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My Dear E——. I return you Mr. ——'s letter. I do not think it answers any of the questions debated in our last conversation at all satisfactorily: the *right* one man has to enslave another, he has not the hardihood to assert; but in the reasons he adduces to defend that act of injustice, the contradictory statements he makes appear to me to refute each other. He says, that to the continental European protesting against the abstract iniquity of slavery, his answer would be, 'the slaves are infinitely better off than half the continental peasantry.' To the Englishman, 'they are happy compared with the miserable Irish.' But supposing that this answered the question of original injustice, which it does not, it is not a true reply. Though the negroes are fed, clothed, and housed, and though the Irish peasant is starved, naked, and roofless, the bare name of freeman—the lordship over his own person, the power to choose and will—are blessings beyond food, raiment, or shelter; possessing which, the want of every comfort of life is yet more tolerable than their fullest enjoyment without them. Ask the thousands of ragged destitutes who yearly land upon these shores to seek the means of existence—ask the friendless, penniless foreign emigrant, if he will give up his present misery, his future uncertainty, his doubtful and difficult struggle for life, at once, for the secure, and as it is called, fortunate dependance of the slave: the indignation with which he would spurn the offer will prove that he possesses one good beyond all others, and that his birthright as a man is more precious to him yet than the mess of pottage for which he is told to exchange it because he is starving.

Of course the reverse alternative cannot be offered to the slaves, for at the very word the riches of those who own them would make themselves wings and flee away. But I do not admit the comparison between your slaves and even the lowest class of European free labourers, for the former are *allowed* the exercise of no faculties but those which they enjoy in common with the brutes that perish. The just comparison is between the slaves and the useful animals to whose level your laws reduce them; and I will acknowledge that the slaves of a kind owner may be as well cared for, and as happy, as the dogs and horses of a merciful master; but the latter condition—i.e. that of happiness—must again depend upon the complete perfection of their moral and mental degradation. Mr. ——, in his letter, maintains that they *are* an inferior race, and, compared with the whites, '*animals*, incapable of mental culture and moral improvement:' to this I can only reply, that if they are incapable of profiting by instruction, I do not see the necessity for laws inflicting heavy penalties on those who offer it to them. If they really are brutish, witless, dull, and devoid of capacity for progress, where lies the *danger* which is constantly insisted upon of offering them that of which they are incapable. We have no laws forbidding us to teach our dogs and horses as much as they can comprehend; nobody is fined or imprisoned for reasoning upon knowledge, and liberty, to the beasts of the field, for they are incapable of such truths. But these themes are forbidden to slaves, not because they cannot, but because they can and would seize on them with avidity—receive them gladly, comprehend them quickly; and the masters' power over them would be annihilated at once and for ever. But I have more frequently heard, not that they were incapable of receiving instruction, but something much nearer the truth—that knowledge only makes them miserable: the moment they are in any degree

enlightened, they become unhappy. In the letter I return to you Mr. —— says that the very slightest amount of education, merely teaching them to read, 'impairs their value as slaves, for it instantly destroys their contentedness, and since you do not contemplate changing their condition, it is surely doing them an ill service to destroy their acquiescence in it;' but this is a very different ground of argument from the other. The discontent they evince upon the mere dawn of an advance in intelligence proves not only that they can acquire but combine ideas, a process to which it is very difficult to assign a limit; and there indeed the whole question lies, and there and nowhere else the shoe really pinches. A slave is ignorant; he eats, drinks, sleeps, labours, and is happy. He learns to read; he feels, thinks, reflects, and becomes miserable. He discovers himself to be one of a debased and degraded race, deprived of the elementary rights which God has granted to all men alike; every action is controlled, every word noted; he may not stir beyond his appointed bounds, to the right hand or to the left, at his own will, but at the will of another he may be sent miles and miles of weary journeying—tethered, yoked, collared, and fettered—away from whatever he may know as home, severed from all those ties of blood and affection which he alone of all human, of all living creatures on the face of the earth may neither enjoy in peace nor defend when they are outraged. If he is well treated, if his master be tolerably humane or even understand his own interest tolerably, this is probably *all* he may have to endure: it is only to the consciousness of these evils that knowledge and reflection awaken him. But how is it if his master be severe, harsh, cruel—or even only careless—leaving his creatures to the delegated dominion of some overseer, or agent, whose love of power, or other evil dispositions, are checked by no considerations of personal interest? Imagination shrinks from the possible result of such a state of things; nor must you, or Mr. ——, tell me that the horrors thus suggested exist only in imagination. The Southern newspapers, with their advertisements of negro sales and personal descriptions of fugitive slaves, supply details of misery that it would be difficult for imagination to exceed. Scorn, derision, insult, menace—the handcuff, the lash—the tearing away of children from parents, of husbands from wives—the weary trudging in droves along the common highways, the labour of body, the despair of mind, the sickness of heart—these are the realities which belong to the system, and form the rule, rather than the exception, in the slave's experience. And this system exists here in this country of your's, which boasts itself the asylum of the oppressed, the home of freedom, the one place in all the world where all men may find enfranchisement from all thraldoms of mind, soul, or body—the land elect of liberty.

