



HEROES

FROM HISTORY:

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

William Wilberforce

(1759–1833), was a British politician and philanthropist¹ who was prominent in the struggle to abolish² the slave trade. Following his conversion in his mid-twenties, he questioned whether he should remain in politics or live a quiet life close to God. His friends counseled him to use his influence for good, and his faith and desire to promote Christian ethics³ in private and public life were the foundation of the reforms he championed throughout his lifetime.



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1. philanthropist: someone with a desire to improve the welfare of humanity, especially through charitable activities
 2. abolish: outlaw something
 3. ethics: moral values; principles governing the appropriate conduct for a person or group

Move it,
slaves!



The slave trade in the late 1700s involved thousands of Africans, hundreds of ships, and millions of pounds (currency in the United Kingdom).

Somewhere on the coast of Africa.

Few were aware of the horrors of the so-called "Middle Passage" across the Atlantic, where an estimated one out of four Africans died.



Get up,
slave!

I can't
go on. ...

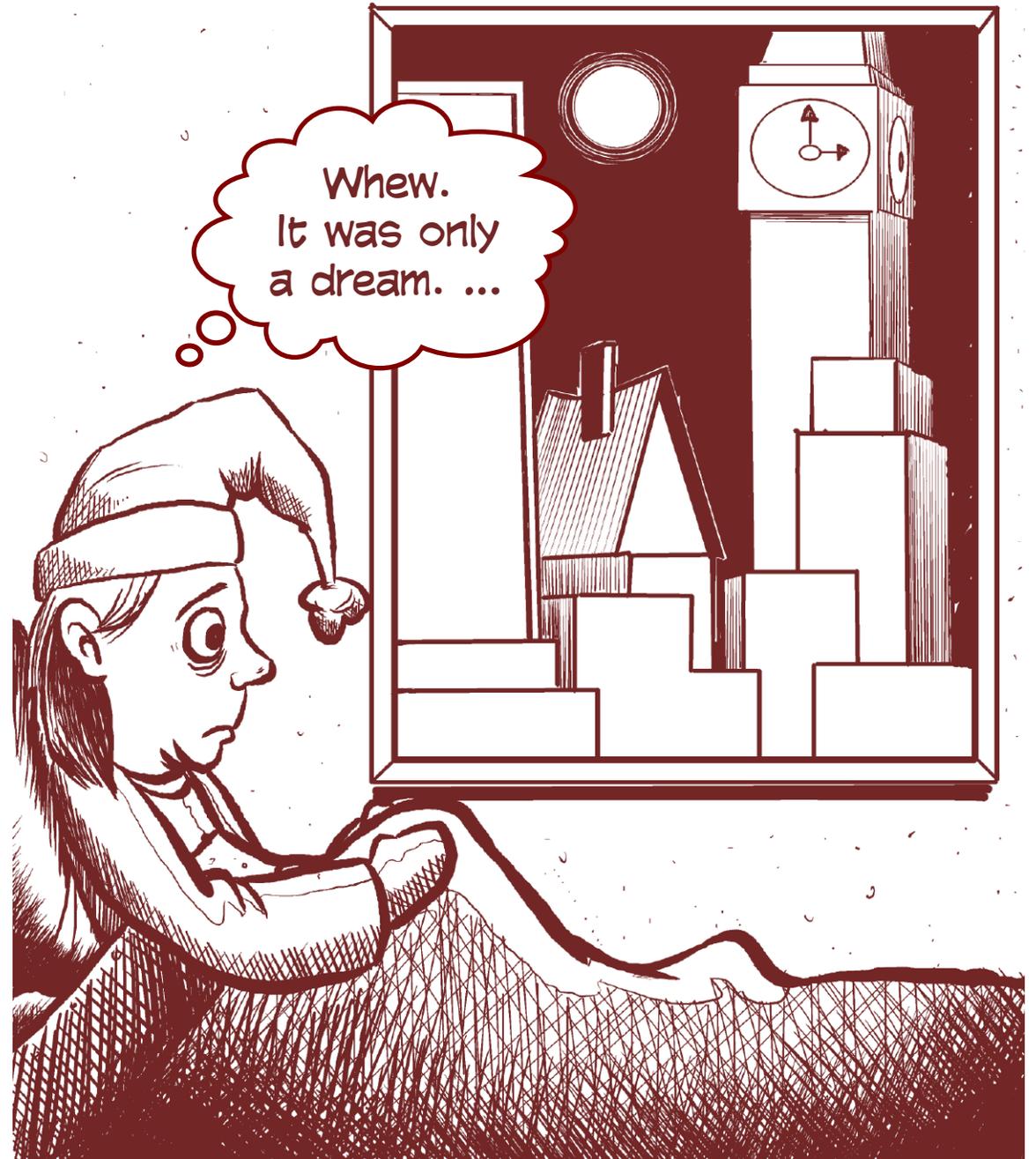




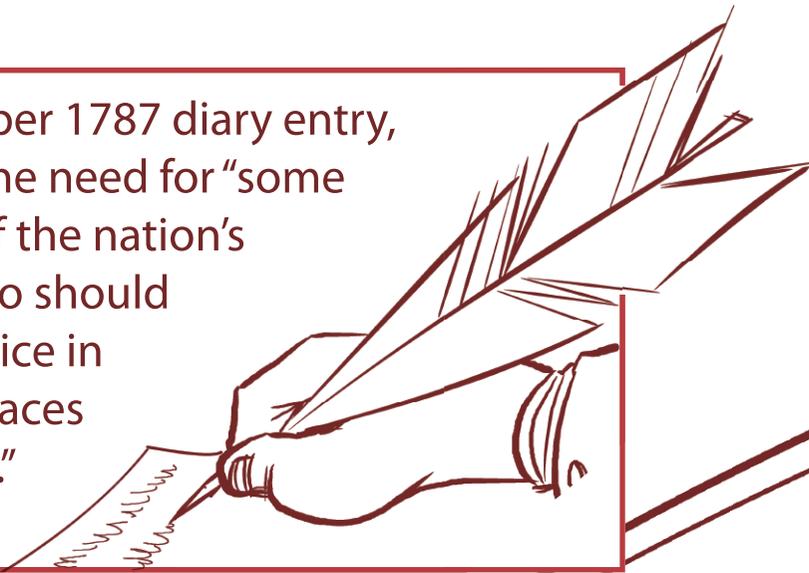
I'll show you!

No... Master ...
Please...

Wilberforce was aware, and he was deeply disturbed.



In an October 1787 diary entry, he noted the need for “some reformer of the nation’s morals, who should raise his voice in the high places of the land.”



