

[Anonymous] - Fugitive slave narrative

It is proper that the reader should be a little prepared for what will follow - A very early enquiry in his mind will be, "How could an unlettered slave be his own biographer?" - The answer is simple; just as Solomon built his temple - with other hands -

The next difficulty will originate in scepticism. Some may be little inclined to give me credit for veracity. I do not wonder at it, nor do I know how to obviate it; I merely know what I am about to say is true, and if the frankness with which I impart it, is not deemed good evidence, I have none other to offer. The items might severally be proven at the proper places; these in their aggregate, would establish the whole; it would however be a tedious & expensive process; besides, I have other reasons for excusing myself from giving the evidence, which I will leave for the reader to imagine -

Lastly, many may think it very important in my present situation, to send forth this auto-biography, inasmuch as by it my personal safety is endangered; that it may be a means of conveying to those who claim ownership over me, intelligence which would put them on a successful search. - If by successful search, be meant, reclaiming lost property, I do not merely think, but I know there is no possibility that this should ever be the case. He, who only imagines what are the advantages of freedom, should have passed through what I have to obtain it; may well be expected to prize it too highly after he has realized its benefits, to part with it on any terms - even to preserve life. This is the stand I have taken -

I have found liberty to be even more valuable, than I conceived or could have conceived, while in that state of ignorance which is inseparable from bondage, and knowing it to be my

inherent, inalienable right I shall never resign it. Physical pain I must endure; sympathy for the suffering of a misguided world I must endure; and the pangs of that death which is destined to relieve me from them all, must be borne; - all this I hope to meet with becoming fortitude; but to leave a fellow being, without being a party, without having an equal share in making the conditions, is something that I feel it impossible should ever again be my lot -

Are any anxious to know what motive I have in thus detailing a sketch of my adventures? I like the retrospect; - the recollection of past difficulties, enhances the value of present enjoyments. This is selfish. It is the wish of some who stand in the relation of friends, that I should do what I am now doing. This is social. I shall send a copy to him who calls me servant; this will induce him to reflect. But better than all, my story will go abroad and may encourage more than one poor out-cast fugitive to persist in his determination to see the glorious sunlight of Heaven, and breathe its mild air - a free man. Should this be the result in one solitary instance, I shall be amply remunerated. The enfranchisement of one suffering degraded fellow-being would afford enjoyment which which those who are not benevolent and just, can never know; and those who have never been the slaves of a tyrant, can never appreciate. Washington congratulated himself (and well he might) on his agency in delivering his countrymen from political bondage; but what is three pence per lb. duty on tea to a suspension of all rights? - While he was employed in fighting his country's battles, to procure them political freedom, what could he have said, if his slaves had stood up and asserted their right to personal freedom? It will scarcely be said that

That the slave holder had claimed in the eye of justice to which the mother government had no pretensions. I am aware it will be said that the laws give him power over this kind of property; Did not the laws give Great-Britain a power to legislate for the colonies?— You say she exercised ^{that} power oppressively and tyrannically. The man who can offer this as a reason why the colonists should revolt, at the same time that he palliates slavery as it had at any time existed in the U. States, or can exist in them at any time, is not worthy of reasoning with; he is incurably ignorant, or abominably wicked; but I am arguing when I ought to be narrating—

The person into whose hands I fell in early life, was what would be called (and what if the thing be at all possible, ought to be called.) a good Master. He fed me well, did not require service that was painful to perform; he was moreover social, and companionable. Such was the character of my servitudes, and such my accommodations, that I do not now believe he could have been a gainer by his ownership. Were such relations as existed between us enforced universally, there would soon be no use for the word master & slave, as no one could propose to himself any advantage from the relation.

I was satisfied with my condition because it was ^{not} one of suffering; it was the satisfaction of ignorance only; a kind of negative contentment, bearable merely because there was no felt evil in it. Mine were the advantages in kind, but differing in degree, which a stone has over a man—

At twenty-five my master started with me to go to Georgia. When we had travelled twenty four miles, I left him and returned near home, where I remained two years without molestation.

About this time I was attacked and taken by four men, notwithstanding I had a sword with which I might have defended myself successfully. When taken I was put in prison where I lay two days and from whence I made my escape by running over the jailer.

I continued at large for six months, being as comfortable as a fugitive from labor could expect to be. At this time an armed force was raised by my owner to arrest me and finally they got within shooting distance when they fired on me and lodged three shot in my body, some of which remain there to this day. — A year or a half after this time I was taken without resistance and loaded with fifty pounds of iron. I was then yoked to a fellow slave with a fifty pound collar, and being hand-cuffed, was driven six hundred miles into Georgia. There I staid eighteen months, when I travelled back without much interruption. I was nine weeks of the journey. I now had my liberty for some months, but one day falling in company with a man in whom I had confidence, he suddenly pointed his gun at me, and required me to surrender. I did not comply, and he fired. He perceived that I was badly wounded, but thinking I was not disabled he retreated with great precipitation, fearing it is probable that it might be unsafe to stay within reach of me. I continued at large for some time. I was often challenged, and sometimes fired at though not wounded. Finally, however I was captured, though I liberated myself in a few hours. Next I was taken by a company of armed men, who had long been in pursuit of me. They threw me into a dungeon, having previously ironed me very heavily. Here I lay five weeks. At the expiration of this time, I got the irons off, broke jail, and made my escape. One week after my departure my owner came to resume his property. According to the adage he was, "A day after the fair" Had

he arrived a week sooner it might have added a few items to my history but it would not have influenced its general character. Had my circumstances been more difficult, I should have evinced more enterprise or desperation -- the idea of never relinquishing the idea of being free

