A historical painting of a coastal city, likely New York City, viewed from a hill. In the foreground, a green hill slopes down towards a body of water. On the hill, there is a large church with two towers and a tall, slender tower with a flag on top. The city is built on a peninsula, with many buildings and a harbor filled with ships. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

A PIONEER IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM

THE LIFE OF
ELISHA TYSON

EDITED BY JOSHUA D. ROTHMAN

A PIONEER IN THE
CAUSE OF FREEDOM

Race in the Atlantic World, 1700–1900

SERIES EDITORS

Richard S. Newman, Rochester Institute of Technology

Patrick Rael, Bowdoin College

Manisha Sinha, University of Connecticut

ADVISORY BOARD

Edward Baptist, Cornell University

Christopher Brown, Columbia University

Vincent Carretta, University of Maryland

Laurent Dubois, University of Virginia

Erica Armstrong Dunbar, Rutgers University

Douglas Egerton, LeMoyne College

Leslie Harris, Northwestern University

Joanne Pope Melish, University of Kentucky

Sue Peabody, Washington State University, Vancouver

Erik Seeman, State University of New York, Buffalo

John Stauffer, Harvard University

A Pioneer in the Cause of Freedom



THE LIFE OF ELISHA TYSON

Edited by Joshua D. Rothman

The University of Georgia Press
Athens

This book was published, in part, with generous support from the J. H. Johnson Fund in Southern History, Department of History, University of Alabama.

Published by the University of Georgia Press

Athens, Georgia 30602

www.ugapress.org

© 2025 by Joshua D. Rothman

All rights reserved

Designed by Melissa Buchanan

Set in Garamond Premier Pro

Most University of Georgia Press titles are available from popular e-book vendors.

Printed digitally

EU Authorized Representative

Easy Access System Europe—Mustamäe tee 50, 10621

Tallinn, Estonia, gpsr.requests@easproject.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Tyson, John S. (John Shoemaker), 1797–1864, author. | Rothman, Joshua D., editor.

Title: A pioneer in the cause of freedom : the life of Elisha Tyson / edited by Joshua D. Rothman.

Other titles: Life of Elisha Tyson

Description: Athens : The University of Georgia Press, 2025. | Series: Race in the Atlantic world, 1700–1900 | Main work originally published: Life of Elisha Tyson, the philanthropist / By a citizen of Baltimore. Baltimore, Printed by B. Lundy, 1825. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024041058 | ISBN 9780820369983 (hardback) |

ISBN 9780820369990 (paperback) | ISBN 9780820370002 (epub) |

ISBN 9780820370019 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Tyson, Elisha, 1750–1824. | Antislavery movements—Maryland—History—18th century. | Antislavery movements—Maryland—History—19th century. | Enslaved persons—Emancipation—Maryland—History—18th century. | Enslaved persons—Emancipation—Maryland—History—19th century. | Abolitionists—Maryland—Biography.

Classification: LCC E445.M3 T97 2025 | DDC 326/.8092 [B]—dc23/eng/20250203

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024041058>

Contents

List of Illustrations vii

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction i

Note on Editorial Method 51

ANNOTATED TEXT OF

Life of Elisha Tyson, the Philanthropist (1825) 53

CORRESPONDENCE, REMINISCENCES, AND OTHER SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTS

1. The Constitution of the Maryland Society for Promoting
the Abolition of Slavery, 1789 151
2. Circular Letter to the Several Abolition Societies
of America, 1790 153
3. Runaway Advertisement, 1796 154
4. The African Academy, 1797–1822 155
5. Elisha Tyson to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, 1811–1812 161
6. Elisha Tyson to Representative Alexander McKim,
December 5, 1811 166
7. Elisha Tyson to President James Madison, July 13, 1812 168
8. Letter to Elisha Tyson and Others Encouraging the
Formation of an Abolition Society, 1819 169
9. The Funeral of Elisha Tyson, February 1824 171
10. Benjamin Lundy Announces the Publication of
Life of Elisha Tyson, September 1825 172
11. Excerpt from Joseph Sturge, *A Visit to the United States in 1841* 172
12. “Reminiscences of Elisha Tyson,” 1891 174

Chronology/Timeline 177

Select Bibliography and Recommendations
for Further Reading 181

Illustrations

Elisha Tyson 3

Anthony Benezet offering instruction to two Black children 5

The mills operated by Josias Pennington and John Taggart 8

The constitution of the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes
Unlawfully Held in Bondage 11

William Pinkney 15

A freedom petition 19

A map of 1804 Baltimore 22

The Maryland Penitentiary 26

A free Black woman and her child being kidnapped 29

The Sharp Street Methodist Episcopal Church 34

Benjamin Lundy 43

Acknowledgments

For their assistance on this project, the author would like to thank Nate Holly, Walter Biggins, and Jon Davies from the University of Georgia Press, Margaret Maxey and the staff at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Professor Warren Milteer, Leah Caldwell, and several anonymous readers commissioned by the press.

A PIONEER IN THE
CAUSE OF FREEDOM

Introduction

Descended from German Quakers who immigrated to Pennsylvania in the late seventeenth century, Elisha Tyson was born in 1749. As a young man he became wealthy in the milling business in northeastern Maryland before moving in the early 1780s to Baltimore, where he grew even wealthier and established a reputation as a prominent member of the city's business community. Throughout his adult life, Tyson also engaged in a variety of civic and charitable causes, but he became legendary for his devotion to the cause of antislavery and his commitment to improving the circumstances of free Black people in the United States.¹

Over the course of more than three decades in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Tyson helped found abolition societies, supported schools for free Black children, and contributed to the creation of numerous Black institutions and benevolent societies. He filed freedom petitions on behalf of enslaved people and pushed for the passage of liberalized manumission laws in Maryland. He used some of his fortune to assist Black people who claimed they were illegally held in bondage sue for their liberty, and he confronted slave traders who kidnapped free Black Americans with the aim of selling them as slaves in the lower South. By the time he died in February 1824, Elisha Tyson had personally aided in the liberation of perhaps two thousand Black people. Black Marylanders filled the streets surrounding Tyson's house for days to pay their respects when he passed away. One Baltimore newspaper estimated that four thousand people attended his funeral, while another report claimed the crowd was closer to ten thousand. A second paper wrote simply that the procession was the largest the city had ever seen, and Black Americans elsewhere lamented the loss as well. Several weeks after Tyson died, a mass meeting at Bishop Richard Allen's Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia, then the leading Black congregation in the United States, mourned Tyson as a man "long known to be a very influential and efficient friend of the people of colour" and someone who "manifested the deep interest he felt in their welfare by acts of humanity and hospitality for upwards of forty years."²

Tyson's influence extended to many white Americans too. News of his death was announced in dozens of papers from Maine to Virginia, and the writer of Tyson's obituary suggested it would be "desirable" if someone who had known him well would "furnish a biographical sketch of the life of this distinguished philanthropist, that it might serve as a beacon to guide others." Accordingly, in the fall of 1825

Benjamin Lundy, the trailblazing editor of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, an antislavery newspaper then being printed in Baltimore, published *Life of Elisha Tyson, the Philanthropist*. Describing Tyson as an “eminent and undaunted advocate of emancipation” and a “great apostle of liberty,” Lundy promised potential readers a “handsomely bound” book of about 150 pages that would include “many interesting anecdotes” and “attract the attention of those who feel desirous of imitating” Tyson’s example.³

When Lundy published *Life of Elisha Tyson*, its author was described only as “a citizen of Baltimore.” In fact, the author was one of Tyson’s nephews, a lawyer named John Shoemaker Tyson, and he intended the account of his uncle’s life in part to serve as an inspiration. He urged “all those seriously concerned for the cause of liberty, to follow in the footsteps of the great pioneer in the cause of freedom; so that what he has begun, may grow and flourish unto the end.” But John Shoemaker Tyson also believed his uncle had had “enemies” who questioned his motives and tactics, and he thus crafted his work with an eye toward defending what he saw as a life filled with unambiguously good deeds that had come with great personal risk and sacrifice.⁴

Moreover, Elisha Tyson’s death came at a moment when the American antislavery movement was in flux. For several decades, white abolitionists like Tyson had been ascendant in the United States. They were individuals who saw immediate and unconditional emancipation as morally just but practically infeasible. Their efforts mostly engaged white elites, and they looked toward amelioration and slowly building broad public and legislative support for universal freedom. It was an essentially conservative approach rooted in cautious gradualism, and its advocates sometimes condescended toward those they purportedly sought to help. By the 1820s this approach faced mounting opposition from a new generation of Black and white antislavery activists who believed in more radical strategies, and John Shoemaker Tyson considered them reckless. *Life of Elisha Tyson* was therefore also an explicitly political document, designed to demonstrate how its protagonist’s path could achieve the ultimate goal of freedom for the enslaved and that “the rash proceedings, entered into by some men, who will have universal emancipation at all hazards” could only lead to failure.⁵

Life of Elisha Tyson has mostly been out of print since its initial publication nearly two hundred years ago, but it remains instructive for readers today. It opens a window onto the evolution of abolitionism in the early republic, demonstrating both the important progress made by that movement in the generations after the American Revolution and its significant limitations. It retrieves the story of a figure, unknown to most Americans, who played a crucial role in the historical



~~~~~  
 The only known portrait of  
 Elisha Tyson depicts him near  
 the end of his life, wearing a  
 plain brown suit in the Quaker  
 tradition, holding a small  
 notebook, and seated in front  
 of several books, including one  
 titled “Abolition of Slavery.”  
 ~~~~~  
 National Portrait Gallery,
 Smithsonian Institution

development of American antislavery and whose legacy deserves recognition and reassessment. And it asks that we consider what it means and what it takes to live a life of principle. Elisha Tyson was not temperamentally as revolutionary a character as those we often revere from the past, and there is much we might critique about his choices and beliefs. But he staked out clear and consistent antislavery stances at a time when they were still deeply unpopular among many white people. He accepted that public ridicule and scorn might be consequences of those stances, and he took far more forceful and concrete actions in their pursuit than most of his contemporaries were willing to take, putting his money behind his convictions and placing himself more than once in personal danger. There are lessons to be learned here for our own political moment.

What follows provides an outline of Elisha Tyson’s life and his activism on behalf of poor, enslaved, and free Black people in the United States. It considers the religious, geographical, political, and ideological contexts in which that life and activism unfolded, and it accounts for the need to engage John Shoemaker Tyson’s biography of his uncle critically and with some circumspection. Readers are then invited to examine *Life of Elisha Tyson* for themselves and to reach their own conclusions about the man at its center. Annotations are provided for some of the cultural references and persons named in the book. Readers will also find a set of

ancillary documents that illuminate some of Elisha Tyson's work, including correspondence from and reminiscences about him, as well as a timeline and a bibliography for further reading.

ANTISLAVERY AND INDUSTRY: A QUAKER LEGACY

John Shoemaker Tyson observed that his uncle's "opinions in matters of religion, were strictly those of the society of Friends." More commonly known as the Quakers, the Religious Society of Friends emerged in England in the middle of the seventeenth century as one of several Christian sects that dissented from the Anglican Church. Believers in the spiritual equality of all people, Quakers opposed nearly every form of hierarchy and coercion, committing themselves instead to simple dress, plain speech, an abstemious and disciplined moral code, and nonviolence. Quakers rapidly attracted growing numbers of adherents in Europe, but they suffered persecution in England as nonconformists, and some began looking to North America as a place where they might live, work, and practice their religion freely. By the 1670s, Quakers could be found in Virginia, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Barbados, and other British imperial possessions. But after William Penn, himself an English Quaker, acquired a royal charter in 1681 for a colony he intended to make a "Holy Experiment" rooted in Quaker ideals and broad religious toleration, Pennsylvania became the center of American Quakerism. Among the thousands drawn to the colony was a small group of Quakers from the city of Krefeld, in what is now western Germany. In 1683, they established a settlement known as Germantown a few miles northwest of Philadelphia. Elisha Tyson's great-grandfather, Reynier Tyson, was one of the founders.⁶

Despite a broad commitment to shared principles and beliefs, Quakers did not always possess what John Shoemaker Tyson described as a "uniformity of doctrine and discipline." Divisions over matters of theology and practice alike could create significant discord among Quakers, and approaches to slavery and slaveholding were common sources of disagreement. On the one hand, Quakers were engaged practically from the inception of their faith in the opposition to slavery that emerged around the same time as Quakerism in fits and starts across the Atlantic world. Quaker ideals stood in tension with the violence, exploitation, and racial hierarchy that underpinned chattel slavery, as well as with the material worldliness of many slaveholders. Residents of Germantown were in fact among the first white American colonists to express their hostility to the institution. In 1688, four Germantown settlers signed a declaration protesting Quaker involvement in the slave trade. They argued, in part, that the "traffick of men-body" constituted theft and oppression, encouraged adultery by selling apart husbands and wives, reflected



An illustration from a mid-nineteenth-century work depicts early Quaker antislavery activist Anthony Benezet offering instruction to two Black children. The founder of a school and an antislavery society in Philadelphia, Benezet helped advance the cause of abolition among his fellow Quakers specifically and Americans more broadly in the Revolutionary era.

New York Public Library

poorly on the morals of Pennsylvania Quakers, and raised the prospect of violent slave rebellions. Above all else, however, the signatories appealed to the Golden Rule. Noting that “there is a saying, that we shall doe to all men, licke as we will be done our selves; macking no difference of what generation, descent or Colour they are,” they wondered by what logic the slave trade in people brought to the Americas “against their will & consent” might be reconciled with that ideal.⁷

On the other hand, Quakers did not adopt antislavery as quickly or universally as common wisdom and popular histories sometimes have it. The Germantown Protest received little support from other Quakers in Pennsylvania. Many Quakers in Pennsylvania and elsewhere in the American colonies continued both to enslave people and participate in the slave trade well into the eighteenth century, and Quaker meetings often avoided taking firm positions against slavery and the in-

volvement of their members with the institution. But Quakers, both as individuals and as a collective, did by degrees become more decisively antislavery. Sentiments like those expressed in the Germantown Protest became more common. Quakers began urging their meetings and their coreligionists not only to disavow participation in the slave trade and sanction those who refused but also to repudiate slaveholding altogether and to provide education and material support for formerly enslaved Black people. Over the course of the second half of the eighteenth century, both slaveholding and slave trading became doctrinally incompatible with Quakerism, and Quakers such as Benjamin Lay, John Woolman, and Anthony Benezet were famously outspoken and influential in their stances against the institution. Doctrinal conflict among Quakers continued to brew throughout Elisha Tyson's lifetime, culminating in 1827 in the rancorous fracturing of American Quakerism into groups of "Orthodox" and "Hicksite" Quakers. But when it came to slavery, the Quaker world of the 1750s and 1760s in which Elisha Tyson was raised was an increasingly antislavery world.⁸

The oldest of ten children born to Isaac Tyson and Esther Shoemaker, Elisha Tyson was also raised in a Pennsylvania that was thriving. In the generations after its founding, the colony's population boomed. Residents of the countryside raised cattle and produced wheat and flour for export, developed burgeoning timber and iron industries, and sustained the bustling commercial and mercantile economy of Philadelphia, which grew into the largest city in North America in the years before the American Revolution. Elisha Tyson's first colonial forebears were likely farmers or craftspeople, like many who lived in early Germantown. But Germantown also became known regionally for linen production and for water-powered mills used in the manufacturing of goods such as paper and flour. Tyson himself was apprenticed as a boy in the milling business, which laid a proven and promising foundation for his future. If he worked independently as a miller in Pennsylvania, however, it was not for long. Instead, in the early 1770s, when his parents sought new prospects in Maryland and moved there with his siblings, Tyson followed, and he and his younger brother Jacob soon established a flour mill in Harford County, near the Little Gunpowder Falls about fifteen miles northeast of Baltimore.⁹

Tyson prospered in Harford County, building several flour mills and a sawmill, and he offered some of his growing resources to support the cause of American independence. He refused to take up arms as a soldier. But he was willing to bend his commitment to Quaker nonviolence such that in the spring of 1776 he informed the Maryland Council of Safety responsible for colonial defense of his readiness to construct a planned flour mill as a mill for producing gunpowder instead. Tyson was only prepared to do so if he got paid for his troubles, and it is unclear whether

the Council of Safety accepted his proposal. Regardless, the offer alone arguably compromised Quaker principles, and while Tyson was hardly the only Quaker to try and accommodate the Revolution in small ways, it was the kind of concession he would rarely entertain over the course of his life.¹⁰

In the fall of 1776, Elisha Tyson married Mary Amos, the daughter of a prominent Harford County Quaker, and the couple had their first child the following year. But even though the Tysons thrived in Harford County, as the Revolutionary War wound to its conclusion late in 1781, Elisha Tyson decided to sell his Harford County mills and move his business operations to Baltimore. It was a momentous choice that would make him exceedingly rich by the time he was forty years old. It would also situate him at the crossroads of slavery and antislavery in the early American republic.¹¹

CIVIC ACTIVISM, SLAVERY, AND EMANCIPATION IN THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS

Though it was less than half the size of Philadelphia, Baltimore in the 1780s sat on the cusp of tremendous growth. Founded in 1729 as a tobacco inspection site on the Patapsco River off the Chesapeake Bay, Baltimore remained small and something of an economic backwater for decades. But as European immigrants moved into the Pennsylvania and Maryland backcountries over the course of the eighteenth century, and as larger numbers of Maryland landowners turned their operations from tobacco to grain during and after the American Revolution to capitalize on European and West Indian demands for flour, Baltimore became a crucial commercial exchange point in the young United States. The city's population more than doubled between 1776 and 1790. At that point it housed more than thirteen thousand people, including more than twelve hundred who were enslaved, and it was the fifth-largest city in the country. Ships crowded the wharves, taking grain and flour from across Maryland and southern Pennsylvania to ports throughout the Atlantic world and bringing back all sorts of trade goods for sale by Baltimore's expanding merchant class. When the city purchased a "mudmachine" in 1790 to deepen the river basin around which commerce clustered to allow for larger ships to dock, it was a sign that governing officials anticipated and courted even more economic development.¹²

An economy predicated so heavily on grain and flour exports was an economy where mills would be in demand, and Elisha Tyson was hardly the only one to see that. By 1804, there were more than fifty flour mills within twenty miles of Baltimore. But Tyson had recognized Baltimore's possibilities early and he had come to the fledgling city with some capital in hand. He established a location for his



~~~~~  
Around 1804, artist Francis Guy painted this view of the mills operated by Josias Pennington and John Taggart by a stream known as Jones Falls that flows into the Baltimore harbor. Elisha Tyson's mills were among dozens like those of Pennington and Taggart situated alongside the Jones Falls in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

~~~~~  
Collection of the Maryland State Archives, *Pennington Mills, Jones Falls, Baltimore, c. 1804, Looking Upstream*, by Francis Guy [1760–1820], c. 1804, oil on canvas, 27¼ × 32¾ inches, MSA SC 4680-10-0029

mills on Jones Falls a few miles north of the river basin, and by the end of the 1780s he operated several mills on the site, just one of which had the capacity to grind more than seventy thousand bushels of wheat in a year. Branching out into associated businesses over the course of the 1780s, Tyson also purchased a warehouse on Cheapside Wharf along the western edge of the river basin, bought a partial interest in several ships, and entered a series of merchant partnerships that dealt in a wide range of commodities. Often partnering with other Quaker businessmen, Tyson sometimes also joined forces with family members, including his brother Jesse. By the early 1790s, Elisha Tyson was one of the wealthiest men in Baltimore.¹³

Tyson used his considerable financial standing to support his fellow Quakers in Baltimore, cosigning a loan in the early 1780s that funded the erection of a new meetinghouse there. Moreover, as a respected and important member of the burgeoning city's business community, Tyson involved himself in work to fortify Baltimore's economic infrastructure and civic institutions as well as its safety and sanitation. In the mid-1780s, he was among a group of businessmen who got together to set the exchange rate for Maryland's money. In 1789, he signed on to the first petition ever submitted to Congress, joining several hundred Baltimore tradesmen and mechanics as they called for federal protection and support of American domestic manufacturing. Tyson joined and became a leader of one of Baltimore's first fire companies, and he would be one of the initial members of its first fire insurance company. In 1790, he was one of several people authorized by the state government to lay out a road extending from Jones Falls into Baltimore city proper. The following year, he signed on to a protest against what he and other merchants considered a monopoly the state held over the right to publicly auction imported goods, and a few years after that he was one of eighty Baltimore residents who petitioned the state to pass a law to prevent those who kept hogs from letting them run wild anywhere near the city. Like the other signatories, he was "improving grounds and farms" in and around Baltimore, and unfenced swine destroyed fences, ripped up hedges, tore up soil, and ruined enhancements that the propertied class was aiming to make.¹⁴

If some of Tyson's engagements spoke primarily to the concerns of wealthy white men, the 1780s and 1790s were also when he began throwing himself into causes on behalf of the subjugated and oppressed, and particularly into the cause of anti-slavery. He was not alone among white Americans of the era, as the incipient anti-slavery of the eighteenth century gained momentum in the United States during the century's latter decades. Expanding Quaker opposition played an important role in the trend. But so, too, did certain strains of Enlightenment thought, the professed spirit of freedom that accompanied the American Revolution, the de-

velopment of antislavery among some evangelical Christian denominations, and the growing efficacy of protests against slavery from free and enslaved Black people themselves both domestically and in Haiti, where the first Black republic emerged out of revolt against French rule. To be sure, antislavery was far from a given in the early United States. Enlightenment thought and the American Revolution contributed to the entrenchment of slavery even as they generated critiques of the institution. Most white Americans were fearful of potential fallout from the Haitian Revolution. And the total number of slaves in the United States increased by nearly 30 percent between 1790 and 1800. Still, the American Revolution was part of what some historians call a broader “Age of Revolutions,” lasting well into the nineteenth century, that saw political upheavals and an enlarged understanding of human liberty in many parts of Europe and the Americas. The impact of that understanding on slavery in the United States was halting and partial, but it was unmistakable.¹⁵

By the outbreak of the American Revolution, most British North American colonies had banned the transatlantic slave trade. In 1777, Vermont became the first American state to abolish slavery altogether. In the early 1780s, Massachusetts courts effectively declared slavery abolished on the grounds that it was incompatible with the state constitution, and the state constitution of New Hampshire pointed toward abolition there as well. In 1780, Pennsylvania passed legislation providing for the gradual emancipation of all enslaved people in the state. Connecticut and Rhode Island followed suit in 1784, and New York and New Jersey initiated the process of gradual emancipation with laws passed in 1799 and 1804, respectively. At the federal level, while the Constitution enshrined several safeguards for slavery that guaranteed its perpetuation in the United States, the Northwest Ordinance, passed in 1787, barred slavery from territories north of the Ohio River, and in 1808 Congress passed a nationwide ban on the transatlantic slave trade. Universal Black freedom in northern states only took hold over several generations, and it rarely translated to Black equality, but by the turn of the nineteenth century it was clear that the future of those states was a future without slavery.¹⁶

The ideological shifts among white Americans and the growing demands from Black Americans that accounted in large measure for changes to the landscape of slavery were complemented and abetted in the early republic by new antislavery organizations. In Philadelphia in 1775, a small group of white reformers, most of whom were Quakers, founded the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, the first formal antislavery society in what would soon become the United States. Though the group disbanded during the Revolutionary War, it reorganized in 1784 as the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Aboli-

THE
CONSTITUTION
OF THE
PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY,
FOR PROMOTING THE
ABOLITION OF SLAVERY,
AND THE RELIEF OF
FREE NEGROES,
UNLAWFULLY HELD IN
BONDAGE.

BEGUN IN THE YEAR 1774, AND ENLARGED ON THE
TWENTY-THIRD OF APRIL, 1787.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,
THE ACTS OF
The General Assembly of Pennsylvania,
FOR THE GRADUAL
ABOLITION OF SLAVERY.

*"All Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you,
do ye even so to them; for this is the Law and the Pro-
phets."* Matth. vii. 12.

PHILADELPHIA:
PRINTED BY FRANCIS BAILEY, FOR "THE PENNSYLVANIA
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE ABOLITION OF SLA-
VERY, AND THE RELIEF OF FREE NEGROES
UNLAWFULLY HELD IN BONDAGE."
M,DCC,LXXXVIII.

~~~~~  
The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, estab-  
lished in Philadelphia in 1775, was the first American antislavery society. Recon-  
stituted in 1784 as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, the organization was a  
leading force for abolition in the early United States and an inspiration for sim-  
ilar groups in other states, including the Maryland Abolition Society, which was  
founded in 1789.

~~~~~  
Internet Archive

tion of Slavery. Commonly known as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS), it quickly attracted support and membership not only from Quakers but from eminent and famous public figures including Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and Albert Gallatin. In 1785, meanwhile, a gathering composed mainly of merchants, lawyers, and bankers in New York City formed the New York Manumission Society (NYMS). Its membership also included a disproportionate number of Quakers but, like the PAS, it drew in several renowned politicians such as John Jay, George Clinton, and Alexander Hamilton.¹⁷

The PAS and the NYMS were the most prominent antislavery organizations in the early United States, carrying out a wide range of activities despite membership that only numbered in the hundreds. Working alongside free Black allies and activists, the societies established Black schools, filed legal challenges for fugitives from slavery and free people who claimed to have been kidnapped and enslaved, provided economic relief for people recently freed from slavery, published antislavery literature, and lobbied state legislatures to enforce and expand antislavery laws. They corresponded with early English and French organizations and activists, and thus became part of a nascent transatlantic antislavery movement. And they reached beyond their individual states to spur organizational efforts elsewhere, convening a national gathering known as the American Convention of Abolition Societies for the first time in 1794. By that year, abolition societies had formed in New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, and even in several upper South states, including Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland.¹⁸

Elisha Tyson probably had been opposed to slavery privately for many years, but his first public engagement with the antislavery movement came with the emergence of an organized antislavery society in Maryland in the late 1780s. In September 1789, Tyson was among a small collection of white men who gathered in Baltimore to establish the Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, and Others, Unlawfully Held in Bondage. Observing that “the present attention of Europe and America to Slavery, seems to constitute that crisis in the minds of men, when the united endeavours of a few may greatly influence the public opinion,” the organization’s constitution declared that “the human race, however varied in colour or intellects, are all justly entitled to liberty” and that it was the duty of “nations and individuals” alike to do what they could to eliminate slavery from their midst. By December 1789, the organization claimed nearly one hundred members from Baltimore and its surrounding countryside, and by July 1790 it claimed nearly two hundred. Tyson was appointed to the Acting Committee, a group of six designated to “transact the business of the Society.”¹⁹

As was true of abolition societies in other states, many members of the Maryland Abolition Society (MAS) were Quakers, and a sizable number were social and economic elites. Along with Elisha Tyson, his brother Jesse, and his son Nathan, for example, other prominent Quakers involved with the MAS included miller Elias Ellicott and merchants Joseph Townsend, who served as its first secretary, and James Carey, who was its first vice president. But a growing number of evangelical Protestants turned against slavery in the early republic as well, and those who joined the MAS and practiced faiths other than Quakerism included the first president of the organization, a Methodist merchant named Philip Rogers; tradesman George Presstman, a Baptist who served as a charter member of the Electing Committee that screened potential members; and Leonard Harbaugh, a builder and architect who belonged to the German Reformed Church. Numerous others were neither Quakers nor particularly wealthy. They included hatters, potters, blacksmiths, tailors, and tavern owners. By the middle of the 1790s, roughly one-third of the members of the MAS were artisans and tradespeople.²⁰

There had been some noticeable antislavery efforts among Marylanders that predated the formation of the MAS. In the 1780s, Maryland newspapers published several antislavery letters and essays from both Black and white Marylanders, and over the course of that decade Maryland Quakers sent antislavery petitions to the state legislature or accompanied Black petitioners who came to that body with similar demands. Enslaved people themselves routinely fled from slavery in Maryland, the evidence of their hostility to the institution appearing in ubiquitous newspaper advertisements taken out by slaveholders looking to recapture freedom seekers. In 1783, Maryland banned the importation of slaves from out-of-state, and in 1787, lawyer Samuel Chase—who represented Maryland in the Continental Congress, signed the Declaration of Independence, and would eventually serve on the Supreme Court—tried introducing an emancipation bill in the state legislature. In 1788, state attorney general Luther Martin, who represented Maryland at the Constitutional Convention, delivered a speech to the state House of Delegates in which he blasted the convention for postponing abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and for not providing the federal government with the power to abolish slavery altogether. Both Chase and Martin would serve as “honorary counsellors” for the MAS, offering their legal advice and services to the organization.²¹

But Maryland remained a state deeply committed to slavery. In 1790, more than one hundred thousand people, nearly one-third of the population, remained in bondage. Those numbers dwarfed the size of the enslaved populations still living in states farther north, and while the percentage of the population that was enslaved was higher in most states to Maryland’s south, only Virginia had a significantly

larger number of enslaved people in absolute terms. Slaveholders and their supporters continued to hold substantial economic power in Maryland, particularly in southern portions of the state and along the Eastern Shore, and that economic power translated to political power in the state legislature. The MAS had its work cut out for it. But Elisha Tyson and his colleagues were steadfast, and they had resources at their disposal. They were prepared to fight.²²

THE MARYLAND SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

The MAS devoted some of its energies toward maintaining a robust organizational structure and toward activities that engaged the larger national conversation on antislavery. Members paid annual dues of ten shillings to support the organization. They worked through committees and attended meetings four times a year. They kept in correspondence with the PAS and other state abolition societies to report on their undertakings and to coordinate activities across state lines. They aided in the 1792 publication of the first almanac written by free Black mathematician and Baltimore native Benjamin Banneker, which demonstrated to many skeptics the intellectual capacities of people of African descent, and they published advice received from British activists such as Granville Sharp, whom the MAS, like the PAS and the NYMS, also made an honorary member. They attended national meetings like those of the American Convention of Abolition Societies, and they petitioned Congress, urging that body in 1791 to use whatever constitutional authority it possessed to restrict American involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. “The rights of man,” the MAS reminded Congress, “can never be seriously venerated, or long supported, by a people familiar in the abuse of those rights.” It was thus imperative “to the long and happy duration of our excellent government, that a trade, so pregnant with corruption as that in slavery, should be early and effectually checked.”²³

Most MAS activities, however, centered on slavery and the rights of Black people within the state of Maryland. It committed, for example, to an extensive campaign of lobbying the state legislature to liberalize Maryland’s restrictive manumission laws, to prevent slaveholders from sending or selling enslaved people out of Maryland to other states, and to move toward the gradual abolition of slavery in the state altogether. On some fronts, the MAS ran into immovable opposition. It appealed to the legislature at least three different times to no avail in the 1790s to ban the exportation of enslaved people out of state, and petitions to the legislature calling for wholesale abolition produced some debate but ultimately went nowhere.²⁴



William Pinkney (1764–1822) was born in Annapolis, trained as a lawyer, and spent much of his adult life in various elective and appointed state and federal offices. Though he was not consistently antislavery, in 1789, during his first term in the Maryland House of Delegates, Pinkney delivered a vigorous and well-publicized address in support of liberalizing the state's manumission laws.

New York Public Library

There seemed initially to be little prospect for addressing Maryland's manumission law either. Colonial legislation passed in 1752, which carried over into state law, banned slaveholders from emancipating people in their last wills and testaments or in any other document written proximate to a slaveholder's death. Effectively eliminating deathbed grants of freedom, the law disincentivized manumission by forcing slaveholders interested in emancipation to forgo at least some of the economic value of enslaved people during their lifetimes. Lawmakers from slaveholding portions of the state strongly supported such limitations, and a year prior to the founding of the MAS they had pushed the legislature to go even further and consider banning manumission almost altogether.²⁵

But an abolition petition sent to the legislature by the MAS late in 1789 produced surprising change. The petition was referred for consideration to a House of Delegates committee led by a lawyer and protégé of Samuel Chase named William Pinkney. Pinkney would have an illustrious political career that culminated with his service as attorney general under President James Madison. In 1789, however, he was in his first term as a legislator. Perhaps thanks to his connections with Chase, he had also corresponded and spoken extensively with Elisha Tyson about slavery, and while he had no illusions that a comprehensive emancipation plan might pass in the state legislature, he believed slavery might gradually disappear if slaveholders could

more easily emancipate people they held in bondage. Accordingly, he brought to the floor a report from his committee that set aside demands for “compulsory abolition” but called for significant modifications to state law.²⁶

Introducing the committee’s findings, Pinkney delivered a blistering attack on the institution of slavery and on white supremacy. He condemned the transatlantic slave trade by which African slavery had appeared in North America as “a disgraceful traffick,” and he counted himself and his colleagues as “equally guilty” for countenancing slavery and continuing to allow it to grow, claiming surprise “that the people of Maryland do not blush at the very name of freedom.” He asserted that slavery was economically damaging and contrary to the spirit of democracy, and he predicted that if it were not done away with, slavery would “one day destroy that reverence for liberty, which is the vital principle of a republic.” Pinkney argued that racial hierarchy was “a flimsy pretext” for justifying slavery, that the circumstances of Black Americans were “solely the result of situation,” and that there was “no evidence” of their natural inferiority. He insisted that the law restricting manumission was a “wanton abuse of legislative authority,” a “shameful disregard of every moral and religious obligation,” and a “flagrant act of strained and unprovoked cruelty.” It lacked any “rational inducement,” it “destroyed almost the only opportunity” for the enslaved to achieve “the station to which God and nature have given them a title,” and it ought to be repealed.²⁷

Pinkney’s speech was extraordinarily bold for its time, and it was a bridge too far for many of his fellow legislators when he delivered it. The proposed measure to roll back the 1752 manumission law failed. But the vote was close, and the MAS saw an opening. They printed Pinkney’s speech and circulated it throughout the state. Many newspapers published the speech as well. When the legislature met at its next session in the fall of 1790, it repealed the 1752 manumission law. Over the course of the next decade, the number of manumissions in Maryland grew at an unprecedented rate. The free Black population of the state increased by 143 percent between 1790 and 1800, at which point there were nearly twenty thousand free Black Marylanders. The free Black population of Baltimore alone increased from just 323 in 1790 to 2,771 in 1800, a growth of more than 750 percent that became the foundation of a vibrant and diverse free Black community. That community would itself become a crucial source of antislavery activism and it would continue to grow rapidly in the first half of the nineteenth century. By 1810, there were more free Black people than enslaved people in Baltimore. By 1820, there were more free Black people in Baltimore than there were in Philadelphia, and by the outbreak of the Civil War free Black people in Baltimore outnumbered enslaved people in the city more than tenfold.²⁸

While the MAS looked to change state laws with the hope of creating general conditions under which slavery in the state might eventually come to an end, it also sought to bring about the freedom of individual slaves. Its options were limited by the fact that the state sustained the property rights of slaveholders in enslaved people. But there were hundreds if not thousands of people held in bondage who insisted that they were enslaved illegally, who maintained they were free people taken into slavery by kidnappers, or who otherwise believed they had legitimate claims to freedom. The MAS had neither the money nor the personnel to help them all, and picking its battles required difficult choices. Elisha Tyson and the Acting Committee on which he served for the entire existence of the MAS played central roles in making those choices because, among other things, “transact[ing] the business of the Society” meant deciding which freedom cases to get involved in and steering legal assistance and funds in those directions.²⁹

These were not simple matters. Freedom suits were costly and time-consuming. They involved navigating legal intricacies and gathering evidence that would demonstrate freedom claims in the face of slaveholders who had every interest in concealing that evidence and courts whose sympathies were uncertain. Each suit courted public controversy and each suit entailed sustained advocacy on behalf of people who often had nowhere else to turn and whose cases the MAS knew it might lose.

The circumstances of one pair of brothers held in bondage demonstrate the complexity and the stakes involved in freedom suits brought by the MAS, as well as the persistence of its members and the forces allied against it. In the late 1770s, a Baltimore resident named Thomas De Witt returned from travels in New York, bringing with him Simon and Fortune, both of whom were between ten and thirteen years old and both of whom De Witt claimed as slaves. After changing their names to David and Jonathan, De Witt sold the boys in Maryland to Edward Dorsey and Ezekiel John Dorsey, respectively. But even though Simon and Fortune were young, they never believed themselves rightfully enslaved. For one thing, they always understood themselves to be of Native rather than of African descent, and Indian slavery was illegal in Maryland. Moreover, they believed their mother may have never been born into slavery in the first place. By 1790, Simon and Fortune had become young men. Their cases came to the attention of the Acting Committee of the MAS, which arranged to have freedom petitions filed on their behalf in the Criminal Court of Baltimore County.³⁰

The cases carried on for the better part of two years. Both the Dorseys and the MAS had people travel to New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey to find and take testimony from witnesses who could speak to the ancestry of Simon and Fortune

and to the question of whether their mother had been born enslaved or free. Both sides asked for and received continuances while they gathered additional evidence and investigated various witness statements. The Dorseys claimed they had proof that Simon and Fortune's mother was "a Mustee, or Mulatto," and understood to be a slave. The MAS asserted that Simon and Fortune had physical features plainly indicating that they were of Native descent. It also introduced testimony about their mother suggesting that a white man in New Jersey had acquired her as an infant and sold her as a slave, but also that "it was not known of whom he got her, or whence she came, except a general idea that it was from Philadelphia, or that neighbourhood."³¹

After many months, even the MAS conceded that the evidence as a whole "left all the merits of the case in total obscurity," and one of its lawyers dropped Simon and Fortune's cases because he concluded that "there appeared to be no foundation for their claim of freedom." But another of its lawyers "entirely differed in sentiment," believing the cases on solid ground and worth seeing through. As the twists and turns of the evidence and the witness testimonies became increasingly byzantine and led to additional delays, the Dorseys asked the court in January 1791 "for a hearing of the petitions" and a swift ruling. The court granted the request. The MAS, feeling it needed still more information to make Simon and Fortune's cases stronger, withdrew the freedom petitions rather than risk losing, only to refile them almost immediately, which was its right and which set the cases in motion once again.³²

Both the MAS and the Dorseys went about collecting more evidence and talking to more witnesses until the fall of 1791, at which point the MAS requested yet another continuance and the Dorseys decided they had had enough. They asked one of their lawyers to bring a formal complaint to the state legislature, accusing the MAS of "improper interference" with their slaves and demanding relief. In December 1791, the Committee of Grievances and Courts of Justice in the House of Delegates came down firmly on the side of the Dorseys. For one thing, the Committee of Grievances effectively accused the MAS of fabricating evidence, arguing that it had introduced testimony from witnesses it claimed "were people of character and credit" but who were in fact "incompetent." In part, that was because the witnesses were former slaves, which made them, in the eyes of the committee, inherently "incompetent." But the committee also asserted that one of the witnesses "was a person of obscene and indecent deportment and infamous character" while another was "a drunken worthless fellow."³³

Ultimately, however, the committee concluded that slaveholders like the Dorseys needed protection from the MAS because the organization was simply too

To the Honourable Judges of Frederick County Court - now in Court-
 sitting is presented the Petition of negroe Rachael - [4171]
 Your Petitioner considering herself unjustly held in Bondage
 by a certain Sebastian Stonebreaker, known by the name of Boston
 Stonebreaker of Frederick County - now prays the assistance of your
 Honors - She states her claim to Freedom to arise both under the
 laws of the State of Maryland, and also under the laws of Pen-
 sylvania for the Abolition of Slavery - she further prays that your
 Honors will take her Case into Consideration and her proper Re-
 dress - and her said Master be Compelled to appear, and that
 Damages may issue -
 Negroe Rachael

Enslaved people in Maryland who believed they were being held in bondage unjustly or illegally could file a freedom petition in court in the hopes of gaining their freedom. This petition was filed in 1792 by a woman named Rachael, who claimed that Sebastian Stonebreaker enslaved her contrary to law.

University of Maryland Libraries Digital Collections, <https://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/15142>

powerful. Its members, the committee argued, were “numerous, wealthy, and influential,” and they were “connected with another society, more numerous, in Philadelphia.” The MAS had forced the Dorseys to incur expenses in defending their claims to Simon and Fortune that “greatly exceeds the value of the slaves,” and the committee believed it had done so intentionally and strategically. By the committee’s reckoning, the MAS had so much money and influence behind it that it gave slaveholders in freedom suits “but a slender chance of encountering them.” Rather, considering the time and expense involved in fighting a freedom suit brought by the MAS, a slaveholder usually “had better consent to give up a slave, than defend his right to him.” Declaring that the MAS had “interfered in an improper, indecent, and unjustifiable manner,” the committee determined that its “conduct has been unjust and oppressive.” Such conduct could not “be warranted upon any principle by which good citizens ought to be actuated.” The committee consequently urged the legislature as a whole “to adopt measures to remedy such grievances.”³⁴

The MAS offered a rebuttal to the Committee of Grievances’ report in which it contended the committee had its facts wrong, protested that the committee had provided no opportunity for the MAS to be heard, and insisted that it had acted entirely legally and in good faith in the cases of Simon and Fortune. But the legis-

lature was uninterested in the objections of the MAS. It followed up on the committee's report with a formal censure, resolving that the MAS had acted "in a most uncandid, unjustifiable, and oppressive manner" with respect to the Dorseys and maintaining that the MAS rebuttal was itself "indecent, illiberal, and highly reprehensible." Indeed, the legislature nearly approved an even harsher resolution, one that would have condemned the MAS as both "altogether unnecessary" and "subversive of the rights of our citizens" and criticized the principles motivating it as "repugnant to the laws and constitution of the state."³⁵

The legislature also took substantive action to "remedy" the complaints of slaveholders like the Dorseys, passing a law that barred refiling freedom petitions in court until those bringing the petition paid all the court costs of the initial filing, including those incurred by the slaveholder in defending his claim. The law was designed to crack down on freedom suits by raising the potential expenses involved for those bringing them, and in the cases of Simon and Fortune, it had precisely its intended impact. Contrary to the claims of the Committee of Grievances and Courts of Justice that the MAS was extravagantly rich and powerful, the organization could not afford to pay all the costs it and the Dorseys had run up during the initial filing and also continue to fight on behalf of Simon and Fortune. Elisha Tyson and the Acting Committee had already spent most of the funds it had at its disposal. According to his nephew, Tyson became "extremely low and depressed" at the prospect of Simon and Fortune remaining in slavery. He offered to pay some of the outstanding costs himself and asked others to contribute to the cause. It still was not enough. Paying what was already owed and then paying even more for a second hearing was beyond what Tyson and his associates could muster. The Acting Committee had no choice but to "abandon" Simon and Fortune "to their hapless destiny." They would stay enslaved.³⁶

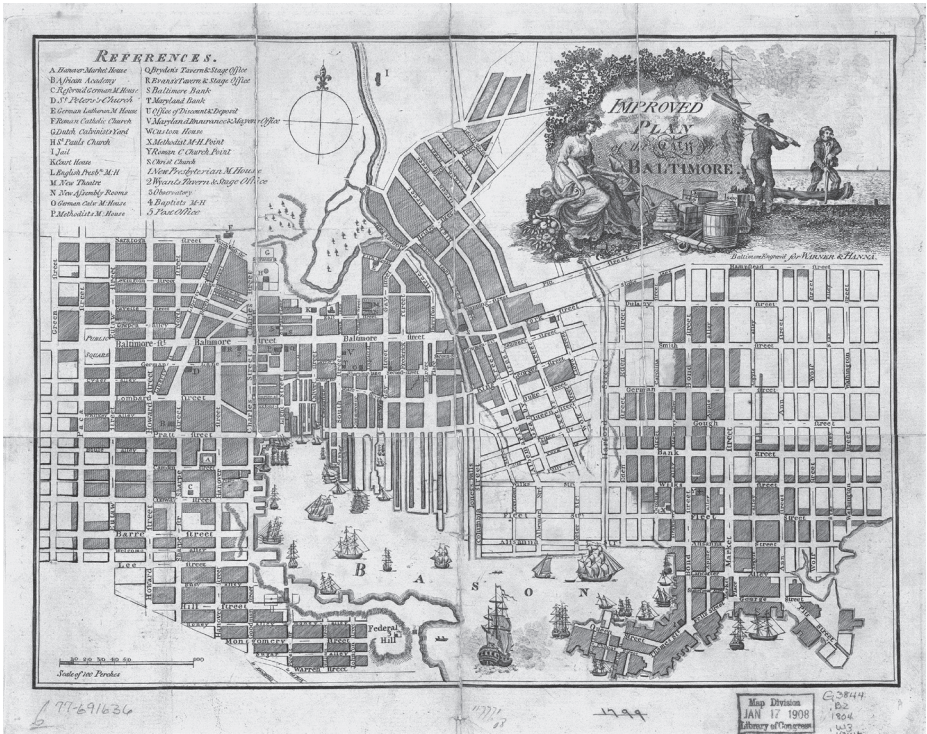
The MAS continued to act despite the setback it encountered, and it would see some successes even after 1791. Its membership continued to grow, and by 1797 it had more than 160 members in Maryland and another 75 from outside the state. Despite the risk of the elevated financial costs involved, it continued to file freedom suits on behalf of those claiming they were unjustly enslaved. By early 1796 it claimed its efforts had led to the freedom of 138 people. Over the next year and a half, it would help liberate at least a few dozen more, and Joseph Townsend later claimed that in total the MAS liberated "several hundred persons" from "unjust and oppressive servitude." In 1792, meanwhile, it launched a fundraising effort to establish a school in Baltimore for free Black students, in the belief that education was vital to Black economic success and that it helped provide what MAS members saw as the need for Black moral elevation from slavery.³⁷

But the ironic and seemingly laughable accusation from the state legislature that the activities of the MAS were “oppressive” reflected the resentment and sense of victimization felt by slaveholders. It signified the backlash that had quickly begun to take hold on behalf of slavery and against the limited progress the MAS had played an important role in instigating. The MAS was able to raise enough money to open a school, an institution that eventually would find a home on Sharp Street and be known as the African Academy. But the project faced opposition from white people who thought Black education futile if not dangerous. It took five years to amass funds necessary for the project, and even then, only the extensive efforts of Baltimore’s burgeoning Black Methodist community ensured its survival.³⁸

Legal changes enacted by the Maryland legislature after 1791 showed intensifying antagonism toward Black freedom as well. In 1796, the legislature passed “An Act Regarding Negroes,” codifying many state laws of race and slavery in ways that generally hardened the regime for free Black and enslaved people alike. It made clear that free Black people could not vote or hold office, and it barred them from testifying either against white people in court or on behalf of enslaved people in freedom suits. It installed a vagrancy law designed to apply particularly to free Black people that forced them to work, post a monetary bond, leave the state, or go to prison and be sold into temporary servitude. The act criminalized giving or selling freedom papers or travel passes to enslaved people that might help them escape from slavery, and while the act did preserve and enshrine the eased manumission law from 1790, it also somewhat tightened its terms of eligibility.³⁹

Perhaps most significantly, at least for anyone wishing to petition for freedom in Maryland, the 1796 act took original jurisdiction over all freedom petitions away from state General Courts that had often been friendly to freedom seekers and generous to petitioners regarding materials it allowed to be admitted as evidence. Instead, the act provided that freedom suits would run first through local courts in the counties where petitioners and their enslavers lived, where local juries made decisions, and where judges were nearly always themselves local slaveholders. This change had been first instituted by the legislature late in 1793, and it was codified in the 1796 act in tandem with the provision mandating that plaintiffs pay all court costs in cases where freedom petitions were withdrawn or dismissed. The legislature’s intentions were unmistakable. As one historian has written, it was “determined to clamp down on freedom petitions” and make petitioners and lawyers “think twice before filing a lawsuit.”⁴⁰

In 1798, the Maryland Abolition Society disbanded. It is not clear what accounted for its demise, and John Shoemaker Tyson provides no explanation for it in his account of his uncle’s life. We might presume that its members felt that



This 1804 map of Baltimore indicates many of the city's landmarks, and it particularly draws attention to its churches and meetinghouses. Around the time this map was created, Elisha Tyson took up residence on Sharp Street, just west of the harbor, where he lived adjacent to the African Academy, a school founded by Black Baltimoreans and members of the Maryland Abolition Society. The academy, located between Lombard and Pratt Streets, is indicated on the map inset by the letter "B."

Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

the conditions under which it was increasingly forced to operate made its work too challenging and too expensive. But it seems equally possible that the collective commitment of its members simply flagged after nearly a decade of work and that many of them felt they had accomplished enough such that it was time to shift their focus to other ventures.

But Elisha Tyson was not prepared to move on. Whatever the substantive accomplishments of the MAS, slavery in Maryland showed no signs of disappearing either legally or demographically at the turn of the nineteenth century. The free Black population of the state did continue to grow, increasing by 75 percent between 1800 and 1810. By that point, nearly thirty-four thousand Black Marylanders, comprising nearly one-quarter of the state's Black population, were free. But the pace at which enslaved Marylanders achieved their freedom slowed from the last decade of the eighteenth century, and the state's enslaved population also continued to grow, going from 103,036 in 1790 to 105,635 in 1800 to 111,502 in 1810. That growth rate was significantly less than the rate of the enslaved population in the United States as a whole, and that was true in part because of some emancipationist tendencies among slaveholders. But it was also true because as cotton became a more profitable crop in the lower South, the demand from slaveholders there for enslaved laborers intensified, spurring the growth of the domestic slave trade and incentivizing the kidnapping of free Black people for sale into slavery.⁴¹

Between 1790 and 1860, well over one million enslaved people would be forcibly migrated across state lines in the United States. The majority were trafficked by slave traders and kidnappers, and most of them were moved from the upper South to the lower South. Maryland alone saw a forced outmigration of more than twenty-two thousand enslaved people in the 1790s. That number dipped to just a bit under twenty thousand people in the 1800s. But it would jump by 65 percent in the 1810s, to more than thirty-three thousand people. In short, one important reason for the relatively slow growth of the enslaved population of Maryland was the sale and theft of Black people away from Maryland and into the lower South.⁴²

Black Marylanders themselves would carry on with the struggle to end slavery, and they would remain at the forefront of the antislavery movement and the fight for their own liberation. But as the eighteenth century came to a close, few white supporters and allies were willing to join them in that battle with greater devotion than Elisha Tyson. If anything, the seemingly shrinking base of support from other white Marylanders led Tyson to become more resolute in his efforts and more audacious in his approach.

Just after the turn of the nineteenth century, Tyson moved his home to the

same block on which both the African Academy and a Black Methodist Episcopal Church sat so that he could live near major centers of Baltimore's Black community. Around the same time, advertisements periodically began appearing in Baltimore newspapers suggesting that Tyson had become known to Black and white people alike as someone who would aid fugitives from slavery and provide them safe harbor as they sought their freedom. In December 1800, for example, a slaveholder named Ruth Norwood, who lived a few miles from Baltimore, offered a twenty-dollar reward for the return of Kate, who was about forty-five years old, and Cassey, who was about eighteen. Kate had already fled from Norwood more than once, and this time both she and Cassey had been "seen at the house of a Mr. Tyson," though Norwood suspected they had since moved on and were hiding somewhere along the turnpike leading northwest out of the city. A little less than a year later, meanwhile, an Annapolis slaveholder named Seth Sweetser advertised that a twenty-two-year-old woman named Milly had fled from him, that she had been gone for nearly five months, and that she was likely somewhere in Baltimore. She had lived there before Sweetser purchased her, and he had heard she spent part of the summer "living with a Mr. Tyson." If institutional and organizational efforts to combat slavery's evils were getting scarcer among other white people in Maryland, then Elisha Tyson believed he had to take matters into his own hands.⁴³

"THE PHILANTHROPIST" COMBATS SLAVE TRADERS AND KIDNAPPERS

According to his nephew, Elisha Tyson withdrew from daily management of his milling business in 1798. He was no longer a young man, and while he continued to keep an eye on the operation of the mills and remained an important player in Baltimore's commercial and financial evolution, his role became less active and more advisory. He consulted especially with his brother Jesse, several of his sons, and numerous members of his extended family as they established banks, founded insurance companies, and invested in concerns that built turnpikes and roads.⁴⁴

Tyson probably stepped back from his mills in part because his personal finances were already thoroughly secure, in part because of his age, and in part because he wished to be around more at home. He and his wife Mary still had several relatively young children, and their family continued to grow as their older children—some of whom lived on the same block as Elisha and Mary Tyson—began to have children of their own. But Tyson also seems to have wanted to devote less time to his business and more to civic and benevolent causes. One historian has claimed that during the early decades of the nineteenth century, Tyson became a kind of "Presiding Elder of Baltimore," expanding his leadership roles among a cluster of like-

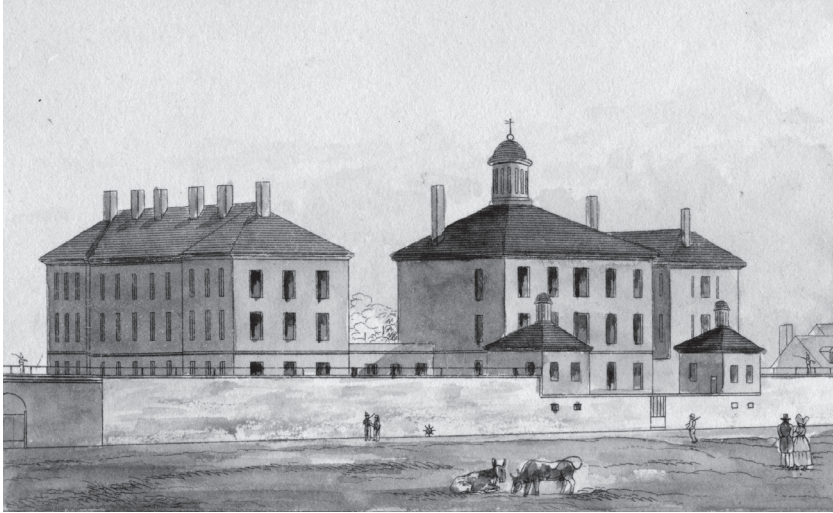
minded men to advance a slew of public and private charitable and humanitarian concerns. The conclusion is a sound one. John Shoemaker Tyson thought deliberately when deciding what to call his uncle's biography, and if Elisha Tyson had not yet earned the moniker of "the Philanthropist" during the first fifty years of his life, the last twenty-five solidified his claim to the title.⁴⁵

Tyson continued to belong to the Union Fire Company, which he had originally joined in the 1790s, and in 1806 he was named a company director. A few years later, Tyson was chosen to chair a gathering of "citizens" from the Second Ward of Baltimore that convened to appoint "Captains" whose job was "to patrol from 10 o'clock in the evening until five in the morning." Tyson himself took a turn as a captain of the patrol, which complemented the system of nightwatchmen and constables that served as Baltimore's police force prior to the formal creation of a police department in the 1850s.⁴⁶

But many of the causes Tyson became more deeply involved with related less to public safety than to work on behalf of the indigent and the unfortunate. In 1801, for example, Tyson was a founder and one of the first managers of the Baltimore General Dispensary, a facility created to provide medical and health care services for the poor, and he remained a manager for at least the first several years of its existence. Contributors helped offset the expenses of the dispensary and could recommend patients, who then had access to a pharmacy, smallpox vaccinations, and general medical treatment from a set of attending physicians. Importantly, the dispensary was open to patients regardless of race, and managers and staff alike became deeply concerned at any implication that the dispensary operated on a discriminatory basis.⁴⁷

Throughout most of the 1810s, Baltimore officials also recruited Tyson repeatedly to help with municipal poor relief. In the winter of 1810, he was appointed by the city "to visit and relieve the distressed poor," making calls to poverty-stricken families to ensure they had wood for fires and food to eat. In 1812, he was similarly appointed to superintend the distribution of funds collected by the city "to alleviate the distresses of the suffering poor," and he remained part of the city's efforts to deliver aid to the destitute at least through 1817. He also made significant charitable donations from his own purse, such as when he contributed the not-small sum of \$100 in 1814 as part of a special collection taken up in Baltimore for those in need, whose usual share of public funds had been diverted to aid the American military effort during the War of 1812.⁴⁸

Tyson also helped bring into being new institutions that were becoming popular among social reformers in Europe and the United States alike in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1804, several of Tyson's close associates were



~~~~~  
 The Maryland Penitentiary, founded in 1811, was an institution designed with the goal of rehabilitating prisoners so that they might emerge as useful and productive citizens after serving their sentences. Reform-minded Americans such as Elisha Tyson, who was appointed an inspector of the facility soon after it opened, saw penitentiaries as parts of larger agendas of social improvement and beneficence.  
 ~~~~~

The John Work Garrett Library, the Sheridan Libraries,
 Johns Hopkins University

among the founders of a Baltimore “School of Industry,” a place akin to a workhouse that would provide food, lodging, and job training for the poor, and in 1812 Tyson was named to a committee that would manage and oversee construction of a building for the facility. Renamed the Baltimore House of Industry, it was designed “for the reception and maintenance of deserving families in distress, and of needy children.” Also in 1812, Tyson was appointed as one of ten inspectors of the Maryland Penitentiary. An establishment founded the previous year, the Maryland Penitentiary, like its counterparts created in many other states by the middle of the century, aimed less to punish individuals convicted of crimes than to rehabilitate them through a regimen of labor and silent reflection. That Tyson’s appointment as an inspector came directly from the governor indicates that his reputation for steadiness and probity was statewide. That the Maryland Penitentiary did not segregate inmates by race indicates the influence he and like-minded associates exerted on its founding.⁴⁹

Yet even as he devoted himself to one philanthropic undertaking after another,

Tyson's concern for the plight of the enslaved and the injustices generally faced by Black people remained preeminent in his mind, and his focus on those matters never wavered. Tyson sometimes made appeals through established structures of power when he thought they might be effective. In 1811, for example, Tyson was part of a Quaker delegation that brought a petition to Washington asking Congress to abolish the domestic slave trade or at least to take actions to combat the abduction and sale of free Black people. While in the nation's capital, Tyson discussed the problems with his congressional representative, Alexander McKim. He followed up on that discussion with a letter to McKim detailing multiple instances of kidnappings as proof "of the existence of an unlawful trade in People of Colour" through which "hundreds have been taken off." He offered to return to Washington if McKim thought it would be helpful. Similarly, a little more than six months later Tyson wrote directly to President James Madison about the case of a Spanish privateer that had landed in distress at Baltimore while carrying more than thirty captive Africans on board. Tyson urged Madison to intervene on the captives' behalf. The ship had reportedly sold nearly two hundred Africans illegally in South Carolina and Georgia before arriving in Maryland, and even if it were ultimately allowed to leave Baltimore, Tyson wrote that surely "a just and humane policy" would see "the suffering victims on board" set at liberty.⁵⁰

Tyson continued as well to turn to extant organized antislavery groups for help and support, drawing especially on connections he had developed with members of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. In 1811, Tyson wrote repeatedly to Isaac Hopper, a fellow Quaker and then a leader of the PAS, asking his assistance in reuniting a nine-year-old Philadelphia boy with his mother after the boy had been kidnapped by "a Monster of a man," sold to a slave trader in Baltimore, and then rescued through Tyson's interventions. Prominent members of the PAS sometimes reached out to Tyson for help in locating Black people they suspected had been taken illegally to Baltimore, and in 1812, Tyson spent months corresponding with the PAS trying to get the group to help him acquire information about four Black men then being held in a Baltimore jail on suspicion of being runaways. In fact, Tyson informed the PAS, the men had been kidnapped and sold. They had then escaped, only to be taken up and jailed. They were willing to testify against their kidnappers, several of whom Tyson heard had been arrested in Philadelphia, but Baltimore officials needed evidence that the men were actually free before they would release them.⁵¹

Whether he was traveling to Washington, trying to get legal documentation to prove the freedom of kidnapping victims, or helping people who wished to challenge their bondage file freedom suits, everything Elisha Tyson did entailed time

and money. Cases could take months or years to resolve, and there were lawyers to hire and court fees to pay and witnesses whose expenses needed to be covered. Tyson absorbed most if not all of the costs himself countless times, with one person remembering that he would get behind a case for freedom whenever “he perceived the absence of a link in the chain of title to a slave.” Moreover, he chose carefully, supposedly never filing “a petition till his own mind, at least, was free from doubt, as to the right of the slave to liberty,” which meant that when a person held in bondage obtained Elisha Tyson’s support, that person usually also obtained their freedom.⁵²

Tyson’s antislavery activism stood out because of his magnanimity and his judiciousness, and he angered slaveholders whenever he engaged the legal system in what they considered interference with their property rights. But arguably more remarkable were the moments when he refused to wait for the law to take its course, risking his personal safety and courting the ire of slaveholders and slave traders alike when he knew that hesitation and delay were luxuries that those in need could not afford. Elisha Tyson was not a person who craved renown or courted publicity. True to his Quaker faith, he embraced humility as a virtue and was uncomfortable even accepting the gratitude of those he helped. On the occasions he thought it would do some good to use the press “to enlighten the public mind” about a matter related to slavery, he seems either to have written articles for publication under a pseudonym or encouraged someone else to write them instead. But humility did not preclude resolution or daring, and some of Tyson’s actions brought him notoriety whether he sought it or not.⁵³

As hinted at by the advertisements that slaveholders sometimes took out in the Baltimore papers with his name attached, Tyson operated an early version of what would eventually come to be known as the Underground Railroad. Not only did he provide shelter and a place for fugitives from slavery to hide in his home, but he also appears to have been in the vanguard of white people in the United States who guided fugitives out of the slave states altogether. From Baltimore, Tyson steered people fleeing their enslavement into the care of Jacob Lindley, a Quaker minister who lived in Avondale, a Pennsylvania town about ten miles north of the Maryland border, and from there Lindley conducted them to locations on the outskirts of Philadelphia.⁵⁴

Tyson’s name might also appear in the newspapers when he interceded directly to prevent a person from being sold, such as when Baltimore sheriff William Merryman postponed the sale of George Shrively in 1810. The sixteen-year-old Shrively had been taken up on suspicion of being a runaway slave and was scheduled to be sold at auction, as was the procedure when no one claimed a supposed fugitive



~~~~~  
 This illustration, from Philadelphian Jesse Torrey's 1822 work, *American Slave Trade*, depicts a free Black woman and her child being kidnapped by a gang of white men who intended to sell them into slavery. Kidnapping was disturbingly widespread in upper South states such as Maryland and Delaware, and even in free states such as Pennsylvania and New York.

~~~~~  
 New York Public Library

held in custody by a sheriff or jailor. But Tyson had heard otherwise about Shrively, and when he procured an affidavit that Shrively was in fact free and apprenticed to work as a rope-maker in Washington, D.C., Merryman held off on the auction until he could investigate.⁵⁵

Sometimes the things Tyson heard moved him to take still more extreme and swift action. He could be particularly roused by the epidemic of kidnappings that raged in Baltimore. Kidnapping of free Black people was a crime on the increase in many parts of the country in the early nineteenth century, but a number of its elements converged in Baltimore in particular. Slave traders without scruples cared little whether the people they trafficked were legally enslaved, and Maryland had a long border with the free state of Pennsylvania and proximity to Philadelphia by water, both of which facilitated the smuggling of kidnapped people. Baltimore also had a sizable free Black population of its own, and it was the largest slave market in the upper South in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Kidnappers secreted people into Baltimore over land and by ship, snatched them off the streets under cover of darkness, and hid them in basements and attics. Stories appeared in Balti-

more papers warning free Black people of kidnapping schemes and urging caution, but the threat could never be eliminated, and time was of the essence for kidnapping victims. They might be moved through the city in a matter of hours or days, and once taken away to be sold in the lower South they were unlikely to be seen or heard from again.⁵⁶

Everyone in Baltimore seems to have known that Tyson could be called on when suspected kidnapping cases came to light and that he would respond instantly. Tyson knew of the kidnapped nine-year-old he wrote to Isaac Hopper about, for example, because the slave trader who purchased the boy kept him at a hotel whose owner saw “the child crying, and appearing in great distress.” The man asked the boy “the cause of his grief; and upon being informed, immediately sent for Elisha Tyson,” who “lost no time, but promptly proceeded to the inn.” Tyson began asking questions, determined the boy had almost certainly been kidnapped, and made sure he would be safe until the authorities could get involved.⁵⁷

Slave traders were rough and violent men, and they did not generally cede their ground and give up their victims simply because someone like Elisha Tyson said so. But Tyson was not easily dissuaded when he believed he had right and the law on his side. John Shoemaker Tyson recalls several stories in *Life of Elisha Tyson* that speak to his uncle’s fearlessness. He writes of an occasion when Elisha Tyson heard that a gang of kidnappers had secreted several people in a tavern, prompting him to rush to the premises in the middle of the night and face down four armed men, daring them to shoot before breaking into a basement space where he freed a woman and two of her children whom he found chained to a wall. Shoemaker Tyson tells as well of a time when Elisha Tyson was informed that a kidnapping victim had been sold and loaded on a ship about to sail for New Orleans, whereupon he procured a small boat and the assistance of two constables and drew up alongside the vessel sitting at anchor. Tyson demanded the release of the man being held captive. The slave trader who claimed the man as his property refused, drew a knife, and vowed to kill anyone who boarded, and the captain of the ship ordered his crew to raise the sails in an attempt to flee. Tyson, however, leapt onto the deck, pushed past the trader, and liberated the kidnapped man from the ship’s hold, telling the slave trader that if he had really purchased the man lawfully, he could try proving it in court.⁵⁸

The incidents described in *Life of Elisha Tyson* might seem practically too good to be true and perhaps even unbelievable. But slave traders who knew of Tyson and may have scoffed at what they imagined to be a gentle and famously sober middle-aged Quaker giving them trouble were surprised when confronted with a man who

was six feet tall, had a physique honed by decades of millwork, and possessed a countenance that said he meant business. As a writer for a Massachusetts paper wrote several years after Tyson's death, he was "meek, gentle, and unassuming in his general demeanor, but full of righteous boldness, when the sufferings of his fellow beings demanded his interposition." The only surviving image of Elisha Tyson, a portrait painted a year before his death in which he wears a plain brown Quaker suit and looks a bit tired around the eyes, does not do him justice. Indeed, nearly everyone who remembered him seems to have known or heard accounts like those recounted by John Shoemaker Tyson.⁵⁹

The most widely circulated story, in fact, was one that John Shoemaker Tyson did not tell. It seems to have originated with Bartholomew Fussell, a Pennsylvania Quaker who lived for a time in Maryland, attended medical school in Baltimore, and got involved in the local antislavery movement there before returning to Pennsylvania and operating an Underground Railroad safehouse at his residence. Fussell knew Tyson, and he claimed personally to have witnessed an occasion when a Black woman was being hauled through the Baltimore streets by agents in the employ of Austin Woolfolk, who in the 1810s and 1820s was the most prominent and notorious slave dealer in the Baltimore market. The agents walked the woman down Sharp Street, where Elisha Tyson lived, and when they passed his house, the woman "demanded to see 'Father Tyson.'" The spectacle created by the slave traders had drawn a crowd that sympathized with the woman, and "they insisted that her wish should be complied with." Outnumbered, Woolfolk's agents turned the woman over, and one of them headed off to tell Woolfolk himself what had happened. An enraged Woolfolk grabbed a pistol, mounted his horse, and rushed to Tyson's home. Tyson came to the door and Woolfolk began swearing at him, announcing that he would send Tyson "to hell for interfering with his property." Tyson, in Fussell's recollection, "coolly exposed his breast," telling Woolfolk "that he dared not shoot" and that the slave trader "was in hell already, though he did not know it." Woolfolk retreated, the woman's case was investigated, and when it was proved that Woolfolk's men had held her illegally, she regained her freedom.⁶⁰

Physically imposing and the operator of a "grand slave mart" whose "horrors" Frederick Douglass witnessed as a child in Maryland and still vividly remembered decades later, Austin Woolfolk was a man few were willing to trifle with. The story of his confrontation with Elisha Tyson became lore among white and Black people alike, and they told it for decades. Samuel McGill, for example, was born free in Baltimore and he went on to become the first Black person in the United States to

earn a medical degree when he graduated from Dartmouth in 1839. Thirty years after Tyson died, McGill described the admiration he “felt for the man who brave[d] the fierce wrath of the slave dealer Woolfolk, who pistol in hand threatened his life for having rescued individuals of my race from his chains.” McGill recalled standing across the street from Tyson’s house as a child, hoping just “to catch a single glance of his towering form,” as “he was too exalted in my boyish opinion for any near approach.”⁶¹

The regard in which McGill held Tyson was matched by the hostility felt by slave traders like Austin Woolfolk. John Shoemaker Tyson remembered that Baltimore’s slave traders “swore that they would murder” Tyson or burn down his house and that they once plotted to assassinate him. But he also claimed that they were by and large too much a collection of cowards to do much of anything, and one newspaper report that slave traders in the early 1820s decided to name a ship they used to transport slaves to New Orleans after Tyson as an insult lends some credence to Shoemaker Tyson’s assessment. While the depth of the enmity slave traders felt for Tyson was quite real, ultimately all they could muster in their own defense was spluttering anger and cheap mockery.⁶²

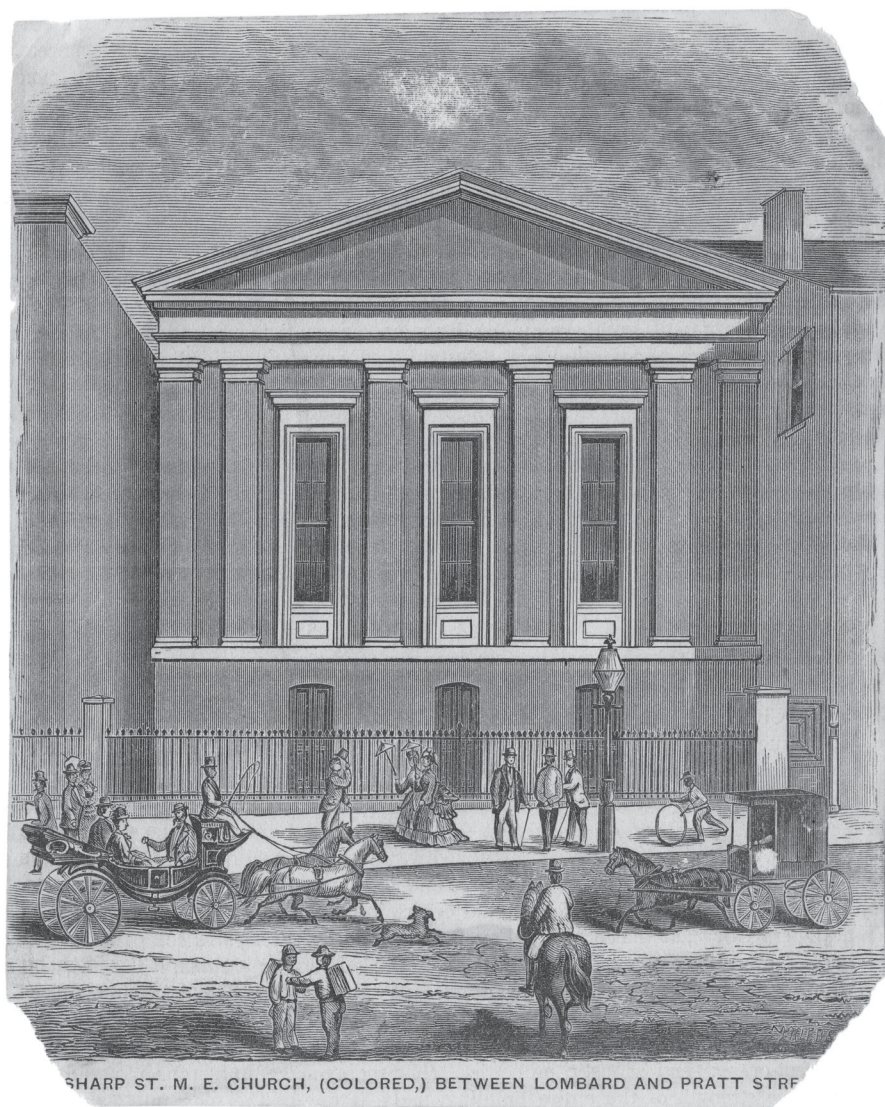
By the second half of the 1810s, however, Elisha Tyson started feeling that time was catching up with him. He was more than sixty years old. His wife Mary passed away in 1813, and though he remarried the following year, becoming a widower had given him a glimpse of his own mortality. A number of years prior to Mary’s passing, meanwhile, Tyson had taken a journey of several months and hundreds of miles on horseback to and from the Indiana Territory north of the Ohio River, where he was part of a delegation of Quakers visiting representatives of the Potawatomi, Wyandot, Miami, and other Native nations. Tyson believed white Americans owed Natives “ages of atonement for wrongs inflicted upon them,” and he was not alone among Quakers in thinking that offering instruction in western-style farming, industry, and other forms of white “civilization” would help ensure Native survival. It was an attitude and approach that bore similarities to those he brought to the cause of Black freedom, but the western trip took an immense physical toll on Tyson, and at one point he required serious medical care and nearly died. John Shoemaker Tyson remembered that as his uncle aged, the “combination of public and private cares” to which he devoted his time became “too much for endurance,” and in 1819 a colleague observed that Tyson was “very Infirm & appears in a great measure to have lost his memory & Recollection.” It was increasingly clear that Tyson was much closer to the end than he was to the beginning. But he was not finished quite yet.⁶³

ELISHA TYSON'S FINAL YEARS, HIS LEGACY,
AND HIS BIOGRAPHY

After the demise of the Maryland Abolition Society in the late 1790s, antislavery organizations were few and far between for many years in Baltimore specifically and Maryland more broadly. But late in 1816, as kidnappings remained noticeably on the rise despite Black vigilance and the best efforts of a small number of sympathetic white people, Elisha Tyson called for the creation of a new association to work on behalf of both free and enslaved Black people. Tyson himself did not attend the meeting in the chambers of the Baltimore City Council that was convened to discuss the idea. His nephew claimed that he absented himself lest it be thought he was seeking a leadership position or public praise. That may have been true, but one of Tyson's sons, Elisha Tyson Jr., also provided a more mundane reason in a letter to Thomas Shipley, a Quaker abolitionist in Pennsylvania. "My father," he wrote, "is pretty far advanced in life & his constitution somewhat impaired from a late extreme illness." The elder Tyson was tired and unwell. He wanted "as much as possible to be released from the troubles and toils which he has long endured for the cause of this oppressed race."⁶⁴

But an organization did come into being from Tyson's suggestion. Known as the Protection Society of Maryland, it committed itself to preserve "*legal and constitutional rights* inviolate" and particularly "to afford protection to *free* persons of color—to shelter the helpless and persecuted from lawless rapine—to open the sanctuary of the law to those whose liberty, either in possession or in reversion, is invaded by violence or stratagem." The Protection Society lobbied the state legislature to enact sterner laws to protect free Black Marylanders. It also divided the city of Baltimore into a series of precincts patrolled by Protection Society members who were to step in and act whenever they saw or heard of situations where Black people were endangered or being denied their legal freedoms and rights.⁶⁵

Over the next couple of years, the Protection Society did some important work. Thanks in part to its efforts, the Maryland General Assembly enacted several legal provisions early in 1818 that were designed to shore up protections for Black Marylanders whose situations were otherwise precarious. Under Maryland law, for example, an enslaved person could receive a legally recognizable promise from a slaveholder to be freed after a certain period of time, but sometimes slaveholders sold them anyway to people who had no intention of standing by that promise. The new law mandated prison time for anyone who sold such a "term slave" to an out-of-state resident or who purchased such a person with the intention of removing them from Maryland. The new law also provided that instead of being sold at



The Sharp Street Methodist Episcopal Church, shown here as it appeared in the late nineteenth century, also housed Baltimore's African Academy. The home of Baltimore's first Black congregation, this facility served as a vital center of the city's Black community for decades. The Sharp Street Church congregation exists to this day, though it is located in a different building and in a new location.

The Maryland Center for History and Culture, MB1497, Baltimore City Life Museum Works on Paper Collection

public auction, Black people taken up on suspicion of being fugitives from slavery were to be released from custody, regardless of whether they could prove their free status, if no one appeared to claim them as their property.⁶⁶

Yet no law could stop such crimes altogether. The Protection Society managed to persuade legislators that the existing state laws “for preventing the kidnapping of free negroes and mulattoes” and for keeping enslaved people entitled to their freedom from being “fraudulently removed” out of state were “insufficient.” But in July 1818, the president of the Protection Society, Methodist minister Abner Neal, admitted that cases of Black people being “unlawfully sold for life to foreign states” remained “of every day’s notoriety.” Neal was proud that the Protection Society had managed to rescue “more than *sixty human beings* from the grasp of lawless oppression” during its two years of existence. Nevertheless, he conceded, too many others to count had “been carried away beyond the hope of deliverance.”⁶⁷

Perhaps a bigger challenge faced by the Protection Society was skepticism about its motives. No matter how often members of the Protection Society disclaimed being abolitionists, many slaveholders and their sympathizers did not believe them. In a public oration delivered to the Protection Society on the Fourth of July in 1818, for example, John Shoemaker Tyson asserted, “Let me be plainly understood. This is not a society formed for the purpose of abolishing slavery.” But he knew “that this is the light in which we are regarded by many of our countrymen.” In the end, the organization could not withstand the suspicion and opprobrium. It also had problems raising funds, and by the middle of 1819, it effectively ceased to exist.⁶⁸

After the Protection Society disbanded, Elisha Tyson became pessimistic about the idea that any permanent organization might carry on the causes he cared about. He still believed in doing public-facing work to fight slavery, such as when he helped organize a meeting in Baltimore late in 1819 to respond to the territory of Missouri’s application to enter the Union as a slave state. The meeting resulted in a petition to Congress signed by roughly two thousand people opposing the application, purportedly making it the longest list of such signatures to come from a slave state. But as he looked toward what he knew would be his final days, Tyson hoped to leave Black Baltimoreans with advice and guidance, and ideally with a strong foundation on which they might stand independently in the future.⁶⁹

Having expended a great deal of his own money over time, Tyson understood how much the fight to secure Black freedom could cost, and so he particularly wanted to make sure that Black Baltimoreans would have what they needed financially to carry ahead the struggle on their own. To that end, in the early 1820s he contacted Black ministers from across the city and asked that they bring their

respective congregations together. Nearly two thousand people responded to their calls, and, meeting at the Methodist Episcopal Church, they heard Tyson recommend they collect funds themselves so that they might “render *your* assistance for the first time, to those of your color, who are oppressed contrary to the law of the land.” Tyson had lost confidence that white people would continue to offer enough support, and he thought it would be only a short time before he would pass away and no longer be able to offer any himself. “I know not who will befriend you after I am gone,” Tyson said, “unless you become friends to one another.”⁷⁰

According to John Shoemaker Tyson, this suggestion met with general approval and support, such that “a considerable sum” was collected that “proved of great service in the cause of emancipation.” But Elisha Tyson was not wrong when he told his audience that his lease on life had become a short one. Indeed, the cause in which he engaged shortly after speaking to the church gathering would be his last.⁷¹

In August 1822, the schooner *General Páez* sailed into Baltimore harbor. Captained by John Chase, a native-born American who had become a naturalized citizen of Colombia, the *General Páez* carried fourteen Africans. Chase claimed he had hired the men as his crew after capturing a Spanish slaver with more than three dozen enslaved captives on board and delivering all the others to British authorities who were combatting illegal transatlantic slave trading. But customs officials in Baltimore doubted Chase’s story, and word started to spread in the city about the *General Páez*. The situation was soon brought to the attention of Elisha Tyson, who tried to find a translator to explain to the Africans, none of whom spoke English, that they could leave Chase’s service if they were being held against their will. When no translator could be found, Tyson filed suit on behalf of the Africans instead, in the belief that Chase held them in slavery and that his landing with them in the United States was against the law and entitled them to their freedom.⁷²

A complicated and somewhat chaotic chain of events ensued. The Africans were taken to a local jail for their own protection, only to have a Baltimore City Court judge discharge them because he claimed he had no jurisdiction to rule in their case. Desperate for help, Tyson reached out to Eli Ayres and Robert Goodloe Harper, both of whom were in Baltimore and were prominent members of the American Colonization Society, an organization founded in 1816 that imagined slavery might be gradually ended in the United States by sending Black Americans to West Africa. Ayres, Harper, and Tyson persuaded the city court judge to give them time to appeal to federal authorities on the Africans’ behalf. While Ayres got word to President James Monroe, who was himself an early supporter of colonization, a translator was finally located, and the Africans were eventually

persuaded that they could in fact claim their freedom and be returned to Africa. Eleven chose repatriation. It still took many additional months of legal wrangling and negotiations between local authorities and federal authorities, and of navigating difficulties in finding a ship on which the Africans might take passage, before the group was able to leave Baltimore. While they waited for their fates to be determined, the Africans lived sometimes in the Baltimore County Poor House and sometimes with local supporters. But they finally sailed in October 1823 on board the schooner *Fidelity*. They arrived in the American colony of Liberia some weeks later. Eli Ayres, who had left Baltimore for Africa months before the captives, met them on their arrival and reported witnessing several being reunited with their families.⁷³

As the Africans' tortuous odyssey unfolded, Elisha Tyson's health went into precipitous decline. By the fall of 1823, he was practically too sick to leave his home. The exact nature of the illness that plagued him is unclear, but his nephew wrote that it "most generally kept him on his couch" and that his "mind and body soon became too weak to undergo, in any degree, the active labors of philanthropy." Yet Tyson remained deeply interested in what became of the Africans who sailed on the *Fidelity*, and he said more than once that he hoped God would keep him alive until he knew how they had fared. On February 10, 1824, Eli Ayres returned to Baltimore from West Africa. A few days later, Elisha Tyson was told that the Africans had arrived safely, and he proclaimed himself ready to die. He passed away on February 16. He was laid to rest a few days later in the Quaker burial ground next to the Baltimore meetinghouse.⁷⁴

Antislavery activists remembered Elisha Tyson and shared stories about him for more than a generation after he died. His coreligionists did so for even longer. Quaker publications ran sketches and memories of Tyson until at least the turn of the twentieth century, as he became a touchstone for those who linked their faith to the ongoing history of the struggle for racial justice in the United States. And Tyson continues to appear and be mentioned in articles and news items, both in print and online, to this day. He shows up especially in reflections on the history of Maryland, including a lengthy local interest piece in the Baltimore *Sun* in 2002 that provided an overview of Tyson's life and activities. Most readers were doubtlessly unfamiliar with the man trumpeted in the headline as an abolitionist who "Rose to Free City Slaves until Dying Day."⁷⁵

Tyson often appears, too, in work by scholars of the antislavery movement in the United States. But with few exceptions he does so only in passing. He usually merits just a few sentences or paragraphs, even in scholarship focused on antislavery in the upper South, and most scholars who do not work in the field probably

have never heard of him at all. Such relative neglect would surely come as a disappointment to his nephew. In *Life of Elisha Tyson*, after all, John Shoemaker Tyson asserted that he believed his uncle possessed “a judgment almost infallible in its decisions,” unsurpassed “moral sublimity,” and powers of persuasion so profound that almost no one who spoke with him personally “could avoid conviction.” Indeed, Shoemaker Tyson considered him “the greatest philanthropist that has appeared on earth, since the days of the Apostles and primitive Fathers,” and he indicated that Elisha Tyson considered “himself to be an instrument in the hands of the Almighty.” So far as John Shoemaker Tyson was concerned, his uncle was a man whose example and deeds warranted being recounted in the annals of history for all time.⁷⁶

Ironically, the tone of John Shoemaker Tyson’s biography of his uncle may be one reason Elisha Tyson has become a somewhat forgotten figure. While the biographical detail and events described in *Life of Elisha Tyson* hew generally to historical fact, the book is hagiographic to an extreme. Its protagonist sometimes seems practically superhuman—as much an idealized caricature of a do-gooder and antislavery crusader as a real person. John Shoemaker Tyson may genuinely have believed his uncle deserved to be remembered in such a fashion. He also resented what seems to have been the scattered criticism of his uncle as a man who drew too much attention to himself, and consequently he may have gone out of his way to dwell on what he saw as Elisha Tyson’s selflessness and ethical purity. Moreover, Shoemaker Tyson’s staunch defense of his uncle’s cautious but progressive approach to politics was a way of staking out his own ground politically. Shoemaker Tyson was only in his late twenties when his uncle passed away. He would be elected to the state assembly a few years later, and he would eventually serve as a Baltimore city judge. Shoemaker Tyson did not provide his name as the author of *Life of Elisha Tyson* when it was published. But it would have been no secret to local readers, and we might read his unwavering adulation of his uncle in part as a kind of campaign document for himself.

Whatever mix of motives led John Shoemaker Tyson to write *Life of Elisha Tyson* as he did, his portrait of his uncle leaves readers with the impression of a man who lived and acted according to a set of unreachable moral standards rather than a model who might reasonably be emulated. While other members of Elisha Tyson’s family and his legions of Black and white admirers, associates, and allies likely appreciated such a glowing appraisal of his life, the audience for such a work was bound to be limited. That it would soon go out of print was nearly a foregone conclusion, and as it did the book became not so much a lasting classic as a piece of timebound ephemera.

Elisha Tyson's fleeting renown might also be explained by the fact that the anti-slavery movement itself moved on after his death. Though the facts in John Shoemaker Tyson's account of Elisha Tyson's life were mainly accurate, he often made his uncle seem more of a singular figure than he actually was. *Life of Elisha Tyson* does not suggest its central figure accomplished everything he did single-handedly. But neither does the book dwell for long on the networks of antislavery activists that, while attenuated and fragmented in the early nineteenth century, were more wide ranging than it might appear. And it gives almost no sense of the biracialism of those networks or of the steady and forceful Black activists who fought unendingly for the liberation of the enslaved. John Shoemaker Tyson did not discuss the efforts of prominent Black leaders such as Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, who lived in Philadelphia, even though he references the Pennsylvania Abolition Society based in that city and the funeral service for Elisha Tyson held there at Allen's church. Even more notably, he did not mention local Black leaders such as Daniel Coker, George McGill, William Watkins, and others who lived in Baltimore contemporaneously with Elisha Tyson and whom Tyson surely knew.⁷⁷

Building on the work of those Black and white advocates for freedom, and on the connections forged between them, abolitionism in the late 1820s and early 1830s took the radical turn that Elisha Tyson did not imagine was possible and that John Shoemaker Tyson cautioned against. Led by new organizations such as the American Anti-Slavery Society that were interracial and included men and women alike, the abolitionist movement began a revolutionary campaign that combined a powerful public moral critique with extensive grassroots organization and political lobbying aimed at bringing slavery to an end immediately. However much Elisha Tyson and other early antislavery activists may have inspired this next generation of abolitionists, they were incrementalists who seemed restrained and hidebound by comparison. In the wake of the Civil War that ended chattel slavery for good in the United States, it is perhaps understandable that people such as William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Sarah and Angelina Grimke, and Harriet Tubman would become recognizable even to schoolchildren while someone like Elisha Tyson would not.

Indeed, Elisha Tyson's brand of antislavery may still seem tame and conservative to modern readers, and it is more than fair to observe that it had important limitations. Most significantly, Tyson respected slaveholder claims to legal property rights in people, and he accepted the fundamental legitimacy of those claims. Tyson did not himself think that human beings ought ever to be enslaved. Over and over again, he fought to liberate people held illegally in bondage, and he came to the defense of those whose enslavers violated whatever legal provisions existed to

protect slaves from abuse. But John Shoemaker Tyson noted that his uncle was also well known “for the profound deference which he paid to the laws of the land,” and he believed citizens had an absolute duty to obey those laws lest disobedience lead to rebellion that could “end in the total subversion of the state.”⁷⁸

While obedience was perhaps a matter of principle to Elisha Tyson, even his nephew conceded that some laws upholding slavery were “so iniquitous in their nature” that a person might wonder if obeying them was “a duty or a crime.” Certainly, the position that the law should not be flouted could have dire repercussions for the enslaved. The Maryland Protection Society that Elisha Tyson helped bring into being saved dozens of people from kidnapping or illegal sale, but Abner Neal also boasted that the organization “restored a number of legal slaves to their proper masters.” And if Tyson sometimes concealed fugitives from slavery in his home and aided them in their quest to leave the slave states, on more than one occasion he turned people away if they had no legal claims to freedom. He also sometimes refused to get involved in cases when enslaved people came to him simply because they were desperate and had nowhere else to go. John Shoemaker Tyson, for example, wrote of an instance when a man knocked on Elisha Tyson’s door late one evening begging for help. The man told Tyson that his enslaver had promised to give him time to raise money to purchase his own freedom but had then taken the money the man had managed to earn and intended to sell him anyway. Tyson asked the man if he had a receipt for the money or a white witness who saw him giving it to his enslaver. When the man responded that he had neither, Tyson told him there was nothing to be done, that the law provided the man no recourse, and that submission was his only option. The man left, but not before telling Tyson that he could not live without his family and would rather die than be sold away from them. His body was found soon thereafter in the river basin near Tyson’s home, where he had drowned himself.⁷⁹

Elisha Tyson also seemed sometimes to believe he knew better than Black people what was best for them. He urged them to be patient and reasonable in their demands, to model their comportment, their work ethic, and their morals on those of upstanding white people, and to trust that at least some white people had their interests at heart. Tyson was well known for periodically walking into the Black church across from his home and rapping his cane to silence the congregation, whose loud worship style he felt showed a lack of decorum. Similarly, when he spoke to the Black congregations convened to hear his ideas about fundraising for their own mutual assistance, he encouraged them not to administer the money themselves but rather to deliver it into “the hands of certain white persons whom I shall name, in whom you may place the utmost confidence.” Tyson

may not have wanted any accolades or even credit for his antislavery work. But he engaged in what today would be called respectability politics, and *Life of Elisha Tyson* does read occasionally like the story of a person with something of a white savior complex.⁸⁰

Many of the shortcomings of Elisha Tyson's vision came together in his "Farewell Address" to "the people of color, in the United States of America." Discovered among Tyson's papers after he died and written just days before he passed away, it was a speech he never had the chance to deliver. In it, he reflects on forty years of activism. He expresses the hope that at least "in some degree" he helped advance "the melioration" of circumstances for Black Americans and aided "in the legal recovery and securing of some" of their "individual rights." He observes that he had seen major changes over the course of those forty years, including thousands of enslaved people being freed and growing numbers of Black people becoming property owners and establishing their own churches and schools. But Tyson also thought he needed to explain to Black people why property holding, religion, and education were important and that he ought to lay out prescriptions for their collective future progress. He told free Black people that they had to make themselves "examples in industry, in sobriety, and in honesty" with the hopes of securing "the confidence and favours of the white people" and demonstrating they "were not unworthy" of their rights. He told enslaved people that they needed to set aside bitterness and be "faithful servants," fulfilling "the duties laid upon them, however hard their allotment, with a due regard even to the interests of their masters." And he told them all, free and enslaved, that they needed to "conduct themselves" so "as to make strong and powerful appeals to the humanity and justice" of slaveholders, hoping that prayer and good conduct would soften the hearts and open "the eyes of their oppressors."⁸¹

Tyson's Farewell Address could be patronizing and moralizing. It was suffused with ideas about Black self-help and racial uplift that were common among both white and Black antislavery activists of the era but that were also deeply paternalistic. The Farewell Address was also more than a bit naïve. Tyson said that he hoped Black Americans would someday be "instrumental in diffusing both civil and religious benefits" to Africa. This was perhaps a gesture toward the work of the American Colonization Society, some of whose members Tyson had collaborated with in support of the Africans on board the *General Páez*. But Tyson knew that many Black people disdained the colonizationist movement and that its popularity among white people in the 1820s lay in part among those who saw it as a vehicle for the forced expulsion of Black Americans from the United States altogether. Tyson said, too, that he was sure "that slavery in our country is drawing to an end" and

that God would bring “good out of this evil.” But he knew slavery was flourishing in many parts of the country at the very moment he penned those words.⁸²

At the same time, though, Elisha Tyson understood something important about how racism operated in the United States. If he stressed the significance of behavior and morals among Black people, it was less because he had serious personal reservations about them than because he had seen how other white people would use even the slightest missteps as justification for their own bigotry, with devastating consequences. It was “lamentable,” he wrote in his Farewell Address, “that the misconduct of some amongst you, who are enjoying the rights and privileges of freemen” would “afford ground for the assertion that you are unworthy of liberty.” But it was true. And while there was neither fairness nor justice in that, Tyson thought it essential to point out that white Americans looked for reasons to resist Black freedom and for any “pretext for perpetuating the sufferings and oppressions” of those “who remain under the galling yoke of bondage.” Tyson may not have been telling his audience much that they did not already know. But as someone with a firm conviction of slavery’s essential wrongness, an abiding faith that his lifelong fight against it was what God wanted of him, and a sincere sense of “duty” and a “deep and affectionate solicitude” for the “welfare” of Black Americans, he risked seeming presumptuous one last time.⁸³

Slavery and the slave trade continued to grow for decades in the United States after Elisha Tyson died. The enslaved population increased by more than 150 percent between 1820 and 1860, at which point nearly four million people of African descent, roughly nine of every ten Black Americans, lived in bondage. More than thirty thousand enslaved people were forcibly moved out of Maryland alone in the 1830s, and more than twenty thousand were in both the 1840s and the 1850s. There was little evidence for John Shoemaker Tyson’s assertion that his uncle did “so much” to combat the slave trade “that but little remained to be done by his successors,” or that his work made “a final triumph easy to those destined to march behind him.”⁸⁴

But Elisha Tyson personally enabled thousands to live as free people rather than as slaves, and he devoted his time and his money to bringing about legal, social, and cultural changes that made freedom possible for thousands more both in and beyond Maryland. The Maryland Protection Society that he conceived, for example, would be succeeded by the Protecting Society for the Preventing of Kidnapping and Man-Stealing in Philadelphia, the New York Vigilance Committee in New York City, and other anti-kidnapping organizations elsewhere in the northeast and mid-Atlantic. Many of those organizations were led and operated by Black people in their own self-defense, but nearly all of them had white abolitionists working



Benjamin Lundy (1789–1839) was a Quaker abolitionist and publisher who edited a series of antislavery newspapers in various cities. He was also the publisher of *Life of Elisha Tyson, the Philanthropist* after its subject passed away in 1824.

