A slave warehouse! Perhaps some of my readers conjure up horrible visions of such a place. They fancy some foul, obscure den... But no, innocent friend; in these days men have learned the art of sinning expertly and genteelly, so as not to shock the eyes and senses of respectable society. Human property is high in the market; and is, therefore, well fed, well cleaned, tended, and looked after, that it may come to sale sleek, and strong, and shining. A slave warehouse in New Orleans is a house externally not unlike many others, kept with neatness; and where every day you may see arranged, under a sort of shed along the outside, rows of men and women, who stand there as a sign of the property sold within.

Then you shall be courteously entreated to call and examine, and shall find an abundance of husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, fathers, mother, and young children, to be "sold separately or in lots, to suit the convenience of the purchaser;" and that soul immortal, once bought with blood and anguish by the Son of God, when the earth shook, and the rocks were rent, and the graves were opened, can be sold, leased, mortgaged, exchanged for groceries or dry goods, to suit the phases of trade, or the fancy of the purchaser.

It was a day or two after the conversation between Marie and Miss Ophelia, that Tom, Adolph, and about half a dozen others of the St. Clare estate, were turned over to the loving kindness of Mr. Skeggs, the keeper of a depot on ----- street, to await the auction the next day.

Tom had with him quite a sizable trunk full of clothing, as had most others of them. They were ushered, for the night, into a long room, where many other men, of all ages, sizes, and shades of complexion, were assembled, and from which roars of laughter and unthinking merriment were proceeding.

"Aha! thatís right. Go it, boys, ­ go it!" said Mr. Skeggs, the keeper. "My people are always so merry! Sambo, I see!" he said, speaking approvingly to a burly Negro who was performing tricks of low buffoonery, which occasioned the shouts which Tom had heard.

As might be imagined, Tom was in no humor to join these proceedings; and, therefore, setting his trunk as far as possible from the noisy group, he sat down on it, and leaned his face against the wall.

The dealers in the hubservers, are constantly enforced upon them, both by the hope of thereby getting a good master, and the fear of all that the driver may bring upon them, if they prove unsalable...

While this scene was going on in the men’s sleeping room, the reader may be curious to take a peep at the corresponding apartment allotted to the women. Stretched out in various attitudes over the floor, he may see numberless sleeping forms of every shade of complexion, from the purest ebony to white, and of all years, whose mother was sold out yesterday, and who tonight cried herself to sleep when nobody was looking at her. Here, a worn old Negress, whose thin arms and callous fingers tell of hard toil, waiting to be sold to-morrow, as a cast-off article, for what can be got for her; and some forty or fifty others, with heads variously enveloped in blankets or articles of clothing, lie stretched around them. But, in a corner, sitting apart from the rest, are two females of amore interesting appearance than common. one of these is a respectable dressed mulatto woman between forty and fifty, with soft eyes and a gentle and pleasing physiognomy. She has on her head s high-raised turban, made of a gay red Madras handkerchief, of the first quality, and her dress is neatly fitted, and of good material, showing that she has been provided for with a careful hand. By her side, and nestling closely to her, is a young girl of fifteen ­ her daughter. She is a quadroon, as may be seen from her fairer complexion, though her likeness to her mother is quite discernible. She has the same soft, dark eye, with longer lashes, and her curling hair is of a luxuriant brown. She is dressed with great neatness and her white, delicate hands betray very little acquaintance with servile toil. These two are to be sold tomorrow, in the same lot with the St. Clare servants; and the gentleman to whom they belong, and to whom the money for their sale is to be transmitted, is a member of a Christian church in New York, who will receive the money , and go thereafter to the sacrament of his Lord and theirs, and think no more of it.

These two, whom we shall call Susan and Emmeline, had been the personal attendants of an amiable and pious lady of New Orleans, by whom they had been carefully and piously instructed and trained. They had been taught to read and write, diligently instructed in the truths of religion, and their lot had always been as happy an one as in their condition it was possible to be. But the only son of their protectress had the management of her property; an, by carelessness and extravagance, involved it to a large amount, and at last failed...

