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“AM I YOUR SLAVE?”
WILLIAM PARKER AND “THE FREEDMAN’S STORY”

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Abstract

This thesis examines the life and narrative of fugitive slave William Parker, who boldly looked into the eyes of a slave kidnapper and asked, “Am I your slave?” Parker was the leader of an uprising that the white residents of Christiana, Pennsylvania would refer to as the Christiana Riots, which resulted in the death of a Southern white slaveholder. However, Parker reveals much more in the “The Freedman’s Story” than the killing of Gorsuch, as his narrative is the first that tells of an African American leading an ongoing, righteous militant resistance against the Fugitive Slave Law. Moreover, upon escaping to Canada, Parker would become intimately connected to the two most influential abolitionist agents in the United States: Frederick Douglass and the *Atlantic Monthly*. Historians have failed to explore the relationship among the three, and their fascinating rhetoric, which promoted the antislavery movement and the Union cause in the Civil War. For this reason, Parker’s powerful narrative is a text invaluable to the genre of African American autobiographical narratives.

Keywords: William Parker, Christiana Resistance, Frederick Douglass, *Atlantic Monthly*, Antislavery movement, African American Narratives.

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Preface

“The Christiana Riot was believed to be the first battle of the Civil War” (Armer). These were the words written in beautiful blue cursive in the last few pages of my great-grandmother’s journal. Grammy wrote a rich history of Christiana, leaving me with a clear mental picture of her own hometown, just minutes away from where I grew up in Bart Township. Through her journal, I learned that Sadsbury Township, where Christiana is located, “was the first organized township in Lancaster County.” She wrote about the original telegraph office, hotel and railroad station, in addition to the first firehouse, schools, and churches. However, she stopped just one sentence into one of the most significant historical events in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. This history was incredibly important, second, in my opinion, only to the brief time when Lancaster stood as the nation’s capital when the Continental Congress was fleeing British invaders (*Downtown Lancaster*). The narrative that I would soon read would be just as entertaining, just as compelling, as any novel from the suspense or drama genre. However, this was even better, as it was a true incident of an escaped slave, William Parker, who lived in the Christiana area, not a half hour from the Mason Dixon Line. Nearly one year after the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, Parker and other African Americans not only organized a resistance in the area, but killed a Southern slave owner in an attempt to allow four escaped slaves to remain free. How could my great-grandmother have overlooked the significance of this event?

I know that the aforementioned line in Grammy’s journal was inspired by Jonathan Katz, author of *Resistance at Christiana*, and I believe that she stopped writing to read about the riots from another perspective. Most of what she and I had learned about the Christiana Riots came from personal accounts handed down from our own family members and members of our white

community. I believe that she wanted formal, researched, historical information, before she wrote about the events from her own perspective. There were many times during family gatherings when various relatives, my Uncle Tom especially, would speak of our own family's involvement in the riot and the following trial. Since I had no evidence to back up this claim, I thought he was just blowing smoke.

It was during my junior year of college that Dr. Phyllis Cole inspired me to investigate the ramblings of my crazy Uncle Tom. My assignment was to transcribe and reflect on a historical manuscript. Thus, my project began with archival research, examining manuscripts from the Moores Memorial Library in Christiana, such as a letter from Elizabeth Pownall, who witnessed the aftermath of the event, diary entries from Dickinson Gorsuch, the son of the deceased slave-owner who also took part in the riots, and testimonial accounts from Castner Hanway's trial, a white abolitionist who was tried for refusing to assist in the arrest of Parker and the other escaped slaves. It was an intriguing opportunity, a window into the lives of those who experienced a significant historical event, to which my own family was connected. From this research, I found two important things: First, my Uncle Tom wasn't as crazy as I thought. Transcripts from *The Trial of Castner Hanway* provide proof that my great-great-great-great grandfather Miller Knott and his son John Knott both testified after witnessing the riots. Second, I realized that, out of all of the reading I had done, William Parker's "The Freedman's Story" was the richest narrative, and despite the fact that Parker was the hero of the riot, his voice and actions went overlooked, in both history and literature.

I considered how I learned of the riot, not in school, but through personal narratives passed down through my own family. In fact, I believe that most of my teachers would not have

agreed that The Christiana Riot “was believed to be the first battle of the Civil War,” since they barely taught this significant part of our county’s history. As a child, this event was only significant to me because two of my family members had witnessed and testified during the trial. My mother eventually passed down Grammy’s copy of *Resistance at Christiana*, and I was finally exposed to the rich African American history that Christiana had to offer. I was previously ignorant of William Parker’s momentous role in both the riots and the Christiana community. The fact that my own family witnessed and testified during the trial was interesting, but not nearly as exciting when I learned that there had been a man, characteristic of a superhero, organizing a resistance among the usually pastoral plains of Southern Lancaster County.

My own perspective on the Christiana Riots has totally changed since reading Parker’s “The Freedman’s Story” and Katz’s *Resistance at Christiana*. Take for instance, the difference in language. I had always heard of this event referred to as a “riot,” defined by violent public disorder and implying a singular, chaotic, unplanned event, but to refer to this event as a riot is to undermine its significance in history. Instead, Katz uses the term “resistance” because the “riot” was neither a singular event, nor was it a totally unplanned occurrence. Nearly a year prior to it, the Fugitive Slave Law stole the safety of both freed and escaped slaves living on the Northern side of the Mason Dixon line. Prior to the day that William Parker led armed slaves against Southern slave owner Edward Gorsuch, there had been a full ongoing resistance led by Parker and other African Americans in the area. Parker and the others helped to protect both fugitive and freed slaves; thus, tension had been building since the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, and this continual resistance culminated in a rebellion that took place nearly on the one year anniversary of that law. The rebellion would result in the death of Gorsuch, at the hands of one of his own slaves, Parker’s wife Eliza, and her sister Hannah. I still absentmindedly refer to this

event as the Christiana Riots, but for the remainder of this thesis I will refer to it as the Christiana Resistance.

Historians will stress the significance of the Christiana Resistance as the first blow in the Civil War. However, I will now have the chance to explore other reasons that this event holds national, historic, and literary significance. Before I begin this process at length, I would like to take a moment to thank Grammy, my Uncle Tom, whose writings and “ramblings” inspired this project, and my great-aunt Emily, who was kind enough to share Grammy’s journal with me. Had they not shared their knowledge, this thesis may never have come to fruition. Also my mother and father, who believe in me unconditionally and provided many of the secondary resources that I needed to complete this project during a time that was particularly challenging for us all. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Cole, who encouraged me to pursue this project on a professional level, granted me with unlimited patience, and has proved to be a marvelous mentor. With love, I express my deepest gratitude to each of you.

Chapter 1: An Introduction to William Parker and “The Freedman’s Story”

The Christiana Resistance occurred when William Parker, a runaway slave, defied the demands of Southern slave owner Edward Gorsuch, who wished to recover four of his own escaped slaves (Parker not included). This uprising took place on September 11, 1851, almost exactly on the one-year anniversary of the Fugitive Slave Law, which declared that “fugitive” or runaway slaves be returned by Northerners to their Southern slave owners.

Northerners assisting escaped slaves would face much harsher penalties as the Fugitive Slave Law declared that this offense was now a federal crime, an actual act of treason against the nation. Prior to this amendment the United States Constitution simply stated:

No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due. (US Const., art. 4, sec. 3)

Northern abolitionists found to be assisting escaped slaves were now subject to fines or imprisonment. Law enforcement officers who neglected to arrest these slaves could also be subject to fines, while the slave himself had no right to request a trial to testify on his own behalf. Other acts of rebellion, similar to the Christiana Resistance, have been recorded since the passage of the law, perhaps the most famous account being William and Ellen Craft, who had escaped from Georgia. When slave catchers arrived in Boston to reclaim them, members of the Boston Vigilance Committee hid the Crafts and forced the slave catchers to leave. Their escape to England is documented in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*. Boston was a hotbed for

abolitionist activity, and many slaves shared similar experiences to the Crafts. For example, a fugitive waiter Shadrach Minkin, who wanted to settle in Boston, was forced to move to Canada when the vigilance committee helped him to escape from the custody of federal marshals (Collison). Unfortunately, the resistance was not always successful as Thomas Sims, who was assisted by the same committee, was ultimately returned to slavery (McPherson 68). However, the resistance that ensued in Christiana, Pennsylvania was not simply another resistance. It held much significance since a white slave-owner was killed by fugitive slaves. More importantly, the Christiana Resistance was nationally significant as one of the first organized African American militant rebellions against the Fugitive Slave Law itself. The rebellion led by William Parker was actually considered to be an act of treason against the United States.

More than a decade after the Resistance, its significance would resound in the pages of the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly* in William Parker's narrative, "The Freedman's Story." The 1866 editor of Parker's narrative, E.K. (James R. Gilmore writing as Edmund Kirke), underscores the importance of this event when he claims that the Christiana Resistance:

cost the Government of the United States fifty thousand dollars, embittered the relations of two 'Sovereign States,' aroused the North to the danger of the Fugitive- Slave Law, and, more than any other event, except the raid of John Brown, helped to precipitate the two sections into the mighty conflict which had just been decided on the battle-field.(153)

Yet, despite its significance in history, the Christiana Resistance, William Parker, and his narrative have all been significantly lost in history. Narrative perspectives surrounding this event offer some explanation. Testimonies from *The Trial of Castner Hanway* show how a white

abolitionist tried for treason for defying the Fugitive Slave Law was nearly held accountable instead. A letter from Elizabeth Pownall, the sister of Parker's landlord, barely mentions Parker, but credits her neighbors for "thoughtfully" rushing to the scene of battle. Perhaps this was because she and her sister assisted in Parker's escape. Likewise, her brother fails to mention Parker in his own correspondence, only referring to a group of "blacks." Even diary entries from Dickinson Gorsuch minimize Parker's involvement. The event dubbed as "the Christiana Riots" was remembered by the white Christiana community, but their perspective often centered around Castner Hanway as the leader of "the riot" since he refused to assist Gorsuch and his posse in the arrest of the fugitive slaves. A monument erected in Christiana, Pennsylvania memorializes all parties involved. The southern face of the monument is devoted to Edward, Dickinson, and Joshua Gorsuch. The eastern face reads, "Castner Hanway, 'Not Guilty.' He suffered for Freedom," and his name is first on a list of 38 men indicted in the trial on the Northern face of the monument. The African Americans involved are simply listed underneath of Hanway's name, minimizing their involvement. Parker's name is nearly hidden as number thirty on this list, eliminating his leading role in the rebellion and the resistance.

Only Parker's narrative, "The Freedman's Story," remains to tell about this truly momentous account of heroism, and despite its obscurity, the importance of his narrative cannot be underestimated. It is with the account of one narrative that authors such as William Still might have been motivated to write *The Underground Railroad*, which shares the true suffering of numerous attempts to escape slavery. Narrative accounts like these inspired authors, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, to create the characters for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which, like Stills' *Underground Railroad*, became part of the national antislavery literature and helped to enlighten a nation to the horrors being committed in its own backyard.

Many historians, such as James McPherson and Sean Wilentz, discuss the Christiana Riots in context of the Fugitive Slave Law, but Parker is often overlooked. In *Battle Cry of Freedom*, McPherson mentions the Crafts and other instances of resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law, but credits local abolitionist Castner Hanway (incorrectly mentioned as a Quaker) and a “band of black men” for the riots (McPherson 69). Similarly, Wilentz discusses the “Christiana, PA Fugitive Slave Law,” but never refers to Parker by name. Instead, the active participants are listed only as Gorsuch, Hanway, and blacks in the area. In fact, Wilentz goes as far as to include the “Christiana, PA Fugitive Slave Incident” and “Edward Gorsuch,” the dead slave owner in his index, but fails to include William Parker, the main leader of the event, in this part of his text.

A few scholars, however, do claim the event for African American history. For example, in *Resistance at Christiana*, Katz uses “The Freedman’s Story,” newspaper articles, and personal testimonies to provide a thorough historical account of the resistance. In Ella Forbes’ *But We Have No Country*, Forbes provides “an African centered perspective...that places this event into the history of the resistance of individuals of African descent to enslavement and oppression in the Western hemisphere (xi). These books are invaluable resources for anyone who would like to learn about the Christiana resistance, but while they rely heavily on the William Parker’s “The Freedman’s Story” they do not explore the narrative as an autobiography written in the same African American tradition as Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* or Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

In contrast to Katz and Forbes, “Am I Your Slave?” William Parker and “The Freedman’s Story” will examine Parker’s narrative as a text invaluable to the genre of African American autobiographical narratives. It will establish Parker’s fundamental identity and voice, place his narrative in the context of other slave narratives, and answer many of the questions surrounding

“The Freedman’s Story.” It will also consider how Parker was connected to two of the most influential abolitionist engines in the antebellum United States: Frederick Douglass and the *Atlantic Monthly*. Parker was a powerful leader in the Christiana community; thus, it is no surprise, that he was acquainted with Frederick Douglass. There is no doubt that the famous abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison, had a dynamic relationship with Douglass. Similarly, Douglass and Parker clearly left a lasting impression on each other which few historians have thoroughly explored. Similarly, historians have overlooked Parker’s publication in the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly*, even though it would have been unusual for an African American to have been published in a primarily white, elite, literary journal.

Gilmore claims that while “The Freedman’s Story” was written “in a fair, legible hand” that “needs no revision,” Parker was not a black Charles Dickens. What is Gilmore’s basis for this claim? He believes that Parker was “a doer of deeds,” but not a writer (152). In this way, Gilmore does not grant Parker justice. Just as Dickens was first known as a writer and then a philanthropist, Parker was known more as a philanthropist and known less for his narrative. Parker’s altruistic concern for his fellow slaves was not manifested in donations of wealth or work to the needy, but in risking his own life to help fugitive slaves to remain free. In this way, he was the ultimate philanthropist, and to many a true hero. The fact that Parker was mainly a man of action and that his narrative is not well known, does not mean that the quality of his writing was in any way inferior. In the context of other slave narratives, his voice is unusually bold, but appropriate for such a leader. His dramatic accounts of kidnappings incorporate compelling dialogue, adding suspense to nearly every page. His epiphanies, the recognition that he has escaped and left his fellow-slaves behind, the discovery of Frederick Douglass and Garrisonian abolitionists, and the realization that he must devote his life to armed resistance, are

expressed with eloquence that is truly amazing coming from a man who did not learn to read or write until he was nearly thirty years old. It is unfortunate that Parker's narrative is not acknowledged as a mainstream African American autobiographical narrative, for "The Freedman's Story" deserves to be read just as much as any other great literary work.

While historians provide a wealth of invaluable information on William Parker, one must read "The Freedman's Story" to truly know his identity. At one point, a friend of Parker's, Samuel Thompson, announces that "Parker has been a class leader" (285). While living in slavery, Parker had no real familial attachments, but that all changed after he gained his freedom. Parker started his own family in Christiana when he married Eliza Anne Howard, "a fugitive whose experience of slavery had been much more bitter than [his] own" (163). Most of what Parker reveals about his community involvement revolves around the kidnappings that he helps to prevent. However, Peter Woods, a sixteen-year-old black resident of the area in 1850 tells how Parker's home became a center and meeting place for the black people of the neighborhood. He remembers that the "The colored fellows met at Parker's nearly every Sunday," and recalls that Parker's residence was the "scene of merriment where apple-butter boiling parties took place" (Katz 28).

Historians can make these points, but nowhere is it more evident that Parker was a community leader than in his narrative. It is within the first two pages that Parker announces who he is and what he is about, in one bold statement: "My rights at the fireplace were won by my child-fists; my rights as a freeman were, under God, secured by my own right arm" (154). These words would become Parker's tag line, for historians who have researched Parker would repeatedly reference this particular statement, and it would manifest itself throughout his

narrative. It is immediately after Parker escapes from slavery that he reflects on his “fellow-servants left behind, bound in the chains of slavery,” and he resolves to “assist in liberating every one”...and “devise some plan for their entire liberation” (160). In one very resolute promise Parker commits his life to the safety of those in his community.

Not long after, Parker is exposed to the famous orator Frederick Douglass and to Garrisonian abolitionists. He is inspired to create the Organization for Mutual Protection, which “resolved to prevent any of our brethren being taken back into slavery, at the risk of our own lives” (161). Evolving from his original resolve to liberate his fellow-servants, this is a particularly daring commitment. Originally, Parker’s aim is slightly different than the Underground Railroad, where abolitionists escorted slaves from the South, traveling mainly by foot or water, to the Free states in the North and finally Canada. Instead, Parker helps blacks in the Christiana area, not fifteen minutes from the Mason Dixon line, to live in this particularly dangerous region. In the following pages of his narrative, Parker prevents numerous kidnappings and secures the rights, not only of himself but of his fellow slaves, with his own right arm. The aforementioned excerpts from “The Freedman’s Story” illustrate how Parker’s writing is just as daring as his decisions and actions.

While writing, Parker recalls intimate details about his life, including full conversations with friends, slaveholders, and others. In many ways, he makes excellent use of this dialogue. As Parker considers running away, he recalls two different conversations between two separate friends, before he and his brother finally escape to freedom. For a full four pages, Parker’s audience knows that he is contemplating his escape, but must wait to see whether or not he will

run away. Just after Parker does manage to escape, a third conversation takes place between Parker and a man who recognizes him as an escaped fugitive just as he is about to reach freedom.

"See here!" said he; "you are the fellows that this advertisement calls for," at the same time taking the paper out of his pocket, and reading it to us.

Sure enough, there we were, described exactly. He came closely to us, and said,--

"You must go back."

I replied,--

"If I must, I must, and you must take me."

"Oh, you need not make any big talk about it,' he answered; "for I have taken back many a runaway, and I can take you. What's that you have in your hand?"

"A stick.'

He put his hand into his pocket, as if to draw a pistol, and said,--

"Come! give up your weapons."

I said again,--

"'T is only a stick.'

He then reached for it, when I stepped back and struck him a heavy blow on the arm. It fell as if broken. (159)

Parker interjects this dialogue, just when the reader believes that he has reached the safety of the North. He is strategically building suspense. This not only creates a more compelling narrative,

it also shows Parker's willingness to fight for his freedom. As Parker breaks the man's arm in order to escape, it shows how both his actions and his dialogue are bold, blunt, and brazen.

Parker utilizes this technique of recalling dialogue repeatedly throughout his narrative. It is especially effective during the standoff between Parker and Edward Gorsuch. While in conflict, Gorsuch asks,

Does not the Bible say, 'Servants, obey your masters'?"

I said that it did, but the same Bible said, "Give unto your servants that which is just and equal. At this stage of the proceedings, we went into a mutual Scripture inquiry, and bandied views in the manner of garrulous old wives. (285)

Afterwards, Parker breaks into an African spiritual song, in which he claims that he will "die on the field of battle,/ with glory in [his soul]" (285). His fellow slaves join in the song as Parker unites the party in bold resistance. This dialogue not only shows how Parker assumed the role of a leader in his community, it also reveals the religious side of Parker. While his dialogue is used to create authenticity, suspense, and drama, it also underscores his most important characteristics. Here, it is clear, in both his actions and his words, that Parker supports militant religious resistance.

While Parker tells much about himself, he never fails to give his friends and family credit for their own valor. When Gorsuch views Parker and his comrades chanting the African American spiritual and asks what they are doing, Parker tells how Samuel Thompson explains that they are "preaching a sinners funeral" (285). Likewise, Parker explains how it was one of Gorsuch's slaves who "struck him the first and second blows," while "*the women put an end to*

him” (286). Eliza and her sister Hannah actually kill Edward Gorsuch with corn cutters. While Parker takes pride in his own courageous actions, he also takes pride in the courage of his friends and family, uniting them in the fight against slavery and supporting their involvement in their own anti-slavery movement.

As a leader, Parker also made important ties in the Christiana community. Not only is the white abolitionist, Castner Hanway willing to refuse in the arrest of Parker, other whites in the area are willing to help Parker escape. For example, his landlord Levi Pownall briefly provides him refuge in his home, even while military personnel are scouring the area. Pownall’s wife, Sarah provides the food that Parker, Abrahamn Johnson, and Pinckney will need to escape to Canada. Pownall’s son, Levi Jr. dresses all three in his own clothing in order to disguise them as three white men, while his sisters, Elizabeth and Ellen, walk the fugitives down the lane as if they were being courted (Katz 249). Parker omitted the Pownall name from his narrative in order to protect the family, but does not fail to acknowledge their kindness when he declares that he is “particularly thankful to [his] old friends and neighbors in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania (293). There is no doubt that these friends and neighbors from Lancaster County included the Pownall family.

