Elisha Tyson, Philanthropist and Emancipator (c. 1749-1824).

Although George Fox and the early Friends seem to have fully recognized "the negroes as equal objects of our Heavenly Father's regard with themselves," acknowledged their right to liberty, and advised their liberation at some stated time, still, strange to say, many of our American Friends were, or became, slave holders—a sad blot on the otherwise fair pages of our Quaker history.

The first attempt to liberate a slave of which we have knowledge was made in one of our southern Meetings.

1684. "William Dixon having a mind to sell a negro his freedom, desires this Meeting's advice. This Meeting refers him to the Yearly Meeting for advice." (Third Haven Monthly Meeting.)

At this time, what is now Baltimore Yearly Meeting was held alternately at Third Haven, on the Eastern Shore, and at West River, in the "tenting field" on the Western shore of the Chesapeake bay, and our little handful of Friends were in the midst of a slave-holding community, with the law of the State prohibiting the manumission of slaves. It was a brave proposition to make, and doubtless the Yearly Meeting hesitated about putting itself on record at this time in regard to any such action; indeed, even later it was slow to act, and it was almost 100 years (1772) before it recommends that its subordinate Meetings "keep under the weight of a concern that had arisen in the Society some time ago in regard to members holding slaves"; and in

1826 "deliberated on the subject with much earnestness of concern, but that way does not open to recommend any specific movement at present except that of continuing it on the minutes for further consideration next year." However, in

1840 "they bear a faithful testimony against slavery," etc.

Meantime individuals had not been idle, and the vigorous protest made by our German Friends of Phila-

delphia in 1688 bore fruit. It was a descendant of one of these, Elisha Tyson, who on his removal to Baltimore, about 1780, took up the work that was continued throughout his life, among the colored people of the State. Those who were inhumanly treated by their owners found in him a friend who ever endeavored to mitigate their sufferings, and for those illegally held in bondage he used every effort to procure release.

In 1789, the Maryland Society for the Abolition of Slavery was formed at the suggestion of Joseph Townsend. Of it many of the more influential citizens of Baltimore were members, and Granville Sharp, the English philanthropist, at his request, became a corresponding member. Elisha Tyson was a member—the chief member—of its "acting committee." During the seven years of the existence of the society, its great work, besides educating public opinion, was the repeal of the law forbidding masters to manumit slaves, which after years of effort was accomplished in 1796. Two years later the Abolition Society was dissolved, and Elisha Tyson continued the work alone—the support he doubtless had of many Friends, and individuals of other denominations, but the great burden of the work was his. It is said that he was instrumental in giving liberty to 2,000 slaves, many of whom were illegally held in bondage. In some cases, alone and unarmed, he made his way to the vile dungeons where slaves were confined, guarded by desperate men. "Shoot if thee dare," was his answer when a cocked pistol was aimed at his heart, "but thee dare not, coward as thou art, for well does thee know that the gallows would be thy portion."

One of the last acts of his life was the rescue and liberation of eleven Africans, who had been kidnapped on the African coast, and were held on board a Colombian privateer calling at Baltimore for supplies. The President at this time was appealed to, and after much effort the Africans were liberated. They desired to return to Africa, and the agent of the Colonization Society came and took charge of them. It was a society of which Elisha Tyson had never fully approved, and he anxiously awaited news of their arrival in Africa. He was seriously ill at the time. "If I could only hear of their safe arrival I

should die content," he said, and again, "that he had prayed to the Father of Mercies that He would be pleased to spare his life till he could receive the intelligence." The news of their restoration to their families in Africa at last reached him, and shedding tears of joy he exclaimed, "Now I am ready to die. My work is done." Two days later, on February 16th, 1824, aged seventy-five years, this great and good man passed away from many works to rewards.

Probably the last one of the Africans liberated by Elisha Tyson died at the "Shelter for Infirm and Aged Colored People," in 1890. A six months voyage had brought a vessel to our coast after 1808, when the lawful slave trade was abolished, and this gave Elisha Tyson the legal opportunity necessary for the release of a kidnapped child. It is said that he never went beyond the law in his efforts to procure liberty for the negroes. In her old age, Mary Wilson, as she was called, would tell of her memory of her African home, "a house and yard *swept clean*, but no upstairs and no bed," and of the short struggle on the sands when she, a little girl, was torn from her mother's arms, and of the latter's wild grief.

