

This man a planter was an elder too,
Great in the church and held its doctrines true,
Who kept the good things of this world in view,
He owned a hundred slaves and longed for more
And might do strange things to increase his store.
He counted his broad acres by the mile,
And would boast of them with a gracious smile.
He little cared for praise, or blame or taunt,
The more he got the more he seemed to want,
In church most powerful in his gift of prayer,
And still more powerful when he chose to swear.
At times to heaven he'd turn his pious eyes,
As if the things of earth he did despise
To cheer a visitor he'd find a pack
And play at "euchre," or at "high-low-jack,"
He had a weakness too for good old rye,
And oft dispensed it while he winked his eye,
Yet there were planters of a different mind,
Who to their slaves and servants were most kind.
He now was getting ready for a chase,
To bring Cleopa back to her old place,
And Mara to his owner should be sent,
He boasted loud that such was his intent,
And thus this planter on a chase was bent.

'Twas midnight and the moon was clear,
The waves on Chesapeake were bright,
So also on James River near,
So too on Hampton Roads in sight,
And south of these that marsh so vast,
The Dismal Swamp, looked as if death
His gloomy shadow here had cast
To rob all living things of breath.
Yet all the reptiles that were hid
Within its noxious mud and seum,
Though dangerous, could never rid
The slave of hope of joys to come.
But if the bloodhounds savage yell
Was heard with shouting hunters near,
The trembling fugitive might well
Let hopes of rescue disappear.
The gloomy swamp looked dark and drear
And never more than on this night.

Though moonbeams flitted here and there,
Like pitying angels in their flight,
All showed how lone that place could be,
Yet oft it was the spot from where
Poor harrassed men who would be free
Took their first step for liberty.
Here Mara, Cleopa and Ben
Had got thus far from hostile men.
They had been resting here for hours
In their escape from evil powers,
And now they must start on their way
To reach the entrance of the bay
Before the dawning of the day.
Then, ere they left, in prayer they knelt,
And Noble Ben spoke as he felt.
He asked the Lord to be their guide
And shelter from their foes provide,
Though in night's gloom they made a start,
Each left the swamp with lightsome heart.

Chaste was the dawn, its modest blush
was seen
Stealing with dewy mist o'er land and sea,
The fragrant air was balmy and serene,
A perfumed fountain of all purity.
The shades that hovered round the wings
of night
Fled one by one away ere morn's first gleam,
Then faintly came the soft and struggling light,
Like radiance wak'ning from a transient dream,
And as some lingering star seen yet on high
Reluctant seemed to dim and fade away,
Some zephyr came, as if its parting sigh,
The star soon disappeared and lo! 'twas day.

And now behold the distant mountain crowned
With the red glory of the sun's first beam,
While greeting flowers seem springing up around
To lend their beauty to the peaceful scene.
The ocean vast now grander in repose
Than when its towering waves would touch the sky
Seems like eternity where human woes
Are lost and hushed with sorrow's latest sigh,
Aerial warblers greet the early rays,
Which flash o'er hill and vale, o'er tower and tree,
And man awakes to gaze in wrapt amaze,