Upon his escape, Parker is “very much depressed,” becoming “silent and abstracted” (290). He is deeply disturbed by the temporary absence of Eliza and his children. However, this does not stop him from assuming the same role as a community leader in the Canada. When three escaped slaves are in danger of being arrested as horse thieves, Parker confirms their innocence and tries to help them escape. He explains how

In the crowd and excitement, the sheriff threatened to imprison me for my interference. I felt indignant, and told him to do so, whereupon he opened the door. About this time there was more excitement, and then a man slipped into the jail, unseen by the officers, opened the gate, and the three prisoners went out, and made their escape to Windsor. (292)

Even in Canada, Parker is assisting escaped slaves. Though it takes some time to save money, Parker and Abraham Johnson purchase “a fifty acre lot” in the Buxton community. Founded by Reverend William King, the Buxton settlement was a refuge for escaped slaves (292). There, Parker would not only learn to read and write, but would become an elected official as the Raleigh Township Councilor (Forbes 40). Even after his trials in Christiana, Parker remains the same strong family man and community leader in Canada.

While William Parker only published one work, it is unfair for Gilmore, given the evidence provided above, to discredit him as a writer. Parker was literate for less than a decade when he wrote “The Freedman’s Story,” proving that he was also a man of considerable intelligence. However, one point that Gilmore makes is true: turning these facts into fiction would only “oblige the reader to dredge for the oyster,” for there is no historian or scholar who can truly express the experiences, thoughts, and emotions of another man (152). Thus, if one devoted to learning about William Parker, they must read “The Freedman’s Story.” No other literary work can provide Parker’s unique experience of slavery, his commitment to the safety and security of his fellow slaves, and his willingness to risk his life for their freedom. No historian can truly depict the life of this hero, other than William Parker himself.

Chapter 2: The Unique Voice of William Parker

Throughout “The Freedman’s Story,” Parker defines his character, and as a result his voice becomes unique among other slave narratives. His audacity is in stark contrast with that of Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* or Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Neither are as defiant as Parker. Yet the reader views Parker’s narrative with more sympathy than that of Nat Turner’s *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, since Turner’s voice is more than defiant. Though Turner’s narrative is delivered with eloquence, many view his lack of remorse as an outrage. As a result, Parker’s character is viewed much differently than any other author.

One cannot miss Parker’s aforementioned, unusually blunt and brazen voice. Consider Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative in the Life of Frederick Douglass* as one example in contrast. As a child, Douglass’ first defiant action is learning to read, a pastime introduced to him by his mistress, Sophia Auld. He explains how this not only defied Mr. Auld’s wishes, but gave Douglass

the best assurance that I might rely with the utmost confidence on the results which, he said, would flow from teaching me to read. What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn. In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both. (34)

While Douglass is developing a skill that will ultimately allow him to fight the institution of slavery, it is not the same type of outright defiant action that Parker would make. As he grows older, Douglass becomes bolder when he teaches other slaves on Mr. Freeman's plantation to read the New Testament. Also, on one rare occasion, when Douglass has been beaten daily by "slave-breaker" Mr. Covey, he retaliates in self-defense, so that Mr. Covey never dares to punish him again. This single outburst is an act of desperation. If Douglass does not take a drastic measure, his life is at stake. While Douglass' narrative is longer than Parker's and provides many more instances of injustices done to both himself and other slaves, he rarely takes action in the same way that Parker does.

Another slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, clearly shows a defiant adolescent. Author Harriet Jacobs often responds in verbal retaliation. In one instance, she is hit by her master for declaring her love for another and responds "You have struck me for answering you honestly. How I despise you!" (61). In another instance, when her master writes her a letter requesting that she travel with him, she returns the letter with a pair of scissors. Her actions are bold, considering that her master is sexually abusive towards his slaves. However, she is more like Douglass than Parker, since her words are rarely followed by direct rebellious action. In contrast, Parker might have hit Harriet Jacobs' master for his misconduct towards a lady.

On the other hand, Parker's language is defiant from the time that he declares that his "rights as a freeman were, under God, secured by [his] own right arm (154). Parker clearly learns to defend himself long before Douglass or Jacobs. He describes a time when he "must have been about ten or eleven years old" and first encouraged his friend Levi Storax to escape with him to Canada. Later, he also tries to convince his friend Alexander Brown to do the same.

Interestingly, both accounts are in direct response to escaping slave sales on his Master Mack's plantation. In some narratives such an arrogant voice may be controversial. However, Parker even manages to use this to his advantage. Throughout his childhood, Parker establishes a pattern, where he is the victim and must act in self defense.

In a confrontation with his master that is similar to Douglass' confrontation with Mr. Covey, Parker learns that he was deceived into working for another slave-owner. Parker is told that his Master Mack wants to make him "pay for the new and the old," and wants to whip him. Parker, responding, declares that "Master Mack is most done whipping me" (157). Parker tells how he then defies his owner by deciding not to work and Master Mack "struck at me; but I caught the stick, and we grappled, and handled each other roughly for a time, when he called for assistance. He was badly hurt" (157). As Parker shares stories of the wrongs done to him and the common plights of his fellow slaves, he sets up a case for defense. Parker has no choice but to be bold. Otherwise, he will not have secured a place by the fire, and may freeze to death. In the case of his friends' Levi Storax and Alexander Brown, Parker realizes that they must escape; otherwise, all that they hold dear will always be at risk. He must fight back against his master or submit to a beating that he does not deserve. Parker clearly never fears reacting to any injustice, even if violence is necessary.

Perhaps Parker is so confident because he never questions his humanity. Harriet Jacobs claims that she was born a slave, but never knew it until "six years of happy childhood had passed away" (11). A kind mistress and maternal grandmother gave her a secure sense of her own humanity. Douglass was not born with this same luxury, but developed the same ideas from reading *The Columbian Orator*. Parker had no one to instill these values in him, nor could he

read. Yet, he seemed to possess an innate understanding of his rights to liberty and justice, even as a child as young as ten or eleven.

Douglass was convinced, after reading *The Columbian Orator*, that slavery could be abolished using only dialogue. His convictions were confirmed after subscribing and reading *The Liberator* and then reinforced when he met William Lloyd Garrison, who encouraged him to speak and share his experiences in slavery. This was Douglass' first real intellectual friendship, and it clearly left a lasting impact on his future. Similarly, Harriet Jacobs responded to the injustices she experienced while enslaved, by writing about the sexual abuses commonly committed by slave masters. In contrast, Parker is again unique, since his beliefs in justice and freedom first translated, not into dialogue or literature, but into direct action. Just prior to meeting Douglass, Parker laments the state of his fellow slaves, left behind in Maryland:

I thought of my fellow-servants left behind, bound in the chains of slavery, -and I was free! I thought, that if I had the power, they should soon be as free as I was; and I formed a resolution that I would assist in liberating every one within my reach at the risk of my life, and that I would devise some plan for their entire liberation (160).

Clearly, this man who previously spoke of the "sleepless vigilance" he was required to keep after escape, is building a case for violent resistance.

Parker's decision to form the Organization for Mutual Protection Against Slaveholders and Kidnappers is not only audacious, it defines his actions amongst others in slave narratives.

Douglass was an orator, and Jacobs was a writer. The only other well-known slave narrative that shows such the daring defiance is *The Confessions of Nat Turner*.

Turner, like Parker, is a born leader, and many around him even suspect that he is “intended for some great purpose” (Turner 8). Likewise, Turner believes this himself. He tells of multiple visions, and explains how he sees

white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle, and the sun was darkened-the thunder rolled in the heavens, and blood flowed in streams-and I heard a voice saying, “Such is your luck, such you are called to see, and let it come rough or smooth, you must surely bare it. (10)

As a result of these visions, Turner believes that God has commanded him to abolish slavery on earth. Turner organizes a rebellion, resulting in the death of 55 people. In his confession, Turner describes how he entered his master’s chamber while the family was sleeping, and killed all five in the family. He even admits that “there was a little infant sleeping in a cradle, that was forgotten, until we had left the house and gone some distance, when Henry and Will returned and killed it” (12). As Turner and his supporters continue, he tells of Mrs. Williams who attempts to flee after witnessing the murder of her husband and sons. She is also

pursued, overtaken, and compelled to get up behind one of the company, who brought her back, and after showing her the mangled body of her lifeless husband, she was told to get down and lay by his side, where she was shot dead. (15)

Turner wanted to “carry terror and devastation wherever [he] went” (11), believing that his apocalyptic visions from God are instructing him to induce terror and revenge that will end

slavery; thus, he is merciless, indiscriminately murdering those who were not even an immediate threat.

In contrast to Turner, Parker organized a successful, ongoing African American led resistance. When Dr. Dingee's son warns him that a slave catcher is eyeing him, Parker boldly approaches the "kidnapper," and asks "am I your slave?" (161). Though Parker is religious, religion does not drive his resistance in the same way that it drives Turner. Consider that it was probably not a coincidence that Parker's first account of a kidnapping in the area can be traced back to September 1850, around the same time that the Fugitive Slave Law was passed. Parker claims that he has "no respect for the fugitive slave law," and his motives for organizing a resistance are clear when he states, "Ourselves, our wives, our little ones, were insecure, and all we had was liable to seizure" (Parker 165). This underscores the vulnerability of citizens in the Christiana community, and then vindicates his actions in just one powerful sentence.

Parker then recalls more than eight confirmed accounts of kidnappings in the Christiana area in which the Organization for Mutual Protection Against Slaveholders was involved. In this part of his narrative, Parker establishes another pattern, just as he did when telling the story of his childhood. However, instead of featuring himself as the victim, he shows how other freed slaves in the Christiana area were being victimized, and were in need of protection. Following this, Parker protested to free William Dorsey, a husband and father who had been taken to jail for no reason. Parker claims that he and his comrades "fought across the road and back again, and I thought our brains would be knocked out." His friends worry that he had "got [himself] into a bad difficulty and that [his] arrest would follow" (161). In another incident, Parker tells how an innocent employee, Elizabeth, of neighbor, Moses Whitson was kidnapped and taken to a local

tavern. When the kidnappers attempt to leave with Elizabeth he explains how he “beat the kidnappers and let them go” (163). Finally, the tavern mysteriously burned after the owner aided these and other slave owners. Sometimes the stories told by Parker seem to be extreme, as he is even shot at one point, but shows no fear. However, these accounts are not the rambling exaggerations of an inflated ego. Many have been confirmed by personal testimonies, while others were confirmed in the *Lancaster Examiner and Herald* (Katz 316). As Parker clearly shows that both escaped and freed slaves in the area needed protection he is also justifying the killing of a white Southern slave-owner.

Other slave narratives including accounts of rebellion such as *The Confessions of Nat Turner* do not elicit the same sympathy for the leading agent that Parker does in “The Freedman’s Story.” It is likely that Nat Turner experienced many injustices while he was enslaved. He tells his confessions without remorse because he believes that he is an avenging angel, but that did not excuse his actions in the eyes of Southerners or even many abolitionists. On the other hand, Parker led a full resistance, instead of a rebellion. While he had no concern for the safety of slaveholders, and many were certainly injured before he murdered Edward Gorsuch, his actions and motives are very different from that of Turner who believed that terror and revenge would abolish slavery. Parker did not use his religious beliefs to justify his resistance or the killing of a white slave owner. Instead, he tried to use scripture to convince his adversary that slavery was wrong. He did not want to kill Gorsuch, and gave him many chances to retreat. Parker was protecting the lives of those who were in immediate danger, and he had to kill Gorsuch in order to protect his fellow slaves.

Chapter 3: Questions Surrounding Parker's Narrative

Many questions remain regarding Parker and "The Freedman's Story." Historians address some of these issues, particularly his authorship, but have overlooked other questions, such as the name and timing of his publication. In many cases, a closer examination of the circumstances surrounding Parker's narrative provides probable answers.

Too few historians have questioned the name of Parker's narrative. Why "The Freedman's Story?" William Parker was not a freed man, at least not in the usual way. He had not bought his freedom, nor had his master allowed him to leave. Instead, he had escaped slavery, continually defied the Fugitive Slave Law by helping slaves to the escape area, and eventually murdered a white Southern slave owner. In most cases, an escaped slave and fugitive probably would have been tried and convicted of both murder and treason, a Federal offense. In terms of his actions, Parker should have been arrested, tried, and hanged multiple times. In this way, few other slaves were less free than Parker and the name of his narrative is highly ironic. Yet, throughout his narrative, Parker claims his freedom. From his childhood, when he explains how his "rights as a freeman were, under God, secured by [his] own right arm," he claims his safety and security (154). He contemplates his escape many times before he and his brother run away. When approached by Northerners who want to return him to slavery, he again fights for his safety, again claiming liberty. Furthermore, Parker made a conscious decision, upon escaping, that he would help others to remain free. He is not only claiming his own liberty, but the liberty of his fellow African Americans. Through his title, *The Freedman's Story* Parker is

again claiming his freedom. Since Parker, as a self-proclaimed freedman was helping to free other men, women and children this title becomes even more appropriate.

Ultimately, it took fifteen years for Parker to publish “The Freedman’s Story.” In his telling, Parker only concentrates on his life in slavery, the resistance, and his escape, leaving a full fifteen year gap from his settlement in Buxton to the publication of his narrative. This indicates that “The Freedman’s Story” was not written as a personal endorsement meant to memorialize William Parker’s life as a hero, nor was it meant only to preserve the memory of a particularly important moment in history. Parker was not one to overlook the timing of an event, and his actions and publication probably revolved around the political atmosphere of the nation. It is difficult to say that the rebellion was completely unplanned since Parker knew that the kidnapers were in the area to take four fugitive slaves. Up until this point, there were so many kidnappings following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law that Parker was given many opportunities to kill for the cause of liberty and justice. Thus, it was not a coincidence that the event dubbed as the “Christiana Riots” occurred on September 11, 1851, just one week before the anniversary of the Fugitive Slave Law. The resistance was not just a resistance, but a political statement.

In the same way, it was probably not by coincidence that his narrative would have been published just after the Civil War, when the civil rights of African Americans were still being seriously questioned. Parker was not the first to defer his publication to promote political change. Harriet Jacobs published *Incidents in Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) while William and Ellen Craft also published *Running Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860) within the same time period, as all three escaped following the Fugitive Slave Law. Publishing such a narrative around the same time of the Fugitive Slave Law would have risked their safety and the safety of

those who had helped them to freedom. Neither the Crafts, Jacobs, nor Parker would have wanted that. However, as the Civil War approached there was more of a political incentive for these authors to take these same risks. Eventually, Parker would do the same.

Parker responds to the Fugitive Slave Law with action during the resistance. With the publication of his narrative, he waits and seizes the opportune time to publish, as he will not overlook the political significance of the time following the Civil War in 1866. After the war ends, The Emancipation Proclamation helps to liberate slaves, but is not enough to grant African Americans the same rights as everyone else in the nation. The ratification of the 13th amendment, will state that slavery is actually a crime and the 14th amendment, will grant African Americans citizenship, legal rights, and equal protection under the law, but these are still struggling through legislation. In fact, President Andrew Johnson vetoes the 14th amendment before the Senate forces its passage. Parker, wants to make a political statement, so he not only claims freedom for himself and others, but takes another step in claiming civil rights for his fellow African Americans in publishing “The Freedman’s Story.”

Jonathan Katz questions Parker’s authorship in *Resistance at Christiana*, stating that some historians have suggested that Thomas Wentworth Higginson, an abolitionist, author, and frequent contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly* actually wrote the narrative. This is doubtful for many reasons. First, it was not Higginson’s style to write his articles, such as “Nat Turner’s Insurrection,” or “Denmark Vessey,” as first person narratives. Second, even though Higginson was definitely aware of Parker, letters to W.U. Hensel acknowledge the resistance with many incorrect details regarding the event (288). The actual narrative contains intimate details that have been confirmed by newspaper and testimonial accounts. Thus, it would have been nearly

impossible for Higginson, with his limited knowledge of the resistance, to be the actual author of “The Freedman’s Story.”

While there is evidence that Parker may have had help in the writing of his narrative, Victor Ullman, author of *The North Star: A Life of William King* provides a convincing argument that Parker was, in fact, literate. First, he points out that Parker had plenty of time to learn to read and write while living on the Buxton settlement, home to one of Canada’s finest schools. Ullman even credits William King, the founder of the Buxton Settlement, for the publication of Parker’s narrative, claiming that Parker was “One of King’s most able adult students” (219). Certainly Parker was successful in the Buxton community as he was appointed the Kent County correspondent for Frederick Douglass’ *North Star* and was a Raleigh Township Councilor, both positions which would have required him to write (Forbes 40).

Provided with this evidence, it is much more likely that Parker simply had help with the telling of “The Freedman’s Story.” When researching the narrative, Forbes refers back to diary entries from Israel D. Shadd, a black resident of the Buxton settlement and the co-editor and publisher of *The Provincial Freeman*. He reports, “Augusta took first manuscript of Parker’s life to work upon. Johnson came in from Buxton to see about it.” Another entry reports “Joseph and Anderson working in office on Parker’s life” (Forbes 40). The Shadd family, free African Americans who had emigrated from West Chester, Pennsylvania, would have been valuable collaborators since they clearly felt very strongly about education, sending their daughter Mary Anne Shadd to a Quaker school. She would eventually teach in Canada; thus, father Abraham, son Isaac, and daughter Mary Anne probably would have been very supportive of Parker’s efforts to learn to read and write (Peterson 99). It is unlikely, given Parker’s personality, that he would not have embraced this opportunity, since it would have given him another way to liberate

himself. Parker was a doer, a man who took action, and he would have wanted to be lead author in the telling of his own story.

The Buxton Historic Site and Museum has typescripts of “The Freedman’s Story” showing that Parker had tried to record his story as early as 1858. From the Shadds’ notes, it appears that Parker had the help of four African Americans in the community. Three collaborators were likely to have been helpful editors, important to a man in his thirties who was just learning to read and write. The fourth was his companion from Christiana, Abraham Johnson, who likely helped Parker to recall the rich details given in his narrative. These rich details which can be backed up by other newspaper and testimonial sources of both his life and narrative, stand as proof that Parker was at least intimately involved if not the sole author of “The Freedman’s Story” (Forbes 40).

Finally, Gilmore confirms Parker’s authorship in his preface, when he states that Parker had written the narrative “In a fair, legible hand...which needs no revision” (152). While he denies that he had help in the telling of Parker’s narrative, that does not mean that he did not influence Parker’s writing. Gilmore frequently contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* as a political and fiction writer. His story, *Among the Pines*, was a very popular fictional work at the time (Mott 542). If Parker had access to Gilmore’s writings, this could have been the reason that Parker’s narrative was so unique. Other slave narratives, such as Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglas* and Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* both contain dialogue, but not to the extent of Parker’s narrative. As seen previously, Parker utilizes this dialogue to make his story more realistic to his audience and to increases the suspense and drama. Throughout his childhood Parker has conversations with friends, encouraging them to run away with him. During many kidnappings Parker uses dialogue as anecdotes. For example,

after a kidnapping, in which the young slave girl has already been saved, the reader is left to question the fate of two Slaveholders as they attempt to find an emergency doctor:

Dr. Duffield and Squire Henderson, two respectable citizens of the town, were looking on during this entire engagement; and after we had stopped firing, they went up to the slaveholders, and the following conversation took place:--

Squire Henderson. What's the matter?

Slaveholder. You may ask, what's the matter! Is this the way you allow your niggers to do?

Squire. Why did you not shoot them?

Slaveholder. We did shoot at them, but it did not take effect.

Squire. There's no use shooting at our niggers, for their heads are like iron pots; the balls will glance off. (163)

This dialogue continues as the Squire tells the injured slaveholders that “men coming after such property ought to be killed,” and advises them to find their own doctor down South (163). The anecdote serves two purposes: increasing suspense and also providing comic relief. Few other slave narratives include such elements characteristic of a work of fiction.

Douglass, Jacobs, and Turner all share compelling narratives, but few reach the full potential of Parker’s “The Freedman’s Story.” His bold, adventurous actions provide a suspenseful, dramatic read that is both compelling and authentic. His truly narrative truly deserves to be recognized, represented, and read as a part of nineteenth-century African American and American Literature.

Chapter 4: The Relationship Between William Parker and Frederick Douglass

The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave was published in 1845, more than 20 years before William Parker shared his own life experiences in “The Freedman’s Story.” Yet, Parker was not unfamiliar with the famous abolitionist orator, even before hearing him speak for the first time. In fact, in his own narrative Parker explains, “I had formerly known Mr. Douglass as a slave in Maryland; I was therefore not prepared for the progress he had showed, neither for his free-spoken and manly language against slavery” (160). It is likely that Parker met up with Douglass again when he spoke at the Bart Quaker Meetinghouse near Parker’s residence in Smyrna, Pennsylvania (Forbes 141). Parker explains the impact of Douglass’ speech:

I listened with the intense satisfaction that only a refugee could feel, when hearing, embodied in earnest, while chosen, and strong speech, his own crude ideas of freedom, and his own hearty censure of the man-stealer. I believed, I knew, every word he said was true. It was the whole truth, - nothing kept back, - no trifling with human rights, no trading in the blood of the slave extenuated, nothing against the slaveholder said in malice. I have never listened to words from the lips of mortal man which were more acceptable to me; and although privileged since then to hear many able and good men speak on slavery, no doctrine has seemed to me so pure, so unworldly, as his. (160)

It is clear that Parker is not only impressed with Douglass’ progression from a slave to a free man, but also holds him, and his speech, in the highest esteem. The man who had always

recognized his own humanity, is now hearing the same ideals from Douglass, who never compromises his own beliefs, yet manages to deliver his speech without reproach for the slaveholder. To Parker, these words are God-sent; thus, it is no surprise that Douglass' narrative influenced Parker's telling of his own story.

