was dated from Canada; and he seldom spoke of me now. This state of

things enabled me to slip down into the storeroom more frequently, where I

could stand upright, and move my limbs more freely.

Days, weeks, and months passed, and there came no news of Ellen. I sent a

letter to Brooklyn, written in my grandmother's name, to inquire whether

she had arrived there. Answer was returned that she had not. I wrote to her

in Washington; but no notice was taken of it. There was one person there,

who ought to have had some sympathy with the anxiety of the child's friends

at home; but the links of such relations as he had formed with me, are

easily broken and cast away as rubbish. Yet how protectingly and

persuasively he once talked to the poor, helpless slave girl! And how

entirely I trusted him! But now suspicions darkened my mind. Was my child

dead, or had they deceived me, and sold her?

If the secret memoirs of many members of Congress should be published,

curious details would be unfolded. I once saw a letter from a member of

Congress to a slave, who was the mother of six of his children. He wrote to

request that she would send her children away from the great house before

his return, as he expected to be accompanied by friends. The woman could

not read, and was obliged to employ another to read the letter. The

existence of the colored children did not trouble this gentleman, it was

only the fear that friends might recognize in their features a resemblance

to him.

At the end of six months, a letter came to my grandmother, from Brooklyn.

It was written by a young lady in the family, and announced that Ellen had

just arrived. It contained the following message from her: "I do try to do

just as you told me to, and I pray for you every night and morning." I

understood that these words were meant for me; and they were a balsam to my

heart. The writer closed her letter by saying, "Ellen is a nice little

girl, and we shall like to have her with us. My cousin, Mr. Sands, has

given her to me, to be my little waiting maid. I shall send her to school,

and I hope some day she will write to you herself." This letter perplexed

and troubled me. Had my child's father merely placed her there till she was

old enough to support herself? Or had he given her to his cousin, as a

piece of property? If the last idea was correct, his cousin might return to

the south at any time, and hold Ellen as a slave. I tried to put away from

me the painful thought that such a foul wrong could have been done to us. I

said to myself, "Surely there must be \_some\_ justice in man;" then I

remembered, with a sigh, how slavery perverted all the natural feelings of

the human heart. It gave me a pang to look on my light-hearted boy. He

believed himself free; and to have him brought under the yoke of slavery,

would be more than I could bear. How I longed to have him safely out of the

reach of its power!

XXVIII. Aunt Nancy.

I have mentioned my great-aunt, who was a slave in Dr. Flint's family, and

who had been my refuge during the shameful persecutions I suffered from

him. This aunt had been married at twenty years of age; that is, as far as

slaves \_can\_ marry. She had the consent of her master and mistress, and a

clergyman performed the ceremony. But it was a mere form, without any legal

value. Her master or mistress could annul it any day they pleased. She had

always slept on the floor in the entry, near Mrs. Flint's chamber door,

that she might be within call. When she was married, she was told she might

have the use of a small room in an outhouse. Her mother and her husband

furnished it. He was a seafaring man, and was allowed to sleep there when

he was at home. But on the wedding evening, the bride was ordered to her

old post on the entry floor.

Mrs. Flint, at that time, had no children; but she was expecting to be a

mother, and if she should want a drink of water in the night, what could

she do without her slave to bring it? So my aunt was compelled to lie at

her door, until one midnight she was forced to leave, to give premature

birth to a child. In a fortnight she was required to resume her place on

the entry floor, because Mrs. Flint's babe needed her attentions. She kept

her station there through summer and winter, until she had given premature

birth to six children; and all the while she was employed as night-nurse to

Mrs. Flint's children. Finally, toiling all day, and being deprived of rest

at night, completely broke down her constitution, and Dr. Flint declared it

was impossible she could ever become the mother of a living child. The fear

of losing so valuable a servant by death, now induced them to allow her to

sleep in her little room in the out-house, except when there was sickness

in the family. She afterwards had two feeble babes, one of whom died in a

few days, and the other in four weeks. I well remember her patient sorrow

as she held the last dead baby in her arms. "I wish it could have lived,"

she said; "it is not the will of God that any of my children should live.

But I will try to be fit to meet their little spirits in heaven."

Aunt Nancy was housekeeper and waiting-maid in Dr. Flint's family. Indeed,

she was the \_factotum\_ of the household. Nothing went on well without her.

She was my mother's twin sister, and, as far as was in her power, she

supplied a mother's place to us orphans. I slept with her all the time I

lived in my old master's house, and the bond between us was very strong.

When my friends tried to discourage me from running away; she always

encouraged me. When they thought I had better return and ask my master's

pardon, because there was no possibility of escape, she sent me word never

to yield. She said if I persevered I might, perhaps, gain the freedom of my

children; and even if I perished in doing it, that was better than to leave

them to groan under the same persecutions that had blighted my own life.

After I was shut up in my dark cell, she stole away, whenever she could, to

bring me the news and say something cheering. How often did I kneel down to

listen to her words of consolation, whispered through a crack! "I am old,

and have not long to live," she used to say; "and I could die happy if I

could only see you and the children free. You must pray to God, Linda, as I

do for you, that he will lead you out of this darkness." I would beg her

not to worry herself on my account; that there was an end of all suffering

sooner or later, and that whether I lived in chains or in freedom, I should

always remember her as the good friend who had been the comfort of my life.

A word from her always strengthened me; and not me only. The whole family

relied upon her judgement, and were guided by her advice. I had been in my

cell six years when my grandmother was summoned to the bedside of this, her

last remaining daughter. She was very ill, and they said she would die.

Grandmother had not entered Dr. Flint's house for several years. They had

treated her cruelly, but she thought nothing of that now. She was grateful

for permission to watch by the death-bed of her child. They had always been

devoted to each other; and now they sat looking into each other's eyes,

longing to speak of the secret that had weighed so much on the hearts of

both. My aunt had been stricken with paralysis. She lived but two days, and

the last day she was speechless. Before she lost the power of utterance,

she told her mother not to grieve if she could not speak to her; that she

would try to hold up her hand; to let her know that all was well with her.

Even the hard-hearted doctor was a little softened when he saw the dying

woman try to smile on the aged mother, who was kneeling by her side. His

eyes moistened for a moment, as he said she had always been a faithful

servant, and they should never be able to supply her place. Mrs. Flint took

to her bed, quite overcome by the shock. While my grandmother sat alone

with the dead, the doctor came in, leading his youngest son, who had always

been a great pet with aunt Nancy, and was much attached to her. "Martha,"

said he, "aunt Nancy loved this child, and when he comes where you are, I

hope you will be kind to him, for her sake." She replied, "Your wife was my

foster-child, Dr. Flint, the foster-sister of my poor Nancy, and you little

know me if you think I can feel any thing but good will for her children."

"I wish the past could be forgotten, and that we might never think of it,"

said he; "and that Linda would come to supply her aunt's place. She would

be worth more to us than all the money that could be paid for her. I wish

it for your sake also, Martha. Now that Nancy is taken away from you, she

would be a great comfort to your old age." He knew he was touching a

tender chord. Almost choking with grief, my grandmother replied, "It was

not I that drove Linda away. My grandchildren are gone; and of my nine

children only one is left. God help me!"

To me, the death of this kind relative was an inexpressible sorrow. I knew

that she had been slowly murdered; and I felt that my troubles had helped

to finish the work. After I heard of her illness, I listened constantly to

hear what news was brought from the great house; and the thought that I

could not go to her made me utterly miserable. At last, as uncle Phillip

came into the house, I heard some one inquire, "How is she?" and he

answered, "She is dead." My little cell seemed whirling round, and I knew

nothing more till I opened my eyes and found uncle Phillip bending over me.

I had no need to ask any questions. He whispered, "Linda, she died happy."

I could not weep. My fixed gaze troubled him. "Don't look \_so\_" he said.

"Don't add to my poor mother's trouble. Remember how much she has to bear,

and that we ought to do all we can to comfort her." Ah, yes, that blessed

old grandmother, who for seventy-three years had borne the pelting storms

of a slave-mother's life. She did indeed need consolation!

Mrs. Flint had rendered her poor foster-sister childless, apparently

without any compunction; and with cruel selfishness had ruined her health

by years of incessant, unrequited toil, and broken rest. But now she became

very sentimental. I suppose she thought it would be a beautiful

illustration of the attachment existing between slaveholder and slave, if

the body of her old worn-out servant was buried at her feet. She sent for

the clergyman and asked if he had any objection to burying aunt Nancy in

the doctor's family burial-place. No colored person had ever been allowed

interment in the white people's burying-ground, and the minister knew that

all the deceased of your family reposed together in the old graveyard of

the slaves. He therefore replied, "I have no objection to complying with

your wish; but perhaps aunt Nancy's \_mother\_ may have some choice as to

where her remains shall be deposited."

It had never occurred to Mrs. Flint that slaves could have any feelings.

When my grandmother was consulted, she at once said she wanted Nancy to lie

with all the rest of her family, and where her own old body would be

buried. Mrs. Flint graciously complied with her wish, though she said it

was painful to her to have Nancy buried away from \_her\_. She might have

added with touching pathos, "I was so long \_used\_ to sleep with her lying

near me, on the entry floor."

My uncle Phillip asked permission to bury his sister at his own expense;

and slaveholders are always ready to grant \_such\_ favors to slaves and

their relatives. The arrangements were very plain, but perfectly

respectable. She was buried on the Sabbath, and Mrs. Flint's minister read

the funeral service. There was a large concourse of colored people, bond

and free, and a few white persons who had always been friendly to our

family. Dr. Flint's carriage was in the procession; and when the body was

deposited in its humble resting place, the mistress dropped a tear, and

returned to her carriage, probably thinking she had performed her duty

nobly.

It was talked of by the slaves as a mighty grand funeral. Northern

travellers, passing through the place, might have described this tribute of

respect to the humble dead as a beautiful feature in the "patriarchal

institution;" a touching proof of the attachment between slaveholders and

their servants; and tender-hearted Mrs. Flint would have confirmed this

impression, with handkerchief at her eyes. \_We\_ could have told them a

different story. We could have given them a chapter of wrongs and

sufferings, that would have touched their hearts, if they \_had\_ any hearts

to feel for the colored people. We could have told them how the poor old

slave-mother had toiled, year after year, to earn eight hundred dollars to

buy her son Phillip's right to his own earnings; and how that same Phillip

paid the expenses of the funeral, which they regarded as doing so much

credit to the master. We could also have told them of a poor, blighted

young creature, shut up in a living grave for years, to avoid the tortures

that would be inflicted on her, if she ventured to come out and look on the

face of her departed friend.

All this, and much more, I thought of, as I sat at my loophole, waiting

for the family to return from the grave; sometimes weeping, sometimes

falling asleep, dreaming strange dreams of the dead and the living.

It was sad to witness the grief of my bereaved grandmother. She had always

been strong to bear, and now, as ever, religious faith supported her. But

her dark life had become still darker, and age and trouble were leaving

deep traces on her withered face. She had four places to knock for me to

come to the trapdoor, and each place had a different meaning. She now came

oftener than she had done, and talked to me of her dead daughter, while

tears trickled slowly down her furrowed cheeks. I said all I could to

comfort her; but it was a sad reflection, that instead of being able to

help her, I was a constant source of anxiety and trouble. The poor old back

was fitted to its burden. It bent under it, but did not break.

XXIX. Preparations For Escape.

I hardly expect that the reader will credit me, when I affirm that I lived

in that little dismal hole, almost deprived of light and air, and with no

space to move my limbs, for nearly seven years. But it is a fact; and to me

a sad one, even now; for my body still suffers from the effects of that

long imprisonment, to say nothing of my soul. Members of my family, now

living in New York and Boston, can testify to the truth of what I say.

Countless were the nights that I sat late at the little loophole scarcely

large enough to give me a glimpse of one twinkling star. There, heard the

patrols and slave-hunters conferring together about the capture of

runaways, well knowing how rejoiced they would be to catch me.

Season after season, year after year, I peeped at my children's faces, and

heard their sweet voices, with a heart yearning all the while to say, "Your

mother is here." Sometimes it appeared to me as if ages had rolled away

since I entered upon that gloomy, monotonous existence. At times, I was

stupefied and listless; at other times I became very impatient to know when

these dark years would end, and I should again be allowed to feel the

sunshine, and breathe the pure air.

After Ellen left us, this feeling increased. Mr. Sands had agreed that

Benny might go to the north whenever his uncle Phillip could go with him;

and I was anxious to be there also, to watch over my children, and protect

them so far as I was able. Moreover, I was likely to be drowned out of my

den, if I remained much longer; for the slight roof was getting badly out

of repair, and uncle Phillip was afraid to remove the shingles, lest some

one should get a glimpse of me. When storms occurred in the night, they

spread mats and bits of carpet, which in the morning appeared to have been

laid out to dry; but to cover the roof in the daytime might have attracted

attention. Consequently, my clothes and bedding were often drenched; a

process by which the pains and aches in my cramped and stiffened limbs were

greatly increased. I revolved various plans of escape in my mind, which I

sometimes imparted to my grandmother, when she came to whisper with me at

the trap-door. The kind-hearted old woman had an intense sympathy for

runaways. She had known too much of the cruelties inflicted on those who

were captured. Her memory always flew back at once to the sufferings of her

bright and handsome son, Benjamin, the youngest and dearest of her flock.

So, whenever I alluded to the subject, she would groan out, "O, don't think

of it, child. You'll break my heart." I had no good old aunt Nancy now to

encourage me; but my brother William and my children were continually

beckoning me to the north.

