

KIND FRIENDS: I am very glad to have it to say, I am very glad to have it to *feel*, that I am once more in the land of Liberty; that I am with those who are friends indeed; those, too, who have daily, in the morning and at midnight, mourned for those who are now oppressed in far-off countries! Yes, I hope you have been making prayers, and shedding many tears, and offering up much supplication to God that he might cause me to be delivered from bondage. I am glad, I say, to be in the land of Liberty, that I am now able to say *my soul is my own* (applause). I want to give you, this evening, a slight history of my journey to Virginia, after I was taken from Boston, and before that time. When I was about ten years old, being unacquainted with God and with Christ, truly I cared not much whither I went to, until it came so that God and Christ struck me with humble conviction, and created within me a new heart. Then I came to feel the necessity of both *soul and body being free* (applause). I had heard for many years of a North country; where no man dared to put his hand upon men of my colour and say "you are my property." As I grew, this feeling grew within me, till I came to a resolution, saying "I will, if God supports me, endeavour to reach that land" (applause). Well, meeting with a golden opportunity, as it were, last year, I took it upon myself that I would pay this visit (applause and laughter), and I came into the land of Boston, hearing that it was a benevolent city, where charity flowed. When I got there, truly I did not make myself known as I ought; but being as many of us is, I did n't want

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to say I was a fugitive slave. At least, you know that I might, thinking I was telling a friend who I was, be telling a foe, and he might lay violent hands upon me. I kept it to myself, and, after a little while, about a month or so, when I got into business, and thought I would try and strive for myself, as I never had an opportunity of doing before. Well then, as I was trying to do a little for my body and soul, behold the thieves came and laid hands upon me. I was going up, one night, to the dwelling where I lived, and I heard some person running and shouting, but I didn't mind it, as I thought it might be some rowdy chaps, as they are in cities; when he cried out, "stop old fellow," and, laying his hand on my shoulder, he said "you are the fellow that broke into the silversmith's shop last night." I said, "Sir, you are mistaken." He told me the name of the street; I said I had never been there. "But you must come along; and if you are not the one we want," he said, "we will let you go." Before I could make a movement, I found that there were not one, but some six or seven of them, and I was almost carried off my feet. The next place I found myself was in a room, up stairs, in the Court-House, where they set me down in a chair, waiting for the "silversmith" to come in. I waited for about, as I suppose, the space of an hour, when, as I hadn't had any supper, and felt kind of hungry, I asked if they wouldn't let me go home? And they said no. I began to consider what was the difficulty. About half an hour afterwards, I heard some one walking along

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the passage, and then somebody opened the door. He didn't open it like an honest man, but seemed to be afraid some one would see him. He opened the door, and walked in, and said, "How do you do, Mr. Burns?" And then I saw that the hunters had caught their game. I used no resistance, and, if I had, it would have availed nought against all of them. It came into my mind to disown him, but then something about the conduct of Christ came to my mind, too, and so I determined, rather than falsify myself, to submit, like a sheep under the shearer, or a lamb under the slaughter, depending on God to arrange the matter. So I called him, as we do down in Virginia, "master." He asked me if I thought he would have any difficulty in taking me back to Virginia. I was brought to kind of a stand, dumb like, but I said "I don't know." He then said how much money he had given me, and asked if I did not remember how kind he had been. "Oh, yes," I said, "I recollect you used to give me 12 ½ cents at the end of every year that I worked for you." I thought it would be a poor business at the North that wouldn't turn me in more than that. He went out and I saw him no more that night, and you may imagine I didn't eat nor sleep that night, and what my feelings were I can't tell.