Mr. —— lays great stress, as a proof of the natural inferiority of the blacks, on the little comparative progress they have made in those States where they enjoy their freedom, and the fact that, whatever quickness of parts they may exhibit while very young, on attaining maturity they invariably sink again into inferiority, or at least mediocrity, and indolence. But surely there are other causes to account for this besides natural deficiency, which must, I think, be obvious to any unprejudiced person observing the condition of the free blacks in your Northern communities. If, in the early portion of their life, they escape the contempt and derision of their white associates—if the blessed unconsciousness and ignorance of childhood keeps them for a few years unaware of the conventional proscription under which their whole race is placed (and it is difficult to walk your streets, and mark the tone of insolent superiority assumed by even the gutter-urchins over their dusky cotemporaries, and imagine this possible)—as soon as they acquire the first rudiments of knowledge, as soon as they begin to grow up and pass from infancy to youth, as soon as they cast the first observing glance upon the world by which they are surrounded, and the society of which, they are members, they must become conscious that they

are marked as the Hebrew lepers of old, and are condemned to sit, like those unfortunates, without the gates of every human and social sympathy. From their own sable colour, a pall falls over the whole of God's universe to them, and they find themselves stamped with a badge of infamy of Nature's own devising, at sight of which all natural kindness of man to man seems to recoil from them. They are not slaves indeed, but they are pariahs; debarred from all fellowship save with their own despised race—scorned by the lowest white ruffian in your streets, not tolerated as companions even by the foreign menials in your kitchen. They are free certainly, but they are also degraded, rejected, the offscum and the offscouring of the very dregs of your society; they are free from the chain, the whip, the enforced task and unpaid toil of slavery; but they are not the less under a ban. Their kinship with slaves for ever bars them from a full share of the freeman's inheritance of equal rights, and equal consideration and respect. All hands are extended to thrust them out, all fingers point at their dusky skin, all tongues—the most vulgar, as well as the self-styled most refined—have learnt to turn the very name of their race into an insult and a reproach. How, in the name of all that is natural, probable, possible, should the spirit and energy of any human creature support itself under such an accumulation of injustice and obloquy? Where shall any mass of men be found with power of character and mind sufficient to bear up against such a weight of prejudice? Why, if one individual rarely gifted by heaven were to raise himself out of such a slough of despond, he would be a miracle; and what would be his reward? Would he be admitted to an equal share in your political rights?—would he ever be allowed to cross the threshold of your doors?—would any of you give your daughter to his son, or your son to his daughter?—would you, in any one particular, admit him to the footing of equality which any man with a white skin would claim, whose ability and worth had so raised him from the lower degrees of the social scale. You would turn from such propositions with abhorrence, and the servants in your kitchen and stable—the ignorant and boorish refuse of foreign populations, in whose countries no such prejudice exists, imbibing it with the very air they breathe here—would shrink from eating at the same table with such a man, or holding out the hand of common fellowship to him. Under the species of social proscription in which the blacks in your Northern cities exist, if they preserved energy of mind, enterprise of spirit, or any of the best attributes and powers of free men, they would prove themselves, instead of the lowest and least of human races, the highest and first, not only of all that do exist, but of all that ever have existed; for they alone would seek and cultivate knowledge, goodness, truth, science, art, refinement, and all improvement, purely for the sake of their own excellence, and without one of those incentives of honour, power, and fortune, which are found to be the chief, too often the only, inducements which lead white men to the pursuit of the same objects.

