My bondage and my freedom

Douglass Frederick
MY BONDAGE
AND
MY FREEDOM.

Part I.—Life as a Slave. Part II.—Life as a Freeman.

BY FREDERICK DOUGLASS.

WITH
AN INTRODUCTION.

BY DR. JAMES M'CUNE SMITH.

By a principle essential to Christianity, a person is eternally differenced from a thing; so that the idea of a human being, necessarily excludes the idea of property in that being.

COLERIDGE.

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BY FREDERICK DOUGLASS,

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TO

HONORABLE GERRIT SMITH,

AS A SLIGHT TOKEN OF

ESTEEM FOR HIS CHARACTER,

ADMIRATION FOR HIS GENIUS AND BENEVOLENCE,

AFFECTION FOR HIS PERSON, AND

GRATITUDE FOR HIS FRIENDSHIP,

AND AS

A SMALL BUT MOST SINCERE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF

HIS PRE-EMINENT SERVICES IN BEHALF OF THE RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES

OF AN

AFFLICTED, DESPISED AND DEEPLY OUTRAGED PEOPLE,

BY RANKING SLAVERY WITH PIRACY AND MURDER,

AND BY

DENYING IT EITHER A LEGAL OR CONSTITUTIONAL EXISTENCE,

THIS VOLUME IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY HIS FAITHFUL AND FIRMLY ATTACHED FRIEND,

FREDERICK DOUGLASS.

ROCHESTER, N. Y.
EDITOR'S PREFACE.

If the volume now presented to the public were a mere work of Art, the history of its misfortune might be written in two very simple words—too late. The nature and character of slavery have been subjects of an almost endless variety of artistic representation; and after the brilliant achievements in that field, and while those achievements are yet fresh in the memory of the million, he who would add another to the legion, must possess the charm of transcendent excellence, or apologize for something worse than rashness. The reader is, therefore, assured, with all due promptitude, that his attention is not invited to a work of Art, but to a work of Facts—Facts, terrible and almost incredible, it may be—yet Facts, nevertheless.

I am authorized to say that there is not a fictitious name nor place in the whole volume; but that names and places are literally given, and that every transaction therein described actually transpired.

Perhaps the best Preface to this volume is furnished
in the following letter of Mr. Douglass, written in answer to my urgent solicitation for such a work:

Rochester, N. Y. July 2, 1855.

Dear Friend: I have long entertained, as you very well know, a somewhat positive repugnance to writing or speaking anything for the public, which could, with any degree of plausibility, make me liable to the imputation of seeking personal notoriety, for its own sake. Entertaining that feeling very sincerely, and permitting its control, perhaps, quite unreasonably, I have often refused to narrate my personal experience in public anti-slavery meetings, and in sympathizing circles, when urged to do so by friends, with whose views and wishes, ordinarily, it were a pleasure to comply. In my letters and speeches, I have generally aimed to discuss the question of Slavery in the light of fundamental principles, and upon facts, notorious and open to all; making, I trust, no more of the fact of my own former enslavement, than circumstances seemed absolutely to require. I have never placed my opposition to slavery on a basis so narrow as my own enslavement, but rather upon the indestructible and unchangeable laws of human nature, every one of which is perpetually and flagrantly violated by the slave system. I have also felt that it was best for those having histories worth the writing—or supposed to be so—to commit such work to hands other than their own. To write of one’s self, in such a manner as not to incur the imputation of weakness, vanity, and egotism, is a work within the ability of but few; and I have little reason to believe that I belong to that fortunate few.

These considerations caused me to hesitate, when first you