Wikimedia Commons

alongside them or as active supporters. John Shoemaker Tyson was wrong that the path followed by antislavery activists in his uncle's wake would be an easy one, but Tyson himself was wrong to worry that Black Americans would have no white allies after he was gone.⁸⁵

Perhaps the best exemplar of how Elisha Tyson served as a model for future white antislavery activists and as a bridge between the antislavery organizations of the early republic and those of the antebellum period resided in Tyson's own Baltimore. After Tyson's death, Benjamin Lundy, who published *Life of Elisha Tyson*, continued using his antislavery newspaper, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, to hammer away relentlessly at the slave trade and slave traders in the United States. He focused especially on what he saw all around him in Baltimore, and he so antagonized Austin Woolfolk that in 1827 Woolfolk tracked Lundy down and pummeled him in the street. Lundy would leave Baltimore a few years later, but not before he hired a new associate editor in 1829 named William Lloyd Garrison. In 1831, Garrison would head out on his own to start his own newspaper. He called it *The Liberator*, and it served as the leading voice of America's antislavery movement for more than thirty years.⁸⁶

We should be wary of taking much comfort in the fact that there were white people like Elisha Tyson who stepped forward to battle the rank injustice of slavery in the United States. The fact is that there were not nearly enough of them. But

their scarcity need not dissuade us from seeing why they mattered. Though they would never really be able to understand the perils and the sufferings of the enslaved, they understood enough to know they could not simply sit by and watch it continue.

NOTES

1. Elisha Tyson is mentioned in passing in many histories of early antislavery in the United States, but the most, and seemingly the only, extensive study of his life appears in Leroy Graham, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1982), 1–92.

2. *Life of Elisha Tyson, the Philanthropist* (Baltimore, 1825), 17, 121–125; *Baltimore Patriot and Mercantile Advertiser*, February 19, 1824; *Baltimore American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, February 28, 1824, and April 3, 1824 (quotation).

3. *Baltimore American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, February 28, 1824 (first two quotations); *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, September 1825, 179 (remaining quotations). On Benjamin Lundy, see Merton L. Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966).

4. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, preface.

5. Ibid. The best recent general history of American abolitionism is Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017). On changes in the abolitionist movement, see Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

6. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 134 (quotation); Graham, *Baltimore*, 1–3; Brycchan Carey, *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1657–1761* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 7–13; Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 5–7. One scholar has suggested that most of the settlers of Germantown were from the town of Greisheim, which is about 150 miles southeast of Krefeld, and an account of Elisha Tyson's genealogy from the early twentieth century claims that Reynier Tyson was born in Holland. See Carey, *From Peace to Freedom*, 72; Emily Emerson Lantz, "Maryland Heraldry," *Baltimore Sun*, January 22, 1905.

8. On early Quakerism, also see Pink Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–52.

7. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 38 (first quotation); Carey, *From Peace to Freedom*, 72–76 (remaining quotations on 74); Graham, *Baltimore*, 1.

8. Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 12–14, 18–24; Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery*, 15–172; Carey, *From Peace to Freedom*, 70–219; Brycchan Carey and Geoffrey Plank, eds., *Quakers and Abolition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 2–4; Paul J. Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality: America's First Abolition Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 44–52. On the transatlantic nature of Quaker antislavery, see Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 34–101, 391–450. Also see Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice*

Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Geoffrey Plank, *John Woolman's Path to the Peaceable Kingdom: A Quaker in the British Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Beautiful Soul of John Woolman* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008); Marcus Rediker, *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist* (London: Verso, 2017).

9. Lantz, "Maryland Heraldry"; Graham, *Baltimore*, 3–5.

10. Graham, *Baltimore*, 5. On the range of Quaker responses to the American Revolution, see Arthur J. Mekeel, *The Quakers and the American Revolution* (York: Sessions Book Trust, 1996); and William C. Kashatus III, *Conflict of Conviction: A Reappraisal of Quaker Involvement in the American Revolution* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990).

11. Lantz, "Maryland Heraldry."

12. Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 18–23; Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 8–15; T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 8–10.

13. Rockman, *Scraping By*, 19; Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 11; Lantz, "Maryland Heraldry"; Graham, *Baltimore*, 13–15, 35–36; *Maryland Journal*, March 29, 1785, August 4, 1789, April 27, 1790, November 1, 1791.

14. Graham, *Baltimore*, 10, 12–13, 17, 18; *Baltimore American Whig*, February 10, 1844; *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, October 30, 1798 (quotation).

15. Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 34–64; Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality*, 30–44, 213; Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010). Figures for numbers of enslaved people are drawn from Aaron O'Neill, "Black and Slave Population of the United States from 1790 to 1880," Statista, August 12, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1010169/black-and-slave-population-us-1790-1880/>.

16. Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 65–77; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Arthur Silversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Gary R. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626–1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 48–133; David N. Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777–1827* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); James G. Gigantino II, *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775–1865* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 18–148.

17. Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality*, 52–55; Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 18–19.

18. Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 73–85, 98–110; Newman, *Transformation of American Aboli-*

tionism, 16–85; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 119–137; Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770–1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 81–88; Gellman, *Emancipating New York*, 9, 56–77.

19. *Maryland Journal*, December 15, 1789 (quotations); Joseph Townsend to James Pemberton, July 7, 1790, series 2, box 14, folder 7, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, collection 0490, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (hereafter PASP). Also see Anita Aidt Guy, “The Maryland Abolition Society and the Promotion of the Ideals of the New Nation,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 84, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 342; William G. Thomas III, *A Question of Freedom: The Families Who Challenged Slavery from the Nation’s Founding to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 37.

20. *Maryland Journal*, December 15, 1789; Graham, *Baltimore*, 18–20; Guy, “Maryland Abolition Society,” 342–343; Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 281n19; Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760–1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 131. On the history of Maryland Quakers and their relationship to slavery prior to the founding of the MAS, see Kenneth L. Carroll, “Maryland Quakers and Slavery,” *Quaker History* 72, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 27–42.

21. *Maryland Journal*, December 15, 1789; Graham, *Baltimore*, 20–21; Thomas, *A Question of Freedom*, 34–37; David Skillen Bogen, “The Maryland Context of *Dred Scott*: The Decline in the Legal Status of Maryland Free Blacks 1776–1810,” *American Journal of Legal History* 34, no. 4 (October 1990): 388; T. Stephen Whitman, *Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake: Black and White Resistance to Human Bondage, 1775–1865* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2007), 56–57. Elisha Tyson himself may have been at least indirectly responsible for some of the letters and essays published in Maryland papers, as his nephew indicated that while Tyson himself published very little, “he aroused the zeal of many individuals, each of whom enlisted himself as a kind of voluntary amanuensis, who wrote and published his dictations” (*Life of Elisha Tyson*, 11).

22. Thomas, *A Question of Freedom*, 38; Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality*, 72; Phillips, *Freedom’s Port*, 15; Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 13; “Free and Slave Populations by State (1790),” *Teaching American History*, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/resource/the-constitutional-convention-free-and-slave-populations-by-state-1790/>; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake*; Whitman, *Price of Freedom*.

23. *Maryland Journal*, December 15, 1789; Guy, “Maryland Abolition Society,” 342, 344–345; Graham, *Baltimore*, 24–25; *Letter from Granville Sharp, Esq. of London, to the Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes and Others, Unlawfully Held in Bondage* (Baltimore, 1793); *Memorials Presented to the Congress of the United States of America by the Different Societies Instituted for the Promoting the Abolition of Slavery &c. &c. in the States of Rhode-Island, Connecticut, New-York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia* (Philadelphia, 1792), 23–26 (quotation on 26). Also see Elias Ellicott to James Pemberton, June 10, July 21, August 31, and September 5, 1791; George Ellicott to James Pemberton, August 24, 1791, all in series 2, box 14, folder 8, PASP.

24. Guy, “Maryland Abolition Society,” 344–345.

25. Thomas, *A Question of Freedom*, 38; Guy, “Maryland Abolition Society,” 344.

26. Thomas, *A Question of Freedom*, 37–42 (“compulsory abolition” on 38); *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 23–24; Graham, *Baltimore*, 21; Whitman, *Price of Freedom*, 67–68.

27. *Speech of William Pinkney, Esq., in the House of Delegates of Maryland, at Their Session in November, 1789* (Philadelphia, 1790), 6, 7, 9, 15, 17, 21.

28. In 1790, the state legislature also repealed a law that imposed servitude on children born to interracial parents, and it provided some enhanced rights for free Blacks and material protections for elderly enslaved people. See *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 34–36; Bogen, “Maryland Context of *Dred Scott*,” 392; Guy, “Maryland Abolition Society,” 344–345; Phillips, *Freedom’s Port*, 15 and 35; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 27; Joseph Townsend to James Pemberton, July 7, 1790, series 2, box 14, folder 7, PASP. On slavery, manumission, and the growth of free Black Baltimore generally, see Phillips, *Freedom’s Port*, and Whitman, *Price of Freedom*.

29. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 22.

30. *Maryland Journal*, February 10, 1792; *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 46–47. On the cases of Simon and Fortune, also see Graham, *Baltimore*, 22; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery*, 55; Guy, “Maryland Abolition Society,” 346; Bogen, “Maryland Context of *Dred Scott*,” 393n41.

31. *Maryland Journal*, February 10, 1792 (quotations); Joseph Townsend to James Pemberton, August 18 and 22, 1790, series 2, box 14, folder 7, PASP.

32. *Maryland Journal*, February 10, 1792 (quotations); *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 48.

33. *Maryland Journal*, February 10, 1792.

34. *Maryland Journal*, February 10, 1792. The Committee of Grievances also noted that Fortune had fled from Ezekiel Dorsey soon after his freedom petition was filed, claiming that “he was treated with barbarity and cruelty,” and that he had lived under the protection of the MAS for a year while Dorsey received no compensation for the loss of his property. That was true, but Dorsey had agreed to let Fortune remain with the MAS while his freedom suit was ongoing in exchange for members of the MAS posting a financial guarantee that Dorsey would be paid for the loss should Fortune ultimately be ruled a slave. Because the case remained open, Dorsey remained uncompensated.

35. *Maryland Journal*, February 10, 1792; *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 51–53 (quotations on 51 and 53).

36. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 54–55 (quotations on 55).

37. Guy, “Maryland Abolition Society,” 342–343, 346; Graham, *Baltimore*, 22–23; *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 56–57; *Friends’ Intelligencer* 21, no. 6 (April 16, 1864): 81 (quotations).

38. Graham, *Baltimore*, 23; Phillips, *Freedom’s Port*, 128–129; *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 56.

39. Bogen, “Maryland Context of *Dred Scott*,” 392–395; Guy, “Maryland Abolition Society,” 345; Whitman, *Price of Freedom*, 68–69, 90.

40. Thomas, *A Question of Freedom*, 67–68, 79–80 (quotations on 68 and 79–80).

41. Phillips, *Freedom’s Port*, 59; “Maryland Census Data, 1790–1880,” *Legacy of Slavery in Maryland*, Maryland State Archives, <http://slavery.msa.maryland.gov/>. On kidnapping, see Richard Bell, *Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020); Carol Wilson, *Freedom at Risk: The Kidnapping of Free Blacks in America, 1780–1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); David Fiske, *Solomon Northup’s Kindred: The Kidnapping of Free Citizens before the Civil War* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger, 2016). On the growth of the domestic slave trade, see Joshua D. Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain: How Domestic Slave Traders Shaped America*

(New York: Basic Books, 2021); Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism, 1815–1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

42. Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 12.

43. Graham, *Baltimore*, 24, 28–29; *Baltimore Federal Gazette*, January 1 (first quotation) and November 10 (second quotation), 1801.

44. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 99; Graham, *Baltimore*, 35–40. The original text of *Life of Elisha Tyson* reads that Tyson “retired from business in the year 1818,” but an errata slip for the book issued the correction “for 1818, read 1798.”

45. Graham, *Baltimore*, 35. Elisha and Mary Tyson had eleven children, six of whom lived to adulthood. In 1800, four of those children were under the age of fifteen, including a four-year-old daughter, though she would pass away in 1801. See Lantz, “Maryland Heraldry.”

46. *Baltimore Telegraphe and Daily Advertiser*, February 12, 1806; *Baltimore Federal Republican*, February 24, 1810 (quotations).

47. *Baltimore Telegraphe and Daily Advertiser*, February 7, 1801, January 9, 1802; *Baltimore Federal Gazette*, March 3, 1802; *Baltimore Democratic Republican*, May 6, 1802; Graham, *Baltimore*, 41–42. The Baltimore General Dispensary Foundation continues its work to this day.

48. *Baltimore Federal Republican*, February 24, 1810 (first quotation), January 22, 1812 (second quotation); *Baltimore Patriot and Evening Advertiser*, January 25, 1817; *Baltimore American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, September 2, 1814; Graham, *Baltimore*, 43–44.

49. *Baltimore Telegraphe and Daily Advertiser*, December 4, 1804; *Baltimore Federal Gazette*, February 14, 1804 (quotation); *Baltimore American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, January 3, 1812; Graham, *Baltimore*, 42–43, 47.

50. Elisha Tyson to Alexander McKim, December 5, 1811, HR.12A-F2.7, Petitions and Memorials, Committee on Commerce and Manufacturers, House of Representatives, 12th Congress, box 21, National Archives (first two quotations); Elisha Tyson to James Madison, July 13, 1812, *The Papers of James Madison Digital Edition*, ed. J. C. A. Stagg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), <https://rotunda-upress-virginia-edu.libdata.lib.ua.edu/founders/JSMN-03-05-02-0017> (third and fourth quotations); Graham, *Baltimore*, 54. Later in the 1810s, Tyson also provided information about the problem of kidnapping to a congressional committee investigating the illegal African slave trade. See Wilson, *Freedom at Risk*, 70.

51. Elisha Tyson to Isaac Hopper, June 27, 1811 (quotation), July 10, 1811, September 24, 1811, and Elisha Tyson to William Masters, December 12, 1811, series 2, box 15, folder 17; Elisha Tyson to James Cammeron and William Masters, November 11, 1812, Elisha Tyson to William Masters, August 20, 1812, September 4, 1812, December 19, 1812, series 2, box 15, folder 18, all in PASP; Graham, *Baltimore*, 54–55. Also see “Tales of Oppression,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 29, 1840, 82.

52. “Elisha Tyson,” *The Friend*, August 16, 1828, 348. For an example of the course followed by one beneficiary of Tyson’s help with his freedom suit, see “Major Anthony Wood,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, July 1844, 194.

53. "Elisha Tyson," *The Friend*, August 16, 1828, 348 (quotation); Graham, *Baltimore*, 57–58; *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 86–87.
54. Graham, *Baltimore*, 48–49.
55. *Baltimore Federal Gazette*, June 28, 1810.
56. Ralph Clayton, *Cash for Blood: The Baltimore to New Orleans Domestic Slave Trade* (Westminster, Md.: Heritage Books, 2007), 38–41; Graham, *Baltimore*, 49–52.
57. "Tales of Oppression," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 29, 1840, 82.
58. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 79–85.
59. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 131–132; *Massachusetts Spy*, June 30, 1830 (quotation).
60. Although the story of Elisha Tyson's confrontation with Austin Woolfolk can be found in many places, the version above is drawn from Joseph Sturge, *A Visit to the United States in 1841* (London, 1842), 10.
61. Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York, 1855), 447 (first two quotations); Graham, *Baltimore*, 84 (remaining quotations).
62. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 87 (quotation); *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, April 1824, 148.
63. James Gillingham, "Notes of a Journey taken by Elisha Tyson & James Gillingham on a Visit to some Indians in the neighbourhood of Fort Wayne, 1808," MSS 003/193, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College; *Baltimore Patriot*, April 19, 1813; Lantz, "Maryland Heraldry"; "Reminiscences of Elisha Tyson," *Friends' Intelligencer* 48, no. 3 (January 17, 1891): 33; *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 47 (first quotation), 58–77, 99 (second and third quotations); Nicholas Stubey to Thomas Shipley, March 8, 1819, series 2, box 15, folder 28, PASP (fourth quotation). Also see Samantha Seeley, *Race, Removal, and the Right to Remain: Migration and the Making of the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), esp. 148–151, 176–177, 199, 204–205.
64. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 100–101; Elisha Tyson Jr. to Thomas Shipley, December 5, 1816, series 2, box 15, folder 24, PASP (quotations); Graham, *Baltimore*, 58–59; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake*, 105–106.
65. *Baltimore American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, November 30, 1816 (quotations); *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 101; Graham, *Baltimore*, 59; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake*, 106.
66. *Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland* (Annapolis, 1818), 116–121, ch. 112, passed February 3, 1818.
67. *Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland* (Annapolis, 1818), 116–117, ch. 112, passed February 3, 1818 (first three quotations on 116); *Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, July 18, 1818 (last four quotations).
68. *Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, July 7, 1818.
69. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 102–106; Graham, *Baltimore*, 79–82.
70. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 106–110, quotations on 108 and 109.
71. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 109–110.
72. Bruce L. Mauser, "Baltimore's African Experiment, 1822–1827," *Journal of Negro History* 80, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 114–115; *The Seventh Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1824), 34; *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 112–113.

73. Mauser, "Baltimore's African Experiment," 115–120; *Seventh Annual Report*, 34–39, 116–119; *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 114–120. For an overview of the American Colonization Society, see Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

74. Mauser, "Baltimore's African Experiment," 120; *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 120–121, 125, quotations on 120.

75. Frederick N. Rasmussen, "Abolitionist Rose to Free City Slaves until Dying Day," *Baltimore Sun*, February 16, 2002. For examples of items about Elisha Tyson appearing in Quaker periodicals long after he passed away, see *Friends' Review* 43, no. 5 (August 29, 1889): 77; and *Friends' Intelligencer* 53, no. 14 (April 4, 1896): 220. Also see A. B. Proff, "Jerusalem's Ancient Mill," *Baltimore Sun*, September 8, 1935; and Henry C. Rauch, "Man in the Street," *Baltimore Sun*, July 31, 1949.

76. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 132, 85, 11, 142, 134.

77. Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 130–191; Graham, *Baltimore*, 62–79; Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 160–161, 215, 220–222.

78. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 13, 14.

79. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 13–14 (first two quotations), 94–96; *Baltimore American*, July 18, 1818 (third quotation).

80. *Friends' Intelligencer* 48, no. 4 (January 24, 1891): 54; *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 109 (quotation).

81. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 126–131, quotations on 126, 129.

82. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 111–112, quotations on 130. On racial uplift ideology among anti-slavery activists in the early republic, see Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 113–116, 133–136.

83. *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 128, 126.

84. Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 12; "Black and Slave Population of the United States from 1790 to 1880," <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1010169/black-and-slave-population-us-1790-1880/>; *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 12 (quotations).

85. Bell, *Stolen*, 225–227, 291–292; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 383–388; Wilson, *Freedom at Risk*, 103–116; Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015). The Protection Society of Maryland was also revived briefly in the late 1820s as the Baltimore Society for the Protection of Free People of Color. See Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 295n62.

86. Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom*, 104–164.

Note on Editorial Method

The editor has approached the text of *Life of Elisha Tyson* with a light hand. A small number of corrections to the original have been made to fix obvious typographical and printing errors. Quotation marks and number hyphenations have been updated to reflect modern usage, and small stylistic changes have been made to typefaces of chapter headings and titles. In a few places, text that appears as lengthy quotations in the original have been changed to block quotes, and the handful of footnotes that appear in the original are in the footnotes here and indicated as “Author’s note.” But no substantive changes have been made that might alter meaning, and all other spelling, punctuation, and capitalization choices are replicated from the original.

Life of Elisha Tyson, the Philanthropist
By A CITIZEN OF BALTIMORE.

Baltimore: Printed by B. Lundy—24, S. Calvert-St.

1825

Preface.

There are three reasons, which have induced the publication of “the life of Elisha Tyson.”

First: To do away the false impressions which his enemies have made upon the minds of many of the community. The motives which led him to make so many sacrifices in the cause of humanity, have been misrepresented. The means he employed, and the mode he adopted, in furtherance of his benevolent designs, have been vilely traduced.

Secondly: To shew that the rash proceedings, entered into by some men, who will have universal emancipation at all hazards, are contrary to the course of policy which he pursued with wonderful success, during the whole course of his life—a success, which will not attend any other course of policy.

Thirdly: To encourage the young philanthropist, and all those seriously concerned for the cause of liberty, to follow in the footsteps of the great pioneer in the cause of freedom; so that what he has begun, may grow and flourish unto the end.—

Thus, “though dead, yet shall he live.”¹

THE AUTHOR.

1. John 11:25: “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”

Contents.²

CHAPTER I.

Genealogy of Mr. Tyson.—Early benevolence.—Expands into philanthropy.—He moves to Maryland.—Turns his attention to the amelioration of the condition of the African descendants.—Difficulties with which he had to contend.—State of slavery at that time, in Maryland.—Mr. Tyson appears before the judicial tribunals in behalf of the persecuted Africans.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Tyson endeavors to procure the passage of laws ameliorating the condition of the Africans; particularly the law, allowing manumissions by last will and testament.—Origin of that law.—Mr. Pinkney enlists in the cause—his speech in the Legislature of Maryland in favor of the law.—The law is enacted—its happy effects.

CHAPTER III.

The slave trade to the coast of Africa begins to interest England and America.—Mr. Tyson takes a part in the question, both in the Society of Friends, and in the Abolition Societies.—Reasons of the comparative ease with which the abolition was effected in America.

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Tyson labors under considerable difficulty, in consequence of the passage of a law, compelling the counsel for petitioners for freedom to pay costs in case of their failure.—Origin of that law.—The case of two Indian boys petitioning for freedom.—The plaintiffs in that case apply to the Legislature.—Conflict between the Legislature and the Abolition Society; which ends in the passage of the above-mentioned law.

2. Although the table of contents describes eleven chapters in *Life of Elisha Tyson*, in fact there are only ten. At some stage of the book's writing or production, the subjects listed in chapters 7 and 8 were folded into a single chapter, but the table of contents was never updated.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Tyson turns his attention towards the Indian natives.—Mode of benevolence adopted by the “Friends” towards these.—Speech of Tarhie, an Indian chief.—Mr. Tyson volunteers his services to go as a deputy among the North Western Indians.—His journey—arrival at Fort Wayne.—Appoints a grand council to be held at Fort Wayne.—Indian characters.—Speeches of Mr. Tyson and the Indians.—Return of Mr. Tyson.

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Tyson renews his efforts in behalf of the Africans, His hostility to the domestic slave trade.—Of kidnapping.—Instances of the extraordinary intrepidity and perseverance of Mr. Tyson.—His humility.—He incurs the hatred of the slave traders—their fear of him—Extraordinary instance of self conviction—leading to the detection of a kidnapper.—Instance of desperation on the part of a victim of the slave-trade.

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Tyson procures the passage of other laws ameliorating slavery.—Their history.—Mr. Tyson retires from private business.—Endeavors to form a Protection Society, and succeeds.—This society dies away.

CHAPTER VIII.

Missouri question.—The part Mr. Tyson took in it.—Town meeting in the city of Baltimore.—Memorial sent to Congress against the claims of Missouri.—Mr. Tyson addresses a large audience of colored persons.

CHAPTER IX.

Colonization Society.—The unfavorable opinion entertained by Mr. Tyson, of this society, removed by an extraordinary incident.—Letter of Dr. Ayres.—Philanthropy of General Harper.—Last illness of Mr. Tyson.—His death.

CHAPTER X.

His funeral.—Valedictory address—read in all the African churches.

CHAPTER XI.

Description of the person of Mr. Tyson—his mental and moral qualities—his opinions in religion, morals, and politics.—His rank as a philanthropist—compared with that of Howard, Clarkson, Wilberforce, and Sharp.—Conclusion.

Life of Elisha Tyson.

Chapter I.

CUSTOM, which has as great a share in prescribing the laws of composition, as either truth or nature, has rendered it necessary that the history of the genealogy of every individual should precede his biography. Under old monarchical governments, the object principally sought for in these genealogical descriptions, is the adorning the birth of the hero of memoir, with the antiquity or nobility of his ancestry. In a republican country, where antiquity and nobility of descent are alike disregarded, the object is, to enhance the merits of the hero by the *virtues* of his progenitors.—No matter which of these be the design, it is irrational, because the merits of every kind, ascribable to our ancestors, are theirs exclusively, and cannot be given to the descendant by any mode of investiture.

Lest this (which is intended solely as a protest which every writer has a right to make against evil custom,) should be regarded as an ingenious mode of avoiding a duty, the performance of which in this particular instance would be rather disagreeable, I will merely state that the oldest known ancestor of Mr. Tyson, was a German Quaker, converted to the faith of Fox, by the preaching of William Penn.³ Persecuted by the government of his native country for his religion, he gathered up his all and followed Penn to England, with whom, and at whose request, he afterwards embarked for America, and was among the first settlers of Pennsylvania. He established himself within what are now called the environs of Philadelphia; married the daughter of an English settler, and became the happy father of sons and daughters. From these, many descendants have been derived.

Elisha Tyson was one of the great grandsons in direct descent of the German Quaker, and was born on the spot which he had chosen for his residence. The re-

3. The Religious Society of Friends, also known as Quakerism, emerged as a dissenting sect from the Church of England in the 1650s among the followers of a man named George Fox. Doctrinally opposed to all forms of hierarchy and holding to the belief that all persons possessed an “inner light” that let individuals form a direct relationship with God, Quakers were persecuted as heretics in England and elsewhere in Europe. They faced persecution in some early American colonies as well, but they gradually found toleration in many parts of colonial America, particularly in Pennsylvania, which was established by English Quaker William Penn in 1676.

ligion and virtues of this ancestor, were instilled into the minds of his children, and children's children, to the third and fourth generation—not by transmission of blood, but by the force of a guarded and a christian education. In the subject of this memoir, they blazed forth with superior lustre. From his infancy he was conspicuous in his neighbourhood for that benevolence of heart and intrepidity of soul which so highly distinguished him in after life. Like the infant Hercules, he may be said to have strangled serpents in his cradle.⁴—For in early youth his constant occupation was the redress of human wrong: and instances might be recorded where, in the pursuit of this occupation, he evinced a moral courage that would have ennobled manhood. Not that there was in Pennsylvania, even before the revolution that established freedom throughout the United States, much of local oppression to resist. In the best regulated communities, there will always be found, individuals disposed to trample on the rights of others—those “Little tyrants of the fields,” to withstand whom, and thus preserve the peace of the neighborhood, it is necessary that “Village Hambdens” should sometimes arise.⁵

This arena soon became too confined for the expanding philanthropy of Mr. Tyson. The eye of his mind began to look beyond the horizon that bounded his natural vision, and his heart sympathised with suffering humanity in other quarters of the globe.

Whether it was this benevolence of soul, which moved him to leave his native state, at an early age, and settle in the state of Maryland, or whether any other was his motive, does not directly appear. But when we consider the peculiar bent of his mind; when we reflect that at the time of his removal, there was nothing to a young man seeking his fortune, inviting in Maryland; when we reflect, also, that for one species of benevolence, the state of Maryland was a field better suited to the operations of philanthropy, than perhaps, any other; and above all, when we reflect that in that species he took an immediate, an extensive, and an unceasing part, we have a right to infer that the desire to be useful to his fellow beings, was the predominating motive that led him to change his residence.

The part of Maryland where he first established himself, was in the county of Harford. He soon found that in that place, there was no continuance for him, and he removed to the spot now occupied by the City of Baltimore, then in its infancy. And having assisted in nourishing that infancy until it grew to manhood, until Bal-

4. In Roman mythology, the goddess Hera, jealous that her husband Zeus had a child with a mortal woman, sent two serpents to kill the infant Hercules in his cradle, but he slayed them both.

5. Thomas Gray, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (1751), lines 57–58: “Some village Hampden, that, with dauntless breast / The little tyrant of his fields withstood.”

timore was enabled to put on what has not inaptly been called the toga virilis, that is the corporate investiture, lived to witness the extraordinary prosperity which made the Metropolis of Maryland the third city in the Union.⁶

Here he soon lent the aid of his powerful mind to the planning and executing of those various schemes for the good of his fellow citizens in general, and of this city in particular, which were from time to time formed and perfected. In deeds of public charity and private benevolence, and in the promotion of charitable institutions of every sort, he took a most active part.

But his exertions in behalf of the persecuted sons of Africa, were those which rendered him pre-eminently conspicuous, and which crowned him benefactor of the *whole* human race.

This was a species of benevolence, at all times more to be admired than any other, on account of the superior number and weight of obstacles that impede its exercise. The man who would practice it, must struggle against the most violent prejudices in himself, and antipathies in others. The objects of his benevolence coming from a quarter of the world which he is taught to despise; their complexions coloured with a deeper dye of nature's pencil; their personal appearance altogether opposite to that which his imagination has set up as the standard, not only of human beauty but even of human nature, degraded by a slavery the most debasing, to the sight of which, from his earliest infancy he has been familiar, he is irresistibly inclined to regard them as an inferior race of beings, born to toil for the benefit of others, and predestined to oppression.

For these reasons too, it happens that benevolence towards this proscribed race of human beings, is the only kind of philanthropy not popular among men. We will "plunge into the infections of hospitals,"⁷ to alleviate the distress of those whom accident or vice has thrown into misery.—We will explore the rank and foetid glooms of a dungeon to sooth and enlighten the more gloomy souls of those whose crimes have brought upon them the miseries they suffer. We will cross mighty oceans, defy cold and heat, disease and death to nerve the arms of insurgent kingdoms bursting in the madness of desperation the manacles of tyranny, or traverse trackless deserts to pour the gospel treasures of salvation into the laps of alienated nations. For this we applaud ourselves, and are applauded by the world.

6. The city of Baltimore was formally incorporated in 1796. By 1800, it was the third-most populous city in the United States, trailing only New York and Philadelphia. By 1830, it had become the largest city in the country other than New York. It held that position into the 1850s.

7. Cf. James Baldwin Brown, *Memoirs of the Public and Private Life of John Howard, the Philanthropist* (London: 1823), 362.

But the unfortunate descendants of those whom the avarice of our ancestors tore from their natal soil of Africa, for no fault by them committed, with the greatest apathy we behold bound in rigid slavery. From them we keep back the light of intellect and the lights of the gospel, and should a solitary individual be found daring enough to extend to them the hand of charity, instead of meeting with the applause, it is well for such an one if he escape the reproaches of society.

A wise man has remarked, “when religion is popular, hypocrites are most numerous; but when religion is in publick disrepute, there are few professors, and every one a true believer.” A similar remark may be applied to philanthropy. When a species of philanthropy is popular, how numerous is the catalogue of philanthropists, and how few of these are really what they seem to be! And when a species of philanthropy meets with public reprobation, who wonders that its ranks are thin, or doubts the sincerity of those who join them?

Human nature furnishes the reasons of this dissimilarity, and the evidences of its existence. These reasons are founded in the opposite motives by which two different ranks of mankind are impelled to action. The fondness of human applause or the dread of human censure in the one, and the love of Divine approbation or the dread of Divine displeasure in the other. When the will of Heaven is suited to the will of man, in any particular, how easy is it to comply! When the public applause echoes the voice of God, who will not obey?—And is it not as certain as it is lamentable, that of those who do, the greater number will obey the voice because of the echo?

In illustration of all this, we need only look at the history of Bible societies, especially as they have been established in the island of Great Britain. We there see men of all ranks and descriptions, kings, princes, nobles and gentry, rich and poor, infidels and true believers, united together for the dissemination of the gospel; a gospel which numbers of them never read; which still more do not believe; and which by far the greater number do not obey. Why this mania?—this pompous parade of Philanthropy?—Because it is popular. Fifty years ago would the vast majority of these, had they then existed, have exhibited such a blaze of zeal? would they then have treated even with respect those sacred pages, which now appear to be the object of their adoration? No. And why? Because, then the Bible was not a popular book, as it now is.⁸

I mention not these truths for the purpose of undervaluing the efforts of Bible

8. Organizations known as Bible societies, which aimed to publish and distribute the Bible cheaply or free of charge, proliferated in Western Europe and the United States in the early nineteenth century.

societies, or of depreciating the value of the “book of books.” I merely offer them in confirmation of what I have advanced, namely, that as it is easy to appear philanthropic, when philanthropy is popular, so it is difficult to be so in opposition to the public voice. For this reason the philanthropist who makes the will of Heaven his guide, whether the breezes of popular favor swell his sails, or the storms of popular fury tear them; whose ardor is as unabated when single handed and alone he wields the weapons of his warfare, as when backed by the collected power of a nation; and who clings closer and closer to his God as he is more and more abandoned by man—HE is the only true philanthropist.—*Such an one was Elisha Tyson.*

If the cause which he so warmly espoused, is not popular in these more benevolent days, what must it have been forty-five years ago, when he commenced his career of public benevolence! Then a free African was a novelty among us. The power which made them slaves, exerted all its rigor to keep them so. Masters were prohibited by law from manumitting their slaves by last will and testament, and were thus deprived in their last moments of the means of expiating the sufferings they might have inflicted upon them. A few laws there were indeed which seemed to favor them, but these for want of exercise had become almost a dead letter.

With regard to the treatment by masters individually of their slaves, though gentle on the part of many, yet it was so severe in general, and acts of cruelty were so numerous, that the public sensibility became indurated, and they all passed by like ordinary occurrences, unnoticed, or at best unpunished.

At such a time, and under such circumstances, Mr. Tyson stood forward, young, solitary, friendless, the champion of the rights of this persecuted race.

The better part of society called it rashness, and the worse arrogance, in such an individual at such a time, to put himself in battle array against the whole community. But he had early laid it down as the leading principle of his conduct, that justice and fear should be strangers to each other, and that the man who would do right, should do so regardless of consequences. This principle was his polar star, and never once did the eye of his mind wander from it.

What gave rise to most of the difficulties with which Mr. Tyson had to contend, was the internal slave trade, as it has been mildly called; but which might, with more propriety, be called *infernal*, and which even now is carried on to a sorrowful extent. At that time it was as common, and in the view of the world as genteel a traffic as any other species of domestic trade. It was not then, as now, viewed with abhorrence by all humane men. Nor was it, as now, conducted solely by the vilest of the human race, who having no good character to lose, have no sensibility to feel its loss; but it was carried on by persons in all ranks of the community. Even the most creditable merchants, felt no compunction in speculating in the

flesh and blood of their own species. These articles of merchandize, were as common as wheat and tobacco, and ranked with these as a staple of Maryland. This state of things was naturally productive of scenes of cruelty. Georgia was then the great receptacle of that portion of these unfortunate beings, who were exported beyond the limits of their native soil; and the worst name given to Tartarus⁹ itself could not be more appalling to their imaginations than the name of that sister state. And when we consider the dreadful consequences suffered by the victims of this traffic; a separation like that of death between the nearest and dearest relatives; a banishment forever from the land of their nativity and the scenes of their youth; the painful inflictions by the hands of slave drivers, to whom cruelty was rendered delightful by its frequent exercise; with many other sufferings too numerous to mention, we cannot wonder at this horror on the part of those unfortunate beings, and that it should cause them to use all the means in their power to avoid so terrible a destiny. The slave trader, aware of all this, and fearful lest his victims might seek safety by flight, became increasingly careful of his property.—With these men, and upon such subjects, care is cruelty; and thus the apparent necessity of the case came in aid of the favorite disposition of their minds. They charged their victims with being the authors of that cruelty, which had its true origin in their own remorseless hearts. Their plea for additional rigor, being plausibly urged, was favourably received by a community darkened by prejudice. Few regarded with pity, and most with stoical indifference, this barbarous correction for crimes anticipated, and rigorous penance for offences existing only in the diabolical fancies of their tormentors. The truth is, it was the love these poor wretches bore their wives, children, and native soil, for which they were punished. They were commonly bound two and two by chains, rivetted to iron collars fastened around their necks, more and more closely, as their drivers had more and more reason to suspect a desire to escape. If they were conveyed in wagons, as they sometimes were, additional chains were so fixed, as to connect the right angle of one with the left angle of another, so that they were fastened foot to foot, and neck to neck. If a disposition to complain, or to grieve, was manifested by any of them, the mouths of such were instantly stopped with a gag. If, notwithstanding this, the overflowings of sorrow found a passage through other channels, they were checked by the “scourge inexorable.”¹⁰ The cruel monsters thus endeavouring to lessen the appearance of pain, by increasing its re-

9. In Greek mythology, Tartarus was the deepest part of the underworld.

10. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk. 2, lines 88–92: “Where pain of unextinguishable fire / Must exercise us without hope of end / The vassals of his anger, when the scourge / Inexorable, and the torturing hour / Calls us to penance?”

ality—like the surgeon who, (though for a more humane purpose,) applies the torturing tourniquat and knife to the limb already painful with disease. These were scenes of ordinary occurrence; troops of these poor slaves were continually seen fettered as before described, marching two and two, with commanders before and behind, swords by their sides, and pistols in their belts—the triumphant victors over unarmed women and children. The sufferings of their victims were, if possible, increased, when they were compelled to stop for the night. They were crowded in cellars, and loaded with an additional number of fetters. On those routes usually taken by them to the South, stated taverns were selected as their resting places for the night. In these, dungeons under ground were specially contrived for their reception. Iron staples, with rings in them, were fixed at proper places in the walls; to these, chains were welded; and to these chains the fetters of the prisoners were locked, as the means of certain safety. It was usual every day for these slave drivers to keep a strict record of the imagined offences of their slaves; which, if not to their satisfaction expiated, by suffering during the day, remained upon the register until its close, when in the midst of midnight dungeon horrors, goaded with a weight of fetters in addition to those which had galled them during their weary march, these reputed sins were atoned by their blood, which was made to trickle down “the scourge with triple thongs.” “What!” my incredulous reader may exclaim, “could such enormities ever have been permitted in a land pretending to civilization? Are you not, in imagination, transported to the barbarous regions of Turkey, and describing the cruelties of Turkish tyrants toward their Christian captives?” No, gentle reader: I am describing the tortures inflicted in a Christian country, by persons calling themselves Christians, upon men entitled to the same high denomination; cruelties sanctioned by a law, which was not only the law of the land then, but is the law of the land now. If you still doubt me, look at the code of Maryland laws, as it has existed from its first enactment, down to the present time, and your doubt will be resolved.

Every act of cruelty above described, might now with impunity be committed. What then it may be asked, has been done by Tyson to prevent or mitigate these worse than barbarian practices? I answer, much; very much. Well knowing that all laws in a republican country, are founded upon public opinion, his great object was to work a change in that respect. He had two principal modes of operating upon the public mind; by conversation in public and private places, and by the press. Through the means of the first, he worked upon the feelings and sentiments of the higher and more influential classes; by means of the latter, he influenced in a great degree, the mass of the community. In private conversation, his arguments were so cogent, his appeals so energetic, and his manner so sincere and disinterested, that

few could avoid conviction. It is true, indeed, as it regards the press, that he did not publish very much of his own composing; but he procured the publication of a vast deal of his own dictating. By his arguments and entreaties, he aroused the zeal of many individuals, each of whom enlisted himself as a kind of voluntary amanuensis, who wrote and published his dictations. Many important essays have in this way, been communicated to the public. It was in these ways that the public feeling became so softened, and the public prejudices so subverted, that among the respectable classes of the community, those laws, by which the enormities above described were permitted, became, though not really, yet virtually repealed. The inhumanities once so publicly practiced, being frowned upon by the majority of society, ceased to offend the public sensibility. The traffic in human flesh once so common, and carried on by persons looked upon as respectable, came to be of very limited extent, and conducted by the lowest and basest of mankind. Dungeons for the reception of slaves about to be exported, formerly so numerous in every part of this city, dwindled down to two or three. These, as if conscious of the disgrace which blackened them, hid themselves in the very skirts of the city, and their infamous owners afraid of the indignation of a virtuous community, were compelled to carry their victims thither, in close carriages, and in the darkness of night. All this happy revolution was the work of one man; and though he did not live to see the abolition of this traffic completely effected, yet he was enabled to do so much, that but little remained to be done by his successors. He was enabled to turn the tide of popular sentiment; to cast a shade of deep disgrace over laws, once viewed as honorable; and thus, like a holy pioneer in the path of true glory, to render a final triumph easy to those destined to march behind him, under the same banners.

Of those held in servitude, two classes of beings felt, in a peculiar manner, the kindness and sympathy of Mr. Tyson—those entitled to their freedom, and illegally held in slavery—and those who, though not illegally kept in bondage, yet were treated with inhumanity by their masters. His first endeavours, in the cause of these, brought him in contact with some of the leading individuals in this city. They of course, and those within the sphere of their influence, were indignant against him, charging him with interfering with what they called their property. To this common argument, in the mouths of slave holders, he would reply: “True, these people are your property, but they are also human beings; as human beings, the law has given them certain privileges. Since, from their helpless and friendless condition, they are unable to vindicate their own rights, and redress their own wrongs, it is the duty of every good citizen to assist in rendering them justice. Upon this sacred ground of duty I stand; and I am not to be driven from it, by frowns, or enticed away by persuasions.”

This was the kind of language he used towards those who, for their inhumanity to their slaves, he had caused to feel the lash of the law. To those who complained of his interference on behalf of the freedom of those whom they illegally held in bondage, he addressed *this* language—"By nature, all men are free; this you cannot deny. Admitting then, that human laws have the power of controlling the decrees of nature, and that every slave is such by force of human laws—how can you, how dare you say, that they do not become free when those very laws of man, shall have declared them so?—How have you the heart to trample upon the necks of your fellow beings, when the laws, not only of God and nature, but your own laws too, have given them equal rights with yourselves? It is not my individual arm, that has achieved the liberty of your slaves: it is the arm of the law that has given to freemen their rights. It is true that I was the means of bringing you and your captives before the legal tribunals of your country; but there I left you to yourselves, and to those whom the law had constituted judges of the matter in dispute between you. If you have any complaint to utter, vent it upon them; for the decision was theirs, not mine. That it has restored to a fellow being the sweets of liberty, I rejoice; and *you*, instead of regretting the loss of his servitude, should only regret, that you had so long reaped the benefits of that servitude in violation of the laws of nature and your country."

During the whole course of Mr. Tyson's philanthropic exertions, he was strongly characterized for the profound deference which he paid to the laws of the land. There are some laws, and those of this state, upon the subject of slavery, are among the number, so iniquitous in their nature, that even a casuist would be puzzled to determine whether or not, obedience to them be a duty or a crime. He, however, hesitated not to inculcate, by example as well as precept, strict subjection to the institutions of his country. Not only because this is one of the conditions upon which only every citizen has a right to continue in the community, but also because the encouraging of disobedience to the laws in one respect, would be the promoting of it in another; disobedience would grow into rebellion, and rebellion end in the total subversion of the state. It was for these reasons that all his appeals in behalf of the persecuted Africans, were made either to the clemency of individuals, or to the justice of the civil judge. In those cases in which masters were guilty of barbarous treatment towards their slaves, if there was any hope that persuasion and entreaty would work a reformation, these were faithfully used. And sometimes they had the desired effect. The disinterested zeal of the benevolent intercessor, would command the silence, while the pleadings of mercy softened the heart of the slaveholder, and the voice of reason taught him, that even his slave by being so, had not ceased to be a man. Thus softened and convinced, he would resolve to yield to his

captive at least so much of the rights of man as was consistent with the character of a slave, and merge the tyrant in the benevolent master.

But those cases wherein argument and persuasion were unavailable, he submitted to the legal tribunals of the country; and having placed them there, left them to the future care of those, whose oaths bound them to do justice.

