**Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass**

**By Frederick Douglass, 1845**

Chapter X

I left Mr. Thomas’s house and went to live with Mr. Covey on the 1st of January, 1833. I was now, for the first time in my life, a field hand. In my new employment, I found myself even more awkward than a country boy appeared to be in a large city. I had been at my new house but one week before Mr. Covey gave me a severe whipping, cutting my back, causing the blood to run, and raising ridges on my flesh as large as my finger . . . He then went to a large gum tree, and with his axe cut three large switches, and, after trimming them up neatly with his pocket knife, he ordered me to take off my clothes. I made no answer, but stood with my clothes on. He repeated his order. I still made no answer, nor did I move to strip myself. Upon this he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave marks visible for a long time after. This whipping was the first of a number like it, and for similar offenses.

I lived with Mr. Covey for one year. During the first six months of that year, scarce a week passed without his whipping me. I was seldom free from a sore back. My awkwardness was almost always his excuse for whipping me. We were worked fully up to the point of endurance. Long before day we were up, our horses fed, and by the first approach of day we were off to the field with our hoes and ploughing teams. Mr. Covey gave us enough to eat, but scarce time to eat it. We were often less than five minutes in taking our meals. We were often in the field from the first approach of day till its last lingering ray had left us; and at saving fodder time, midnight often caught us in the fields binding blades.

Covey would be out with us. The way he used to stand it was this. He would spend most of his afternoons in bed. He would then come out fresh in the evening, ready to urge us on with his words, example, and frequently with the whip. Mr. Covey was one of the few slaveholders who could and did work with his hands. He was a hardworking man. He knew by himself just what a man or boy could do. There was no deceiving him. His work went on in his absence almost as well as in his presence, and he had the faculty of making us feel that he was ever present with us. This he did by surprising us. He seldom approached the spot where we were at work openly, if he could do it secretly. He always aimed at taking us by surprise. Such was his cunning, that we used to call him, among ourselves, “the snake.” When we were at work in the cornfield, he would sometimes crawl on his hands and knees to avoid detection, and all at once he would rise nearly in our midst, and scream out. “Ha, ha! Come, come! Dash on, dash on!” This being his mode of attack, it was never safe to stop a single minute. . . .

Mr. Covey’s forte consisted in hs power to deceive. His life was devoted to planning and perpetrating the grossest deceptions. Every thing he possessed in the shape of learning or religion, he made conform to his disposition to deceive. He seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the Almighty. He would make a short prayer in the morning, and a long prayer at night; and, strange as it may seem, few men would at times appear more devotional than he. . . Poor man! Such was his disposition, and success at deceiving, I do verily believe that he sometimes deceived himself into the solemn belief that he was a sincere worshipper of the most high God; and this, too, at a time when he may be said to have been guilty of compelling his woman slave to commit the sin of adultery. The facts in the case are these: Mr. Covey was a poor man; he was just commencing in life; he was only able to buy one slave; and, shocking as is the fact, he bought her, as he said, for a breeder. This woman was named Caroline. Mr. Covey bought her from Mr. Thomas Lowe, about six miles from St. Michael’s. She was a large, able-bodied woman, about twenty years old. She had already given birth to one child, which proved her to be just what he wanted. After buying her, he hired a married man of Mr. Samuel Harrison, to live with him for one year; and him he used to fasten up with her every night! The result was that, at the end of the year, the miserable woman gave birth to twins. At this result, Mr. Covey seemed to be highly pleased, both with the man and the wretched woman. . .

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

**“Social Life in Virginia Before the War,” The Old South**

**By Thomas Nelson Page, 1900**

From the back yard and quarters the laughter of women and the shrill, joyous voices of children came. Far off, in the fields, the white-shirted "ploughers" followed singing their slow teams in the fresh furrows, wagons rattled, and oxcarts crawled along, or gangs of hands in lines performed their work in the corn or tobacco fields, loud shouts and peals of laughter, mellowed by the distance, floating up from time to time, telling that the heart was light and the toil not too heavy.