And now I must go back a few months in my story. I have stated that the

first of January was the time for selling slaves, or leasing them out to

new masters. If time were counted by heart-throbs, the poor slaves might

reckon years of suffering during that festival so joyous to the free. On

the New Year's day preceding my aunt's death, one of my friends, named

Fanny, was to be sold at auction, to pay her master's debts. My thoughts

were with her during all the day, and at night I anxiously inquired what

had been her fate. I was told that she had been sold to one master, and her

four little girls to another master, far distant; that she had escaped from

her purchaser, and was not to be found. Her mother was the old Aggie I have

spoken of. She lived in a small tenement belonging to my grandmother, and

built on the same lot with her own house. Her dwelling was searched and

watched, and that brought the patrols so near me that I was obliged to keep

very close in my den. The hunters were somehow eluded; and not long

afterwards Benny accidentally caught sight of Fanny in her mother's hut. He

told his grandmother, who charged him never to speak of it, explaining to

him the frightful consequences; and he never betrayed the trust. Aggie

little dreamed that my grandmother knew where her daughter was concealed,

and that the stooping form of her old neighbor was bending under a similar

burden of anxiety and fear; but these dangerous secrets deepened the

sympathy between the two old persecuted mothers.

My friend Fanny and I remained many weeks hidden within call of each other;

but she was unconscious of the fact. I longed to have her share my den,

which seemed a more secure retreat than her own; but I had brought so much

trouble on my grandmother, that it seemed wrong to ask her to incur greater

risks. My restlessness increased. I had lived too long in bodily pain and

anguish of spirit. Always I was in dread that by some accident, or some

contrivance, slavery would succeed in snatching my children from me. This

thought drove me nearly frantic, and I determined to steer for the North

Star at all hazards. At this crisis, Providence opened an unexpected way

for me to escape. My friend Peter came one evening, and asked to speak with

me. "Your day has come, Linda," said he. "I have found a chance for you to

go to the Free States. You have a fortnight to decide." The news seemed too

good to be true; but Peter explained his arrangements, and told me all that

was necessary was for me to say I would go. I was going to answer him with

a joyful yes, when the thought of Benny came to my mind. I told him the

temptation was exceedingly strong, but I was terribly afraid of Dr. Flint's

alleged power over my child, and that I could not go and leave him behind.

Peter remonstrated earnestly. He said such a good chance might never occur

again; that Benny was free, and could be sent to me; and that for the sake

of my children's welfare I ought not to hesitate a moment. I told him I

would consult with uncle Phillip. My uncle rejoiced in the plan, and bade

me go by all means. He promised, if his life was spared, that he would

either bring or send my son to me as soon as I reached a place of safety. I

resolved to go, but thought nothing had better be said to my grandmother

till very near the time of departure. But my uncle thought she would feel

it more keenly if I left here so suddenly. "I will reason with her," said

he, "and convince her how necessary it is, not only for your sake, but for

hers also. You cannot be blind to the fact that she is sinking under her

burdens." I was not blind to it. I knew that my concealment was an

ever-present source of anxiety, and that the older she grew the more

nervously fearful she was of discovery. My uncle talked with her, and

finally succeeded in persuading her that it was absolutely necessary for me

to seize the chance so unexpectedly offered.

The anticipation of being a free woman proved almost too much for my weak

frame. The excitement stimulated me, and at the same time bewildered me. I

made busy preparations for my journey, and for my son to follow me. I

resolved to have an interview with him before I went, that I might give him

cautions and advice, and tell him how anxiously I should be waiting for him

at the north. Grandmother stole up to me as often as possible to whisper

words of counsel. She insisted upon writing to Dr. Flint, as soon as I

arrived in the Free States, and asking him to sell me to her. She said she

would sacrifice her house, and all she had in the world, for the sake of

having me safe with my children in any part of the world. If she could only

live to know \_that\_ she could die in peace. I promised the dear old

faithful friend that I would write to her as soon as I arrived, and put the

letter in a safe way to reach her; but in my own mind I resolved that not

another cent of her hard earnings should be spent to pay rapacious

slaveholders for what they called their property. And even if I had not

been unwilling to buy what I had already a right to possess, common

humanity would have prevented me from accepting the generous offer, at the

expense of turning my aged relative out of house and home, when she was

trembling on the brink of the grave.

I was to escape in a vessel; but I forbear to mention any further

particulars. I was in readiness, but the vessel was unexpectedly detained

several days. Meantime, news came to town of a most horrible murder

committed on a fugitive slave, named James. Charity, the mother of this

unfortunate young man, had been an old acquaintance of ours. I have told

the shocking particulars of his death, in my description of some of the

neighboring slaveholders. My grandmother, always nervously sensitive about

runaways, was terribly frightened. She felt sure that a similar fate

awaited me, if I did not desist from my enterprise. She sobbed, and

groaned, and entreated me not to go. Her excessive fear was somewhat

contagious, and my heart was not proof against her extreme agony. I was

grievously disappointed, but I promised to relinquish my project.

When my friend Peter was apprised of this, he was both disappointed and

vexed. He said, that judging from our past experience, it would be a long

time before I had such another chance to throw away. I told him it need not

be thrown away; that I had a friend concealed near by, who would be glad

enough to take the place that had been provided for me. I told him about

poor Fanny, and the kind-hearted, noble fellow, who never turned his back

upon any body in distress, white or black, expressed his readiness to help

her. Aggie was much surprised when she found that we knew her secret. She

was rejoiced to hear of such a chance for Fanny, and arrangements were made

for her to go on board the vessel the next night. They both supposed that I

had long been at the north, therefore my name was not mentioned in the

transaction. Fanny was carried on board at the appointed time, and stowed

away in a very small cabin. This accommodation had been purchased at a

price that would pay for a voyage to England. But when one proposes to go

to fine old England, they stop to calculate whether they can afford the

cost of the pleasure; while in making a bargain to escape from slavery, the

trembling victim is ready to say, "take all I have, only don't betray me!"

The next morning I peeped through my loophole, and saw that it was dark and

cloudy. At night I received news that the wind was ahead, and the vessel

had not sailed. I was exceedingly anxious about Fanny, and Peter too, who

was running a tremendous risk at my instigation. Next day the wind and

weather remained the same. Poor Fanny had been half dead with fright when

they carried her on board, and I could readily imagine how she must be

suffering now. Grandmother came often to my den, to say how thankful she

was I did not go. On the third morning she rapped for me to come down to

the storeroom. The poor old sufferer was breaking down under her weight of

trouble. She was easily flurried now. I found her in a nervous, excited

state, but I was not aware that she had forgotten to lock the door behind

her, as usual. She was exceedingly worried about the detention of the

vessel. She was afraid all would be discovered, and then Fanny, and Peter,

and I, would all be tortured to death, and Phillip would be utterly ruined,

and her house would be torn down. Poor Peter! If he should die such a

horrible death as the poor slave James had lately done, and all for his

kindness in trying to help me, how dreadful it would be for us all! Alas,

the thought was familiar to me, and had sent many a sharp pang through my

heart. I tried to suppress my own anxiety, and speak soothingly to her. She

brought in some allusion to aunt Nancy, the dear daughter she had recently

buried, and then she lost all control of herself. As she stood there,

trembling and sobbing, a voice from the piazza called out, "Whar is you,

aunt Marthy?" Grandmother was startled, and in her agitation opened the

door, without thinking of me. In stepped Jenny, the mischievous housemaid,

who had tried to enter my room, when I was concealed in the house of my

white benefactress. "I's bin huntin ebery whar for you, aunt Marthy," said

she. "My missis wants you to send her some crackers." I had slunk down

behind a barrel, which entirely screened me, but I imagined that Jenny was

looking directly at the spot, and my heart beat violently. My grandmother

immediately thought what she had done, and went out quickly with Jenny to

count the crackers locking the door after her. She returned to me, in a few

minutes, the perfect picture of despair. "Poor child!" she exclaimed, "my

carelessness has ruined you. The boat ain't gone yet. Get ready

immediately, and go with Fanny. I ain't got another word to say against it

now; for there's no telling what may happen this day."

Uncle Phillip was sent for, and he agreed with his mother in thinking that

Jenny would inform Dr. Flint in less than twenty-four hours. He advised

getting me on board the boat, if possible; if not, I had better keep very

still in my den, where they could not find me without tearing the house

down. He said it would not do for him to move in the matter, because

suspicion would be immediately excited; but he promised to communicate with

Peter. I felt reluctant to apply to him again, having implicated him too

much already; but there seemed to be no alternative. Vexed as Peter had

been by my indecision, he was true to his generous nature, and said at once

that he would do his best to help me, trusting I should show myself a

stronger woman this time.

He immediately proceeded to the wharf, and found that the wind had shifted,

and the vessel was slowly beating down stream. On some pretext of urgent

necessity, he offered two boatmen a dollar apiece to catch up with her. He

was of lighter complexion than the boatmen he hired, and when the captain

saw them coming so rapidly, he thought officers were pursuing his vessel in

search of the runaway slave he had on board. They hoisted sails, but the

boat gained upon them, and the indefatigable Peter sprang on board.

The captain at once recognized him. Peter asked him to go below, to speak

about a bad bill he had given him. When he told his errand, the captain

replied, "Why, the woman's here already; and I've put her where you or the

devil would have a tough job to find her."

"But it is another woman I want to bring," said Peter. "\_She\_ is in great

distress, too, and you shall be paid any thing within reason, if you'll

stop and take her."

"What's her name?" inquired the captain. "Linda," he replied.

"That's the name of the woman already here," rejoined the captain. "By

George! I believe you mean to betray me."

"O!" exclaimed Peter, "God knows I wouldn't harm a hair of your head. I am

too grateful to you. But there really \_is\_ another woman in great danger.

Do have the humanity to stop and take her!"

After a while they came to an understanding. Fanny, not dreaming I was any

where about in that region, had assumed my name, though she called herself

Johnson. "Linda is a common name," said Peter, "and the woman I want to

bring is Linda Brent."

The captain agreed to wait at a certain place till evening, being

handsomely paid for his detention.

Of course, the day was an anxious one for us all. But we concluded that if

Jenny had seen me, she would be too wise to let her mistress know of it;

and that she probably would not get a chance to see Dr. Flint's family till

evening, for I knew very well what were the rules in that household. I

afterwards believed that she did not see me; for nothing ever came of it,

and she was one of those base characters that would have jumped to betray a

suffering fellow being for the sake of thirty pieces of silver.

I made all my arrangements to go on board as soon as it was dusk. The

intervening time I resolved to spend with my son. I had not spoken to him

for seven years, though I had been under the same roof, and seen him every

day, when I was well enough to sit at the loophole. I did not dare to

venture beyond the storeroom; so they brought him there, and locked us up

together, in a place concealed from the piazza door. It was an agitating

interview for both of us. After we had talked and wept together for a

little while, he said, "Mother, I'm glad you're going away. I wish I could

go with you. I knew you was here; and I have been \_so\_ afraid they would

come and catch you!" I was greatly surprised, and asked him how he had

found it out.

He replied, "I was standing under the eaves, one day, before Ellen went

away, and I heard somebody cough up over the wood shed. I don't know what

made me think it was you, but I did think so. I missed Ellen, the night

before she went away; and grandmother brought her back into the room in the

night; and I thought maybe she'd been to see \_you\_, before she went, for I

heard grandmother whisper to her, 'Now go to sleep; and remember never to

tell.'"

I asked him if he ever mentioned his suspicions to his sister. He said he

never did; but after he heard the cough, if he saw her playing with other

children on that side of the house, he always tried to coax her round to

the other side, for fear they would hear me cough, too. He said he had kept

a close lookout for Dr. Flint, and if he saw him speak to a constable, or a

patrol, he always told grandmother. I now recollected that I had seen him

manifest uneasiness, when people were on that side of the house, and I had

at the time been puzzled to conjecture a motive for his actions. Such

prudence may seem extraordinary in a boy of twelve years, but slaves, being

surrounded by mysteries, deceptions, and dangers, early learn to be

suspicious and watchful, and prematurely cautious and cunning. He had never

asked a question of grandmother, or uncle Phillip, and I had often heard

him chime in with other children, when they spoke of my being at the north.

I told him I was now really going to the Free States, and if he was a good,

honest boy, and a loving child to his dear old grandmother, the Lord would

bless him, and bring him to me, and we and Ellen would live together. He

began to tell me that grandmother had not eaten any thing all day. While he

was speaking, the door was unlocked, and she came in with a small bag of

money, which she wanted me to take. I begged her to keep a part of it, at

least, to pay for Benny's being sent to the north; but she insisted, while

her tears were falling fast, that I should take the whole. "You may be sick

among strangers," she said, "and they would send you to the poorhouse to

die." Ah, that good grandmother!

For the last time I went up to my nook. Its desolate appearance no longer

chilled me, for the light of hope had risen in my soul. Yet, even with the

blessed prospect of freedom before me, I felt very sad at leaving forever

that old homestead, where I had been sheltered so long by the dear old

grandmother; where I had dreamed my first young dream of love; and where,

after that had faded away, my children came to twine themselves so closely

round my desolate heart. As the hour approached for me to leave, I again

descended to the storeroom. My grandmother and Benny were there. She took

me by the hand, and said, "Linda, let us pray." We knelt down together,

with my child pressed to my heart, and my other arm round the faithful,

loving old friend I was about to leave forever. On no other occasion has it

ever been my lot to listen to so fervent a supplication for mercy and

protection. It thrilled through my heart, and inspired me with trust in

God.

Peter was waiting for me in the street. I was soon by his side, faint in

body, but strong of purpose. I did not look back upon the old place, though

I felt that I should never see it again.

XXX. Northward Bound.

I never could tell how we reached the wharf. My brain was all of a whirl,

and my limbs tottered under me. At an appointed place we met my uncle

Phillip, who had started before us on a different route, that he might

reach the wharf first, and give us timely warning if there was any danger.