Where he had reason to believe that a person claimed as a slave was entitled to his freedom, he would, in the first place, in order to avoid litigation, lay before the reputed owner the grounds of his belief. If these were disregarded, he then proceeded to employ counsel, by whom a petition for freedom was filed in the proper court, and the case prosecuted to a final determination. What excited most astonishment in these trials, was the extraordinary success which attended him. Very few were the cases in which he was defeated; and his failure even in these, was more generally owing to the want of testimony, than to the want of justice on his side. To enumerate his successes, would be as impossible, on account of their vast number, as it would be tedious on account of their similarity to each other. Whole families were often liberated by a single verdict, the fate of one relative deciding the fate of many. And often ancestors, after passing a long life in illegal slavery, sprung at last, like the chrysallis in autumn, into new existence, beneath the genial rays of the sun of liberty, which shed at the same time its benign influence upon their children, and children's children.

The titles, of the individuals, thus liberated, to their freedom, were variously derived. Sometimes from deeds of manumission long suppressed, and at last brought to light, by the searching scrutiny of Tyson—sometimes from the genealogy of the petitioner traced by him to some Indian or white maternal ancestor—sometimes from the right to freedom, claimed by birth, but attempted to be destroyed by the rapacity of some vile kidnapper—and sometimes from the violation of those of our laws which manumitted slaves imported from foreign parts. Many of these cases were tried in Baltimore county court, during the presidency of judge Nicholson¹¹ over that tribunal; and, (let it be spoken to his honor,) he powerfully seconded the exertions of Mr. Tyson, whenever he could do so consistently with his judicial character. And although sometimes it became his duty to pronounce against the unfortunate, yet this was the voice of the law, commanding into silence the feelings of the man. Nicholson at the time of his elevation to the bench, was a resident of the Eastern Shore of Maryland, then the most slave-holding part of our state. He

11. Joseph Hopper Nicholson (1770–1817) served in the Maryland House of Delegates and in Congress before becoming a justice of the U.S. Circuit Court and the U.S. Court of Appeals in Maryland from 1806 to 1817.

came to Baltimore with all the prejudices incident to a condition of society, such as that he had left. At first these prejudices threatened hostility to the cause of freedom; but such were the persevering efforts of Mr. Tyson, such the repeated practical illustrations which he exhibited to the view of that upright judge, that the latter began and continued more and more, until the day of his death, to see the weakness of those prepossessions which had fastened on his mind, to regard with horror what he had before viewed with equanimity, so that when he died, the friends of humanity mourned the loss of “the philanthropic judge.” Of those *living* judges who preside in this and the other law tribunals throughout the state, it does not behoove me particularly to speak, in the language either of censure or of praise. But in general terms I may remark, that with very few exceptions, they have endeavoured to administer impartial justice, and in some instances, have manifested real feeling in behalf of the oppressed; thereby shewing, that the prejudices of education, and doctrines of Maryland jurisprudence, have not eradicated from their souls, those inborn sympathies of man, and that eternal code of nature, by nature’s God written upon every heart, which none but apostates to humanity, and monstrous exceptions to their species, would wish to see obliterated.

The labors of Mr. Tyson, were not confined to a single district—they extended over the whole of Maryland. There is not a county in it which has not felt his influence, or a court of justice whose records do not bear proud testimonials of his triumphs over tyranny. Throwing out of calculation, the many liberations indirectly resulting from his efforts, we speak more than barely within bounds, when we say, that he has been the means, under Providence of rescuing at least two thousand human beings from the galling yoke of a slavery which, but for him, would have been perpetual.

And here let me join my readers in expressions of wonder and astonishment at this extraordinary display of human benevolence, in the person of a single individual—unsupported by power, wealth, or title, beneath the frowns of society, and against a torrent of prejudice. If among the Romans a civic crown was justly decreed to him, who saved, in battle, the life of a fellow citizen, what reward great enough, can this world furnish for the man, who snatched from the altars of slavery, whole hecatombs¹² of human victims, already doomed and dressed for the sacrifice? But he looked only to Heaven for his reward, and there has he found it.

12. A word meaning a large-scale slaughter or sacrifice, a hecatomb originally referred in ancient Greece to an offering to the gods of as many as one hundred head of cattle.

Chapter II.

In the commencement of his career of mercy, Mr. Tyson's exertions were very much circumscribed, on account of the rigor of the prevailing laws. In process of time, however, these became more and more lenient, and opportunities for the display of his benevolence more and more multiplied.

In effecting these different improvements, he took a most conspicuous part, thus with one hand opening the doors of emancipation, while with the other he led forth captive multitudes to light and liberty.

The most important innovation on the old law, and of which I shall take principal notice, is the one by which persons, for the first time, were allowed to manumit their slaves, by last will and testament.

In the earliest periods of our state existence, individuals were found, who, at the close of life, about to settle their accounts with God—painfully conscious of the evils of slavery, and terrified at the idea of making these perpetual, by leaving their unhappy slaves in bondage after death; desirous also of making a kind of pious sacrifice to Heaven, in atonement for whatever injustice they might have committed towards them, would insert a clause in their wills, bequeathing freedom to their slaves. Previous to the year seventeen hundred and fifty-three, these clauses were generally considered as of doubtful force, and by the law tribunals, inoperative, unless the representatives of the testator, out of mere respect for his memory, or for more charitable motives, chose to carry them into effect. This they very seldom did. Considering themselves creatures of time, and not like their ancestors, inhabitants of eternity, eager to enjoy the pleasures of the one, and not thinking of the terrors of the other—blinded too by the prejudices of education, and the darkness of the times—they treated these benevolent designs, as the unreasonable dictations of disordered minds. This unnatural conflict between the living and the dead, in which the courts of law took so decided a stand in favour of the former, though the *law itself* stood neutral between the parties, was at last silenced in the year seventeen hundred and fifty-three, by an act of Assembly, by which all persons were positively denied the right of manumitting their slaves by last will and testament. This law *seemingly* fraught with so much evil to the cause of liberty, was on the contrary, productive of much good. As it only declared that to be law, which had been so pronounced by the judicature of the state, it could do no additional harm; and as it rendered that certain, which before was doubtful, it prevented those who were desirous of giving freedom to their slaves, from postponing to the day of their deaths, this act of justice. Accordingly, we find from that period, manumissions by deed began to multiply. Liberal ideas too, upon the subject of human liberty, began

to prevail, and so continued, that in the year seventeen hundred and eighty-nine, an attempt was made to repeal the above mentioned law. Which attempt, after having been annually repeated for seven years, was at last in seventeen hundred and ninety-six crowned with complete success. A new law was substituted in the place of the one thus annulled, by which persons, legally capable, were allowed, by their last will and testament, to manumit their slaves. As the period of the establishment of this law constitutes an important era in the history of the rise and progress of emancipation in this state, a brief account of its origin and completion will be expected by the reader.

This account will lead us somewhat out of place, to introduce into this sketch, the name of a society for the abolition of slavery,¹³ whose existence commenced in the summer of seventeen hundred and eighty-nine, the very year in which, as before remarked, the attempt to repeal the law of seventeen hundred and fifty-three, respecting bequests of freedom, originated. The plan for the formation of this society was first started by Joseph Townsend,¹⁴ now an old and always a respectable member of this community, to whom this city is indebted for the birth of several public institutions of great and growing usefulness. In the execution of this plan, Mr. Townsend found a most able coadjutor in the person of Mr. Tyson, who brought the whole vigor of his mind and body in aid of its completion. The preamble to their constitution is so remarkable for the sentiments it contains, considered with reference to the darkness of the times in which it was written, as to make it a matter of modern curiosity. "The present attention of Europe and America to slavery," it proceeds, "seems to constitute that crisis in the history of the human mind, when the united endeavours of a few may greatly influence the public opinion, and produce from the transient sentiment of the times, effects extensive, lasting and useful.

"The common Father of mankind created all men free and equal, and his great command is, that we love our neighbor as ourselves, doing unto all men as we would that they should do unto us. The human race, however varied in color or intellects, are all justly entitled to liberty, and it is the duty and interest of nations and individuals, enjoying the blessings of freedom, to remove this dishonor of the christian character from among them.

13. The Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, and Others, Unlawfully Held in Bondage.

14. Joseph Townsend (1756–1841), a Quaker schoolteacher, was founder of the Friends School of Baltimore and cofounder of the Baltimore Equitable Society, which is today the Baltimore Equitable Insurance Company.

“From the fullest impression of the truth of these principles; from an earnest wish to bear our testimony against slavery, in all its forms; to spread it abroad, as far as the sphere of our influence may extend, and to afford our friendly assistance to those who may be engaged in the same undertaking, and in the humble hope of support from that Being, who takes as an offering to himself what we do for each other.

“We the subscribers, have formed ourselves into the Maryland Society for promoting the abolition of slavery, and for the relief of free negroes and others unlawfully held in bondage.”

The first president of this society, was Philip Rogers, and the first vice president, James Carey, both still alive, and revered for their age and virtue.¹⁵ Those who composed it were of the most respectable class in the community, and there is hardly an old and venerable citizen, now in existence in Baltimore, whose name was not enrolled among the number—Most of its members have long since gone to reap their rewards in Heaven—Of these we mention, with pride and pleasure, the names of our once distinguished fellow citizens, general Joseph Sterrett,¹⁶ William Winchester,¹⁷ judge James Winchester,¹⁸ Adam Fonerden,¹⁹ William Pinkney,²⁰ judge Chase,²¹ and Archibald Robinson.²² Other names might be added of those who were not citizens, (for they admitted persons from all parts of the world,) but the enumeration would too much swell the catalogue. We cannot avoid, however, mentioning the name of the illustrious Granville Sharp, the great English philan-

15. Philip Rogers (1749–1836) was a Methodist merchant in Baltimore; James Carey (1751–1834) was a Quaker merchant and cofounder of the Bank of Maryland who also served as a member of the Baltimore City Council for twelve years beginning in 1796.

16. Joseph Sterrett (1773–1821) was a plantation owner and a militia officer who commanded units composed mostly of men from Baltimore during the War of 1812.

17. William Winchester (1750–1812) was a Baltimore merchant and the father of James Winchester.

18. James Winchester (1772–1806) was a member of the Maryland House of Delegates from 1794 to 1796, and judge of the U.S. District Court for Maryland from 1799 to 1806.

19. Adam Fonerden (1750–1817) was a wool and cotton card manufacturer and a Methodist who served on the Baltimore City Council and in the Maryland General Assembly.

20. William Pinkney (1764–1822) was a lawyer who would have a long career in politics. He sat in the Maryland House of Delegates from 1788 to 1792, and he also served as a congressman, a senator, the mayor of Annapolis, U.S. ambassador to Great Britain, and U.S. attorney general under President James Madison.

21. Samuel Chase (1741–1811) was a member of the Continental Congress, a signatory of the Declaration of Independence, chief justice of the Baltimore district criminal court and the Maryland General Court, and an associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

22. Archibald Robinson was a lawyer.

thropist, a name which will live, when the memory of kings and other artificial dignitaries shall be forgotten among men.²³ This gentleman was elected at his own request, and though he could not act in the immediate presence of the society, yet he assisted them by means of his valuable correspondence. Of those members of this institution who yet remain, like monuments of former days, we could number many of our most worthy and venerable fellow citizens. These must remember, with heart-felt satisfaction, the time when, in concert with the subject of this biography, they lent their days and nights to the cause of humanity; and will no doubt bear testimony to the extraordinary zeal and noble exertions of Mr. Tyson, in the holy work which made him the soul of their confederacy.

That he was so, is evidenced by the fact, that when, after an ephemeral duration of seven years, this society fell into non-existence—when all its members had sunk down one by one, devoid of life and energy, he stood alone the intrepid asserter of universal liberty, against hosts of enemies, uniting in himself the spirits of the fallen; like the last of the hundred Spartans, who, at the pass of Thermopylae, against the hosts of Xerxes, stood the solitary bulwark of Grecian liberty, while all his brave companions were lifeless around him.²⁴

The most important part of the business of this society was entrusted to a committee, called “the acting committee.” It was their duty to seek out cases requiring the interference of the society; to file petitions for freedom, in behalf of those illegally held in bondage; to arrest kidnappers, and bring them to condign punishment; to submit to the grand jury of the county, cases of outrageous misconduct on the part of masters towards their slaves; and in fine, to represent on all occasions, the executive power of the body. This was the proper place for Mr. Tyson, and accordingly we find that he was elected a member of the first “acting committee,” and though all others annually chosen to act upon this committee, were annually displaced by substitutes, yet the name of Tyson remained undisturbed, upon the list from year to year. He continued to fulfil the arduous duties of this station during almost the whole period of the existence of the society. On all occasions, he was the first to venture his person and fortune in defence of human rights, and often his intrepidity made him stand in situations, where he endeavoured to lead on those who dared not follow.

23. Granville Sharp (1735–1813) was a British civil servant and a prominent early antislavery activist in England.

24. At the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BCE), a small force of Spartan soldiers fought to the death in an attempt to hold off a much larger Persian army under the command of Xerxes I that sought to conquer Greece.

We will now pursue our account of the origin of the law, authorizing manumissions by last will and testament. Almost the first act done by the abolition society after its institution, was a petition to the Legislature, praying the repeal of the old prohibitory law of 1753, and the substitution in its place, of one of a contrary description. They had little hopes of succeeding, *at once*, in their ultimate design; but knowing that great attempts must have a beginning, however small, they determined to make that beginning in this instance, and to prosecute what they should thus have begun, with unabated zeal, to glorious success, or desperate defeat. Their first attempt was made, as before stated, in 1789. A committee was appointed by the society, to wait upon the Legislature, with the memorial just alluded to.—This was read, and referred to a committee of the House of Delegates, who, in a short time, introduced a bill, suited exactly to the request contained in the memorial. The introduction, and discussion of this bill, produced a great sensation throughout the state. The enemies of freedom, viewed with terror, so daring an inroad of light, upon their much loved darkness, while the friends of virtue, and of man, hailed with rapture, this first dawn of liberty, upon an oppressed race. The struggle of the contending parties was violent in the extreme; a struggle, the like of which, had never before been witnessed, in the legislative halls of Maryland. The genius of slavery had triumphed there so long, that she seemed to have obtained a kind of prescriptive right of possession; no one had hitherto dared to question it. At first, she took up the gauge which had now been cast upon her very altar, more like one desirous of taking bloody vengeance of an adversary for his impudence, than to defend a long established authority, through fear of losing it. But when she had found, and proved her adversary, she began to tremble for her own safety, and roused to the conflict all her powers. In the van of liberty stood William Pinkney, then, for the first time, a member of any legislative body. Between him and Mr. Tyson, an early acquaintance had been formed, and there had passed between them much correspondence, verbal and epistolary, as well upon the subject of slavery in general, as particularly that of the bill then before the house. To say that a man of Pinkney's composition could be influenced, in the formation of his opinions, upon momentous subjects, by the arguments of any man, would be to undervalue that great originality of genius, and correctness of thought, in which he transcended all his contemporaries. But we may say, and do say, that the ardor of soul which blazed forth on all occasions, in which his feelings were interested, became "seven times heated,"²⁵ when it mingled with

25. Daniel 3:19: "Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated."

the flame of liberty, from the breast of Tyson; so that, on the occasion above alluded to, it came forth like a hurricane of living fire, consuming whatever dared resist it. The speech which he made on that occasion, was his first effort at legislative eloquence, and there are persons now alive, who can describe, in glowing colors, its wonderful success in the establishment of his character as a great orator, and his cause for its justice.

As this speech was the medium through which William Pinkney passed from his domestic area to the great world, and as its delivery constitutes an important event in the history of individual emancipation in Maryland, a few specimens of its general character, may not be unacceptable to the reader.

In the course of an exordium, replete with beauties, he expresses his regret "that in a country which has set even distant Europe in a ferment, and lavished the blood of thousands in defence of its liberties, against the encroachments of an arrogant and abandoned government, the cause of freedom was yet the most unpopular, in which an advocate could appear. The alarms occasioned by mistaken ideas of interest; the deep rooted prejudice which education has fostered, and habit matured; the general hereditary contempt for those, who are the objects of their provisions; the common dread of innovation, and above all, a recent defeat, are obstacles, which, would seem sufficient to damp, if not entirely extinguish, the ardor of exertion. But with me these difficulties only serve to rouse every faculty of mind and body, which the occasion demands, and to call forth that spirit of perseverance, which no opposition can subdue, but that which affords me conviction of my error."

After a few additional preparatory remarks, and a fair statement of the question, then before the house, he complains that "the door to freedom, is fenced about with such barbarous caution, that a stranger would be naturally led to believe that our statesmen considered the existence of its opposite among us, as the *sine qua non* of our prosperity; or, at least that they regarded it as an act of most atrocious criminality, to raise an humble bondman from the dust, and place him on the stage of life, on a level with their citizens."

He then boldly strikes at the root of the question by examining into the origin of American slavery, and showing in the strongest colors its iniquity, as well as the wickedness of continuing it in this free and enlightened nation.—"Mr. Speaker, most iniquitous and dishonorable to Maryland, is that dreary system of partial bondage, which her laws have hitherto supported with a solicitude worthy of a better object, and her citizens by their practice countenanced.

"Founded in a disgraceful traffick, to which the parent country lent her fostering aid, from motives of interest, but which, even she, would have disdained to encour-

age, had England been the destined mart of such inhuman merchandize, its continuance is as shameful as its origin.

“Eternal infamy awaits the abandoned miscreants, whose selfish souls could ever prompt them to rob unhappy Africa of her sons and freight them here by thousands, to poison the fair Eden of Liberty with the rank weed of individual bondage! Nor is it more to the credit of our ancestors, that they did not command these savage spirits to bear their hateful cargo to another shore, where the shrine of freedom knew no votaries, and every purchaser would at once be both a master and a slave.

“But wherefore should we confine the edge of the censure to our ancestors, or those from whom they purchased? Are not we equally guilty? *They* strewed around the seeds of slavery; *we* cherish and sustain the growth.—*They* introduced the system; *we* enlarge, invigorate, and confirm it. Yes, let it be handed down to posterity, that the people of Maryland, who could fly to arms with the promptitude of Roman citizens, when the hand of oppression was lifted up against themselves; who could behold their country desolated and their citizens slaughtered; who could trace with unshaken firmness every calamity of war, before they would submit to the smallest infringement of their rights; that this very people could yet see thousands of their fellow creatures, within the limits of their territory, bending beneath an unnatural yoke; and, instead of being assiduous to destroy their shackles, anxious to immortalize their duration, so that a nation of slaves might exist in a country where freedom is its boast.”

After continuing to speak upon slavery, in the abstract, and to show its inherent iniquity, he proceeds to examine into its policy, in a national point of view. “That dangerous consequences of this system of bondage have not, as yet been felt, does not prove they never will be. At least the experiment has not been sufficiently made, to preclude speculation and conjecture. To me sir, nothing for which I have not the evidence of my senses, is more clear, than that it will one day destroy that reverence for liberty, which is the vital principle of a republic.

“There is no maxim in politics more evidently just, than that laws should be relative to the principle of government. But is the encouragement of civil slavery, by legislative acts, correspondent with the principle of a democracy? Call that principle what you will—the love of *equality*, as defined by some; of liberty as understood by others; such conduct is manifestly in violation of it.”

He then states at length the ideas of Montesquieu,²⁶ that in *despotic* govern-

26. Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689–1755), was a French political philosopher and author of numerous works, including *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), that had a deep influence on early American constitutionalism.

ments, civil slavery is tolerable; in *monarchical* governments, it should not be admitted; but in *democracies*, it is the bane of the government. "For in *democracies*, where they are all on an equality, slavery is contrary to the spirit of the constitution; it only contributes to give a power and luxury to the citizens, which they ought not to possess." "Such," says Mr. Pinkney, "must have been the ideas in England, when the general voice of the nation demanded the repeal of the statute of Edward VI, two years after its passage, by which their rogues and vagabonds were to be enslaved for their punishment.²⁷ It could not have been compassion for the culprits, that excited this aversion to the law, for they deserved none. But the spirit of the people could not brook the idea of bondage, even as a penalty, judicially inflicted. They dreaded the consequences; they abhorred the example:—in a word, they revered the public liberty, and hence detested every species of slavery.

"Mr. Speaker, the thing is impolitic, in another respect, never will your country be productive; never will its agriculture, its commerce, or its manufactures flourish, so long as they depend on reluctant bondsmen for their progress." "Even the very earth itself,' (says one celebrated author,) 'which teems with profusion under the cultivating hand of the free-born laborer, shrinks into barrenness, from the contaminating touch of a slave.'²⁸—This sentiment is not more figuratively beautiful than substantially just.

"Survey the countries, sir, where the hand of freedom conducts the ploughshare, and compare their produce with yours. Your granaries, in their view, appear like the storehouses of emmets, though not supplied with equal industry. To trace the cause of this disparity, between the fruits of a freeman's voluntary labours, animated by the hope of profit, and the slow-paced efforts of a slave, who acts from compulsion only, who has no incitement to exertion but fear—no prospect of remuneration to encourage—would be insulting the understanding. The cause and the effect are too obvious to escape observation."

Mr. Pinkney then proceeds to consider and refute the various objections that had been urged against emancipation. One of these was, "that freed-men are the most convenient tools of usurpation." This objection he combats by history, experience and reason. "In Rome, says he, the fact was clearly otherwise. We have the evidence of Tiberius Gracchus, confirmed by Cicero, and approved by Montesquieu, that the incorporation of freed-men into the city tribes, re-animated

27. In 1547, British King Edward VI introduced the Vagrancy Act, under which able-bodied persons who did not work could be branded and enslaved for a period of two years. The law was repealed in 1550.

28. This sentiment was widely attributed to Montesquieu.

the drooping spirit of democracy, in that republic, and checked the career of Patrician influence.”²⁹ “How much more rational would it be to argue, that slaves are the fit machines by which an usurper might effect his purposes, and there is, therefore, nothing which a free government ought more to dread, than a diffusive private bondage within its territory. A promise of manumission might rouse every bondsman to arms, under the conduct of an aspiring leader; and, invited by the fascinating prospect of freedom, they might raise such a storm in Maryland, as it would be difficult to appease.” In support of this idea, he refers to the conduct of those slaves, who fought under Hannibal in the second Punic war; who, under the promise of liberty, fought with the madness of desperation.³⁰ “With the same promptitude and intrepidity would they have turned their arms against the senate themselves, if the same assurances had been given them by any enterprising citizen.” “Sylla, before he abdicated the dictatorship gave freedom to ten thousand slaves, and lands to a number of legions.³¹ By these means he was enabled, notwithstanding all his precedent enormities, to live unmolested as a private citizen, in the bosom of that very country, where he had acted the most hateful deeds of cruelty and usurpation. For by manumitting these slaves, the usurper secured their fidelity and attachment forever, and disposed them to support and revenge his cause at every possible hazard.

“But where slaves are manumitted by government, or in consequence of its provisions, the same motives which have attached them to tyrants, when the act of emancipation has flowed from them, would then attach them to government. They are then no longer the creatures of despotism. They are bound by gratitude, as well as by interest, to seek the welfare of that country, from which they have derived the restoration of their plundered rights, and with whose prosperity their own is inseparably involved.” “When we see freemen scrupulously faithful to a lawless abandoned villain, from whom they have received their liberty, can we suppose that they will reward the like bounty of a free government with the turbulence of a faction or the seditious plots of treason?”

In support of these doctrines, he then quotes his favorite Montesquieu—He

29. Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus (164–133 BCE) was a Roman official best known for proposing reforms that would redistribute state-controlled land (and some land aggrandized by the wealthy) among poorer citizens. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE) was a statesman, orator, and philosopher who continued to advocate republican principles as Rome became an empire.

30. Hannibal (247–183 BCE) was a Carthaginian general who commanded the forces of Carthage in their fight against Rome during the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE).

31. Lucius Cornelius Sylla (138–78 BCE) was a Roman general and dictator of Rome from 82 to 79 BCE.

alludes to the practice of England, while bondage existed there; where, by parliament and courts of justice, manumission was always encouraged. "Even in India too, where climate and the nature of the country have, of necessity, established a political despotism, their slaves are manumitted without difficulty. No legislative restrictions to observe! No tyrannic clogs to struggle with!

"But it has been said that nature has 'black-balled these wretches out of society.' Gracious God! can it be supposed that thy Almighty Providence intended to proscribe these victims of fraud and power from the pale of society, because thou hast denied them the delicacy of an European complexion! Is this color, Mr. Speaker, the mark of divine vengeance, or is it only the flimsy pretext upon which we attempt to justify our treatment of them. Arrogant and presumptuous is it thus to make the dispensations of providence subservient to the purposes of iniquity, and every slight diversity in the work of nature the apology for oppression. Thus acts the intemperate bigot in religion.—He persecutes every dissenter from his creed, in the name of God, and even rears the horrid fabric of an inquisition, upon heavenly foundations.—I like not these holy arguments. They are as convenient for the tyrant as the patriot—the enemy, as the friend of mankind. Contemplate this subject through the calm medium of philosophy, and then to know that those shackled wretches are men as well as we are, sprung from the same common parent, and endued with equal faculties of mind and body, is to know enough to make us disdain to turn casuists on their complexions, to the destruction of their rights. The beauty of complexion is mere matter of taste, and varies in different countries—nay, even in the same; and shall we dare to set up this vague, indetermined, and weathercock standard, as the criterion by which it shall be decided on what complexion the rights of human nature are conferred, and to what they are denied by the great ordinances of the Deity? As if the Ruler of the universe, had made the darkness of a skin, the flatness of a nose, or the whiteness of a mouth, which are only deformities or beauties as the undulating tribunal of taste shall determine, the indicia of his wrath.

"It is pitiable to reflect, on the mistaken light in which this unfortunate generation are viewed, by the people in general. Hardly do they deign to rank them among an order of beings above the mere animal that grazes the fields of its owner. That an humble, dusky, unlettered wretch, that drags the chain of bondage through the weary round of life, with no other privilege but that of existing for another's benefit, should have been intended by heaven for their equal, they will not believe. But, let me appeal to the intelligent mind, in what respect are they our inferiors? Though they have never been taught to tread the paths of science, or embellish human life by literary acquirements; though they cannot soar into the regions of taste

and sentiment, or explore the scenes of philosophical research, is it to be inferred that they want the power, if the yoke of slavery did not check each aspiring effort, and clog the springs of action?" "As well might you expect to see the bubbling fountain gush from the burning sands of Arabia, as that the inspiration of genius, the enthusiastic glow of sentiment, should rouse the mind which has yielded its elasticity to habitual subjection. Thus the ignorance and the vices of these wretches, are solely the result of situation, and therefore no evidence of their inferiority. Like the flower, whose culture has been neglected, and perishes amid permitted weeds, e'er it opens its blossoms to the spring, they only prove the imbecility of human nature, unassisted and oppressed.

"Tis *Liberty* alone which gives the flow'r
Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume;
And we are weeds without it."³²

He then combats with success, the vulgar opinion, "that manumitted slaves are nuisances to society," by arguments drawn from experience; which being subject to universal observation, need not be repeated here.

He next proceeds more particularly to the bill then before the house, and refutes with force and facility, the arguments adopted by its opponents. First, "that testators may impoverish their families by inconsiderate manumission in their last sickness.—They may be frightened by preachers, refined moralists, and others, when the mind is easily alarmed, and incapable of its usual resistance." Secondly, "that manumissions, by last will, may produce the untimely death of the maker.—Slaves knowing that they are provided for in the will, may destroy the master to prevent a revocation, and hasten the completion of the bequest." Thirdly, "that such humane provisions in favor of slaves, will diminish their value, by rendering them turbulent, disobedient and unruly." These are stated as the only objections to the bill, then before the house. To those who live in this enlightened age, they appear too trifling, to merit any refutation. They had, perhaps, some importance at the period in which they were urged, or Mr. Pinkney would not have given to them, as he did, a serious consideration. Time, however, has proved the correctness of Mr. Pinkney's ideas upon these objections, and rendered their fallacy so self-evident, that it would be useless to transcribe those ideas, for the perusal of the present generation. We will conclude, therefore, this imperfect sketch of Mr. Pinkney's speech, by inserting at length, its peroration; beautiful in its kind, and admirably adapted to the subject.

32. William Cowper, *The Task* (1785), bk. 5.

“Thus stands the question at present. A former legislature has created a barrier to the cause of voluntary liberation. They have forbid a manumission by last will and testament, or in any manner, during the last sickness of the owner, a time when the heart is most powerfully disposed to be generous and just. They have destroyed almost the only opportunity these wretches can have of regaining the station to which God and nature have given them a title. They have thrown up an insuperable mound against the gentle current of humanity, to the additional injury of those whom they had already injured beyond the reach of justification. All this they have done without one rational inducement—without even policy to plead in its extenuation. Shall you then, whose councils the breath of freedom has hitherto inspired; whose citizens have been led by Providence to conquest, as glorious as unexpected, in the sacred cause of human nature; whose government is founded on the never moulding basis of equal rights; shall you, I say, behold this wanton abuse of legislative authority; this shameful disregard of every moral and religious obligation; this flagrant act of strained and unprovoked cruelty, and not attempt redress, when redress is so easy to be effected?

“Often, Mr. Speaker, has the public treasure relieved the wants of suffering merit, when the bounty of government was hardly reconcilable with justice; but you have now submitted to your consideration, a case where the finer feelings of benevolence may be gratified, and right and justice, add their sanction to the measure, while the community sustains no damage. Yours, too, will be the gratitude of the millions, whom this day’s vote may give to breathe the air of freedom; yours, the flattering approbation of the friends of mankind; and yours, the pleasing consciousness of having, under the influence of every nobler sentiment, unloosed the manacles of many a fellow creature, and led him by the hand, to LIBERTY and SOCIAL HAPPINESS.”

This eloquent speech, was delivered by Mr. Pinkney at the age of twenty-five, and would do no discredit to his riper years. No one who reads it, will say, that it is any thing else, than the effusion of heart deeply and sincerely affected with the truth of those melancholy sentiments, which reason and observation had compelled him to adopt. To those, who are unacquainted with the dark and gloomy state of the public mind, at the time of the delivery of this speech, it will appear strange, that the arguments it contains, could have failed of complete success; but, to others better informed, it will be surprising, that it met the success which, in reality, did attend it. Before its delivery, the bill which it advocated, was considered as an idle attempt to consume the time of the legislature, about a matter, impossible of accomplishment. After its delivery, many of those who had stood forward in direct hostility to the bill, became its friends; and all who had professed them-

selves its advocates, however luke-warm before, were filled with ardor, in so much that when it was put upon its final passage, it was lost by only a small majority. This speech was circulated by the Abolition Society throughout the whole state; it was printed in almost every newspaper in Maryland. All admired it, for its eloquence, and very many were convinced by its reasoning. To it, in a great measure, may be ascribed the final success of this celebrated bill. The minds of the *people* were enlightened by it, and these took care to select for their organs, in the Legislature, those who would most faithfully represent their sentiments. This change in the public opinion, however, was not instantaneous. Year after year were Mr. Tyson and his associates, compelled to renew their attack upon public prejudice and private interest, until at last, in 1796, the bill completely triumphed.

The wonderful consequences resulting from the passage of this bill, though seen by the prophetic eye of Pinkney, as it would seem, when he speaks of the “millions that would bless the legislature of Maryland in after ages, for so benevolent a provision,” and though they were most certainly foreseen by Tyson, were not anticipated by the generality of those who claimed to be numbered among the wise men of the age. Not to speak of the great results that have immediately flowed from it, as from their proper fountain—of the thousands that owe to it the sweets of liberty—it is daily working, and will finally consummate the triumph of universal emancipation throughout the State of Maryland. The immediate effects which it daily produces, become themselves causes, these produce again their consequences, and so on in unceasing succession, consequences will continue to arise out of causes, and causes out of consequences, until a mighty series shall be effected, the last of which will end in universal liberty.

The history of emancipation in Maryland, has proved that manumissions beget manumissions, that they increase even in a geometrical proportion. To those who are aware of this fact, it must be a cause of rejoicing, that so wide a door as that unfolded by the law alluded to, has been opened by the legislative arm. Before the passage of this law, manumission dealt in units one by one, and at intervals, were emancipated, according to the caprice of the owner, or his desire to reward the long tried and faithful services of a favorite slave. Now manumission deals in hundreds; it has become a wholesale business, in which liberty by the mass, is bartered for peace of mind. The man, who on his death bed, tortured by the stings of conscience, at the retrospection of his past life, determines to be just, will not be partial. He will feel it his *duty* to give to all, what inclination might induce him to bestow on one alone.—When the terrors of eternity stare him in the face, he will not pause to gratify his petty preferences, but will make the clause of justice, and the

act of mercy sweeping and comprehensive. His example will be followed by others, who would not have acted without example; and these again will be imitated by many more, until light and liberty increasingly abound; not a single individual will dare rush into the presence of a just and merciful God, without first proving himself just and merciful to man.

Chapter III.

It is remarkable, that about this time, the subject of slavery, and particularly the slave-trade, to the coast of Africa, had begun to interest the attention of Europe.—There seemed to be a simultaneous effort throughout the world in favor of humanity, so long oppressed; and during the period when Pinkney was astonishing an audience of American legislators and slave holders by his bold attempt to lead captive in the chains of eloquence, the captive's conquerors, Wilberforce, in the English parliament, and Mirabeau in the national assembly of France,³³ were endeavouring to rouse the torpid energies of *their* countrymen, in the holy cause of man against those inhuman mercenaries, who on the coasts of Africa bartered trinkets for his blood, and by an unhallowed speculation in foreign climes, exchanged this blood again for gold.

This holy unpremeditated union of philanthropists, living in places so remote; led on by men, who seemed born for the part they acted, so well were they fitted to the times in which they lived, could not have been accidental, "The hand of Heaven was in it;" which having permitted, for wise purposes, the cruelties of the African slave trade, and American slavery, was now about to display its most glorious power, of "bringing good out of evil and light out of darkness."

We mention the subject of the African slave trade, because of the part Mr. Tyson took in its abolition. In that philanthropic phalanx of two hemispheres, which just after the period of our revolution endeavoured, though under different forms and disguises, to extend the maxims of that revolution, in theory and practice, throughout the world, the subject of this biography had a conspicuous place.—The dissem-

33. William Wilberforce (1759–1833) was a member of Parliament and a leading figure of British antislavery. He spearheaded the campaign against British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and pushed for the abolition of slavery throughout the British empire. Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau (1749–1791), was a French revolutionary and member of the National Assembly who argued for abolition.

ination of these maxims, had a direct tendency to strike at the root of all oppression, since they all enforced, in the strongest manner, the universal equality of man. In America, they had already established a mighty republic—in France, they had broken down the outworks of despotic power—in England, they had struggled to render her constitution in practice what it professed to be in form—a pure and free monarchy—and now, in all those countries, the same principles were working the abolition of the slave-trade, and the amelioration of the human condition throughout the world.

Upon the subject of this traffic, there were two theatres on which Mr. Tyson was called to act. The one much the larger of the two, and embracing the whole of the United States of America; the other confined within the State of Maryland. To play well his part in both, required all his energies and abilities. These he exerted to their uttermost. Upon a subject of such vast importance, it was impossible for any man to act alone, and with efficiency—he therefore, became the animating spirit of others, and marched on with them in their glorious career. There were two classes of men who seemed to have this subject peculiarly at heart—one of which, was composed of the different abolition societies throughout the United States—the other, of the Society of Friends—of each of which, Mr. Tyson was an active and influential member. Delegates from the various abolition societies in the United States, annually met in convention at Philadelphia.—Here they formed the plans of all future operations, that required concert and union—which, if practicable, were carried into effect the succeeding year, reported according to their failure or success, to a future meeting—by this meeting again pursued or rejected, altered or enlarged, according to the dictates of reason and experience.

The Society of Friends, throughout the United States, took up the subject in those annual assemblies, which they have been accustomed to hold ever since their constitution, as a religious society. These annual assemblies, were six or seven in number, and the members composing each of them, were circumscribed within a large district of country. Though all these different assemblies did not, as did the abolition societies, meet by delegation, and in *that* way consolidate their strength, yet the same effect was produced, in a way equally effective: This was, by epistolary correspondence.—The quaker churches, imitating the practice of the apostles and primitive fathers, have always maintained, one with another, a regular, unbroken chain of correspondence.—Hence arises that uniformity of doctrine and discipline, which pervades this religious society throughout the world; hence, is to be attributed their union of sentiment upon all prevailing subjects of importance, however marked with novelty; and hence, in an especial manner, their union of thought and action, upon the great subject of the abolition of the slave trade. The

telegraphic summons from the tops of the green mountains, met again its answer on the summit of the Allegany—nor did it pause until south answered unto north, from the peak of otter.³⁴

The efforts of these two classes were powerfully aided by all ranks of men throughout the country, in whose breasts the icy fingers of self interest, had not chilled the warm feelings of human nature. The limits which I have assigned myself in the composition of this biography, will not allow a detail of the rise, origin and progress of the abolition of the slave trade by the *government of the United States*.—To do this, would require a treatise by itself, and would necessarily lead into the narration of many facts, too separate in their character, to admit of a logical connection with the subject of these remarks. Suffice it to say, that the same mysterious hand, which had at the same time commenced the great work in the two hemispheres, as if to shew, that in all holy undertakings, he is both Alpha and Omega—concluded it in both, at the very same period—for in the year eighteen hundred and eight, as the great Clarkson³⁵ remarks, “England and America, the mother and the son, put an end to the disgraceful traffic,” which had so long rested, like an incubus of guilt, upon the breast of each.

The wise men of Europe have evinced their astonishment, that this traffic, the abolition of which met with the most serious opposition in England, and which even now is encouraged by other European nations, should have been abolished, as it was, with apparent unanimity in America. The patriotic reader will pardon me, if in as brief a manner as possible, I endeavour to unfold some of these causes.

The difficulties which impeded the progress of the abolitionists here, were very different from those with which those on the other side of the Atlantic had to struggle. To the latter, the most insurmountable obstacle was the apathy which pervaded the minds of those whose duty it was *to decide* upon “the great question.”—The slave ships did not visit the coasts of Britain.—

“Slaves could not breathe in England;
They touch’d that country and their shackles fell.”³⁶

To the people of that country, the horrors of the slave trade were only known by description. This description came so far short of the reality, and the reality existed

34. The Peaks of Otter is a series of three peaks in the Blue Ridge Mountains near what is now central Virginia.

35. Thomas Clarkson (1760–1846) was an English abolitionist and a cofounder of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787.

36. Cowper, *The Task* (1785), bk. 2.

so many hundred miles distant from the scene of feeling, that the feeling could do no justice to the subject.

The public sensibility, in that case, was operated on through the medium of the imagination only. Those familiar with the workings of that faculty, know full well, that though while the spell is upon us, we may be made to suffer with acuteness, or enjoy with extacy, yet that it is evanescent in its character, subject to be blown aside by the first blast of misery, or breeze of joy.—Nor is there much, if any difference, in this respect, between those cases wherein our imaginations are excited by tales of actual woe, and where they are known to have a fictitious original. If there *be* any difference, it can only exist when the real object of our sympathies is within our reach, though not within our sight: but it must completely vanish away, when removed beyond the capacity of observation, upon the farthest of the ocean's waves, or shores of foreign continents. With the generality of mankind, the first object of consideration, to every individual, is himself—the next embraces his family, the third his country, and then, by turns, the different nations of the globe; his feelings, his passions, his imaginations, grow stronger and stronger, and rise higher and higher, as they approach to—or become weaker and weaker, fall lower and lower, as they recede from himself, the great centre of attraction and repulsion.—Thus the circle wave, suddenly formed upon the placid bosom of some expansive lake, at first raises aloft its rainbow crest, but in each successive undulation sinks it lower and lower, as it spreads wider and wider, until at last it mingles itself in undistinguished equality, with the mass of waters that sleep unruffled in their common bed. It is the philanthropist alone, who, regardless of the little circumference that bounds his own personal safety or pleasure, springs beyond the horizon, and seeks for miseries to alleviate, and sorrows to assuage, where ordinary mortals dare not tread, even with fancied footsteps. The great orators and statesmen, therefore, of England, who came forward at the call of humanity, to rescue the oppressed of foreign continents, shewed well their knowledge of human nature, by not confining their arguments to abstract speculations, upon the justice of their cause. They came nearer home to the feelings and pride of Englishmen.—They represented the slave trade as a tarnish on the British fame; a disgrace upon the national character, which, if not washed away, would degrade them in the view of an enlightened universe, and hand down their name for the execration of posterity. Yet even these arguments, with the generality of people, had not the desired effect. Even these could not dispel the universal gloom of apathy which rested upon the minds of men, whose regard for the nation consisted only in a concern for her *safety*, in which *their own security* was materially involved.

The second great obstacle in England to the abolition of this traffic, was its

name. It had been dignified with the name of trade. It was a trade, too in which the wealthiest individuals engaged. Thus dignified by name and capital, this traffic became like all others, the subject of regulation and encouragement. Its abolition became a question of state policy—of expediency—Forgetful, it would seem, that they were debating about the policy, the expediency of murder, of barbarity, of crimes which should have been suppressed at the risk even of national dissolution, the members of the British legislature condescended to a pitiful calculation of profit and loss. They who opposed the Abolition, spoke of its interference with the prosperity of their colonies—of the loss which their sugar plantations would sustain from the want of laborers—of the injury which would be inflicted upon the English revenue from a decreased importation of colonial produce—of the loss of English shipping, which thrown out of this trade, and finding all others full, must rot in idleness—of the loss which the English navy would sustain, when this great nursery of seamen was wasted and destroyed—and a multitude of other losses, on all of which time has laid the stamp of vanity and folly.

In the third place, the wealth of those concerned in the traffic, procured them an influence with many of the Parliament: and this was exerted in their favor—I do not say that it was *actually* bought, in all instances. Every one familiar with the corrupt nature of man, must know, that there is a magic in the naked name of wealth, arising out of the reverence we are taught to feel for it from our earliest infancy, which gives it influence and power. Our natures are bribed by the very barren rays that play around the golden deity, and we feel an instinctive propensity to fall down and worship it.

It was by these obstacles, and others such as these, which my prescribed limits will not permit me to delineate, that the march of British justice was so long delayed.

Very different was the case on this side of the Atlantic. In the first place there was no apathy here, among the friends of abolition; each was ardent in the cause.—The contest between them and their opponents, was the collision of light and darkness, holding divided empire over the minds of men, each struggling for absolute dominion. There was no room for apathy. The slave trade, carried to our very doors, its miseries spread in reality, before the eyes of sense. Those who had hearts to feel, felt as it were the electric shock of humanity, and were fired into action: while those, on the other side, whose indurated natures had become additionally hardened, by their continual community with cruel scenes; fought with a fiend like ferocity, which blackened their cause, and ensured its destruction.

With regard to the *policy* of continuing this traffic, the enemies of the abolition, did not venture a word upon that subject. We had no *colonies* to people, and as to

our own country, it was already ascertained, that so far was it from standing in need of slaves to aid in its cultivation, we could do better without them; that the importation of any number of slaves, caused the exclusion of just the same number of freemen, and unless it could be shewn, that the soil could flourish better by the toil of the former, than the labor of the latter, in vain would they urge the *impolicy* of abolition. Besides even admitting that the importation of slaves had ever been justifiable, on the score of policy; that time had passed away, and it was admitted on all hands, that *further* importations were not only unnecessary, but injurious to the country. As it regarded our revenue, the destruction of the slave trade could have no effect upon it, even as it respected the duties upon imports from the West Indies. Since the exclusion of slaves from *our* soil, could not lessen the number there, and thereby abate the usual quantity of colonial produce.

As to the injury which our navy might sustain from the loss of what was called a nursery for seamen, it could be but trifling, since our navy was at that time very small, and had it been the largest, it could have sustained no damage, since the fact has been satisfactorily proved, that the African slave trade, instead of being the nursery, is the grave of seamen.

As it regarded the wealth and influence of those concerned in the traffic—the first not being generally very great, the other could be but small; and were it otherwise, the number of individuals, engaged in the traffic, was not large enough to make their influence very extensive.

In this country, the contest between these two parties was not a contest of policy or interest, in array against humanity. It was freedom, struggling for dominion over tyranny. Reckless of the past or the present, she bent her eyes upon the time to come, and saw in the destruction of her present hopes, the loss of future glory. Such a struggle could not be long; and accordingly the friends of abolition soon congratulated each other upon complete success.

The slave trade had been abolished in the state of Maryland, as early as seventeen hundred and eighty-three. The maxims of the revolution, then warm in the hearts of our fathers, prompted them to this act of justice.

Thus is our country, in one sense of the word a land of perfect freedom, no *foreign* slave can breathe within our borders—to them no matter what may be the tincture of the skin, or the title of their would be lords, the flag under which they sail, or the accident that may have blown them hither, the first moment “their lungs receive our air, that moment they are free.”³⁷ But look at the inconsistency of man! While we proclaim liberty to all the world—however black, degraded or enslaved,

37. Cowper, *The Task* (1785), bk. 2.

provided they will seek for it within our borders, and while we proclaim that every human being in the land blessed with a white colored skin, however infamous, is and shall be free—we at the same time declare that there is a class of beings in our country, endowed like ourselves, with the God-like capacity of “looking before and after”³⁸ into time, possessing all the feelings and sympathies of men, from whom the precious boon of liberty shall be intercepted in its descent from heaven, and given to the winds. It is their misfortune to be born of progenitors, whom our ancestors with rapacious hand tore from their country’s bosom—bound and fettered in slave ships—dragged naked to these shores, and sold as they would so many beasts of the field, to those who bid the highest for them:—And this is made our justification!

Chapter IV.

About the year seventeen hundred and ninety-two, the cause of liberty was very much retarded, by an act of our legislature, by which those, filing petitions for freedom, were made liable to the payment of costs in case of failure, and by which persons were obliged to pay all the costs which had accrued under one petition, before they filed a second.

