

TO MAJOR GENERAL HOWARD.¹

Chief of the Freedmen's Bureau, Washington.

Sir: Your high official trust makes you, in a certain sense, the representative man of the North, as concerns their dealing with the African race in these United States. It is as such that I venture to address you, and through you all your fellow-citizens on behalf of this recently liberated people. My purpose is humbly to remind you of your weighty charge, and to encourage you to go forward with an enlarged philanthropy and zeal in that career of beneficence toward the African which Providence has opened before you. Rarely has it fallen to the lot of one of the sons of men to receive a larger trust, or to enjoy a wider opportunity for doing good. At the beginning of the late war there were in the South nearly four millions of Africans. All these, a nation in numbers, now taken from their former guardians, are laid upon the hands of that government of which you are the special agent for their protection and guidance. To this nation of black people you are virtually father and king; your powers for their management are unlimited, and for assisting their needs you have the resources of the "greatest people on earth." Your action for the freedmen's good is restrained by no constitution or precedents, but the powers you exercise for them are as full as your office is novel. We see evidence of this in the fact that your agents, acting for the good of your charge, can seize by military arrest any one of their fellow-citizens of African descent, for no other offense than being unemployed, convey him without his consent, and without the company of his wife and family, to a distant field of industry, where he is compelled to wholesome labor for such remuneration as you may be pleased to assign. Another evidence is seen in your late order, transferring all causes and indictments in which a freedman is a party, from the courts of law of the Southern States to the bar of your own commission-

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ers and sub-commissioners for adjudication. I beg you to believe that these instances are not cited by me for the purpose of repeating the cavils against the justice and consistency of the powers exercised in them, in which some have been heard to indulge. My purpose is not to urge with them that there is no law by which a free citizen can be rightfully abridged of his liberty of enjoying the *otium cum dignitate* so long as he abstains from crime or misdemeanor therein, merely because he wears a black skin, while the same government does not presume to interfere with the exercise of this privilege by his white fellow-citizens, even though they be those lately in rebellion against it; that this military arrest and transference to the useful though distant scene of compulsory labor, is precisely that penalty of "transportation" which Southern laws never inflicted, even on the slave, except for crime and after judicial investigation; that these commissioners for adjudicating cases to which freedmen are parties, are in reality judges at law, appointed by you, for every city and county in eleven States, and empowered to sit without jury, and to decide without regard to the precedents or statutes of the States; which would exhibit your bureau as not only an executive, but a judicial branch of the government, established without constitutional authority, and that a hundred fold more pervasive in its jurisdiction than the Supreme Court itself; and that this "order" has, by one stroke of your potent pen, deprived eight millions of white people of the right of a trial by jury, guaranteed to them by the sixth and seventh additional articles of the United States Constitution, in every case where a freedman happens to be a party against them. I repeat, that I have not adduced these instances for the purpose of urging these or such like objections; (it does not become the subject to cavil against the powers exercised by his conquerors), but only to impress you with the obligation, which the fullness of your powers brings upon you, to do good to your charge upon a great scale.

I cannot believe that means will be lacking to you any more than powers. At your back stands the great, the powerful, the rich, the prosperous, the philanthropic, the Christian North, friend and liberator of the black man. It must be assumed that the zeal which waged a gigantic war for four years,

which expended three thousand million of dollars, and one million of lives, in large part to free the African, will be willing to lavish anything else which may be needed for his welfare. And if the will is present, the ability is no less abundant among a people so wealthy and powerful, who exhibit the unprecedented spectacle of an emersion from a war which would have been exhausting to any other people with resources larger than when they began it, and who have found out (what all previous statesmen deemed an impossibility), that the public wealth may be actually increased by unproductive consumption. With full powers and means to do everything for the African, what may he not expect from your guardianship?

The answer which a generous and humane heart would make to this question, must of course be this: that it would seek to do for the good of its charge *everything which is possible*. But more definitely I wish to remind you that there is a *minimum* limit, which the circumstances of the case forbid you to touch. Common sense, common justice says: that *the very least you can do for them must be more than the South has accomplished*, from whose tutelage they have been taken. To this measure, at least, if not to some higher, your country, posterity, fame, and the righteous heavens, will rigidly hold you. The reason is almost too plain to be explained. If a change procured for the Africans at such a cost brings them no actual benefit, then that cost is uncompensated, and the expenditure of human weal which has been made was a blunder and a crime. Thus it becomes manifest that the measure for the task which you have before you, is the work which the South accomplished for the negro while he was a slave. The question, how much was this? is a vital one for you; it gives you your starting point from which you must advance in your career of progressive philanthropy. Listen then.