It is not uncommon for slaves to share very similar, if not almost identical life experiences, but the two also use similar language to describe the same experiences. For example, Parker and Douglass both begin by telling their birthplace, then explain their lack of knowledge regarding their age. Douglass laments,

I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant" (1).

In much the same way, Parker describes how "Slaveholders are particular to keep the pedigree and age of favorite horses and dogs, but are quite indifferent about the age of their servants, until they want to purchase" (10). Both clearly make the analogy that a slave is to his master as a horse is to his owner. Parker more effectively uses this to truly underscore this demoralizing quality of slavery as he drives home the point that slaves are not only kept ignorant and like animals, but are also disposable to their owners. Douglass does "not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. They seldom come nearer to it than planting-time, harvesttime, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time" (1). Parker also tells how birthdays are not recorded, but related to general times as "the time of 'corn-planting, 'corn-husking, 'Christmas, 'New Year, 'Easter, 'the Fourth of July, ' or some similar indefinite date. My own birth was no

more exact; so that to this day I am uncertain how old I am” (10). It is not unusual for a slave not to know his or her age, but the descriptions of this injustice given by Parker and Douglass are almost identical.

Given only this evidence, some may still doubt that Douglass truly influenced Parker’s telling in his own narrative. However, the descriptions and language used to describe their escape, the feelings associated with their newly found freedom, and their experiences as freed slaves also support this theory.

Upon running for freedom, Parker says that he “had broken the bonds that held me so firmly (12), and likewise, Douglass, tells how “I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind” (107). Both Parker and Douglass describe slavery in the form of chains, bonds, or restraints, and these parallels in imagery continue as they address their first experiences of freedom.

Both authors immediately address similar concerns. Parker asks, “How shall I describe my first experience of free life?” (12), while Douglas tells how, “I have been frequently asked how I felt when I found myself in a Free State. I have never been able to answer the question with any satisfaction to myself.” He continues, “It was a moment of the highest excitement I ever experienced. I suppose I felt as one may imagine the unarmed mariner to feel when he is rescued by a friendly man-of-war from the pursuit of a pirate” (107). When describing the same experience of free life, Parker says:

The mandates of slavery are like leaden sounds, sinking with dead weight into the very soul, only to deaden and destroy. The impulse of freedom lends wings to the

feet, buoys up the spirit within, and the fugitive catches glorious glimpses of light through rifts and seams in the accumulated ignorance of his years of oppression (12).

While Douglas compares his relief to that of an unarmed mariner, Parker more subtly conjures watery images with his description of the mandates of slavery sinking and the soul floating. The rifts and seams lend a rocky, turbulent feel to this transition from slavery to freedom, underscoring the uneasiness both Parker and Douglass feel about the overall change. This passage by Parker is also similar to Douglass' description of boats on the Chesapeake as "freedom's swift winged angels" (64). Parker's allusion of wings and a floating spirit elicits the same heavenly imagery as Douglass. As the two authors describe their escape from slavery, the similar flow of their story, the imagery of restraints, water, and heaven, all allow the two narratives to echo each other in both points and terms.

After Parker and Douglass escape from slavery, they continue to express feelings of ambivalence regarding their newfound freedom. Both realize that they are always in danger. Parker recalls this danger:

After a few years of life in a Free State, the enthusiasm of the lad materially sobered down, and I found, by bitter experience, that to preserve my stolen liberty I must pay, unremittingly, an almost sleepless vigilance (16).

As if providing the evidence for this sleepless vigilance, Douglas spends nearly a page describing how, "I was yet liable to be taken back, and subjected to all the tortures of slavery" (108). He tells how:

The motto which I adopted when I started from slavery was this—"Trust no man!" I saw in every white man an enemy, and in almost every colored man cause for distrust. It was a most painful situation; and, to understand it, one must needs experience it, or imagine himself in similar circumstances. Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land—a land given up to be the hunting-ground for slaveholders—whose inhabitants are legalized kidnappers—where he is every moment is subjected to the terrible liability of being seized upon by his fellowmen, as the hideous crocodile seizes upon his prey! (108)

The "sleepless vigilance" of a man whose "every moment is subjected to the terrible liability of being seized upon by his fellowmen" sounds almost as Parker and Douglass are the same person, describing the same even

Parker's eloquent words regarding Douglass' speech, in addition to the similarities in points, terms, and style, prove that Frederick Douglass significantly influenced William Parker's telling in "A Freedman's Story." In powerful, prophetic praise for Douglass, Parker (the man who is supposedly a "doer" and not a writer) predicts that "They [Douglass and the Garrisonian abolitionists] like Gideon's band, though few, will yet rout the enemy Slavery, make him flee his own camp, and eventually fall upon his own sword" (161). Though Parker is a man of action, he clearly embraces Douglass' oratory as an invaluable resource in the fight against slavery.

Parker and Douglass met as slaves in the South, but this was obviously not the end of their relationship. What many did not realize at the time, and what has gone understated by historians, is the bridge of mutual respect that exists between Douglass and Parker. Douglass had made a clear split from the passive resistance of Garrisonian ideals early in 1850, so Parker

cannot be credited for this change. Garrison did not approve of Douglass editing *The Frederick Douglass Paper*, an exclusively black abolitionist newspaper, and their relationship suffered as a result. However, Parker's rebellion occurred during this time, and his stay at Douglass home in Rochester fueled active change on Douglass' part.

From their narratives and other writings it appears that, just as Douglass had once left a lasting impression on Parker, Parker also left a lasting impression on Douglass. Both authors write about how Douglass helps Parker to escape to Canada. Upon his arrival in Rochester, Parker notes:

On leaving the cars, after walking two or three squares, we overtook a colored man, who conducted us to the house of—a friend of mine. He welcomed me at once, as we were acquainted before, took me up stairs to wash and comb, and prepare, as he said, for company. (290)

This friend was Frederick Douglass, and this brief stay in Douglass' home would later be documented in *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. But meanwhile, just two weeks after the riot, on September 25, 1851 Douglass would publish "Freedom's Battle in Christiana" in *The Frederick Douglass Paper*. In this article, Douglass gives Parker a voice by telling his story. It is one of the few accounts (other than Parker's own narrative) that gives Parker responsibility for his actions, since a white man, Castner Hanway was actually put on trial instead. In this article, Douglass also questions whether or not it is "right for the colored men to resist their enslavers?" He answers his own question with a resounding,

Yes, or the whole structure of the world's theory of right and wrong is a lie. If it be right for any man to resist those who would enslave them, it was right for the men of color at Christiana to resist (1).

This writing is significant because it shows the shift that Douglass makes from supporting passive resistance to active resistance. If Parker had shared with Douglass his experiences of kidnappings in the Christiana area, giving Douglass the same argument that he gives in "The Freedman's Story," then it is likely that Parker reinforced Douglass' new ideals. Certainly he leaves a lasting impression, as Douglass explain his part in Parker's escape in his revised narrative, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. Just after discussing his disgust for the Fugitive Slave Law, which he describes as "cruel and shocking," Douglass refers to other acts of rebellion, and then credits Parker for undermining the authority of the new law in question:

The thing which more than all else destroyed the fugitive slave law was the resistance made to it by the fugitives themselves. A decided check was given to the execution of the law at Christiana, Penn., where three colored men, being pursued by Mr. Gorsuch and his son, slew the father, wounded the son, and drove away the officers, and made their escape to my house in Rochester. (349)

Men prior to Parker had rebelled against the Fugitive Slave Law, and some had even lost their lives in the rebellion; however, Douglass credits "the fugitives" and grants William Parker responsibility for destroying the authority of this law. Douglass goes even further when he comments, "I could not look upon them as murderers. To me, they were heroic defenders of the just rights of man against manstealers and murderers." Moreover, he claims:

Had they been pursued then and there, my home would have been stained with blood, for these men who had already tasted blood were well armed and prepared to sell their lives at any expense to the lives and limbs of their probble (*sic*) assailants. What they had already done at Christiana and the cool determination which showed very plainly especially in Parker, (for that was the name of the leader), left no doubt on my mind that their courage was genuine and that their deeds would equal their words. (349)

Here, one can see that if violent resistance were necessary to help Parker escape, Douglass would have definitely joined in the battle. Douglass' writing evolves as it is more blunt and bold, like the language found in Parker's "The Freedman's Story." For example, on June 2, 1854 Douglass would publish an article called, "Is It Right and Wise to Kill a Kidnapper?" and was quoted saying "The only way to make the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter is to make half a dozen or more dead kidnappers." (McPherson 69).

When Douglass explains that he "received from Parker the revolver that fell from the hand of Gorsuch when he died, presented now as a token of gratitude and a memento of the battle for Liberty at Christiana," it is clear that the two men possess a mutual respect for one another. Douglass returns to his home in Rochester, relieved with the belief that Parker will arrive safely in Canada.

Chapter 5: William Parker, “The Freedman’s Story,” and the *Atlantic Monthly*

When a group of writers, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and other white, liberal-minded gentlemen founded the *Atlantic Monthly*, William Parker was probably the last person on their mind as a possible contributor. Certainly, they had been aware of the resistance at Christiana, but it had taken place six years earlier, Parker had long escaped to Canada, and to their knowledge he had no way of reading or writing. Their aim was simply to create a journal that would define a progressive American voice. In fact, when the first *Atlantic Monthly* was published in November of 1857, this journal of literature, politics, science and the arts declared that it would rank itself “with that body of men which is in favor of Freedom, National Progress, and Honor whether public or private” (History of the *Atlantic Monthly*). However, William Parker embodied this spirit of freedom, in both his actions and his voice, and it is this spirit that would bring his narrative “The Freedman’s Story” to the *Atlantic Monthly*. The agenda of the *Atlantic Monthly*, its broad-minded editors and authors, and the content of the magazine made it the perfect home for William Parker’s “The Freedman’s Story.”

Parker’s narrative would be published in two installments in February and March of 1866, almost ten years after the journal’s first publication. During that time, encompassing the entire Civil War, the *Atlantic Monthly* had become an invaluable source of social and political commentary. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a frequent contributor to the journal, would tell how New England authors saw themselves as “teachers, educators, and bringers of the light with a deep and affectionate feeling of obligation towards the young republic their fathers had brought into being. That New England was appointed to guide the nation, to civilize it, to humanize it, none of them doubted” (Sedgwick 4). The founders of the *Atlantic Monthly* had a liberal agenda

that would come to support both the abolitionists' cause and the women's suffrage movement. Their authors would contribute from all parts of the country, even reaching into Canada; likewise, this popular literary journal would entertain readers in all parts of the nation. Though, as it promoted the Union cause in the Civil War, it probably didn't have many Southern readers. It had become home to many abolitionist writings, including Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and Thomas Wentworth Higginson's abolitionist essays, such as "Nat Turner's Insurrection" or "Denmark Vesey"; and it was about to publish Frederick Douglass's "Reconstruction." The *Atlantic Monthly* was a prestigious literary magazine open to featuring both women and African American writers, and these new voices influenced American society, bringing new ideologies. Some abolitionist newspapers, such as *The Liberator* had included black voices; however, even this was a radical idea at the time, so it was highly unusual for a journal with more general literary content like the *Atlantic Monthly*, to feature an African American Writer. Just as these authors came to guide, civilize, and humanize their nation, Parker was a leader who would do the same for his community. In fact, he not only led his community in an African-American resistance, his narrative is another type of leadership. "The Freedman's Story" gave African Americans a new voice.

The *Atlantic Monthly* would not have been able to pursue this agenda without authors such as Julia Ward Howe, for they helped to create a liberal, militant discourse that would identify with Parker's. In the 1862 February issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* Howe contributed "Battle Hymn of the Republic." In just four lines, she beautifully captures the spirit of violent rebellion under a higher power.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea.

With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me.

As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,

While God is Marching on (The Atlantic Online).

These lines resonate with the voice of Parker whose “rights as a freeman were, under God, secured by [his] own right arm” (154). In fact, they are very similar to the same lines that Parker chants when confronting Edward Gorsuch:

Leader, what do you say

About the judgment day?

I will die on the field of battle,

Die on the field of battle,

With glory in my soul (285)

These lines from an African spiritual song, “Die on the Field” by Samuel Wakefield, are also found in Chapter four of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (24). Coincidentally, she was also a frequent contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*. Both Stowe and Howe have drawn their vision of religious militancy from the African American spiritual. These spirituals embrace the judgment day, claiming glory, for the time when the justice will prevail. Parker, who unites his comrades in battle, embodies the militant spirit of these songs, as he not only announces, but celebrates his willingness to die for a higher cause of freedom. William Parker is a true superhero and he chooses “Die on the Field” to be his theme song.

While authors such as Howe provided content that identified with the theme of Parker's narrative, the contributions of Thomas Wentworth Higginson would serve a slightly different purpose. As one of Boston's Secret Six, who financially supported John Brown, Higginson "managed to contribute to the *Atlantic Monthly* sympathetic accounts of slave revolts of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner (*The Atlantic Monthly*). In 1831 Nat Turner's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* had left an image among northern whites, even abolitionists, of a merciless, remorseless slave seeking revenge. Higginson attempts to repair Turner's image in "Nat Turner's Insurrection." Higginson emphasizes that Turner believed that he was an avenging angel, and shows how he suffered while enslaved. If Higginson's reader cannot find sympathy in Turner's suffering, the reader certainly understands that Turner's actions were the result of his belief that his life and actions were of apocalyptic importance (Lauter 2014). After reading Higginson's articles, readers of the *Atlantic Monthly* would have likely been more sympathetic to Parker's cause. After all, Parker did not lash out in revenge like Turner, but clearly acted in self-defense for both himself and his comrades. He describes how "The insolent and overbearing conduct of the Southerners... forced me to my course of action" (162). It is clear that Parker had no choice in his actions when he emphasizes the vulnerability of all parties involved. He underscores his point in telling how "Ourselves, our wives, our little ones, were insecure, and all we had was liable to seizure." Parker shows how the life, liberty and justice of even the most innocent women and children were constantly at risk after the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, justifying his actions.

Parker might have intentionally used Higginson's writings to his advantage, since he was able to publish his narrative after both Nat Turner's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* and Higginson's *Nat Turner's Insurrection*. The story of Turner was well-known among both blacks

and whites, but it is also likely that Parker would have been exposed to these literary resources after he escaped to the Buxton community in Canada and attended one of Canada's finest schools. Parker would have been able to see how Turner's blunt and brazen tongue clearly left the negative image that Higginson would later attempt to repair. Whether or not he was aware of these writings, he would clearly represent himself in a different manner.

Furthermore, Higginson's articles were important for a publication such as Parker's, since the idea of an African American publishing in any journal, especially one as prestigious as the *Atlantic Monthly*, would have been controversial. While Higginson was not African American, his articles, sympathetic towards rebellious slaves, were probably even more controversial since the actions of the man he was defending were so severe. Having already published these articles, Parker's own account of self defense may have been more acceptable. In fact, Parker's narrative probably would have been out of place in any other journal

The content of the *Atlantic Monthly* would evolve under the journal's second editor, James T. Fields, who introduced leading authors such as Howe, Stowe, and Higginson (Fields 30). The mission of the journal became more important in embracing and promoting Republican politics and the Union cause during the time of the Civil War. Finally, in 1866, "The Freedman's Story," would be one of the politically charged articles featured in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the first part appearing in the February issues of the journal. While both the February and March issues of the journal are filled with poetry, fiction, and reviews of other works, some of the other works have more political value that are relevant to "The Freedman's Story"

For example, G.W. Hosmer's "The Origin of the Gypsies" offers an interesting view of foreigners in which Hosmer examines the history of the Gypsies. His examination of this culture

shows how Gypsies have been alienated in America, just as African Americans had been alienated and oppressed. While the Gypsies did not experience the harsh life of the slaves, these articles underscore the point that those who are different are both objects of fascination that are often both puzzling and feared. Certainly, Parker could have identified with this, and the readers of this article may have been more sympathetic towards his cause as Parker would have been viewed as an “outsider” much like the Gypsies.

Another story in the March issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* has more relevance to Parker’s “The Freedman’s Story.” When Gilmore introduces “The Freedman’s Story,” he states

Every man and woman who has essayed to depict the slave character has miserably failed, unless inoculated with the genuine spirit of the negro; and even those who have succeeded best have done only moderately well, because they have not had the negro nature. (153)

Some have speculated that Gilmore was referencing Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. She was a frequent contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*, and installments of “The Chimney Corner for 1866” was featured in the same issues as Parker’s. However, Gilmore could have also been referring to Lydia Maria Child’s “Poor Chloe,” the true story of a young female slave, which is featured in the same issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* as “The Freedman’s Story.” Chloe’s story emphasizes some of the same themes captured in Parker’s narrative. She was a black slave who did everything she could to obey her mistress and minister, and eventually she is forced to marry the minister’s slave. Ultimately she finds happiness in their first child, Tommy, but when her mistress gives Tommy away, Chloe dies of a broken heart. Much like Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Child’s “Poor Chloe” is very sentimental. Chloe’s

character is almost too perfect to be real, but this increases the reader's sympathy when she experiences harsh treatment under her Master. Though it serves the same purpose, evoking sympathy for the antislavery movement, from the reader, it does not include any of Parker's militant resistance.

This story not only captures the sympathy of the reader, but underscores Parker's point that slaves are at the mercy of the whims of their masters and mistresses. At one point, after Tommy has been taken and Chloe is grieving, the minister compares Chloe to one of his cows who moaned for days after the loss of a calf. This emphasizes another common theme among slave tracts, also evident in Parker's narrative that slaves are looked upon as animals.

While Child illustrates a heart breaking story, she cannot have truly captured the thoughts, feelings, and emotions as someone who actually experienced this heartache like Parker. While Parker did not lose a child to slavery, he lost many friends and family, including his mother. His story is invaluable to the *Atlantic Monthly* because it is more authentic than one hundred fictional accounts, such as Child's "Poor Chloe" or Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

The *Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism* reports that Charles Waddell Chestnut was the first African American author to be published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1887. This is incorrect. Parker's "The Freedman's Story" appeared in two parts in the February and March of 1866, and Frederick Douglass "Reconstruction" appeared in December of the same year. Douglass' article is much more political than Parker's, and revolves around the changes that Congress needs to make to the Constitution. However, Parker anticipates political turmoil surrounding the 13th and 14th amendment, and presents himself as a "Freedman." Thus, Parker and Douglass were likely to be the first African American authors to be published in the

Atlantic Monthly. There is no question that Douglass and Parker both knew and held a great respect for each other. Douglass had a connection with Mary Anne Shadd Cary and had published some of her letters in *The Frederick Douglass' Paper* (Peterson 99). Furthermore, he was working on "Reconstruction" to be published later in the same year, and it is fair to say he could have been Parker's link in Canada's Buxton community to the literary greats in Boston.

Conclusion

In many ways, Parker's story was unique to the *Atlantic Monthly* as an authentic slave narrative that was retrospective to antebellum American literature and history. Written and published in 1866, after the Civil War, Parker would have been able to recall other instances of violent resistance such as the Nat Turner's Rebellion and John Brown's Raid. His narrative, "The Freedman's Story" was published after Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," Thomas Wentworth Higginson's "Nat Turner's Insurrection," and even more popular slave narratives such as Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* or Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the life of a slave Girl*. Thus, Parker would have had the chance to reflect on both history and literature, which greatly influenced his writing. Gilmore incorrectly states that Parker is not a "black Shakespeare or Dickens," because he "is a doer, not a writer" (153). On the contrary, Parker's narrative becomes as bold as his actions, as he writes a suspenseful, dramatic, true life account of the Christiana resistance. Emerging from the increasing number of African American autobiographical narratives now available from the antebellum United States, William Parker's "The Freedman's Story," like Parker, demands attention and should be read.

William Parker shared many of the experiences commonly found in African American slave narratives: suffering from the separation of his family, ill treatment at the hands of his master, and lack of information about himself that is so important to one's sense of identity. Yet Parker overcomes these challenges, escaping from slavery, establishing himself as a community leader in the Christiana Community, and moving directly into righteous resistance as the leader of the Organization of Mutual Protection Against Slaveholders and Kidnappers. In this way, his life is representative of the decade of the 1850s, when tension between the North and South was building, and the nation was fated for Civil War. In fact, Parker's killing of white slaveholder

Edward Gorsuch is symbolic of how the North conquered the South. In this context, the African American hero William Parker of Christiana, Pennsylvania, really did lead the first battle of the Civil War.

Appendix: An Annotated Version of the “The Freedman’s Story”

The following text is available from the University of South Carolina’s website.
Footnotes have been added by Dana Gibson.