A row-boat was in readiness. As I was about to step in, I felt something

pull me gently, and turning round I saw Benny, looking pale and anxious. He

whispered in my ear, "I've been peeping into the doctor's window, and he's

at home. Good by, mother. Don't cry; I'll come." He hastened away. I

clasped the hand of my good uncle, to whom I owed so much, and of Peter,

the brave, generous friend who had volunteered to run such terrible risks

to secure my safety. To this day I remember how his bright face beamed with

joy, when he told me he had discovered a safe method for me to escape. Yet

that intelligent, enterprising, noble-hearted man was a chattel! Liable, by

the laws of a country that calls itself civilized, to be sold with horses

and pigs! We parted in silence. Our hearts were all too full for words!

Swiftly the boat glided over the water. After a while, one of the sailors

said, "Don't be down-hearted, madam. We will take you safely to your

husband, in ----." At first I could not imagine what he meant; but I had

presence of mind to think that it probably referred to something the

captain had told him; so I thanked him, and said I hoped we should have

pleasant weather.

When I entered the vessel the captain came forward to meet me. He was an

elderly man, with a pleasant countenance. He showed me to a little box of a

cabin, where sat my friend Fanny. She started as if she had seen a spectre.

She gazed on me in utter astonishment, and exclaimed, "Linda, can this be

\_you\_? or is it your ghost?" When we were locked in each other's arms, my

overwrought feelings could no longer be restrained. My sobs reached the

ears of the captain, who came and very kindly reminded us, that for his

safety, as well as our own, it would be prudent for us not to attract any

attention. He said that when there was a sail in sight he wished us to keep

below; but at other times, he had no objection to our being on deck. He

assured us that he would keep a good lookout, and if we acted prudently, he

thought we should be in no danger. He had represented us as women going to

meet our husbands in ----. We thanked him, and promised to observe

carefully all the directions he gave us.

Fanny and I now talked by ourselves, low and quietly, in our little cabin.

She told me of the suffering she had gone through in making her escape, and

of her terrors while she was concealed in her mother's house. Above all,

she dwelt on the agony of separation from all her children on that dreadful

auction day. She could scarcely credit me, when I told her of the place

where I had passed nearly seven years. "We have the same sorrows," said I.

"No," replied she, "you are going to see your children soon, and there is

no hope that I shall ever even hear from mine."

The vessel was soon under way, but we made slow progress. The wind was

against us, I should not have cared for this, if we had been out of sight

of the town; but until there were miles of water between us and our

enemies, we were filled with constant apprehensions that the constables

would come on board. Neither could I feel quite at ease with the captain

and his men. I was an entire stranger to that class of people, and I had

heard that sailors were rough, and sometimes cruel. We were so completely

in their power, that if they were bad men, our situation would be dreadful.

Now that the captain was paid for our passage, might he not be tempted to

make more money by giving us up to those who claimed us as property? I was

naturally of a confiding disposition, but slavery had made me suspicious of

every body. Fanny did not share my distrust of the captain or his men. She

said she was afraid at first, but she had been on board three days while

the vessel lay in the dock, and nobody had betrayed her, or treated her

otherwise than kindly.

The captain soon came to advise us to go on deck for fresh air. His

friendly and respectful manner, combined with Fanny's testimony, reassured

me, and we went with him. He placed us in a comfortable seat, and

occasionally entered into conversation. He told us he was a Southerner by

birth, and had spent the greater part of his life in the Slave States, and

that he had recently lost a brother who traded in slaves. "But," said he,

"it is a pitiable and degrading business, and I always felt ashamed to

acknowledge my brother in connection with it." As we passed Snaky Swamp, he

pointed to it, and said, "There is a slave territory that defies all the

laws." I thought of the terrible days I had spent there, and though it was

not called Dismal Swamp, it made me feel very dismal as I looked at it.

I shall never forget that night. The balmy air of spring was so refreshing!

And how shall I describe my sensations when we were fairly sailing on

Chesapeake Bay? O, the beautiful sunshine! the exhilarating breeze! And I

could enjoy them without fear or restraint. I had never realized what grand

things air and sunlight are till I had been deprived of them.

Ten days after we left land we were approaching Philadelphia. The captain

said we should arrive there in the night, but he thought we had better wait

till morning, and go on shore in broad daylight, as the best way to avoid

suspicion.

I replied, "You know best. But will you stay on board and protect us?"

He saw that I was suspicious, and he said he was sorry, now that he had

brought us to the end of our voyage, to find I had so little confidence in

him. Ah, if he had ever been a slave he would have known how difficult it

was to trust a white man. He assured us that we might sleep through the

night without fear; that he would take care we were not left unprotected.

Be it said to the honor of this captain, Southerner as he was, that if

Fanny and I had been white ladies, and our passage lawfully engaged, he

could not have treated us more respectfully. My intelligent friend, Peter,

had rightly estimated the character of the man to whose honor he had

intrusted us. The next morning I was on deck as soon as the day dawned. I

called Fanny to see the sun rise, for the first time in our lives, on free

soil; for such I \_then\_ believed it to be. We watched the reddening sky,

and saw the great orb come up slowly out of the water, as it seemed. Soon

the waves began to sparkle, and every thing caught the beautiful glow.

Before us lay the city of strangers. We looked at each other, and the eyes

of both were moistened with tears. We had escaped from slavery, and we

supposed ourselves to be safe from the hunters. But we were alone in the

world, and we had left dear ties behind us; ties cruelly sundered by the

demon Slavery.

XXXI. Incidents In Philadelphia.

I had heard that the poor slave had many friends at the north. I trusted we

should find some of them. Meantime, we would take it for granted that all

were friends, till they proved to the contrary. I sought out the kind

captain, thanked him for his attentions, and told him I should never cease

to be grateful for the service he had rendered us. I gave him a message to

the friends I had left at home, and he promised to deliver it. We were

placed in a row-boat, and in about fifteen minutes were landed on a wood

wharf in Philadelphia. As I stood looking round, the friendly captain

touched me on the shoulder, and said, "There is a respectable-looking

colored man behind you. I will speak to him about the New York trains, and

tell him you wish to go directly on." I thanked him, and asked him to

direct me to some shops where I could buy gloves and veils. He did so, and

said he would talk with the colored man till I returned. I made what haste

I could. Constant exercise on board the vessel, and frequent rubbing with

salt water, had nearly restored the use of my limbs. The noise of the great

city confused me, but I found the shops, and bought some double veils and

gloves for Fanny and myself. The shopman told me they were so many levies.

I had never heard the word before, but I did not tell him so. I thought if

he knew I was a stranger he might ask me where I came from. I gave him a

gold piece, and when he returned the change, I counted it, and found out

how much a levy was. I made my way back to the wharf, where the captain

introduced me to the colored man, as the Rev. Jeremiah Durham, minister of

Bethel church. He took me by the hand, as if I had been an old friend. He

told us we were too late for the morning cars to New York, and must wait

until the evening, or the next morning. He invited me to go home with him,

assuring me that his wife would give me a cordial welcome; and for my

friend he would provide a home with one of his neighbors. I thanked him for

so much kindness to strangers, and told him if I must be detained, I should

like to hunt up some people who formerly went from our part of the country.

Mr. Durham insisted that I should dine with him, and then he would assist

me in finding my friends. The sailors came to bid us good by. I shook their

hardy hands, with tears in my eyes. They had all been kind to us, and they

had rendered us a greater service than they could possibly conceive of.

I had never seen so large a city, or been in contact with so many people in

the streets. It seemed as if those who passed looked at us with an

expression of curiosity. My face was so blistered and peeled, by sitting on

deck, in wind and sunshine, that I thought they could not easily decide to

what nation I belonged.

Mrs. Durham met me with a kindly welcome, without asking any questions. I

was tired, and her friendly manner was a sweet refreshment. God bless her!

I was sure that she had comforted other weary hearts, before I received her

sympathy. She was surrounded by her husband and children, in a home made

sacred by protecting laws. I thought of my own children, and sighed.

After dinner Mr. Durham went with me in quest of the friends I had spoken

of. They went from my native town, and I anticipated much pleasure in

looking on familiar faces. They were not at home, and we retracted our

steps through streets delightfully clean. On the way, Mr. Durham observed

that I had spoken to him of a daughter I expected to meet; that he was

surprised, for I looked so young he had taken me for a single woman. He was

approaching a subject on which I was extremely sensitive. He would ask

about my husband next, I thought, and if I answered him truly, what would

he think of me? I told him I had two children, one in New York the other at

the south. He asked some further questions, and I frankly told him some of

the most important events of my life. It was painful for me to do it; but I

would not deceive him. If he was desirous of being my friend, I thought he

ought to know how far I was worthy of it. "Excuse me, if I have tried your

feelings," said he. "I did not question you from idle curiosity. I wanted

to understand your situation, in order to know whether I could be of any

service to you, or your little girl. Your straight-forward answers do you

credit; but don't answer every body so openly. It might give some heartless

people a pretext for treating you with contempt."

That word \_contempt\_ burned me like coals of fire. I replied, "God alone

knows how I have suffered; and He, I trust, will forgive me. If I am

permitted to have my children, I intend to be a good mother, and to live in

such a manner that people cannot treat me with contempt."

"I respect your sentiments," said he. "Place your trust in God, and be

governed by good principles, and you will not fail to find friends."

When we reached home, I went to my room, glad to shut out the world for a

while. The words he had spoken made an indelible impression upon me. They

brought up great shadows from the mournful past. In the midst of my

meditations I was startled by a knock at the door. Mrs. Durham entered, her

face all beaming with kindness, to say that there was an anti-slavery

friend down stairs, who would like to see me. I overcame my dread of

encountering strangers, and went with her. Many questions were asked

concerning my experiences, and my escape from slavery; but I observed how

careful they all were not to say any thing that might wound my feelings.

How gratifying this was, can be fully understood only by those who have

been accustomed to be treated as if they were not included within the pale

of human beings. The anti-slavery friend had come to inquire into my plans,

and to offer assistance, if needed. Fanny was comfortably established, for

the present, with a friend of Mr. Durham. The Anti-Slavery Society agreed

to pay her expenses to New York. The same was offered to me, but I declined

to accept it, telling them that my grandmother had given me sufficient to

pay my expenses to the end of my journey. We were urged to remain in

Philadelphia a few days, until some suitable escort could be found for us.

I gladly accepted the proposition, for I had a dread of meeting

slaveholders, and some dread also of railroads. I had never entered a

railroad car in my life, and it seemed to me quite an important event.

That night I sought my pillow with feelings I had never carried to it

before. I verily believed myself to be a free woman. I was wakeful for a

long time, and I had no sooner fallen asleep, than I was roused by

fire-bells. I jumped up, and hurried on my clothes. Where I came from,

every body hastened to dress themselves on such occasions. The white people

thought a great fire might be used as a good opportunity for insurrection,

and that it was best to be in readiness; and the colored people were

ordered out to labor in extinguishing the flames. There was but one engine

in our town, and colored women and children were often required to drag it

to the river's edge and fill it. Mrs. Durham's daughter slept in the same

room with me, and seeing that she slept through all the din, I thought it

was my duty to wake her. "What's the matter?" said she, rubbing her eyes.

"They're screaming fire in the streets, and the bells are ringing," I

replied.

"What of that?" said she, drowsily. "We are used to it. We never get up,

without the fire is very near. What good would it do?"

I was quite surprised that it was not necessary for us to go and help fill

the engine. I was an ignorant child, just beginning to learn how things

went on in great cities.

At daylight, I heard women crying fresh fish, berries, radishes, and

various other things. All this was new to me. I dressed myself at an early

hour, and sat at the window to watch that unknown tide of life.

Philadelphia seemed to me a wonderfully great place. At the breakfast

table, my idea of going out to drag the engine was laughed over, and I

joined in the mirth.

I went to see Fanny, and found her so well contented among her new friends

that she was in no haste to leave. I was also very happy with my kind

hostess. She had had advantages for education, and was vastly my superior.

Every day, almost every hour, I was adding to my little stock of knowledge.

She took me out to see the city as much as she deemed prudent. One day she

took me to an artist's room, and showed me the portraits of some of her

children. I had never seen any paintings of colored people before, and they

seemed to be beautiful.

At the end of five days, one of Mrs. Durham's friends offered to accompany

us to New York the following morning. As I held the hand of my good hostess

in a parting clasp, I longed to know whether her husband had repeated to

her what I had told him. I supposed he had, but she never made any allusion

to it. I presume it was the delicate silence of womanly sympathy.

When Mr. Durham handed us our tickets, he said, "I am afraid you will have

a disagreeable ride; but I could not procure tickets for the first-class

cars."

Supposing I had not given him money enough, I offered more. "O, no," said

he, "they could not be had for any money. They don't allow colored people

to go in the first-class cars."

This was the first chill to my enthusiasm about the Free States. Colored

people were allowed to ride in a filthy box, behind white people, at the

south, but there they were not required to pay for the privilege. It made

me sad to find how the north aped the customs of slavery.

We were stowed away in a large, rough car, with windows on each side, too

high for us to look out without standing up. It was crowded with people,

apparently of all nations. There were plenty of beds and cradles,

containing screaming and kicking babies. Every other man had a cigar or

pipe in his mouth, and jugs of whiskey were handed round freely. The fumes

of the whiskey and the dense tobacco smoke were sickening to my senses, and

my mind was equally nauseated by the coarse jokes and ribald songs around

me. It was a very disagreeable ride. Since that time there has been some

improvement in these matters.

XXXII. The Meeting Of Mother And Daughter.

When we arrived in New York, I was half crazed by the crowd of coachmen

calling out, "Carriage, ma'am?" We bargained with one to take us to

Sullivan Street for twelve shillings. A burly Irishman stepped up and said,

"I'll tak' ye for sax shillings." The reduction of half the price was an

object to us, and we asked if he could take us right away. "Troth an I

will, ladies," he replied. I noticed that the hackmen smiled at each other,

and I inquired whether his conveyance was decent. "Yes, it's dacent it is,

marm. Devil a bit would I be after takin' ladies in a cab that was not

dacent." We gave him our checks. He went for the baggage, and soon

reappeared, saying, "This way, if you plase, ladies." We followed, and

found our trunks on a truck, and we were invited to take our seats on them.