First, for the physical welfare of the negro the South has done something. A rapid increase of population and longevity are a safe index of the prosperous and sane condition of the bodies of a people. The South has so provided for the wants of the negro that his numbers have doubled themselves as rapidly as those of the whites, with no accessions by immigration. The census returns show that the South so cared for him that

the percentage of congenital defects and diseases, these unflinching revealers of a depressed physical condition, idiocy, blindness, deafness, dumbness, hereditary scrofula, and such like ills, was as small as among the most prosperous Northern States. The South gave to her negro men, on an average, a half pound of bacon and three pounds of breadstuffs per day, besides his share in the products of his master's kitchen-garden, dairy and orchard; and to the women and children at a rate equally liberal. If, in some neighborhoods, the supply was less bountiful than the above, there were a hundred fold more in which it was even more abundant. The South gave to every negro, great and small, a pair of shoes every winter, and to the laboring men an additional pair at harvest. She clothed them all with a substantial suit of woollens every winter, an additional suit of cotton or flax each summer, and two shirts and two pair of socks per year, while the adults drew their hat and blanket each. She furnished each negro family with a separate cottage or cabin, and, during the severe weather, with about one-third of a cord of wood per day, to keep up those liberal fires on which his health and life so much depend. She provided, universally, such relief for his sickness that every case of serious disease was attended by a physician with nearly the same promptitude and frequency as the cases of the planters' own wives and daughters; and in all the land never was a negro fastened to his bed by illness but he received the personal, sympathizing visits of some intelligent white person besides; master, mistress or their agent, who never went to his couch empty-handed. His dead universally received decent and Christian burial, where the bereaved survivors were soothed by the offices of Christianity. The South so shielded the negro against destitution, that from the Potomac to the Gulf, not one negro pauper was ever seen, unless he were free, and not one African poorhouse existed or was needed. Her system secured for every slave, male or female, a legal claim upon the whole property, income, and personal labor of his master, for a comfortable maintenance during any season of infirmity brought upon him by old age, the visitation of God, or his own imprudence, however protracted that season might be: a claim so sure and definite that it could be pursued by an action at law

upon the slave's behalf; a claim so universally enforced and acquiesced in, that its neglect, or the death of a helpless slave through destitution, was as completely unknown among us as cannibalism. The South met that claim, which the free laboring men of other lands have so often had sorrowful occasion to argue, amid pallid famine, and with the fearful logic of insurrections and bloodshed, the claim of "the right to labor," and has met it so successfully that she has secured to every African slave capable of labor, without even one exception among all her millions, remunerative occupation, at all times, and amid all financial convulsions and depressions of business. That is, she has found at all times such occupation for all of them as has procured for them, without excessive toil, a decent maintenance during their active years, an adequate and unfailing provision for old age, a portion for their widows, and a rearing of their children. The South has so far performed these duties to the bodies of the Africans that no community of them have ever, in a single instance, amid any war, or hlight, or drouth, or dearth, felt the tooth of famine on its vitals, or so much as seen the wolf, destitution, at its door.

For the culture of the negro's mind and character, the South has also done something. She has not, indeed, fallen into the hallucination that the only processes of education are those summed up in the arts of reading and writing—facts which were not prevalent among those literary dictators of the ancient world, the compatriots of Pericles and Plato—nor has she deemed it a likely mode to communicate these useful arts to the ebony youth, to gather three hundred of them into one pandemonium, under a single overtasked "school-marm" or bald-pated negro, and duh the seething cauldron of noise, confusion and "negro-gen gas," a "primary school." But thousands and tens of thousands has she taught to read (and offered the art to ten-fold more, who declined it from their own indolence), through the gentle and faithful agency of cultivated young masters and mistresses, a process prohibited, I boldly assert, *quicunque vult* by no law upon the statute-book of my State, at least. But this tuition, extensive as it has been, is the merest atom and mite, in the extensive culture which she has given to the African race. She received them at the hands