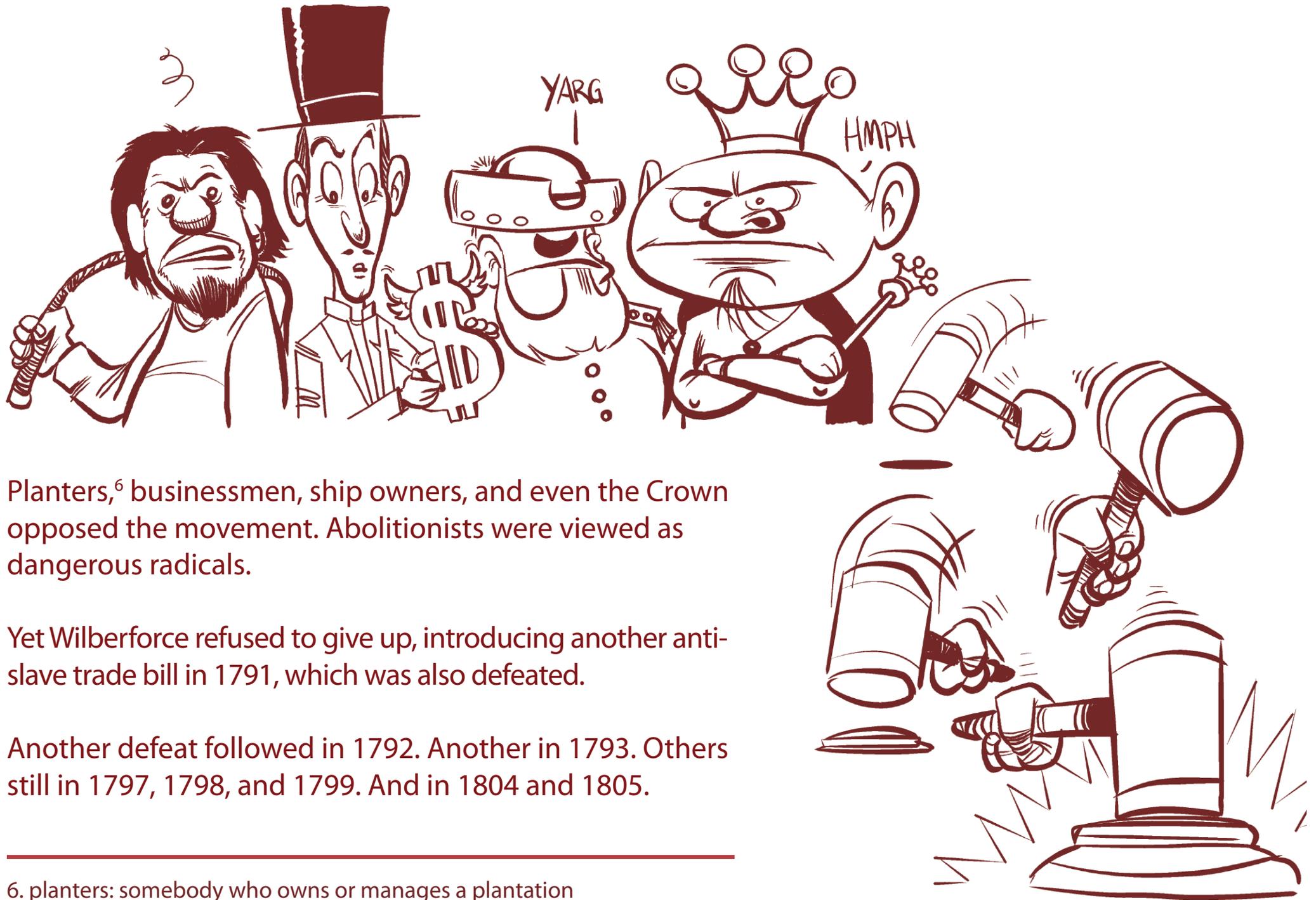
He then summed up what became one of his life’s missions: “God Almighty has set before me ... the suppression⁴ of the slave trade.”

In May 1788, Wilberforce introduced a motion to Parliament indicting⁵ the trade. But the motion was defeated.

4. suppression: conscious and forceful action to put an end to something

5. indict: accuse somebody of wrongdoing, formally charge accused person





Planters,⁶ businessmen, ship owners, and even the Crown opposed the movement. Abolitionists were viewed as dangerous radicals.

Yet Wilberforce refused to give up, introducing another anti-slave trade bill in 1791, which was also defeated.

Another defeat followed in 1792. Another in 1793. Others still in 1797, 1798, and 1799. And in 1804 and 1805.

