



# **Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-Slavery Labours in the United States, Canada, and England**

*Samuel Ringgold Ward*

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This is a memoir written by a runaway slave. From the preface: "THE idea of writing some account of my travels was first suggested to me by a gentleman who has not a little to do with the bringing out of this work. The Rev. Dr. Campbell also encouraged the suggestion. I then thought that a series of letters in a newspaper would answer the purpose. Circumstances over which I had no control placed it beyond my power to accomplish the design in that form of publication. A few months ago I was requested to spend an evening with some ardent friends of the Negro race, by the arrangement of Mrs. Massie, at her house, Upper Clapton. Her zeal and constancy in behalf of the American Slave are well known on both sides of the Atlantic. Nor is there, I believe, a more earnest friend of my kindred race than is her husband. With him I have repeatedly taken counsel on the best modes of serving our cause. Late in August last, Dr. Massie urged on me the propriety of preparing a volume which might remain as a parting memorial of my visit to England, and serve to embody and perpetuate the opinions and arguments I had often employed to promote the work of emancipation. Peter Carstairs, Esq., of Madras, being present, cordially and frankly encouraged the project; and other friends, in whose judgment I had confidence, expressed their warmest approval. My publisher has generously given every facility for rendering the proposal practicable. To him I owe my warmest obligations for the promptitude and elegance with which the Volume has been prepared. I do not think the gentlemen who advised it were quite correct in anticipating that so much would be acceptable, in a Book from me. I should have gone about it with much better courage if I had not felt some fears on this point. However, amidst many apprehensions of imperfection, I place it before the reader, begging him to allow me a word by way of apology. I was obliged to write in the midst of most perplexing, most embarrassing, private business, and had not a solitary book or paper to refer to, for a fact or passage; my brain alone had to supply all I wished to compose or compile. Time, too, was very limited. Under these circumstances, that I should have committed some slight inaccuracies, will not appear very strange, though I trust they are not very great or material. I beg the reader generously to forgive the faults he detects, and to believe that my chief motive in writing is the promotion of that cause in whose service I live. I hope that this Book will not be looked upon as a specimen of what a well educated Negro could do, nor as a fair representation of what Negro talent can produce--knowing that, with better materials, more time, and in more favourable circumstances, even I could have done much better; and knowing also, that my superiors among my own people would have written far more acceptably. It will be seen that I have freely made remarks upon other things than slavery, and compared my own with those of other peoples. I did the former as a Man, the latter as a Negro. As a Negro, I live and therefore write for my people; as a Man, I freely speak my mind upon whatever concerns me and my fellow men. If any one be disappointed or offended at that, I shall regret it; all the more, as it is impossible for me to say that, in like circumstances, I should not do just the same again. The reader will not find the dry details of a journal, nor any of my speeches or sermons. I preferred to weave into the Work the themes upon which I have spoken, rather than the speeches themselves. The Work is not a literary one, for it is not written by a literary man; it is no more than its humble title indicates--the Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro. In what sense I am a fugitive, will appear on perusal of my personal and family history."

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