At special times there was special activity: at ice-getting time, at corn-thinning time, at fodder-pulling time, at threshing-wheat time, but above all at corn-shucking time, at hog-killing time, and at "harvest." Harvest was spoken of as a season. It was a festival. The severest toil of the year was a frolic. Every "hand" was eager for it. It was the test of the men's prowess and the women's skill. For it took a man to swing his cradle through the long June days and keep pace with the bare-necked, knotted-armed leader as he strode and swung his ringing cradle through the heavy wheat. So it demanded a strong back and nimble fingers in the binding to "keep up" and bind the sheaves. The young men looked forward to it as young bucks look to the war-path. How gay they seemed, moving in oblique lines around the "great parallelograms," sweeping down the yellow grain, and, as they neared the starting-point, chanting with mellow voices the harvest song "Cool Water"! How musical was the cadence as, taking time to get their wind, they whet in unison their ringing blades!

Though the plantations were large, so large that one master could not hear his neighbor's dog bark, there was never any loneliness: it was movement and life without bustle; whilst somehow, in the midst of it all, the house seemed to sit enthroned in perpetual tranquillity, with outstretched wings under its spreading oaks, sheltering its children like a great gray dove.

Even at night there was stirring about: the ring of an axe, the infectious music of the banjos, the laughter of dancers, the festive noise and merriment of the cabin, the distant, mellowed shouts of 'coon or 'possum hunters, or the dirge-like chant of some serious and timid wayfarer passing along the paths over the hills or through the woods, and solacing his lonely walk with religious song.

Such was the outward scene. What was there within? That which has been much misunderstood, - that which was like the roses, wasteful beyond measure in its unheeded growth and blowing, but sweet beyond measure, too, and filling with its fragrance not only the region round about, but sending it out unmeasuredly on every breeze that wandered by.

…

That the social life of the Old South had its faults I am far from denying. What civilization has not? But its virtues far outweighed them; its graces were never equalled. For all its faults, it was, I believe, the purest, sweetest life ever lived. It has been claimed that it was non-productive, that it fostered sterility. Only ignorance or folly could make the assertion. It largely contributed to produce this nation; it led its armies and its navies; it established this government so firmly that not even it could overthrow it; it opened up the great West; it added Louisiana and Texas, and more than trebled our territory; it christianized the negro race in a little over two centuries, impressed upon it regard for order, and gave it the only civilization it has ever possessed since the dawn of history. It has maintained the supremacy of the Caucasian race, upon which all civilization seems now to depend. It produced a people whose heroic fight against the forces of the world has enriched the annals of the human race, - a people whose fortitude in defeat has been even more splendid than their valor in war. It made men noble, gentle, and brave, and women tender and pure and true. It may have fallen short in material development in its narrower sense, but it abounded in spiritual development; it made the domestic virtues as common as light and air, and filled homes with purity and peace.

It has passed from the earth, but it has left its benignant influence behind it to sweeten and sustain its children. The ivory palaces have been destroyed, but myrrh, aloes, and cassia still breathe amid their dismantled ruins.

**Swallow Barn**

**By John Pendleton Kennedy, 1829**

[We make] servitude as tolerable to them as we can consistently with our own safety and their ultimate good. We should not be justified in taking the hazard of internal convulsions to get rid of them; nor have we a right, in the desire to free ourselves, to whelm them in greater evils than their present bondage. A violent removal of them, or a general emancipation, would assuredly produce one or the other of these calamities. Has any sensible man, who takes a different view of this subject, ever reflected upon the consequences of committing two or three millions of persons, born and bred in a state so completely dependent as that of slavery—so unfurnished, so unintellectual, so utterly helpless, I may say—to all the responsibilities, cares and labors of a state of freedom? Must he not acknowledge, that the utmost we could give them would be but a nominal freedom, in doing which we should be guilty of a cruel desertion of our trust—inevitably leading them to progressive debasement penury, oppression, and finally to extermination? I would not argue with that man whose bigotry to a sentiment was so blind and so fatal as to insist on this expedient. When the time comes, as I apprehend it will come,—and all the sooner, if it be not delayed by these efforts to arouse something like a vindictive feeling between the disputants on both sides—in which the roots of slavery will begin to lose their hold in our soil; and when we shall have the means for providing these people a proper asylum, I shall be glad to see the State devote her thoughts to that enterprise, and, if I am alive, will cheerfully and gratefully assist in it. In the mean time, we owe it to justice and humanity to treat these people with the most considerate kindness. As to what are ordinarily imagined to be the evils or sufferings of their condition, I do not believe in them. The evil is generally felt on the side of the master. Less work is exacted of them than voluntary laborers choose to perform: they have as many privileges as are compatible with the nature of their occupations: they are subsisted, in general, as comfortably—nay, in their estimation of comforts, more comfortably, than the rural population of other countries. And as to the severities that are alleged to be practised upon them, there is much more malice or invention than truth in the accusation. The slaveholders in this region are, in the main, men of kind and humane tempers—as pliant to the touch of compassion, and as sensible of its duties, as the best men in any community, and as little disposed to inflict injury upon their dependents. Indeed, the owner of slaves is less apt to be harsh in his requisitions of labor than those who toil much themselves. I suspect it is invariably characteristic of those who are in the habit of severely tasking themselves, that they are inclined to regulate their demands upon others by their own standard. Our slaves are punished for misdemeanors, pretty much as disorderly persons are punished in all societies; and I am quite of opinion that our statistics of crime and punishment will compare favorably with those of any other population. But the punishment, on our side, is remarked as the personal act of the master; whilst, elsewhere, it goes free of ill-natured comment, because it is set down to the course of justice. We, therefore, suffer a reproach which other polities escape, and the conclusion is made an item of complaint against slavery.