of British and Yankee slave traders, besotted in their primeval jungles, for the spontaneous fruits of which they lived in common. She taught the whole of them some rudiments of civilization. She taught them all the English language, a gift which, had they been introduced into the Northern States as free men, in numbers so large, they would not have received in three centuries. She taught all of them some arts of useful labor, and as large a portion of them as any other peasantry learned the mechanical arts. With the comparatively small exception of the negroes upon large estates, belonging to non-resident owners, the South has placed every negro boy and girl, during his or her growth, under the forming influence of white men and ladies, by whom they have been taught some little tinctures of the cleanliness, the decencies, the chastity, the truthfulness, the self-respect, so utterly alien to their former savage condition, and a share of courtesy and good breeding which would not disgrace any civilized people. Of the young negroesses, who would otherwise have grown up the besotted victims of brutal passions, the great majority have been, at some stage of their training, introduced by the South to the parlors and chambers of their women, from whom they have learned to revere and imitate, to some degree, that grace and purity, that sweet humanity and delicacy of sentiment which glorify the Southern lady above all her sex; and under her watchful and kindly eye, has her dark-skinned sister been taught the agencies and domestic arts which make woman a blessing in her home. The boys and youths, by the same influences, have become the humble, yet affectionate, companions of their masters, and have imbibed some of their intelligence and principle. Herein was the great educational work of the South, potent and persuasive as it was simple. By her system, every man and woman of the superior race, yea, every child, was enlisted in the work of the culture of the inferior, and the whole business of domestic life was converted, by interest and affection alike, into a schooling of the mind and character.

This culture has been so far successful that the African race, lately rude savages, was raised to such a grade that, according to high military authority in the United States, they

were fit to make armies as efficient as those recruited in the "great, free and enlightened North"; and in the judgment of a powerful party in that country (a party which embraces the major part of that particular corner which has the prescriptive right of knowing everything), they have been made, under Southern tutelage, fully equal to the rights and duties of voters and rulers, in the most complicated of governments. Now, feeling that it does not become a subject of that government, one recently conquered by the great North, to dispute its *dicta* on these points, I shall of course assume that they are correct. Here, then, is what the South has done for the development of the negro's mind.

Nor has our section neglected that noblest and highest interest of all races, the spiritual interest of the negro. She has diffused among the blacks a pure gospel. She gave him the Christian Sabbath, and fortified the gift with laws and penalties, capable of being executed in his behalf against his own master—laws so efficacious that enforced Sabbath labor was almost utterly unknown to him. She gave him a part in every house of worship built throughout her border (for never have I heard of one church in all these States where the slaves were not admitted along with their masters), besides building more temples for his exclusive use than the Christianity of the North has built for Pagans, in all Hindostan and China together. She has given him evangelical preaching, unmingled with the poison of Universalism, Millerism, Socinianism, Mormonism, or with the foreign and disastrous element of politics. For nearly all the church-members of this people are connected with the great orthodox and evangelical denominations; and having been a preacher to Africans for twenty years, I have never yet heard a sermon addressed to them, or heard of the man who had heard it, in which the subject of abolition or pro-slavery was obtruded on their attention by a Southern minister. In one word, the South has so far cared for their souls as to bring five hundred thousand of them into the full communion of the church, thus making them at least outward and professed Christians—a ratio as large as that prevailing among the whites of the great, Christian North.

These facts concerning the work of the South for the

slaves, I give without the fear of contradiction. The son of a slaveholder, an owner of slaves by inheritance, reared and educated among them, laboring for them and their masters all my professional life, I know whereof I affirm. Every intelligent citizen of the South will substantiate these statements, as within the limits of moderation, and as only a part of those which might be made.

When I claim that the South did thus much for the Africans, I am far from boasting. We ought to have done much more. Instead of pointing to it with self-laudation, it becomes us, with profound humility towards God, to confess our shortcomings towards our servants. He has been pleased, in His sovereign and fearful dispensation, to lay upon us a grievous affliction, and we know He is too just to do this except for our sins. While I am as certain as the sure word of Scripture can make me concerning any principle of social duty, that there was nothing sinful in the relation of master and slave itself, I can easily believe that our failure to fulfill some of the duties of that righteous relation is among the sins for which God's hand now makes us smart. And it does not become those who are under His discipline to boast of their good works. No; verily we have sinned; my argument is that you must do more for the negro than we sinners of the South have done.

I have written wittingly the words, *you* must do it for them. The South cannot. Your people have effectually disabled them therefor. They have done so by taking away our wealth. The South is almost utterly impoverished, and is able to do little more than to keep destitution from her own doors. But a more conclusive reason is the alienation which the armed and clerical missionaries of the North have inculcated in the breasts of these people, lately so affectionate and contented. The negroes have been diligently taught that their masters were their enemies and oppressors, that their bondage was wicked and destructive of their well-being, and especially that the religious teachings of all Southern ministers were "doctrines of devils," because they would not shout the shibboleth of abolition. The consequence is that the black race will no longer listen to the Southern people, or be guided by them. Take as evidence my own instance, which I cite precisely for

