



From *The Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave, Written by Himself* (1825)

. . . Those slaves who have kind masters, are perhaps as happy as the generality of mankind. They are not aware that their condition can be better, and I dont know as it can: indeed it cannot by their own exertions. I would advise no slave to leave his master. If he runs away, he is most sure to be taken. If he is not, he will ever be in the apprehension of it. And I do think there is no inducement for a slave to leave his master, and be set free in the northern states. I have had to work hard; I have been often cheated, insulted, abused, and injured; yet a black man, if he will be industrious and honest, he can get along here as well as any one who is poor, and in a situation to be imposed on. I have been very unfortunate in life in this respect. Notwithstanding all my struggles and sufferings, and injuries, I have been an honest man. There is no one who can come forward and say he knows any thing against Grimes. This I know, that I have been punished for being suspected of things, of which, some of those who were loudest against me, were actually guilty. The practice of warning poor people out of town is very cruel. It may be necessary that towns should have that power, otherwise some might be overrun with paupers. But it is mighty apt to be abused. A poor man just gets a going in business, and is then warned to depart. Perhaps he has a family, and dont know where to go, or what to do. I am a poor man, and ignorant. But I am a man of sense. I have seen them contributing at church for the heathen, to build churches, and send out preachers to them, yet there was no place where I could get a seat in the church. I knew in New-Haven, Indians and negroes, come from a great many thousand miles, sent to be educated, while there were people I knew in the town, cold and hungry, and ignorant. They have kind of societies to make clothes, for those, who they say, go naked in their own countries. The ladies sometimes do this at one end of a town, while their father's who may happen to be selectmen, may be warning a poor man and his family, out at the other end, for fear they may have to be buried at the state expense. It sounds rather strange upon a man's ear, who feels that he is friendless and abused in society, to hear so many speeches about charity; for I was always inclined to be observing.

I have forebore to mention names in my history where it might give the least pain, in this I have made it less interesting and injured myself.

I may sometimes be a little mistaken, as I have to write from memory, and there is a great deal I have omitted from want of recollection at the time of writing. I cannot speak as I feel on some subjects. If those who read my history, think I have not led a life of trial, I have failed to give a correct representation. I think I must be Forty years of age but don't know; I could not tell my wife my age. I have learned to read and write pretty well; if I had opportunity I could learn very fast. My wife has a tolerable good education, which has been a help to me.

I hope some will buy my books from charity, but I am no beggar. I am now entirely destitute of property; where and how I shall live I don't know; where and how I shall die I dont know, but I hope I may be prepared. If it were not for the stripes on my back which were made while I was a slave. I would in my will, leave my skin a legacy to the government, desiring that it might be taken off and made into parchment, and then bind the constitution of glorious happy *and free* America. Let the skin of an American slave, bind the charter of American Liberty.