 "It has not escaped the attention of our legislation to provide against the ill-treatment of our negro population. I heartily concur in all effective laws to punish cruelty in masters. Public opinion on that subject, however, is even stronger than law, and no man can hold up his head in this community who is chargeable with mal-treatment of his slaves.

 "One thing I desire you specially to note: the question of emancipation is exclusively our own, and every intermeddling with it from abroad will but mar its chance of success. We cannot but regard such interference as an unwarrantable and mischievous design to do us injury, and, therefore, we resent it—sometimes, I am sorry to say, even to the point of involving the innocent negro in the rigor which it provokes. We think, and, indeed, we know, that we alone are able to deal properly with the subject; all others are misled by the feeling which the natural sentiment against slavery, in the abstract, excites. They act under imperfect knowledge and impulsive prejudices which are totally incompatible with wise action on any subject. We, on the contrary, have every motive to calm and prudent counsel. Our lives, fortunes, families—our commonwealth itself, are put at the hazard of this resolve. You gentlemen of the North greatly misapprehend us, if you suppose that we are in love with this slave institution—or that, for the most part, we even deem it profitable to us. There are amongst us, it is true, some persons who are inclined to be fanatical on this side of the question, and who bring themselves to adopt some bold dogmas tending to these extreme views—and it is not out of the course of events that the violence of the agitations against us may lead ultimately to a wide adoption of these dogmas amongst the slaveholding States. It is in the nature of men to recalcitrate against continual assault, and, through the zeal of such opposition, to run into ultraisms which cannot be defended. But at present, I am sure the Southern sentiment on this question is temperate and wise, and that we neither regard slavery as a good, nor account it, except in some favorable conditions, as profitable. The most we can say of it is that, as matters stand, it is the best auxiliary within our reach.

 "Without troubling you with further reflections upon a dull subject, my conclusion is that the real friends of humanity should conspire to allay the ferments on this question, and, even at some cost, to endeavor to encourage the natural contentment of the slave himself, by arguments to reconcile him to a present destiny, which is, in fact, more free from sorrow and want than that of almost any other class of men occupying the same field of labor."

**Excerpt from *The Liberator***

**By William Lloyd Garrison**

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During my recent tour for the purpose of exciting the minds of the people by a series of discourses on the subject of slavery, every place that I visited gave fresh evidence of the fact, that a greater revolution in public sentiment was to be effected in the free states – *and particularly in New England* – than in the South. I found contempt more bitter, opposition more active, detraction more relentless, prejudice more stubborn, and apathy more frozen, than among the slave owners themselves. Of course, there were individual exceptions to the contrary.

The state of things afflicted, but did not dishearten me. I determined, at every hazard, to lift up the standard of emancipation in the eyes of the nation, *within sight of Bunker Hill and in the birthplace of liberty*. That standard is now unfurled, and long may it float, unhurt by the spoliations of time or the missiles of a desperate foe – yes, till every chain be broken, and every bondmen set free! Let southern oppressors tremble – let their secret abettors tremble – let their northern apologists tremble – let all the enemies of the persecuted blacks tremble . . .

I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I *will* be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. No! no! Tell a man whose house is on fire, to give a moderate alarm; . . . tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen; - but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest – I will not equivocate – I will not excuse – I will not retreat a single inch – AND I WILL BE HEARD.

