

### The Fugitive Slave Law, with its Secret Inquisition in Chester County.

Let the people of Pennsylvania read the following startling record of the way in which liberty is cloven down in their midst, by the kidnapping law, with its star-chamber courts and its Jeffrey-judges. Let the fact be told to the nation and the world, of a woman seized at night, dragged instantly before a commissioner, and without counsel or a witness in her behalf, without a friend and without defense, doomed to slavery, delivered to the Southern woman-hunter, and sent off to the South. The perpetrators of such a deed of darkness wight well choose the time when "men slept" for their crime. We copy the account from the West Chester Village Record, a strongly conservative whig paper, which has never been liable to the suspicion of too ardent or excitable sympathies for the oppressed.

**FUGITIVE SLAVE CASE.**—"*The Summary Process.*"—During the last several days there has been great exasperation of feeling manifested by our citizens by the rendition of a colored female from a state of freedom to a state of servitude, in a manner so "summary" that before her arrest and trial were known to the community, she was condemned and sent into a state of servitude.

It appears that a colored woman, who called herself Elizabeth Williams, had been convicted at the Court of Quarter Sessions in West Chester, of a theft upon her employer, Mr. John H. Sweeney, and sentenced to five months imprisonment in the jail of Chester county. Shortly after her conviction she was claimed by Mr. Geo. McCrone, of Delaware, as servant for a term of years. It appears she had been sold for crime for six or eight years. Mr. McCrone visited West Chester, and desired to be conducted to the cell of the convict to identify her; and although it is against the rules of the prison to allow any but public officers or the clergy to visit the convicts, the rule was abated in this case, as an act of courtesy, due to the benevolent objects of the visitor, and when it was understood that his design was nothing more than to ascertain whether he could not legally reduce her to a state of slavery! The rules of the prison are made by the Inspectors, and it may be that by these rules the restrictions upon the public do not extend to slave hunters. If so, there can be no censure upon the keeper of the prison.—Upon examination, the woman was said to be the one sought for. Accordingly, on Saturday morning last, a few minutes after four o'clock, the news spread around the town, that the girl Williams had that morning been liberated from jail, taken before the U. S. Commissioner, proved to owe service, and delivered over to her master, and that she was already borne off to the State of Delaware! An event so startling, having taken place at an hour when nearly all of our citizens were in bed, caused a wonderful sensation. Every one was anxious to know the particulars—to know what were the proofs in the case, and who appeared as the counsel for the poor helpless woman; and when they were told that no white person was present at the hearing except the owner and his witnesses, the Commissioner and his marshal, and that there was no counsel on her side, and that the whole trial did not occupy more than a quarter of an hour—there was a general feeling of disapprobation, not to say indignation.—And when it was told too, that the sentence of the law had expired on the night of the 27th ult, at 12 o'clock, and that the authorities of the Chester county prison had retained her until four o'clock on Saturday morning, by appointment with the claimants, who were at that moment waiting in the borough to seize her as soon as she had escaped from its walls, every one felt that the Inspectors of the prison had done wrong if they had any agency in an arrangement for delivering her up to a state of bondage—or even to trial—at such an unseasonable hour, when no friend, no counsel or adviser, could appear in her defence. We trust the Directors of the prison will exonerate themselves from any collusion in this matter. They are all gentlemen of high and honorable feelings, and we are sure that they mean no wrong.

It has been contended that the slave law should not be amended. Admitting that it is right, there ought to be some provision in the law requiring the examination to be in public, and between 6 or 8 in the morning and 6 in the evening. If a Commissioner holds the examination during the silent hours of the night, with no one present but the claimant, it is nothing more nor less than a secret inquisition. In the case before us, we are told that the woman acknowledged that Mr. McCrone was her master, and stated that she was desirous to go with him. If this were true, what use was there to go to the expense and trouble of getting out a warrant? It is also said that there was no doubt of the ability of Mr. McCrone to prove his property. Then he ought to have demanded a full and public examination. We do not know him; he is in all probability a fair business man; he ought then, as a matter of justice to himself, and to the fugitive, have demanded that his claims should be fully investigated in the face of the public, at such an hour as that all would be satisfied.

The friends of the Slave law—the South—the Slave holder—must condemn such insufficient and summary proceedings. While they claim their right to fugitives, there is not one honest or honorable man in the whole South, who does not ask, and who ought not to demand, that the most rigid examination should be made into the rights of the claimant, and that the liberty of the person claimed should be guarded in the most effectual manner. They want no secret inquisition—they want no violent and insolent disregard of the several forms of trial. Is it not provoking—is it not beyond endurance—that in Chester county—where the "supremacy of the law" is acknowledged—whose constitutional obligations are respected—that the houses of our citizens should be broken open by gangs of midnight assassins—desperadoes in search of slaves—that the Marshal of the U. S. should avail himself of the shadows of the night in his endeavors to capture the fugitive, as has been the case in more than one instance?