We told him that was not what we bargained for, and he must take the trunks

off. He swore they should not be touched till we had paid him six

shillings. In our situation it was not prudent to attract attention, and I

was about to pay him what he required, when a man near by shook his head

for me not to do it. After a great ado we got rid of the Irishman, and had

our trunks fastened on a hack. We had been recommended to a boarding-house

in Sullivan Street, and thither we drove. There Fanny and I separated. The

Anti-Slavery Society provided a home for her, and I afterwards heard of her

in prosperous circumstances. I sent for an old friend from my part of the

country, who had for some time been doing business in New York. He came

immediately. I told him I wanted to go to my daughter, and asked him to aid

me in procuring an interview.

I cautioned him not to let it be known to the family that I had just

arrived from the south, because they supposed I had been at the north seven

years. He told me there was a colored woman in Brooklyn who came from the

same town I did, and I had better go to her house, and have my daughter

meet me there. I accepted the proposition thankfully, and he agreed to

escort me to Brooklyn. We crossed Fulton ferry, went up Myrtle Avenue, and

stopped at the house he designated. I was just about to enter, when two

girls passed. My friend called my attention to them. I turned, and

recognized in the eldest, Sarah, the daughter of a woman who used to live

with my grandmother, but who had left the south years ago. Surprised and

rejoiced at this unexpected meeting, I threw my arms round her, and

inquired concerning her mother.

"You take no notice of the other girl," said my friend. I turned, and there

stood my Ellen! I pressed her to my heart, then held her away from me to

take a look at her. She had changed a good deal in the two years since I

parted from her. Signs of neglect could be discerned by eyes less observing

than a mother's. My friend invited us all to go into the house; but Ellen

said she had been sent of an errand, which she would do as quickly as

possible, and go home and ask Mrs. Hobbs to let her come and see me. It was

agreed that I should send for her the next day. Her companion, Sarah,

hastened to tell her mother of my arrival. When I entered the house, I

found the mistress of it absent, and I waited for her return. Before I saw

her, I heard her saying, "Where is Linda Brent? I used to know her father

and mother." Soon Sarah came with her mother. So there was quite a company

of us, all from my grandmother's neighborhood. These friends gathered round

me and questioned me eagerly. They laughed, they cried, and they shouted.

They thanked God that I had got away from my persecutors and was safe on

Long Island. It was a day of great excitement. How different from the

silent days I had passed in my dreary den!

The next morning was Sunday. My first waking thoughts were occupied with

the note I was to send to Mrs. Hobbs, the lady with whom Ellen lived. That

I had recently come into that vicinity was evident; otherwise I should have

sooner inquired for my daughter. It would not do to let them know I had

just arrived from the south, for that would involve the suspicion of my

having been harbored there, and might bring trouble, if not ruin, on

several people.

I like a straightforward course, and am always reluctant to resort to

subterfuges. So far as my ways have been crooked, I charge them all upon

slavery. It was that system of violence and wrong which now left me no

alternative but to enact a falsehood. I began my note by stating that I had

recently arrived from Canada, and was very desirous to have my daughter

come to see me. She came and brought a message from Mrs. Hobbs, inviting me

to her house, and assuring me that I need not have any fears. The

conversation I had with my child did not leave my mind at ease. When I

asked if she was well treated, she answered yes; but there was no

heartiness in the tone, and it seemed to me that she said it from an

unwillingness to have me troubled on her account. Before she left me, she

asked very earnestly, "Mother, will you take me to live with you?" It made

me sad to think that I could not give her a home till I went to work and

earned the means; and that might take me a long time. When she was placed

with Mrs. Hobbs, the agreement was that she should be sent to school She

had been there two years, and was now nine years old, and she scarcely knew

her letters. There was no excuse for this, for there were good public

schools in Brooklyn, to which she could have been sent without expense.

She staid with me till dark, and I went home with her. I was received in a

friendly manner by the family, and all agreed in saying that Ellen was a

useful, good girl. Mrs. Hobbs looked me coolly in the face, and said, "I

suppose you know that my cousin, Mr. Sands, has \_given\_ her to my eldest

daughter. She will make a nice waiting-maid for her when she grows up." I

did not answer a word. How \_could\_ she, who knew by experience the strength

of a mother's love, and who was perfectly aware of the relation Mr. Sands

bore to my children,--how \_could\_ she look me in the face, while she thrust

such a dagger into my heart?

I was no longer surprised that they had kept her in such a state of

ignorance. Mr. Hobbs had formerly been wealthy, but he had failed, and

afterwards obtained a subordinate situation in the Custom House. Perhaps

they expected to return to the south some day; and Ellen's knowledge was

quite sufficient for a slave's condition. I was impatient to go to work and

earn money, that I might change the uncertain position of my children. Mr.

Sands had not kept his promise to emancipate them. I had also been deceived

about Ellen. What security had I with regard to Benjamin? I felt that I had

none.

I returned to my friend's house in an uneasy state of mind. In order to

protect my children, it was necessary that I should own myself. I called

myself free, and sometimes felt so; but I knew I was insecure. I sat down

that night and wrote a civil letter to Dr. Flint, asking him to state the

lowest terms on which he would sell me; and as I belonged by law to his

daughter, I wrote to her also, making a similar request.

Since my arrival at the north I had not been unmindful of my dear brother

William. I had made diligent inquiries for him, and having heard of him in

Boston, I went thither. When I arrived there, I found he had gone to New

Bedford. I wrote to that place, and was informed he had gone on a whaling

voyage, and would not return for some months. I went back to New York to

get employment near Ellen. I received an answer from Dr. Flint, which gave

me no encouragement. He advised me to return and submit myself to my

rightful owners, and then any request I might make would be granted. I lent

this letter to a friend, who lost it; otherwise I would present a copy to

my readers.

XXXIII. A Home Found.

My greatest anxiety now was to obtain employment. My health was greatly

improved, though my limbs continued to trouble me with swelling whenever I

walked much. The greatest difficulty in my way was, that those who employed

strangers required a recommendation; and in my peculiar position, I could,

of course, obtain no certificates from the families I had so faithfully

served.

One day an acquaintance told me of a lady who wanted a nurse for her babe,

and I immediately applied for the situation. The lady told me she preferred

to have one who had been a mother, and accustomed to the care of infants. I

told her I had nursed two babes of my own. She asked me many questions,

but, to my great relief, did not require a recommendation from my former

employers. She told me she was an English woman, and that was a pleasant

circumstance to me, because I had heard they had less prejudice against

color than Americans entertained. It was agreed that we should try each

other for a week. The trial proved satisfactory to both parties, and I was

engaged for a month.

The heavenly Father had been most merciful to me in leading me to this

place. Mrs. Bruce was a kind and gentle lady, and proved a true and

sympathizing friend. Before the stipulated month expired, the necessity of

passing up and down stairs frequently, caused my limbs to swell so

painfully, that I became unable to perform my duties. Many ladies would

have thoughtlessly discharged me; but Mrs. Bruce made arrangements to save

me steps, and employed a physician to attend upon me. I had not yet told

her that I was a fugitive slave. She noticed that I was often sad, and

kindly inquired the cause. I spoke of being separated from my children, and

from relatives who were dear to me; but I did not mention the constant

feeling of insecurity which oppressed my spirits. I longed for some one to

confide it; but I had been so deceived by white people, that I had lost all

confidence in them. If they spoke kind words to me, I thought it was for

some selfish purpose. I had entered this family with the distrustful

feelings I had brought with me out of slavery; but ere six months had

passed, I found that the gentle deportment of Mrs. Bruce and the smiles of

her lovely babe were thawing my chilled heart. My narrow mind also began to

expand under the influences of her intelligent conversation, and the

opportunities for reading, which were gladly allowed me whenever I had

leisure from my duties. I gradually became more energetic and more

cheerful.

The old feeling of insecurity, especially with regard to my children, often

threw its dark shadow across my sunshine. Mrs. Bruce offered me a home for

Ellen; but pleasant as it would have been, I did not dare to accept it, for

fear of offending the Hobbs family. Their knowledge of my precarious

situation placed me in their power; and I felt that it was important for me

to keep on the right side of them, till, by dint of labor and economy, I

could make a home for my children. I was far from feeling satisfied with

Ellen's situation. She was not well cared for. She sometimes came to New

York to visit me; but she generally brought a request from Mrs. Hobbs that

I would buy her a pair of shoes, or some article of clothing. This was

accompanied by a promise of payment when Mr. Hobbs's salary at the Custom

House became due; but some how or other the pay-day never came. Thus many

dollars of my earnings were expended to keep my child comfortably clothed.

That, however, was a slight trouble, compared with the fear that their

pecuniary embarrassments might induce them to sell my precious young

daughter. I knew they were in constant communication with Southerners, and

had frequent opportunities to do it. I have stated that when Dr. Flint put

Ellen in jail, at two years old, she had an inflammation of the eyes,

occasioned by measles. This disease still troubled her; and kind Mrs. Bruce

proposed that she should come to New York for a while, to be under the care

of Dr. Elliott, a well known oculist. It did not occur to me that there was

any thing improper in a mother's making such a request; but Mrs. Hobbs was

very angry, and refused to let her go. Situated as I was, it was not

politic to insist upon it. I made no complaint, but I longed to be entirely

free to act a mother's part towards my children. The next time I went over

to Brooklyn, Mrs. Hobbs, as if to apologize for her anger, told me she had

employed her own physician to attend to Ellen's eyes, and that she had

refused my request because she did not consider it safe to trust her in New

York. I accepted the explanation in silence; but she had told me that my

child \_belonged\_ to her daughter, and I suspected that her real motive was

a fear of my conveying her property away from her. Perhaps I did her

injustice; but my knowledge of Southerners made it difficult for me to feel

otherwise.

Sweet and bitter were mixed in the cup of my life, and I was thankful that

it had ceased to be entirely bitter. I loved Mrs. Bruce's babe. When it

laughed and crowed in my face, and twined its little tender arms

confidingly about my neck, it made me think of the time when Benny and

Ellen were babies, and my wounded heart was soothed. One bright morning, as

I stood at the window, tossing baby in my arms, my attention was attracted

by a young man in sailor's dress, who was closely observing every house as

he passed. I looked at him earnestly. Could it be my brother William? It

\_must\_ be he--and yet, how changed! I placed the baby safely, flew down

stairs, opened the front door, beckoned to the sailor, and in less than a

minute I was clasped in my brother's arms. How much we had to tell each

other! How we laughed, and how we cried, over each other's adventures! I

took him to Brooklyn, and again saw him with Ellen, the dear child whom he

had loved and tended so carefully, while I was shut up in my miserable den.

He staid in New York a week. His old feelings of affection for me and Ellen

were as lively as ever. There are no bonds so strong as those which are

formed by suffering together.

XXXIV. The Old Enemy Again.

My young mistress, Miss Emily Flint, did not return any answer to my letter

requesting her to consent to my being sold. But after a while, I received a

reply, which purported to be written by her younger brother. In order

rightly to enjoy the contents of this letter, the reader must bear in mind

that the Flint family supposed I had been at the north many years. They had

no idea that I knew of the doctor's three excursions to New York in search

of me; that I had heard his voice, when he came to borrow five hundred

dollars for that purpose; and that I had seen him pass on his way to the

steamboat. Neither were they aware that all the particulars of aunt Nancy's

death and burial were conveyed to me at the time they occurred. I have kept

the letter, of which I herewith subjoin a copy:--

Your letter to sister was received a few days ago. I gather from

it that you are desirous of returning to your native place, among

your friends and relatives. We were all gratified with the

contents of your letter; and let me assure you that if any

members of the family have had any feeling of resentment towards

you, they feel it no longer. We all sympathize with you in your

unfortunate condition, and are ready to do all in our power to

make you contented and happy. It is difficult for you to return

home as a free person. If you were purchased by your grandmother,

it is doubtful whether you would be permitted to remain, although

it would be lawful for you to do so. If a servant should be

allowed to purchase herself, after absenting herself so long from

her owners, and return free, it would have an injurious effect.

From your letter, I think your situation must be hard and

uncomfortable. Come home. You have it in your power to be

reinstated in our affections. We would receive you with open arms

and tears of joy. You need not apprehend any unkind treatment, as

we have not put ourselves to any trouble or expense to get you.

Had we done so, perhaps we should feel otherwise. You know my

sister was always attached to you, and that you were never

treated as a slave. You were never put to hard work, nor exposed

to field labor. On the contrary, you were taken into the house,

and treated as one of us, and almost as free; and we, at least,

felt that you were above disgracing yourself by running away.

Believing you may be induced to come home voluntarily has induced

me to write for my sister. The family will be rejoiced to see

you; and your poor old grandmother expressed a great desire to

have you come, when she heard your letter read. In her old age

she needs the consolation of having her children round her.

Doubtless you have heard of the death of your aunt. She was a

faithful servant, and a faithful member of the Episcopal church.

In her Christian life she taught us how to live--and, O, too high

the price of knowledge, she taught us how to die! Could you have

seen us round her death bed, with her mother, all mingling our

tears in one common stream, you would have thought the same

heartfelt tie existed between a master and his servant, as

between a mother and her child. But this subject is too painful

to dwell upon. I must bring my letter to a close. If you are

contented to stay away from your old grandmother, your child, and

the friends who love you, stay where you are. We shall never

trouble ourselves to apprehend you. But should you prefer to come

home, we will do all that we can to make you happy. If you do not

wish to remain in the family, I know that father, by our

persuasion, will be induced to let you be purchased by any person

you may choose in our community. You will please answer this as

soon as possible, and let us know your decision. Sister sends

much love to you. In the mean time believe me your sincere friend

and well wisher.