Susan and Emmeline were sent to the depot to await a general auction on the following morning; and as they glimmer faintly upon us in the moonlight which steals through the grated window, we may listen to their conversation. Both are weeping, but each quietly, that the other may not hear.

"Mother, just lay your head on my lap, and see if you canít sleep a little," says the girl, trying to appear calm.

"I havenít any heart to sleep, Em; I canít; itís the last night we may be together!"

"Oh, mother, donít say so! Perhaps we shall get sold together ­ who knows?"

"If it was anybodyís else case, I should say so, too, Em," said the woman; "But Iím so ëfeared of losiní you that Ii donít see anything but the danger."

"Why, mother, the man said we were both likely, and would sell well."

Susan remembered the manís looks and words. With a deadly sickness at her heart, she remembered how he had looked at Emmelineís hands, and lifted up her curly hair, and pronounced her a first-rate article. Susan had been trained as a Christian, brought up in the daily reading of the Bible, and had the same horror of her childís being sold to a life of shame that any other Christian mother might have; but she had no hope ­ no protection.

"Mother, I think we might do first-rate, if you could get a place as a cook, and I as chambermaid or seamstress, in some family. I dare say we shall. Letís both look as bright and lively as we can, and tell all we can do, and perhaps we shall," said Emmeline.

"I want you to brush your hair all back straight, to-morrow," said Susan.

"What for, mother? I donít look near so well that way."

"Yes, but youíll sell better so."

"I donít see why!" said the child.

"Respectable families would be more apt to buy you, if they say you looked plain and decent, as if you wasnít trying to look handsome. I know their ways betterín you do," said Susan.

"Well, mother, then I will."

"And Emmeline, if we shouldnít ever see each other again, after tomorrow ­ if Iím sold way up on a plantation somewhere, and you somewhere else, and you somewhere else ­ always remember how youíve been brought up. and all Missis has told you; take your Bible with you, and your hymnbook; and if youíre faithful to the Lord, heíll be faithful to you."

So speaks the poor soul, in sore discouragement; for she knows that tomorrow any man, however vile and brutal, however godless and merciless, if he only has money to pay for her, may become owner of her daughter, body and soul; and then, how is the child to be faithful? She thinks of all this, as she holds her daughter in her arms, and wishes that she were not handsome and attractive. It seems almost an aggravation to her to remember how purely and piously, how much above the ordinary lot, she has been brought up. But she has no resort but to pray,  and many such prayers to God have gone up from those same trim, neatly arranged, respectable slave-prisons ­ prayers which God has not forgotten, as a coming day shall show; for it is written: "Whoso causeth one of these little ones to offend, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea."

The soft, earnest, quiet moonbeam looks in fixedly, marking the bars of the grated windows on the prostrate, sleeping forms. The mother and daughter are singing together a wild and melancholy dirge, common as a funeral hymn among the slaves:

"Oh, where is weeping Mary?
Oh, where is weeping Mary?
ëRived in the goodly land.
She is dead and gone to heaven;
She is dead and gone to heaven;
ëRived in the goodly land."

These words, sung by voices of a peculiar and melancholy sweetness, in an air which seemed like the sighing of earthly despair after heavenly hope, floated through the dark prison rooms with a pathetic cadence, as verse after verse was breathed out...

Sing on, poor souls! The night is short, and the morning will part you forever!

But now it is morning, and everybody is astir; and the worthy Mr. Skeggs is busy and bright, for a lot of goods is to be fitted out for auction. There is a brisk lookout on the toilet; injunctions passed around to every one to put on their best face and be spry; and now all are arranged in a circle for a last review, before they are marched up to the Bourse.

Mr. Skeggs, with his palmetto on and his cigar in his mouth, walks around to put farewell touches on his wares.