Well, next morning, they told me my master had said I was his, and he had got all the papers to prove it. They put on bracelets, and took me down to the Court-room; not such bracelets as you wear, ladies, of silver and gold, but iron, yes, steel, that cut into the wrists, and [exhibiting his

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wrists] here are the scars they have left. Well, the lawyers insisted upon me that I should have counsel, though, as I had called the man "master," I told them that I could see no good in it. I considered that the words which I first spoke had ruined me; therefore, I said unto my friends, "There is no use—I don't see whereby any good can be done, except through Almighty God"—for I couldn't tell a falsehood even to save my liberty. Well, they insisted upon me, and at last I consented to it, although it profited me nothing. And they tried me, and what a brave sight! I, a poor fugitive, was surrounded by a body-guard of 200 men, all armed with their big horse-pistols and cutlasses (groans), some of 'em lying upon the table and some of 'em in their hands, to the number of full 200, I should think. Some of 'em says to me, "Burns, don't you have anything to do with them d—d sons of b—s of Abolitionists"—meaning thereby lawyers Dana, Ellis, Phillips, and the others—"they don't care anything for you, and won't do you any good." I said that "they were the only men who worked for my freedom, and if they failed, it was not to their blame." Well, next morning, a paper came up and I read in it that they said I had expressed a wish to go back to Virginia; that I wanted to go back very much. Now, Satan himself, if he had come up out of the pit upon the earth, could not have told a bigger lie. Now, I want to ask you, white or black, who of you wants to go into a den of roaring lions? who wants to go into slavery?

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Do any of you? (No! no!) Who that has had, as I have, the blood trickling down my back, from my neck to my heels, from the deep gashes of the cow-skin, would want to go back there, and beg to be taken back? They give a man 500 lashes for insulting them; how many would they give if a man made them mad? Who wants to be in that position? Is there any man here who holds with that? (No, no.) This is the position to which we are fettered in the South. Well, I was carried down to the Revenue Cutter from the Court-House in a delightful manner. I was quite the [...ion], the wonderful Burns; [l...] they had got the military from all parts of the State, as a guard of honour. There were soldiers before, and soldiers behind, and one at each side of me, with pistols and drawn swords. Some said, "Burns, we have overcome your friends, the Abolitionists, but we will buy you, and bring you back; we have got the money, and your master said he would let us have you." I said, "Gentlemen, if so be as you think you're a-fooling me, you won't do it, for I don't believe you will ever bring me back." And I was not mistaken. I wasn't a-going to believe them. On my way to Norfolk, they still fed me with fine fancies, and said they wan't a-going to put me in prison, and all that; but as soon as I touched the wharf at Norfolk, I was braceletted and put in jail. Some of them said, "we have got Burns, the lion, now." And, as I walked a little stiff, from having had no exercise on the ship, one of them said to me, "Come, now, walk up, walk up, step up, *damn it!* you ain't in Boston now!" Of course, I knew that; and as it would have been

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no use to say anything there, I mended my steps. I was put into the City Prison, with my bracelets on. I asked for food, and they told me no preparation had been made for my reception. I had no seat, so I had to sit down on the dirty floor, which did not look as if it had been swept once in nine months. For two days and nights, I did not eat above six mouthfuls; and then, about three o'clock in the morning, they came and took me, in a cab, to the wharf, and put me on board the steamer Jamestown for Richmond. When they got me to Richmond, I was put, handcuffs and all, into an omnibus—a great honour, you see, for “niggers” are not permitted to ride in omnibuses there. I was conveyed to the City Prison, where I was kept for a week. Here I was not only handcuffed, but irons were put upon my ancles, so close together that I could scarcely move my feet, and so tight that the flesh grew over them. At the end of that time, they transferred me to the Traders’ Jail, on the other side of the street, where they put me into a pen, about big enough for a little dog. Here they kept me for four long months, without once allowing me to leave it. The irons were so tight that I thought they would wear through my bones. When I would lie down, I had to fall on to the floor, for I had no other means of lying down, on account of the tightness of my bonds; and when I got up, it was only by the aid of a broken chair, which I dragged along to me, and upon which I would rest my elbows and raise myself up. I did not have enough to eat; and as for water, why, that was given me, a half a bucketful