the reason that it is not in the least peculiar, but reflects the common experience of all ministers and people here. Before the advent of your armies, plantation meetings were held weekly in the different quarters of the congregation, on Saturdays, in working time, cheerfully surrendered by the masters for that purpose, which brought religious instruction within two or three miles of every house. They are now all at an end. Six years ago my congregation pulled down the substantial house, built by their fathers only thirty years before, with walls as solid as living rocks, which was entirely adequate to hold the whites, and replaced it by a larger. One prominent reason was that it was not large enough to hold the servants also. They constructed in the new house three hundred commodious sittings exclusively for the blacks. Last Sabbath, under a bright and cheerful sun, those sittings were occupied during public worship by precisely three persons; and at the afternoon service, held in a chapel-of-ease, primarily for the blacks, there was not one present. Thus the North has prevented the South from doing its former work for the good of the African; consequently it must make its account to do it all itself.

But while I assert this, I would bear my emphatic testimony against the falsehood and injustice of the charge that the Southern people wish to cast off and ruin the negro, in a spirit of pique and revenge for his emancipation. That they regard this measure as neither just nor wise, is perfectly true. But they have promised to acquiesce in it as a condition of peace; that promise they intend faithfully to keep; and they universally regard slavery as finally at an end. There is nothing more manifest than that the North, amid the flame and heat of all its animosities, knows and feels that this people will not be the one to break its new covenant, hard as its conditions are; and that the freedom of the late slaves and the authority which has dictated it are secured from attack by us. And I boldly testify that this magnanimous people has not voluntarily withdrawn its humane interest from the blacks; that it earnestly desires their prosperity; that it wishes to give them employment and opportunity, and to co-operate in their maintenance as far as possible; that they do not cast off the negroes, but it is the negroes who cast them off. Yea, the people of

the South are this day extending to tens of thousands of black families a generous sympathy in the midst of their own heavy losses and deep poverty, which we challenge the Christian world to surpass in its splendid philanthropy: in that we still refuse to cast off those families, although, by reason of the incumbrance of old persons, sick, and little children, their present labor is worse than worthless to us, and we know we shall receive no future recompense in the labor of the children we are thus rearing *gratis* for other men as independent of us in future as we are of them. And this is done (oftentimes in spite of a present requital of insolence, misconception, ingratitude and a petty warfare of thefts and injuries) by Southern gentlemen and ladies, who appropriate thereto a part of the avails of their own personal labors, undertaken to procure subsistence for their own children. And this is done, not in a few exceptional cases, but in a multitude of cases, in every neighborhood of every county, so that the numbers of destitute freedmen under which the able hands of your Bureau now faint, are not a tithe of those who are still maintained by the impoverished people of the South. And this is done simply because humanity makes us unwilling to thrust out those for whose happiness we have so long been accustomed to care into the hardships of their new and untried future. And unless you can expect this delicate sentiment to exhibit a permanence which would be almost miraculous under the "wear and tear" of our future poverty, I forewarn you that you must stand prepared for a tenfold increase of your present responsibilities, when these families are committed to you. That tenfold burden you must learn to bear successfully.

Having shown you the starting point of that career of beneficence to the African, from which you are solemnly bound to God and history to advance, I now return to strengthen the already irresistible argument of that obligation. If the South, with all its disadvantages, has done this modicum of good to this poor people, the North, their present guardians, with their vast advantages, must do far more. The South was the inferior section (so the North told us) in number, in wealth, in progress, in intelligence, in education, in religion. The South (so the North says) held the Africans under an antiquated, unright-

eous and mischievous relation—that of domestic slavery. The North now has them on the new footing, which is, of course, precisely the right one. The South was their oppressor; the North is their generous liberator. The South was hagridden in all its energies for good (so we were instructed) by the “barbarism of slavery”; the North contains the most civilized, enlightened and efficient people on earth. Now, if you do not surpass our poor performances for the negro with this mighty contrast in your favor, how mighty will be the just reprobation which will be visited upon you by the common sentiment of mankind and by the Lord of Hosts? If you do not surpass our deeds as far as your power and greatness surpass ours, how can you stand at His bar, even beside us sinners? He has taught us that “a man is accepted according to that which he hath, and not according to that which he hath not.” To this righteous rule we intend to hold you, as our successors in the guardianship of the negro.