We will, though a little out of time, give some account of the origin of this law, because it is important in the history of emancipation in Maryland, with which the life of Elisha Tyson was identified—and because it will lead to a detail of facts with which Mr. Tyson was *particularly* connected—and shew in a striking manner the spirit and temper of the times.

In seventeen hundred and ninety-eight, or seventeen hundred and ninety-nine, a certain Thomas De Wit, of Baltimore county, having been on an expedition up the north river, brought home with him two boys as his slaves, the one aged about ten, the other about thirteen years. These boys after having been transferred from master to master, came at last into the possession of two gentlemen by the name of D——.³⁹ The complexions of these boys—their hair—their features—form and general appearance, all led to a strong suspicion that they were Indians, or of Indian descent: and if so, unjustly held in bondage. But in addition to this, the boys

38. *Hamlet*, act 4, scene 4: “Sure, he that made us with such large discourse / Looking before and after, gave us not / That capability and god-like reason / To fust in us unused.”

39. The men, unnamed here, were Ezekiel Dorsey of Baltimore County and Edward Dorsey of Anne Arundel County. The years listed are a typographical error. They should read 1778 or 1779.

themselves evinced their descent to be of Indian original, and young as they were, had impressed upon their memories, some of the traditions of their fathers.

Their situation coming to the knowledge of the acting committee of the Abolition Society, (of which committee Mr. Tyson was the principal member,) they determined by a full investigation to dispel the mystery which seemed to surround them—This they were the more induced to do, by their strong sympathies in behalf of the orphan brothers, at a great distance from their native homes, and all they held dear. They thought that if any one case of oppression could, here be more unjust than another, it must be that exercised towards the aborigines of this country. We had driven their ancestors from their native hunting grounds, and often with great slaughter; we had forced their descendants to retire into the farthest wildernesses of the west, to seek for sustenance; and were still urging them forward with an eagerness, which one would think could not be satisfied, until it should see them drowned in the Pacific Ocean itself. We were indebted to them for our country—we owed to them ages of atonement, for wrongs inflicted upon them. It was therefore as trifling a duty as could be performed towards them, to treat their offspring with humanity—at any rate, to see that the law of the land was not perverted to the destruction of their rights.—That law, hostile as it was to every feature and complexion, not of the European cast, had not dared to lay its grasp upon the Indian skin, as it had done upon that of the African, by declaring *it prima facie* evidence of slavery. Yet often, as in the instance before us, was this law called in to lend its sacred sanction, to the oppression which it had denounced. The acting committee, therefore, of this society, thought proper to file petitions for freedom, in behalf of these boys, in the Criminal Court of Baltimore County. In consequence of these petitions, subpoenas were had against their claimants, who appeared and entered into the usual recognizances—upon which the petitioners were remanded to them, to await the day of trial.—Afterwards, however, and before the session of another court, one of the petitioners complained, by counsel, of the bad treatment of his master—upon which representation, the court declared, that if any gentlemen would enter into an obligation, binding themselves, in case the said Fortune was adjudged a slave, to return him to his claimant, and pay him the amount of wages which he might have earned in the interim—that the said Fortune should forthwith be delivered to the charge of such gentlemen. Immediately several individuals stepped forward, and entered their recognizances—at the head of which, stood the name of Elisha Tyson. The petitioner was then handed over to these gentlemen, to pass a small portion of his life, in liberty and peace.

The case of these boys excited universal commiseration—and even slave holders felt an ardent desire that the two Indian orphans might not be deprived of that

freedom, which was the only thing of value they had inherited from their persecuted fathers. Evidence was collected, even before the filing of the petition, sufficient to throw a shade of doubt upon the title of the claimants—which doubt was increased by the *prima facie* evidence, impressed by nature, upon their form and features.

The trial of this cause was postponed from term to term, sometimes at the request of one party, and sometimes at the instance of another, until a very long period had elapsed, and considerable expense incurred on both sides. At length, the defendants being prepared, pressed for a final hearing.

The petitioners counsel appealed to the justice of the court, and magnanimity of their opponents, for the farther delay of one term only, when the return of their commissions, which had hitherto been prevented by unforeseen circumstances, would be certain. The court decided for an immediate and final disposal of the cause, unless the defendants were willing to induce the plaintiffs with a continuance. This they refused to do, although they had, from time to time, received a similar indulgence, at the hands of their opponents. The petitioners counsel thus compelled to withdraw their petition, determined to file a new one, which by law they were allowed to do.

In order to frustrate this determination, the defendants, at the suggestion of one of their counsel, famed for his acuteness, took a step unexpected and unprecedented.

This counsel knowing that a new petition could not be acted upon before the adjournment of the legislature, which was then in session, and (perhaps) foreseeing ultimate defeat, should the case be adjudicated, drew in the name of the Messrs. D's. a memorial to the General Assembly of Maryland, which, after a most plausible statement, concluded with praying that in all cases where a second petition should be filed upon the dismissal of the first, the last shall be rejected, unless it shall appear to the court, having cognizance of the case, that all the costs, attendant upon the trial of the former petition, shall have been duly and punctually paid, together with all reasonable expences and damages, incurred by the master, in the prosecution of his defence. This acute counsel knew very well the difficulty of prescribing bounds to damages and expences, which defendant masters might choose to term reasonable; and that the road to freedom would be much less expensive, as well as shorter, were benevolent men to purchase at once, and manumit these unfortunate petitioners.

This memorial, signed by the Messrs. D's, was referred by the legislature to the committee of grievances, and courts of justice; who, upon the *ex parte* declaration of the memorialists, founded one of the most irrational and undignified reports,

that ever emanated from any legislative committee. It was irrational, because it not only assumed erroneous premises, but drew from those premises the most absurd conclusions. It was undignified, because it descended from that high and independent ground, upon which they should have stood, to enlist in a partizan contest, on the side of two individuals, against a respectable body of their fellow citizens. The following are the concluding words of this report:

“The committee further report, that the said society, in Baltimore town, are numerous, wealthy, and influential, composed principally of Quakers, Methodists, and Emigrants from Ireland, since the revolution; and that they are connected with another society more numerous in Philadelphia.

“That the Messrs. D——’s have incurred expences in travelling to Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, and attending the execution of commissions, to the amount of two hundred and fifty pounds, which greatly exceeds the value of the slave; and it appears to the committee, that from the number, wealth, influence and industry of the society, with their extensive connexions, an individual has but slender chance of encountering them; and that if interest only was to be considered, he had better consent to give up a slave, than defend his right to him, when he is supported by such a powerful society.—That whatever may be the views and intentions of the society in general, the committee are of opinion, that, in this instance, they have interfered in an improper, indecent, and unjustifiable manner; and that their conduct has been unjust and oppressive, and cannot be warranted upon any principle by which good citizens ought to be actuated:—they are therefore of opinion, that the legislature ought to adopt measures to remedy such grievances.”

In reply to this flaming report, the Abolition Society addressed to the legislature a calm and rational memorial; in which, after contradicting the misrepresentations of the committee, founded on the *ex parte* declarations of the memorialists, and entering into a full statement of facts, amounting in substance to what I have already detailed, in relation to the case of the two Indian boys, they conclude—“Your memorialists will take up no more of that time which the business of the public demands, but feel the firmest confidence, that every member of this honorable house must be fully convinced, in the words of the ‘report,’ with only *few* variations, that whatever may be the views and intentions of the society in general, they have *not*, in this instance, interfered in an improper manner; and that their conduct has *not* been unjust and oppressive, but is warranted by every principle by which good citizens ought to be actuated; and that every suggestion and idea, that has been entertained to the contrary, has been founded upon the grossest misrepresentation and imposition.”

This memorial arrived at Annapolis, timely enough to have a simultaneous in-

troductio[n] with the report of the committee of grievances and courts of justice. After the latter had been read to the House of Delegates, a motion was made that they should hear, also, the “memorial.” Such was the temper of the house, that even this privilege was obtained with difficulty—the proposition giving rise to a sharp debate, and assented to by a majority of but six individuals.—After which, *the question* was put on the resolution: “that the said society, in the part they have taken in behalf of the said petitioners,” (meaning the said Indian boys,) “have conducted themselves in a most uncandid, unjustifiable, and oppressive manner; and their conduct cannot be justified upon any principle by which good citizens ought to be actuated.” Strange as it may seem, this resolution was carried by a majority of thirty-three. It was also resolved: “that the memorial of the said society is indecent, illiberal, and highly reprehensible; and, moreover, is as untrue, as it is illiberal.”

If the committee of grievances acted an irrational and undignified part, in enlisting on the side of the Messrs. D——s, in their private disputes, what shall we say of their principals, the delegated representation of the state? who though more exalted in rank than the “committee,” as a body, yet condescended lower than they, in the language of vituperation and unqualified abuse, against some of the most respectable and virtuous individuals in the community—who entered into the very feelings, malevolent as they were, of those whose cause they espoused? We shall be compelled to use towards *them*, by way of retaliation the language which they had dared to use towards this respectable society. In making these remarks, we allude to the majority of those who then constituted the general assembly.—There were some even among those who went the whole length with the friends of the memorialists, who acted under a belief that they were doing their duty, however mistaken the premises from which they drew so strange a conclusion—Our reason for saying so is, because some of these were of the highest rank in the state for talents, and character for integrity—Of most, however, we may not only say what we have said, but may also add, that being, like the memorialists, accustomed to hold large numbers of human beings in bondage, their sympathies for these two individuals, was only another name for self interest; and that as slaveholders, their hostility to the “Abolition Society of Maryland,” was only an attitude of self-defence against the anticipated attacks of that holy alliance of freemen against tyranny, which might one day against them, as against the Messrs. D——s, be exerted, to burst asunder those unlawful fetters, which it had been the study of their lives to rivet and perpetuate. The names of *such* individuals we can find recorded among the thirty-one who lent their sanction to the following preamble and resolution, intended for the highest roll in the ladder of this injustice, but which, for the honor of our state, was rejected—though by a majority of *one* only.—

“Whereas the people of Maryland have happily an efficient government, adequate to all the purposes of society, and have subsisting laws, which, as administered by our courts of judicature, have been found abundantly sufficient to protect all descriptions of people in the enjoyment of their rights and privileges, without the intervention of any association of men whatever; *therefore, resolved*, that the ‘society for the abolition of slavery,’ established in Baltimore town, is altogether unnecessary; their conduct as disclosed in the case of the Messieurs D——’, already become oppressive, and subversive of the rights of our citizens; and the principles of their association, as submitted to the house, repugnant to the laws and constitution of the state.” In addition to what we have already said concerning this preamble and intended resolution, we may add our belief that it was designed by some of those who framed it, as the first step towards the absolute and uncontrollable dominion of domestic tyranny over the whole colored population of this state.—The freedom of speech and liberty of the press, sacred on all other occasions, was to be proscribed when exerted in their behalf; and they who in future should have the temerity to step forward in order “to raise a humble bondsman from the dust,”⁴⁰ buried there by the hands of *unlawful* force, were hereafter to be put under the ban of the state.

The “Society,” though abused by those who should have been their guardians, were not in a hopeless situation: for their public character, they had higher tribunal than the legislature to which they could appeal—the tribunal of the *people*; and to this they did resort: they published the whole proceedings, accompanied with an energetic address to “the citizens of Maryland.” Which was received with enthusiasm in every quarter. The most enlightened portions of this state were long and loud in condemnation of the conduct of their delegates. Nor was the spirit which animated these, confined to Maryland. Throughout the United States, the newspapers echoed and re-echoed the voice of Maryland.—And the abolition society saw with pride the approbation of their own consciences confirmed and sweetened by the universal applause of their countrymen.

The conduct of the legislature, therefore, would have been a cause of exultation rather than regret to the “Society,” had it ended at the point to which our history has brought it—what they had hitherto declared and resolved being nothing but

*“The windy suspiration of forced breath,”*⁴¹

40. 1 Samuel 2:8: “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifeth the beggar from the dung-hill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory.”

41. *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 2: “’Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother / Nor customary suits of solemn black / Nor windy suspiration of forced breath / No, nor the fruitful river in the eye / Nor the dejected havior of the visage / Together with all forms, moods, shows of grief / That can denote me truly.”

would have mingled harmlessly with the ambient air, and been despised like all other vapours, that are disagreeable without being noxious. But the passage of these, unfortunately, was the ushering in of the law alluded to in the commencement of this detail, by which the course of justice in the case of the two Indian boys was effectually arrested, and which has since been of serious inconvenience to the general cause of freedom.—For it was enacted that in all future cases of freedom, in any court of law in Maryland, where a first petition shall be dismissed, a second petition should not be filed, by the same party, untill all the costs in the preceeding case shall have been paid.

In the case of the Indian boys, the committee of grievances and courts of justice, had already estimated the expenses of the Messrs. D——’s to the amount of two hundred and fifty pounds. As there was reason to fear that the court, to whose adjudication the case should be submitted, would confirm this estimate, the acting committee were compelled to abandon these unfortunate victims to their hapless destiny. Mr. Tyson at that time was extremely low and depressed in his circumstances, yet, even in such a situation, he was very desirous to contribute a great proportion of his small income to a subscription, in which he vainly importuned others to assist. The payment by himself, of the whole demand, valuable as money was at that time, would have swept the bottom of his shallow purse; and breaking up the foundation of his future wealth, would have destroyed the means of future and more extensive usefulness. But it is doubtful whether any single individual, unless he possessed the wealth of Croesus,⁴² would have been justified in paying, out of his solitary pocket, the price of a second trial; because he would have been compelled to act a partial part—since such were the demands, occasioned by the passage of this law, that hardly the wealth of Croesus could have responded to them all.

Considerable alteration took place in the General Assembly of Maryland after this contest; so much so that the abolition society ventured to petition them at the very next session, in behalf of the humane law, the history of whose origin, I have already, (somewhat prematurely perhaps,) described; and the changes at every election, (which is held annually,) continued to be so great, and so favourable, that in five years from the boisterous session of ’91, this law was enacted.—All which fully proves, that the people of Maryland were not in general hostile to the views of this society; and that the legislature of ’91 did not speak their sentiments, when they ventured to anathematize one of the most respectable associations of citizens that a good cause ever collected together.

42. Croesus (585–546 BCE) was king of Lydia (located now in western Turkey) and renowned for his wealth.

About this time, the public attention was turned to the subject of the moral and religious instruction of the colored people. It was a novel subject at that time.—So necessary for the public welfare, was it universally thought, to keep these people in the profoundest ignorance, that the attempt to enlighten their minds, was at first considered almost an act of treason against the state, and provoked a warm contest in this city, between the friends and opponents of the measure. It was not considered as a question of justice, or injustice. No one pretended to support the abstract notion, that it was criminal to cultivate the human mind, in whatever body it might be found. The supposition of mind, supposes, necessarily, its capacity of being cultivated. As it is with all its capacities, the gift of God, to improve it is a duty we owe ourselves, and the very same reason which makes its improvement in ourselves a duty, makes it criminal to prevent its cultivation in others. This question, like that of the abolition of the slave trade, was treated by the enemies of liberty, as a question of expediency and policy. And their arguments, like those in the former case, even admitting that they established the end of their exercise, proved the badness of their cause. For they went to shew the *impolicy* of justice—the expediency of tyranny—the prudence of oppression—since it was admitted by them to be unjust, tyrannical and oppressive to enchain in ignorance, and mental abasement, the minds of those whose bodies had been fettered in slavery. Their conclusion, if logically correct, being one in nature with their premises, could not be other than corrupt. But the truth was, their conclusion was as absurd in logic, as their premises were false in fact, if the arguments through which they arrived at it, were such, as they have been represented by tradition. Time, however, and experience, has exposed their fallacy to the satisfaction of all. Multitudes under the benign system of education, introduced by the abolition society, have been instructed in the ways of knowledge; and the lives and conduct of these have evinced, not only the safety, but the policy of that instruction. It has been discovered, that just in proportion as their minds have been expanded, has their conduct been peaceable and orderly: wisdom unfolds to them the necessities of their condition, the folly of repining, where repining could only beget additional sources of sorrow; and this knowledge produces acquiescence in their fate.

Religion, too, followed in the train of knowledge. In the present state of the world, in which mankind regard form and ceremony as indispensable to the worship of the Deity, some knowledge of letters is necessary; for without it these forms and ceremonies cannot be properly observed, much less understood. The disposition and capacity, therefore, on the part of the colored population for public worship, gave rise to African churches in the city of Baltimore. A sufficient number of

these have been erected for the accommodation of the whole colored population of the city. They are well attended; and through them religion is brought, in aid of knowledge, to secure the public tranquility, against the designs of those who might be disposed to disturb it.

Of these churches, two, large enough to contain a thousand individuals, acknowledge the fostering hand of Tyson in their establishment. One of them in particular (the African Bethel Church)⁴³ owes its existence, almost entirely, to his exertions.

The abolition society of Maryland having existed seven years, become dissolved in the year seventeen hundred and ninety-eight.⁴⁴ From that time Mr. Tyson supported, alone, the cause of emancipation in Maryland.—Alone, I mean, as the sole director and prime mover of the machinery by which that cause was maintained.—Assisted he was, no doubt, from time to time; but that assistance was procured through his influence, or rendered effectual under his inspection and advice.⁴⁵

Chapter V.

Before we pursue Mr. Tyson any further in the course of benevolence, which we have been hitherto describing, let us look at him in another department of philanthropy. As though the theatre of his native state, and one class of men, were not large enough for the comprehensiveness of his charity, we see him in the wilds of the west, climbing mountains—traversing wildernesses—daring the rapid torrent—and plunging through the deep and expansive morass, to seek out the untutored children of the forest, and teach them the arts of civilization and peace.

The society of Friends, in North America, had at an early period turned their attention to the civilization of the Aborigines of this country. In their endeavors

43. The African Bethel Church, today the Bethel AME Church, began as the African Methodist Society in 1785. It then became the Bethel Free African Society before formally separating from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1797 and becoming the African Methodist Bethel Church of Baltimore City in 1811.

44. This is an arithmetic error; the Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery existed for nine years.

45. [*Author's note*] One of his most active assistants was his brother Jesse, much younger than Elisha. He followed him to this state a few years after the arrival of the latter, was an active member of the abolition society, and continued to the day of his death to co-operate with Elisha. [*Editor's note*: Jesse Tyson lived from 1761 to 1821.]

to effect this object, they pursued a course very different from that pursued by most religious societies on this continent. *These*, as an indispensable *preliminary*, have always attempted to christianize the Indian, by sending missionaries among them. The society of Friends, on the contrary, have attempted solely to civilize them; thinking it most proper that christianity should follow in the train of civilization.—Experience has proved the correctness of the course. Christianity is not calculated for *barbarous* nations, nor has the attempt to disseminate its principles among them ever been successful.—A few, here and there, have been received as converted, while they retained their original manners and customs; but all of these will be found, on examination, to have been converted from one superstition to another—the superstition, not the religion of christianity.

But whatever may be the true opinion, as respects the practicability, no one, on reflection, can doubt the impolicy of making conversion to any religion, the forerunner of civilization. Though a few savages may be found, who will listen to the persuasive eloquence of the missionary, and believe the tales and adopt the legends of his religion, yet most of them will shrink from him with repugnance and disgust. There is nothing which all tribes of men cherish with such eager fondness as their religious prejudices—any sudden and direct attempt to root them out, will be regarded as sacrilegious, and, for that reason, received with horror.

We recollect having seen this sentiment forcibly expressed, and our whole doctrine on this subject eloquently expounded, in a printed address originally delivered by a celebrated Indian orator, around a council fire held at the request, and in the presence, of sundry missionaries, sent among them by a religious society in New York, for the purpose of converting them to their faith.

“The great *Sasteretsey*⁴⁶ who gave your religion to you, gave ours to us. Yours is the religion of white people—ours is the religion of red men.—Would our religion suit the whites? no.—Why therefore should the religion of the whites be suited to red men? Do we ever disturb the whites in the exercise of their religion? no.—Why, therefore, should they disturb us.

“The Quakers treat us more kindly—they furnish us with ploughs, with horses and oxen—they do more: they shew us how to use them—they teach us how to raise corn and rye—they teach us how we shall be able to live, when the wild deer

46. [Author's note] Great Spirit. [Editor's note] John Shoemaker Tyson spelled this Native term inconsistently, but other contemporaneous sources spell the word as “Sasteretsey,” and so all uses of the term have been brought into conformity with that spelling.

of our forests shall have fled beyond the great Miami.⁴⁷ For all this kindness, they do not ask us to change our religion.”

I offer this extract, not because I approve of *all* the sentiments it contains, but for the purpose of shewing, that while such sentiments shall be entertained by the Indian nations, it will be impossible for missionary establishments to succeed among them.

So early as seventeen hundred and ninety-five, the yearly meeting of Friends, held in Baltimore, “influenced,” to use their own language, “by the kindness of the Indian ancestry to them in the early settlement of this country, and also by that exalted benevolence and good will to men which their holy profession inculcates,” believed it their duty to do something towards instructing the aborigines of this country in the knowledge of agriculture, and the useful mechanic arts.

For these objects, a subscription was immediately opened, and filled; deputies were appointed, who, with the approbation of the government of the United States, proceeded with instructions to visit the Shawnese, Delawares, Wyandots, and other nations of Indians, north west of the river Ohio. Little success attended, both this mission and a second one, in seventeen hundred and ninety-seven.— But a third, in seventeen hundred and ninety-eight, was more fortunate. Tarhie,⁴⁸ the principal chief of the Wyandot nation, presented the missionary with a belt of wampum, as a token of great friendship, and accompanied the present with an encouraging speech, of which the following is an extract:

BRETHREN QUAKERS!

You remember that we once met at a certain place, at which meeting many good things were said, and much friendship was professed between us.

Brothers:

You told us at that time, that you not only took us by the *hand*; but that you held us fast by the *arm*; that you then formed a chain of friendship. You said that it was not a chain of iron; but that it was a chain of precious metal, a chain of silver that would never get rusty; and that this chain would bind us in brotherly affection forever.

Brethren listen:

We have often heard that you were good and faithful people, ever ready to do justice and good to all men, without distinction of color; therefore we love

47. The Great Miami River lies in southwestern Ohio and empties into the Ohio River near the intersection of the modern boundaries of Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky.

48. Tarhie (1742–1818) was also known by the Anglo-American nickname “The Crane.”

you the more sincerely, because of the goodness of your hearts, which has been talked of among our nations long since.

Brethren listen:

You have informed us that you intend to visit us; yes, that even in our tents and cabins, you will take us by the hand. You brethren cannot admit a doubt that we would be very happy to see you.

Brethren listen:

It is but proper to inform you, at this time, that when you do come forward to see us, you will, no doubt, pass by my wigwam at Sandusky. I will then take you, not only by the hand, but by the arm, and will conduct you safely to the grand council fire of our great *Sasteretsey*, where all good things are transacted, and where nothing bad is permitted to appear. When in the grand council of our *Sasteretsey*, we will then sit down together in peace and friendship, as brethren are accustomed to do after long absence, and remind each other, and talk, of those things that were done between our GOOD GRAND-FATHERS, when they first met upon this great island!

Brethren:

May the Great Spirit, the master of light and life, so dispose the hearts and minds of all our nations and people, that the calamities of war may never more be felt or known by any of them! that our roads and paths may never more be stained with the blood of our young warriors! and that our helpless women and children, may live in peace and happiness.

Encouraged by this, and the like addresses, the society of Friends repeated their efforts among the Indian nations—established agencies among them—presented them with the implements of husbandry, and taught them how to use them.

It was necessary, in furtherance of the great objects connected with these exertions, that deputies from the yearly meeting of Friends, held in Baltimore, should regularly be sent among the tribes. There was no power of compulsion vested in the society for this purpose—their religious principles forbade the offer of reward:—those who accepted the difficult and perilous duties of the office, volunteered their services—influenced by no other motives but those founded in benevolence.

It was *thus* that Mr. Tyson, at the advanced age of sixty years, stood forward and offered his services to his friends.

As most of his way lay over mountains, through trackless wildernesses, or deep rivers, he was obliged to travel on horseback, a mode of conveyance more tiresome than any other, especially to an aged man.

James Gillingham, younger than Mr. Tyson, but advanced in years, and still a venerable citizen of Baltimore, influenced by the same benevolent feelings that operated upon Tyson, volunteered, also, to dare the dangerous journey.

In the beginning of the present century, these champions of human happiness, set out on their tour.⁴⁹

The close of their fourth day's journey found them at the foot of the south mountains. After crossing these, and the ridge of high hills beyond them, they descended into the broad and fertile valley of Connecocheague.⁵⁰

They could not avoid contrasting the beautiful prospect presented to them by this valley, with the barren ones, exhibited by many other portions of their native state: and as it was cultivated by the hands of freemen, they naturally concluded, that to this circumstance, this valley owed its superiority. The soil of Maryland, in every part, was fruitful, until slavery and tobacco united to impair it.

In a few days, they found themselves crossing one of the steeps of the Alleghanies, that huge ridge of mountains, denominated the back bone of the United States, and said to be the counterpart to the Andes of South America. In the midst of a storm of wind and snow, they descended to the plain, below, fatigued but not overcome.

They passed through Concord in the state of Ohio, where a gentleman, by the name of David Graves, nobly offered to share the toils of their journey.

On the twenty-third day of their tour, they reached the town of Chilicothe, in the same state, where they were detained some time, in consequence of the unusual swell of intermediate waters.

After this, commenced their greatest privations; when after passing whole days without food for themselves, or (what is worse to the traveller) for their horses—compelled repeatedly to lie on the floor of some cabin, and occasionally on the bare ground—a stone for their pillow, and the canopy of Heaven for their covering.

They passed through extensive Prairies, one of which, forty miles in breadth, was a continuous marsh, through the whole of which they were obliged to plunge—So deep was it, that the hat of Mr. Tyson falling from his head beneath the feet of his horse, was sunk beyond the possibility of recovery. They began to be alarmed, lest their faithful beasts, fatigued by much exertion, would sink in the morass never to rise again, in the midst of an uninhabitable wild, waving its long grass to the wind further than the eye could reach, like the surface of the intermi-

49. In 1862, Gerard Hopkins, a Quaker businessman and former member of the Maryland Society for the Abolition of Slavery, published a journal of a "visit to the Western Indians" that he made with a Quaker delegation that included Elisha Tyson. Hopkins remembered the trip taking place in 1804. A contemporaneous journal kept by James Gillingham, however, clearly indicates that the travels described here took place in 1808.

50. The Conococheague Valley runs through southern Pennsylvania and western Maryland.

nable ocean. Providentially, however, they crossed the vast meadow, and arrived at a habitation, where they and their half famished horses found food in abundance, and sufficient shelter.

On the thirty-fourth day they arrived at Staunton, on the great Miami River, where they were detained several days, in consequence of the great and sudden swell of the neighboring streams.

At length, leaving Staunton, they rode through the Loramies,⁵¹ a large branch of the great Miami, the water rising to the saddle skirts. The Loramies being very serpentine, they were obliged to cross it again, but in a place so deep, that their horses were compelled to swim.

In this way, they continued to ride through forest and fen, and river—enduring the pains of hunger, and fatigue, through lonely regions, uninhabited save by the wolf, the panther, and the bear, until, at last, on the eleventh day of May, they arrived at Fort Wayne, situated in what was then the territory, but now state, of INDIANA.

This fortification was built for the protection of the north western frontier of the United States, and was, at that time, the remotest military establishment in that quarter.

Commencing at this post, and spreading in every direction beyond it, was the region inhabited by the various tribes of Indians; among whom the chief were the Potowatomies, the Miamies, the Delawares, and the Wyandots.

At this place they were immediately waited upon by the factor of the American government, Mr. John Johnston,⁵² whose house, through pressing invitation, they made their home.

Through the politeness of captain Heald,⁵³ commander of the Fort, they were handsomely entertained at Fort Wayne—the captain and other officers spared no pains to render their condition comfortable. With these, and with the Indian factor, they immediately consulted about the best mode of serving the cause of humanity among the Indian tribes, and concluded to invite their chiefs and principal men to a conference within the walls of the Fort.

In the mean time, they held “a talk” with Winnemaha,⁵⁴ chief of the Potowatomies, and others of that tribe.—This was necessary, as much dissatisfaction had

51. Loramie Creek is a tributary of the Great Miami River in what is today western Ohio.

52. John Johnston (1775–1861) was an Indian agent in the Northwest Territory for roughly thirty years.

53. Captain Nathan Heald (1775–1832) was commander at Fort Wayne from 1807 to 1810.

54. A reference to Winamac, the name of a series of Potawatomi chiefs from the late 1600s through the era of the War of 1812.

been expressed by Winnemaha, in consequence, as he said, of ill treatment towards him, on the part of his great Father,⁵⁵ who had promised to send some young men with tools to assist him in farming, but had failed so to do.

To do away this impression, they informed him, that an agent had been sent to the Potowatomies and Miamies, with the intention of assisting them in the cultivation of their lands, but that they had refused to receive him; the consequence of which was, that he was compelled to leave them and go among the Shawnese, from whom he had a much better reception. With much difficulty, they removed his prejudices, and appeased his anger.

Previous to the meeting of the grand council, to be held at Fort Wayne, it was thought proper to visit the Misissinaway Indians at a place of the same name, near the head of the Wabash river. At the time appointed, Mr. Tyson was unable to join his companions. The consequences of his great fatigue, and exposure, through his long journey, having affected him from time to time, at last burst with violence on his frame. Medical aid was immediately administered; and by care and skill, his valuable life was preserved. In a short time, he met his friends, who were then at the house of a friend, in the neighborhood of Misissinaway.

Here, they received intelligence, that the great bane of savage as well as civilized life, ardent spirits, had been introduced among the Misissinaway Indians to a great extent, and that at that time, they were so furious with liquor, that they were actually killing one another. Their chief, however, the celebrated WHITE LOON,⁵⁶ was sober enough to lament the condition of his tribe, to execrate the worse than savage traders, who introduced poison into the habitations of the unsuspecting Indians, and for the sake of lucre, ruined the bodies and souls of those whom they were bound, by every tie of honor and humanity; to preserve from physical and moral harm.

With WHITE LOON, they had some considerable conversation; which, no doubt, was fraught with instruction, calculated to benefit him, and through him, his tribes.

Leaving this chief, they proceeded to a settlement of Indians on Eel River,⁵⁷ not far distant, where they met with a better prospect, and more success. After they had communicated some instruction to these, they were informed the Misissinaways

55. [Author's note] The President of the United States.

56. Wapamangwa (1769–1876), also known by the Anglo-American nickname White Loon, was a leader among the Miami tribe. “Misissinaway” refers to the Mississinewa River in Indiana along which numerous Miami villages were located.

57. The Eel River is a tributary of the Wabash River in what is now northern Indiana.

had returned to their reason. Thinking *that* a proper time to call them together, they invited a meeting. The Eel river Indians also attended. The assembly was large. Mr. Tyson delivered an address, in which he depicted the horrors of drunkenness, descanted upon the necessity they were under to cultivate their lands, and the value of industrious habits. The audience of red men listened with profound attention, and seemed deeply affected.

White Loon made a pertinent reply, but reserved many remarks, he said, “until the grand council fire about to be kindled at Fort Wayne.” A few days after, our travellers, in company with several chiefs, assembled again together. The pipe of peace was handed round and instructive advice given to the Indians.

The day for the grand council approached, and the Indians began to assemble in the vicinity of Fort Wayne. The white Loon, chief of the Misissinaways, the chiefs of the upper and lower village Indians, the chief of the Eel river Indians, the Little Turtle,⁵⁸ a chief of the Potowatomies, Five Medals,⁵⁹ a chief of the Miamies, Wapakee,⁶⁰ a celebrated warrior, and several other chiefs of the adjacent tribes, together with a large number of Indians, met within the walls of Fort Wayne.

Of these, Five Medals, White Loon, Little Turtle and Wapakee, were the most conspicuous. Five Medals was famous for his dignity of conduct, his wisdom, and powers of oratory. White Loon for his courage in war, and great attention to the interests of his tribe, who revered him as a father. Little Turtle combined the skill and courage of the warrior, with the sagacity of a politician, and eloquence of a finished orator. He had been much grieved by the alarming effects, which the increasing use of ardent spirits had produced among his tribe. In the year eighteen hundred and two, having, in company with Five Medals and several other chiefs, visited the President of the United States, on his return home he tarried a few days in Baltimore, where, in a conference with “the committee of FRIENDS on Indian affairs,” he made a most pathetic and impressive address on the subject of drunkenness. As this speech refers to the condition of the Indian nations, at the time of the visit of Mr. Tyson among them, and as his mission was greatly with a view to expose and alter this condition. It will not be improper to furnish an extract.

58. Michikinikwa (1747–1812), also known by the Anglo-American nickname Little Turtle, was actually a Miami chief and military leader. He was the father-in-law of White Loon.

59. Wonongaseah, also known by the Anglo-American nickname Five Medals, was actually a leader among the Potawatomi.

60. Almost certainly a reference to Wenebeset (1768–1816), also known by the French nickname Main Poc, a military leader among the Potawatomi.

Brothers and Friends:

When our forefathers first met on this great Island, your red brethren were very numerous! But since the introduction among us, of what you call spiritous liquors, and what we think may justly be called poison, our numbers are greatly diminished. It has destroyed a great part of your red brethren.

My Brothers and Friends:

We plainly perceive, that you see the very evil which destroyed your red brethren; it is not an evil of our own making; we have not placed it among ourselves; it is an evil placed among us by the white people; we look to them to remove it out of our country. We tell them: brethren, bring us useful things; bring goods that will clothe us, our women and our children; and not this evil liquor, that destroys our reason, that destroys our health, that destroys our lives. But all we can say on this subject, is of no service, nor gives relief to your red brethren.

My Brothers and Friends:

I rejoice to find that you agree in opinion with us, and express an anxiety to be, if possible, of service to us, in removing this great evil out of our country; an evil which has had so much room in it; and has destroyed so many of our lives, that it causes our young men to say, "we had better be at war with the white people." This liquor, which they introduce into our country, is more to be feared than the gun and the tomahawk. There are more of us dead, since the treaty of Greenville,⁶¹ than we lost by the six years war before. It is all owing to the introduction of this liquor amongst us.

Brothers:

When our young men have been out hunting, and are returning home, loaded with skins and furs, on their way, if it happens, that they come along where some of this whiskey is deposited, the white man who sells it, tells them to take a little drink; some of them will say "no, I do not want it;" they go on till they come to another house, where they find more of the same kind of drink; it is there offered again; they refuse; and again the third time. But finally, the fourth or fifth time, one accepts of it and takes a drink; and getting one, he wants another; and then a third, and a fourth, till his senses have left him. After his reason comes back to him again; when he gets up and finds where he is, he asks for his peltry. The answer is, "you have drank them." Where is my gun? "It is gone." Where is my blanket? "It is gone." Where is my shirt? "You have sold it for whiskey!!" Now Brothers, figure to yourselves, the condition of this man.

61. The Treaty of Greenville (1795) brought an end to several years of warfare between the United States and a confederation of Indian nations in the Northwest Territory. By its terms, much of what became Ohio was ceded to the United States.

He has a family at home; a wife and children, who stand in need of the profits of his hunting. What must be their wants, when he himself, is even without a shirt!

The little Turtle was now old, and afflicted with the rheumatism, which had impaired much of his vigor, both of mind and body.

The qualities of Wapakee, were wholly warlike. He was of a gigantic size, stern, ferocious, and wild. Although he had lost his left arm, he was at that time, the bravest and most successful warrior of all the Indian tribes.—The red men looked upon him with terror, and trembled in his presence. His blood being a mixture of the Sioux and Potowatomy tribes, he professed to belong to each, and fought their respective battles. He was the chief who took the forty Osage prisoners, whom the United States, at a great price, had just redeemed.⁶² A war that had raged between the Osage Indians and the Sioux, had hardly been concluded by this redemption, when the former entered the territory of the Sioux, and killed ten of their warriors. The intelligence of this massacre, was then fresh in the memory of Wapakee, and unrevenged. He was therefore unfitted for consultation in a council, where the only topics of discussion, were the arts of Peace. He walked about with rapid strides, his forehead wrinkled with terrible frowns, breathing vengeance and brandishing his war-club in his hand. But the spirit of Wapakee which no dangers could terrify—no warlike power subdue—fell a prey to whiskey; and on the day of the grand council, he was sunk in inebriation. The assemblage of Indians on this occasion, afforded a fine opportunity to the inhuman sellers of whiskey, to vend their poison; which they did to such an extent, that Mr. Tyson and his companion thought proper to postpone a day later, the time of the meeting of the grand council.

At the hour appointed, the gates of the fortress were thrown open, and the assemblage of Indians admitted into the hall of conference. First, the chiefs advanced, took Mr. Tyson and his fellow missionary by the hand, and seated themselves apart by the side of each other. Their principal men next seated themselves, according to their respective rank and distinction—after them their young men—and lastly, the women, who occupied seats distinct from those of the men.

After a solemn pause, one of the chiefs arose, and stated, that they had come, not to make any speech of their own, except by way of reply to what the deputies might say to them, and were now ready to listen to their talk. It was then proposed, in the first place, to read an address that had been prepared for the Indians in that quar-

62. A reference to a raid carried out by Wenebeset in 1805.

ter, by the Committee of Friends in Baltimore, appointed by their yearly meeting to take cognizance of Indian affairs—next they read speeches delivered by little Turtle, and five medals on the subject of civilization—and lastly, they read a speech of their own, and the speech of little Turtle on the subject of spirituous liquors, an extract of which, we have already given.

Mr. Tyson then addressed the council. He painted in glowing colours the dreadful effects of intemperance—both upon civilized and savage life—told them that they must resolve to abstain *entirely* from it. If they admitted it at all among them, it would soon conquer them, and reduce them to a condition worse than that of the brute creation. That not until they abandoned altogether, the rise of ardent spirits, would they be fit subjects for civilization. If they were ready to do this, he would then unfold to them the blessings of civilization—the superiority of such a condition over the one in which they then subsisted.—He traced their history from the earliest period to the present time—shewed them how, as the white population had expanded itself, they had retreated into the western wilderness—that if they did not remain, but continued to retreat, in a few years they would have no territory upon this continent. In order, therefore, to their permanent establishment, he recommended to them the practice of agriculture, as a substitute for hunting. He advised them to mark out their lands, and ask advice of the agents established by the society of Friends among them, with respect to their cultivation. They stood ready, not only with their advice, but with their assistance—they were furnished for their use with all the necessary implements of husbandry—with beasts of the plough also, and beasts of burden.

They had come a great distance, endured much privation and fatigue, in order to see them, and must endure a great deal more before they could again behold their wives and their children. But they could bear it all with patience, nay with joy, if they could only have the satisfaction of seeing them adopt the disinterested advice which he had thus given them.

Upon the conclusion of this address, it being signified that the deputies had communicated all they had to say. The chiefs arose as their custom is, and advanced towards the deputies—these did the same—both parties met in the middle of the hall, the chiefs then with countenances of deep and solemn gravity, took the deputies by their hands and grasped them with fervor. Immediately the whole assembly rose. The White Loon then signified, that if they were left by themselves for a short time, they would prepare their answer; after which, the deputies might return again. The deputies accordingly arose and walked towards the door. As they passed, they could not avoid remarking the thoughtfulness, in which the whole assembly seemed absorbed, no eye bent on vacancy, or wandering in curiosity, but

all fixed and motionless, as if spell bound by the novelty and importance of the subjects which they had just heard discussed.

In about two hours, the deputies were informed, that the Indians had prepared their answer, and were ready to receive them again in council.

Five Medals first rose, expressed his approbation of what had been said, and hoped that the advice which, had been given would be followed—"There is one subject," said he, "which presses on my mind. Your red brethren have always been taught to look on the President of the United States, as their Great Father.—When, therefore, our Great Father told Winnemah, that he would assist us, by sending an agent here, skilled in agriculture, with a sufficiency of every thing necessary to enable us to farm our lands, he believed him; and when Winnemah told his people, they believed, and rejoiced at the goodness of our Great Father.

Brothers:

When the time came, when we were to look for this aid, behold it did not arrive—tis true that you have told us that an agent sent by government did come to our territory; if this was so he must have arrived at a time when we were abroad; was it not his duty then to have remained until our return?"

Mr. Tyson endeavoured, as he had already done, to explain this matter. He did so to the satisfaction of all, excepting, perhaps, the Five Medals.

The White Loon next rose, "in act more graceful and humane." His reputation among the Indians, for eloquence, was below that of the FIVE MEDALS, but on this occasion he proved himself superior.

"Brothers," said he:

"Ever since your great father Onas, (William Penn,) came upon this great island, the Quakers have been the friends of red men. They have proved themselves worthy of being the descendants of their great father. And now, when all the whites have forgotten that they owe any thing to us, the Quakers of Baltimore, though so far distant from us, have remembered the distressed condition of their red brethren, and interceded with the great spirit in our behalf.

Brothers:

You have travelled very far to see us—you have climbed over mountains—you have swam over deep and rapid torrents—you have endured cold, and hunger and fatigue—in order that you might have an opportunity of seeing your red brethren. For this, so long as life exists within us, we shall be very grateful.

Brothers:

That wide region of country, over which you have passed, was once filled with red men. Then was there a plenty of deer and buffaloe, and all kinds of

game. But the white people came from beyond the great water; they landed in multitudes on our shores; they cut down our forests; they drove our warriors before them, and frightened the wild herds, so that they sought security in the deep shades of the west.

Brothers:

These white men were not *your* grand fathers:—for, as I said before, the sons of *Onas* were always the friends of red men.

Brothers:

The whites are still advancing upon us. They have reached our territory, and have built their wigwams, within our very hunting grounds. Our game is vanishing away.

Brothers:

Formerly our hunters pursued the wild deer, and the buffaloe, and the bear; and when they killed them they ate their flesh for food, and used their skins as covering for themselves, their old men, their women, and their children.—But now, they kill them that they may have plenty of skins and furs to sell to the white men. The consequence of this is, the game is destroyed wantonly, and faster than our necessities require.

Brothers:

We would not mind all this, provided these skins and furs were exchanged for useful articles—for implements of husbandry, or clothes for our old men, our women, and our children.—But they are too often bartered away for whiskey, that vile poison, which has sunk even Wapakee into the dust.

Brothers:

We shall soon be under the necessity either of leaving our hunting grounds, or of converting them into pastures and fields of corn. Under the kind assistance of our brothers, the Quakers, we have already proceeded a great way. You have witnessed, as you have passed among us, the good effects of the kindness of our brothers. We are disposed to go on as we have begun, until our habits and manners, as well as the face of our country, shall be changed, and look like those of the white people.

Brothers:

Accept from us this Belt of Wampum, and pipe of peace.—And may the Great Sasteretsey, who conducted you here in safety, still go with you, and restore you in peace and happiness to the arms of your women and children.”

After this, with ceremonies, such as those already described, but, if possible, accompanied with more solemnity, the chiefs dissolved the council.

Believing their further stay in those regions unnecessary, our travellers took their leave of their kind friends at Fort Wayne, and set out for home. The pains and privations of their return were, if possible, much greater than those which they en-

dured in their journey outward. Mr. Tyson, especially, in consequence of previous indisposition, felt the miseries of weariness.—And ere the expiration of his tour, could not, but with great difficulty, maintain himself upon his saddle. The happy moment, however, when he was to throw himself into the arms of his wife and children, at length arrived, and he soon forgot his sufferings in their fond endearments.

In tracing the footsteps of these two worthy men, every thing we see is calculated to excite our applause and admiration. We applaud the philanthropic hearts that conceived purposes so noble, and the intrepid and manly spirits that dared to fulfil them, through a host of difficulties almost insurmountable.—And our admiration is raised to the highest pitch, when we see these good spirits, a thousand miles distant from their native home, in the midst of an illimitable wilderness, without any state power or adventitious influence, with no support but the sincerity of their hearts, assembling the wild men of the woods—awing them into silence—softening their ferocity—and, by the magic tones of their persuasive voice, taking captive their imaginations while they described the dignity of civilized life, until the whole convocation of discordant tribes with one voice declared their resolution to change their manners and customs, nay their very nature, and become the docile subjects of law and government.

Mr. Tyson has left behind him no written memorial, whence could be obtained the particulars, no doubt deeply interesting, of this tour. Though he enjoyed the wild and romantic diversity of mountains and meadows, rivers and forests, that rose before him at every step, and could look with warm emotion through this grand display of nature, “up to nature’s God;”⁶³ yet it was not for these that he left the comforts of domestic life. It was the grand moral scenery of the universe upon which his eye delighted to revel, and which he explored in every species of its vast variety. It was in his character of *father of the human race*, that he loved to adore the great first cause of all things.

Chapter VI.

On his return home, Mr. Tyson renewed his efforts in behalf of the persecuted Africans. Finding himself, as before described, alone in the cause, he redoubled those efforts, which one would think had already, been exerted to the uttermost.

The Domestic Slave Trade, which through his exertions, had suffered public

63. Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man: Epistle IV* (1733–1734), line 331: “Slave to no sect, who takes no private road / But looks through Nature up to Nature’s God.”

degradation, still existed, though it was now conducted by the most abandoned of their species. It could not have been expected, that in behalf of those unfortunate men, who were the victims, and against those remorseless beings who were the actors, in this traffic, there could have been much scrupulous or ceremonious hostility on the part of Mr. Tyson. It was like the hostility of Hannibal to Rome, everlasting and terrible.

This traffic gave rise to an evil still greater—I mean the crime of *kidnapping*.—If the horrors arising from the first, were so great as I have described them, how shall I depict those of the other! Slaves only, were the victims of the slave trade. In passing from hand to hand, they merely exchanged one condition of slavery for another. And though, on such occasions, they fell from a less degree of misery into a greater, they could not number among their privations any thing so bitter as the loss of liberty. It was this that made the difference between them and victims of the kidnapper. Not that they laid their hands exclusively upon the freeman, for some times their rapacity seized upon a slave. But this was very seldom, for the vigilance of slave owners was always alive to detect, and their vengeance, to punish such daring felony. In almost all cases of man stealing, the stolen beings were of those who had tasted the sweets of liberty. To the kidnapper who made these his prey, there were great facilities for escaping with impunity. Not only because in the depth and darkness of a dungeon, his limbs loaded with fetters, and utterance choaked with a gag, his suffering could not be made visible, or audible—but, also, because the deadness of sensibility, on this subject, which still pervaded the public, though in a less degree than formerly, seemed to have unnerved every eye, and palsied every ear. Sights of misery passed darkly before the one, and sounds of woe fell lifeless on the other.