I was next betrayed by a man of my own color, who was instrumental in raising a posse. The house in which I was, was surrounded by armed men, and in my retreat from it, I received fifty shots in my body. I was taken and imprisoned. My owner's brother removed me from confinement, by giving my honor in pledge that I would not leave the settlement till his brother came. On his arrival he caused me to be imprisoned before he had an interview -- After much solicitation, some promises, & some tears, he offered me the best terms if I would go with him; he required nothing of me but my promise to accompany him, and remain with him -- He had implicit confidence that I would fulfill any engagement he could induce me to make, & so had I; hence it was that to every proposition he made, my only reply was, "sell me". When he despaired of getting me along with him, he caused me to be taken from the prison I yoked to another. I soon disenthralled myself and companions. Offers were now made, that I should be permitted to remain in my own neighborhood in peace, but not confiding in their seeming friendship, I left my native state of S. C. in 1825. --

I resided at Elizabeth City on Cape Fear river several months. In this place, I was suspected of being a runaway, and with others, was attacked, & subjected to great sufferings in making my escape during an inclement season. A woman of our company was arrested and imprisoned. The men of our company (four in number) armed with guns, and provided with a crow-bar, & whips, three in hostile attitudes stood sentinels, the fourth

forced the prison door, & set the woman at liberty.
 As might be expected, a strong force was raised to
 arrest us. I left the others, and proceeded toward the
 boundary of N. C. where I was arrested on suspicion
 and after fifteen months imprisonment, sold for two
 hundred dollars to pay my jail fees. I was taken to
 Portsmouth prison in Virginia, where I lay eight days
 waiting a purchase for the southern market. From there
 I was removed to Norfolk, whence at the expiration of
 three weeks, I was taken back to Elizabeth & hired out
 as a hatter two months; I was again imprisoned for
 safe keeping, then heavily ironed & driven to Raleigh
 where after twelve days, I was sold to a legislator for
 Rockingham. I staid with my new owner but nine days
 and passed on to Warrentown, where I was encountered
 by a posse & imprisoned forty three days. I was
 now taken back to Rockingham, where I remained four weeks.
 From this place I escaped & went to Edenton, where after a
 few months I was attacked & wounded but not taken; I
 continued in the adjoining country two years. A company
 of four hundred men united to arrest myself, & some other
 fugitives, who were together for mutual defence. We had
 an engagement in which some of my party were wounded
 and taken. I was unscathed, but on my way to Raleigh
 was fired upon and taken at Gates C. H. Made my escape
 and went to Perquimans County, & thence to Virginia. I
 was arrested at Bowling Green C. H. & confined for 12
 months. Here I was treated very badly and finally sold
 for prison fees at one hundred & fifty dollars. The spec-
 ulator removed me to Richmond, but not succeeding in
 finding a market, took me back to Bowling Green, and
 set me to work. It cannot be that my new owner was
 a gainer by his purchase of me, unless the sequel had led
 him to reflect on the uncertainty of traffic in human
 flesh & blood, for I only continued in his employment one
 week well knowing that was six days labor over & above
 what was due from me to him. I staid two months however

in the vicinity, but finding I was suspected, I thought best to shape my course for a place of greater safety. I was taken once more near the Potomac, but escaped from two men who were conducting me to the prison.

Such is a sketch of my adventures, of my trials, and hairbreadth escapes told with one eye to brevity the other to truth. In my difficulties I was compelled sometimes to do that which under any other circumstances than those of necessity, my principles would have revolted at, namely, taking that which would sustain me, without making a return; but I resolved... that when I could control the proceeds of my own labor, I would be just with extreme exactness. Years have rolled away since this was my happy lot, and have not been subjected to the necessity or temptation to deviate from this resolution. I have been industrious, I have been economical, I have been fortunate, & I am^{as} happy as I think reasonable for human beings to anticipate under any circumstances. My savings are such, that should I become frail in a few years, (which from my present age I must expect,) I shall have the means of independent comfortable support. Besides this I have some good and true friends, who looking over all minor distinctions divide mankind into two classes - the good and the bad. But better than all this, I have the approbation of my own conscience. While the tyrant oppressor is striving to extend his dominion, and to devise apologies for his odious tyranny, I have the satisfaction to know, that it has been, and is, my constant wish, to avoid wrong and do right; with this consciousness, and my other accommodations, I enjoy life, and most confidently expect to resign it willingly at no distant day, and to rest on the lap of mother earth in everlasting peace.