"Howís this?" he said, stepping in front of Susan and Emmeline. "Whereís your curls, gal?"

The girl looked timidly at her mother, who, with the smooth adroitness common among her class, answers ­

"I was telling her, last night, to put up her hair smooth and eat, and not haviní it flying about in curls; looks more respectable so."

"Bother!" said the man, peremptorily, turning to the girl: "You go right along, and curl yourself real smart!" He added, giving a crack to a rattan he held in his hand, "And be back in quick time, too!"

"You go and help her," he added, to the mother. "The, curls ma make a hundred dollars difference in the sale of her."

Beneath a splendid dome were men of all nations, moving to and fro, over the marble pavement...And here we may the St. Clare servants ­ Tom, Adolph, and others; and there too, Susan and Emmeline, awaiting their turn with anxious and dejected faces. Various spectators, intending to purchase, or not intending, as the case might be, gathered around the group, handling, examining, and commenting on their various points and faces with the same freedom that a set of jockeys discuss the merits of a horse.

"Hulloa, Alf! what brings you here? said a young exquisite, slapping the shoulder of a sprucely dressed young man, who was examining Adolph through an eye-glass.

"Well, I was wanting a valet, and I heard that St. Clareís lot was going. I thought Iíd just look at his" ­

"Catch me ever buying any of St. Clareís people! Spoilt niggers, every one. Impudent as the devil!" said the other.

"Never fear that!" said the first; "If I get ëem, Iíll soon have their airs out of them; theyíll soon find out that theyíve another master to deal with than Monsieur St. Clare. ëPon my word. Iíll buy that fellow. I like the shape of him..."

Tom had been standing wistfully examining the multitude of faces thronging around him, for one whom he would wish to call master... A little before the sale commenced, a short, broad, muscular man, in a checked shirt considerably open at the bosom, and pantaloons much the worse for dirt and wear, elbowed his way through the crowd, like one who is going actively into a business; and, coming up to the group, began to examine them systematically. From the moment Tom saw him approaching, he felt an immediate and revolting horror at him, that increased as he came near. He was evidently, though short, of gigantic strength. His round, bullet-head, large. light grey eyes, with their shaggy, sandy eyebrows, and stiff, wiry, sunburned hair, were rather unprepossessing items, it is to be confessed; his large, course mouth was distended with tobacco, the juice of which, from time to time, he ejected from him with great decision and explosive force; his hands were immensely large, hairy, sunburned, freckled, and very dirty, and garnished with long nails, in a very foul condition. This man proceeded to a very free personal examination of the lot. He seized Tom by the jaw, and pulled open his mouth to inspect his teeth; made him strip up his sleeve, to show his muscle; turned him round, made him jump and spring, to show his paces.

"Where was you raised?" he added, briefly, to these investigations.

"In Kintuck, Masír," said Tom, looking about, as if in deliverance.

"What have you done?"

"Had care of Masírís farm," said Tom.

"Likely story!" said the other, shortly, as he passed on. He paused for a moment before Adolph; then spitting a discharge of tobacco juice on his well-blacked boots, and giving a contemptuous umph, he walked on. Again he stopped before Susan and Emmeline. He put out his heavy, dirty hand, and drew the girl towards him; passed it over her neck, and bust, felt her arms, looked at her teeth, then pushed her back against her mother, whose patient face shoed the suffering she had been going through at every motion of the hideous stranger.

The girl was frightened, and she began to cry.

"Stop that, you minx!" said the salesman; "no whimpering here ­ the sale is going to begin." And accordingly the sale began...

Tom stepped upon the block, gave a few anxious looks around... and almost in a moment came the final thump of the hammer, and the clear ring on the last syllable of the word, "dollars," as the auctioneer announced his price, and Tom was made over. He had a master.

He was pushed from the block; the short, bullet-headed man, seizing him roughly by the shoulder, pushed him to one side, saying, in a harsh voice, "Stand there, you!"