But there was an eye that never slept, while rapacity was awake—there was an ear, open as the heavens, to the cry of suffering humanity.—They were those of Tyson.—Accordingly, we find him with the scrutiny of a censor, exploring every quarter, each dark avenue where suspicion lingered, to ferret out the man-stealer, and rescue his prey from destruction; bringing forth the one to punishment, and the other to light and liberty.

In doing this, he encountered much difficulty and danger. Many instances might be recorded, in which he evinced, a degree of intrepidity and perseverance in behalf of those suffering beings, which in another age, or another country, would have stamped him with the character of a hero. We shall select two or three of these, and give them to the reader.

On one occasion he received intelligence, that three colored persons, supposed to have been kidnapped, had been seen under suspicious circumstances, late in the

evening, with a notorious slave-trader, in a carriage, which was then moving rapidly towards a quarter of the precincts of Baltimore, in which there was a den of man-hunters. It was late in the day when he received the information; which was immediately communicated to the proper authorities. As the testimony offered to these, was not, in their opinions, sufficiently strong to induce them to act instantaneously.—Mr. Tyson was obliged to seek for aid in other quarters.—He accordingly requested certain individuals, who had sometimes lent him their assistance, to accompany him to the scene of suspicion, in order to obtain, if possible, additional proof. One after another made excuse—(some telling him that the evidence was too weak to justify any effort—and others saying that it would be better to postpone the business for the next morning,) until Mr. Tyson saw himself without the hope of foreign assistance.—But he did not yield or despair—one hope yet remained, and that rested on himself.—Alone he determined, to search out the den of thieves—to see and judge for himself. If there was no foundation for his suspicions—to dismiss them—if they were true, to call in the aid of the civil power, for the punishment of guilt, and the rescue of innocence.

So much time had been spent in receiving the excuses of his friends, that it was late at night when he set out on foot, and without a single weapon of defence, in the midst of silence and darkness, he marched along until he arrived at the place of destination.—It was situated in the very skirts of the city, a public tavern in appearance, but almost exclusively appropriated to a band of slave-traders. Here they conveyed their prey, whether stolen or purchased; here they held their midnight orgies, and revelled in the midst of misery. The keeper of this place was himself one of the party, and therefore not very scrupulous about the *sort* of victims, his companions chose to place beneath his care. Mr. Tyson ascended the door-sill, and, for a moment, listened, if perchance he might hear the sounds of woe. Suddenly a loud laugh broke upon his ears, which was soon lost in a chorus of laughter. Indignant at the sound, he reached forth his hand, and rapped with his whole might. No answer was received. He rapped again; again all was silence. He then applied himself to the fastening of the door, and finding it unlocked opened it and entered. Suddenly four men made their appearance. They had been carousing around a table, which stood in the centre of a room, when a little alarmed by the rapping at the door, they had gone in different directions to seize their weapons. Mr. Tyson immediately recognised in the countenance of one of these, who appeared to be their leader, the slave trader whose conduct had given rise to the suspicions that had brought him thither. Nor was it many moments before the person and character of Mr. Tyson became known.

"I understand," said he, "that there are persons confined in this place, entitled to their freedom."

"You have been wrongly informed," said the leader of the quartetto, "and, besides, what business is it of yours?"

"Whether I am wrongly informed," said Mr. Tyson, calmly, "can be soon made appear; and I hold it my business, as it is the business of every good man in the community, to see that all doubts of this kind are settled!"

"You shall advance no further," rejoined the leader, swearing a tremendous oath, and putting himself in a menacing attitude.

With the rapidity of lightning, and with a strength, that seemed to have been lent him for the occasion, Mr. Tyson broke through the arms of his opponent. As he had been repeatedly at this house on similar errands, he knew the course he should steer, and made directly for the door of the dungeon.—There he met another of the band, with a candle in one hand, and in the other a pistol, which, having cocked, he presented full against the breast of Mr. Tyson, swearing that he would shoot him if he advanced a step further.

"Shoot if thee dare," said Mr. Tyson, in a voice of thunder, "but thee dare not, coward as thou art, for well does thee know, that the gallows would be thy portion."

Whether it was the voice, and countenance of Mr. Tyson, or the terror of the word gallows that affected the miscreant, his arm suddenly fell, and he stood as if struck dumb with amazement. Mr. Tyson taking advantage of the moment, in the twinkling of an eye, snatched the candle from the hand of the kidnapper, entered the dungeon door, which was providentially unlocked, and descended into the vault below.

There he beheld a dismal sight, six poor creatures chained to each other by links connected with the prison wall! The prisoners shrunk within themselves at the sight of a man, and one of them uttered a shriek of terror, mistaking the character of their visitor.—He told them that he was their friend; and his name was Elisha Tyson. That name was enough for them, for their whole race had been long taught to utter it. He enquired, "if any of them were entitled to their freedom?" "Yes," said one, "these two boys say that they and their mother here are free, but she cant speak to you, for she is gagged." Mr. Tyson approached this woman, and found that she was really deprived of her utterance. He instantly cut away the band that held in the gag, and thus gave speech to the dumb. She told her tale, she was manumitted by a gentleman on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, her sons were born after her emancipation, and of course free. She referred to persons and

papers. She had come over the Chesapeake in a packet for the purpose of getting employment; and was, with her children, decoyed away immediately on her arrival by a person, who brought her to that house. Mr. Tyson told her to be of good comfort, for he would immediately provide the means of her rescue. He then left the dungeon and ascended the stair way, when he reached the scene of his preceding contest, he looked around, but saw no one save the keeper of the tavern. Fearing that the others had escaped, or were about to escape, he hastened out of the house, and proceeded with rapid strides in pursuit of a constable. He soon found one, and entreated his assistance. But the officer refused, unless Mr. Tyson would give him a bond of indemnity, against all loss which he might suffer by his interference. Mr. Tyson complied without hesitation. The officer, after summoning assistance, proceeded with Mr. Tyson to the scene of cruelty. There meeting with the tavern keeper, they compelled him to unlock the fetters of the three individuals claiming their freedom. They then searched the house for the supposed kidnappers, and found two of them in bed, whom, together with the woman and children, they conveyed that night to the gaol of Baltimore county, to await the decision of a court of justice. The final consequence was, the mother and children were adjudged free. One of the two slave-traders, taken as aforementioned in custody, was found guilty of having kidnapped them, and was sentenced to the Maryland penitentiary, for a term of years.

On another occasion, Mr. Tyson, having received satisfactory evidence that a colored person, on board a vessel about to sail for New-Orleans, in Louisiana, was entitled to his freedom, hastened to his assistance. On reaching the wharf, where the vessel had lain, he learnt that she had cleared out the day before, and was then lying at anchor, a mile down the river. He immediately procured two officers of the peace, with whom he proceeded in a batteau, with a full determination to board the suspected ship.

When he arrived along side, he hailed the captain, and asked him, whether such a person, (naming him,) having on board negroes destined for the New-Orleans market, was not among the number of his passengers? Before the captain had time to reply, the passenger alluded to, who had overheard the question, stepped to the side of the vessel, and recognising Mr. Tyson, asked what business *he* had with him? "I understand," said Mr. Tyson, "that a colored person," describing him, "now in thy possession, is entitled to his freedom." "He is my slave," said the trader—"I have purchased him by a fair title, and no man shall interfere between him and me."

"If these documents speak the truth," said Mr. Tyson, holding certain papers in his hand, "however fairly you have purchased him, he is not your slave." He then proceeded to read the documents.—At the same time a light breeze springing up,

the captain ordered all hands to hoist sail and be off. Mr. Tyson seeing that there was not a minute to be lost, requested the constables to go on board with him, for the purpose of rescuing the free man, who had been deprived of his rights. The trader immediately drew a dagger from his belt, (for this sort of men went always armed,) and swore that "the first man that dared set his foot upon the deck of that ship, was a dead man." "Then I will be that man," said Mr. Tyson, with a firm voice, and intrepid countenance, and sprang upon the deck. The trader stepped back aghast. The officers followed, and descended the hold of the ship. There they soon saw the object of their search. Without any resistance being made, on the part of a single person on board, they led their rescued prisoner along, and safely lodged him in the boat below. Then Mr. Tyson, addressing the trader, said: "If you have any lawful claim to this man, come along and try your title; if you cannot come, name your agent, and I will see that justice is done to all parties." The trader, who seemed dumb with confusion, made no answer; and Mr. Tyson requested his boatmen to row off. Ere they had proceeded half their distance from the ship, her sails were spread, and she began to ride down the stream. Had Mr. Tyson's visit been delayed half an hour longer, his benevolent exertions would have been in vain.

No one appearing to dispute the right of the colored man to freedom, his freedom papers were given him, and he was set at liberty.

Much has been said in praise of the moral sublimity exhibited in the conduct of Julius Caesar, when he said to the pilot who was afraid to put to sea in a storm: "Quid times? Caesarem vehis." "What do you fear? You carry Caesar."⁶⁴ And Lucan has enlarged upon it, in his "Pharsalia,"⁶⁵ in beautiful, though wild diffusion.—But even this scarcely equals the moral sublimity exhibited by Mr. Tyson, when he said to the slave-trader, who had sworn that the first man who stepped on board that ship, was a dead man, "I will be that man." The belief that fate was with him, made Caesar despise the storm. But the certain assurance that God Almighty would protect him, caused Mr. Tyson to despise the assassin's dagger.

The whole life of Mr. Tyson was diversified by acts such as we have just described. Those I have given to the reader may be considered as specimens merely, a few examples out of a vast many, which, if they were all repeated, would satiate by their number, and tire by their uniformity.

64. According to a legend relayed in Plutarch's *Lives*, during a military campaign Julius Caesar boarded a ship disguised as a slave and uttered the statement above to the crew, who feared passage during a storm.

65. In the epic poem *Pharsalia*, Lucan (39–65) describes the Roman civil war between the forces of Julius Caesar and those of Pompey.

The joy manifested by the poor creatures whom he thus rescued from misery, on their deliverance, may be imagined, but cannot well be described. Some times it broke forth in loud and wild demonstrations, some times it was deep and inexpressible, or expressed only by mingled tears of gratitude and extacy, rolling silently but profusely down their woe-worn checks.

Mr. Tyson, it is remarkable, would always turn his eyes from these manifestations. He would listen to no declarations of thanks. When these were strongly pressed upon him, he would usually exclaim, "well, that will do now—that is enough for this time:" and once when one of these creatures, fearful that Mr. Tyson would not consider him sufficiently grateful, cried out, "indeed master I am very thankful, I would die to serve you." Mr. Tyson exclaimed, "why man, I have only done my duty, I don't want thy thanks;" and turned abruptly away.

We have before seen that it was not the love of human fame—we now see that it was not the love of human gratitude—the pleasure of imposing obligations—the avarice of thanks, that propelled him along in this career of philanthropy. It was a sense of duty—a love of divine approbation. Believing that his master had bestowed upon him "the ten talents,"⁶⁶ and would look for a corresponding increase on the day of account he dreaded to bury them in the earth. He cultivated them, until they produced not other ten only—or ten fold, but an hundred fold. For this he who would not listen to the thanks of men, or witness the joy of their hearts, for blessings conferred by him upon them, now receives the praises, and mingles in the joy of Heaven.

Equalled only by the delight of the rescued victims, was the chagrin and vexation of the slave traders, when they saw their prey torn from their grasp.—They cursed the law—they cursed its ministers—but above all they invoked imprecations upon the head of Tyson.

These were not uttered in his presence—they were thought, not spoken—deep—not loud. The worse part, if indeed there were any degrees of comparison among them, dreaded as much as they hated him. All of them had felt more or less, and some very severely, the weight of his influence, and though they dared not court his favor, yet each individually was afraid, lest he might exasperate that vengeance, which he imagined him to possess, in common with himself. But when in company with others of the same fraternity, all fear hushed, and nothing but deep rooted hate awake, each bloody dealer, gave full vent to the boilings of his indignation.

They swore that they would murder him, that they would fire his dwelling over

66. A reference to the Parable of the Talents from Matthew 25: 14–30.

his head, that they would do a thousand things, all full of vengeance. None of these threats were ever put into execution, for though a plot was once laid to take away his life, fear dispersed the actors long before the day of performance. Thus does it always happen that the wickedest of men are also the meanest, and therefore the most dastardly. And thus did the cowardice of Mr. Tyson's enemies shield him from the effects of their enmity. Nor did he profit less by that *individual* fear of him, which these slave traders were made to feel.—They feared him because they deprecated his hostility. In order if possible to lessen this hostility, they frequently became informers on others engaged in the same traffic. This they were further inclined to do, in consequence of the jealousy that subsisted between them—a jealousy very natural to competitors in the same line of business.—It was always a time of exultation with them, when one of their number found his way into the penitentiary.

It sometimes happened that Mr. Tyson extracted from the mouths of these monsters, evidence, which afterwards went to criminate those who had uttered it. It was usual with him when he could not obtain testimony against a suspected person, to send for such person and interrogate him. No one refused his summons—fear forbid the refusal; and after they had come, the very fear which brought them there, sacrificed them to injured humanity. Sometimes those who came voluntarily for the purpose of criminating others, involved themselves in toils of their own weaving, where they were no sooner seen by the penetrating eye of Tyson, than he reached forth his hands and secured his astonished prisoner, before he had a suspicion of his danger.

Mr. Tyson's knowledge of the sort of people with whom he had principally to deal, was perfect. His quickness of perception and self command, were also remarkable. These qualifications gave him an extraordinary power in the examinations just alluded to. A Scottish Judge, the shrewdest and calmest of human beings, could not have interrogated with greater ingenuity and success, the criminals brought before him. Mr. Tyson would begin the dialogue in the most familiar style, and after talking sometime upon every day occurrences, he would introduce the principal subject of conversation as an ordinary matter. After dwelling upon it a short time, he would wander away, like one in a reverie following a train of images upon his mind, without any regard to logical connection. He would then come back to it again; and in this way would wander and return, until he involved the party in a material contradiction.—Upon this he would build others, until having obtained a sufficient number, he would begin to recount them to the unsuspecting party. His attempts to explain these, would involve him in still further and more material contradictions, until at length, in the midst of great confusion and embar-

arrassment, forgetting where he was or what he was saying—he would either surrender at discretion by a voluntary confession, or present a point in his armor, through which he might be pierced.—Sometimes he pursued a different course, varying his manner according to the occasion. We particularly recollect a conversation that took place in our presence, between Mr. Tyson and a notorious slave trader, a veteran in the business, who had once narrowly escaped conviction for the crime of kidnapping, and was at that moment laboring under the suspicion of having committed the like offence.

One evening the servant announced a stranger at the door, who wished to see Mr. Tyson privately. Mr. Tyson requested that he might be asked into the room, where we were then setting, and if further privacy were necessary, he should have it.

When the door opened and the stranger appeared, he was no other than the slave trader we have just alluded to.

“Your humble servant,” said the man, casting off his hat and bowing profoundly, “I hope you are well sir; I have a few words for your private ear.”

“Every one present may be safely trusted,” said Mr. Tyson: “but sit down.”

The man seated himself. “Well,” said Mr. Tyson, “what is there new in thy way of business, I suppose it continues as usual to be a good business?”

“Ah! sir,” said the man, “I believe it to be a bad business, in more ways than one. I am resolved to quit it.”

“Not while thee can get two hundred dollars profit, per man,” said Mr. Tyson.

“Notwithstanding that,” said the trader, “its a bad business—its a hard business—I must quit it, and that very soon.”

“Hast thou heard of the old saying,” said Mr. Tyson, “Hell is paved with good intentions? I fear,” said he, “when thee goes there, thee will find thine among the number.”

“I know,” said the trader, “you think me very bad, but when you hear what I have to communicate, perhaps your opinion will alter a little.”

“I wish it may.” But said Mr. Tyson, “thy progress, down hill has been so rapid, and thou hast got so far, that thee will find it rather hard to turn about and ascend.”

These doublings attended with a shrewd, suspicious, yet satirical look, had the effect intended, for the man became doubly anxious to do what he had come to do, and what he thought would be esteemed a great favor by Mr. Tyson. Accordingly, after a word or two of preface, he stated that he had reason to believe that ——— naming a certain trader, had kidnapped two free blacks.

“Thee is certainly mistaken,” said Mr. Tyson, affecting great surprise; “it is *hardly* possible that so *worthy* a man could have been guilty of so great a crime.”

This apparent doubt on the part of Mr. Tyson, made the man more anxious to bring out all his testimony.

"But who told thee this piece of news?" said Mr. Tyson. *There* was a breach at once, into the man's order and arrangement, and he hesitated for a reply "Mr. — Mr. — Mr. — What do ye call him spoke to me about it." "Who?" said Mr. Tyson. "Mr. — —," said the man, mentioning the name of a veteran dealer in human flesh.

"Is he engaged in the traffic *now*?" asked Mr. Tyson.

"Yes sir, very deep in it."

"By himself, or in partnership?"—asked Mr. Tyson, carelessly.

"Why, I believe he is in partnership with some body."

"Is he not in partnership," said Mr. Tyson, "with — —," naming the person whom the man was anxious to inculcate. "I believe he *was*, but I dont know that he is now."

"Thee dont know of their having dissolved?" asked Mr. Tyson; at the same time, as if thoughtlessly, lighting his pipe.

"No: I do not—but as I was going to say," said the trader—

"Ah, true," said Mr. Tyson, "we must not forget.—Thee was talking about a case of kidnapping; well?"

"Last night," said the trader, "a hack drove up to the tavern where I lodge. The hackman enquired the way to —'s tavern, which is the place of rendezvous for — —, and his gang," naming the person whose guilt *seemed* to be the principal object of enquiry. "I looked into the carriage, and saw two boys."

"Did thee speak to them?"

"No, they were gagged, and that made me think they were kidnapped."

"Was any body with them?"

"No body but the driver, and he was black."

"Did thee direct him as he requested?" asked Mr. Tyson.

"Yes."

"And they arrived accordingly?"

"Yes."

"Did thee follow them?"

"No sir, not immediately—but I went this morning and enquired whether a hack with two boys and a black driver, had not arrived late last night? and they said there had."

"What o'clock last night was it when thee saw the carriage?"

"About ten, sir."

“Was the hack close, or were the curtains down?”

“The curtains were down, and that increased my suspicion.”

Mr. Tyson had now heard enough to convince him, that if there was any kidnapping in this case, the trader who stood before him had a much nearer connection with it than that of a mere spectator.

He had said, in the first place, that he obtained his knowledge from a trader who had been partner with the party implicated.—He had then stated that he derived it from seeing the kidnapped persons in a hack.—And though it was ten o’clock at night, (at a time too, as Mr. Tyson knew, when there was no moon,) yet he could not only see that these two persons were in the hack, but that they were gagged.—He could not have done this by the light of a candle, or the moon, because “the hack was tight, and the curtains were down.”

Fearing lest the suspicions of the trader might be excited as to the sentiments of Mr. Tyson towards *him*, an end was put to the part of the dialogue which related to the kidnapping, by saying, “well I am much obliged to thee for thy information, we’ll see this ———, and settle the matter with him;” and then turned the tide of conversation into a different direction.

The same day Mr. Tyson sent for the person who was first mentioned, as the person communicating the knowledge of the transaction, and asked him as to the fact of such communication. It was positively denied.—He had “not seen the informer for six weeks, except the last evening, when he brought a hack load of negroes to the tavern, where he and his partner were lodgers.”

“Were two boys among the number?”

“Yes.”

“Were they gagged?”

“Yes.”

The moment this man left his house Mr. Tyson went in search of bailiffs, and civil process.—With these he proceeded to the place where the two boys were confined, and had them, and all three of the traders taken into custody.

It turned out afterwards, in the further prosecution of this investigation, by what testimony, we do not distinctly recollect, that the informer who first came to Mr. Tyson, had himself kidnapped the two boys.—He sold them to the person upon whom he had endeavored, in the manner we have detailed, to affix the whole crime—who refusing afterward to pay their price—and yet, determined to retain them, exasperated the seller to such a degree, that he resolved to sacrifice him—in attempting which, he sacrificed himself—for he was afterward convicted, and sentenced to the penitentiary.

During the progress of any investigation, originated by Mr. Tyson, in behalf of

individual freedom, his anxiety about the final issue, though concealed from the world, burned with intensity. His days were restless, his nights were sleepless, and himself, except when in company, which he avoided at those times, lost in the abstractions of hope, or of despondency.

When he succeeded, his joy was strong, but invisible or inaudible, save to the father of all mercies. To him he never failed “to pour out his soul,” in pious thanksgivings for that he had made him a humble instrument, in the restoration of a follow-being to light and liberty.

When he failed, which was seldom, after he had seriously undertaken a case, his sorrow was equally great, and as inscrutable to human observation, excepting that of the unfortunate objects of his care, who saw him mingling tears of sympathy with theirs of suffering.

Though Mr. Tyson seldom failed in those cases which he had commenced in legal form, yet very many persons were turned hopelessly away, whose cases were too groundless for adjudication: and often those who knew they had no cause for hope—condemned to be torn from their connections and sold, as if to death, never to be heard of more, would call, merely to obtain his sympathies, as if the universe had no other friend for them.

On all these occasions he told those who came, that they must submit to the law.—This they almost always did, for they dared not hide, because of the hundred argus eyes which would then be opened upon them; or abscond—because by so doing, they would be banished from their wives and children, as they were then about to be—besides, they generally hoped for relief, until they found themselves within the grasp of the slave trader, where (they might have said, as has been sung of the infernal regions,)

“Hope never comes, that comes to all,
But sorrow without end.”⁶⁷

There was relief, however, even after hope had departed, and that was some times sought for, and found in death, or in voluntary disability inflicted by the unfortunate sufferer upon himself.

A man, who lived with his master, in Anne Arundel county, came late one evening to Mr. Tyson, and begged that he would listen to his case. His master had promised him his freedom, provided he would raise, and pay him the sum of five hundred dollars in six years; and he had earned half of the money, which he had

67. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk. 1, lines 66–67: “Hope never comes / That comes to all; but torture without end.”

given his master. The six years were not expired, yet he was about to be sold to Georgia. Mr. Tyson asked “if there was any receipt for the money.”—“No.” “Was there any witness who could prove its payment?” “No body, but his master’s wife.” Then, said Mr. Tyson, “the law is against thee, and thou must submit. I can do nothing for thee.” “Never,” said Mr. Tyson, when relating this story, “shall I forget the desperate resolution which shewed itself in the countenance and manner of this man, when he said with clenched fist, his eyes raised to heaven, his whole frame bursting with the purpose of his soul, while a smile of triumph played around his lips—‘I will die before the Georgia man shall have me’; and, then, suddenly melting into a flood of tears, he said, ‘I cannot live away from my wife and children.’—After this poor fellow had left me,” said Mr. Tyson, “I said to a person present, ‘that is no common man, he will do what he has resolved.’”

A short time afterwards, the remains of a colored person who had been drowned in the basin, at Baltimore, were discovered. The fact coming to the knowledge of Mr. Tyson, he went to see the body, and recognized in its features, and from its dress, the remains of the unfortunate man, who, a short time before, had breathed the deathful resolution in his presence.

Chapter VII.

We have hitherto proceeded in this biography without much regard to dates, because it would have been impossible to have detailed them, and because such detail if it had been made, would have been without utility.

The period of the return of Mr. Tyson, from his western tour, was about the year one thousand eight hundred and one,⁶⁸ between which time, and the year one thousand eight hundred and eighteen, have occurred the incidents described in the last chapter.

In the year one thousand eight hundred and seventeen, he signalized himself, by his success in procuring the passage of a law, further ameliorating the condition of the African race in Maryland.

In this state a dark colored skin is *prima facie* evidence of slavery.—It becomes every colored person therefore, whose freedom is called in question, to rebut this presumption, by stronger presumptions, or by positive proof. Until the year one

68. This is an error. As John Shoemaker Tyson himself notes earlier in the narrative, his uncle was roughly sixty years old when he made this journey. In that earlier spot Shoemaker Tyson was correct, as Elisha Tyson’s travels to the Indiana Territory took place in 1808.

thousand eight hundred and seventeen, this principle was carried so far, that in all cases where a colored person was committed to prison, on suspicion of being a runaway, he was sold as a slave for his gaol fees, if after due notice given in the public prints, no one claimed him, or he could not establish his freedom in a court of justice. In consequence of this, many a poor wretch, entitled to his freedom, was doomed to perpetual slavery. Where they were born free, it often happened that they could not obtain the testimony necessary to prove it; and where they had been manumitted, it often occurred that the papers giving them their freedom were lost, or were stolen by the miscreant who arrested them, under circumstances which precluded the possibility of supplying their loss, in due time. Certain of the lowest grade of constables were constantly, like blood-hounds, on the hunt, in pursuit of those helpless creatures. The streets and roads were scoured of all such colored persons who could not, when called upon, produce, instantly, proof irrefragible of their freedom, and our newspapers were continually crowded with advertisements, beginning with “was committed to the gaol of Baltimore county, as a runaway,” and ending with “the owner is requested to come, pay charges, and take him away, otherwise he will be sold for his gaol fees.”

To these grand auctions of the state of Maryland, held before the front door of every county gaol, thronged the savage slave traders, who, in the absence of all honest and feeling purchasers, found here cheap bargains, and indisputable titles.

Many an individual who had been incarcerated, and marked for sacrifice on such occasions, has blessed Mr. Tyson as his saviour. At a time when all the world seemed deaf to their cries for help—when those who should have pitied, shut their eyes or passed by upon the other side, the good Samaritan stepped in, administered the oil of joy to the sufferer, and clothed him in the white robe of liberty.

At length, through the exertions of Mr. Tyson, repeated from year to year, through a long succession of years, in one thousand eight hundred and seventeen, a law was enacted, making it the duty of the sheriffs of the several counties, to discharge all colored persons confined as runaways from custody, if, within a time limited, no one stepped forward to claim them as his property.

In the same year he was enabled to procure the passage of another law of great service to the cause of freedom. Under the unlimited powers of sale formerly possessed by the masters of slaves, they might sell to men not resident in the state, colored persons entitled to freedom after the expiration of a term of years. The consequence of this, was that, of the numerous individuals, vested in this way with a future right to freedom, very many were sold out of the state, and often into perpetual bondage. For, to them, in a distant land, in the midst of universal slavery, strangers to every human being around them, of what avail would be the language

of complaint? The southern slave-traders were always on the alert to pounce upon such victims.—They could purchase slaves entitled to their freedom after the lapse of a few years, for a very small sum, and woe, to those, who under such circumstances, fell into their hands. Never did they retrace the footsteps that marked their progress to the land of horrors. The bright anticipations of liberty, which like the solar rays upon the farther verge of some black and threatening cloud, gilded the future of their existence, were covered with ever-during dark despair.

All these evils were prevented by the passage of the law last alluded to, which made it a penitentiary offence to sell out of the state of Maryland, a slave entitled to his freedom on the expiration of a term of years.

It is not a little surprising that the subject of this biography, notwithstanding his great attention to the general interests of humanity, was enabled faithfully to conduct the particular concerns of his family. Nay, so to conduct them as to acquire solely by his own industry, a very large fortune. His business was the manufacturing of flour, which, during all the time in which he was engaged in it, was exceedingly profitable. It has always been much pursued in the city of Baltimore, not only on account of its profits, but also, because of the peculiar facilities afforded to it in this part of the world. Several strong and never failing streams of water, mingle themselves with the tide at Baltimore, each presenting in its wide meanderings, a long chain of mill seats; added to this, wheat and Indian corn are staples of our state, and produced in rich abundance.

As Mr. Tyson advanced in years, he found this combination of public and private cares too much for endurance; he saw that he must abandon the one or the other, and he chose to give up the latter. Accordingly he retired from business in the year 1818,⁶⁹ and gave the whole of his time and talents to the great cause of philanthropy.

Having succeeded in scattering far and wide the principles of liberty and the spirit of benevolence, he thought he might now with safety call upon his fellow-citizens for their practical assistance. In enquiring out the mode in which this call might be successfully made, it occurred to him that a public notice inviting all humane persons to assemble for the purpose of forming a Protection Society, would be the most efficient. The word “abolition” he knew to be a great bug bear with most of the community, and that Abolition Societies in the Southern states had merely, by their title, proved stumbling blocks in the way of much benevolence. He chose therefore the establishment of a Protection Society, the object of which

69. An “errata” slip accompanying the original text indicates that the actual year of Elisha Tyson’s retirement should read 1798.

should be the protection of all colored persons, free or enslaved, in the enjoyment of their *legal* rights. No individual reverencing the existing laws, could object to such an institution; and as it sought not directly (however it might lead to it remotely) the abolition of slavery, even slave-holders might with propriety become its members.⁷⁰

Accordingly after Mr. Tyson had sufficiently agitated the subject in the public newspapers, a notice was published, inviting all persons, friendly to the establishment of such an institution, to assemble for the purpose, at the City Council Chamber, in South-street.

Many of the most influential citizens of Baltimore obeyed the invitation, and the chamber was crowded. Every eye was immediately in search of the grand mover of the drama, when they found that he was absent, and upon enquiry, that he would not be present.—He absented himself because he feared least he who had received and braved public obloquy from his earliest infancy, for supporting the cause of the degraded Africans, might now be considered as ambitious of distinction or applause, when the same cause had grown into some degree of popularity through his exertions.—In order, therefore, to shun that distinction or applause, he refused to attend the aforesaid meeting, or to become a member of any society which they might choose to form. His being at the head of such an institution, would not have increased his benevolent exertions, and he hoped that those who should be appointed to leading stations in it, would for that reason, be stimulated to efforts which they would not otherwise have made.

The society, therefore, was formed without him, consisting of slave-holders, as well as non-slave-holders, and proceeded immediately into active operation.—Its style was “The Protection Society of Maryland,” and its object “to protect the colored population of this state in the enjoyment of their *legal* privileges.”

This society in a very short time died away. Its President, the late Abner Neal, its Secretary, William E. Coale,⁷¹ together with one of its counsel and a few others, hung together by a desperate effort for some time, but the weight of pecuniary obligations, to which its officers were liable by virtue of their stations, broke the bands asunder by which they were connected; and with them sunk the whole establishment.

It might have subsisted perhaps, until the present hour, in active and extensive

70. Though the text gives the impression that the Protection Society of Maryland was formed in 1818, it was founded late in 1816.

71. Abner Neal (1776–1824) was a Methodist minister, and William E. Coale (1795–1865) a Quaker and a commission merchant.

operation, if the exertions of one individual, who was the chief instrument of Mr. Tyson in its formation, had not been withdrawn. The object of this person was to be at the head of the institution, and rather than not be there, “choose not to be at all.” His retirement drew with it many who would have continued, by his continuance, and unnerved the exertions of others, who wanted the stimulus of high example. Thus does ambition continue on earth as it did in Heaven, by its seductions to poison virtue, and sacrifice the holiest purposes to the vilest of designs.

During the existence of this society, and after its abolition, Mr. Tyson continued unabatedly his exertions. Indeed these seemed to gather ardor in the increase of years, as the daily laborer in an earthly vineyard gathers strength when he beholds the shades of evening; because they foretell him that his reward is nigh.

In the year 1822⁷² the union of these states was shaken to its centre, by the agitation of what has been called the Missouri question. For the information of those abroad, we will state in a very few words what was meant by this term.

The territory of Missouri (lying along the west bank of the Mississippi river, between 36° and 40½° N. Lat.) being sufficiently peopled, and its inhabitants having complied with every necessary prerequisite, they petitioned Congress to be constituted one of the confederacy of states. This petition met with a most formidable opposition, in consequence of a clause in the constitution of the intended state, legalizing slavery. As was to be expected, the slave-holding states took part *with* Missouri, and those of an opposite character, *against* her. The South was arrayed against the North. It was a war of prejudices and passions. Neither side looked much at consequences. But though prejudice and passion had too much to do in this contest, yet the rights of nature and humanity were on the side against Missouri. Where these were, there was Mr. Tyson.

The city of Baltimore being the metropolis of a slave holding state, it was generally supposed that her sentiments were in favor of the unqualified admission of Missouri into the Union. But Mr. Tyson believed the contrary, and was determined to convince the world that the belief was not founded in error.—He procured an advertisement to be published, inviting a public town meeting, to be held in the court house, for the purpose of taking into consideration, the propriety of petitioning Congress, against the claims of Missouri. The doors were to be opened for the admission of all, and the discussion on both sides of the question to be without restraint.

Previous to the time of meeting he solicited several gentlemen of known talents, to prepare themselves for argument on the side which he and they had ad-

72. The Missouri Crisis described above actually played out from 1819 to 1821.

opted.—They consented, and the report getting abroad that such individuals were to speak against the demands of Missouri, corresponding advocates started up on the other side.

The meeting assembled. The Mayor of the city—Edward Johnson, Esquire,⁷³ presided. As was expected, the debate was warm and vigorous. Mr. Tyson took no part in it, for nature had not thought it necessary, to bestow upon him the powers of oratory.—But he sat burning with anxiety about the event of a storm, which he had conjured into existence. We will not recount the arguments, urged with eloquence on each side.—Similar arguments have been used upon the floor of Congress—they have been published and re-published to the world—to repeat them now, would be harping a tune already so often repeated, that what was music once, has at length become discord.

The debate lasted until a late hour, when there was an unanimous cry for the question, which was, whether a memorial should be presented to the citizens of Baltimore for signature, remonstrating against the admission of Missouri into the Union, unless she would expunge from her constitution the clause in it legalizing slavery? When this question was first taken, though the chairman decided in favour of the affirmative side, yet such was the apparent equality into which the meeting was divided, that the most discriminating ear might easily have been puzzled how to decide. The question was again loudly called for. Upon estimating numbers, or rather upon comparing masses, the majority was decidedly on the side in favor of the memorial.

In less than one week, more than two thousand memorialists subscribed their names; and had delay been prudent, a large majority of the voters of Baltimore would have followed their example. But the subject was then under Congressional discussion, and the period at hand, when it would be too late to receive memorials—Success, therefore, depended on despatch.

When the news, that a memorial on the subject of the Missouri question was preparing in Baltimore, arrived at Washington, many concluded that it partook of the general character of all such memorials, when they emanated from the south. This impression was confirmed when on its arrival being announced upon the floor of Congress, the eager eyes of the contending parties beheld its almost interminable length, while one of the representatives from Baltimore, unfurled its columns. “It might possibly be,” thought they, “that some individuals, in the slave holding city of Baltimore, would wish us to oppose the views of Missouri, but that

73. Edward Johnson (1767–1829) served as mayor of Baltimore, 1808–1816, 1819–1820, and 1822–1824.

such a vast catalogue of persons as is there enrolled, outnumbering every list which has yet been presented to us upon either side of this question, should come from that city, is not for a moment to be supposed.”

When, therefore, the reading of this memorial had dispelled the delusion which enveloped it—the whole house were ready to exclaim with astonishment. Looking first one at the other, and then at the memorial, they seemed to doubt the evidence of their senses. The enemies of slavery were filled with exultation, and her friends with disappointment and chagrin.

Whether this memorial aided very considerably in inducing the house to decide against the claims of Missouri, we cannot determine, but we believe its effect to have been greater than that of any other memorial on the same subject—because it came from a slave-holding district, and because it seemed to speak almost unanimately the sentiments of that district.

At length a final end was put to this discussion, and Mr. Tyson, with many other wise and good men, had to regret, that the spirit of slavery, which in its native shape had been spurned from our representative hall, should have found admission in the form of compromise and concession. Thus was it that she obtained a complete triumph over those who had proclaimed to the world in the early part of the contest, that they were fighting for a matter of principle, not of expediency.—For when they consented that Missouri should be admitted into the Union, although that consent was accompanied with a proviso, by which the admission of slaves into the territories of the United States beyond the thirty-sixth degree of north latitude was prohibited—yet it was a sacrifice of the very principle, for which they had so strenuously contended.—This was all that was desired by the southern representatives, and they cheerfully surrendered in exchange, for this recognition of their principle for which *they* had struggled, the right to convey their slaves into the other territories of the United States. This surrender was a matter of expediency merely, and they lost nothing by it, whereas they gained every thing in exchange.

Mr. Tyson had now attained his seventieth year.—The infirmities of old age began to press heavily upon one, whose mind and body had been in such incessant and laborious operation. Looking to his death as an event, not far distant, and anxious that the cause, in which he had spent the greater portion of his life, should not die with him, he began to meditate upon the best means of preserving it. Having witnessed the early dismemberment of two societies, instituted for the avowed purpose of advancing this cause, he abandoned every idea of establishing a third upon similar principles.

Considerable funds were necessary in the prosecution of the system of benevolence in which he had been engaged.—And though he could find no one who

would run the risk of undergoing this expense, or take upon himself the trouble of soliciting voluntary contributions, yet he could find individuals, who would bear all other burthens. It became, therefore, his principal object to contrive some permanent mode, by which the necessary funds should in future be obtained.

As the colored population were more immediately interested in this matter, as they were very numerous, and as many of them were in easy circumstances, he thought he might with confidence look to these as a source of lasting and effectual relief. Accordingly he requested their preachers to announce to their respective congregations, that at a certain time, and in a certain place, he would wish to see assembled all those of their adult male members who could conveniently come.

Mr. Tyson had adopted this measure, without consulting a single individual, and it continued a secret even to his friends, until a few minutes before the hour of the appointed meeting, when he sent for a young gentleman who usually accompanied him on all such occasions, and exposing the whole design, requested his assistance. It was readily granted.

When they arrived at the place of meeting, which was in one of the largest of the African churches, they found every avenue of entrance crowded to excess, by the overflowings from the interior of the church, which is capable of containing near two thousand souls.

The news of Mr. Tyson's approach, soon passed from ear to ear, upon the conveyance of a thousand tongues, each uttering it to his neighbor.—Every foot pressed forward, that the eyes of all might behold the venerable man, who had grown grey in vindicating their rights. Gratitude beamed from every countenance, and innumerable voices invoked blessings on him and his children.

The press was so great, that it was with difficulty that Mr. Tyson and his companion could make their way through it, to an enclosure within the altar of the church, fitted up for his reception. When he had seated himself, a sudden and universal silence pervaded the whole assembly, and continued for the space of ten minutes. At length he arose upon his feet—all was deep attention, while he spoke to the following effect.

"You already know by whom this large assembly has been called together. You know also that the object intended by it, is something connected with the general good of your race. Of the particulars you are now to be informed. In one word then, my object is to call upon you to come forward and render *your* assistance for the first time, to those of your color, who are oppressed contrary to the law of the land. This kind of assistance you have a right to render. I would be the last man in the world to ask you to go beyond this. I say the assistance you may render on this occasion, will be rendered for the first time. Is it not true? I do not say this in order

to censure you, for you never have been called upon until now for that assistance. I mention it with a view to induce you now to come forward with greater zeal. If I had a long lease of my life—if I were vigorous and strong—if all other means of obtaining aid, had not failed, and if I had not lost all hopes of procuring any other in time to come, I would not even now call upon you for yours, because I am sensible that much censure will fall from the unreflecting part of my fellow citizens, upon the cause which I have espoused on all occasions, by the step which I have this day dared to take. But it is matter of necessity, intended to prevent evil, and I trust that the Father of Mercies will turn it to a good account. I am now old and weak—in the course of a few days I shall be gathered to my fathers. The greater portion of this audience will perhaps never see my face again. I know not who will befriend you after I am gone, unless you become friends to one another.

“I propose to you that you form a society, whose duty it shall be to raise subscriptions, from among your number, and to deposit the money in the hands of certain white persons whom I shall name, in whom you may place the utmost confidence. There are many among you able to subscribe: some of you are blessed with abundance. It is time, therefore, that you should come forward and do away what has very much injured your cause, that is, a belief that you are destitute of the *sympathies* of human nature. The mode in which you are to do this, I leave to yourselves.” He then sat down amid a general expression of satisfaction, and hearty co-operation.

The address of Mr. Tyson, the skeleton of which, only we have given to the reader, produced on its delivery a powerful effect. He was frequently interrupted by expressions of feeling, and ere he had finished not a tearless eye could be seen around him. They were tears of gratitude and sorrow—gratitude for his unequalled kindness toward them and their race—and sorrow at the thought that the time was at hand when the fountain of so much benevolence would be sealed by death. “They sorrowed more than all for the words which he spake, that they might see his face no more.”⁷⁴

One of the audience arose and recommended that a subscription be raised forthwith. His advice was adopted with acclamation—and they began to pour forth upon the communion table, that stood by the altar, offerings as pure and acceptable, in the sight of heaven, as had ever rested upon it.—A considerable sum was soon collected, which has since proved of great service in the cause of emancipation.

Mr. Tyson left this meeting, amidst increased demonstrations of reverence and

74. Acts 20:38.

attention. Those present, on his departure immediately organized themselves, and took the first step towards the formation of a society that has since been completed. The sole object for which it exists, is the raising of funds among the colored people, to be deposited into the hands of white persons, chosen by themselves, for the purpose of administering to the necessitous among their brethren.

If any thing could add to the high character which the reader had already conceived of the subject of this biography, it was this anxious solicitude about the future condition of the cause in which he had been so long engaged. Mankind are generally satisfied with doing good while they are alive, and trust that future generations will take care of themselves. But Mr. Tyson felt otherwise: he saw that what he had done was only a beginning, in the cause of emancipation; that in vain had been all his sacrifices, if it were to die in prematurity; he therefore looked into the future of time, and rested not until, like a tender parent, he had bequeathed the means of future living to his offspring.

Chapter VIII.

We are now about to call the attention of the reader to the last, though not the least interesting, of Mr. Tyson's philanthropic exertions. Connected with this, we must here introduce the name of the American Colonization Society, instituted for the purpose of establishing settlements of colored persons on the coast of Africa.⁷⁵ We may not disguise from the reader, that it was not until the closing period of Mr. Tyson's life, that this society enjoyed his confidence. The plan of colonizing, upon the continent of Africa, the descendants of those who, two centuries ago, had been torn from it by the hand of avaricious tyranny, in itself, met with, as it merited, his warmest encomiums. He deemed it fraught with blessings to Africa, and through Africa, the world. But he grieved to see the execution of this plan, holy as it was, committed to unhallowed hands. He believed that blot and blemish should be as invisible upon the ministers of the altar, as upon the altar itself. Though some of the founders and prime supporters of this institution were pious men, and honorable in their views—yet he numbered among their companions, men unworthy of the cause, and fraught with sinister designs. When he saw domestic tyrants and men who had actually in the southern slave trade speculated in the flesh and blood of their fellow creatures,

75. Organized by ministers and prominent slaveholders, the American Colonization Society was founded late in 1816 with the goal of sponsoring and supporting the migration of free Black Americans to West Africa.

united with their betters in a society, the professed object of which was the peopling of a continent with freemen, by the depopulation of a continent of slaves, he argued, as he had a right to argue, mischief to the cause. He believed that those unworthy members had in their minds a design to frustrate the original purposes of the institution—that what was intended as a society for the colonization in Africa, of such persons of color as choose freely to emigrate, including such slaves as were voluntarily surrendered for this purpose by their masters, they wished to convert into an inquisition for the purpose of banishing all free persons of color; of abolishing all emancipatory laws; and at last of rivetting, with tenfold tightness, the chains of servitude upon the slave population. It was not until the secession of many of these from a society with which they could not mingle, that this noble institution began to enjoy the regard of Mr. Tyson. But it was not until by the incident we are now about to relate, that he reposed his entire faith upon it. Those who are disposed to censure this tardiness, may be reminded of the saying of Lord Chatham, that at all times, “confidence is a plant of slow growth in an aged bosom,”⁷⁶ and thus be led to drop their censure, or throw it on the constitution of our common nature.

A Spanish slave ship, returning from the coast of Africa to Havana with slaves, was captured, within sight of its port of destination, by a Colombian privateer, commanded by a native of the United States, lately naturalized in Colombia.⁷⁷

Of forty-two slaves, the whole number thus captured, eleven strong and able bodied men were selected for the service of the privateer; (slaves cruising in the cause of liberty!) the rest were disposed of in the West Indies.

The privateer then made her way for the port of Baltimore, to be refitted. It was not long before Mr. Tyson obtained information of her arrival, and the character of her crew. Believing that while these Africans should be in the service of the Colombian captain they would be slaves, and that if some effectual way were not adopted, ere his departure to take them out of his grasp, their slavery would be perpetual, he was not long in contriving a plan for their enlargement. The execution of this plan, however, was attended with considerable difficulty and delay. Had they been imported as slaves, the immediate operation of the laws of Maryland, and the United States, would have effected instantaneously their emancipation. But they

76. The passage is taken from a speech that William Pitt, the First Earl of Chatham, delivered before Parliament in 1766.

77. The remainder of this chapter describes an incident that began in the summer of 1822, when the schooner *General Páez*, acting as a privateer under the command of a captain named John Chase, captured a Spanish slaver and took from it more than three dozen enslaved Africans. Chase sold many of the enslaved in the West Indies but sailed with the rest to Baltimore, claiming they were members of his crew.

were brought here as volunteers in the Colombian service; to all appearance they were united to the rest of the crew; and their ignorance of every language, intelligible here, seemed to preclude the possibility of discovering whether their situation was one of compulsion or of choice.