You know very well dear E——, that in speaking of the free blacks of the North I here state nothing but what is true and of daily experience. Only last week I heard, in this very town of Philadelphia, of a family of strict probity and honour, highly principled, intelligent, well-educated, and accomplished, and (to speak the world's language) respectable in every way—i.e. *rich*. Upon an English lady's stating it to be her intention to visit these persons when she came to Philadelphia, she was told that if she did nobody else would visit *her*; and she probably would excite a malevolent feeling, which might find vent in some violent demonstration against this family. All that I have now said of course bears only upon the condition of the free coloured population of the North, with which I am familiar enough to speak confidently of it. As for the slaves, and their capacity for progress, I can say nothing, for I have never been among them to judge what faculties their unhappy social position leaves to them unimpaired. But it seems to me,

that no experiment on a sufficiently large scale can have been tried for a sufficient length of time to determine the question of their incurable inferiority. Physiologists say that three successive generations appear to be necessary to produce an effectual change of constitution (bodily and mental), be it for health or disease. There are positive physical defects which produce positive mental ones; the diseases of the muscular and nervous systems descend from father to son. Upon the agency of one corporal power how much that is not corporal depends; from generation to generation internal disease and external deformity, vices, virtues, talents, and deficiencies are transmitted, and by the action of the same law it must be long indeed before the offspring of slaves—creatures begotten of a race debased and degraded to the lowest degree, themselves born in slavery, and whose progenitors have eaten the bread and drawn the breath of slavery for years—can be measured, with any show of justice, by even the least favoured descendants of European nations, whose qualities have been for centuries developing themselves under the beneficent influence of freedom, and the progress it inspires.

I am rather surprised at the outbreak of violent disgust which Mr. —— indulges in on the subject of amalgamation; as that formed no part of our discussion, and seems to me a curious subject for abstract argument. I should think the intermarrying between blacks and whites a matter to be as little insisted upon if repugnant, as prevented if agreeable to the majority of the two races. At the same time, I cannot help being astonished at the furious and ungoverned execration which all reference to the possibility of a fusion of the races draws down upon those who suggest it; because nobody pretends to deny that, throughout the South, a large proportion of the population is the offspring of white men and coloured women. In New Orleans, a class of unhappy females exists whose mingled blood does not prevent their being remarkable for their beauty, and with whom no man, no *gentleman*, in that city shrinks from associating; and while the slaveowners of the Southern States insist vehemently upon the mental and physical inferiority of the blacks, they are benevolently doing their best, in one way at least, to raise and improve the degraded race, and the bastard population which forms so ominous an element in the social safety of their cities certainly exhibit in their forms and features the benefit they derive from their white progenitors. It is hard to conceive that some mental improvement does not accompany this physical change. Already the finer forms of the European races are cast in these dusky moulds: the outward configuration can hardly thus improve without corresponding progress in the inward capacities. The white man's blood and bones have begotten this bronze race, and bequeathed to it in some degree qualities, tendencies, capabilities, such as are the inheritance of the highest order of human animals. Mr. —— (and many others) speaks as if there were a natural repugnance in all whites to any alliance with the black race; and yet it is notorious, that almost every Southern planter has a family more or less numerous of illegitimate coloured children. Most certainly, few people would like to assert that such connections are formed because it is the *interest* of these planters to increase the number of their human property, and that they add to their revenue by the closest intimacy with creatures that they loathe, in order to reckon among their wealth the children of their body. Surely that is a monstrous and unnatural supposition, and utterly unworthy of belief. That such connections exist commonly, is a sufficient proof that they are not abhorrent to nature; but it seems, indeed, as if marriage (and not concubinage) was the horrible enormity which cannot be tolerated, and against which, moreover, it has been deemed expedient to enact laws. Now it appears very evident that there is no law in the white man's nature which prevents him from making a coloured woman the mother of his children, but there *is* a law on his statute books forbidding him to make her his wife; and if we are to admit the theory that the

mixing of the races is a monstrosity, it seems almost as curious that laws should be enacted to prevent men marrying women towards whom they have an invincible natural repugnance, as that education should by law be prohibited to creatures incapable of receiving it. As for the exhortation with which Mr. —— closes his letter, that I will not 'go down to my husband's plantation prejudiced against what I am to find there,' I know not well how to answer it. Assuredly I *am* going prejudiced against slavery, for I am an Englishwoman, in whom the absence of such a prejudice would be disgraceful. Nevertheless, I go prepared to find many mitigations in the practice to the general injustice and cruelty of the system—much kindness on the part of the masters, much content on that of the slaves; and I feel very sure that you may rely upon the carefulness of my observation, and the accuracy of my report, of every detail of the working of the thing that comes under my notice; and certainly, on the plantation to which I am going, it will be more likely that I should some things extenuate, than set down aught in malice.

Yours ever faithfully.