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THE FREEDMAN'S STORY.

IN TWO PARTS.

PART I.

[Vol. XVII, February, 1866.]

The manuscript of the following pages has been handed to me with the request that I would revise it for publication, or weave its facts into a story which should show the fitness of the Southern black for the exercise of the right of suffrage.

It is written in a fair, legible hand; its words are correctly spelled; its fact are clearly stated, and--in most instances --its sentences are properly constructed. Therefore it needs no revision. On reading it over carefully, I also discover that it is in itself a stronger argument for the

manhood of the negro than any which could be adduced by one not himself a freedman; for it is the argument of facts, and facts are the most powerful logic. Therefore, if I were to imbed these facts in the mud of fiction, I should simply oblige the reader to dredge for the oyster, which in this narrative he has without the trouble of dredging, fresh and juicy as it came from the hand of Nature,--or rather, from the hand of one of Nature's noblemen,--and who, until he was thirty years of age, had never put two letters together.¹

The narrative is a plain and unpretending account of the life of a man whose own right arm--to use his own expression --won his rights as a free man. It is written with the utmost simplicity, and has about it the verisimilitude which belongs to truth, and to truth only when told by one who has been a doer of the deeds and an actor in the scenes which he describes. It has the further rare merit of being written by one of the "despised race"; for none but a negro can fully and correctly depict negro life and character.

General Thomas--a Southern man and a friend of the Southern negro--was once in conversation with a gentleman who has attained some reputation as a delineator of the black man, when a long, lean, "poor white man," then a scout in the Union army, approached the latter, and, giving his shoulder a familiar slap, accosted him with,--

"How are you, ole feller?"

The gentleman turned about, and forgetting, in his joy at meeting an old friend, the presence of this most dignified of our military men, responded to the salutation of the scout in an equally familiar and boisterous manner. General Thomas "smiled wickedly," and quietly remarked,--

"You seem to know each other."

"Know *him!*" exclaimed the scout. "Why, Gin'ral, I ha'n't seed him fur fourteen year; but I sh'u'd know him, ef his face war as black as it war one night when we went ter a nigger shindy tergether!"

The gentleman colored up to the roots of his hair, and stammered out,--

"That was in my boy days, General, I when I was sowing my wild oats."

"Don't apologize, Sir," answered the General, "don't apologize; for I see that to your youthful habit of going to negro shindies we owe your truthful pictures of negro life."

And the General was right. Every man and woman who has essayed to depict the slave character has miserably failed, unless inoculated with the genuine spirit of the negro; and even those who have succeeded best have done only moderately well, because they have not had the negro nature. It is reserved to some black Shakspeare or Dickens to lay open the wonderful humor, pathos, poetry, and power which slumber in the negro's soul, and which now and then flash out like the fire from a thunder-cloud.

¹ Parker did not learn to read or write until after he escaped to the Buxton Settlement in Canada. William King, the founder of the Buxton settlement, claimed that Parker was one of his "most able adult students" (Ulman 219).

I do not mean to say that this black

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prophet has come in this narrative. He has not. This man is a doer, not a writer; though he gives us--particularly in the second part--touches of Nature, and little bits of description, which are perfectly inimitable. The prophet is still to come; and he *will* come. God never gives great events without great historians; and for all the patience and valor and heroic fortitude and self-sacrifice and long-suffering of the black man in this war, there will come a singer--and a black singer who shall set his deeds to a music that will thrill the nations.

But I am holding the reader at the threshold.

The author of this narrative--of every line in it--is William Parker.² He was an escaped slave, and the principal actor in the Christiana riot,--an occurrence which cost the Government of the United States fifty thousand dollars, embittered the relations of two "Sovereign States," aroused the North to the danger of the Fugitive-Slave Law, and, more than any other event, except the raid of John Brown, helped to precipitate the two sections into the mighty conflict which has just been decided on the battle-field.

Surely the man who aided towards such results must be a man, even if his complexion be that of the ace of spades; and what he says in relation to the events in which he was an actor, even if it have no romantic interest,--which, however, it has to an eminent degree,--must be an important contribution to the history of the time.

With these few remarks, I submit the evidence which he gives of the manhood of his race to that impartial grand-jury, the American people.

E. K.³

EARLY PLANTATION LIFE.

I WAS born opposite to Queen Anne, in Anne Arundel County, in the State of Maryland, on a plantation called Rowdown. My master was Major William Brogdon, one of the wealthy men of that region. He had two sons,--William, a doctor, and David, who held some office at Annapolis, and for some years was a member of the Legislature.

² Though some historians have questioned Parker's authorship, the Buxton Historic Site and Museum typescripts show that Parker began "The Freedman's Story" as early as 1858 (Forbes 40).

³ E.K., stands for Edmund Kirke. This is the pen name for James R. Gilmore, a political and fiction writer, who frequently contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* (Mott 542).

My old master died when I was very young; so I know little about him, except from statements received from my fellow-slaves, or casual remarks made in my hearing from time to time by white persons. From those I conclude that he was in no way peculiar, but should be classed with those slaveholders who are not remarkable either for the severity or the indulgence they extend to their people.

My mother, who was named Louisa Simms, died when I was very young, and to my grandmother I am indebted for the very little kindness I received in my early childhood; and this kindness could only be shown me at long intervals, and in a hurried way, as I shall presently show.

Like every Southern plantation of respectable extent and pretensions, our place had what is called the "Quarter," or place where the slaves of both sexes are lodged and fed. With us the Quarter was composed of a number of low buildings, with an additional building for single people and such of the children as were either orphans or had parents sold away or otherwise disposed of. This building was a hundred feet long by thirty wide, and had a large fireplace at either end, and small rooms arranged along the sides. In these rooms the children were huddled from day to day, the smaller and weaker subject to the whims and caprices of the larger and stronger. The largest children would always seize upon the warmest and best places, and say to us who were smaller, "Stand back, little chap, out of my way"; and we had to stand back or get a thrashing.

When my grandmother, who was cook at the "great house," came to look after me, she always brought me a morsel privately; and at such times I was entirely free from annoyance by the older ones. But as she could visit me only once in twenty-four hours, my juvenile days enjoyed but little rest from my domineering superiors in years and strength.

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When my grandmother would inquire of the others how her "little boy" was getting on, they would tell her that I was doing well, and kindly invite me to the fire to warm myself. I was afraid to complain to her of their treatment, as, for so doing, they would have beaten me, after she had gone to the "great house" again. I was thus compelled to submit to their misrepresentation, as well as to their abuse and indifference, until I grew older, when, by fighting first with one and then with another, I became "too many" for them, and could have a seat at the fire as well as the best. This experience of my boyhood has since been repeated in my manhood. My rights at the fireplace were won by my child-fists; my rights as a freeman were, under God, secured by my own right arm.

Old master had seventy slaves, mostly field-hands. My mother was a field-hand. He finally died; but after that everything went on as usual for about six years, at the end of which time the brothers, David and William, divided the land and slaves. Then, with many others, including my brother and uncle, it fell to my lot to go with Master David, who built a house on the southeast part of the farm, and called it Nearo.

Over the hands at Nearo an overseer named Robert Brown was placed; but as he was liked by neither master nor slaves, he was soon discharged. The following circumstance led to his dismissal sooner, perhaps, than it would otherwise have happened.

While master was at Annapolis, my mistress, who was hard to please, fell out with one of the house-servants, and sent for Mr. Brown to come and whip her. When he came, the girl refused to be whipped, which angered Brown, and he beat her so badly that she was nearly killed before she gave up. When Master David came home, and saw the girl's condition, he became very angry, and turned Brown away at once.

Master David owned a colored man named Bob Wallace. He was a trusty man; and as he understood farming thoroughly, he was installed foreman in place of Brown. Everything went on very well for a while under Wallace, and the slaves were as contented as it is possible for slaves to be.

Neither of our young masters would allow his hands to be beaten or abused, as many slaveholders would; but every year they sold one or more of them,--sometimes as many as six or seven at a time. One morning word was brought to the Quarter that we should not work that day, but go up to the "great house." As we were about obeying the summons, a number of strange white men rode up to the mansion. They were negro-traders. Taking alarm, I ran away to the woods with a boy of about my own age, named Levi Storax; and there we remained until the selections for the sale were made, and the traders drove away. It was a serious time while they remained. Men, women, and children, all were crying, and general confusion prevailed. For years they had associated together in their rude way,--the old counselling the young, recounting their experience, and sympathizing in their trials; and now, without a word of warning, and for no fault of their own, parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, were separated to meet no more on earth. A slave sale of this sort is always as solemn as a funeral, and partakes of its nature in one important particular,--the meeting no more in the flesh.

Levi and I climbed a pine-tree, when we got to the woods, and had this conversation together.

"Le," I said to him, "our turn will come next; let us run away, and not be sold like the rest."

"If we can only get clear this time," replied Le, "may-be they won't sell us. I will go to Master William, and ask him not to do it."

"What will you get by going to Master William?" I asked him. "If we see him, and ask him not to sell us, he will do as he pleases. For my part, I think the best thing is to run away to the Free States."

"But," replied Levi, "see how many

start for the Free States, and are brought back, and sold away down South. We could not be safe this side of Canada, and we should freeze to death before we got there."

So ended our conversation. I must have been about ten or eleven years old then; yet, young as I was, I had heard of Canada as the land far away in the North, where the runaway was safe from pursuit; but, to my imagination, it was a vast and cheerless waste of ice and snow. So the reader can readily conceive of the effect of Levi's remarks. They were a damper upon our flight for the time being.

When night came, Levi wanted to go home and see if they had sold his mother; but I did not care about going back, as I had no mother to sell. How desolate I was! No home, no protector, no mother, no attachments. As we turned our faces toward the Quarter,--where we might at any moment be sold to satisfy a debt or replenish a failing purse,--I felt myself to be what I really was, a poor, friendless slave-boy. Levi was equally sad. His mother was not sold, but she could afford him no protection.

To the question, "Where had we been?" we answered, "Walking around." Then followed inquiries and replies as to who were sold, who remained, and what transpired at the sale.

Said Levi,--

"Mother, were you sold?"

"No, child; but a good many were sold; among them, your Uncles Anthony and Dennis."

I said,--

"Aunt Ruthy, did they sell Uncle Sammy?"

"No, child."

"Where, then, is Uncle Sammy?"

I thought, if I could be with Uncle Sammy, may-be I would be safe. My Aunt Rachel, and her two children, Jacob and Priscilla, were among the sold, who altogether comprised a large number of the servants.

The apologist for slavery at the North, and the owner of his fellow-man at the South, have steadily denied that the separation of families, except for punishment, was perpetrated by Southern masters; but my experience of slavery was, that separation by sale was a part of the system. Not only was it resorted to by severe masters, but, as in my own case, by those generally regarded as mild. No punishment was so much dreaded by the refractory slave as selling. The atrocities known to be committed on plantations in the Far South, tidings of which reached the slave's ears in various ways, his utter helplessness upon the best farms and under the most humane masters and overseers, in Maryland and other Northern Slave States, together with the impression that the journey was of great extent, and comfortless even to a slave, all combined to

make a voyage down the river or down South an era in the life of the poor slave to which he looked forward with the most intense and bitter apprehension and anxiety.

This slave sale was the first I had ever seen. The next did not occur until I was thirteen years old; but every year, during the interval, one or more poor souls were disposed of privately.

Levi, my comrade, was one of those sold in this interval. Well may the good John Wesley speak of slavery as the sum of all villainies; for no resort is too despicable, no subterfuge too vile, for its supporters. Is a slave intractable, the most wicked punishment is not too severe; is he timid, obedient, attached to his birthplace and kindred, no lie is so base that it may not be used to entrap him into a change of place or of owners. Levi was made the victim of a stratagem so peculiarly Southern, and so thoroughly the outgrowth of an institution which holds the bodies and souls of men as of no more account, for all moral purposes, than the unreasoning brutes, that I cannot refrain from relating it. He was a likely lad, and, to all appearance, fully in the confidence of his master. Prompt and obedient, he seemed to some of us to enjoy high favor at the "great house." One morning he was told to take a letter to Mr. Henry

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Hall, an acquaintance of the family; and it being a part of his usual employment to bring and carry such missives, off he started, in blind confidence, to learn at the end of his journey that he had parted with parents, friends, and all, to find in Mr. Hall a new master. Thus, in a moment, his dearest ties were severed.

I met him about two months afterwards at the Cross-Road Meeting-House, on West River; and, after mutual recognition, I said to him,--

"Levi, why don't you come home?"

"I am at home," said he; "I was sold by Master William to Mr. Henry Hall."

He then told me about the deception practised upon him. I thought that a suitable opportunity to remind him of our conversation when up the pine-tree, years before, and said,--

"You told me, that, if you could escape the big sale, Master William would not sell you. Now you see how it was: the big sale was over, and yet you were sold to a worse master than you had before. I told you this would be so. The next time I hear from you, you will be sold again. Master Mack will be selling me one of these days, no doubt; but if he does, he will have to do it running."

Here ended our conversation and our association, as it was not in our power to meet afterward.

The neighbors generally called Master David, Mack, which was one of his Christian names; and the slaves called him Master Mack; so the reader will understand, that, whenever that name occurs, Master David is meant.

After the sale of Levi, I became greatly attached to Alexander Brown, another slave. Though not permitted to learn to read and write, and kept in profound ignorance of everything, save what belonged strictly to our plantation duties, we were not without crude perceptions of the dignity and independence belonging to freedom; and often, when out of hearing of the white people, or certain ones among our fellow-servants, Alexander and I would talk the subject over in our simple way.

Master Mack had a very likely young house-servant named Ann. She was between sixteen and eighteen years old; every one praised her intelligence and industry; but these commendable characteristics did not save her. She was sold next after Levi. Master told the foreman, Bob Wallace, to go to Annapolis, and take Ann with him. When Wallace told me he was going, I had a presentiment that the purpose was to sell the girl, and I told him so; but, man as he was, he had no fear about it. Wallace and Ann started for the city on horseback, and journeyed along pleasantly until they reached the town and were near the market-place, when a man came up to them, took Ann off the horse without ceremony, and put her into jail. Wallace, not suspecting the manoeuvre, attacked the man, and came well-nigh getting into difficulty. When Wallace returned, he said to Master Mack, "Why did you not tell me that Ann was sold, and not have me fighting for her? They might have put me in jail." But his master did not appear to hear him.

Poor Uncle Henry followed Ann. His wife lived in Annapolis, and belonged to a Mr. George McNear, residing there. Uncle Henry went one Saturday night to see her, when Master William put him into jail for sale; and that was the last we saw or heard of him.

Alex Brown's mother followed next. After the poor woman was gone, I said to Alex,--

"Now that your mother has been sold, it is time that you and I studied out a plan to run away and be free."

But so thoroughly had his humanity been crushed by the foul spirit of Slavery, so apathetic had he--though in the vigor of youth--become from long oppression, that he would not agree to my suggestion.

"No," he said, "'t is no use for you and I to run away. It is too far to the Free States. We could not get there. They would take us up and sell us; so we had better not go. Master Mack can't sell any more of his hands; there are no more than can carry on his farm."

"Very well," said I, "trust to that, and you will see what will come of it."

After that I said no more to him, but determined to be free. My brother Charles was of like mind; but we kept our thoughts to ourselves. How old I was then I do not know; but from what the neighbors told me, I must have been about seventeen. Slaveholders are particular to keep the pedigree and age of favorite horses and dogs, but are quite indifferent about the age of their servants, until they want to purchase. Then they are careful to select young persons, though not one in twenty can tell year, month, or day. Speaking of births,--it is the time of "corn-planting," "corn-husking," "Christmas," "New Year," "Easter," "the Fourth of July," or some similar indefinite date. My own time of birth was no more exact; so that to this day I am uncertain how old I am.

About the time of the conversation last narrated, Jefferson Dorsey, a planter near by, had a butchering. One of Dorsey's men met me, and said that they wanted more help, and that Master Mack said I might go and lend a hand. Thinking that he spoke truth, I did not ask permission, but went, and stayed until noon. I soon learned, however, that the man had deceived me.

Master Mack, when told by some of the people where I was, sent my brother John after me, with the threat of a whipping. On reaching home, the women also told me that master would almost kill me. This excited me greatly, and I replied,--

"Master Mack is 'most done whipping me."

When I went in to see him, I saw plainly enough that his face foretold a storm.

"Boy," said he, "yoke up the oxen, and haul a load of wood."

I went at once, and did the task; but, to my dismay, there he stood at the stable. I had to drive near to him; and as he evidently intended to catch me, I was all vigilance.

"When you unload that wood, come to me, Sir," he said.

I made no reply, but unloaded the wood, left the oxen standing, and stole away to Dorsey's, where I staid until the next day. Then I prevailed upon Samuel Dorsey to go home with me. Master Mack told me to go to my work, and he would forgive me; but the next time he would pay me for "the new and the old." To work I went; but I determined not to be paid for "the new and the old."

This all occurred in the month of May. Everything went on well until June; when the long-sought-for opportunity presented itself. I had been making preparations to leave ever since Master Mack had threatened me; yet I did not like to go without first having a difficulty with him. Much as I disliked my condition, I was ignorant enough to think that something besides the fact that I was a slave was necessary to exonerate me from blame in running away. A cross word, a blow, a good fright, anything, would do, it mattered not whence nor how it came. I told my brother Charles, who shared my confidence, to be ready; for the time was at hand when we should leave Old Maryland forever. I was only waiting for the first crooked word from my master.

A few days afterwards all hands were ordered to the fields to work; but I stayed behind, lurking about the house. I was tired of working without pay. Master Mack saw me, and wanted to know why I did not go out. I answered, that it was raining, that I was tired, and did not want to work. He then picked up a stick used for an ox-gad, and said, if I did not go to work, he would whip me as sure as there was a God in heaven. Then he struck at me; but I caught the stick, and we grappled, and handled each other roughly for a time, when he called for assistance. He was badly hurt. I let go my hold, bade him good-bye, and ran for the woods. As I went by the field, I beckoned to my brother, who left work, and joined me at a rapid pace.

I was now at the beginning of a now and important era in my life. Although

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upon the threshold of manhood, I had, until the relation with my master was sundered, only dim perceptions of the responsibilities of a more independent position. I longed to cast off the chains of servitude, because they chafed my free spirit, and because I had a notion that my position was founded in injustice; but it has only been since a struggle of many years, and, indeed, since I settled upon British soil, that I have realized fully the grandeur of my position as a free man.

One fact, when I was a slave, often filled me with indignation. There were many poor white lads of about my own age, belonging to families scattered around, who were as poor in personal effects as we were; and yet, though our companions, (when we chose to tolerate them,) they did not have to be controlled by a master, to go and come at his command, to be sold for his debts, or whenever he wanted extra pocket-money. The preachers of a slave-trading gospel frequently told us, in their sermons, that we should be "good boys," and not break into master's hen-roost, nor steal his bacon; but they never told this to these poor white people, although they knew very well that they encouraged the slaves to steal, trafficked in stolen goods, and stole themselves.

Why this difference? I felt I was the equal of these poor whites, and naturally I concluded that we were greatly wronged, and that all this talk about obedience, duty, humility, and honesty was, in the phrase of my companions, "all gammon."

But I was now on the high-road to liberty. I had broken the bonds that held me so firmly; and now, instead of fears of recapture, that before had haunted my imagination whenever I thought of running away, I felt as light as a feather, and seemed to be helped onward by an irresistible force.

Some time before this, I had been able, through the instrumentality of a friend, to procure a pass, for which I paid five dollars,--all the money I had saved in a long time; but as my brother determined to go with me, and as we could not both use it safely, I destroyed it.

On the day I ceased working for master, after gaining the woods, we lurked about and discussed our plans until after dark. Then we stole back to the Quarter, made up our bundles, bade some of our friends farewell, and at about nine o'clock of the night set out for Baltimore. How shall I describe my first experience of free life? Nothing can be greater than the contrast it

affords to a plantation experience, under the suspicious and vigilant eye of a mercenary overseer or a watchful master. Day and night are not more unlike. The mandates of Slavery are like leaden sounds, sinking with dead weight into the very soul, only to deaden and destroy. The impulse of freedom lends wings to the feet, buoys up the spirit within, and the fugitive catches glorious glimpses of light through rifts and seams in the accumulated ignorance of his years of oppression. How briskly we travelled on that eventful night and the next day!

We reached Baltimore on the following evening, between seven and eight o'clock. When we neared the city, the patrols were out, and the difficulty was to pass them unseen or unsuspected. I learned of a brick-yard at the entrance to the city; and thither we went at once, took brick-dust and threw it upon our clothes, hats, and boots, and then walked on. Whenever we met a passer-by, we would brush off some of the dust, and say aloud, "Boss gave us such big tasks, we would leave him. We ought to have been in a long time before." By this ruse we reached quiet quarters without arrest or suspicion.

We remained in Baltimore a week, and then set out for Pennsylvania.