There are many interesting anecdotes preserved of the philanthropist, but no adequate biography of his life has been written.[1]

Through his efforts the first African Church in this city was established, and, it being near his home, when their meetings became noisy, as was sometimes their wont, he would seize his hat and cane, and "stride into their midst, and rapping them to silence, ask if they expected to take Heaven by storm." If this did not answer, he would not hesitate to put out the candles and drive them home!

He is said to have been a large and powerful man, and once when assaulted by a bully did not return the blow, but grasped his assailant and "held him *so uneasy*" that when he was released he was quite willing to be civil.

Shortly before his death he caused to be announced

[1] In 1825, a small volume appeared in Baltimore, entitled, *Life of Elisha Tyson, the Philanthropist*, written by John S. Tyson, a nephew of Elisha Tyson, with portrait. A copy is in D., presented by Lucy Tyson Fitzhugh, Westminster, Md.

his desire to meet the colored men of the city. At the appointed time a great audience greeted him with every mark of reverence and affection. He began by saying, "I am now old and weak, in a few days I shall be gathered to my fathers—the great 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."

He then proposed that they form a society, and raise and deposit money for necessary emancipation work in future, in the hands of certain white persons, named by him, in whom they could have the utmost confidence.

He also left behind him a "Farewell Address to the People of Colour in the United States of America."[2] It was written a few days before his death, and read afterward in the African churches of this city, and also generally in their churches throughout the United States.

The day of his funeral the colored people of the city endeavoured to show their love and gratitude by attending his funeral in a body. To the number of more than 10,000, they met in their various churches and the immense dusky throng followed the funeral procession on foot to the grave in the Friends' Burying Ground at Aisquith Street.

But great as was the work of Elisha Tyson among the colored people, he had time also for other good works. He was much interested in the American Indians, and in 1801 was one of the two Friends appointed by the Yearly Meeting to make the fourth visit to the Indians northwest of the Ohio river, but the account of this long journey is too full of interest to come within the limits of this paper.

His interest in the Indians had brought to his knowledge the ill effects of intoxicating liquors, and with them he would have nothing to do. They were not even allowed storage room in his warehouses. This was his practical protest against one of the evils of the day.

As a "merchant miller" he had become a wealthy man, but he lived simply, despising ostentation either in dress or furniture. He was "a progressive and leading

[2] Copy in **D.**

citizen, and used his wealth with liberality and public spirit." Anyone looking into the eagle face of the fine old lithograph that hangs in the Swarthmore Library can readily believe that "he possessed wonderful strength of understanding, quickness of perception and readiness of reply," and that

"Wherever wrong did right deny,
Or suffering spirits urge their plea,
His was the voice to smite the lie,
The hand to set the captive free."

WHITTIER, *Garrison*, slightly altered.

ELLA K. BARNARD.

Baltimore, Md.

American Friends in Dunkirk.

Paris, Oct. 23. Letters from Dunkirk announce the almost immediate arrival of fourteen vessels from North America, having on board one hundred Quakers and Baptist families. These good people mean to settle in Dunkirk, where they are to be established in the possession of every liberty of conscience; they will experience in Flanders all the protection and encouragement due to the pacific disposition of their sect and the meakness of their manners. This asylum was pointed out to them by M. de Calonne, the chancellor of the Exchequer; he thought it the properest place on account of its contiguity to England, and the similarity of the inhabitants manners to those of their British neighbours. It is a pity that these honest Americans come amongst us to witness our vices, and perhaps to catch the dangerous contagion. Their chief trade will consist in the whale fishery in the Northern seas.[1]

Newscutting in **D.**, dated 1786.

[1] Numerous references to this immigration are in **D.**, mostly connected with the Rotch family of Nantucket Island. See life of William Rotch, 1734-1828, by Augustine Jones, 1901.

Art thou shapely, comely, beautiful—the exact draught of a human creature? Admire that Power that made thee so. Let the beauty of thy body teach thee to beautify thy mind with holiness, the ornament of the beloved of God.

Art thou homely or deformed? Magnify that goodness that did not make thee a beast; and with the grace that is given unto thee, for it has appeared unto all, learn to adorn thy soul with enduring beauty.

WILLIAM PENN, *No Cross, No Crown*, pt. i., chap. xi., sect x.