6. planters: somebody who owns or manages a plantation

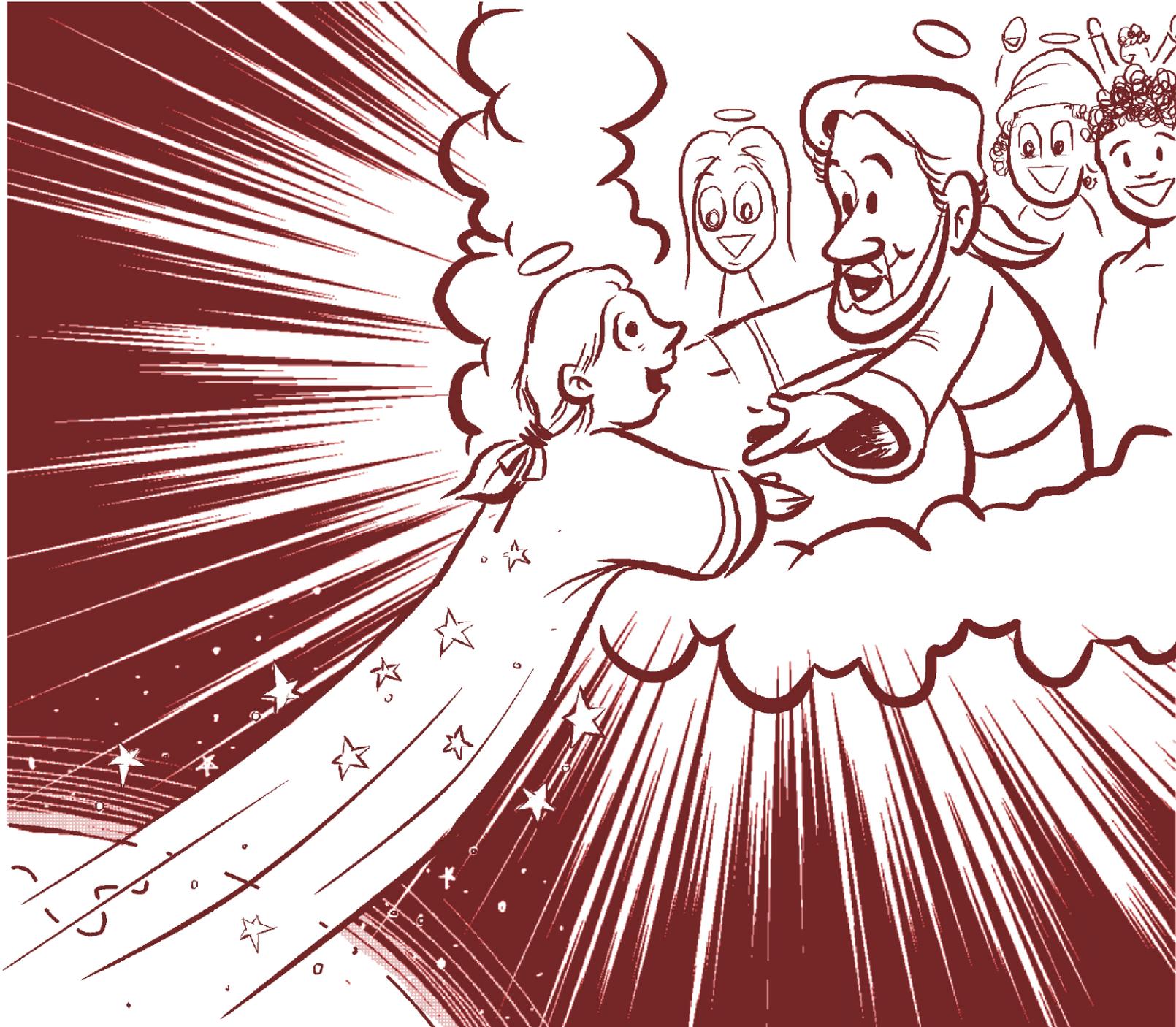
Gradually, however, the public came to support the abolitionists' efforts, and in 1807 Parliament abolished the slave trade throughout the British Empire.



Wilberforce wept in joy.



Not one for complacency, he next set his mind to the larger issue, the freeing of all slaves.



This too required remarkable persistence. But in the summer of 1833, Parliament finally passed the Emancipation Act.⁷ Three days later, Wilberforce died.

7. The Emancipation Act, or The Slavery Abolition Act was an 1833 Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom abolishing slavery throughout the majority of the British Empire