We started with the brightest visions of future independence; but soon they were suddenly dimmed by one of those unpleasant incidents which annoy the fugitive at every step of his onward journey.

The first place at which we stopped to rest was a village on the old York

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road, called New Market. There nothing occurred to cause us alarm; so, after taking some refreshments, we proceeded towards York; but when near Logansville, we were interrupted by three white men, one of whom, a very large man, cried,--

"Hallo!"

I answered,--

"Hallo to you!"

"Which way are you travelling?" he asked.

We replied,--

"To Little York."

"Why are you travelling so late?"

"We are not later than you are," I answered.

"Your business must be of consequence," he said.

"It is. We want to go to York to attend to it; and if you have any business, please attend to it, and don't be meddling with ours on the public highway. We have no business with you, and I am sure you have none with us."

"See here!" said he; "you are the fellows that this advertisement calls for," at the same time taking the paper out of his pocket, and reading it to us.

Sure enough, there we were, described exactly. He came closely to us, and said,--

"You must go back."

I replied,--

"If I must, I must, and you must take me."

"Oh, you need not make any big talk about it," he answered; "for I have taken back many a runaway, and I can take you. What's that you have in your hand?"

"A stick."

He put his hand into his pocket, as if to draw a pistol, and said,--

"Come! give up your weapons."

I said again,--

"'T is only a stick."

He then reached for it, when I stepped back and struck him a heavy blow on the arm. It fell as if broken; I think it was. Then he turned and ran, and I after him. As he ran, he would look back over his shoulder, see me coming, and then run faster, and halloo with all his might. I could not catch him, and it seemed, that, the longer he ran, the faster he went. The other two took to their heels at the first alarm,--thus illustrating the valor of the chivalry!

At last I gave up the chase. The whole neighborhood by that time was aroused, and we thought best to retrace our steps to the place whence we started. Then we took a roundabout course until we reached the railroad, along which we travelled. For a long distance there was unusual stir and commotion. Every house was lighted up; and we heard people talking and horses galloping this way and that way, with other evidences of unusual excitement. This was between one and two o'clock in the morning. We walked on a long distance before we lost the sounds; but about four o'clock the same morning, entered York, where we remained during the day.

Once in York, we thought we should be safe, but were mistaken. A similar mistake is often made by fugitives. Not accustomed to travelling, and unacquainted with the facilities for

communication, they think that a few hours' walk is a long journey, and foolishly suppose, that, if they have few opportunities of knowledge, their masters can have none at all at such great distances. But our ideas of security were materially lessened when we met with a friend during the day, who advised us to proceed farther, as we were not out of imminent danger.

According to this advice we started that night for Columbia. Going along in the dark, we heard persons following. We went very near to the fence, that they might pass without observing us. There were two, apparently in earnest conversation. The one who spoke so as to be distinctly heard we discovered to be Master Mack's brother-in-law. He remarked to his companion that they must hurry and get to the bridge before we crossed. He knew that we had not gone over yet. We were then near enough to have killed them, concealed as we were by the

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darkness; but we permitted them to pass unmolested, and went on to Wrightsville that night.

The next morning we arrived at Columbia before it was light, and fortunately without crossing the bridge, for we were taken over in a boat. At Wrightsville we met a woman with whom we were before acquainted, and our meeting was very gratifying. We there inclined to halt for a time.

I was not used to living in town, and preferred a home in the country; so to the country we decided to go. After resting for four days, we started towards Lancaster to try to procure work. I got a place about five miles from Lancaster, and then set to work in earnest.

While a slave, I was, as it were, groping in the dark, no ray of light penetrating the intense gloom surrounding me. My scanty garments felt too tight for me, my very respiration seemed to be restrained by some supernatural power. Now, free as I supposed, I felt like a bird on a pleasant May morning. Instead of the darkness of slavery, my eyes were almost blinded by the light of freedom.

Those were memorable days, and yet much of this was boyish fancy. After a few years of life in a Free State, the enthusiasm of the lad materially sobered down, and I found, by bitter experience, that to preserve my stolen liberty I must pay, unremittingly, an almost sleepless vigilance; yet to this day I have never looked back regretfully to Old Maryland, nor yearned for her flesh-pots.

I have said I engaged to work; I hired my services for three months for the round sum of three dollars per month. I thought this an immense sum. Fast work was no trouble to me; for when the work was done, the money was mine. That was a great consideration. I could go out on Saturdays and Sundays, and home when I pleased, without being whipped. I thought of my fellow-servants left behind, bound in the chains of slavery,--and I was free! I thought, that, if I had the power, they should soon be as free as I was; and I formed a resolution that I would assist in liberating every one within my reach at the risk of my life, and that I would devise some plan for their entire liberation.

My brother went about fifteen miles farther on, and also got employment. I "put in" three months with my employer, "lifted" my wages, and then went to visit my brother. He lived in Bart Township, near Smyrna; and after my visit was over, I engaged to work for a Dr. Dengy, living near by. I remained with him thirteen months. I never have been better treated than by the Doctor; I liked him and the family, and they seemed to think well of me.

While living with Dr. Dengy, I had, for the first time, the great privilege of seeing that true friend of the slave, William Lloyd Garrison, who came into the neighborhood, accompanied by Frederick Douglass.⁴ They were holding anti-slavery meetings. I shall never forget the impression that Garrison's glowing words made upon me. I had formerly known Mr. Douglass as a slave in Maryland; I was therefore not prepared for the progress he then showed, neither for his free-spoken and manly language against slavery. I listened with the intense satisfaction that only a refugee could feel, when hearing, embodied in earnest, well-chosen, and strong speech, his own crude ideas of freedom, and his own hearty censure of the man-stealer. I believed, I knew, every word he said was true. It was the whole truth,--nothing kept back,--no trifling with human rights, no trading in the blood of the slave extenuated, nothing against the slaveholder said in malice. I have never listened to words from the lips of mortal man which were more acceptable to me; and although privileged since then to hear many able and good men speak on slavery, no doctrine has seemed to me so pure, so unworldly, as his. I may here say, and without offence, I trust, that, since that time, I have had a long experience of Garrisonian Abolitionists, and have always

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found them men and women with hearts in their bodies. They are, indeed and in truth, the poor slave's friend. To shelter him, to feed and clothe him, to help him on to freedom, I have ever found them ready; and I should be wanting in gratitude, if I neglected this opportunity--the only one I may ever have--to say thus much of them, and to declare for myself and for the many colored men in this free country whom I know they have aided in their journey to freedom, our humble confidence in them. Yes, the good spirit with which he is imbued constrained William Lloyd Garrison to plead for the dumb; and for his earnest pleadings all these years, I say, God bless him! By agitation, by example, by suffering, men and women of like spirit have been led to adopt his views, as the great necessity, and to carry them out into actions. They, too, have my heartfelt gratitude. They, like Gideon's band, though few, will yet rout the enemy Slavery, make him flee his own camp, and eventually fall upon his own sword.*

One day, while living at Dr. Dengy's, I was working in the barn-yard, when a man came to the fence, and, looking at me intently, went away. The Doctor's son, observing him, said,--

"Parker, that man, from his movements, must be a slaveholder or kidnapper. This is the second time he has been looking at you. If not a kidnapper, why does he look so steadily at you and not tell his errand?"

⁴ Though Parker was acquainted with Douglass while enslaved in Maryland, it is likely that this meeting took place when Douglass spoke at the Bart Quaker Meetinghouse near Parker's residence in Smyrna, Pennsylvania (Forbes 141).

I said,--

"The man must be a fool! If he should come back and not say anything to me, I shall say something to him."

We then looked down the road and saw him coming again. He rode up to the same place and halted. I then went to the fence, and, looking him steadily in the eye, said,--

"Am I your slave?"

He made no reply, but turned his horse and rode off, at full speed, towards the valley. We did not see him again; but that same evening word was brought that kidnappers were in the valley, and if we were not careful, they would "hook" some of us. This caused a great excitement among the colored people of the neighborhood.

A short while prior to this, a number of us had formed an organization for mutual protection against slaveholders and kidnappers, and had resolved to prevent any of our brethren being taken back into slavery, at the risk of our own lives. We collected together that evening, and went down to the valley; but the kidnappers had gone. We watched for them several nights in succession, without result; for so much alarmed were the tavern-keepers by our demonstration, that they refused to let them stop over night with them. Kidnapping was so common, while I lived with the Doctor, that we were kept in constant fear. We would hear of slaveholders or kidnappers every two or three weeks; sometimes a party of white men would break into a house and take a man away, no one knew where; and, again, a whole family would be carried off. There was no power to protect them, nor prevent it. So completely roused were my feelings, that I vowed to let no slaveholder take back a fugitive, if I could but get my eye on him.⁵

One day word was sent to me that slaveholders had taken William Dorsey, and had put him into Lancaster jail to await a trial. Dorsey had a wife and three or four children; but what was it to the slaveholder, if the wife and children should starve? We consulted together, as to what course to take to deliver him; but no plan that was proposed could be worked. At last we separated, determining to get him away some way or other on the day of trial. His case caused great excitement. We attended the trial, and eagerly watched all the movements from an outside position, and had a man to tell us how proceedings were going on within. He finally came out and said that the case would go against Dorsey. We then formed in a column at the court-house

* This sentence was written before the beginning of our civil war. Viewed in the light of subsequent events, it is somewhat remarkable.-- E.K.

⁵ Many of the following accounts of kidnappings are actually documented by personal testimonies or *The Lancaster Examiner and Herald* (Katz 316).

door, and when the slaveholders and Dorsey came out, we walked close to them,--behind and around them,--trying to separate them from him. Before we had gone far towards the jail, a slaveholder drew a pistol on Williams Hopkins, one of our party. Hopkins defied him to shoot; but he did not. Then the slaveholder drew the pistol on me, saying, he would blow my black brains out, if I did not go away. I doubled my fists to knock him down, but some person behind caught my hand; this started a fracas, and we got Dorsey loose; but he was so confused that he stood stock still, until they tied him again. A general fight followed. Bricks, stones, and sticks fell in showers. We fought across the road and back again, and I thought our brains would be knocked out; when the whites, who were too numerous for us, commenced making arrests. They got me fast several times, but I succeeded in getting away. One of our men was arrested, and afterwards stood trial; but they did not convict him. Dorsey was put into jail, but was afterwards bought and liberated by friends.

My friends now said that I had got myself into a bad difficulty, and that my arrest would follow. In this they were mistaken. I never was disturbed because of it, nor was the house at which I lodged ever searched, although the neighbors were repeatedly annoyed in that way. I distinctly remember that this was the second time that resistance had been made to their wicked deeds. Whether the kidnapers were clothed with legal authority or not, I did not care to inquire, as I never had faith in nor respect for the Fugitive-Slave Law.

The whites of that region were generally such negro-haters, that it was a matter of no moment to them where fugitives were carried,--whether to Lancaster, Harrisburg, or elsewhere.

The insolent and overbearing conduct of the Southerners, when on such errands to Pennsylvania, forced me to my course of action. They did not hesitate to break open doors, and to enter, without ceremony, the houses of colored men; and when refused admission, or when a manly and determined spirit was shown, they would present pistols, and strike and knock down men and women indiscriminately.

I was sitting one evening in a friend's house, conversing about these marauding parties, when I remarked to him that a stop should be put to such "didos," and declared, that, the next time a slaveholder came to a house where I was, I would refuse to admit him. His wife replied, "It will make a fuss." I told her, "It is time a fuss was made." She insisted that it would cause trouble and it was best to let them alone and have peace. Then I told her we must have trouble before we could have peace "The first slaveholder that draws a pistol on me I shall knock down."

We were interrupted, just at this stage of the conversation, by some one rapping at the door.

"Who's there?" I asked.

"It's me! Who do you think? Open the door!" was the response, in a gruff tone.

"What do you want?" I asked.

Without replying, the man opened the door and came in, followed by two others.

The first one said,--

"Have you any niggers here?"

"What have we to do with your niggers?" said I.

After bandying a few words, he drew his pistol upon me. Before he could bring the weapon to bear, I seized a pair of heavy tongs, and struck him a violent blow across the face and neck, which knocked him down. He lay for a few minutes senseless, but afterwards rose, and walked out of the house without a word, followed by his comrades, who also said nothing to us, but merely asked their leader, as they went out, if he was hurt.

The part of Lancaster County in which I lived was near Chester County. Not far away, in the latter county, lived Moses Whitson, a well-known Abolitionist, and a member of the Society of Friends. Mr. Whitson had a colored girl living in his family, who

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was pounced upon by the slaveholders, awhile after the Dorsey arrest. About daylight three men went to Mr. Whitson's house and told him that the girl he had living with him was their property, and that they intended to have her. Friend Whitson asked the girl if she knew any of the men, and if any of them was her master. She said, "No!" One of the slaveholders said he could prove that she was his property; and then they forcibly tied her, put her into a carriage, and started for Maryland.

While the kidnapers were contending with Moses Whitson for the girl, Benjamin Whipper, a colored man, who now lives in this country, sounded the alarm, that "the kidnapers were at Whitson's, and were taking away his girl." The news soon reached me, and with six or seven others, I followed them. We proceeded with all speed to a place called the Gap-Hill, where we overtook them, and took the girl away. Then we beat the kidnapers, and let them go. We learned afterwards that they were all wounded badly, and that two of them died in Lancaster, and the other did not get home for some time. Only one of our men was hurt, and he had only a slight injury in the hand.

Dr. Duffield and Squire Henderson, two respectable citizens of the town, were looking on during this entire engagement; and after we had stopped firing, they went up to the slaveholders, and the following conversation took place:--

Squire Henderson. What's the matter?

Slaveholder. You may ask, what's the matter! Is this the way you allow your niggers to do?

Squire. Why did you not shoot them?

Slaveholder. We did shoot at them, but it did not take effect.

Squire. There's no use shooting at our niggers, for their heads are like iron pots; the balls will glance off. What were you doing?

Slaveholder. Taking our property, when the niggers jumped on us and nearly killed some of the men.

Squire. Men coming after such property ought to be killed.

Slaveholder. Do you know where we can find a doctor?

Squire. Yes; there are plenty of doctors South.

Being much disabled, and becoming enraged, they abruptly left, and journeyed on until they reached McKenzie's tavern, where their wounds were dressed and their wants attended to. So strongly was McKenzie in sympathy with these demons, that he declared he would never employ another nigger, and actually discharged a faithful colored woman who had lived a long time in his employ. Dr. Lemmon, a physician on the road to Lancaster, refused to attend the slaveholders; so that by the time they got to the city, from being so long without surgical aid, their limbs were past setting, and two of them died, as before stated, while the other survived but a short time after reaching Maryland.

A large reward was offered by the Maryland authorities for the perpetrators of the flogging, but without effect.

McKenzie, the tavern-keeper referred to, boasted after this that he would entertain all slaveholders who came along, and help them recapture their slaves. We were equally determined he should not, if we could prevent it.

The following affliction was eventually the means, under Providence, by which he was led to adopt other views, and become a practical Abolitionist.

A band of five men stood off, one dark night, and saw with evident satisfaction the curling flames ascend above his barn, from girder to roof, and lap and lash their angry tongues in wild license, until every vestige of the building was consumed.

After that mysterious occurrence, the poor fugitive had no better friend than the publican McKenzie.

Shortly after the incidents just related, I was married to Eliza Ann Elizabeth Howard, a fugitive, whose experience of slavery had been much more bitter than my own.⁶ We commenced housekeeping, renting a room from Enoch

⁶ Coincidentally, Parker's wife's name is Eliza and her mother's name is Cassy, the same names as the mother and grandmother in Harriett Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It is curious that Douglass speaks of Stowe's visit to his home just after Parker in *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (349).

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Johnson for one month. We did not like our landlord, and when the time was up left, and rented a house of Isaac Walker for one year. After the year was out, we left Walker's and went to Smyrna, and there I rented a house from Samuel D. Moore for another year. After the year was out we left Smyrna also, and went to Joseph Moore's to live. We lived on his place about five years. While we were living there, several kidnappers came into the neighborhood. On one occasion, they took a colored man and started for Maryland. Seven of us set out in pursuit, and, soon getting on their track, followed them to a tavern on the Westchester road, in Chester County. Learning that they were to remain for the night, I went to the door and asked for admittance. The landlord demanded to know if we were white or colored. I told him colored. He then told us to be gone, or he would blow out our brains. We walked aside a little distance, and consulted about what we should do. Our men seemed to dread the undertaking; but I told them we could overcome them, and that I would go in. One of them said he would follow at the risk of his life. The other five said we should all get killed,--that we were men with families,--that our wives and children needed our assistance,--and that they did not think we would be doing our families justice by risking our lives for one man. We two then went back to the tavern, and, after rapping, were told again by the landlord to clear out, after he found that we were colored. I pretended that we wanted something to drink. He put his head out of the window, and threatened again to shoot us; when my comrade raised his gun and would have shot him down, had I not caught his arm and persuaded him not to fire. I told the landlord that we wanted to come in and intended to come in. Then I went to the yard, got a piece of scantling, took it to the door, and, by battering with it a short time, opened it. As soon as the door flew open, a kidnapper shot at us, and the ball lodged in my ankle, bringing me to the ground. But I soon rose, and my comrade then firing on them, they took to their heels. As they ran away, I heard one say, "We have killed one of them."

My companion and I then rushed into the house. We unbound the man, took him out, and started for home; but had hardly crossed the door-sill before people from the neighboring houses began to fire on us. At this juncture, our other five came up, and we all returned the compliment. Firing on both sides was kept up for ten or fifteen minutes, when the whites called for quarter, and offered to withdraw, if we would stop firing. On this assurance we started off with the man, and reached home safely.

The next day my ankle was very painful. With a knife I extracted the ball, but kept the wound secret; as long before we had learned that for our own security it was best not to let such things be generally known.

About ten o'clock of a Sabbath night, awhile after the event last narrated, we were aroused by the cry of "Kidnappers! kidnappers!" and immediately some one halloed under my window,--

"William! William!"

I put my head out and demanded his errand. He said,--

"Come here!"

I answered,--

"You must be a fool to think I am going to you at this time of the night, without knowing who you are and what you want."

He would not satisfy me, so I took my gun, and went out to him. I was then informed that kidnappers had been at Allen Williams's; that they had taken Henry Williams, and gone towards Maryland. I called one of our party, who dressed and proceeded to arouse our men. Two of us then started for the Nine Points, in Lancaster County, and left instructions for the other men to meet us in the valley. They did so, and we hurried on to our destination. We had not gone far before we heard some one calling, "Kidnappers! kidnappers!" Going back some distance, we

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found the cry came from a man who had fallen into a lime quarry. He was in a bad situation, and unable to get out without assistance, and, hearing us pass, concluded we were kidnappers and raised the cry. We were delayed for a time in helping him out, and it provoked me very much, as it was important we should be in haste.

We started again for the Nine Points, but, arriving there, learned to our dismay, that the kidnappers had passed an hour before. The chase was given up, but with saddened feelings. A fellow-being had been dragged into hopeless bondage, and we, his comrades, held our liberty as insecurely as he had done but a few short hours before! We asked ourselves the question, "Whose turn will come next," I was delegated to find out, if possible, who had betrayed him, which I accordingly did.

Lynch law is a code familiar to the colored people of the Slave States. It is of so diabolical a character as to be without justification, except when enforced by men of pure motives, and then only in extreme cases, as when the unpunished party has it in his power to barter away the lives and liberties of those whose confidence he possesses, and who would, by bringing him before a legal tribunal, expose themselves to the same risks that they are liable to from him. The frequent attacks from slaveholders and their tools, the peculiarity of our position, many being escaped slaves, and the secrecy attending these kidnapping exploits, all combined to make an appeal to the Lynch Code in our case excusable, if not altogether justifiable. Ourselves, our wives, our little ones, were insecure, and all we had was liable to seizure. We felt that something must be done, for some one must be in our midst with whom the slaveholders had communication. I inquired around, quietly, and soon learned that Allen Williams, the very man in whose house the fugitive was, had betrayed him. This information I communicated to our men. They met at my house and talked the matter over; and, after most solemnly weighing all the facts and evidence, we resolved that he should die, and we set about executing our purpose that evening. The difficulty was, how to punish him. Some were for shooting him, but this was not feasible. I proposed another plan, which was agreed to.

Accordingly, we went to his house and asked if a man named Carter, who lived with him, was at home, as rumor said that he had betrayed Henry Williams. He denied it, and said that

Carter had fought for Henry with him, but the slaveholders being too strong for them, they had to give him up. He kept beyond reach, and the men apologized for intruding upon him, while I stepped up to the door and asked for a glass of water. He gave it to me, and to the others. When he was giving water to one of the party, I caught him by the throat, to prevent his giving the alarm, and drew him over my head and shoulders. Then the rest beat him until we thought we heard some one coming, which caused us to flee. If we had not been interrupted, death would have been his fate. At that time I was attending a threshing-machine for George Whitson and Joseph Scarlot.