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at a time; once in every other two days, and that in August; and when I went to drink it, 'twas so hot I thought 'twould scald my eyes out. How many times I strained my eyes towards the North! Many a time did I lift up my voice to God, that he would deliver me—as he did Daniel and the old Prophets—from this den of lions. At the end of these four months, they took me down into the sales-room, and, after some two or three hundred persons had looked at me, they put me up on the block to sell me, and, as I stood on the block, one man said [imitating voice and gestures]—“Darn me, he’s a good-looking ‘nigger.’ If I had him, he would be worth \$1,400 or \$1,500.” “Yes,” says another, “if he had never been to Bosting and got tainted. Why, he’d make 75 barrels of corn for himself.” Another old loafer, who looked as though he’d only got a ninepence in his pocket to buy him a glass of bad rum, said, “Look-a-here, nigger, if I had yer on my place, I put you whar yer couldn’t get to Boston again in a hurry.” And I thought, if I had a-been on his place, *I’d a-ground him to powder*; I’d mashed him to a mummy first (applause). Still another would say, “This is the great lion, Burns. Eh, Burns, are you the lion?” One would ask me about the North, and I told him it was a place where men of my colour could walk the streets without being afraid of insult, or getting knocked down. That was saucy, and he said, “What! not knock a ‘nigger’ down? Here, take this fellow down, and give him 500.” And they got mad to such a pitch that I

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believe they would have flogged me, only the auctioneer was interested in keeping my skin as free from bruises as he could, because, if I didn't look well, I would not fetch him so much by a good many dollars. At length they got a bid of \$25, at which they kept for full three-quarters of an hour, plenty saying they'd like to have me, only I would be telling their "niggers" about the North, and get 'em all to run away. At last, I was knocked down for \$905.

The man who bought me wanted me to swear, before God and man, that I would serve him as a slave and be very submissive. I said, "Sir, I belong to you; truly, you can whip me to death if you please—but I cannot make any pledges before God. If you take me home and treat me as a man ought to be treated, I will try to do all I can," and my meaning was while I stayed with him. For I was bent on once more seeing Boston or Canada (laughter and applause). He put me in prison again, and I was one day let down to walk in the yard, but I was quickly put back again, because, as I had been at the North, I would be talking with the other "niggers" and tainting them with Abolitionism, and set them into the notion of running away too. David McDonald, of North Carolina, was the man to whom I was sold. He took me from the jail in a hack—a great thing, you know, sitting back in a carriage (laughter), a "nigger" don't often ride in a carriage, you know—that was in style! When I left Richmond, one man says, "tell 'em in North Carolina that the people at the North are starving, and that's a fact,

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you know, Burns.” When I got to North Carolina, I found another hack waiting for me—very fine indeed—something big. My master began to talk to me and tell me that he looked at the heart of a man, not at his skin—I had got a white heart, and so he didn’t look on me as a “nigger,” by no manner of means. He just wanted me to drive him and his wife out, and I was to sleep in a little office among the inferior white folks, who worked on his place, and he would give me money whenever I wanted it. He wanted me to come and tell him whenever I saw anything wrong in the other “niggers”—but I was not to mix in with them, nor make free with them. I went into the little office, and there was no bed, so I went to my master, and asked for one; he sent me to the cook for a blanket—and that was all I got to sleep on. When I had been with this man about a month, I went and told him he had promised to give me whatever money I wanted, and I should, if he pleased, like a little change. And what do you think he gave me—six cents (great laughter). I touched my beaver respectfully, and went off. I was determined to pay one more visit North, and so I wrote to my friends, and I *would have come* if I had had to wade through blood to my neck. I wrote this to Boston, but I don’t know if any answer was ever sent to that. I wrote that the only way to escape from bondage was a general uprising of the slaves, and I would have been willing to lead them, as their captain, to Death or Freedom (great applause).

[Being admonished of the lapse of time, by his friend Grimes,] he said, in conclusion—Kind

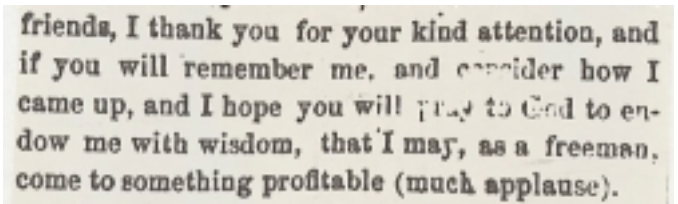
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March 10, 1855
Burns, Anthony
National Anti-Slavery Standard

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