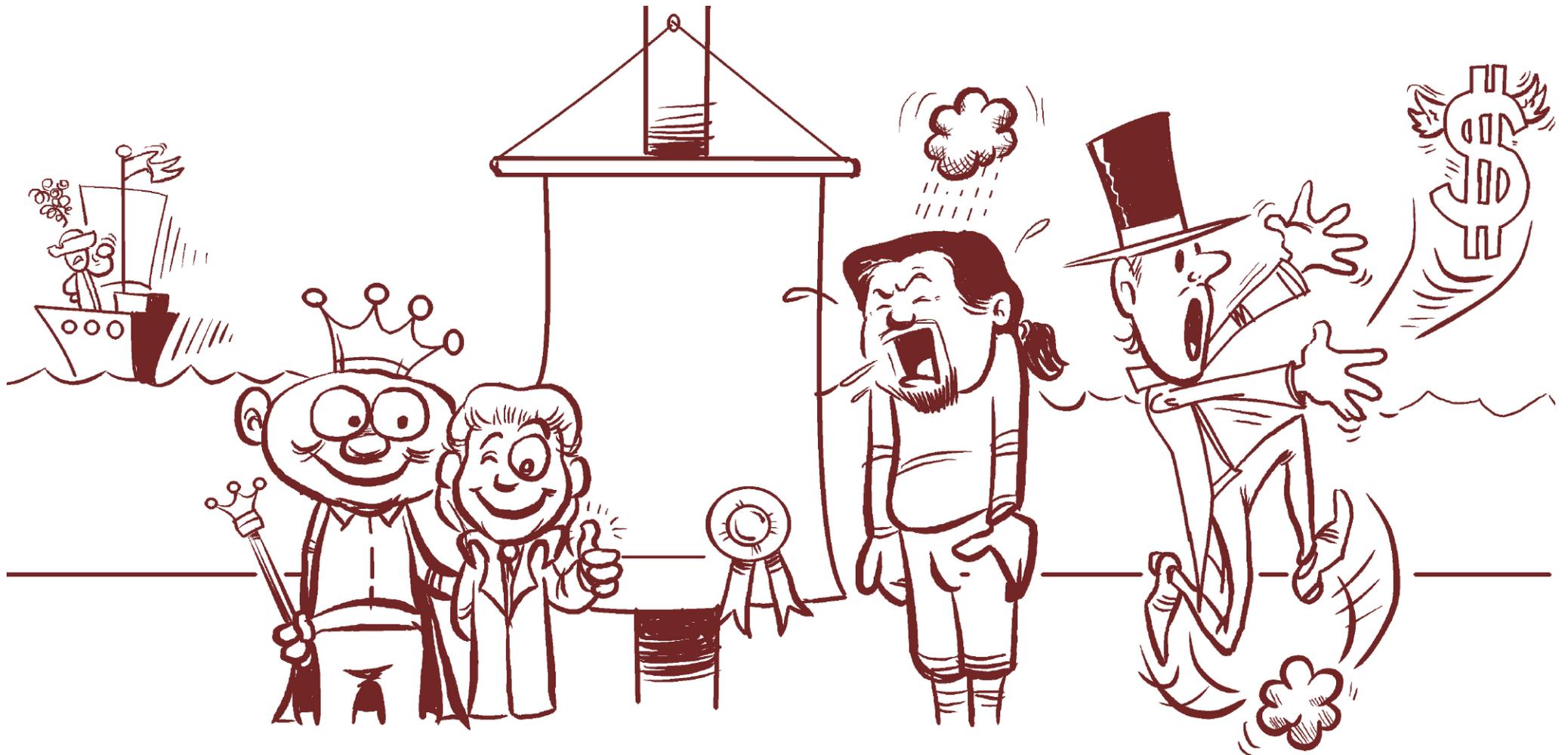
THINK ABOUT IT:

What would you do if you were in Wilberforce's place? Would you think that you're just one person and therefore couldn't affect great change?



Or would you believe that with God on your side nothing is impossible?

Wilberforce was just one man, but with God's anointing, he changed the world of his day. If God could use Wilberforce to make such a difference and change countless hearts and lives, imagine the special plan and purpose the Lord has for your life!



PRAYER:

Jesus, I ask that You help me not be afraid of circumstances that appear challenging. I believe that with You all things are possible. So please anoint me with courage and determination to fulfill Your plan for my life.



S&S link: Christian Life and Faith: Great Men and Women of God-2b

Contributed by Tomoko Matsuoka, compiled from various online sources. Illustrated by MJ. Designed by Stefan Merour.

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