It must have been a month after the Williams affray, that I was sitting at home one evening, talking with Pinckney and Samuel Thompson about how I was getting on with my work, when I thought I heard some one call my name. I went out, but all was quiet. When I went in, Pinckney and Thompson laughed at me, and said that I had become so "scary" that I could not stay in the house. But I was not satisfied. I was sure some one had called me. I said so, and that I would go to Marsh Chamberlain's to see if anything was wrong. They concluded to go also, and we started.

Arriving near the house, I told Pinckney and Thompson to stop outside, and I would go in, and if anything was wrong, would call them. When I reached the house, I saw a chair broken to pieces, and knew that something had happened. I said,--

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"Hallo, Marsh!"

"Who is that?" said he.

And his wife said,--

"Parker, is that you?"

"Yes," I said.

"Oh, Parker, come here!" she called.

I called Pinckney and Thompson and we went in. Marsh met us, and said that kidnapers had been there, had taken John Williams, and gone with him towards Buck Hill. They had then been gone about fifteen minutes. Off we started on a rapid run to save him. We ran to a stable, got out two horses, and Pinckney and I rode on. Thompson soon got the rest of our party together and followed. We were going at a pretty good gait, when Pinckney's horse stumbled and fell, fastening his rider's leg; but I did not halt. Pinckney got his horse up and caught up with me.

"You would not care," said he, "if a man were to get killed! You would not help him!"

"Not in such a case as this," I replied.

We rode on to the Maryland line, but could not overtake them. We were obliged to return, as it was near daybreak. The next day a friend of ours went to Maryland to see what had been done with Williams. He went to Dr. Savington's, and the Doctor told him that the fugitive could not live,--the kidnappers had broken his skull, and otherwise beaten him very badly; his ankle, too, was out of place. In consequence of his maimed condition, his mistress refused to pay the men anything for bringing him home. That was the last we ever heard of poor John Williams; but we learned afterwards why we failed to release him on the night he was taken. The kidnappers heard us coming, and went into the woods out of the way, until we had passed them.

Awhile before this occurrence, there lived in a town not far away from Christiana a colored man who was in the habit of decoying fugitives fresh from bondage to his house on various pretexts, and, by assuming to be their friend, got from them the name of their master, his residence, and other needed particulars. He would then communicate with the master about his slave, tell him at what time the man would be at his house, and when he came at the appointed hour, the poor refugee would fall into the merciless clutches of his owner. Many persons, mostly young people, had disappeared mysteriously from the country, from whom nothing could be heard. At last the betrayer's connection with these transactions was clearly traced; and it was decided to force him to quit the nefarious business.

He was too wary to allow himself to be easily taken, and a resort was had to stratagem. I, with others, thought he deserved to be shot openly in his daughter's house, and was willing to take the consequences.

At last this man's outrages became so notorious that six of our most reliable men resolved to shoot him, if they had to burn him out to do it. After I had sworn the men in the usual form, we went to his barn, took two bundles of wheat-straw, and, fastening them under the eaves with wisps, applied a lighted match to each. We then took our stations a few rods off, with rifles ready and in good condition,--mine was a smooth-bore, with a heavy charge.

The house burned beautifully; and half an hour after it ignited the walls fell in, but no betrayer showed himself. Instead of leaving the house by the rear door, as we had expected, just before the roof fell in, he broke out the front way, rushed to his next neighbor's, and left his place without an effort to save it. We had built the fire in the rear, and looked for him there; but he ran in the opposite direction, not only as if his life was in danger, but as if the spirit of his evil deeds was after him.

PART II.
[Vol. XVII, March, 1866.]

AS the Freedman relates only events which came under his own observation, it is necessary to preface the remaining portion of his narrative with a brief account of the Christiana riot. This I extract mainly from a statement made at the time by a member of the Philadelphia bar, making only a few alterations to give the account greater clearness and brevity.

On the 9th of September, 1851, Mr. Edward Gorsuch, a citizen of Maryland, residing near Baltimore, appeared before

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Edward D. Ingraham, Esquire, United States Commissioner at Philadelphia, and asked for warrants under the act of Congress of September 18, 1850, for the arrest of four of his slaves, whom he had heard were secreted somewhere in Lancaster County. Warrants were issued forthwith, directed to H. H. Kline, a deputy United States Marshal, authorizing him to arrest George Hammond, Joshua Hammond, Nelson Ford, and Noah Buley, persons held to service or labor in the State of Maryland, and to bring them before the said Commissioner.

Mr. Gorsuch then made arrangements with John Agin and Thompson Tully, residents of Philadelphia, and police officers, to assist Kline in making the arrests. They were to meet Mr. Gorsuch and some companions at Penningtonville, a small place on the State Railroad, about fifty miles from Philadelphia. Kline, with the warrants, left Philadelphia on the same day, about 2 P. M., for West Chester. There he hired a conveyance and rode to Gallagherville, where he hired another conveyance to take him to Penningtonville. Before he had driven very far, the carriage breaking down, he returned to Gallagherville, procured another, and started again. Owing to this detention, he was prevented from meeting Mr. Gorsuch and his friends at the appointed time, and when he reached Penningtonville, about 2 A. M. on the 10th of September, they had gone.

On entering the tavern, the place of rendezvous he saw a colored man whom he recognized as Samuel Williams, a resident of Philadelphia. To put Williams off his guard, Kline asked the landlord some questions about horse thieves. Williams remarked that he had seen the "horse thieves," and told Kline he had come too late.

Kline then drove on to a place called the Gap. Seeing a person he believed to be Williams following him, he stopped at several taverns along the road and made inquiries about horse thieves. He reached the Gap about 3 A. M., put up his horses, and went to bed. At half past four he rose, ate breakfast, and rode to Parkesburg, about forty-five miles from Philadelphia, and on the same railroad. Here he found Agin and Tully asleep in the bar-room. He awoke Agin, called him aside, and inquired for Mr. Gorsuch and his party. He was told they had gone to Sadsbury, a small place on the turnpike, four or five miles from Parkesburg.

On going there, he found them, about 9 A. M. on the 10th of September. Kline told them he had seen Agin and Tully, who had determined to return to Philadelphia, and proposed that the whole party should return to Gallagherville. Mr. Gorsuch, however, determined to go to Parkesburg instead, to see Agin and Tully, and attempt to persuade them not to return. The rest of the party were to go to Gallagherville, while Kline returned to Downingtown, to see Agin and Tully, should Mr. Gorsuch fail to meet them at Parkesburg. He left Gallagherville about 11 A. M., and met Agin and Tully at Downingtown. Agin said he had seen Mr. Gorsuch, but refused to go back. He promised, however, to return from Philadelphia in the evening cars. Kline returned to Downingtown, and then met all the party except Mr. Edward Gorsuch, who had remained

behind to make the necessary arrangements for procuring a guide to the houses where he had been informed his negroes were to be found.

About 3 P. M., Mr. Edward Gorsuch joined them at Gallagherville, and at 11 P. M. on the night of the 10th of September they all went in the cars to Downingtown, where they waited for the evening train from Philadelphia.

When it arrived, neither Agin nor Tully was to be seen. The rest of the party went on to the Gap, which they reached about half past one on the morning of the 11th of September. They then continued their journey on foot towards Christiana, where Parker was residing, and where the slaves of Mr. Gorsuch were supposed to be living. The party then consisted of Kline, Edward Gorsuch, Dickinson Gorsuch, his son, Joshua M. Gorsuch, his nephew,

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Dr. Thomas Pierce, Nicholas T. Hutchings, and Nathan Nelson.

After they had proceeded about a mile they met a man who was represented to be a guide. He is said to have been disguised in such a way that none of the party could recognize him, and his name is not mentioned in any of the proceedings. It is probable that he was employed by Mr. Edward Gorsuch, and one condition of his services may have been that he should be allowed to use every possible means of concealing his face and name from the rest of the party. Under his conduct, the party went on, and soon reached a house in which they were told one of the slaves was to be found. Mr. Gorsuch wished to send part of the company after him, but Kline was unwilling to divide their strength, and they walked on, intending to return that way after making the other arrests.

The guide led them by a circuitous route, until they reached the Valley Road, near the house of William Parker, the writer of the annexed narrative, which was their point of destination. They halted in a lane near by, ate some crackers and cheese, examined the condition of their fire-arms, and consulted upon the plan of attack. A short walk brought them to the orchard in front of Parker's house, which the guide pointed out and then left them. He had no desire to remain and witness the result of his false information. His disguise and desertion of his employer are strong circumstances in proof of the fact that he knew he was misleading the party. On the trial of Hanway, it was proved by the defence that Nelson Ford, one of the fugitives, was not on the ground until after the sun was up. Joshua Hammond had lived in the vicinity up to the time that a man by the name of Williams had been kidnapped, when he and several others departed, and had not since been heard from. Of the other two, one at least, if the evidence for the prosecution is to be relied upon, was in the house at which the party first halted, so that there could not have been more than one of Mr. Gorsuch's slaves in Parker's house, and of this there is no positive testimony.

It was not yet daybreak when the party approached the house. They made demand for the slaves, and threatened to burn the house and shoot the occupants, if they would not surrender. At this time, the number of besiegers seems to have been increased, and as many as fifteen are said

to have been near the house. About daybreak, when they were advancing a second or third time, they saw a negro coming out, whom Mr. Gorsuch thought he recognized as one of his slaves. Kline pursued him with a revolver in his hand, and stumbled over the bars near the house. Some of the company came up before Kline, and found the door open. They entered, and Kline, following, called for the owner, ordered all to come down, and said he had two warrants for the arrest of Nelson Ford and Joshua Hammond. He was answered that there were no such men in the house. Kline, followed by Mr. Gorsuch, attempted to go up stairs. They were prevented from ascending by what appears to have been an ordinary *fish gig*. Some of the witnesses described it as "like a pitchfork with blunt prongs," and others were at a loss what to call this, the first weapon used in the contest. An axe was next thrown down, but hit no one.

Mr. Gorsuch and others then went outside to talk with the negroes at the window. Just at this time Kline fired his pistol up stairs. The warrants were then read outside the house, and demand made upon the landlord. No answer was heard. After a short interval, Kline proposed to withdraw his men, but Mr. Gorsuch refused, and said he would not leave the ground until he had made the arrests. Kline then in a loud voice ordered some one to go to the sheriff and bring a hundred men, thinking, as he afterwards said, this would intimidate them. The threat appears to have had some effect, for the negroes asked time to consider. The party outside agreed to give fifteen minutes.

While these scenes were passing at

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the house, occurrences transpired elsewhere that are worthy of attention, but which cannot be understood without a short statement of previous events.

In the month of September, 1850, a colored man, known in the neighborhood around Christiana to be free, was seized and carried away by men known to be professional kidnappers, and had not been seen by his family since. In March, 1851, in the same neighborhood, under the roof of his employer, during the night, another colored man was tied, gagged, and carried away, marking the road along which he was dragged with his blood. No authority for this outrage was ever shown, and the man was never heard from. These and many other acts of a similar kind had so alarmed the neighborhood, that the very name of kidnapper was sufficient to create a panic. The blacks feared for their own safety; and the whites, knowing their feelings, were apprehensive that any attempt to repeat these outrages would be the cause of bloodshed. Many good citizens were determined to do all in their power to prevent these lawless depredations, though they were ready to submit to any measures sanctioned by legal process. They regretted the existence among them of a body of people liable to such violence; but without combination had, each for himself, resolved that they would do everything dictated by humanity to resist barbarous oppression.

On the morning in question, a colored man living in the neighborhood, who passing Parker's house at an early hour, saw the yard full of men. He halted, and was met by a man who presented a pistol at him, and ordered him to leave the place. He went away and hastened to a store kept by Elijah Lewis, which, like all places of that kind, was probably the head-quarters of news in the

neighborhood. Mr. Lewis was in the act of opening his store when this man told him that "Parker's house was surrounded by *kidnappers*, who had broken into the house, and *were trying to get him away*." Lewis, not questioning the truth of the statement, repaired immediately to the place. On the way he passed the house of Castner Hanway, and, telling him what he had heard, asked him to go over to Parker's. Hanway was in feeble health and unable to undergo the fatigue of walking that distance; but he saddled his horse, and reached Parker's during the armistice.

Having no reason to believe he was acting under legal authority, when Kline approached and demanded assistance in making the arrests, Hanway made no answer. Kline then handed him the warrants, which Hanway examined, saw they appeared genuine, and returned.

At this time, several colored men, who no doubt had heard the report that kidnappers were about, came up, armed with such weapons as they could suddenly lay hands upon. How many were on the ground during the affray it is *now* impossible to determine. The witnesses on both sides vary materially in their estimate. Some said they saw a dozen or fifteen; some, thirty or forty; and others maintained, as many as two or three hundred. It is known there were not two hundred colored men within eight miles of Parker's house, nor half that number within four miles; and it would have been almost impossible to get together even thirty at an hour's notice. It is probable there were about twenty-five, all told, at or near the house from the beginning of the affray until all was quiet again. These the fears of those who afterwards testified to larger numbers might easily have magnified to fifty or a hundred.

While Kline and Hanway were in conversation, Elijah Lewis came up. Hanway said to him, "Here is the Marshal." Lewis asked to see his authority, and Kline handed him one of the warrants. When he saw the signature of the United States Commissioner, "he took it for granted that Kline had authority." Kline then ordered Hanway and Lewis to assist in arresting the alleged fugitives. Hanway refused

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to have anything to do with it, The negroes around these three men seeming disposed to make an attack, Hanway "motioned to them and urged them back." He then "advised Kline that it would be dangerous to attempt making arrests, and that they had better leave." Kline, after saying he would hold them accountable for the fugitives, promised to leave, and beckoned two or three times to his men to retire.

The negroes then rushed up, some armed with guns, some with corn-cutters, staves, or clubs, others with stones or whatever weapon chance offered. Hanway and Lewis in vain endeavored to restrain them.

Kline leaped the fence, passed through the standing grain in the field, and for a few moments was out of sight. Mr. Gorsuch refused to leave the spot, saying his "property was there, and he would have it or perish in the attempt." The rest of his party endeavored to retreat when they heard the Marshal calling to them, but they were too late; the negroes rushed up, and the firing began. How many times each party fired, it is impossible to tell. For a few moments

everything was confusion, and each attempted to save himself. Nathan Nelson went down the short lane, thence into the woods and towards Penningtonville. Nicholas Hutchings, by direction of Kline, followed Lewis to see where he went. Thomas Pierce and Joshua Gorsuch went down the long lane, pursued by some of the negroes, caught up with Hanway, and, shielding themselves behind his horse, followed him to a stream of water near by. Dickinson Gorsuch was with his father near the house. They were both wounded; the father mortally. Dickinson escaped down the lane, where he was met by Kline, who had returned from the woods at the end of the field. Kline rendered him assistance, and went towards Penningtonville for a physician. On his way he met Joshua M. Gorsuch, who was also wounded and delirious. Kline led him over to Penningtonville and placed him on the upward train from Philadelphia. Before this time several persons living in the neighborhood had arrived at Parker's house. Lewis Cooper found Dickinson Gorsuch in the place where Kline had left him, attended by Joseph Scarlett. He placed him in his dearborn, and carried him to the house of Levi Pownall, where he remained till he had sufficiently recovered to return home. Mr. Cooper then returned to Parker's, placed the body of Mr. Edward Gorsuch in the same dearborn, and carried it to Christiana. Neither Nelson nor Hutchings rejoined their party, but during the day went by the railroad to Lancaster.

Thus ended an occurrence which was the theme of conversation throughout the land. Not more than two hours elapsed from the time demand was first made at Parker's house until the dead body of Edward Gorsuch was carried to Christiana. In that brief time the blood of strangers had been spilled in a sudden affray, an unfortunate man had been killed, and two others badly wounded.

When rumor spread abroad the result of the affray, the neighborhood was appalled. The inhabitants of the farmhouses and the villages around, unused to such scenes, could not at first believe that it had occurred in their midst. Before midday, exaggerated accounts had reached Philadelphia, and were transmitted by telegraph throughout the country.

Many persons were arrested for participation in the riot; and, after a long imprisonment, were arraigned for trial, on the charge of treason, before Judges Grier and Kane, of the United States Court, sitting at Philadelphia.

Every one knows the result. The prisoners were all acquitted; and the country was aroused to the danger of a law which allowed bad men to incarcerate peaceful citizens for months in prison, and put them in peril of their lives, for refusing to aid in entrapping, and sending back to hopeless slavery, men struggling for the very same freedom we value as the best part of our birthright.

The Freedman's narrative is now resumed.

A short time after the events narrated in the preceding number, it was whispered about that the slaveholders intended to make an attack on my house; but, as I had often been threatened, I gave the report little attention. About the same time, however, two letters were found thrown

carelessly about, as if to attract notice. These letters stated that kidnappers would be at my house on a certain night, and warned me to be on my guard. Still I did not let the matter trouble me. But it was no idle rumor. The bloodhounds were upon my track.

I was not at this time aware that in the city of Philadelphia there was a band of devoted, determined men,--few in number, but strong in purpose,--who were fully resolved to leave no means untried to thwart the barbarous and inhuman monsters who crawled in the gloom of midnight, like the ferocious tiger, and, stealthily springing on their unsuspecting victims, seized, bound, and hurled them into the ever open jaws of Slavery. Under the pretext of enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law, the slaveholders did not hesitate to violate all other laws made for the good government and protection of society, and converted the old State of Pennsylvania, so long the hope of the fleeing bondman, wearied and heartbroken, into a common hunting-ground for their human prey. But this little band of true patriots in Philadelphia united for the purpose of standing between the pursuer and the pursued, the kidnapper and his victim, and, regardless of all personal considerations, were ever on the alert, ready to sound the alarm to save their fellows from a fate far more to be dreaded than death. In this they had frequently succeeded, and many times had turned the hunter home bootless of his prey. They began their operations at the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, and had thoroughly examined all matters connected with it, and were perfectly cognizant of the plans adopted to carry out its provisions in Pennsylvania, and, through a correspondence with reliable persons in various sections of the South, were enabled to know these hunters of men, their agents, spies, tools, and betrayers. They knew who performed this work in Richmond, Alexandria, Washington, Baltimore, Wilmington, Philadelphia, Lancaster, and Harrisburg, those principal depots of villany, where organized bands prowled about at all times, ready to entrap the unwary fugitive.

They also discovered that this nefarious business was conducted mainly through one channel; for, spite of man's inclination to vice and crime, there are but few men, thank God, so low in the scale of humanity as to be willing to degrade themselves by doing the dirty work of four-legged bloodhounds. Yet such men, actuated by the love of gold and their own base and brutal natures, were found ready for the work. These fellows consorted with constables, police-officers, aldermen, and even with learned members of the legal profession, who disgraced their respectable calling by low, contemptible arts, and were willing to clasp hands with the lowest ruffian in order to pocket the reward that was the price of blood. Every facility was offered these bad men; and whether it was night or day, it was only necessary to whisper in a certain circle that a negro was to be caught, and horses and wagons, men and officers, spies and betrayers, were ready, at the shortest notice, armed and equipped, and eager for the chase.

Thus matters stood in Philadelphia on the 9th of September, 1851, when Mr. Gorsuch and his gang of Maryland kidnappers arrived there. Their presence was soon known to the little band of true men who were called "The Special Secret Committee." They had agents faithful and true as steel; and through these agents the whereabouts and business of Gorsuch and his minions were soon discovered. They were noticed in close converse with a certain member of the Philadelphia bar, who had lost the little reputation he ever had by continual dabbling in negro-catching, as well as by association with and support of the notorious Henry H.

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Kline, a professional kidnapper of the basest stamp. Having determined as to the character and object of these Marylanders, there remained to ascertain the spot selected for their deadly spring; and this required no small degree of shrewdness, resolution, and tact.

Some one's liberty was imperilled; the hunters were abroad; the time was short, and the risk imminent. The little band bent themselves to the task they were pledged to perform with zeal and devotion; and success attended their efforts. They knew that one false step would jeopardize their own liberty, and very likely their lives, and utterly destroy every prospect of carrying out their objects. They knew, too, that they were matched against the most desperate, daring, and brutal men in the kidnappers' ranks,--men who, to obtain the proffered reward, would rush willingly into any enterprise, regardless alike of its character or its consequences. That this was the deepest, the most thoroughly organized and best-planned project for man-catching that had been concocted since the infamous Fugitive Slave Law had gone into operation, they also knew; and consequently this nest of hornets was approached with great care. But by walking directly into their camp, watching their plans as they were developed, and secretly testing every inch of ground on which they trod, they discovered enough to counterplot these plotters, and to spring upon them a mine which shook the whole country, and put an end to man-stealing in Pennsylvania forever.