Mr. Tyson was very desirous, before he attempted any thing, to procure from among those who had traded to the coast of Africa, one capable of acting as interpreter. His object was to inform them, through this medium, of their true condition, to acquaint them with the fact of their free agency, and then call upon them to make their choice of freedom here, or servitude with the Colombian captain. Failing in this, he took the only remaining step, a bold one, and boldly executed. This was to file a petition for their freedom, on the presumption that they were involuntarily held in slavery, to lodge the petitioners in gaol for safe keeping, and hold their claimants under ample security for their appearance, to answer the petition. The gaol being at a considerable distance from the place of their debarkation, they were conveyed in open carriages through nearly the whole extent of the city. This, together with public notice of the circumstance in the newspapers, aroused the public sympathy in their behalf, as well as the public curiosity in regard to their probable fate.

The matter was submitted to the chief Justice of the Baltimore city court, at his chambers, who determined against the petitioners.

An application was then made for their restoration to the Colombian captain, and granted. Before, however, sufficient time could elapse for their discharge from prison, Mr. Tyson, (who was absent at the judicial investigation,) was apprised of the decision of the court.

Although at that time laboring under severe indisposition, he ordered his carriage, and with Dr. E. Ayres,⁷⁸ the benevolent agent of the African Colonization Society,⁷⁹ proceeded with all possible despatch to the house of General Robert Goodloe Harper,⁸⁰ another and a very distinguished member of the same Associa-

78. Dr. Eli Ayers (1778–1830s[?]) was a New Jersey physician and the first colonial agent of the American Colonization Society.

79. Both here and elsewhere in the text, the author sometimes wrote “African Colonization Society” when referring to the “American Colonization Society.”

80. Robert Goodloe Harper (1765–1825) was born in Virginia, moved to North Carolina as a child, and was admitted to the bar in South Carolina after studying law in Charleston. He sat in the South Carolina House of Representatives and was elected to Congress before moving to Maryland around the turn of the nineteenth century. He achieved the rank of major general in the War of 1812, served briefly as U.S. senator from Maryland in 1816, and was an original member of the American Colonization Society.

tion. A proposition was then agreed to, that these three should hasten to the chief Justice of the city court, and request him to procure the detention of the Africans in prison until application could be made to the government of the United States, for its interference in their behalf.

Mr. Tyson and his friends found the Judge at his dwelling, by whom they were very politely received, and who without the least hesitation, granted their request, by ordering the further detention of the prisoners.

The President of the United States was next solicited on their behalf, who referred the matter to the Navy Department, by whom it was again referred to the Marshal of this District, who was requested to take the Africans under his care. The Marshal refused to receive them, unless so requested by judicial authority; and the Judge refused to make such request, because, as he conceived, he had not the power.

He had not even the power he thought to retain them in prison, and therefore gave notice to the Colombian Captain on the one hand, and Dr. Ayres on the other, that at a certain hour the Africans would be discharged from prison, after which, they would be at liberty to go with whom, and wherever they wished. Having been already under the control of the Colombian, it was apprehended that fear would induce them again to submit themselves to his command, unless some one could be found so possessed of the knowledge of their language, as to be able to interpret to them their real situation. With much difficulty such an one was procured.

With him Dr. Ayres proceeded to the prison gate at the hour appointed, where he found the Colombian Capt. waiting with impatience the anticipated discharge of the African prisoners.

Through the aid of the interpreter they were informed of their real condition, of their being free to go with the Colombian Captain or remain behind—and the question was then put to them, by Dr. Ayres, whether they would go or stay? If they preferred the latter, he told them to follow him—if the former, to follow the Colombian Captain.

They all immediately proceeded to follow Dr. Ayres. By the menaces and gestures of the Colombian, they were induced for a while to halt. Dr. Ayres again approached them and proclaiming to them that they were free, informed them that if they preferred going with him and would start, he was ready to follow and protect them. At this they all sprang up and ran in the direction wherein the Colombian stood. He in a great rage ran after them and succeeded in intercepting three boys, whom he took to his vessel. Dr. Ayres did not pursue these, because as they were obtained by violence, he relied upon the hope (which afterwards proved to be vain) of recovering them before a judicial tribunal.

The number rescued was eleven who were immediately lodged in the Poor House of the county, there to await their future fate.

As the engagements and office of Dr. Ayres required his immediate presence in Africa, he was obliged to leave the entire management of their case in the hands of Mr. Tyson and General Harper. By these, their freedom was at length obtained, and measures taken for their future disposal. As their native places of residence were not far distant from the country allowed to the African Colonization Society as the scene of their labors, a proposition to send them thither, met with the warm approbation of that society, and with the joyful concurrence of the objects of so much solicitude.

Dr. Ayres being then in Africa and anticipating their arrival, preparations for their transportation were made without delay. On their departure their two kind friends presented them with both necessities and trinkets, which would have been acceptable even to an African Prince. These were accompanied with much good advice, calculated not more for their own, than for the benefit of the tribes to which they severally belonged.

The rest of the narrative is contained in a letter from Dr. Ayres to the Abolition Society of Philadelphia, which it would be unjust in me not to transcribe.

“The eleven Africans who were seized in Baltimore, and rescued from a piratical vessel, were last November delivered to me in Africa, by the captain of the schooner *Fidelity*. It was ascertained that they had been taken in war near our settlement, and sold to King Shaker, of Galleons,⁸¹ and by him sold to the captain of a Spanish vessel. This vessel was plundered by Capt. Chase of Baltimore, and boldly brought into that port, trusting to his influence with certain persons of high standing, to elude the authority of our laws. But by the interference of E. Tyson, deceased, there was an investigation, and the slaves were detained until I arrived in that city, and took charge of them as Agent of the Colonization Society. Their cause could not be decided before I sailed for Africa, but they were shortly after set at liberty, and sent in the African packet to our colony, and delivered to my care. As they all preferred returning to their parents and families to remaining in our colony, they were permitted to do so.

“When I went on board the vessel, though much emaciated, and reduced almost to a skeleton, they immediately recognized me to be the person who had the year before rescued them from slavery. I had scarcely stepped my foot on deck before

81. A reference to King Siaka of the Vai people, whose territory was located in Sierra Leone along the Gallinas River, a region of West Africa notorious for illegal slave trading.

they were all round me, expressing by words and gestures the most heartfelt satisfaction for the favors they had received.

“When the vessel was getting under way, yielding to early impressions, by which they had been taught to consider a white face and treachery as inseparable, they concluded they were betrayed, and were again to return to America. They sprang below to get their bags, and were about to plunge into the Ocean, and swim to the shore with their bundles. On being assured I was about to restore them to their native towns, some of which were nearly in sight, their confidence was restored, and they contentedly went to work. When we arrived at Sugary, our crew being sickly, I went on shore for Charles Gomez, a native, who had been educated in England, to come off with his boat, and take the captives on shore. He came off, accompanied by several of the natives; and here a most interesting interview took place between these long separated acquaintances.

“A circumstance attending this affair, is truly characteristic of the African character. One of these captives had been taken by this Gomez two years before, in a war between him and the father of the captives, and afterwards sold to King Shaker. This captive was at first very shy of Gomez, and refused to go on shore with him, fearing the war was not yet over, and that he should be again sold to a slave vessel then lying in sight; but I assured him that he was in no danger; that I knew the war to be over; that Gomez was a particular friend of mine, and traded with me; and, in the presence of both assured them, that should Gomez attempt to do him injustice, I would not fail to chastise him.—These assurances entirely overcame his doubts, and when told that his father and the fathers of two others of them were then standing on the beach, not knowing that it was their sons, whom they had long supposed were doomed to perpetual slavery, were so shortly to be restored to their found embraces, they all stepped into the boat, and in a few minutes astonished their delighted parents on the shore. I was much pleased to see that Gomez appeared truly to enter into the feelings of those poor creatures at this time, although he had been the cause of all their sufferings; but that was considered by them as the fortune of war, and created no hostile feeling or revenge.

“When taking my final leave of these poor fellows, they, pointing to their bags, filled with presents from General Harper and Elisha Tyson, exclaimed, see there!—our fathers in America good men. These circumstances shew what entire confidence may be obtained over native Africans by good offices.”

In a subsequent letter to the writer of this biography, Doctor Ayres, describing the meeting between three of those restored Africans, and their respective parents, speaks of it as a most affecting sight. “Witness, says he, to yourself, three aged fathers standing on the sea shore, casting perhaps a longing look, in the course the

vessel had taken, which conveyed their sons into a hopeless state of slavery—all the endearing recollections of parental fondness brought into association, at the sight of a strange sail coming to anchor near the spot on which they stood, and in the midst of all the bitterness of feeling arising from these recollections, their long lost sons suddenly rushing into their arms, and turning the flood of joy into channels yet wet with tears of sorrow.—Be assured sir, that I shared in these sympathies, nor was there a dry eye to be seen.”

The rescue and restoration of these Africans, was a noble achievement of philanthropy, productive of blessings not only to the individuals rescued and restored, but to the African race. It discovered to them a secret hitherto concealed from them, that although a white face upon the African coast was *prima facie* evidence of perfidy, fraud, and cruelty, yet beyond the Atlantic there was to be found splendid exceptions to this rule, in the land of Washington and Franklin.—This has given them confidence in the Colonization Society, and satisfied them that the hopes and promises which this society has exhibited to their view, were not lures, but realities. Upon that confidence the benevolent of this country will be enabled to build up additional facilities, in furtherance of the great purposes of humanity.

In the early part of this work we had occasion to notice the services and character of William Pinkney; we are now led to notice those of General Harper, in reference to the African cause. We have seen the confidence which Mr. Tyson had in his exertions, and the great alacrity with which those exertions were afforded in aid of the captured Africans. The feeling which prompted Harper on that occasion, sprang from a heart full of sensibility, and was guided by an intellect, rich in all that gives nobility to man. The whole ardor of that feeling, and force of that intellect, aroused into action by the moral earthquake engendered in Missouri, continued to the day of his death to blaze and energize in the African cause. Universal emancipation, connected with colonization, was the favorite theme of his declining age and the last days of his existence were cheered, by the hopes which seemed to beam on him through the dark vista of futurity, of the glorious realization of his wishes.

The rescue and transportation of the eleven Africans was, as we have stated, the last public act of philanthropy, in which Mr. Tyson was concerned; for scarcely had he bid the objects of his benevolence a final adieu, when the disease which was then preying on the seat of life, attacked him with new vigor; and though it sometimes permitted him to walk about his house, yet most generally kept him on his couch. His mind and body soon became too weak to undergo, in any degree, the active labors of philanthropy.—But his life had not yet ceased to be useless

to the cause.—There seemed to emanate from the spot on which he lay a passive power, which, without effort, infused itself into whatever approached him, like the virtue that proceeded from good men of old, to the healing of the multitude. It was from his voice, uttering the maxims of experience, and pronouncing the blessings of heaven—from his countenance, scattering the rays of benevolence upon all around, that emanated this power, which melted the hearts of the hardened, and nerved the arms of the timid philanthropist, who else would have had the will only, without the courage, to follow his example. The great concern in which he had spent his life was the constant topic of his conversation; and he continued with his latest breath to enforce the claims of the unhappy sons of slavery upon the humanity of their brethren. It was natural that he should feel a strong anxiety about the fate of those, who, through his exertions, had been restored to their friends in Africa.—He was on the alert to hear intelligence of their fate—his spirit seemed to follow them across the mighty waters. On one occasion he was heard to say, “if I could only hear of their safe arrival, I should die content;” and on another, that he had prayed to the father of mercies, that he would be pleased to spare his life, until he could receive the pleasing intelligence. His prayer was heard. The news reached his ears amid the last lingerings of life.—He shed tears of joy on the occasion; and when he had sufficiently yielded to the first burst of feeling, exclaimed like one satiated with earthly happiness, “now I am ready to die. My work is done.”—His expressions were prophetic; for in the short space of forty-eight hours, on the sixteenth of February, eighteen hundred and twenty-four, at the age of seventy-five years, he breathed his soul into the hands of God Almighty.

Chapter IX.

The news soon went abroad, that a “prince,” of no ordinary dignity, “had fallen in Israel:”⁸² and mourning, deeper than sackcloth and ashes, covered the souls of thousands. These were the benevolent and good in every quarter; his brethren in religious communion; the sable multitude, whose bulwark against apprehension he had been for near half a century; but above all the many happy creatures whom he had rescued from perpetual slavery and woe. Even his enemies seemed to respect the occasion, and their exultation lowered for a while, beneath the cloud of sorrow, that covered this city.

82. 2 Samuel 2:38: “And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?”

His mortal remains were placed in a large hall of his spacious habitation, the doors of which were freely opened to all those who wished to take a last look at the features, where so lately sat enthroned the dignity of human nature, amid the rays divine of hope and joy, and christian exultation. None were excluded, for death, the great leveller, had marked him for that vast community of all sorts of men, that mingle in the tomb, and he lay humbled beneath the lowest of the living.—Yet even in the face of that humility, you might read that greatness had been there; and the eye of the benevolent could almost see his manly brow knit with indignation at human wrongs, or his lips smiling with triumph, at the triumph of innocence.

The numbers that came to view this illustrious victim of death, were incalculable. For two days, from an early hour in each day, until late at night, the house of mourning was without intermission crowded with visitors, and many a tear from the eyes of those who owed their all of earthly happiness to him, was mingled with the shroud of their benefactor.

At length the time arrived when all that was visible of Elisha Tyson, was to be forever closed to human eyes, and the coffin lid went down amid the awful hum of multitudes who had already assembled for the purpose of paying the last dues of honor to the dead.

The society of “Friends,” with the great number of those who love the memory of a good man, met, as with one accord, and mingled with the crowd.

The colored population of the city, to the amount of more than ten thousand persons, having assembled at their respective churches, united their vast numbers to the concourse of people, and thronged along every adjacent and circumjacent street. On that occasion, all were free. To preserve, under such circumstances, the accustomed regularity of funerals, was impossible. The whole breadth of Sharp street and Baltimore street, wide as these are, and extending for the space of half a mile, was filled with the assemblage.

The funeral was conducted according to the ceremony of “the Friends,” if that can be called ceremony, which consisted in a proscription of all form. The coffin was enclosed within a simple brown hearse, stripped of all ornament or superfluous workmanship, and conveyed by a single horse, harnessed in an ordinary way. The rest of the procession, went entirely on foot. It moved slowly and calmly along, without any noise or confusion, save that which arose from the consolidated mass about the hearse, when they pressed forward, as if ambitious of a station nearest the body of the deceased. Throughout the whole multitude, there was not to be seen any of the external evidences of mourning, none of “the trappings and the

suits of woe,”⁸³ which usually make up the pageantry of a funeral. Yet the mourning was universal. It was the mourning of the heart—that kind of mourning, which so far from offering outward evidences, manifests its existence, only by the effort to conceal it.

As the eye wandered along this immense crowd, and beheld their melancholy gaze fixed, as if immovably, on the vehicle that bore along the remains of the great Philanthropist, and as the mind reflected, that to his philanthropy, was this mighty tribute paid, the exclamation naturally arose, “What are all the treasures of wealth, the titles of nobility, the honors of birth or alliance, compared with the dignity of him, who by his life merits such exalted obsequies! What avails the golden coffin, and the embroidered car, the rich caparison, the tolling bell, the splendid row of mourners, decked in their flowing robes of sable, when not a tear bedews the earth, nor sigh escapes to heaven!”

The honors that gather about the hearse of such an one, do but enhance the dishonors of his life, and throw a false and dangerous lustre around iniquity! Not so with those we are now contemplating. The sincerity with which they are bestowed, arising from the consciousness that they are deserved, give them a value above all the pomp, and glitter, and emblazonry with which servility can deck the obsequies of the falsely great; and arrays, in brighter glory, the life of him they are meant to celebrate.

The van of the procession at length reached the place of final destination. The hearse was then disburthened of its contents. Many were surprised on viewing the coffin, at not finding upon it the ornaments that usually decorate those of the illustrious dead.—Nothing was seen about it but that plainness and simplicity, inculcated by the religious society to which the deceased belonged, and which it had been at all times his delight to practice.

The place of interment was the burial ground attached to the “Friends,” meeting house, in Old Town, which was distinguished from the surrounding scenery, not by piles of stone and sculptured marble, but only by the heaps of monumental earth that ranged in regular order around the area.

The body was committed to the earth amid the tears of thousands: profound and universal silence succeeded: after which, the grave was closed upon the dead, and the immense crowd with thoughtful brows and softened hearts dispersed to their various habitations.

83. Hamlet, act 1, scene 2: “But I have that within which passeth show; These but the trappings and the suits of woe.”

A funeral ceremony, more distinguished by form, took place in Philadelphia, on the occasion of Mr. Tyson's death. If it were material to describe minutely this celebration, the writer could not do it for want of particulars. All he has learned is, that the procession was large—that it paraded through several of the streets of Philadelphia to a church, when those of the multitude who could force an entrance, listened to a laudatory discourse on the life of the deceased.

On searching amid an almost incredible heap of papers and pamphlets on the subject of emancipation in general, as well as documents respecting particularly the freedom of individuals, his executors discovered carefully sealed up a valedictory address to the colored population of his country. As it is the only written relic which he has left behind of his labors of humanity, it is a subject for curiosity, and will no doubt be read with interest.

The Farewell Address of
Elisha Tyson,
of the City of Baltimore, to the People of Color, in
the United States of America.

“It has long been in my heart as a duty I owe you, and now near the close of my day, the impression remains with increased force upon my mind, to leave some advice, as a legacy to you, and as an evidence of the deep and affectionate solicitude I feel for your welfare. It is known to some of you that I have, for the last forty years, sustained many trying conflicts on your account; but if I have shared largely in these, I have the consolation of believing myself to have been imperiously called upon to espouse your cause; and I now feel the reward of an approving conscience, under the reflection that I may, in some degree, have been instrumental in promoting the melioration of your condition, or in the legal recovery and securing of some of your individual rights.

“In looking back through the period of time, during which I have been engaged as your advocate, how great appears the change, both in your condition as a people, and in the minds even of slave holders towards you!—The force of justice, and the power of religious principle, have so operated upon many of those who held you in bondage, that by voluntary emancipation many thousands of you have been restored to the rank of freemen. We now behold you a numerous and an increasing people, set at liberty to share in rights and privileges, in which you are deeply interested, and upon the proper exercise or abuse of which, may depend the thralldom or enlargement of your yet enslaved brethren.

“You will permit me to bring into view some of those circumstances which,

within the last forty years, have combined to improve your condition, and which, I conceive, are calculated to produce further results of the most importance to you. You now have the privilege of holding, and many of you are in actual possession of considerable property—others of you are liberally rewarded for their industry, and to all of you who have been emancipated, the means are offered of rendering yourselves comfortable in the world, and of diffusing blessings to your offspring as well as to those of your color generally. Under these favors, for which you stand immediately indebted to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, both civil and religious improvements are advancing amongst you. Your friends rejoice in perceiving the number of schools established and encouraged for the education of your children; because they view in the cultivation of the human mind, not only a preparation for freedom, but also a qualification for increased usefulness to civil society at large, believing in the important truth, that in proportion as barbarism and ignorance amongst you shall yield to light and knowledge, civilization and refinement will render you more valuable both to yourselves and to the community in which you live. They also observe with deep interest, the worship houses erected for your accommodation, in many places, in which you are permitted undisturbedly to assemble, for the public acknowledgment due to the God and Father of us all. In adverting to this momentous consideration, I feel an ardent desire, that you may entertain just conceptions, both of the importance of religion, and of the nature and obligations of divine worship. The most solemn act in which the mind of man can possibly be engaged, is the worship of God. The aid of words is not necessary to communicate our wants, neither is the utmost exertion of the powers of the human voice capable of reaching the Divine ear, with any increased certainty. True worship is the adoration of the soul; and when clothed in vocal expressions, it ought to be with reverence and awe, and under a demeanor, marked by that decency and order, which the knowledge of a God of order necessarily implies. In communicating these sentiments, I feel the warmest solicitude, that your religious assemblies, under whatever name you may meet, may be acceptable to the Divine Being; and that they may be so conducted as to claim the respect, even of your enemies.

“I will now call your attention to the importance of the relation in which such of you as are at liberty stand, to those who are in bondage. I desire to convince you, that your conduct, whether good or evil, will have a powerful influence in loosening, or in riveting the chains of such of your oppressed fellow descendants of Africa as may yet remain in slavery.—How lamentable is the reflection that the misconduct of some amongst you, who are enjoying the

rights and privileges of freemen, should afford ground for the assertion that you are unworthy of liberty, and that this abuse of your privileges should furnish a pretext for perpetuating the sufferings and oppressions of your brethren who remain under the galling yoke of bondage! I assuredly believe, that not only those who are at liberty, but that those also who are enslaved, may become the instruments of alleviating the sufferings of one another, or, on the contrary, of aggravating and continuing those sufferings, by prejudicing the minds, and rendering callous the feelings, of Slave Holders against you. Under this view it is the earnest desire of my heart, not only that the free people of color, but also that such as are in slavery, may so conduct themselves, as to make strong and powerful appeals to the humanity and justice of those who hold them in bondage. Religion, under its true and vital obligations, would lead those of you who are at liberty, to observe integrity and uprightness of conduct. It would make you examples in industry, in sobriety, and in honesty. It would render you happy in yourselves, and it would secure to you the confidence and favours of the white people, by proving to them that you were not unworthy of the rights you enjoyed. The same would likewise be its conspicuous and important benefits to those yet held in bondage; it would lead these to be faithful servants, to fill up the duties laid upon them, however hard their allotment, with a due regard even to the interests of their masters; and instead of indulging the malignant passions of depraved human nature, which go to render evil for evil, their souls would be directed in prayer to God, that the eyes of their oppressors might be opened to see, and their hearts softened to feel, for the wrongs and sufferings of the descendants of Africa. They would confide in the overruling and superintending Providence of the Almighty—of him who heard the cries, and brought out of Egyptian bondage, a numerous people formerly, long subjected to the cruelty of hard task masters, who ‘made them serve with rigour,’⁸⁴ and embittered their lives with heavy oppression.

“Having thus expressed myself in relation to those who are now at liberty, and also to those who are yet in slavery in the United States generally, but very especially to you of the middle states, and of Baltimore, the city of my residence, in behalf of whom, my agency has, on many occasions, been more immediately exerted, I feel myself impelled under the deepest concern for your welfare; and from a sense of the duty which I believe I owe to you, to say yet further, that my mind is impressed with a clear and full conviction that the Arm of Omnipotence is stretched out for your enlargement—that he is manifesting his power by his influences upon the hearts of our Rulers, and that he

84. Exodus 1:13: “And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour.”

is enlightening the minds and mitigating the feelings of many of those who yet hold you in bondage.

“Many are the advocates who are raised up even in the councils of nations, to plead your cause, both in reference to the foreign trade, and to domestic slavery.—The wrongs and the cries of Africa and her descendants have not only reached the ears of the Infinite Jehovah, but have touched the hearts of thousands, with feelings of philanthropy, under which they are becoming instruments in the Divine hand, in loosening your chains. And whilst I view with joyous anticipation, the great and interesting certainty, that slavery in our country is drawing to an end, and that thousands and tens of thousands of the descendants of Africa are becoming restored to the rights of freemen, my heart is animated with the warmest solicitude that the great purposes of the Almighty, in relation to you as a people, may not be retarded by any indiscretions on your part. I believe it to be the design of infinite Wisdom, not only to furnish in your case a proof of the very important truth, that slavery, being in itself inherently wrong, cannot always exist, but that it is also his sacred determination to manifest his omnipotence by bringing good out of this evil. In accordance with these views, I religiously believe, that the day will come in which the people of color in these United States, emerging from a state of slavery, will be made instrumental in diffusing both civil and religious benefits, to the dark and benighted regions of Africa. Under considerations like these, how great is the responsibility which rests upon you, and how serious the duties you owe to God, to yourselves individually, and to one another!

“Having said thus much in discharge of the solemn and last debt, which I have believed I owe to you, I now close this my farewell address: in doing which the effusions of my heart reach forth to the God of all grace, earnestly desiring that under the dispensations of his Providence, the light of his truth may be your light, that it may lead, guide and direct you, in every difficulty, and under every extremity, and that he may finally give you an inheritance in the regions of eternal life, with ‘that great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and tongues, and people.’⁸⁵

ELISHA TYSON.

Baltimore, 2d Mo. 1824.”

This address was written a very few days before his death, which, he had anticipated would take place at the time when it happened. It was printed and circu-

85. Revelation 7:9: “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.”

lated both in a pamphlet form, and in the newspapers of the day: it was read from the pulpits of the various African churches throughout the United States—and attended with the happiest effects.

Chapter X.

The person of Mr. Tyson was about six feet in height, though the habit of leaning forward as he walked, gave a less appearance to his stature. The rest of his frame was suited to his height.

The features of his countenance were strong.—His forehead was high—his nose large, and of the Roman order—his eyes were dark and piercing—his lips so singularly expressive, that even in their stillest mood, they would almost seem to be uttering the purposes of his mind. Indeed his whole face was indicative, to a striking degree, of the passions and feelings of his soul, when they were permitted to be manifested. Those of indignation and pity, but above all, that arch and incredulous look, which marks suspicion, were most strikingly displayed.—The latter seldom failed to drag forth the lurking truth from the bosom of the kidnapper, when he felt the piercing glance stirring up his soul.

The mind of Mr. Tyson was strong, rather than brilliant—with scarcely any imagination, he possessed a judgment almost infallible in its decisions—great powers of reason, which were more conspicuous for the certainty of its conclusions, than remarkable for displaying the train of inferences by which it arrived at them. He possessed wonderful acuteness of understanding, quickness of perception, and readiness of reply.

For these qualities, he was indebted more to nature than to art. He was not educated for the exalted station of a philanthropist, but for the business of the world—and yet, he seemed fitted exactly for the part he acted. He possessed not the *refinements* of education—he had not learnt to soar into the regions of fancy—his destiny was upon the earth—and he knew no flight, but that which bears the soul to heaven.

As to his moral qualities, they have been developed by his life.—His was the life of a philanthropist.—All those moral qualities, therefore, which belong to a philanthropist, were his. He was a *great* philanthropist; these qualities, therefore, were his in a *great* degree.

In very early life he enlisted under the banners of the true God. He never de-

serted his standard—on the contrary, in every encounter, where the honor of his Divine Master was at stake, he fought with more than heroic intrepidity in his cause. He was a good soldier in such a cause; constant—bold—firm against temptation—patient under suffering—not practicing upon others the injuries he received from them, but returning good for evil—warring not against man, but against the corruptions of man.

His conduct through life was singularly marked with prudence. His maxim was not

*“Fiat Justitia Ruat Caelum.”*⁸⁶

He looked to consequences, even in pursuing what was just. But they were consequences of a public nature—they were consequences calculated to effect the great cause which he had espoused. Hence it was that he never recommended any rash plan of humanity—not even sudden and universal emancipation—which seems to be the great theme of modern philanthropists.

But consequences of a nature, personal as to himself, were those which he despised. *His* maxim was

*“FIAT JUSTITIA RUAT” MEUM.*⁸⁷

His habits were those of temperance, industry, and economy. By the first, he was enabled to preserve for seventy-five years, a life, much burdened with those things which wear down existence. By the others he was enabled to amass a considerable estate, to obtain the comforts of life for his family, and bequeath independencies to his children.

His opinions in matters of religion, were strictly those of the society of Friends—I mean those of the more solid part of this society. Though he wore their costume and spoke their language, yet he believed not in the religion of dress and language—he thought them non-essentials—but that plainness within, would lead to corresponding plainness without.

He believed that human events were under the immediate inspection and control of the Almighty. That the only way in which these were effected, was by the immediate presence and guidance of the spirit of the Deity. The active principle in man was spiritual—God was a spirit—and, therefore, the only way in which man could be guided, and consequently human events controlled, was by the immediate union and communion of the finite with the infinite Spirit. This doctrine he

86. Latin: “Let justice be done, though the heavens fall.”

87. Latin: “Let justice be done, though I may fall.”

found confirmed by the testimony of the wise and good among the ancient heathens and the virtuous Israelites—but above all, of the great founder of the Christian Religion.

He thought that a communion of this extraordinary kind could not exist without being perceptible to the sentient power of him whose privilege it was to enjoy it: and he spoke with certainty, that he felt from time to time, the overpowering and all-guiding presence of Jehovah. No enterprise of humanity or responsibility was attempted by him, without consulting this divine oracle, which existed in the soul of man, long before the Rhodian and the Delphian amused mankind by their incantations.⁸⁸ He believed himself to be an instrument in the hands of the Almighty—bound to go when and where *he* commanded, and certain of success when he obeyed—and he was never deceived.

His opinions upon the subject of domestic slavery, were those which he most openly expressed, because he was most desirous to inculcate them. These may be best gathered from his biography. The common arguments in favor of slavery, to wit: That it is a necessary evil, imposed upon us by our ancestors—that the condition of the free colored population is worse than that of the slaves—he treated as a mere apology for the want of argument.

1. Nothing can be called a necessary evil which it is in our power to avoid or remove. Each slave holder has in it his power to remove from *himself* the evil of slavery, by acts of private manumission. Therefore, to no slave holder, is slavery a necessary evil.

2. The sins of our ancestors will not excuse our iniquities. The sin of continuing slavery, when it is in our power to remove it, is as bad as the original crime of introducing it. Therefore, the sin of continuing slavery, is not excused by its introduction on the part of our ancestors.

3. Suppose it true, that the condition of the free population is worse than that of the slaves; freedom is not the cause of it. To say so, would be to slander the choicest gift of heaven. This condition may be the effect of the misfortunes, folly, or vice of the free colored man, or to all combined together. Even suppose the latter to be the case: who will dare to say that the misfortunes, folly, or vice of any one or more human beings, should be an excuse for the vice and folly of another?

88. In the ancient Greek world, the Oracle of Delphi was a priestess who presided over a temple to the god Apollo, located at Delphi on the slopes of Mt. Parnassus. She was renowned for her supposed ability to answer questions posed by those who wished to know the future. Rhodes is a Greek island legendary in the ancient world as a maritime power and the site of an enormous statue of the god Helios that is colloquially known as the Colossus of Rhodes.

His political principles were purely American. He loved to contemplate liberty in her proper station, equally removed from servility, and licentiousness.—He considered political freedom, though not incompatible with domestic slavery, yet disgraced by it; and gloried in anticipating the approaching jubilee, when the one will have rooted out the other. He believed that the march of freedom throughout the world, was proceeding with a step steady and resistless as the tide of time:—that though the body of tyranny was of brass, and its legs of iron, yet its feet were of clay: and that, ere long, “the little stone, dug out of the mountain” by invisible hands, would smite the image to the ground; and becoming a great mountain, fill the world—that then, and not till then, would the millennium bless the nations.⁸⁹

His practice corresponded with his principles.—Regarding all men equal, in the sight of God, he affected no superiority over those whom the world would call his inferiors; nor did he look up for a superior, to any being less than God.

His manners were plain and simple.—He despised ostentation, whether in dress or furniture; and though he had it in his power to obtain the luxuries, was satisfied with the substantialities of life.

As a philanthropist, all must accord him a station of the first order. It is difficult, in the history of modern philanthropists, to find his superior.

The ancients did not pretend to philanthropy. Seldom did the benevolent virtues flow from one nation to another. The enlightened Greeks regarded all mankind, except themselves, as barbarians, and of inferior nature. Even the wise Aristotle assumed, as an undeniable position, that all other nations were inferior to the GREEKS, and then gravely deduced therefrom the conclusion, that nature intended all mankind to be *their* slaves. The great and good Socrates confined his lessons of morality, to the Athenian youth: and his disciple Plato, even in imagination, found ample scope for the exercise of his philanthropy, within the bounds of his visionary republic.

The Romans regarded all nations, but the Greeks and Egyptians, as inferior to them; and, excepting occasionally one or two instances of Praetors and Proconsuls, who governed with more than ordinary mildness the provinces committed to their care, nothing like a *philanthropist* is presented to the mind, through the extensive period of their history. Indeed, from the perpetual wars which they carried on against all parts of the world, where their sway was not acknowledged, it would seem that the opposite of philanthropy—*hatred* to mankind—was regarded as the first of Roman virtues.

Even the Jewish nation, (to whom was revealed the knowledge of God’s exis-

89. Cf. the interpretation of the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2:31–45.

tence, and the important fact that, as all mankind were descended from Adam and Eve, so they were, by creation, brothers,) designated all those, not in communion with them, by a term which has been translated “enemies”—regarding those only, who were of *their* persuasion, as “neighbors.” Every one will recollect the parable of the “good Samaritan,” uttered by the Saviour of the World.—A certain man going from Jerusalem to Jericho fell among thieves; and they stripped him, and beat him, and left him half dead. The Levite, of the highest of the tribes of Israel, passed by on the other side.—But the good Samaritan bound up his wounds, soothed his woes, and administered to his wants. “Now,” asked our Lord, “which of these was *neighbor* unto him that suffered?” The truth flashed, like lightning, upon the mind of him to whom the question was addressed; and he gave his voice in favor of the kind Samaritan.⁹⁰

A short time before the utterance of this parable, the same great and good being who spoke it in his sermon on the mount, had uttered the truth which that parable was intended to enforce. “Ye have heard that it has been said, by them of old time, thou shalt love thy *neighbor*, and hate thine *enemy*; but I say unto you, love your *enemies*.”⁹¹

Then was it that the principles of philanthropy first dawned upon the world. Then the barrier was broken down between the Gentile and the Jew, and the various tribes of mankind mingled into one, beneath the melting power of universal charity.

Jesus Christ was the first and greatest philanthropist. The virtue “that went out from him,” to the healing of the multitude, was equally extended to “the son of a certain rich man,” and “to the poor blind man by the way side”—to the Roman Centurion, as to the Jewish Pharisee or Saducee. The religion he taught was intended as a blessing to *all* mankind.⁹²

The apostles imitated him in his God-like virtues—and the primitive fathers followed in the footsteps of the Apostles. To compare the degenerate beings of modern times with these unequalled worthies, would be arrogance in the extreme.

Comparison is folly where the dissimilarity is great between the objects to be compared.—Modern philanthropists should, therefore, be compared with each

90. The parable of the good Samaritan is told in Luke 10:30–37.

91. Matthew 5:43–44: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy / But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”

92. Luke 6:19, 15:11, and 18:35.

other: and, for that reason, we will consider the philanthropy of Elisha Tyson, together with that of Howard, Clarkson, Wilberforce, and Sharp.

Howard risked his life amidst the foetid damps and infectious plagues of the dungeon. In his circum-navigation of charity, (to use the language of Burke,) he encountered difficulty, privation, and fatigue, as he administered to the wants and comforts of the prisoners of all nations, and at last fell a martyr to his cause.—His cause, however, was popular—he walked amid the acclamations of nations—kings and princes decreed him the respect of their subjects—and their dungeon doors were opened at the sound of his footsteps. The benefits he conferred were temporary in their nature, and now little is left but the benefit of his great example.⁹³

But the cause to which Mr. Tyson lent his life, though much more important for the good of mankind than that in which Howard died, was so far from being popular, that at the time in which he first entered upon it, it was, in the eyes of the world, even degradation to espouse it. The *great* men of the earth frowned upon him; and even his equals and inferiors treated him with contempt.—And although dungeons opened at his approach, yet this was not at the sound of his footsteps, but by force of his arm, which, for that purpose, became the arm of the law. His was the cause of liberty. 'Tis true he did not die a martyr to it, but his biography shews us that he was on all occasions ready to offer up his life for the good of his fellow creatures.

Clarkson confined his philanthropy to one great object—the abolition of the slave trade to the coast of Africa—and having achieved that, turned his attention to other objects. The same may be said of Wilberforce, the illustrious co-adjutor of Clarkson, in the great cause of abolition. Their efforts, though for a while resisted with obstinacy, triumphed at last; and their subsequent exertions were backed by the whole naval power of Great Britain.

But the whole life of Elisha Tyson, from his youth up, was devoted to the cause of emancipation. His very last act was an achievement of philanthropy, and his last breath was spent in thanking heaven for its success. He was not backed by the power of a mighty nation—but, single handed, compelled to fight his way through hosts of opponents.

In character and disposition, there was a striking resemblance between *Granville Sharp* and the subject of this biography. With very slight alterations, an obituary notice describing the character of Sharp will be found strikingly adapted to that

93. John Howard (1726–1790) was an English philanthropist interested especially in penal reform. He died of typhus that he contracted while visiting a prison.

of Tyson. Part of this we will extract for the benefit of the reader.—The rest may be seen by a reference to the “London Christian Observer, for August, eighteen hundred and thirteen.”

“At Fulham, on the sixth of July last, died Granville Sharp, Esquire, in the seventy-ninth year of his age—a man of pre-eminent philanthropy, whose life was most actively and perseveringly devoted to promote the best interests of his species, under a deep sense of his responsibility to GOD. He was a man of singularly gentle, modest and courteous demeanor; but in a cause which he deemed important, especially when it involved the rights either of his great Lord and Master, or of his fellow men, no less singularly bold and intrepid.

“He was a most efficient instrument in operating some mighty changes in the opinion and conduct of this nation—changes which will immortalize his name while the idea of liberty is cherished, or fearless, unwearied, self-denying, and successful exertions for the happiness of mankind, are admired among men. But the praise of men was not the prevailing motive to exertion with this distinguished individual. He did what he did as unto GOD.—His fear was ever before his eyes; and the life of Granville Sharp appeared, to those who knew him, to be marked, in a very extraordinary degree, by a reference to the will of his GOD, as the supreme and decisive rule of his conduct; and to the influences of the Holy Spirit, as the only source of strength and peace.

“It is scarcely necessary to advert to the part which Mr. Sharp bore in the great question of the slave-trade and slavery. Every one in Great Britain knows, that if in the present day

*‘Her soil is freedom to the feet of slaves,’*⁹⁴

it is to the constancy and intrepidity of Granville Sharp, that we owe this blessing. He achieved the recognition of this grand and ennobling principle, though almost singly opposed to the lawyers, the judges, and the statesmen of the day, and though vilified and traduced by the then formidable host of slave traders and their friends in Liverpool, London and Bristol. The case we allude to, is that of Somerset, in which it was decided by the Judges of England, that slaves cannot breathe upon our shores.”⁹⁵

94. James Montgomery, “The West Indies” (1809): “When Sharpe, on proud Britannia’s charter’d shore / From Libyan limps the unsanction’d fetters tore / And taught the world, that while she rules the waves / Her soil is freedom to the feet of slaves.”

95. In *Somerset v. Stewart* (1772), an enslaved man named James Somerset, aided by Granville Sharp, won his freedom, a precedent that helped enslaved people in England establish their own legal claims to freedom.

The above description, where it does not respect matters of local character, is most strictly adapted to the subject of this biography; and, therefore, we have inserted it.

What Sharp performed, Tyson would have done, had he lived in England. What Tyson did, Sharp might have performed, had he lived in Maryland. Nature seems to have formed them out of one common mould. She, however, cast the lot of Tyson in a field of wider and more laborious exertion, than that in which Sharp was born. In England, where all have a right by law to freedom, individual instances of oppression, furnishing opportunities for the exercise of philanthropy, rarely occur. But in countries like Maryland, where slavery is upheld by law, the philanthropist will find no end to his labors. As it was the fate of Tyson to be located in such a country, it is probable that he was furnished by nature with a greater portion of those noble qualities and powers that enter into the composition of a philanthropist, than belonged to the soul of Sharp.—His were confined to a few instances—those of the former, to multitudes. Two thousand human beings have blessed him as the immediate agent of their deliverance from perpetual slavery. Indirectly, their present offspring, and the countless number of their future descendants, owe, or will owe to him, the light of liberty. When we add to these, the thousands that have obtained their freedom through the doors of private emancipation, opened through his exertions by the legislative arm; the numbers of masters, that have been, by his advice or his example, induced to do justice to their slaves by deeds of manumissions; the great improvement he effected in the condition of the free, by the erection of churches and the encouragement of schools; the amelioration, in the condition of slaves by the practical lessons of humanity which he taught their masters before the judicial tribunals of the state; the sacrifices he made, and the labors he endured, in order to reclaim from savage wildness, the red men of the West; and the interest he manifested in the welfare of all classes of human beings, of every sex, rank, condition, color, and degree—we will be justified in saying, that in closing, as we now do, this little volume, we close the history of the greatest philanthropist that has appeared on earth, since the days of the Apostles and primitive Fathers.

Correspondence, Reminiscences & Other Supplementary Documents

1 + The Constitution of the Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, 1789

When the Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery was founded in 1789, it was just one among a loosely organized network of other antislavery associations created in multiple states. Its principles and its structure were similar to those others, and they were published alongside the names of ninety members, the officers, those serving on committees, and the lawyers who worked with the organization bringing suits on behalf of enslaved people. Elisha Tyson sat on the “Acting Committee” of the Maryland Abolition Society (MAS) from its origin until the association disbanded in 1798.

CONSTITUTION *of the* MARYLAND SOCIETY, *for promoting the* ABOLITION *of* SLAVERY, *and the* RELIEF *of* FREE NEGROES, *and others,* *unlawfully held in* BONDAGE.

The present attention of Europe and America to Slavery, seems to constitute that crisis in the minds of men, when the united endeavours of a few may greatly influence the public opinion, and produce, from the transient sentiment of the times, effects extensive, lasting, and useful.

The common Father of mankind created all men free and equal, and his great command is, that we love our neighbour as ourselves, doing unto all men as we would they should do unto us.

The human race, however varied in colour or intellects, are all justly entitled to liberty; and it is the duty and the interest of nations and individuals, enjoying every blessing of freedom, to remove this dishonour of the Christian character from amongst them.—From the fullest impression of the truth of these principles; from an earnest wish to bear our testimony against Slavery in all its forms, to spread it abroad as far as the sphere of our influence may extend, and to afford our friendly assistance to those who may be engaged in the same undertaking; and in the humblest hope of support from that Being, who takes as an offering to himself what we do for each other,—We, the subscribers, have formed ourselves into ‘*the MARY-*

LAND SOCIETY for promoting the ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, and for the RELIEF of FREE NEGROES, and others, unlawfully held in BONDAGE.'

THE CONSTITUTION.

I. The Officers of the Society are, a President, Vice-President, Secretary, a Treasurer, four Counsellors, an Electing-Committee of twelve, and an Acting-Committee of six members. All these, except the Acting-Committee, shall be chosen annually, by ballot, on the first *Seventh-Day*, called *Saturday*, in the month called *January*.

II. The President, or, in his absence, the Vice-President, shall subscribe all the public acts of the Society.

III. The President, or, in his absence, the Vice-President, shall, moreover, have the power of calling a special meeting of the Society, whenever he shall judge proper, or six members require it.

IV. The Secretary shall keep fair records of the proceedings of the Society; he shall also conduct the correspondence of the Society, with a committee of three, appointed by the President; and all letters, on the business of the Society, are to be addressed to him.

V. Corresponding-Members shall be appointed by the Electing-Committee: Their duty shall be, to communicate to the Secretary, and his assistants, any information that may promote the purposes of this institution, which shall be transferred by him to the Acting-Committee.

VI. The Treasurer shall pay all orders drawn by the President, or Vice-President; which orders shall be his vouchers for his expenditures—He shall, before he enters on his office, give a bond, of not less than two hundred pounds, for the faithful discharge of his duty.

VII. The duty of the Counsellors shall be, to explain the laws and constitutions of the states, which relate to the emancipation of Slaves; and to urge their claims to freedom, when legal, before such persons, or courts, as are authorized to decide upon them.

VIII. The Electing-Committee shall have the sole power of admitting new members: Two-thirds of them shall be a quorum for this purpose—and the concurrence of a majority of them, by ballot, when met, shall be necessary for the admission of a member. No member shall be admitted, who has not been proposed at a general-meeting of the Society; nor shall an election for a member take place, in less than one month after the time of his being proposed. Foreigners, or other persons, who do not reside in this state, may be elected Corresponding-Members of the Society, without being subject to an annual payment; and shall be admitted to the meetings of the Society, during their residence in the state.

IX. The Acting-Committee shall transact the business of the Society, in its re-

cess, and report the same at each quarterly-meeting: They shall have a right, with the concurrence of the President, or Vice-President, to draw upon the Treasurer, for such sums of money as shall be necessary to carry on the business of their appointment: Four of them shall be a quorum: After their first election, at each succeeding quarterly-meeting, there shall be an election for two of their number.

X. Every member, upon his admission, shall subscribe the constitution of the Society, and contribute *Ten Shillings*, annually, in quarterly payments, towards defraying its contingent expenses. If he neglects to pay the same, for more than six months, he shall, upon due notice being given him, cease to be a member.

XI. The Society shall meet on the first *Seventh-Day*, called *Saturday*, in the months called *January, April, July, and October*, at such time and place as shall be agreed to by a majority of the Society.

XII. No person, holding a Slave as his property, shall be admitted a member of this Society: Nevertheless, the Society may appoint persons of legal knowledge, owners of Slaves, as Honorary-Counsellors.

XII. When an alteration in the constitution is thought necessary, it shall be proposed at a previous meeting, before it shall take place.—All questions shall be decided, where there is a division, by a majority of votes.—In those cases where the Society is equally divided, the presiding Officer shall have a casting vote.

Maryland Journal, December 15, 1789.

2 → Circular Letter to the Several Abolition Societies of America, 1790

In the fall of 1790, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS), which was the leading American antislavery organization in the late eighteenth century, circulated a request to antislavery societies in other states for a joint effort to petition Congress to take action against the slave trade. The request points to some of the lobbying activities of these organizations, their incipient attempts to forge a national network, and the extent to which the antislavery movement in this era was not only an American one but also a transatlantic one.

Gentlemen—

From a serious conviction of the necessity of using every justifiable means in promoting the great cause in which we are jointly engaged we have now to request your assistance in a measure which to us has appeared of very great importance.

You will long since have been informed of our application to Congress at its last session and of the result thereof. By the enclosed copy of an authenticated report of the Committee of the whole house of Representatives, you will perceive that the

powers of Congress, tho' limited, are yet, in some respects, adequate to procure relief for the oppressed Blacks.

We conceive that, with the blessing of divine providence on our endeavors this desirable end may be attained by the united addresses of the Several Societies instituted in the United States for the abolition of Slavery.