Tom hardly realized anything; but still the bidding went on ­ rattling, clattering, now French, now English. Down goes the hammer again ­ Susan is sold! She goes down from the block, stops, looks wistfully back ­ her daughter stretches her hands towards her. She looks with agony I the face of the man who has bought her ­ a respectable, middle-aged man, of benevolent countenance.

"Oh, Masír, please do buy my daughter!"

"Iíd like to, but Iím afraid I canít afford it!" said the gentleman, looking, with painful interest, as the young girl mounted the block, and looked around her with a frightened and timid glance.

The  blood flushes painfully in her otherwise colorless cheek, her eye has a feverish fire, and her mother groans to see that she looks more beautiful than ever before...

The hammer falls; [our bullet-headed acquaintance] has got the girl, body and soul, unless God save her.

Her master is Mr. Legree, who owns a cotton plantation on the Red River. She is pushed along into the same lit with Tom and two other men and goes off, weeping as she goes.

The benevolent gentleman is sorry; but then, the thing happens every day! One sees girls and mothers crying, at these sales,  always!  It canít be helped, etc., and he walks off, with his acquisition, in another direction...

On the lower part of a small, mean boat, on the Red River, Tom sat ­ chains on his wrists, chains on his feet, and a weight heavier than chains lay on his heart. All had faded from his sky... all had passed by him, as the trees and banks were now passing, to return no more. Kentucky home, with wife and children, indulgent owners; St. Clare home, with all its refinements and splendors... the proud, gay, handsome, seemingly careless, yet ever-kind St. Clare; hours of ease and indulgent leisure ­ all gone! And in place thereof, what remains?

It is one of the bitterest apportionments of a lot of slavery, that the Negro, sympathetic and assimilative, after acquiring, in a refined family, the tastes and feelings which form the atmosphere of such a place, is not the less liable to become the bond-slave of the coarsest and most brutal ­ just as a chair or table, which once decorated the superb saloon, comes, at last, battered and defaced, to the bar-room of some filthy tavern, or some low  haunt of vulgar debauchery. The great difference is, that the table and the chair cannot feel, and the man can; for even a legal enactment that he shall be "taken, reputed, adjudged in law, to be a chattel personal," cannot blot out his soul, with its own private little world of memories, hopes, loves, fears, and desires.

Mr. Simon Legree, Tomís master, had purchased saves at one place and another, in New Orleans, to the number of eight, and driven them, handcuffed, in couples of two and two, down to the good steamer Pirate, which lay at the levee, ready for a trip up the Red River.

Having got them fairly on  board, and the boat being off, he came round, with that air of efficiency which ever characterized him, to take a review of them. Stopping opposite to Tom, who had been attired for sale in his best broadcloth suit, with well-starched linen and shining boots, expressed himself as follows:

"Stand up."

Tom stood up.

"Take off that stock (neckcloth or collar)!" and, as Tom, encumbered by his fetters, proceeded to do it, he assisted him, by pulling it, with no gentle hand, from his neck, and putting it in his pocket.

Legree now turned to Tomís trunk, which, previous to this, he had been ransacking, and taking from it a pair of old pantaloons and dilapidated coat, which Tim had been wont put on about his stable work, he said, liberating Tomís hands from the handcuffs, and pointing to a recess in among the boxes ­

"You go there, and put these on."

Tom obeyed, and in a few moments returned.

"Take off your boots," said Mr. Legree.

Tom did so.

"There," said the former, throwing him a pair of coarse, stout shoes, such as were common among the slaves, "put these on."

In Tomís hurried exchange, he had not forgotten to transfer his cherished Bible to his pocket. It was well he did so, for Mr. Legree, having refitted Tomís handcuffs, proceeded deliberately to investigate the contents of his pockets. He drew out a silk handkerchief, and put it into his own pocket. Several little trifles, which Tom had treasured... he looked upon with a contemptuous grunt, and tossed him over his shoulder into the river.