The trusty agent of this Special Committee, Mr. Samuel Williams, of Philadelphia,--a man true and faithful to his race, and courageous in the highest degree,--came to Christiana, travelling most of the way in company with the very men whom Gorsuch had employed to drag into slavery four as good men as ever trod the earth. These Philadelphia roughs, with their Maryland associates, little dreamed that the man who sat by their side carried with him their inglorious defeat, and the death-warrant of at least one of their party. Williams listened to their conversation, and marked well their faces, and, being fully satisfied by their awkward movements that they were heavily armed, managed to slip out of the cars at the village of Downington unobserved, and proceeded to Penningtonville, where he encountered Kline, who had started several hours in advance of the others. Kline was terribly frightened, as he knew Williams, and felt that his presence was an omen of ill to his base designs. He spoke of horse thieves; but Williams replied,--"I know the kind of horse thieves you are after. They are all gone; and you had better not go after them."

Kline immediately jumped into his wagon, and rode away, whilst Williams crossed the country, and arrived at Christiana in advance of him.

The manner in which information of Gorsuch's designs was obtained will probably ever remain a secret; and I doubt if any one outside of the little band who so masterly managed the affair knows anything of it. This was wise; and I would to God other friends had acted thus. Mr. Williams's trip to Christiana, and the many incidents connected therewith, will be found in the account of his trial; for he was subsequently arrested and thrown into the cold cells of a loathsome jail for this good act of simple Christian duty; but, resolute to the last, he publicly stated that he had been to Christiana, and, to use his own words, "I done it, and will do it again." Brave man, receive my thanks!

Of the Special Committee I can only say that they proved themselves men; and through the darkest hours of the trials that followed, they were found faithful to their trust, never for one moment deserting those who were compelled to suffer. Many, many innocent men residing in the vicinity of Christiana, the ground where the first battle was fought for liberty in Pennsylvania, were seized, torn from their families, and, like Williams, thrown into prison for long, weary months, to be tried for their lives. By them this Committee

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stood, giving them every consolation and comfort, furnishing them with clothes, and attending to their wants, giving money to themselves and families, and procuring for them the best legal counsel. This I know, and much more of which it is not wise, even now, to speak: 't is enough to say they were friends when and where it cost something to be friends, and true brothers where brothers were needed.

After this lengthy digression, I will return, and speak of the riot and the events immediately preceding it.

The information brought by Mr. Williams spread through the vicinity like a fire in the prairies; and when I went home from my work in the evening, I found Pinckney (whom I should have said before was my brother-in-law), Abraham Johnson, Samuel Thompson, and Joshua Kite at my house, all of them excited about the rumor. I laughed at them, and said it was all talk. This was the 10th of September, 1851. They stopped for the night with us, and we went to bed as usual. Before daylight, Joshua Kite rose, and started for his home. Directly, he ran back to the house, burst open the door, crying, "O William! kidnappers! kidnappers!"

He said that, when he was just beyond the yard, two men crossed before him, as if to stop him, and others came up on either side. As he said this, they had reached the door. Joshua ran up stairs, (we slept up stairs,) and they followed him; but I met them at the landing, and asked, "Who are you?"

The leader, Kline, replied, "I am the United States Marshal."

I then told him to take another step, and I would break his neck.

He again said, "I am the United States Marshal."

I told him I did not care for him nor the United States. At that he turned and went down stairs.

Pinckney said, as he turned to go down,--"Where is the use in fighting? They will take us."

Kline heard him, and said, "Yes, give up, for we can and will take you anyhow."

I told them all not to be afraid, nor to give up to any slaveholder, but to fight until death.

"Yes," said Kline, "I have heard many a negro talk as big as you, and then have taken him; and I'll take you."

"You have not taken me yet," I replied; "and if you undertake it you will have your name recorded in history for this day's work."

Mr. Gorsuch then spoke, and said,-- "Come, Mr. Kline, let's go up stairs and take them. We *can* take them. Come, follow me, I'll go up and get my property. What's in the way? The law is in my favor, and the people are in my favor."

At that he began to ascend the stair; but I said to him,--"See here, old man, you can come up, but you can't go down again. Once up here, you are mine."

Kline then said,--"Stop, Mr. Gorsuch. I will read the warrant, and then, I think, they will give up."

He then read the warrant, and said, "Now, you see, we are commanded to take you, dead or alive; so you may as well give up at once."

"Go up, Mr. Kline," then said Gorsuch, "you are the Marshal."

Kline started, and when a little way up said, "I am coming."

I said, "Well, come on."

But he was too cowardly to show his face. He went down again and said,--"You had better give up without any more fuss, for we are bound to take you anyhow. I told you before that I was the United States Marshal, yet you will not give up. I'll not trouble the slaves. I will take you and make you pay for all."

"Well," I answered, "take me and make me pay for all. I'll pay for all."

Mr. Gorsuch then said, "You have my property."

To which I replied,--"Go in the room down there, and see if there is anything there belonging to you. There are beds and a bureau, chairs, and other things. Then go out to the barn; there you will find a cow and some hogs. See if any of them are yours."

He said,--"They are not mine; I

want my men. They are here, and I am bound to have them."

Thus we parleyed for a time, all because of the pusillanimity of the Marshal, when he, at last, said,--"I am tired waiting on you; I see you are not going to give up. Go to the barn and fetch some straw," said he to one of his men. "I will set the house on fire, and burn them up."

"Burn us up and welcome," said I. "None but a coward would say the like. You can burn us, but you can't take us; before I give up, you will see my ashes scattered on the earth."

By this time day had begun to dawn; and then my wife came to me and asked if she should blow the horn, to bring friends to our assistance. I assented, and she went to the garret for the purpose. When the horn sounded from the garret window, one of the ruffians asked the others what it meant; and Kline said to me, "What do you mean by blowing that horn?"

I did not answer. It was a custom with us, when a horn was blown at an unusual hour, to proceed to the spot promptly to see what was the matter. Kline ordered his men to shoot any one they saw blowing the horn. There was a peach-tree at that end of the house. Up it two of the men climbed; and when my wife went a second time to the window, they fired as soon as they heard the blast, but missed their aim. My wife then went down on her knees, and, drawing her head and body below the range of the window, the horn resting on the sill, blew blast after blast, while the shots poured thick and fast around her. They must have fired ten or twelve times. The house was of stone, and the windows were deep, which alone preserved her life.

They were evidently disconcerted by the blowing of the horn. Gorsuch said again, "I want my property, and I will have it."

"Old man," said I, "you look as if you belonged to some persuasion."

"Never mind," he answered, "what persuasion I belong to; I want my property."

While I was leaning out of the window, Kline fired a pistol at me, but the shot went too high; the ball broke the glass just above my head. I was talking to Gorsuch at the time. I seized a gun and aimed it at Gorsuch's breast for he evidently had instigated Kline to fire; but Pinckney caught my arm and said, "Don't shoot." The gun went off, just grazing Gorsuch's shoulder. Another conversation then ensued between Gorsuch, Kline, and myself, when another one of the party fired at me but missed. Dickinson Gorsuch, I then saw, was preparing to shoot; and I told him if he missed, I would show him where shooting first came from.

I asked them to consider what they would have done, had they been in our position. "I know you want to kill us," I said, "for you have shot at us time and again. We have only fired twice, although we have guns and ammunition, and could kill you all if we would, but we do not want to shed blood."

"If you do not shoot any more," then said Kline, "I will stop my men from firing."

They then ceased for a time. This was about sunrise.

Mr. Gorsuch now said,--"Give up and let me have my property. Hear what the Marshal says; the Marshal is your friend. He advises you to give up without more fuss, for my property I will have."

I denied that I had his property, when he replied, "You have my men."

"Am I your man?" I asked.

"No."

I then called Pinckney forward.

"Is that your man?"

"No."

Abraham Johnson I called next, but Gorsuch said he was not his man.

The only plan left was to call both Pinckney and Johnson again; for had I called the others, he would have recognized them, for they were his slaves.

Abraham Johnson said, "Does such a shrivelled up old slaveholder as you own such a nice, genteel young man as I am?"

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At this Gorsuch took offence, and charged me with dictating his language. I then told him there were but five of us, which he denied, and still insisted that I had his property. One of the party then attacked the Abolitionists, affirming that, although they declared there could not be property in man, the Bible was conclusive authority in favor of property in human flesh.

"Yes," said Gorsuch, "does not the Bible say, 'Servants, obey your masters'?"

I said that it did, but the same Bible said, "Give unto your servants that which is just and equal."

At this stage of the proceedings, we went into a mutual Scripture inquiry, and bandied views in the manner of garrulous old wives.

When I spoke of duty to servants, Gorsuch said, "Do you know that?"

"Where," I asked, "do you see it in Scripture, that a man should traffic in his brother's blood?"

"Do you call a nigger my brother?" said Gorsuch.

"Yes," said I.

"William," said Samuel Thompson, "he has been a class-leader."

When Gorsuch heard that, he hung his head, but said nothing. We then all joined in singing,--

"Leader, what do you say
About the judgment day?
I will die on the field of battle,
Die on the field of battle,
With glory in my soul."⁷

Then we all began to shout, singing meantime, and shouted for a long while. Gorsuch, who was standing head bowed, said, "What are you doing now?"

Samuel Thompson replied, "Preaching a sinner's funeral sermon."

"You had better give up, and come down."

I then said to Gorsuch,--"If a brother see a sword coming, and he warn not his brother, then the brother's blood is required at his hands; but if the other see the sword coming, and warn his brother, and his brother flee then his brother's blood is required at his own hand.' I see the sword coming, and, old man, I warn you to flee; if you flee not, your blood be upon your own hand."

It was now about seven o'clock.

"You had better give up," said old Mr. Gorsuch, after another while, "and come down, for I have come a long way this morning, and want my breakfast; for my property I will have, or I'll breakfast in hell. I will go up and get it."

He then started up stairs, and came far enough to see us all plainly. We were just about to fire upon him, when Dickinson Gorsuch, who was standing on the old oven, before the door, and could see into the up-stairs room through the window, jumped down and caught his father, saying,--"O father, do come down! do come down! They have guns, swords, and all kinds of weapons! They'll kill you! Do come down!"

The old man turned and left. When down with him, young Gorsuch could scarce draw breath, and the father looked more like a dead than a living man, so frightened were they at their supposed danger. The old man stood some time without saying anything; at last he said, as if soliloquizing, "I want my property, and I will have it."

Kline broke forth, "If you don't give up by fair means, you will have to by foul."

⁷ These lines are from an African Spiritual song, "Die on the Field" by Samuel Wakefield, and are also found in Chapter four of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

I told him we would not surrender on any conditions.

Young Gorsuch then said,--"Don't ask them to give up,--*make* them do it. We have money, and can call men to take them. What is it that money won't buy?"

Then said Kline,--"I am getting tired waiting on you; I see you are not going to give up."

He then wrote a note and handed it to Joshua Gorsuch, saying at the same time,--"Take it, and bring a hundred men from Lancaster."

As he started, I said,--"See here! When you go to Lancaster, don't bring a hundred men,--bring five hundred. It will take all the men in Lancaster to change our purpose or take us alive."

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He stopped to confer with Kline, when Pinckney said, "We had better give up."

"You are getting afraid," said I.

"Yes," said Kline, "give up like men. The rest would give up if it were not for you."

"I am not afraid," said Pinckney; "but where is the sense in fighting against so many men, and only five of us?"

The whites, at this time, were coming from all quarters, and Kline was enrolling them as fast as they came. Their numbers alarmed Pinckney, and I told him to go and sit down; but he said, "No, I will go down stairs."

I told him, if he attempted it, I should be compelled to blow out his brains. "Don't believe, that any living man can take you," I said. "Don't give up to any slaveholder."

To Abraham Johnson, who was near me, I then turned. He declared he was not afraid. "I will fight till I die," he said.

At this time, Hannah, Pinckney's wife, had become impatient of our persistent course; and my wife, who brought me her message urging us to surrender, seized a corn-cutter, and declared she would cut off the head of the first one who should attempt to give up.⁸

Another one of Gorsuch's slaves was coming along the highroad at this time, and I beckoned to him to go around. Pinckney saw him, and soon became more inspirited. Elijah Lewis, a Quaker, also came along about this time; I beckoned to him, likewise; but he came straight on, and was met by Kline, who ordered him to assist him. Lewis asked for his authority,

⁸ Here, Parker's wife arms herself with a corn cutter. Later, on page 49, Parker claims that it was the women who killed Gorsuch, implying that Hannah and Eliza killed him off with a corn-cutter.

and Kline handed him the warrant. While Lewis was reading, Castner Hanway came up, and Lewis handed the warrant to him. Lewis asked Kline what Parker said.

Kline replied, "He won't give up."

Then Lewis and Hanway both said to the Marshal,--"If Parker says they will not give up, you had better let them alone, for he will kill some of you. We are not going to risk our lives"; and they turned to go away.

While they were talking, I came down and stood in the doorway, my men following behind.

Old Mr. Gorsuch said, when I appeared, "They'll come out, and get away!" and he came back to the gate.

I then said to him,--"You said you could and would take us. Now you have the chance."

They were a cowardly-looking set of men.

Mr., Gorsuch said, "You can't come out here."

"Why?" said I. "This is my place. I pay rent for it. I'll let you see if I can't come out."

"I don't care if you do pay rent for it," said he. "If you come out, I will give you the contents of these";--presenting, at the same time, two revolvers, one in each hand.

I said, "Old man, if you don't go away, I will break your neck."

I then walked up to where he stood, his arms resting on the gate, trembling as if afflicted with palsy, and laid my hand on his shoulder, saying, "I have seen pistols before to-day."

Kline now came running up, and entreated Gorsuch to come away.

"No," said the latter, "I will have my property, or go to hell."

"What do you intend to do?" said Kline to me.

"I intend to fight," said I. "I intend to try your strength."

"If you will withdraw your men," he replied, "I will withdraw mine."

I told him it was too late. "You would not withdraw when you had the chance, --you shall not now."

Kline then went back to Hanway and Lewis. Gorsuch made a signal to his men, and they all fell into line. I followed his example as well as I could; but as we were not more than ten paces

apart, it was difficult to do so. At this time we numbered but ten, while there were between thirty and forty of the white men.

While I was talking to Gorsuch, his son said, "Father, will you take all this from a nigger?"

I answered him by saying that I

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respected old age; but that, if he would repeat that, I should knock his teeth down his throat. At this he fired upon me, and I ran up to him and knocked the pistol out of his hand, when he let the other one fall and ran in the field.

My brother-in-law, who was standing near, then said, "I can stop him";--and with his double-barrel gun he fired.

Young Gorsuch fell, but rose and ran on again. Pinckney fired a second time, and again Gorsuch fell, but was soon up again, and, running into the cornfield, lay down in the fence corner.

I returned to my men, and found Samuel Thompson talking to old Mr. Gorsuch, his master. They were both angry.

"Old man, you had better go home to Maryland," said Samuel.

"You had better give up, and come home with me," said the old man.

Thompson took Pinckney's gun from struck Gorsuch, and brought him to his knees. Gorsuch rose and signalled to his men. Thompson then knocked him down again, and he again rose. At this time all the white men opened fire, and we rushed upon them; when they turned, threw down their guns, and ran away. We, being closely engaged clubbed our rifles. We were too closely pressed to fire, but we found a good deal could be done with empty guns.

Old Mr. Gorsuch was the bravest of his party; he held on to his pistols until the last, while all the others threw away their weapons. I saw as many as three at a time fighting with him. Sometimes he was on his knees, then on his back, and again his feet would be where his head should be. He was a fine soldier and a brave man. Whenever he saw the least opportunity, he would take aim. While in close quarters with the whites, we could load and fire but two or three times. Our guns got bent and out of order. So damaged did they become, that we could shoot with but two or three of them. Samuel Thompson bent his gun on old Mr. Gorsuch so badly, that it was of no use to us.

When the white men ran, they scattered. I ran after Nathan Nelson, but could not catch him. I never saw a man run faster. Returning, I saw Joshua Gorsuch coming, and Pinckney behind him. I reminded him that he would like "to take hold of a nigger," told him that now was his

"chance," and struck him a blow on the side of the head, which stopped him. Pinckney came up behind, and gave him a blow which brought him to the ground; as the others passed, they gave him a kick or jumped upon him, until the blood oozed out at his ears.

Nicholas Hutchings, and Nathan Nelson of Baltimore County, Maryland, could outrun any men I ever saw. They and Kline were not brave, like the Gorsuches. Could our men have got them, they would have been satisfied.

One of our men ran after Dr. Pierce, as he richly deserved attention; but Pierce caught up with Castner Hanway, who rode between the fugitive and the Doctor, to shield him and some others. Hanway was told to get out of the way, or he would forfeit his life; he went aside quickly, and the man fired at the Marylander, but missed him,--he was too far off. I do not know whether he was wounded or not; but I do know, that, if it had not been for Hanway, he would have been killed.

Having driven the slavocrats off in every direction, our party now turned towards their several homes. Some of us, however, went back to my house, where we found several of the neighbors.

The scene at the house beggars description. Old Mr. Gorsuch was lying in the yard in a pool of blood, and confusion reigned both inside and outside of the house.

Levi Pownell said to me, "The weather is so hot and the flies are so bad, will you give me a sheet to put over the corpse?"⁹

In reply, I gave him permission to get anything he needed from the house.

"Dickinson Gorsuch is lying in the fence-corner, and I believe he is dying. Give me something for him to drink,"

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said Pownell, who seemed to be acting the part of the Good Samaritan.

When he returned from ministering to Dickinson, he told me he could not live.

The riot, so called, was now entirely ended. The elder Gorsuch was dead; his son and nephew were both wounded, and I have reason to believe others were,--how many, it would be difficult to say. Of our party, only two were wounded. One received a ball in his hand, near the wrist; but it only entered the skin, and he pushed it out with his thumb. Another received a ball in the fleshy part of his thigh, which had to be extracted; but neither of them were sick or crippled by the wounds. When young Gorsuch fired at me in the early part of the battle, both balls passed

⁹ Levi Pownall and his family cared for Dickinson Gorsuch and helped Parker to escape the Christiana area (Katz 249). Letters from Dickinson thanking the Pownall family may be found in the Moores Memorial library in Christiana, Pennsylvania.

through my hat, cutting off my hair close to the skin, but they drew no blood. The marks were not more than an inch apart.

A story was afterwards circulated that Mr. Gorsuch shot his own slave, and in retaliation his slave shot him; but it was without foundation. His slave struck him the first and second blows; then three or four sprang upon him, and, when he became helpless, left him to pursue others. *The women put an end to him.* His slaves, so far from meeting death at his hands, are all still living.

After the fight, my wife was obliged to secrete herself, leaving the children in care of her mother, and to the charities of our neighbors. I was questioned by my friends as to what I should do, as they were looking for officers to arrest me. I determined not to be taken alive, and told them so; but, thinking advice as to our future course necessary, went to see some old friends and consult about it. Their advice was to leave, as, were we captured and imprisoned, they could not foresee the result. Acting upon this hint, we set out for home, when we met some female friends, who told us that forty or fifty armed men were at my house, looking for me, and that we had better stay away from the place, if we did not want to be taken. Abraham Johnson and Pinckney hereupon halted, to agree upon the best course, while I turned around and went another way.

Before setting out on my long journey northward, I determined to have an interview with my family, if possible, and to that end changed my course. As we went along the road to where I found them, we met men in companies of three and four, who had been drawn together by the excitement. On one occasion, we met ten or twelve together. They all left the road, and climbed over the fences into fields to let us pass; and then, after we had passed, turned, and looked after us as far as they could see. Had we been carrying destruction to all human kind, they could not have acted more absurdly. We went to a friend's house and stayed for the rest of the day, and until nine o'clock that night, when we set out for Canada.

The great trial now was to leave my wife and family. Uncertain as to the result of the journey, I felt I would rather die than be separated from them. It had to be done, however; and we went forth with heavy hearts, outcasts for the sake of liberty. When we had walked as far as Christiana, we saw a large crowd, late as it was, to some of whom, at least, I must have been known, as we heard distinctly, "A'n't that Parker?"

"Yes," was answered, "that's Parker."

Kline was called for, and he, with some nine or ten more, followed after. We stopped, and then they stopped. One said to his comrades, "Go on,--that's him." And another replied, "You go." So they contended for a time who should come to us. At last they went back. I was sorry to see them go back, for I wanted to meet Kline and end the day's transactions.

We went on unmolested to Penningtonville; and, in consequence of the excitement, thought best to continue on to Parkersburg. Nothing worth mention occurred for a time. We proceeded to Downingtown, and thence six miles beyond, to the house of a friend.

We stopped with him on Saturday night, and on the evening of the 14th went fifteen miles farther. Here I learned from a preacher, directly from the city, that the excitement in Philadelphia was too great for us to risk our safety by going there. Another man present advised us to go to Norristown.

At Norristown we rested a day. The friends gave us ten dollars, and sent us in a vehicle to Quakertown. Our driver, partly intoxicated, set us down at the wrong place, which obliged us to stay out all night. At eleven o'clock the next day we got to Quakertown. We had gone about six miles out of the way, and had to go directly across the country. We rested the 16th, and set out in the evening for Friendsville.

A friend piloted us some distance, and we travelled until we became very tired, when we went to bed under a haystack. On the 17th, we took breakfast at an inn. We passed a small village, and asked a man whom we met with a dearborn, what would be his charge to Windgap. "One dollar and fifty cents," was the ready answer. So in we got, and rode to that place.

