

At the last term of Walton Superior Court, a man by the name of John Wright was tried for selling, as a slave, a female child, about two years old, that had been placed in his hands, by its mother, for nurture. It appeared in evidence that the child had very dark hair and complexion, and was imposed upon the purchaser as a mulatto or Indian; for it was represented to him by the seller, that it had been obtained in the Indian Nation. As no other crime in the Penal Code applied to the case, Wright was indicted for false imprisonment, was convicted, and received the highest punishment known to this last offence. The bill of sale from Wright to the purchaser was introduced in evidence, by which he had doomed to perpetual servitude an individual born as free as himself. The following are the remarks of Judge Clayton, at the time of passing the sentence of the Court:

You, John Wright, have been indicted and found guilty of a charge, which, in its consequences, will embitter many a future hour of your life. You are an old man, and in that very term, with reference to your present situation, is contained much cause for self-reproach.— Instead of employing the remnant of a life, long preserved to you, in deeds which would have taken from old age many of its pangs, you have indiscreetly stepped aside to the perpetration of an act, which, in point of wicked and cruel tendency, condemns all description. In your conviction, the justice of your country is satisfied, and your crime, which before was odious, is now changed to a misfortune that entitles you to pity. It is therefore not the intention of this Court to mock your distress: its motive is good. Your own reformation, and the usefulness of your example, is surely all that now belongs to your miserable condition. And so far as the one can be obtained, or the other can be profitable, you ought to offer yourself a willing and an atoning subject of public reproof. You will be shortly separated from your aged wife, who, during the trial, seems to have hung around you under feelings of the most lively concern; and while you leave her and your family, peculiar to suffering, you will be removed to a place where you will be deprived of their tender consolations, and where no affectionate family hand will be ready to refer the usual comforts of sickness, or to soften the cares of a sleepless bed; and where no cheering and domestic converse will be offered to beguile the tedium of your servitude: but where you will be surrendered over to an association with the most varied and abandoned profligacy, and what it is still more to be dreaded, to the keener piercings of a restless remorse. But when you reflect that you will only suffer for a short season what you wished and intended to inflict for life, upon an innocent and helpless subject, how just must you consider your sentence! Yours will be a temporary bondage, but hers was to have been entered through life, and perhaps through all her posterity. Where was your humanity when its tender age and its more helpless sex were pleading with you for protection? Where was your conscience when you were about to violate generous confidence? This infant had been placed in your hands by an unfortunate mother for nurture and education; and you were to receive your reward, if it in the sentiments of an approving bonn, at least in the future services of the child. This trust you have most shamefully abused, by attempting to make a slave of this friendless innocent. While the consequences of your crime are to be deplored, so far as they reach to your friends and family, they will never perhaps excite a sympathetic emotion towards yourself. Your punishment will be peculiarly appropriate to your transgression; for whenever it most sorely presses, remember you aimed a similar anguish at an object much less able to bear it. It is probable your case will create but one regret—that your punishment cannot be greater.