Tomís Methodist hymn-book, which, in his hurry, he had forgotten, he now held up and turned over.

"Humph! Pious, to be sure. So, whatís yer name ­ you belong to the church, eh?"

"Yes, Masír," Tom said firmly.

"Well, Iíll soon have that out of you. I have none oí yer bawling, praying, singing niggers on my place; so remember. Now, mind yourself," he said, with a stamp and a fierce glance of his gray eye, directed at Tom. "Iím your church now! You understand ­ youíve got to be as I say."

Something within the silent black man answered, No!  and, as if repeated by an invisible voice, came the words of an old prophetic scroll... "Fear not! For I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by my name. Thou art mine!"

But Simon Legree heard no voice. That voice is one he shall never hear. He only glared for a moment at the downcast face of Tom, and walked off. He took Tomís trunk, which contained a very neat and abundant wardrobe, to the forecastle, where it was soon surrounded by various hands of the boat. With much laughing, at the expense of niggers who tried to be gentlemen, the articles very readily were sold to one and to another, and the empty trunk finally put up at auction. It was a good joke, to see how Tom looked after his things, as they were going this way and that; and then the auction of the trunk, that was funnier than all, and occasioned abundant witticisms.

This little affair being over, Simon sauntered up again to his property.

"Now, Tom, Iíve relieved you of any extra baggage, you see. Take mighty good care of them clothes. Itíll be long enough ëfore you get more. I go in for making niggers careful; one suit has to do for one year, on my place."

Simon next walked up to the place where Emmeline was sitting, chained to another woman.

"Well, my dear," he said, chucking her under the chin, "keep up your spirits..."

"Now," said he, doubling his great, heavy fist into something resembling a blacksmithís hammer. "díye see this fist? Heft it!" he said, bringing it down on Tomís hand. "Look at these yer bones! Well, I tell ye this yer fist has got as hard as iron knocking down niggers..." said he, bringing his fist down so near to the face of Tom that he winked and drew back. "I donít keep none oí yer cussed overseers; I does my own overseeing; and I tell you things is seen to. Youís every one on ye get to toe the mark, I tell ye; quick, straight, the moment I speak, Ye wonít find no soft spot in me, nowhere. So, now, mind yerselves; for I donít show no mercy!.... Thatís the way I begin with my niggers," he said to a gentlemanly man, who had stood by him during his speech. "Itís my system to begin strong ­ just let ëem know what to expect!"

"Indeed," said the stranger, looking upon him with the curiosity of a naturalist studying some out-of-the-way specimen.

"Yes, indeed. Iím none oí yer gentlemen planters, with lily fingers, to slop around and be cheated by some old cuss of an overseer! Just feel of my knuckles, now; look at my fist. Tell ye, sir, the flesh onít has come jest like a stone, practicing on  niggers ­ feel on it."

The stranger applied his fingers to the implement in question, and simply said, "It is hard enough; and I suppose," he added, "practice has made your heart just like it..."

The stranger turned away, and seated himself beside a gentleman, who had been listening to the conversation with repressed uneasiness.

"You must not tale that fellow to be any specimen of southern planters, " said he.

"I should hope not," said the young gentleman, with emphasis.

"He is a mean, low, brutal fellow!" said the other.

"And yet your laws allow him to hold any number of human beings subject to his absolute will without even a shadow of protection; and, low as he is, you cannot say that there are not many such."

"Well," said the other, "there are also many considerate and humane men among planters."

"Granted," said the young man; "but, in my opinion, it is you considerate, humane men that are responsible for all the brutality and outrage wrought by these wretches; because, if it were not for your sanction and influence, the whole system could not keep foothold for an hour. If there were no planters except such as that one," said he, pointing with his finger to Legree, who stood with his back to them, "the whole thing would go down like a mill-stone. It is your respectability and humanity that licenses and protects his brutality."