And here I close with this fresh dedication:

“Oppression! I have seen thee, face to face,

And met thy cruel eye and cloudy brow;

But thy soul-withering glance I fear not now –

For dread to prouder feelings doth give place

Of deep abhorrence! Scorning the disgrace

Of slavish knees that at that footstool bow,

I also kneel – but with far other bow

Do hail thee and thy herd of hirelings base: -

I swear, while life-blood warms my throbbing veins,

Still to oppose and thwart , with heart and hand,

Thy brutalizing sway – ‘till Africa’s chains

Are burst, and Freedom rules the rescued land, -

Trampling Oppression and his iron rod:

*Such is the vow I take* – SO HELP ME GOD!”

**Letter by Joseph J. DeBruz, 1838**

The next letter deals with a man named Alfred, who was also a runaway slave. The author of the letter was Joseph J. DeBrutz, a former resident of Fayetteville, N. C. who moved to the Black Belt of Alabama in the 1830s. He wrote to John Waddill Jr., his relative who remained in Fayetteville to obtain help in recapturing Alfred. The letter is in the Elijah Fuller Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

Joseph J. DeBruz to John Waddill Jr., Fayetteville, N. C.

Near Linden Marengo [County, Alabama]

22nd Sept • 38

My dear John

I wrote you only five days ago not expecting a letter from you very soon but I had scarcely dispatched my letter before I recvd yours (yesterday) by Express, and as the contents call for all immediate answer, I sit down to write you again—My mind is already made up in regard to Alfred. rather than take $700 for Alfred, I would go into the woods and mall rails for the next twelve months to pay the reward to have him shot. I am so provoked with the villain, that I would almost prefer anything being done with him to giving up to the rascal, and selling him in Fayetteville, and that too upon half his value. I can get $50 per month here for Alfred, and if I would sell him here, he would bring almost any money-- there is a steam saw mill, in 3 miles of my house owned by I gentleman of great wealth, whom I could either sell or hire Alfred at my own price as he has no negro of his own who could attend to the mill. of course then you will see I am justified in refusing $700 for him, however as it is so difficult to apprehend the villain, I am willing to let him go if I can get anything like his worth. if Peter Johnston thinks proper to give you I thousand dollars $100 to be paid to you for Mr. Kelly and $900 in Alabama money payable to me or Hart Ahderson & Co at Mobile 2 months after the Recpt of this, you can close the affair for me, and let me hear of it. if he does not give it, let the outlaw be caught or killed whichever he prefers-- I am of the opinion that if Alfred is so often seen that he can certainly be caught. I wish to god that I could get in 40 yards of him with double barreld if I did not stop him I am much mistaken, can you not get some one to way lay him and if he wont surrender shoot him in the legs thus stop him but this my dear John I leave to you, confidently trusting to soon hear that you have got the gentleman caged again. I should much prefer his being caught to selling him for $1000-- he appears so anxious to die that I have no objections to gratify him in his 'wish, if he can be taken in no other way. Tom Ashe has promised to give me his aid in taking Alfred. He will assist you at anytime with pleasure, and I confide more in you two, than in the balance of North Carolina. I have not yet seen Mr Seawell but will see him this morning as I go over to Linden and will give you his reply at the bottom. the old man and his family are very sick and have been so for some days-- I am suffering very much for Alfreds work and I trust you will leave nothing undone to secure him for me, and I will remember you for the favour for the balance of my life if he should be caught confine him in a room to himself and chain him by legs hands and neck in the middle of the floor, until I can get him out and by all means mind who you send him by and make the bargain with the person to get no pay if he does not keep him ironed all the way, for I would rather loose him altogether than let him escape again if there is no one ready by whom you can send him, write me immediately and I will come myself for him you can say for me that 1f he comes in voluntarily that I pledge my word not to strike him, nor to keep him if he does not want to live with me. I am willing to either sell or hire to another person. but if he wont come in, pursue him till he is caught or killed. as to giving up to him, or regarding his threats, I am solmenly (sic] determined to spend double his value, or conquer him. and I pre-fer hearing that he is dead rather than take one cent less than I thousand dollars for him--

the news I gave you in my last letter. and there is nothing else no more at present--believe

me your affectionate relation

Joseph J. DeBrutz

P.S. I have just called on Mr Sid Seawell and delivered the message, and read him the letter. the old man is very ill-- he requested me to say “that his man Harry could not be bought at any price whatever but that he will give a liberal reward for his apprehension.”- these are his exact words-- Yrs

Joseph DeBrutz