This letter was signed by Emily's brother, who was as yet a mere lad. I

knew, by the style, that it was not written by a person of his age, and

though the writing was disguised, I had been made too unhappy by it, in

former years, not to recognize at once the hand of Dr. Flint. O, the

hypocrisy of slaveholders! Did the old fox suppose I was goose enough to go

into such a trap? Verily, he relied too much on "the stupidity of the

African race." I did not return the family of Flints any thanks for their

cordial invitation--a remissness for which I was, no doubt, charged with

base ingratitude.

Not long afterwards I received a letter from one of my friends at the

south, informing me that Dr. Flint was about to visit the north. The letter

had been delayed, and I supposed he might be already on the way. Mrs. Bruce

did not know I was a fugitive. I told her that important business called me

to Boston, where my brother then was, and asked permission to bring a

friend to supply my place as nurse, for a fortnight. I started on my

journey immediately; and as soon as I arrived, I wrote to my grandmother

that if Benny came, he must be sent to Boston. I knew she was only waiting

for a good chance to send him north, and, fortunately, she had the legal

power to do so, without asking leave of any body. She was a free woman; and

when my children were purchased, Mr. Sands preferred to have the bill of

sale drawn up in her name. It was conjectured that he advanced the money,

but it was not known. At the south, a gentleman may have a shoal of colored

children without any disgrace; but if he is known to purchase them, with

the view of setting them free, the example is thought to be dangerous to

their "peculiar institution," and he becomes unpopular.

There was a good opportunity to send Benny in a vessel coming directly to

New York. He was put on board with a letter to a friend, who was requested

to see him off to Boston. Early one morning, there was a loud rap at my

door, and in rushed Benjamin, all out of breath. "O mother!" he exclaimed,

"here I am! I run all the way; and I come all alone. How d'you do?"

O reader, can you imagine my joy? No, you cannot, unless you have been a

slave mother. Benjamin rattled away as fast as his tongue could go.

"Mother, why don't you bring Ellen here? I went over to Brooklyn to see

her, and she felt very bad when I bid her good by. She said, 'O Ben, I wish

I was going too.' I thought she'd know ever so much; but she don't know so

much as I do; for I can read, and she can't. And, mother, I lost all my

clothes coming. What can I do to get some more? I 'spose free boys can get

along here at the north as well as white boys."

I did not like to tell the sanguine, happy little fellow how much he was

mistaken. I took him to a tailor, and procured a change of clothes. The

rest of the day was spent in mutual asking and answering of questions, with

the wish constantly repeated that the good old grandmother was with us, and

frequent injunctions from Benny to write to her immediately, and be sure to

tell her every thing about his voyage, and his journey to Boston.

Dr. Flint made his visit to New York, and made every exertion to call upon

me, and invite me to return with him, but not being able to ascertain where

I was, his hospitable intentions were frustrated, and the affectionate

family, who were waiting for me with "open arms," were doomed to

disappointment.

As soon as I knew he was safely at home, I placed Benjamin in the care of

my brother William, and returned to Mrs. Bruce. There I remained through

the winter and spring, endeavoring to perform my duties faithfully, and

finding a good degree of happiness in the attractions of baby Mary, the

considerate kindness of her excellent mother, and occasional interviews

with my darling daughter.

But when summer came, the old feeling of insecurity haunted me. It was

necessary for me to take little Mary out daily, for exercise and fresh air,

and the city was swarming with Southerners, some of whom might recognize

me. Hot weather brings out snakes and slaveholders, and I like one class of

the venomous creatures as little as I do the other. What a comfort it is,

to be free to \_say\_ so!

XXXV. Prejudice Against Color.

It was a relief to my mind to see preparations for leaving the city. We

went to Albany in the steamboat Knickerbocker. When the gong sounded for

tea, Mrs. Bruce said, "Linda, it is late, and you and baby had better come

to the table with me." I replied, "I know it is time baby had her supper,

but I had rather not go with you, if you please. I am afraid of being

insulted." "O no, not if you are with \_me\_," she said. I saw several white

nurses go with their ladies, and I ventured to do the same. We were at the

extreme end of the table. I was no sooner seated, than a gruff voice said,

"Get up! You know you are not allowed to sit here." I looked up, and, to my

astonishment and indignation, saw that the speaker was a colored man. If

his office required him to enforce the by-laws of the boat, he might, at

least, have done it politely. I replied, "I shall not get up, unless the

captain comes and takes me up." No cup of tea was offered me, but Mrs.

Bruce handed me hers and called for another. I looked to see whether the

other nurses were treated in a similar manner. They were all properly

waited on.

Next morning, when we stopped at Troy for breakfast, every body was making

a rush for the table. Mrs. Bruce said, "Take my arm, Linda, and we'll go in

together." The landlord heard her, and said, "Madam, will you allow your

nurse and baby to take breakfast with my family?" I knew this was to be

attributed to my complexion; but he spoke courteously, and therefore I did

not mind it.

At Saratoga we found the United States Hotel crowded, and Mr. Bruce took

one of the cottages belonging to the hotel. I had thought, with gladness,

of going to the quiet of the country, where I should meet few people, but

here I found myself in the midst of a swarm of Southerners. I looked round

me with fear and trembling, dreading to see some one who would recognize

me. I was rejoiced to find that we were to stay but a short time.

We soon returned to New York, to make arrangements for spending the

remainder of the summer at Rockaway. While the laundress was putting the

clothes in order, I took an opportunity to go over to Brooklyn to see

Ellen. I met her going to a grocery store, and the first words she said,

were, "O, mother, don't go to Mrs. Hobbs's. Her brother, Mr. Thorne, has

come from the south, and may be he'll tell where you are." I accepted the

warning. I told her I was going away with Mrs. Bruce the next day, and

would try to see her when I came back.

Being in servitude to the Anglo-Saxon race, I was not put into a "Jim Crow

car," on our way to Rockaway, neither was I invited to ride through the

streets on the top of trunks in a truck; but every where I found the same

manifestations of that cruel prejudice, which so discourages the feelings,

and represses the energies of the colored people. We reached Rockaway

before dark, and put up at the Pavilion--a large hotel, beautifully

situated by the sea-side--a great resort of the fashionable world. Thirty

or forty nurses were there, of a great variety of nations. Some of the

ladies had colored waiting-maids and coachmen, but I was the only nurse

tinged with the blood of Africa. When the tea bell rang, I took little Mary

and followed the other nurses. Supper was served in a long hall. A young

man, who had the ordering of things, took the circuit of the table two or

three times, and finally pointed me to a seat at the lower end of it. As

there was but one chair, I sat down and took the child in my lap. Whereupon

the young man came to me and said, in the blandest manner possible, "Will

you please to seat the little girl in the chair, and stand behind it and

feed her? After they have done, you will be shown to the kitchen, where you

will have a good supper."

This was the climax! I found it hard to preserve my self-control, when I

looked round, and saw women who were nurses, as I was, and only one shade

lighter in complexion, eyeing me with a defiant look, as if my presence

were a contamination. However, I said nothing. I quietly took the child in

my arms, went to our room, and refused to go to the table again. Mr. Bruce

ordered meals to be sent to the room for little Mary and I. This answered

for a few days; but the waiters of the establishment were white, and they

soon began to complain, saying they were not hired to wait on negroes. The

landlord requested Mr. Bruce to send me down to my meals, because his

servants rebelled against bringing them up, and the colored servants of

other boarders were dissatisfied because all were not treated alike.

My answer was that the colored servants ought to be dissatisfied with

\_themselves\_, for not having too much self-respect to submit to such

treatment; that there was no difference in the price of board for colored

and white servants, and there was no justification for difference of

treatment. I staid a month after this, and finding I was resolved to stand

up for my rights, they concluded to treat me well. Let every colored man

and woman do this, and eventually we shall cease to be trampled under foot

by our oppressors.

XXXVI. The Hairbreadth Escape.

After we returned to New York, I took the earliest opportunity to go and

see Ellen. I asked to have her called down stairs; for I supposed Mrs.

Hobbs's southern brother might still be there, and I was desirous to avoid

seeing him, if possible. But Mrs. Hobbs came to the kitchen, and insisted

on my going up stairs. "My brother wants to see you," said she, "and he is

sorry you seem to shun him. He knows you are living in New York. He told me

to say to you that he owes thanks to good old aunt Martha for too many

little acts of kindness for him to be base enough to betray her

grandchild."

This Mr. Thorne had become poor and reckless long before he left the south,

and such persons had much rather go to one of the faithful old slaves to

borrow a dollar, or get a good dinner, than to go to one whom they consider

an equal. It was such acts of kindness as these for which he professed to

feel grateful to my grandmother. I wished he had kept at a distance, but as

he was here, and knew where I was, I concluded there was nothing to be

gained by trying to avoid him; on the contrary, it might be the means of

exciting his ill will. I followed his sister up stairs. He met me in a very

friendly manner, congratulated me on my escape from slavery, and hoped I

had a good place, where I felt happy.

I continued to visit Ellen as often as I could. She, good thoughtful child,

never forgot my hazardous situation, but always kept a vigilant lookout for

my safety. She never made any complaint about her own inconveniences and

troubles; but a mother's observing eye easily perceived that she was not

happy. On the occasion of one of my visits I found her unusually serious.

When I asked her what was the matter, she said nothing was the matter. But

I insisted upon knowing what made her look so very grave. Finally, I

ascertained that she felt troubled about the dissipation that was

continually going on in the house. She was sent to the store very often for

rum and brandy, and she felt ashamed to ask for it so often; and Mr. Hobbs

and Mr. Thorne drank a great deal, and their hands trembled so that they

had to call her to pour out the liquor for them. "But for all that," said

she, "Mr. Hobbs is good to me, and I can't help liking him. I feel sorry

for him." I tried to comfort her, by telling her that I had laid up a

hundred dollars, and that before long I hoped to be able to give her and

Benjamin a home, and send them to school. She was always desirous not to

add to my troubles more than she could help, and I did not discover till

years afterwards that Mr. Thorne's intemperance was not the only annoyance

she suffered from him. Though he professed too much gratitude to my

grandmother to injure any of her descendants, he had poured vile language

into the ears of her innocent great-grandchild.

I usually went to Brooklyn to spend Sunday afternoon. One Sunday, I found

Ellen anxiously waiting for me near the house. "O, mother," said she, "I've

been waiting for you this long time. I'm afraid Mr. Thorne has written to

tell Dr. Flint where you are. Make haste and come in. Mrs. Hobbs will tell

you all about it!"

The story was soon told. While the children were playing in the grape-vine

arbor, the day before, Mr. Thorne came out with a letter in his hand, which

he tore up and scattered about. Ellen was sweeping the yard at the time,

and having her mind full of suspicions of him, she picked up the pieces and

carried them to the children, saying, "I wonder who Mr. Thorne has been

writing to."

"I'm sure I don't know, and don't care," replied the oldest of the

children; "and I don't see how it concerns you."

"But it does concern me," replied Ellen; "for I'm afraid he's been

writing to the south about my mother."

They laughed at her, and called her a silly thing, but good-naturedly put

the fragments of writing together, in order to read them to her. They were

no sooner arranged, than the little girl exclaimed, "I declare, Ellen, I

believe you are right."

The contents of Mr. Thorne's letter, as nearly as I can remember, were as

follows: "I have seen your slave, Linda, and conversed with her. She can be

taken very easily, if you manage prudently. There are enough of us here to

swear to her identity as your property. I am a patriot, a lover of my

country, and I do this as an act of justice to the laws." He concluded by

informing the doctor of the street and number where I lived. The children

carried the pieces to Mrs. Hobbs, who immediately went to her brother's

room for an explanation. He was not to be found. The servants said they saw

him go out with a letter in his hand, and they supposed he had gone to the

post office. The natural inference was, that he had sent to Dr. Flint a

copy of those fragments. When he returned, his sister accused him of it,

and he did not deny the charge. He went immediately to his room, and the

next morning he was missing. He had gone over to New York, before any of

the family were astir.

It was evident that I had no time to lose; and I hastened back to the city

with a heavy heart. Again I was to be torn from a comfortable home, and all

my plans for the welfare of my children were to be frustrated by that demon

Slavery! I now regretted that I never told Mrs. Bruce my story. I had not

concealed it merely on account of being a fugitive; that would have made

her anxious, but it would have excited sympathy in her kind heart. I valued

her good opinion, and I was afraid of losing it, if I told her all the

particulars of my sad story. But now I felt that it was necessary for her

to know how I was situated. I had once left her abruptly, without

explaining the reason, and it would not be proper to do it again. I went

home resolved to tell her in the morning. But the sadness of my face

attracted her attention, and, in answer to her kind inquiries, I poured out

my full heart to her, before bed time. She listened with true womanly

sympathy, and told me she would do all she could to protect me. How my

heart blessed her!

Early the next morning, Judge Vanderpool and Lawyer Hopper were consulted.

They said I had better leave the city at once, as the risk would be great

if the case came to trial. Mrs. Bruce took me in a carriage to the house of

one of her friends, where she assured me I should be safe until my brother

could arrive, which would be in a few days. In the interval my thoughts

were much occupied with Ellen. She was mine by birth, and she was also mine

by Southern law, since my grandmother held the bill of sale that made her

so. I did not feel that she was safe unless I had her with me. Mrs. Hobbs,

who felt badly about her brother's treachery, yielded to my entreaties, on

condition that she should return in ten days. I avoided making any promise.