The object of our address on this occasion will principally consist of a request to Congress that they will exert the powers they are possessed of to pass such laws as may alleviate as much as possible the horrors of the slave trade. We submit to you the propriety of speaking the same language in all our addresses, as this must necessarily encrease their weight.

The favorable Train in which this business is at present before the national assembly of France and parliament of Great Britain owing chiefly to the exertions of Societies similar to our own, must afford us much encouragement, and when we consider that in our country there are societies in Rh[ode] Isl[and], Connect[icut], New York, Delaware, Maryland & Virginia, besides the two in Pennsylvania, all of which it is hoped, will unite in this measure, we have additional motives to continue our exertions until Slavery is unknown in our land.

As the residence of Congress will be, for some time, in this City, we think it will be advisable to forward the address you may agree upon, as soon as convenient, to the President of our Society, as it will be most useful to present them all at the same time.

With much respect, we remain Your sincere friends.

Signed in behalf and by request of the Committee of Correspondence of the Pennsy[lvania] Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the relief of free Negroes unlawfully held in bondage, and for improving the Condition of the African race.

Philad[elphia] Oct. 25th, 1790.

“Circular Letter to the Several Abolition Societies of America,” October 25, 1790,
Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, series 2, box 18, folder 6, collection 0490,
Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (hereafter PASP).

3 → Runaway Advertisement, 1796

The MAS routinely provoked the ire of slaveholders by offering legal assistance to procure freedom for the enslaved. But contrary to slaveholder beliefs that members of the MAS “enticed” those held in bondage, enslaved people needed no invitation to seek their own

liberty. Early in 1796, when Christopher Hughes offered a reward in a Baltimore newspaper for a man named Jim who fled from him, he claimed he would never enslave someone illegally, yet those claims are belied by his obvious anger at Jim and the MAS alike. His advertisement also points toward some of the ways Elisha Tyson would continue to aid the enslaved long after the MAS ceased to exist.

Fifty Dollars Reward.

RAN AWAY from the subscriber, living in Baltimore-town, on or about the 20th day of September last, a yellowish Negro Man, named JIM, about 6 feet 2 inches high, remarkably straight, has lost one of his front teeth, the remainder very good; he is supposed to have had a cut on his upper lip, and another over his eye; he generally laughs when spoken to, and is an uncommon large, awkward, ugly, disgusting Negro Man, by trade a brickmaker, is very fond of strong drink: it is needless to describe his dress, as he must have changed it before this.—He formerly belonged to the widow James, who brought him from Charlestown, near the head of the bay, where it is possible he may be skulking.—The subscriber would have advertised him sooner, but was informed by a certain Elisha Tyson, that the Abolition Society, or that a deputation or committee of the Abolitionists, had the fellow in keeping, to get him his freedom. The subscriber told Mr. Tyson, that he held in abhorrence holding any person in improper bondage, and bid him or his associates bring the fellow forward, to claim his freedom in a legal manner, and any right he had thereto, should be duly attended to.

It is hard to be thus deprived of the labor of my Negro, for whom I paid four hundred dollars, without receiving one month's service from him. Whoever brings home the said Negro, shall, if taken in town, or within ten miles thereof, receive TEN DOLLARS; if within sixty miles, THIRTY DOLLARS, and if out of the state, the above reward, paid by

CHRISTOPHER HUGHES.

Federal Gazette, February 4, 1796.

4 → The African Academy, 1797–1822

In the early 1790s, the MAS began raising funds to create a school for free Black children in Baltimore. First opened in 1797, the African Academy struggled financially for several years. In 1802, thanks in part to James Carey, who had been a leader of the MAS, a Black

+ C +

Board of Health.

ORPHANS.

Since the introduction of the present prevailing disease, the Board of Health having discovered that there were on Fell's-Point, a number of children, who in consequence thereof, were deprived of their parents, some of whom were left without relations, and all of them in a suffering condition, for want of the necessaries of life, and other assistance, from sucking infants up to ten years—did on the 16th ult. take possession of the African academy, had them collected therein, and employed nurses for their accommodation, since which the number has considerably increased from different parts of the city, and which probably may continue to be the case for a time—and as most of them are in want of cloathing of almost every description, particularly linen, &c. the subscribers think it proper to lay the wants of these orphans before their fellow-citizens, hoping, that the subject will so far claim their attention (particularly of those who are impressed with the tender ties of parental affection and sympathy) as to administer to their necessities.

Donations of this occasion will be received by George Matthews, on the East side of Jones's Falls, and Amos James, on Howard's Hill, or by Susanna Elliott, who acts as matron at the said academy, or by the subscribers.

Adam Fonerden,
Joseph Townsend,
 Com'rs. of Health
 10th mo. 4th, 1800.

Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser, October 4, 1800.

+ D +

We the Trustees of the African School, in the city of Baltimore, humbly desire to represent to the beneficent—

THAT some years ago we were encouraged by the liberality of the public, to add our utmost exertions in carrying on the blessed work of instructing colored youths, which was begun by our worthy friends, the Manumission Society—

That for this purpose, we erected a house adjacent to the African Church in Sharp-street, where there are at this time, a number of coloured children taught, at a moderate price; and some have made considerable progress in Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. But it is obvious to us (as hath also been mentioned by some of our

white friends) that we yet labour under some very great disadvantages; one particular point is, that the present plan will not admit of any children being taught gratis; and believing that ignorance is the bane of society, and that literature qualifies human beings, in a great measure, to be more useful in all stations in which the Providence of God shall place them, it is our earnest desire that this invaluable blessing may be embraced, in some small degree, by the poor distressed orphans of our colour, who are growing up in ignorance, without any friends, or humane institution to give them instruction.

And although the pecuniary circumstances of our coloured people in this city, is not sufficient to enable us to effect our laudable designs, yet the remembrance of the friendship and benevolence manifested toward us, by the inhabitants of Baltimore on former applications, inflames our hearts with sentiments of gratitude, and excites in us a gleam of hope, that the same spirit of philanthropy will prompt those to aid us, whose highest pleasure (we believe) has been to better the condition of the rising posterity.

With this belief, we have contracted with Mr. John Sinclair, for a house and lot of ground, adjoining the present school house, which, (if we should be so favoured as to obtain) will be the means of removing these difficulties, and will greatly aid us in accomplishing our wishes; as this purchase will answer for grand purposes, viz. It will afford a dwelling for the teachers, that they, being on the premises, may prevent the disorderly conduct of the scholars during the intervals of school hours; it will afford the privilege of dismissing the children in the alley back of the premises; it will enable us to reserve a room for the purpose of employing a Madam to teach the girls needle work; and lastly that the money arising from the rent, paid by the teachers for the house, to be sacred forever, for the education of orphans or poor coloured children. The sum agreed upon for the property is \$1050, and to make suitable accommodations for the intended purposes, will cost at least \$300 (as the building that now stands on the lot is no more than a work shop), making the whole amount to \$1350.

Therefore, seeing that our objects are of so great importance to the rising generation of coloured children in this city, and as the coloured people are generally poor, and many of them still in bondage (as is well known) we believe that the disclosure of our present intention will be a sufficient stimulus to all benevolent persons, to extend the hand of liberality, in aiding to diffuse light among the helpless sons and daughters of the descendants of Africans.

We can assure the liberal minded, that for their smallest contributions, they will receive from us unfeigned thanks, and from God, the source of all blessedness, and just reward of their acts of charity.

In order to give an opportunity to those who may be willing to contribute towards the purchase of the said lot of ground, we intend to call on the citizens, and receive from them whatever they may think proper to bestow; which shall be faithfully applied to the above purpose, by their humble servants.

Jacob Gilyard, sen.

Richard Russell

William Moore

Jacob Gilyard, jun.

William Watkins

George Collins

Joseph Sellars

Hannibal Moore

John Mingo

Trustees of the African School.

We, the subscribers, having had frequent opportunities of observing the capacity, sobriety and correctness of the conduct of the teachers employed at the African Academy, have no hesitation in saying, that we believe them to be well qualified; that the children under their care appear to us to make advances in learning, much to the credit of the teachers, as well as of themselves; and that we fully approve of the objects above proposed by the trustees.

John Stricker.

John Brevitt.

Philip Littig.

John Hagerty.

James Carey.

Elisha Tyson.

Gerard T. Hopkins.

Philip E. Thomas.

Elias Ellicott.

The objects contemplated by the Trustees of the African School have our most cordial approbation, and certainly deserve the attention of the benevolent public.

G. Dashiell, Rector of St. Peters Church, Baltimore

Edward Johnson,

John Hargrove, M.N.J.C.

We agree with the above Gentlemen:

C. Otterbein,
Joseph G.J. Bend.

From the knowledge which we possess of the Trustees of the African School, and the objects which they contemplate, we recommend them to the patronage of the benevolent of every order.

John Pitts,
Jno. Swartzwelder,
Jos. Frye,
G. Roberts,
Methodist Ministers.

From the information I possess respecting the African School, I cheerfully unite with the above gentlemen in recommending it to the attention of the benevolent.

James Inglis,
Minister of the First Presbyterian Church.

From the information I have received respecting the African School, I cheerfully unite with the above Gentlemen, in recommending it to the attention of the benevolent.

Lewis Richards,
Pastor of the first Baptist Church.

Being well persuaded of the good effects arising from the above institution, I can say it gives me pleasure, in recommending any thing calculated to promote the morals of Society, and more especially the general cause of humanity.

John Healey.

I have no hesitation in recommending the above institution, to the patronage of a generous public, believing the advantages which arise from it, to be great.

J. Daniel Kurtz,
Minister of the Lutheran Congregation.

The instruction of those children belonging to African parents on the plan proposed is, I think, practicable and excellent.

J. Kingston.

Having no doubt of the great advantages to the rising generation, that will result from teaching people of colour, and being assured of the faithful discharge of the trust reposed in the persons now engaged in teaching and preparing means for an extension of their institution, I hereby recommend them to the public in general and particularly to liberal characters for aid in so laudable a purpose.

Henry Wilkins.
Baltimore, April 22d, 1811.

Baltimore American and Commercial Daily Advertiser, April 29, 1811.

+ E +

Communication.

To those parents that have committed the tuition of their children to my care, and the public generally.

There will be an examination on Friday the 16th inst. of the children who are now under my charge. This examination is intended to precede a vacation, and as I am desirous of giving ample satisfaction to my employers, I do cordially solicit the attendance of the parents and friends of said children, and those humane gentlemen and ladies who feel themselves interested in the advancement of learning in the rising generation of colored people.

This examination will be held in Mr. Creery's school house on FRIDAY at 3 o'clock PM.

HENRY JORDINE,
Teacher of the African Academy, S. Charles street.

Baltimore American and Commercial Daily Advertiser, August 15, 1822.

5 + Elisha Tyson to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, 1811–1812

Though the MAS no longer existed by the 1810s, Elisha Tyson continued corresponding with leaders of antislavery organizations in other states. In the series of letters below, Tyson asks for the help of Isaac Hopper and William Master, fellow Quakers active in the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, as he looked to free several Black Philadelphians who had been kidnapped and sold illegally in Baltimore, and to provide evidence that would aid in the prosecution of their kidnappers. Tyson's letters demonstrate how many complicated legal

and procedural hurdles there could be to liberate even people whose freedom seemed unquestionable and how challenging it was to punish kidnappers and slave traders engaged in illegal activities. They also open a small window onto the seemingly all-consuming nature of Tyson's activism. He was involved in hundreds of cases like these over the course of several decades, each of which entailed legal intricacies and significant amounts of time. Tyson's correspondence does not indicate whether Moses Phillips and Joseph Roach, the kidnappers and slave traders at the center of the cases in these letters, were ever convicted for their crimes.

→ A →

Balto. 6th mo. 27th 1811
Isaac T. Hopper

Esteemed friend—

I have Taken the liberty to ask Thy assistance in detecting a Monster of a man, by the name of Mosses Phillip alias Moses Judah; who it appears a few days past hired a mulatto boy, by the name of Peter Reubin Francis Johnson, about nine years old; from his mother in your city who formerly lived with Benj. Chew as a cook; whose name was formerly calld. Isabella Douglas but now Stephens, and at present lives with her mother in Middle Alley sixth Street, and follows sewing for a livelihood.

Immediately on the fellow's arrival here it appears he lost no time in selling the boy to one of the dealers in human flesh for the sum of \$250; but fortunately for the boy he was accidentally resqued from being made slave for life and is now here safe, which I wish Thee to inform his mother; The fellow has made his escape; I wish some person or Documents to be sent on here sufficient to Identify the boy so that he may return to his mother and friends again.

In haste I conclude Thy Friend &c.
Elisha Tyson

NB please to attend to it as speedily as possible.

→ B →

Baltimore 7th mo. 10th 1811

Esteemed Friend—

I have been waiting with anxiety to see the uncle of the mulatto Boy which is now here in the hands of the sheriff with such Documents & Information as will Release him but none have yet come to hand, and the Expences are Increasing

Daily, therefore should be extreamly glad if Immediate attention was paid to this Business.

I am thy friend
Elisha Tyson

Isaac T. Hopper
Philadelphia

+ C +

Balto. 9th mo. 24th 1811

Esteemed Friend—

I wrote thee some days since in answer to thy Enquiries Respecting the coloured Boy, thee having informed me of the apprehension of the man who took him away. I can now Inform thee that I this day saw the man (whose name is Joseph Roach) to whom this Boy was actually sold in this city & who had paid part of all the consideration for him, & this man Roach says if he is written to & Informed when the Trial of this Moses Philips, alias something else he will come on to Philadelphia to prove what I have mentioned above.

I am thine &c.
Elisha Tyson

Wm. Master
Phila.

+ D +

Balto 18th of 7th mo 1812

Esteemed Friend—

I wrote thee some days since concerning the Black men which are now in our Gaol, the object of my writing again is to request thee will loose no time in answering my former letter, as our Criminal Court is now sitting & if it should not be likely that the Governor of your state should Demand the persons concerned in this Business it will be necessary for some steps to be taken here in that case it will be necessary that Proper Documents should be sent on to prove the freedom of the rest of Coloured people now in Gaol. Thy particular attention is requested to this Business by thy friend.

Elisha Tyson
William Master
Philadelphia

→ E →

Balto, 8th mo 20th 1812

Esteemed Friend—

Thy favour of 17th Inst. is at hand & note its contents, I have made application to the Judge of our Court to release the Black man for whom documents were forwarded, but he says it is not proper for him to release him, but that he must with the others be Demanded by the Governor of your State as it will be necessary to have them at the place so that they can be Identified on the Trial—and my opinion is that Immediate application should be made by the proper authority of your State so that these men may be sent on to Philadelphia. I am sorry to hear the one from Delaware which was concerned in this kidnapping has made his escape. Bench warrents have been issued by our Court for the apprehension of the other Two men by the name of Orams & I hope they will be taken. I am thine &c.

Elisha Tyson

NB I should be glad to Receive any Information concerning this Business which thee may get. E.T.

William Master
Philadelphia

→ F →

Balto 9th mo 4th 1812

Esteemed Friend—

I have to inform thee that Joseph Roach the man who is in our Gaol for selling the Negroes Luff, Jackson & Bailey has employed the ablest council in our City to defend him & our Grand Jury have got hold of the Business & have found Bills of Indictment against him, and his council appear determined that his trial shall take place here, which will be the case, & in order to his conviction it will be absolutely necessary to get some person or persons from Philadelphia & Delaware to identify those coloured people Peregrine Boon to identify the person of negro Solomon Luff & Peter Patten of Delaware to identify the person of negro Gabriel Jackson, also some person to identify the person of Richard Bailey also some person to identify Amos Morris. It is also necessary that the witnesses should be able to state that those people were free or at least Reputed to be so and lived as such.—It is positively necessary the witnesses should be here as no Certificate or Deposition can be used in a Criminal Prosecution in this State.—I have named Two persons as thee will perceive who I presume can Identify negroes Luff & Jackson, but it is

not material they should come, provided some persons will come who can Identify them Individually.—I cannot but indulge the hope that some persons will come as witnesses to prove what I have before stated, & I can also say that they will not be detained one day as the trial will be brought on immediately there being nothing to prevent it but the arrival of those witnesses & on their return they can take with them the coloured people now in Gaol who cannot be released before the trial; the witnesses while here shall be at no Expence, I wish no time to be lost & wish to be informed when those witnesses will be on. I must intreat thee to send the witnesses on as it will be a great Pity this man should be acquitted for want of the Testimony which no doubt can be had.

I am respectfully thy Friend

Elisha Tyson

William Master

P S It is not only necessary that those witnesses should come on in order to aid the conviction of Roach, but it is impossible that the Black People can be released unless Identified. E.T.

+ G +

To James Cammeron & William Master
Philadelphia

Balto. 11th mo. 11th 1812

The Bearers Gabriel Jackson, Solomon Luff, Richard Baily, and Amos Morris, all coloured People, were kidnapped and Brought from Philadelphia and Sold here for Life, but were fortunately apprehended & have been some time confined in Prison. They have a few days since, been Liberated by the Judge of Baltimore County Criminal Court, and are now on their return to their families and friends in Philadelphia—any little assistance afforded them, will be very grateful and an act of Christian Benevolence.

Elisha Tyson

+ H +

Baltimore 19th of 12th mo. 1812

Esteemed Friend—

I wrote some time since Respecting Joseph Roach. I should be glad to learn what Determination has been come to as he still remains in confinement & ac-

cordova to Law if he is not Demanded within 6 months he will be released here by a writ of *Habeus Corpus*. As I before said I am of opinion under all Circumstances it will be best to Release him so that we may be able to get at those who were concerned with him.

I remain thy friend
Elisha Tyson
William Master
Philadelphia

All letters from series 2, box 15, PASP. Letters A–C are contained
in folder 17, and letters D–H are contained in folder 18.

6 → Elisha Tyson to Representative Alexander McKim, December 5, 1811

Alexander McKim (1748–1832) was a Quaker merchant, an early member of the MAS, a longtime acquaintance of Elisha Tyson, and a member of Congress who represented the Baltimore area from 1809 to 1815. In 1811, after visiting Washington, D.C., as part of a Quaker delegation, Tyson wrote McKim and provided examples of kidnapping and the illegal slave trade in the ultimately vain hope that congressional action on such matters might be forthcoming.

Balti. 12 mo. 5, 1811

Respected friend—

Agreeable to the arrangement made between us when I was at Washington I now enclose thee, some proofs of the existence of an unlawful trade in People of Colour, these with the glaring evidence lately exhibited in the detection of a set of kidnappers at Petersburg in Virginia, with a family of black people, forcibly taken from the State of Delaware, will, I hope be deemed conclusive evidence on the subject. I am respectfully on behalf of the Committee

Thy Friend
Elisha Tyson

Remarks

Case 1st Abraham Long. This boy was born free on the Eastern Shore, & was bound out by his mother. He was kidnaped and taken off to New Orleans, where he was sold to Doctor Blackburn, who some time afterwards came on a

visit to Baltimore, attended by this boy as waiting man; the boy on getting here made his case known and a Petition being filed for his freedom, these facts were proved, and he discharged.

Case 2 Negro Phebe. This woman lived on Staten Island in the State of New York, and was manumitted to be free at the expiration of a term of years which had nearly expired. She was privately sold & clandestinely brought out of that State by night, and actually shipped on board a vessel lying in the harbour of Baltimore for the purpose of being transported to New Orleans. Her situation by accident, became known to a person in the city, who by Habeas Corpus caused her to be brought before Chief Justice Scott whereupon a Petition was filed for her freedom & she discharged.

Case 3 Antionette & her male child. This woman was free, and lived in the City of New York, she was decoyed off from there and sold to some traders who brought her to Baltimore, where she was discovered in a *Depot* with a number of other People of Colour, who were collected for transportation. Her case being represented to the court, she was under a Petition discharged.

Case 4 Negro Bill. This boy was born free in the City of New York. He was decoyed off from there, and sold to a trader in this city, whilst they were in the act of shipping him, he made his escape and disclosed his situation to a person who directed a petition to be filed for his freedom, and he was thereupon discharged.

In addition to the foregoing a great multitude of other instances might be produced in proof of the existence of an illicit and unjustifiable traffic in people of colour from the middle to the southern states, and not a doubt exists, but hundreds have been taken off, who, from the clandestine manner in which the trade is carried on, never come to the knowledge of the public, or under the cognizance of the laws.

This trade is conducted by a chain of individuals, of the most unprincipled & profligate characters, whose connection extends from Orleans to New York, and from the manner of their conducting the business it is scarcely possible to bring any individual of them to punishment. Thus, for instance, the one who actually steals or decoys a Negro from New York, immediately hands him over to one of the association* in Delaware or Maryland and should the latter by any accident be detected with the Negro in his possession, he pleads that *he* bought him & even shews a bill of sale!

Amongst the people of colour thus carried off, it is believed there are many slaves, who having absconded from Virginia & elsewhere and come to this & other places have fallen into the fangs of these people, and from the facility for transporting them, they are sent to Orleans & the Mississippi territory &c and their real owners never hear from them.

Should it be thy opinion that any further personal attention will be necessary, on our part, thou will please to inform us and we will return to Washington.

*Note it will be recollected that evidence of a person of colour is not admitted in proof against white people.

Alexander McKim Esq.

Elisha Tyson to Alexander McKim, December 5, 1811, HR.12A-F2.7, Petitions and Memorials, Committee on Commerce and Manufacturers, House of Representatives, 12th Congress, box 21, National Archives.

7 → Elisha Tyson to President James Madison, July 13, 1812

James Madison's stance on slavery, both personally and as president, was more ambiguous and ambivalent than Alexander McKim's. But he did oppose the transatlantic slave trade and supported harsher federal laws to punish illegal imports of enslaved people, and Elisha Tyson thought he could be counted on to prevent the potential release of an illegal slaver that arrived in Baltimore in 1812. Ultimately, and perhaps partially in response to Tyson's letter, Madison counseled the release of the vessel but not of the Africans held captive on board, who he insisted ought to be freed in conformity with Maryland law.

Balto. 7 mo 13 1812

Respected Friend—

It is only under the apprehension of its being my duty, that I am induced to address a letter to thee upon the present occasion.

The Spanish Privateer schooner Genl. Morla, with 32 affrican negroes on board, having put into this Port, under the pretext of being in distress, was libeled for a breach of the laws of the U.S. In a conversation which I have just had with the collector of this District on the subject, he has informed me, that representations had, or would be made, to the Government for the release of the Vessel & People on board, and not doubting but that every artifice and misrepresentation will be resorted to by those interested in getting her off, in order to mislead and deceive; I have believed it right to communicate to thee, the information which has reached me, from a credible person who was on board of the Vessel, and had some conversation with one of the crew. He states, that he learned that this Privateer had been a considerable time out, from a piratical cruise, during which time she committed numerous depredations, and amongst others, plundered these negro[es] and about 220 others from a Guineaman on the Coast of Cuba, and that they had succeeded

white allies did not answer Tucker's call. Instead, the Protection Society soon folded, and in the years after 1825, white antislavery advocates in Baltimore tended to look toward colonization as a solution to the problem of slavery rather than toward more radical forms of abolition.

Philada. 4 mo. 1819

At this time when the sufferings of the African race, and the unjust and iniquitous traffic in their Blood, have awakened the sympathy, and called in action for their relief, the power of almost every civilized Nation, it is believed, with confidence, that efforts to strengthen the cause of Abolition will have more extensive and certain success, than at any other former period. The rights of slaveholders are not now, as formerly, proclaimed with boldness, and their protection vested in force alone. Those who ask to preserve these rights found their claims upon considerations, which they endeavour to persuade us, humanity will sanction, and kindness to the objects of their oppression will appear. Many of those, who possess their property in human flesh, profess, and we believe truly, their regret, for its ownership, cast upon them by inheritance, and without any exercise of their will; and thus evidence that the condition of the Master and his Slave, are equally objects of sympathy in the eye of the Philanthropist.

If such is the condition of many of the owners of Slaves, and if among all these ameliorated views towards them prevail, we submit to you, if they will not while such feelings and opinions are in operation, receive with satisfaction the efforts of humane individuals to improve the condition of their Slaves by the introduction of religious knowledge and education among them.

We believe that many slaveowners will acquiesce in such measures, and some will aid in promoting their success. Experiment has fully ascertained that by no means whatsoever can measures of this kind be so well concerted and prepared, and in no manner can the cause of Abolition be so efficiently promoted as by the organization and labours of Abolition and Manumission Societies.

Under the influence of these feelings and opinions, the acting Committee of the American Convention are extremely solicitous for the establishment of a Society for the Abolition of Slavery and Manumission of people of Colour in Baltimore. Such a Society, organized in the immediate vicinity of slaveholders, must be useful; and if it could be promoted and founded by more of others than of those who are of the Society of Friends, we consider it would be more extensively useful. We particularly request your opinion of the proposition and of its practicability, and if you approve, your efforts for its success.

While we submit this inquiry, we are not unmindful of the many and important services rendered by the Protection Society to the emmanipated objects of our cause; but under a solemn impression of the importance of the above proposition if carried into effect we have thought it proper to submit it for your serious consideration.

By order of the Acting Committee of the American Convention for promoting the abolition of Slavery &c.

Benjn. Tucker Chairman

Elisha Tyson

Thomas Ellicott

Philip E. Thomas

Andrew Elicot

Dr. Skipwith Coale

Of Baltimore.

"Copy of Letter Addressed to E. Tyson & Others to encourage the formation of an Abolition Socy 4 mo 1819," series 2, box 18, folder 16, PASP.

9 + The Funeral of Elisha Tyson, February 1824

After Elisha Tyson died, visitors crowded his home around the clock for two days to pay their respects. On February 18, 1824, his body was conveyed to the Quaker burial ground in Baltimore, where he was laid to rest. Multiple newspapers covered Tyson's funeral procession. The report that follows ran originally in the *Federal Republican and Baltimore Telegraph*. It was republished by the *Baltimore Patriot and Mercantile Advertiser*.

Yesterday the remains of the worthy and venerable ELISHA TYSON, were interred in the Friends burying ground in this city. A numerous concourse of relatives and friends attended his obsequies, together, it is supposed, with nearly four thousand people of color, who assembled to pay their last tribute of respect and gratitude to their deceased friend and patron. Mr. Tyson for many years had been the unvaried champion of oppressed humanity; and whenever he discovered an attempt to violate the laws of his country in the cruel traffic of human flesh, his zeal was active and efficient. His feelings were alive to human suffering, and his sense of justice outweighed all considerations of favor or friendship. The spectacle was indeed truly impressive and solemn, and evinced a sense of grati-

tude in these children of misfortune, highly honorable to their character, which was manifested by a strict decorum and a high sense of the great loss they had sustained.

Baltimore Patriot and Mercantile Advertiser, February 19, 1824.

10 + Benjamin Lundy Announces the Publication of *Life of Elisha Tyson*, September 1825

The antislavery editor of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Benjamin Lundy, was based in Baltimore and was also the publisher of *Life of Elisha Tyson*. Lundy advertised the work prominently in his newspaper in the fall of 1825. The likeness of Tyson referred to in the advertisement was an engraving of the portrait described and seen on page 3.

Life of Elisha Tyson.

Now in the press, and will speedily be published at the office of the Genius of Universal Emancipation, the Life of that eminent and undaunted advocate of emancipation, the late Elisha Tyson. An elegant engraved likeness will accompany it. The work will contain about 150 pages neat duodecimo.—It will be handsomely bound in boards, and the price will not exceed 50, or 62 1-2 cents. There are many interesting anecdotes interspersed through the work, relative to the manly exertions of this great apostle of liberty; and it is to be hoped that it will not fail to attract the attention of those who feel desirous of imitating his examples, or profiting by his experience.

Genius of Universal Emancipation, September 1825.

11 + Excerpt from Joseph Sturge, *A Visit to the United States in 1841*

In 1841, Englishman Joseph Sturge traveled throughout the United States to observe slavery and the state of American antislavery. Sturge was himself a Quaker and an abolitionist who helped found a leading British antislavery society, and he met and traveled in com-

pany with many American abolitionists on his journey. Among them was Pennsylvania abolitionist Bartholomew Fussell, who in April 1841 recounted for Sturge an incident involving Elisha Tyson that he claimed to have witnessed personally. The story of this incident constituted a foundational element of how Tyson was remembered by antislavery activists after his death, and it would remain so through the remainder of the nineteenth century.

I returned to New York on the 15th. in company with several anti-slavery friends. One of these, Dr. BARTHOLOMEW FUSSELL, resided on the borders of the State of Maryland, and had afforded relief and aid to many negroes escaping from slavery. He had kept no account of the number thus assisted till last year, when there were thirty-four, being fewer he thought than the average of several years preceding. The same individual related some interesting particulars of the late ELISHA TYSON, of Baltimore, an abolitionist of the old school, who had rescued many negroes from illegal bondage. Dr. FUSSELL was an eye witness of the following occurrence:—A poor woman had been seized by the agents of WOOLFOLK, the notorious Maryland slave dealer, and was carried along the street in which ELISHA TYSON lived. When they arrived opposite his house, she demanded to see “FATHER TYSON.” A crowd collected about the party, and she so far moved their pity, that they insisted that her wish should be complied with. One of the men hereupon went to inform his employer, who galloped off, pistol in hand, and found ELISHA TYSON standing at his own door. WOOLFOLK with an oath, declared he would “send him to hell for interfering with his *property*.” ELISHA TYSON coolly exposed his breast, telling him that he dared not shoot, and that he (WOOLFOLK) “was in hell already, though he did not know it.” An investigation followed; the poor woman was proved to be illegally detained, and was set at liberty. The death of ELISHA TYSON was remarkable. He had received a letter detailing the particulars of the restoration of certain negroes to freedom, through his instrumentality; also informing him of their joy and happiness on their deliverance. Under the influence of a sudden and too violent emotion of delight he fell down with the letter in his hand, and instantly expired. The affection of this grateful people was testified by thousands crowding to the house, previous to the interment, and they were permitted to view the remains of their benefactor. It is generally allowed that so bold and uncompr[om]ising an advocate of the negroes’ right, does not now remain in the Slave States.

12 → “Reminiscences of Elisha Tyson,” 1891

Many white and Black Americans remembered Elisha Tyson and recollected his deeds, but his fellow Quakers particularly revered his example and published stories about him in their periodicals for decades after he passed away. In 1891, the *Friends’ Intelligencer*, a Quaker magazine, published the piece below, which was sent in response to a call for accounts of Tyson’s life and his work. It reports the death of Mary Wilson, who was likely one of the last surviving formerly enslaved people liberated thanks to Tyson’s efforts.

A few weeks ago since there died at the “Shelter for Infirm and Aged Colored Poor,” in the city of Baltimore, Mary Wilson, a negro woman, whose age was probably not much less than ninety years. She was a native of Africa, whence she was taken in her early youth by slavers, and after a voyage said to have been of six months duration, brought to Baltimore, where she was rescued from her captors by the eminent Friend and philanthropist, Elisha Tyson. It is probably the unusual length of the voyage of the vessel which brought her over, gave her benefactor the legal opportunity of which he availed himself for her release. The abolition of the lawful slave trade took place in 1808, and had she arrived a few weeks earlier her case might have been without remedy, since Elisha Tyson never went beyond the law in his efforts for the liberty of the negro slaves. How large a scope for his work lay within this limit is shown by the fact that he was the means of rescuing at least two thousand human beings, illegally held in slavery, which but for him might have ended only with their lives. Mary Wilson distinctly remembered the seizure of herself and two brothers, and often spoke of the wild grief of their mother, upon their capture, after a short struggle on the sands. Her recollection of her African home was of a house situated in a yard, both swept clean, but with no “upstairs” and no bed. Eighty-two years of her life had been passed in this country and she could hardly have been less than six or eight at the time of her being carried off. Elisha Tyson placed her at first in charge of Mrs. Knight of Philadelphia, and afterwards in the family of William Gover, at the head of South river, in Anne Arundel county, Md., where she remained until the age of eighteen. She always spoke with gratitude of the kind treatment received by her from both these families.

Mary Wilson was a woman of pleasant and amiable deportment and always maintained an excellent reputation. There was nothing in her appearance, manners, or speech, to distinguish her from those of her own race born in America. She was particularly neat and tidy in dress, and had been twice married. Her maiden name of Brown had been given her by Mr. Tyson on account of her color.

Thus passed away the last individual of the colored race so far as known, eman-

cipated from illegal slavery by the philanthropic will and energy of Elisha Tyson, who died more than sixty years ago. In the life recently published by William Birney, of his father, the celebrated James G. Birney,¹ Elisha Tyson is spoken of as “the philanthropist and emancipator fallen at the ripe age of seventy-five, after a life whose deeds of heroism entitle him to rank among the great souls of our race. He was born of a family of Philadelphia Friends, but removed to Harford county, Md., and afterward to Baltimore, in early manhood. When he witnessed the sufferings of the enslaved and persecuted Africans, his soul was seized with a mighty love and pity for those wretched people, and he consecrated the best energies of his life to their service. If any one was illegally held in slavery he hunted up the proofs and appealed to the courts. To this class belonged all those brought into the State. Some were freedmen who had lost their papers; others were descended from Indians and other free persons; some had mothers who were freed women. He was indefatigable in bringing these cases before the judges of the County Court, who to their honor be it said, enforced the law. . . . He procured the passage of several laws, ameliorating the condition of slaves and facilitating emancipation, persuaded many masters to give deeds of manumission, and aided in the construction of churches and schools for the freedmen. Mr. Tyson’s whole life proves that he regarded slavery as a sin to be repented of and abandoned instantly by the slave holder. It is probable, however, that when there was a question of general abolition by compulsory statutes, he thought it wiser to follow the example of the States which had become free. It must be borne in mind that in 1824, New York was still a slave State, and there were (a few) slaves held in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Illinois.”

It is greatly to be regretted that there is no more complete biography of Elisha Tyson. The one of him extant was written by his nephew, John S. Tyson, and published by Benjamin Lundy in Baltimore, within a year after his death. It was composed with almost single reference to his anti-slavery record, and fails in presenting a full conception of his whole character. There is no doubt that many of his words and deeds, lingering in the memories of his contemporaries, which should have been recorded, have with them passed into the grave of eternal silence. A life of Elisha Tyson worthy of its subject, would unquestionably be one of the most interesting works of its valuable class. He was in no sense a man of one idea, but full

1. James G. Birney (1792–1857), born in Kentucky, was a planter and slaveholder who practiced law and began a political career in Alabama before becoming a colonizationist and then an abolitionist. He moved to Ohio and published an antislavery newspaper that was destroyed by a mob in 1836. In 1840, Birney became the presidential candidate of the Liberty Party, the first national antislavery political party in American history.

of the wisdom and courage and conduct of every-day life. Large and majestic in person, with more than ordinary personal strength, and resolute as conscientious, there is no doubt that he wielded the sword of the spirit with a very strong arm of the flesh. When once assaulted by a bully, he did not return the blow in kind, but grasping his assailant "held him so uneasy" that when released he was very willing to retreat. He was a prominent and progressive citizen. He imported the first fire engine ever seen in Baltimore, and presented the lot where the house was placed for its keeping. As a merchant miller, he was one of the most prominent, successful, and respected members of what was a leading business in his day. In this he acquired a considerable fortune, which he dispensed prudently, but with liberality and public spirit. His sympathies were always held in complete subjection to his clear judgment; and his success, and in a certain sense his popularity, were due almost as much to his tact as to his unyielding persistence in the right.

Friends' Intelligencer, January 17, 1891.

Chronology/Timeline

- 1688 Quaker residents of Pennsylvania's Germantown settlement, home of Elisha Tyson's great-grandfather, publicly protest Quaker involvement in the slave trade.
- 1749 Elisha Tyson, the oldest child of Isaac and Esther Tyson, is born in Pennsylvania.
- 1752 Maryland colonial assembly passes legislation barring slaveholders from manumitting enslaved people by last will and testament.
- 1772/1773 Elisha Tyson goes into the milling business in Harford County, Maryland, on the Little Gunpowder River northeast of Baltimore.
- 1775 The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage is founded in Philadelphia. Later reorganized in the 1780s as the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, it is the first formal antislavery society in what would become the United States.
- 1776 Elisha Tyson marries Mary Amos, with whom he would have eleven children, six of whom lived to adulthood.
- 1781 Elisha Tyson moves his milling business to Baltimore, where he also purchases warehouses and other real estate, invests in ships, and forges merchant partnerships.
- 1783 Maryland prohibits the importation of enslaved people from out of state.
- 1787 Samuel Chase attempts to introduce an emancipation bill in the Maryland state legislature.
- 1789 Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes and Others Unlawfully Held in Bondage (MAS) is founded; Elisha Tyson is named chair of the Acting Committee; Tyson signs first petition submitted to Congress in a call for federal protection of American domestic manufacturing.
- 1790 U.S. Census records just over 103,000 enslaved people in Maryland, constituting nearly one-third of the state's population, along with a little more than 8,000 free people of color; Maryland legislature repeals restrictive 1752 manumission law.
- 1792 Partially in response to freedom suits filed by the MAS, the Maryland legislature passes a law requiring that all court costs for failed freedom petitions

- be paid before further freedom petitions could be filed; MAS launches fundraising effort for a free Black school in Baltimore.
- 1794 The American Convention of Abolition Societies, a national umbrella group of antislavery organizations, convenes for the first time.
- 1796 Maryland legislature passes “An Act Regarding Negroes,” comprehensive legislation that mostly tightened laws regarding race, slavery, and emancipation in the state.
- 1797 The African Academy, the first free Black school in Baltimore, opens with the support of the MAS.
- 1798 The MAS disbands; Elisha Tyson begins to withdraw from daily management of his milling business.
- 1800 Elisha Tyson moves to Sharp Street, near the African Academy and a Black Methodist congregation.
- 1801 Elisha Tyson is a founder and an original manager of the Baltimore General Dispensary, providing medical and health services to the poor. He stays involved in city efforts to collect and distribute money, food, and firewood to the poor for nearly twenty years.
- 1806 Elisha Tyson is named a director of the Union Fire Company, one of five fire companies in Baltimore.
- 1808 United States passes nationwide ban on slave imports from abroad; Elisha Tyson journeys to the Indiana Territory as part of a Quaker delegation visiting the representatives of several Native nations.
- 1810 U.S. Census reveals that the number of free Black people in Baltimore is larger than the number of enslaved people in the city.
- 1811 Elisha Tyson visits Washington, D.C., as part of a Quaker delegation lobbying Congress to take action against the domestic slave trade.
- 1812 Elisha Tyson is named to a committee that would manage and oversee construction of the Baltimore House of Industry. He is also appointed by the governor of Maryland as an inspector of the state penitentiary.
- 1813 Mary Tyson, Elisha Tyson’s wife, passes away.
- 1816 The Protection Society of Maryland, an anti-kidnapping society, is founded in Baltimore at Elisha Tyson’s suggestion; the American Colonization Society is founded.
- 1818 Maryland legislature passes a law shoring up protections for free and enslaved Marylanders.

- 1819 The Protection Society of Maryland disbands; Elisha Tyson organizes a meeting to protest the potential admission of Missouri to the Union as a slave state.
- 1822 Elisha Tyson files suit on behalf of captive Africans on board the *General Páez* in the belief that they were illegally enslaved.
- 1824 Elisha Tyson dies in Baltimore and is interred at the Friends Burial Ground in the city.
- 1825 Benjamin Lundy, editor of the antislavery *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, publishes *Life of Elisha Tyson, the Philanthropist*, written by John Shoemaker Tyson, one of Elisha Tyson's nephews.
- 1829 Benjamin Lundy hires William Lloyd Garrison as an editorial assistant.
- 1833 The American Anti-Slavery Society, a biracial organization committed to immediate emancipation, is founded in Philadelphia.

Select Bibliography & Recommendations for Further Reading

- Ball, Erica. *To Live an Antislavery Life: Personal Politics and the Antebellum Black Middle Class*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.
- Bell, Richard. *Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020.
- Bogen, David Skillen. "The Maryland Context of *Dred Scott*: The Decline in the Legal Status of Maryland Free Blacks 1776–1810." *American Journal of Legal History* 34, no. 4 (October 1990): 381–411.
- Brown, Christopher Leslie. *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Burin, Eric. *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008.
- Carey, Brycchan. *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Anti-slavery, 1657–1761*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
- Carey, Brycchan, and Geoffrey Plank, eds. *Quakers and Abolition*. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018.
- Clayton, Ralph. *Cash for Blood: The Baltimore to New Orleans Domestic Slave Trade*. Westminster, Md.: Heritage Books, 2007.
- Crothers, A. Glenn. *Quakers Living in the Lion's Mouth: The Society of Friends in Northern Virginia, 1730–1865*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012.
- Dillon, Merton L. *Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom*. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966.
- Fields, Barbara Jeanne. *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Fiske, David. *Solomon Northup's Kindred: The Kidnapping of Free Citizens before the Civil War*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger, 2016.
- Graham, Leroy. *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1982.
- Grivno, Max. *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790–1860*. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014.
- Jackson, Maurice. *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- Jordan, Ryan. *Slavery and the Meetinghouse: The Quakers and the Abolitionist Dilemma, 1820–1865*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.
- Mouser, Bruce L. "Baltimore's African Experiment, 1822–1827." *Journal of Negro History* 80, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 113–130.
- Nash, Gary R., and Jean R. Soderlund. *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

- Newman, Richard S. *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Newman, Richard, and James Mueller, eds. *Antislavery and Abolition in Philadelphia: Emancipation and the Long Struggle for Racial Justice in the City of Brotherly Love*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011.
- Pargas, Damian Alan. *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Phillips, Christopher. *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790–1860*. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- Plank, Geoffrey. *John Woolman's Path to the Peaceable Kingdom: A Quaker in the British Empire*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.
- Polgar, Paul J. *Standard-Bearers of Equality: America's First Abolition Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019.
- Rediker, Marcus. *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist*. London: Verso, 2017.
- Rockman, Seth. *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.
- Schermerhorn, Calvin. *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism, 1815–1860*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.
- Sinha, Manisha. *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.
- Slaughter, Thomas P. *The Beautiful Soul of John Woolman*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2008.
- Soderlund, Jean R. *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Thomas, William G., III. *A Question of Freedom: The Families Who Challenged Slavery from the Nation's Founding to the Civil War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020.
- Tomek, Beverly C. *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Anti-slavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania*.
- Whitman, T. Stephen. *Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake: Black and White Resistance to Human Bondage, 1775–1865*. Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2007.
- . *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997.
- Wilson, Carol. *Freedom at Risk: The Kidnapping of Free Blacks in America, 1780–1865*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994.

Race in the Atlantic World, 1700–1900

*The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery
and the Burning of Old Montréal*

by Afua Cooper

Christian Ritual and the Creation of British Slave Societies, 1650–1780

by Nicholas M. Beasley

*African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry:
The Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee*

edited by Philip Morgan

*The Horrible Gift of Freedom: Atlantic Slavery
and the Representation of Emancipation*

by Marcus Wood

*The Life and Letters of Philip Quaque,
the First African Anglican Missionary*

edited by Vincent Carretta and Ty M. Reese

*In Search of Brightest Africa: Reimagining the Dark Continent
in American Culture, 1884–1936*

by Jeannette Eileen Jones

*Contentious Liberties: American Abolitionists in
Post-Emancipation Jamaica, 1834–1866*

by Gale L. Kenny

*We Are the Revolutionists: German-Speaking Immigrants
and American Abolitionists after 1848*

by Mischa Honeck

The American Dreams of John B. Prentis, Slave Trader

by Kari J. Winter

*Missing Links: The African and American Worlds of
R. L. Garner, Primate Collector*

by Jeremy Rich

Almost Free: A Story about Family and Race in Antebellum Virginia

by Eva Sheppard Wolf

*To Live an Antislavery Life: Personal Politics and the
Antebellum Black Middle Class*

by Erica L. Ball

*Flush Times and Fever Dreams: A Story of Capitalism and
Slavery in the Age of Jackson*

by Joshua D. Rothman

*Diplomacy in Black and White: John Adams, Toussaint Louverture,
and Their Atlantic World Alliance*

by Ronald Angelo Johnson

Enterprising Women: Gender, Race, and Power in the Revolutionary Atlantic
by Kit Candlin and Cassandra Pybus

Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States, 1777–1865
by Patrick Rael

Finding Charity's Folk: Enslaved and Free Black Women in Maryland
by Jessica Millward

*The Mulatta Concubine: Terror, Intimacy, Freedom, and
Desire in the Black Transatlantic*
by Lisa Ze Winters

*The Politics of Black Citizenship: Free African Americans in the
Mid-Atlantic Borderland, 1817–1863*
by Andrew K. Diemer

*Punishing the Black Body: Marking Social and Racial
Structures in Barbados and Jamaica*
by Dawn P. Harris

Race and Nation in the Age of Emancipations
edited by Whitney Nell Stewart and John Garrison Marks

*Vénus Noire: Black Women and Colonial Fantasies
in Nineteenth-Century France*
by Robin Mitchell

*City of Refuge: Slavery and Petit Marronage in the
Great Dismal Swamp, 1763–1856*
by Marcus P. Nevius

An American Color: Race and Identity in New Orleans and the Atlantic World
by Andrew N. Wegmann

Maroons in Guyane: Past, Present, Future
by Richard Price and Sally Price

Almost Dead: Slavery and Social Rebirth in the Black Urban Atlantic, 1680–1807
by Michael Lawrence Dickinson

Race and Reproduction in Cuba
by Bonnie A. Lucero

*Escapes from Cayenne: A Story of Socialism and Slavery
in the Age of Revolution and Reaction*
by Léon Chautard, edited and with an introduction by Michaël Roy

Wanted! A Nation!: Black Americans and Haiti, 1804–1893
by Claire Bourhis-Mariotti, translated by C. Jon Delogu and
with a foreword by Ronald A. Johnson

A Pioneer in the Cause of Freedom: The Life of Elisha Tyson
Edited by Joshua D. Rothman