

SKETCH OF THE LIFE AND LABORS OF REV. HENRY HIGHLAND GARNET

BY JAMES McCUNE SMITH

HENRY H. GARNET was born on the 23rd December, 1815, at New Market, Kent Co., Maryland.

His ancestry did not come over in the *May-Flower*, nor land at Plymouth Rock, nor kiss the blarney stone of the Pilgrim Fathers. On the contrary, his grandfather was stolen by slave-traders from the coast of Africa, survived the horrors of the middle-passage, on a ship doubtless owned in Bristol or Boston, landed on the James River, and was thence transferred to the estate of Colonel William Spencer at New Market, doomed to perpetual slavery, himself and his heirs forever; himself, according to Rev. Dr. Seabury, in exchange for the life forfeited in battle, and his offspring forever, according to the same luminous authority, by what may be termed the “baby contract.”

And yet this grandfather, shorn of his strength and bound with bands of steel, “was as noble an ancestor as human kind could desire.”

i. “We have seen that the contract which tacitly subsists between the master and his slaves, devolves on the one party the care and protection, and on the other party the duty of service. Now the children of slaves are naturally part of their parents—bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh. Naturally, therefore, as well as justly, and by a moral necessity, they become parties to the contract that subsists between their parents and the master. (How, O learned Doctor, does this contract read, when one of the parents is the master?) That infants as soon as born, are incapable of becoming parties to a contract, will be affirmed by no person who is even moderately conversant with moral science.” — *American Slavery Justified*: by DR. SEABURY, p. 160.

Of nearly perfect physical make-up, he survived unscathed that middle-passage whose horrors soon roused Clarkson and Wilberforce to compass its destruction; and along with physical he brought moral and religious power with him to New Market, which won for him the significant name of Joseph Trusty—JOSEPH from his gifts in exhorting, praying, and praising the Lord, and TRUSTY from his unbending integrity of character.

In due course of time there were added to the family of Joseph Trusty six stalwart sons and two daughters, between whom and Colonel Spencer, the owner of the estate, there was doubtless executed the “contract,” of Rev. Dr. Seabury’s imagination. And from what happened, it would seem that the contract was well kept on both sides. Colonel Spencer, a “high-toned,” liberal gentleman, rejoicing in his human chattels, bestowed every care and attention on their food, clothing, and other comforts, and took great pride in having them appear well. In the further course of time these sons of Joseph Trusty grew up to manhood, and in their turn became fathers of families. George, the son who most resembled his father Joseph in person and character, became the father of Henry H. Garnet, whose mother was a woman of extraordinary energy, industrious, pious, and holding at the highest value that education from which her condition had debarred her, and continued to debar her children.

Col. Spencer, who was a bachelor, died in 1824, devising his estate, real and personal (including the “baby contracts”), to his brother Isaac and sundry nephews. These heirs took a different view from their testator, of the Patriarchal Institution. They determined to exercise their Constitutional Rights to the fullest extent, and reduce those who had hitherto borne the name of slaves, down, to bear the veriest yoke and degradation of slavery. As they made no secret of their intention, it

reached the ears of the Trustys, a portion of whom, headed by Henry's father, held a family council, wherein they opened a new volume, in which, forgetful of "contracts" and constitutional obligations, they made sundry entries treating of their own rights to their own persons, and to the fruits of their own labor: in a word, of their Liberty!

Within a few weeks after the death of Col. Spencer, a family exodus was planned and carried out in the following manner. Permission having been obtained to attend the funeral of a relative at some few miles distance, eleven in number started in the same night on that sad errand ostensibly, but really with hearts which the North Star lit up with its wondrous joys, to the liberty-seeking slave. A covered market wagon awaited them in a piece of woods; they got in and kept on till near daybreak, when they left the wagon and concealed themselves in the woods until night. Henry's father, mother, sister, and seven others, including himself, composed this company. They have not, to this day, returned from that funeral, although all of them, except the subject of this memoir, having bountifully partaken of the blessings of Liberty, are gone on a longer and brighter pilgrimage.

For several days they slept in the woods and swamps, traveling all night long. Henry, now nine years old, kept up with the fugitives, until his little limbs gave out, when his father and uncles took turns in carrying him upon their backs. After weary travel by night and partial rest by day, they at length reached Wilmington, Del., and that ever to be remembered half-way house for pilgrims on the road to Freedom, the barn of Thomas Garret, the good Quaker, the noble-hearted philanthropist, to whom so many thousands of our brethren, on the way to Liberty, are indebted for shelter, aid, and sustenance. In times now remote, one of the kings of England, having lost his queen in a distant part of the realm, started with a solemn and gorgeous funeral

procession on his way to her burial-place near London; the progress was slow, and, at the end of each day's march, was a halt until the following morning. In after years, he manifested his profound grief at the loss of his consort, by causing to be erected at each of these resting-places a beautiful and costly cross of most elaborate and beautiful workmanship; some of these yet remain as monuments of royal sorrow and affection. Is it hoping too much, that in "the good time coming," this resting-place of the captive, this first breathing-spot of the budding freeman, this first assured foothold on the free earth, may, in like manner, be consecrated forever, by some sacred fane, in which songs of joy, of ransom and of liberty may be sung forever?

At Wilmington the fugitives separated; seven of the company went into New Jersey, to Greenwich and Salem; Henry's family went to New Hope, Bucks County, Pa., where he first entered a school-house. They remained in Pennsylvania a few months, and then moved to New York.

In 1825, the pilgrims arrived in New York, and life and hope began to bud. Although yet, and for two years after a slave State, there was a safer and more expansive feeling in this State than in Pennsylvania, which had been a free State some thirty years. There was something more gladdening in the State in which freedom was newly entering, than in the other State whose so-called free border was in poisoned contact with the direful institution of slavery.

In the city of New York, as we have said, a new life seemed to open up to our wanderers, and, following the example given in the Holy Scriptures, they took a new name, and called themselves Garnets. The process of this re-baptism, or baptism to Liberty, was simple, solemn, primitive. The father called up the little flock which had escaped from the wolves, and said: "By the blessings of God we are now free—come,