She came to me clad in very thin garments, all outgrown, and with a school

satchel on her arm, containing a few articles. It was late in October, and

I knew the child must suffer; and not daring to go out in the streets to

purchase any thing, I took off my own flannel skirt and converted it into

one for her. Kind Mrs. Bruce came to bid me good by, and when she saw that

I had taken off my clothing for my child, the tears came to her eyes. She

said, "Wait for me, Linda," and went out. She soon returned with a nice

warm shawl and hood for Ellen. Truly, of such souls as hers are the kingdom

of heaven.

My brother reached New York on Wednesday. Lawyer Hopper advised us to go to

Boston by the Stonington route, as there was less Southern travel in that

direction. Mrs. Bruce directed her servants to tell all inquirers that I

formerly lived there, but had gone from the city. We reached the steamboat

Rhode Island in safety. That boat employed colored hands, but I knew that

colored passengers were not admitted to the cabin. I was very desirous for

the seclusion of the cabin, not only on account of exposure to the night

air, but also to avoid observation. Lawyer Hopper was waiting on board for

us. He spoke to the stewardess, and asked, as a particular favor, that she

would treat us well. He said to me, "Go and speak to the captain yourself

by and by. Take your little girl with you, and I am sure that he will not

let her sleep on deck." With these kind words and a shake of the hand he

departed.

The boat was soon on her way, bearing me rapidly from the friendly home

where I had hoped to find security and rest. My brother had left me to

purchase the tickets, thinking that I might have better success than he

would. When the stewardess came to me, I paid what she asked, and she gave

me three tickets with clipped corners. In the most unsophisticated manner I

said, "You have made a mistake; I asked you for cabin tickets. I cannot

possibly consent to sleep on deck with my little daughter." She assured me

there was no mistake. She said on some of the routes colored people were

allowed to sleep in the cabin, but not on this route, which was much

travelled by the wealthy. I asked her to show me to the captain's office,

and she said she would after tea. When the time came, I took Ellen by the

hand and went to the captain, politely requesting him to change our

tickets, as we should be very uncomfortable on deck. He said it was

contrary to their custom, but he would see that we had berths below; he

would also try to obtain comfortable seats for us in the cars; of that he

was not certain, but he would speak to the conductor about it, when the

boat arrived. I thanked him, and returned to the ladies' cabin. He came

afterwards and told me that the conductor of the cars was on board, that he

had spoken to him, and he had promised to take care of us. I was very much

surprised at receiving so much kindness. I don't know whether the pleasing

face of my little girl had won his heart, or whether the stewardess

inferred from Lawyer Hopper's manner that I was a fugitive, and had pleaded

with him in my behalf.

When the boat arrived at Stonington, the conductor kept his promise, and

showed us to seats in the first car, nearest the engine. He asked us to

take seats next the door, but as he passed through, we ventured to move on

toward the other end of the car. No incivility was offered us, and we

reached Boston in safety.

The day after my arrival was one of the happiest of my life. I felt as if I

was beyond the reach of the bloodhounds; and, for the first time during

many years, I had both my children together with me. They greatly enjoyed

their reunion, and laughed and chatted merrily. I watched them with a

swelling heart. Their every motion delighted me.

I could not feel safe in New York, and I accepted the offer of a friend,

that we should share expenses and keep house together. I represented to

Mrs. Hobbs that Ellen must have some schooling, and must remain with me for

that purpose. She felt ashamed of being unable to read or spell at her age,

so instead of sending her to school with Benny, I instructed her myself

till she was fitted to enter an intermediate school. The winter passed

pleasantly, while I was busy with my needle, and my children with their

books.

XXXVII. A Visit To England

In the spring, sad news came to me. Mrs. Bruce was dead. Never again, in

this world, should I see her gentle face, or hear her sympathizing voice. I

had lost an excellent friend, and little Mary had lost a tender mother. Mr.

Bruce wished the child to visit some of her mother's relatives in England,

and he was desirous that I should take charge of her. The little motherless

one was accustomed to me, and attached to me, and I thought she would be

happier in my care than in that of a stranger. I could also earn more in

this way than I could by my needle. So I put Benny to a trade, and left

Ellen to remain in the house with my friend and go to school.

We sailed from New York, and arrived in Liverpool after a pleasant voyage

of twelve days. We proceeded directly to London, and took lodgings at the

Adelaide Hotel. The supper seemed to me less luxurious than those I had

seen in American hotels; but my situation was indescribably more pleasant.

For the first time in my life I was in a place where I was treated

according to my deportment, without reference to my complexion. I felt as

if a great millstone had been lifted from my breast. Ensconced in a

pleasant room, with my dear little charge, I laid my head on my pillow, for

the first time, with the delightful consciousness of pure, unadulterated

freedom.

As I had constant care of the child, I had little opportunity to see the

wonders of that great city; but I watched the tide of life that flowed

through the streets, and found it a strange contrast to the stagnation in

our Southern towns. Mr. Bruce took his little daughter to spend some days

with friends in Oxford Crescent, and of course it was necessary for me to

accompany her. I had heard much of the systematic method of English

education, and I was very desirous that my dear Mary should steer straight

in the midst of so much propriety. I closely observed her little playmates

and their nurses, being ready to take any lessons in the science of good

management. The children were more rosy than American children, but I did

not see that they differed materially in other respects. They were like all

children--sometimes docile and sometimes wayward.

We next went to Steventon, in Berkshire. It was a small town, said to be

the poorest in the county. I saw men working in the fields for six

shillings, and seven shillings, a week, and women for sixpence, and

sevenpence, a day, out of which they boarded themselves. Of course they

lived in the most primitive manner; it could not be otherwise, where a

woman's wages for an entire day were not sufficient to buy a pound of meat.

They paid very low rents, and their clothes were made of the cheapest

fabrics, though much better than could have been procured in the United

States for the same money. I had heard much about the oppression of the

poor in Europe. The people I saw around me were, many of them, among the

poorest poor. But when I visited them in their little thatched cottages, I

felt that the condition of even the meanest and most ignorant among them

was vastly superior to the condition of the most favored slaves in America.

They labored hard; but they were not ordered out to toil while the stars

were in the sky, and driven and slashed by an overseer, through heat and

cold, till the stars shone out again. Their homes were very humble; but

they were protected by law. No insolent patrols could come, in the dead of

night, and flog them at their pleasure. The father, when he closed his

cottage door, felt safe with his family around him. No master or overseer

could come and take from him his wife, or his daughter. They must separate

to earn their living; but the parents knew where their children were going,

and could communicate with them by letters. The relations of husband and

wife, parent and child, were too sacred for the richest noble in the land

to violate with impunity. Much was being done to enlighten these poor

people. Schools were established among them, and benevolent societies were

active in efforts to ameliorate their condition. There was no law

forbidding them to learn to read and write; and if they helped each other

in spelling out the Bible, they were in no danger of thirty-nine lashes, as

was the case with myself and poor, pious, old uncle Fred. I repeat that the

most ignorant and the most destitute of these peasants was a thousand fold

better off than the most pampered American slave.

I do not deny that the poor are oppressed in Europe. I am not disposed to

paint their condition so rose-colored as the Hon. Miss Murray paints the

condition of the slaves in the United States. A small portion of \_my\_

experience would enable her to read her own pages with anointed eyes. If

she were to lay aside her title, and, instead of visiting among the

fashionable, become domesticated, as a poor governess, on some plantation

in Louisiana or Alabama, she would see and hear things that would make her

tell quite a different story.

My visit to England is a memorable event in my life, from the fact of my

having there received strong religious impressions. The contemptuous manner

in which the communion had been administered to colored people, in my

native place; the church membership of Dr. Flint, and others like him; and

the buying and selling of slaves, by professed ministers of the gospel, had

given me a prejudice against the Episcopal church. The whole service seemed

to me a mockery and a sham. But my home in Steventon was in the family of a

clergyman, who was a true disciple of Jesus. The beauty of his daily life

inspired me with faith in the genuineness of Christian professions. Grace

entered my heart, and I knelt at the communion table, I trust, in true

humility of soul.

I remained abroad ten months, which was much longer than I had anticipated.

During all that time, I never saw the slightest symptom of prejudice

against color. Indeed, I entirely forgot it, till the time came for us to

return to America.

XXXVIII. Renewed Invitations To Go South.

We had a tedious winter passage, and from the distance spectres seemed to

rise up on the shores of the United States. It is a sad feeling to be

afraid of one's native country. We arrived in New York safely, and I

hastened to Boston to look after my children. I found Ellen well, and

improving at her school; but Benny was not there to welcome me. He had been

left at a good place to learn a trade, and for several months every thing

worked well. He was liked by the master, and was a favorite with his

fellow-apprentices; but one day they accidentally discovered a fact they

had never before suspected--that he was colored! This at once transformed

him into a different being. Some of the apprentices were Americans, others

American-born Irish; and it was offensive to their dignity to have a

"nigger" among them, after they had been told that he \_was\_ a "nigger."

They began by treating him with silent scorn, and finding that he returned

the same, they resorted to insults and abuse. He was too spirited a boy to

stand that, and he went off. Being desirous to do something to support

himself, and having no one to advise him, he shipped for a whaling voyage.

When I received these tidings I shed many tears, and bitterly reproached

myself for having left him so long. But I had done it for the best, and now

all I could do was to pray to the heavenly Father to guide and protect him.

Not long after my return, I received the following letter from Miss Emily

Flint, now Mrs. Dodge:--

In this you will recognize the hand of your friend and mistress.

Having heard that you had gone with a family to Europe, I have

waited to hear of your return to write to you. I should have

answered the letter you wrote to me long since, but as I could

not then act independently of my father, I knew there could be

nothing done satisfactory to you. There were persons here who

were willing to buy you and run the risk of getting you. To this

I would not consent. I have always been attached to you, and

would not like to see you the slave of another, or have unkind

treatment. I am married now, and can protect you. My husband

expects to move to Virginia this spring, where we think of

settling. I am very anxious that you should come and live with

me. If you are not willing to come, you may purchase yourself;

but I should prefer having you live with me. If you come, you

may, if you like, spend a month with your grandmother and

friends, then come to me in Norfolk, Virginia. Think this over,

and write as soon as possible, and let me know the conclusion.

Hoping that your children are well, I remain your friend and

mistress.

Of course I did not write to return thanks for this cordial invitation. I

felt insulted to be thought stupid enough to be caught by such professions.

"Come up into my parlor," said the spider to the fly;

"Tis the prettiest little parlor that ever you did spy."

It was plain that Dr. Flint's family were apprised of my movements, since

they knew of my voyage to Europe. I expected to have further trouble from

them; but having eluded them thus far, I hoped to be as successful in

future. The money I had earned, I was desirous to devote to the education

of my children, and to secure a home for them. It seemed not only hard, but

unjust, to pay for myself. I could not possibly regard myself as a piece of

property. Moreover, I had worked many years without wages, and during that

time had been obliged to depend on my grandmother for many comforts in food

and clothing. My children certainly belonged to me; but though Dr. Flint

had incurred no expense for their support, he had received a large sum of

money for them. I knew the law would decide that I was his property, and

would probably still give his daughter a claim to my children; but I

regarded such laws as the regulations of robbers, who had no rights that I

was bound to respect.

The Fugitive Slave Law had not then passed. The judges of Massachusetts had

not then stooped under chains to enter her courts of justice, so called. I

knew my old master was rather skittish of Massachusetts. I relied on her

love of freedom, and felt safe on her soil. I am now aware that I honored

the old Commonwealth beyond her deserts.

XXXIX. The Confession.

For two years my daughter and I supported ourselves comfortably in Boston.

At the end of that time, my brother William offered to send Ellen to a

boarding school. It required a great effort for me to consent to part with

her, for I had few near ties, and it was her presence that made my two

little rooms seem home-like. But my judgment prevailed over my selfish

feelings. I made preparations for her departure. During the two years we

had lived together I had often resolved to tell her something about her

father; but I had never been able to muster sufficient courage. I had a

shrinking dread of diminishing my child's love. I knew she must have

curiosity on the subject, but she had never asked a question. She was

always very careful not to say any thing to remind me of my troubles. Now

that she was going from me, I thought if I should die before she returned,

she might hear my story from some one who did not understand the palliating

circumstances; and that if she were entirely ignorant on the subject, her

sensitive nature might receive a rude shock.

When we retired for the night, she said, "Mother, it is very hard to leave

you alone. I am almost sorry I am going, though I do want to improve

myself. But you will write to me often; won't you, mother?"

I did not throw my arms round her. I did not answer her. But in a calm,

solemn way, for it cost me great effort, I said, "Listen to me, Ellen; I

have something to tell you!" I recounted my early sufferings in slavery,

and told her how nearly they had crushed me. I began to tell her how they

had driven me into a great sin, when she clasped me in her arms, and

exclaimed, "O, don't, mother! Please don't tell me any more."

I said, "But, my child, I want you to know about your father."

"I know all about it, mother," she replied; "I am nothing to my father, and

he is nothing to me. All my love is for you. I was with him five months in

Washington, and he never cared for me. He never spoke to me as he did to

his little Fanny. I knew all the time he was my father, for Fanny's nurse

told me so, but she said I must never tell any body, and I never did. I

used to wish he would take me in his arms and kiss me, as he did Fanny; or

that he would sometimes smile at me, as he did at her. I thought if he was

my own father, he ought to love me. I was a little girl then, and didn't

know any better. But now I never think any thing about my father. All my

love is for you." She hugged me closer as she spoke, and I thanked God that

the knowledge I had so much dreaded to impart had not diminished the

affection of my child. I had not the slightest idea she knew that portion

of my history. If I had, I should have spoken to her long before; for my

pent-up feelings had often longed to pour themselves out to some one I

could trust. But I loved the dear girl better for the delicacy she had

manifested towards her unfortunate mother.