As we wanted to make some inquiries when we struck the north and south road, I went into the post-office, and asked for a letter for John Thomas, which of course I did not get. The postmaster scrutinized us closely,--more so, indeed, than any one had done on the Blue Mountains,--but informed us that Friendsville was between forty and fifty miles away. After going about nine miles, we stopped in the evening of the 18th at an inn, got supper, were politely served, and had an excellent night's rest. On the next day we set out for Tannersville, hiring a conveyance for twenty-two miles of the way. We had no further difficulty on the entire road to Rochester,--more than five hundred miles by the route we travelled.

Some amusing incidents occurred, however, which it may be well to relate in this connection. The next morning, after stopping at the tavern, we took the cars and rode to Homerville, where, after waiting an hour, as our landlord of the night previous had directed us, we took stage. Being the first applicants for tickets, we secured inside seats, and, from the number of us, we took up all of the places inside; but, another traveller coming, I tendered him mine, and rode with the driver. The passenger thanked me; but the driver, a churl, and the most prejudiced person I ever came in contact with, would never wait after a stop until I could get on, but would drive away, and leave me to swing, climb, or cling on to the stage as best I could. Our traveller, at last noticing his behavior, told him promptly not to be so fast, but let all passengers get on, which had the effect to restrain him a little.

At Big Eddy we took the cars. Directly opposite me sat a gentleman, who, on learning that I was for Rochester, said he was going there too, and afterwards proved an agreeable travelling-companion.

A newsboy came in with papers, some of which the passengers bought. Upon opening them, they read of the fight at Christiana.

"O, see here!" said my neighbor; "great excitement at Christiana; a--a statesman killed, and his son and nephew badly wounded."

After reading, the passengers began to exchange opinions on the case. Some said they would like to catch Parker, and get the thousand dollars reward offered by the State; but the man opposite to me said, "Parker must be a powerful man."

I thought to myself, "If you could tell what I can, you could judge about that."

Pinckney and Johnson became alarmed, and wanted to leave the cars at the next stopping-place; but I told them there was no danger. I then asked particularly about Christiana, where it was, on what railroad, and other questions, to all of which I received correct replies. One of the men became so much attached to me, that, when we would go to an eating-saloon, he would

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pay for both. At Jefferson we thought of leaving the cars, and taking the boat; but they told us to keep on the cars, and we would get to Rochester by nine o'clock the next night.

We left Jefferson about four o'clock in the morning, and arrived at Rochester at nine the same morning. Just before reaching Rochester, when in conversation with my travelling friend, I ventured to ask what would be done with Parker, should he be taken.

"I do not know," he replied; "but the laws of Pennsylvania would not hang him,-- they might imprison him. But it would be different, very different, should they get him into Maryland. The people in all the Slave States are so prejudiced against colored people, that they never give them justice. But I don't believe they will get Parker. I think he is in Canada by this time; at least, I hope so,--for I believe he did right, and, had I been in his place, I would have done as he did. Any good citizen will say the same. I believe Parker to be a brave man; and all you colored people should look at it as we white people look at our brave men, and do as we do. You see Parker was not fighting for a country, nor for praise. He was fighting for freedom: he only wanted liberty, as other men do. You colored people should protect him, and remember him as long as you live. We are coming near our parting-place, and I do not know if we shall ever meet again. I shall be in Rochester some two or three days before I return home; and I would like to have your company back."

I told him it would be some time before we returned.

The cars then stopped, when he bade me good by. As strange as it may appear, he did not ask me my name; and I was afraid to inquire his, from fear he would.

On leaving the cars, after walking two or three squares, we overtook a colored man, who conducted us to the house of--a friend of mine.¹⁰ He welcomed me at once, as we were acquainted before, took me up stairs to wash and comb, and prepare, as he said, for company.

As I was combing, a lady came up and said, "Which of you is Mr. Parker?"

¹⁰ This friend was Frederick Douglass. Douglass' later tells of Parker's stay in his home in *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (349).

"I am," said I,--"what there is left of me."

She gave me her hand, and said, "And this is William Parker!"

She appeared to be so excited that she could not say what she wished to. We were told we would not get much rest, and we did not; for visitors were constantly coming. One gentleman was surprised that we got away from the cars, as spies were all about, and there were two thousand dollars reward for the party.

We left at eight o'clock that evening, in a carriage, for the boat, bound for Kingston in Canada. As we went on board, the bell was ringing. After walking about a little, a friend pointed out to me the officers on the "hunt" for us; and just as the boat pushed off from the wharf, some of our friends on shore called me by name. Our pursuers looked very much like fools, as they were. I told one of the gentlemen on shore to write to Kline that I was in Canada. Ten dollars were generously contributed by the Rochester friends for our expenses; and altogether their kindness was heartfelt, and was most gratefully appreciated by us.

Once on the boat, and fairly out at sea towards the land of liberty, my mind became calm, and my spirits very much depressed at thought of my wife and children. Before, I had little time to think much about them, my mind being on my journey. Now I became silent and abstracted. Although fond of company, no one was company for me now.

We landed at Kingston on the 21st of September, at six o'clock in the morning, and walked around for a long time, without meeting any one we had ever known. At last, however, I saw a colored man I knew in Maryland. He at first pretended to have no knowledge of me, but finally recognized me. I made known our distressed condition,

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when he said he was not going home then, but, if we would have breakfast, he would pay for it. How different the treatment received from this man--himself an exile for the sake of liberty, and in its full enjoyment on free soil--and the self-sacrificing spirit of our Rochester colored brother, who made haste to welcome us to his ample home,--the well-earned reward of his faithful labors!

On Monday evening, the 23d, we started for Toronto, where we arrived safely the next day. Directly after landing, we heard that Governor Johnston, of Pennsylvania, had made a demand on the Governor of Canada for me, under the Extradition Treaty. Pinckney and Johnson advised me to go to the country, and remain where I should not be known; but I refused. I intended to see what they would do with me. Going at once to the Government House, I entered the first office I came to. The official requested me to be seated. The following is the substance of the conversation between us, as near as I can remember. I told him I had heard that Governor Johnston, of Pennsylvania, had requested his government to send me back. At this he came forward, held forth his hand, and said, "Is this William Parker?"

I took his hand, and assured him I was the man. When he started to come, I thought he was intending to seize me, and I prepared myself to knock him down. His genial, sympathetic manner it was that convinced me he meant well.

He made me sit down, and said, "Yes, they want you back again. Will you go?"

"I will not be taken back alive," said I. "I ran away from my master to be free,--I have run from the United States to be free. I am now going to stop running."

"Are you a fugitive from labor?" he asked.

I told him I was.

"Why," he answered, "they say you are a fugitive from justice." He then asked me where my master lived.

I told him, "In Anne Arundel County, Maryland."

"Is there such a county in Maryland?" he asked.

"There is," I answered.

He took down a map, examined it, and said, "You are right."

I then told him the name of the farm, and my master's name. Further questions bearing upon the country towns near, the nearest river, etc., followed, all of which I answered to his satisfaction.

"How does it happen," he then asked, "that you lived in Pennsylvania so long, and no person knew you were a fugitive from labor?"

"I do not get other people to keep my secrets, sir," I replied. "My brother and family only knew that I had been a slave."

He then assured me that I would not, in his opinion, have to go back. Many coming in at this time on business, I was told to call again at three o'clock, which I did. The person in the office, a clerk, told me to take no further trouble about it, until that day four weeks. "But you are as free a man as I am," said he. When I told the news to Pinckney and Johnson, they were greatly relieved in mind.

I ate breakfast with the greatest relish, got a letter written to a friend in Chester County for my wife, and set about arrangements to settle at or near Toronto.

We tried hard to get work, but the task was difficult. I think three weeks elapsed before we got work that could be called work. Sometimes we would secure a small job, worth two or three shillings, and sometimes a smaller one; worth not more than one shilling; and these not oftener

than once or twice in a week. We became greatly discouraged; and, to add to my misery, I was constantly hearing some alarming report about my wife and children. Sometimes they had carried her back into slavery,--sometimes the children, and sometimes the entire party. Then there would come a contradiction. I was soon so completely worn down by my fears for them, that I thought, my heart

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would break. To add to my disquietude, no answer came to my letters, although I went to the office regularly every day. At last I got a letter with the glad news that my wife and children were safe, and would be sent to Canada. I told the person reading for me to stop, and tell them to send her "right now,"--I could not wait to hear the rest of the letter.

Two months from the day I landed in Toronto, my wife arrived, but without the children. She had had a very bad time. Twice they had her in custody; and, a third time, her young master came after her, which obliged her to flee before day, so that the children had to remain behind for the time. I was so glad to see her that I forgot about the children.

The day my wife came, I had nothing but the clothes on my back, and was in debt for my board, without any work to depend upon. My situation was truly distressing. I took the resolution, and went to a store where I made known my circumstances to the proprietor, offering to work for him to pay for some necessaries. He readily consented, and I supplied myself with bedding, meal, and flour. As I had selected a place before, we went that evening about two miles into the country, and settled ourselves for the winter.

When in Kingston, I had heard of the Buxton settlement, and of the Revds. Dr. Willis and Mr. King, the agents.¹¹ My informant, after stating all the particulars, induced me to think it was a desirable place; and having quite a little sum of money due to me in the States, I wrote for it, and waited until May. It not being sent, I called upon Dr. Willis, who treated me kindly. I proposed to settle in Elgin, if he would loan means for the first instalment. He said he would see about it, and I should call again. On my second visit, he agreed to assist me, and proposed that I should get another man to go on a lot with me.

Abraham Johnson and I arranged to settle together, and, with Dr. Willis's letter to Mr. King on our behalf, I embarked with my family on a schooner for the West. After five days' sailing, we reached Windsor. Not having the means to take us to Chatham, I called upon Henry Bibb, and laid my case before him. He took us in, treated us with great politeness, and afterwards took me with him to Detroit, where, after an introduction to some friends, a purse of five dollars was made up. I divided the money among my companions, and started them for Chatham, but was obliged to stay at Windsor and Detroit two days longer.

While stopping at Windsor, I went again to Detroit, with two or three friends, when, at one of the steamboats just landed, some officers arrested three fugitives, on pretence of being horse

¹¹ Not only would Parker learn to read and write while living in the Buxton Settlement, he would also become an elected official as the Raleigh Township Councilor (Forbes 40).

thieves. I was satisfied they were slaves, and said so, when Henry Bibb went to the telegraph office and learned through a message that they were. In the crowd and excitement, the sheriff threatened to imprison me for my interference. I felt indignant, and told him to do so, whereupon he opened the door. About this time there was more excitement, and then a man slipped into the jail, unseen by the officers, opened the gate, and the three prisoners went out, and made their escape to Windsor. I stopped through that night in Detroit, and started the next day for Chatham, where I found my family snugly provided for at a boarding-house kept by Mr. Younge.

Chatham was a thriving town at that time, and the genuine liberty enjoyed by its numerous colored residents pleased me greatly; but our destination was Buxton, and thither we went on the following day. We arrived there in the evening, and I called immediately upon Mr. King, and presented Dr. Willis's letter. He received me very politely, and said that, after I should feel rested, I could go out and select a lot. He also kindly offered to give me meal and pork for my family, until I could get work.

In due time, Johnson and I each chose a fifty-acre lot; for although when in Toronto we agreed with Dr. Willis to take one lot between us, when

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we saw the land we thought we could pay for two lots. I got the money in a little time, and paid the Doctor back. I built a house, and we moved into it that same fall, and in it I live yet.

When I first settled in Buxton, the white settlers in the vicinity were much opposed to colored people. Their prejudices were very strong; but the spread of intelligence and religion in the community has wrought a great change in them. Prejudice is fast being uprooted; indeed, they do not appear like the same people that they were. In a short time I hope the foul spirit will depart entirely.

I have now to bring my narrative to a close; and in so doing I would return thanks to Almighty God for the many mercies and favors he has bestowed upon me, and especially for delivering me out of the hands of slaveholders, and placing me in a land of liberty, where I can worship God under my own vine and fig-tree, with none to molest or make me afraid. I am also particularly thankful to my old friends and neighbors in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to the friends in Norristown, Quakertown, Rochester, and Detroit, and to Dr. Willis of Toronto, for their disinterested benevolence and kindness to me and my family. When hunted, they sheltered me; when hungry and naked, they clothed and fed me; and when a stranger in a strange land, they aided and encouraged me. May the Lord in his great mercy remember and bless them, as they remembered and blessed me.¹²

The events following the riot at Christiana and my escape have become matters of history, and can only be spoken of as such. The failure of Gorsuch in his attempt; his death, and the terrible wounds of his son; the discomfiture and final rout of his crestfallen associates in crime;

¹² Undoubtedly, Parker means to include the Pownall family in his thanks to his "friends and neighbors in Lancaster Pennsylvania." Likewise, he appears to be thanking Douglass in Rochester.

and their subsequent attempt at revenge by a merciless raid through Lancaster County, arresting every one unfortunate enough to have a dark skin,--is all to be found in the printed account of the trial of Castner Hanway and others for treason. It is true that some of the things which did occur are spoken of but slightly, there being good and valid reasons why they were passed over thus at that time in these cases, many of which might be interesting to place here, and which I certainly should do, did not the same reasons still exist in full force for keeping silent. I shall be compelled to let them pass just as they are recorded.

But one event, in which there seems no reason to observe silence, I will introduce in this place. I allude to the escape of George Williams, one of our men, and the very one who had the letters brought up from Philadelphia by Mr. Samuel Williams. George lay in prison with the others who had been arrested by Kline, but was rendered more uneasy by the number of rascals who daily visited that place for the purpose of identifying, if possible, some of its many inmates as slaves. One day the lawyer previously alluded to, whose chief business seemed to be negro-catching, came with another man, who had employed him for that purpose, and, stopping in front of the cell wherein George and old Ezekiel Thompson were confined, cried out, "*That's him!*" At which the man exclaimed, "*It is, by God! that is him!*"

These ejaculations, as a matter of course, brought George and Ezekiel, who were lying down, to their feet,--the first frightened and uneasy, the latter stern and resolute. Some mysterious conversation then took place between the two, which resulted in George lying down and covering himself with Ezekiel's blanket. In the mean time off sped the man and lawyer to obtain the key, open the cell, and institute a more complete inspection. They returned in high glee, but to their surprise saw only the old man standing at the door, his grim visage anything but inviting. They inserted the key, click went the lock, back shot the bolt, open flew the door, but old Ezekiel stood there firm, his eyes flashing fire, his brawny hands flourishing a stout oak stool furnished him to rest on by friends of whom I

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have so often spoken, and crying out in the most unmistakable manner, every word leaving a deep impression on his visitors, "The first man that puts his head inside of this cell I will split to pieces."

The men leaped back, but soon recovered their self-possession; and the lawyer said,--"Do you know who I am? I am the lawyer who has charge of this whole matter, you impudent nigger. I will come in whenever I choose."

The old man, if possible looking more stern and savage than before, replied, "I don't care who you are; but if you or any other nigger-catcher steps inside of my cell-door I will beat out his brains."

It is needless to say more. The old man's fixed look, clenched teeth, and bony frame had their effect. The man and the lawyer left, growling as they went, that, if there was rope to be had, that old Indian nigger should certainly hang.

This was but the beginning of poor George's troubles. His friends were at work; but all went wrong, and his fate seemed sealed. He stood charged with treason, murder, and riot, and there appeared no way to relieve him. When discharged by the United States Court for the first crime, he was taken to Lancaster to meet the second and third. There, too, the man and the lawyer followed, taking with them that infamous wretch, Kline. The Devil seemed to favor all they undertook; and when Ezekiel was at last discharged, with some thirty more, from all that had been so unjustly brought against him, and for which he had lain in the damp prison for more than three months, these rascals lodged a warrant in the Lancaster jail, and at midnight Kline and the man who claimed to be George's owner arrested him as a fugitive from labor, whilst the lawyer returned to Philadelphia to prepare the case for trial, and to await the arrival of his shameless partners in guilt. This seemed the climax of George's misfortunes. He was hurried into a wagon, ready at the door, and, fearing a rescue, was driven at a killing pace to the town of Parkesburg, where they were compelled to stop for the night, their horses being completely used up. This was in the month of January, and the coldest night that had been known for many years. On their route, these wretches, who had George handcuffed and tied in the wagon, indulged deeply in bad whiskey, with which they were plentifully supplied, and by the time they reached the public-house their fury was at its height. 'T is said there is honor among thieves, but villains of the sort I am now speaking of seem to possess none. Each fears the other. When in the bar-room, Kline said to the other,--"Sir, you can go to sleep. I will watch this nigger."

"No," replied the other, "I will do that business myself. You don't fool me, sir."

To which Kline replied, "Take something, sir?"--and down went more whiskey.

Things went on in this way awhile, until Kline drew a chair to the stove, and, overcome by the heat and liquor, was soon sleeping soundly, and, I suppose, dreaming of the profits which were sure to arise from the job. The other walked about till the barkeeper went to bed, leaving the hostler to attend in his place, and he also, somehow or other, soon fell asleep. Then he walked up to George, who was lying on a bench, apparently as soundly asleep as any of them, and, saying to himself, "The damn nigger is asleep,--I'll just take a little rest myself,"--he suited the action to the word. Spreading himself out on two chairs, in a few moments he was snoring at a fearful rate. Rum, the devil, and fatigue, combined, had completely prostrated George's foes. It was now his time for action; and, true to the hope of being free, the last to leave the poor, hunted, toil-worn bondsman's heart, he opened first one eye, then the other, and carefully examined things around. Then he rose slowly, and, keeping step to the deep-drawn snores of the miserable, debased wretch who claimed him, he stealthily crawled towards the door, when, to his consternation, he

found the eye of the hostler on him. He paused, knowing his fate hung by a single hair. It was only necessary for the man to speak, and he would be shot instantly dead; for both Kline and his brother ruffian slept pistol in hand. As I said, George stopped, and, in the softest manner in which it was possible for him to speak, whispered, "A drink of water, if you please, sir." The

man replied not, but, pointing his finger to the door again, closed his eyes, and was apparently lost in slumber.

I have already said it was cold; and, in addition, snow and ice covered the ground. There could not possibly be a worse night. George shivered as he stepped forth into the keen night air. He took one look at the clouds above, and then at the ice-clad ground below. He trembled; but freedom beckoned, and on he sped. He knew where he was,--the place was familiar. On, on, he pressed, nor paused till fifteen miles lay between him and his drunken claimant; then he stopped at the house of a tried friend to have his handcuffs removed; but, with their united efforts, one side only could be got off, and the poor fellow, not daring to rest, continued his journey, forty odd miles, to Philadelphia, with the other on. Frozen, stiff, and sore, he arrived there on the following day, and every care was extended to him by his old friends. He was nursed and attended by the late Dr. James, Joshua Gould Bias, one of the faithful few, whose labors for the oppressed will never be forgotten, and whose heart, purse, and hand were always open to the poor, flying slave. God has blessed him, and his reward is obtained.

I shall here take leave of George, only saying, that he recovered and went to the land of freedom, to be safe under the protection of British law. Of the wretches he left in the *tavern*, much might be said; but it is enough to know that they awoke to find him gone, and to pour their curses and blasphemy on each other. They swore most frightfully; and the disappointed Southerner threatened to blow out the brains of Kline, who turned his wrath on the hostler, declaring he should be taken and held responsible for the loss. This so raised the ire of that worthy, that, seizing an iron bar that was used to fasten the door, he drove the whole party from the house, swearing they were damned kidnappers, and ought to be all sent after old Gorsuch, and that he would raise the whole township on them if they said one word more. This had the desired effect. They left, not to pursue poor George, but to avoid pursuit; for these worthless man-stealers knew the released men brought up from Philadelphia and discharged at Lancaster were all in the neighborhood, and that nothing would please these brave fellows--who had patiently and heroically suffered for long and weary months in a felon's cell for the cause of human freedom--more than to get a sight at them; and Kline, he knew this well,--particularly old Ezekiel Thompson, who had sworn by his heart's blood, that, if he could only get hold of that Marshal Kline, he should kill him and go to the gallows in peace. In fact, he said the only thing he had to feel sorry about was, that he did not do it when he threatened to, whilst the scoundrel stood talking to Hanway; and but for Castner Hanway he would have done it, anyhow. Much more I could say; but short stories are read, while long ones are like the sermons we go to sleep under.

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Organizer of the Philadelphia Shy and Socially Anxious Meetup Group (*Organizer, 2007-2009*)

- Organized the Philadelphia Shy and Socially Anxious Meetup group, increasing membership from 150 members to 400.
- Arranged more than 52 events for Philadelphia Shy and Socially Anxious Meetup Group to travel to places such as New York, Washington DC, and Six Flags Great Adventure.

Penn State, Brandywine on-campus food drive for Philabundance

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- Solicited donations from faculty, staff, alumni, and local community members.
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INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

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