The next morning, she and her uncle started on their journey to the village

in New York, where she was to be placed at school. It seemed as if all the

sunshine had gone away. My little room was dreadfully lonely. I was

thankful when a message came from a lady, accustomed to employ me,

requesting me to come and sew in her family for several weeks. On my

return, I found a letter from brother William. He thought of opening an

anti-slavery reading room in Rochester, and combining with it the sale of

some books and stationery; and he wanted me to unite with him. We tried it,

but it was not successful. We found warm anti-slavery friends there, but

the feeling was not general enough to support such an establishment. I

passed nearly a year in the family of Isaac and Amy Post, practical

believers in the Christian doctrine of human brotherhood. They measure a

man's worth by his character, not by his complexion. The memory of those

beloved and honored friends will remain with me to my latest hour.

XL. The Fugitive Slave Law.

My brother, being disappointed in his project, concluded to go to

California; and it was agreed that Benjamin should go with him. Ellen liked

her school, and was a great favorite there. They did not know her history,

and she did not tell it, because she had no desire to make capital out of

their sympathy. But when it was accidentally discovered that her mother was

a fugitive slave, every method was used to increase her advantages and

diminish her expenses.

I was alone again. It was necessary for me to be earning money, and I

preferred that it should be among those who knew me. On my return from

Rochester, I called at the house of Mr. Bruce, to see Mary, the darling

little babe that had thawed my heart, when it was freezing into a cheerless

distrust of all my fellow-beings. She was growing a tall girl now, but I

loved her always. Mr. Bruce had married again, and it was proposed that I

should become nurse to a new infant. I had but one hesitation, and that was

feeling of insecurity in New York, now greatly increased by the passage of

the Fugitive Slave Law. However, I resolved to try the experiment. I was

again fortunate in my employer. The new Mrs. Bruce was an American, brought

up under aristocratic influences, and still living in the midst of them;

but if she had any prejudice against color, I was never made aware of it;

and as for the system of slavery, she had a most hearty dislike of it. No

sophistry of Southerners could blind her to its enormity. She was a person

of excellent principles and a noble heart. To me, from that hour to the

present, she has been a true and sympathizing friend. Blessings be with her

and hers!

About the time that I reentered the Bruce family, an event occurred of

disastrous import to the colored people. The slave Hamlin, the first

fugitive that came under the new law, was given up by the bloodhounds of

the north to the bloodhounds of the south. It was the beginning of a reign

of terror to the colored population. The great city rushed on in its whirl

of excitement, taking no note of the "short and simple annals of the poor."

But while fashionables were listening to the thrilling voice of Jenny Lind

in Metropolitan Hall, the thrilling voices of poor hunted colored people

went up, in an agony of supplication, to the Lord, from Zion's church. Many

families, who had lived in the city for twenty years, fled from it now.

Many a poor washerwoman, who, by hard labor, had made herself a comfortable

home, was obliged to sacrifice her furniture, bid a hurried farewell to

friends, and seek her fortune among strangers in Canada. Many a wife

discovered a secret she had never known before--that her husband was a

fugitive, and must leave her to insure his own safety. Worse still, many a

husband discovered that his wife had fled from slavery years ago, and as

"the child follows the condition of its mother," the children of his love

were liable to be seized and carried into slavery. Every where, in those

humble homes, there was consternation and anguish. But what cared the

legislators of the "dominant race" for the blood they were crushing out of

trampled hearts?

When my brother William spent his last evening with me, before he went to

California, we talked nearly all the time of the distress brought on our

oppressed people by the passage of this iniquitous law; and never had I

seen him manifest such bitterness of spirit, such stern hostility to our

oppressors. He was himself free from the operation of the law; for he did

not run from any Slaveholding State, being brought into the Free States by

his master. But I was subject to it; and so were hundreds of intelligent

and industrious people all around us. I seldom ventured into the streets;

and when it was necessary to do an errand for Mrs. Bruce, or any of the

family, I went as much as possible through back streets and by-ways. What a

disgrace to a city calling itself free, that inhabitants, guiltless of

offence, and seeking to perform their duties conscientiously, should be

condemned to live in such incessant fear, and have nowhere to turn for

protection! This state of things, of course, gave rise to many impromptu

vigilance committees. Every colored person, and every friend of their

persecuted race, kept their eyes wide open. Every evening I examined the

newspapers carefully, to see what Southerners had put up at the hotels. I

did this for my own sake, thinking my young mistress and her husband might

be among the list; I wished also to give information to others, if

necessary; for if many were "running to and fro," I resolved that

"knowledge should be increased."

This brings up one of my Southern reminiscences, which I will here briefly

relate. I was somewhat acquainted with a slave named Luke, who belonged to

a wealthy man in our vicinity. His master died, leaving a son and daughter

heirs to his large fortune. In the division of the slaves, Luke was

included in the son's portion. This young man became a prey to the vices he

went to the north, to complete his education, he carried his vices with

him. He was brought home, deprived of the use of his limbs, by excessive

dissipation. Luke was appointed to wait upon his bed-ridden master, whose

despotic habits were greatly increased by exasperation at his own

helplessness. He kept a cowhide beside him, and, for the most trivial

occurrence, he would order his attendant to bare his back, and kneel beside

the couch, while he whipped him till his strength was exhausted. Some days

he was not allowed to wear any thing but his shirt, in order to be in

readiness to be flogged. A day seldom passed without his receiving more or

less blows. If the slightest resistance was offered, the town constable was

sent for to execute the punishment, and Luke learned from experience how

much more the constable's strong arm was to be dreaded than the

comparatively feeble one of his master. The arm of his tyrant grew weaker,

and was finally palsied; and then the constable's services were in constant

requisition. The fact that he was entirely dependent on Luke's care, and

was obliged to be tended like an infant, instead of inspiring any gratitude

or compassion towards his poor slave, seemed only to increase his

irritability and cruelty. As he lay there on his bed, a mere degraded wreck

of manhood, he took into his head the strangest freaks of despotism; and if

Luke hesitated to submit to his orders, the constable was immediately sent

for. Some of these freaks were of a nature too filthy to be repeated. When

I fled from the house of bondage, I left poor Luke still chained to the

bedside of this cruel and disgusting wretch.

One day, when I had been requested to do an errand for Mrs. Bruce, I was

hurrying through back streets, as usual, when I saw a young man

approaching, whose face was familiar to me. As he came nearer, I recognized

Luke. I always rejoiced to see or hear of any one who had escaped from the

black pit; I was peculiarly glad to see him on Northern soil, though I no

longer called it \_free\_ soil. I well remembered what a desolate feeling it

was to be alone among strangers, and I went up to him and greeted him

cordially. At first, he did not know me; but when I mentioned my name, he

remembered all about me. I told him of the Fugitive Slave Law, and asked

him if he did not know that New York was a city of kidnappers.

He replied, "De risk ain't so bad for me, as 'tis fur you. 'Cause I runned

away from de speculator, and you runned away from de massa. Dem speculators

vont spen dar money to come here fur a runaway, if dey ain't sartin sure to

put dar hans right on him. An I tell you I's tuk good car 'bout dat. I had

too hard times down dar, to let 'em ketch dis nigger."

He then told me of the advice he had received, and the plans he had laid. I

asked if he had money enough to take him to Canada. "'Pend upon it, I hab,"

he replied. "I tuk car fur dat. I'd bin workin all my days fur dem cussed

whites, an got no pay but kicks and cuffs. So I tought dis nigger had a

right to money nuff to bring him to de Free States. Massa Henry he lib till

ebery body vish him dead; an ven he did die, I knowed de debbil would hab

him, an vouldn't vant him to bring his money 'long too. So I tuk some of

his bills, and put 'em in de pocket of his ole trousers. An ven he was

buried, dis nigger ask fur dem ole trousers, an dey gub 'em to me." With a

low, chuckling laugh, he added, "You see I didn't \_steal\_ it; dey \_gub\_ it

to me. I tell you, I had mighty hard time to keep de speculator from findin

it; but he didn't git it."

This is a fair specimen of how the moral sense is educated by slavery. When

a man has his wages stolen from him, year after year, and the laws sanction

and enforce the theft, how can he be expected to have more regard to

honesty than has the man who robs him? I have become somewhat enlightened,

but I confess that I agree with poor, ignorant, much-abused Luke, in

thinking he had a \_right\_ to that money, as a portion of his unpaid wages.

He went to Canada forthwith, and I have not since heard from him.

All that winter I lived in a state of anxiety. When I took the children out

to breathe the air, I closely observed the countenances of all I met. I

dreaded the approach of summer, when snakes and slaveholders make their

appearance. I was, in fact, a slave in New York, as subject to slave laws

as I had been in a Slave State. Strange incongruity in a State called free!

Spring returned, and I received warning from the south that Dr. Flint knew

of my return to my old place, and was making preparations to have me

caught. I learned afterwards that my dress, and that of Mrs. Bruce's

children, had been described to him by some of the Northern tools, which

slaveholders employ for their base purposes, and then indulge in sneers at

their cupidity and mean servility.

I immediately informed Mrs. Bruce of my danger, and she took prompt

measures for my safety. My place as nurse could not be supplied

immediately, and this generous, sympathizing lady proposed that I should

carry her baby away. It was a comfort to me to have the child with me; for

the heart is reluctant to be torn away from every object it loves. But how

few mothers would have consented to have one of their own babes become a

fugitive, for the sake of a poor, hunted nurse, on whom the legislators of

the country had let loose the bloodhounds! When I spoke of the sacrifice

she was making, in depriving herself of her dear baby, she replied, "It is

better for you to have baby with you, Linda; for if they get on your track,

they will be obliged to bring the child to me; and then, if there is a

possibility of saving you, you shall be saved."

This lady had a very wealthy relative, a benevolent gentleman in many

respects, but aristocratic and pro-slavery. He remonstrated with her for

harboring a fugitive slave; told her she was violating the laws of her

country; and asked her if she was aware of the penalty. She replied, "I am

very well aware of it. It is imprisonment and one thousand dollars fine.

Shame on my country that it \_is\_ so! I am ready to incur the penalty. I

will go to the state's prison, rather than have any poor victim torn from

\_my\_ house, to be carried back to slavery."

The noble heart! The brave heart! The tears are in my eyes while I write of

her. May the God of the helpless reward her for her sympathy with my

persecuted people!

I was sent into New England, where I was sheltered by the wife of a

senator, whom I shall always hold in grateful remembrance. This honorable

gentleman would not have voted for the Fugitive Slave Law, as did the

senator in "Uncle Tom's Cabin;" on the contrary, he was strongly opposed to

it; but he was enough under its influence to be afraid of having me remain

in his house many hours. So I was sent into the country, where I remained a

month with the baby. When it was supposed that Dr. Flint's emissaries had

lost track of me, and given up the pursuit for the present, I returned to

New York.

XLI. Free At Last.

Mrs. Bruce, and every member of her family, were exceedingly kind to me. I

was thankful for the blessings of my lot, yet I could not always wear a

cheerful countenance. I was doing harm to no one; on the contrary, I was

doing all the good I could in my small way; yet I could never go out to

breathe God's free air without trepidation at my heart. This seemed hard;

and I could not think it was a right state of things in any civilized

country.

From time to time I received news from my good old grandmother. She could

not write; but she employed others to write for her. The following is an

extract from one of her last letters:--

Dear Daughter: I cannot hope to see you again on earth; but I

pray to God to unite us above, where pain will no more rack this

feeble body of mine; where sorrow and parting from my children

will be no more. God has promised these things if we are faithful

unto the end. My age and feeble health deprive me of going to

church now; but God is with me here at home. Thank your brother

for his kindness. Give much love to him, and tell him to remember

the Creator in the days of his youth, and strive to meet me in

the Father's kingdom. Love to Ellen and Benjamin. Don't neglect

him. Tell him for me, to be a good boy. Strive, my child, to

train them for God's children. May he protect and provide for

you, is the prayer of your loving old mother.

These letters both cheered and saddened me. I was always glad to have

tidings from the kind, faithful old friend of my unhappy youth; but her

messages of love made my heart yearn to see her before she died, and I

mourned over the fact that it was impossible. Some months after I returned

from my flight to New England, I received a letter from her, in which she

wrote, "Dr. Flint is dead. He has left a distressed family. Poor old man! I

hope he made his peace with God."

I remembered how he had defrauded my grandmother of the hard earnings she

had loaned; how he had tried to cheat her out of the freedom her mistress

had promised her, and how he had persecuted her children; and I thought to

myself that she was a better Christian than I was, if she could entirely

forgive him. I cannot say, with truth, that the news of my old master's

death softened my feelings towards him. There are wrongs which even the

grave does not bury. The man was odious to me while he lived, and his

memory is odious now.

His departure from this world did not diminish my danger. He had threatened

my grandmother that his heirs should hold me in slavery after he was gone;

that I never should be free so long as a child of his survived. As for Mrs.

Flint, I had seen her in deeper afflictions than I supposed the loss of her

husband would be, for she had buried several children; yet I never saw any

signs of softening in her heart. The doctor had died in embarrassed

circumstances, and had little to will to his heirs, except such property as

he was unable to grasp. I was well aware what I had to expect from the

family of Flints; and my fears were confirmed by a letter from the south,

warning me to be on my guard, because Mrs. Flint openly declared that her

daughter could not afford to lose so valuable a slave as I was.

I kept close watch of the newspapers for arrivals; but one Saturday night,

being much occupied, I forgot to examine the Evening Express as usual. I

went down into the parlor for it, early in the morning, and found the boy

about to kindle a fire with it. I took it from him and examined the list of

arrivals. Reader, if you have never been a slave, you cannot imagine the

acute sensation of suffering at my heart, when I read the names of Mr. and

Mrs. Dodge, at a hotel in Courtland Street. It was a third-rate hotel, and

that circumstance convinced me of the truth of what I had heard, that they

were short of funds and had need of my value, as \_they\_ valued me; and that

was by dollars and cents. I hastened with the paper to Mrs. Bruce. Her

heart and hand were always open to every one in distress, and she always

warmly sympathized with mine. It was impossible to tell how near the enemy

was. He might have passed and repassed the house while we were sleeping. He

might at that moment be waiting to pounce upon me if I ventured out of

doors. I had never seen the husband of my young mistress, and therefore I

could not distinguish him from any other stranger. A carriage was hastily

ordered; and, closely veiled, I followed Mrs. Bruce, taking the baby again

with me into exile. After various turnings and crossings, and returnings,

the carriage stopped at the house of one of Mrs. Bruce's friends, where I

was kindly received. Mrs. Bruce returned immediately, to instruct the

domestics what to say if any one came to inquire for me.

It was lucky for me that the evening paper was not burned up before I had a

chance to examine the list of arrivals. It was not long after Mrs. Bruce's

return to her house, before several people came to inquire for me. One

inquired for me, another asked for my daughter Ellen, and another said he

had a letter from my grandmother, which he was requested to deliver in

person.

They were told, "She \_has\_ lived here, but she has left."

"How long ago?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Do you know where she went?"

"I do not, sir." And the door was closed.

This Mr. Dodge, who claimed me as his property, was originally a Yankee

pedler in the south; then he became a merchant, and finally a slaveholder.

He managed to get introduced into what was called the first society, and

married Miss Emily Flint. A quarrel arose between him and her brother, and

the brother cowhided him. This led to a family feud, and he proposed to

remove to Virginia. Dr. Flint left him no property, and his own means had

become circumscribed, while a wife and children depended upon him for

support. Under these circumstances, it was very natural that he should make

an effort to put me into his pocket.

I had a colored friend, a man from my native place, in whom I had the most

implicit confidence. I sent for him, and told him that Mr. and Mrs. Dodge

had arrived in New York. I proposed that he should call upon them to make

inquiries about his friends at the south, with whom Dr. Flint's family were

well acquainted. He thought there was no impropriety in his doing so, and

he consented. He went to the hotel, and knocked at the door of Mr. Dodge's

room, which was opened by the gentleman himself, who gruffly inquired,

"What brought you here? How came you to know I was in the city?"

"Your arrival was published in the evening papers, sir; and I called to ask

Mrs. Dodge about my friends at home. I didn't suppose it would give any

offence."

"Where's that negro girl, that belongs to my wife?"

"What girl, sir?"

"You know well enough. I mean Linda, that ran away from Dr. Flint's

plantation, some years ago. I dare say you've seen her, and know where she

is."

"Yes, sir, I've seen her, and know where she is. She is out of your reach,

sir."

"Tell me where she is, or bring her to me, and I will give her a chance to

buy her freedom."

"I don't think it would be of any use, sir. I have heard her say she would

go to the ends of the earth, rather than pay any man or woman for her

freedom, because she thinks she has a right to it. Besides, she couldn't do

it, if she would, for she has spent her earnings to educate her children."

This made Mr. Dodge very angry, and some high words passed between them. My

friend was afraid to come where I was; but in the course of the day I

received a note from him. I supposed they had not come from the south, in

the winter, for a pleasure excursion; and now the nature of their business

was very plain.

Mrs. Bruce came to me and entreated me to leave the city the next morning.

She said her house was watched, and it was possible that some clew to me

might be obtained. I refused to take her advice. She pleaded with an

earnest tenderness, that ought to have moved me; but I was in a bitter,

disheartened mood. I was weary of flying from pillar to post. I had been

chased during half my life, and it seemed as if the chase was never to end.

There I sat, in that great city, guiltless of crime, yet not daring to

worship God in any of the churches. I heard the bells ringing for afternoon

service, and, with contemptuous sarcasm, I said, "Will the preachers take

for their text, 'Proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of prison

doors to them that are bound'? or will they preach from the text, 'Do unto

others as ye would they should do unto you'?" Oppressed Poles and

Hungarians could find a safe refuge in that city; John Mitchell was free to

proclaim in the City Hall his desire for "a plantation well stocked with

slaves;" but there I sat, an oppressed American, not daring to show my

face. God forgive the black and bitter thoughts I indulged on that Sabbath

day! The Scripture says, "Oppression makes even a wise man mad;" and I was

not wise.

I had been told that Mr. Dodge said his wife had never signed away her

right to my children, and if he could not get me, he would take them. This

it was, more than any thing else, that roused such a tempest in my soul.

Benjamin was with his uncle William in California, but my innocent young

daughter had come to spend a vacation with me. I thought of what I had

suffered in slavery at her age, and my heart was like a tiger's when a

hunter tries to seize her young.

Dear Mrs. Bruce! I seem to see the expression of her face, as she turned

away discouraged by my obstinate mood. Finding her expostulations

unavailing, she sent Ellen to entreat me. When ten o'clock in the evening

arrived and Ellen had not returned, this watchful and unwearied friend

became anxious. She came to us in a carriage, bringing a well-filled trunk

for my journey--trusting that by this time I would listen to reason. I

yielded to her, as I ought to have done before.

The next day, baby and I set out in a heavy snow storm, bound for New

England again. I received letters from the City of Iniquity, addressed to

me under an assumed name. In a few days one came from Mrs. Bruce, informing

me that my new master was still searching for me, and that she intended to

put an end to this persecution by buying my freedom. I felt grateful for

the kindness that prompted this offer, but the idea was not so pleasant to

me as might have been expected. The more my mind had become enlightened,

the more difficult it was for me to consider myself an article of property;

and to pay money to those who had so grievously oppressed me seemed like

taking from my sufferings the glory of triumph. I wrote to Mrs. Bruce,

thanking her, but saying that being sold from one owner to another seemed

too much like slavery; that such a great obligation could not be easily

cancelled; and that I preferred to go to my brother in California.

Without my knowledge, Mrs. Bruce employed a gentleman in New York to enter

into negotiations with Mr. Dodge. He proposed to pay three hundred dollars

down, if Mr. Dodge would sell me, and enter into obligations to relinquish

all claim to me or my children forever after. He who called himself my

master said he scorned so small an offer for such a valuable servant. The

gentleman replied, "You can do as you choose, sir. If you reject this offer

you will never get any thing; for the woman has friends who will convey her

and her children out of the country."

Mr. Dodge concluded that "half a loaf was better than no bread," and he

agreed to the proffered terms. By the next mail I received this brief

letter from Mrs. Bruce: "I am rejoiced to tell you that the money for your

freedom has been paid to Mr. Dodge. Come home to-morrow. I long to see you

and my sweet babe."

My brain reeled as I read these lines. A gentleman near me said, "It's

true; I have seen the bill of sale." "The bill of sale!" Those words struck

me like a blow. So I was \_sold\_ at last! A human being \_sold\_ in the free

city of New York! The bill of sale is on record, and future generations

will learn from it that women were articles of traffic in New York, late in

the nineteenth century of the Christian religion. It may hereafter prove a

useful document to antiquaries, who are seeking to measure the progress of

civilization in the United States. I well know the value of that bit of

paper; but much as I love freedom, I do not like to look upon it. I am

deeply grateful to the generous friend who procured it, but I despise the

miscreant who demanded payment for what never rightfully belonged to him or

his.

I had objected to having my freedom bought, yet I must confess that when it

was done I felt as if a heavy load had been lifted from my weary shoulders.

When I rode home in the cars I was no longer afraid to unveil my face and

look at people as they passed. I should have been glad to have met Daniel

Dodge himself; to have had him seen me and known me, that he might have

mourned over the untoward circumstances which compelled him to sell me for

three hundred dollars.

When I reached home, the arms of my benefactress were thrown round me, and

our tears mingled. As soon as she could speak, she said, "O Linda, I'm \_so\_

glad it's all over! You wrote to me as if you thought you were going to be

transferred from one owner to another. But I did not buy you for your

services. I should have done just the same, if you had been going to sail

for California to-morrow. I should, at least, have the satisfaction of

knowing that you left me a free woman."

My heart was exceedingly full. I remembered how my poor father had tried to

buy me, when I was a small child, and how he had been disappointed. I hoped

his spirit was rejoicing over me now. I remembered how my good old

grandmother had laid up her earnings to purchase me in later years, and how

often her plans had been frustrated. How that faithful, loving old heart

would leap for joy, if she could look on me and my children now that we

were free! My relatives had been foiled in all their efforts, but God had

raised me up a friend among strangers, who had bestowed on me the precious,

long-desired boon. Friend! It is a common word, often lightly used. Like

other good and beautiful things, it may be tarnished by careless handling;

but when I speak of Mrs. Bruce as my friend, the word is sacred.

My grandmother lived to rejoice in my freedom; but not long after, a letter

came with a black seal. She had gone "where the wicked cease from

troubling, and the weary are at rest."

Time passed on, and a paper came to me from the south, containing an

obituary notice of my uncle Phillip. It was the only case I ever knew of

such an honor conferred upon a colored person. It was written by one of his

friends, and contained these words: "Now that death has laid him low, they

call him a good man and a useful citizen; but what are eulogies to the

black man, when the world has faded from his vision? It does not require

man's praise to obtain rest in God's kingdom." So they called a colored man

a \_citizen\_! Strange words to be uttered in that region!

Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage. I

and my children are now free! We are as free from the power of slaveholders

as are the white people of the north; and though that, according to my

ideas, is not saying a great deal, it is a vast improvement in \_my\_

condition. The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my

children in a home of my own, I still long for a hearthstone of my own,

however humble. I wish it for my children's sake far more than for my own.

But God so orders circumstances as to keep me with my friend Mrs. Bruce.

Love, duty, gratitude, also bind me to her side. It is a privilege to serve

her who pities my oppressed people, and who has bestowed the inestimable

boon of freedom on me and my children.

It has been painful to me, in many ways, to recall the dreary years I

passed in bondage. I would gladly forget them if I could. Yet the

retrospection is not altogether without solace; for with those gloomy

recollections come tender memories of my good old grandmother, like light,

fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea.

APPENDIX.

The following statement is from Amy Post, a member of the Society of

Friends in the State of New York, well known and highly respected by

friends of the poor and the oppressed. As has been already stated, in the

preceding pages, the author of this volume spent some time under her

hospitable roof.

L.M.C.

The author of this book is my highly-esteemed friend. If its

readers knew her as I know her, they could not fail to be deeply

interested in her story. She was a beloved inmate of our family

nearly the whole of the year 1849. She was introduced to us by

her affectionate and conscientious brother, who had previously

related to us some of the almost incredible events in his

sister's life. I immediately became much interested in Linda; for

her appearance was prepossessing, and her deportment indicated

remarkable delicacy of feeling and purity of thought.

As we became acquainted, she related to me, from time to time

some of the incidents in her bitter experiences as a slave-woman.

Though impelled by a natural craving for human sympathy, she

passed through a baptism of suffering, even in recounting her

trials to me, in private confidential conversations. The burden

of these memories lay heavily upon her spirit--naturally virtuous

and refined. I repeatedly urged her to consent to the publication

of her narrative; for I felt that it would arouse people to a

more earnest work for the disinthralment of millions still

remaining in that soul-crushing condition, which was so

unendurable to her. But her sensitive spirit shrank from

publicity. She said, "You know a woman can whisper her cruel

wrongs in the ear of a dear friend much easier than she can

record them for the world to read." Even in talking with me, she

wept so much, and seemed to suffer such mental agony, that I felt

her story was too sacred to be drawn from her by inquisitive

questions, and I left her free to tell as much, or as little, as

she chose. Still, I urged upon her the duty of publishing her

experience, for the sake of the good it might do; and, at last,

she undertook the task.

Having been a slave so large a portion of her life, she is

unlearned; she is obliged to earn her living by her own labor,

and she has worked untiringly to procure education for her

children; several times she has been obliged to leave her

employments, in order to fly from the man-hunters and

woman-hunters of our land; but she pressed through all these

obstacles and overcame them. After the labors of the day were

over, she traced secretly and wearily, by the midnight lamp, a

truthful record of her eventful life.

This Empire State is a shabby place of refuge for the oppressed;

but here, through anxiety, turmoil, and despair, the freedom of

Linda and her children was finally secured, by the exertions of a

generous friend. She was grateful for the boon; but the idea of

having been \_bought\_ was always galling to a spirit that could

never acknowledge itself to be a chattel. She wrote to us thus,

soon after the event: "I thank you for your kind expressions in

regard to my freedom; but the freedom I had before the money was

paid was dearer to me. God gave me \_that\_ freedom; but man put

God's image in the scales with the paltry sum of three hundred

dollars. I served for my liberty as faithfully as Jacob served

for Rachel. At the end, he had large possessions; but I was

robbed of my victory; I was obliged to resign my crown, to rid

myself of a tyrant."

Her story, as written by herself, cannot fail to interest the

reader. It is a sad illustration of the condition of this

country, which boasts of its civilization, while it sanctions

laws and customs which make the experiences of the present more

strange than any fictions of the past.

Amy Post. Rochester, N.Y., Oct. 30th, 1859.

The following testimonial is from a man who is now a highly respectable

colored citizen of Boston.

L.M.C.

This narrative contains some incidents so extraordinary, that,

doubtless, many persons, under whose eyes it may chance to fall,

will be ready to believe that it is colored highly, to serve a

special purpose. But, however it may be regarded by the

incredulous, I know that it is full of living truths. I have been

well acquainted with the author from my boyhood. The

circumstances recounted in her history are perfectly familiar to

me. I knew of her treatment from her master; of the imprisonment

of her children; of their sale and redemption; of her seven

years' concealment; and of her subsequent escape to the North. I

am now a resident of Boston, and am a living witness to the truth

of this interesting narrative.

George W. Lowther.

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