If there are any who endeavor to lull your energies in this work, by saying that the negro, being now a free man, must take care of himself like other people; that he should be thrown on his own resources, and that, if he does not provide for his own well-being, he should be left to suffer, I beseech you, in the behalf of humanity, of justice and of your own good name, not to hearken to them. I ask you solemnly whether the freedmen have an “even start” in the race for subsistence with the other laboring men of the nation, marked as they are by difference of race and color, obstructed by stubborn prejudices, and disqualified (as you hold) for the responsibilities of self-support, to some extent, by the evil effects of their recent bondage upon their character? Is it fair, or right, or merciful to compel him to enter the *stadium*, and leave him to this fierce competition under these grave disadvantages? Again, no peasantry under the sun was ever required or was ever able to sustain themselves when connected with the soil by no tenure of any form. Under our system our slaves had the most permanent and beneficial form of tenancy; for their master’s lands were bound to them by law for furnishing them homes, occupations and subsistence during the whole continuance of the master’s tenure. But you have ended all this, and consigned four mil-

lions of people to a condition of homelessness. Will the North thus make gipsies of them, and then hold them responsible for the ruin which is inevitable from such a condition?

But there is another argument equally weighty. By adopting the unfeeling policy of throwing the negro upon his own resources, to sink or swim as he may, you run too great a risk of verifying the most biting reproaches and objections of your enemies. They, in case of his failure, will argue thus: "That the great question in debate between the defenders of slavery and the advocates of emancipation was whether the negro was capable of self-control: that the former, who professed to be more intimately acquainted with his character, denied that he was capable of it, and solemnly warned you of the danger of his ruin, if he was intrusted with his own direction, in this country, and that you, in insisting on the experiment in spite of this warning, assumed the whole responsibility. Sir, if the freedmen should perchance fail to swim successfully, that argument would be too damaging to you and your people. You cannot afford to venture upon this risk. You are compelled by the interests of your own consistency and good name, to take effectual care that the negro shall swim; and that better than before. In the name of justice, I remonstrate against your throwing him off in his present state, by the inexorable fact that he was translated into it, neither by us, nor by himself, but by you alone; for out of that fact proceeds an obligation upon you, to make your experiment successful, which will cleave to you even to the judgment day. And out of that fact proceeds this farther obligation: that seeing you have persisted, of your own free will, in making this experiment of his liberation, you and your people are bound to bestow anything or everything, and to do everything, except sin, to insure that it shall be, as compared with his previous condition, a blessing to him. For, if you were not willing to do all this, were you not bound to let him alone? When the shipmaster urges landmen to embark in his ship, and venture the perils of the deep, he thereby incurs an obligation, if a storm arises, to do everything and risk everything, even to his own life, for the rescue of his charge. If, then, you and your people should find that it will require the labors of another million of busy hands, and

the expenditure of three thousand millions more of the national wealth, to obviate the evils and dangers arising to the freedmen from your experiment upon their previous condition: yea, if to do this, it is necessary to make the care and maintenance of the African the sole business and labor of the whole mighty North you will be bound to do it at this cost.

And I beg you, sir, let no one vainly think to evade this duty which they owe you in your charge, by saying that perhaps even so profuse an expenditure as this, for the benefit of the Africans, would fail of its object; because they hold that making a prosperous career is one of those things like chewing their own food, or repenting of their own sins, which people must do for themselves, or else they are impossible to be done; and that so no amount of help can make the freedmen prosperous as such, without the right putting forth of their own spontaniety. For, do you not see that this plea surrenders you into the hands of those bitter adversaries, the Pro-Slavery men? Is this not the very thing they said? This was precisely their argument to show that philanthropy required the Africans in this country should be kept in a dependent condition. If your section acquiesces in the failure of your experiment of their liberation on this ground, what will this be but the admission of the damning charge that your measure is a blunder and a crime, aggravated by the warning so emphatic, which your opponents gave you, and to which you refused to listen?

But I feel bound, as your zealous and faithful supporter in your humane task, to give you one more caution. The objectors who watch you with so severe an eye have even a darker suggestion to make than the charge of headstrong rashness and criminal mistake in your experiment of emancipation. They are heard gloomily to insinuate that the ruin of the African (which they so persistently assert must result from the change) is not the blunder of the North, but the foreseen and intended result! Are you aware of the existence of this frightful inuendo? It is my duty to reveal it to you, that you may be put upon your guard. These stern critics are heard darkly hinting that they know Northern statesmen and presses who now admit, with a sardonic shrug, that the black man, deprived of the benignant shield of domestic servitude, must of course perish

like the red man. These critics are heard inferring that the true meaning of Northern Republicanism and Free Soil is, that the white race must be free to shoulder the black race off this continent, and monopolize the sunny soil, which the God of nations gave the latter as their heritage. They take a sort of grim pleasure in pointing to the dead infants, which, they say, usually marked the liberating course of your armies through the South, in displaying the destitution and mortality which, they charge, are permitted in the vast settlements of freedmen under your care; in insinuating the rumors of official returns of a mortality already incurred in the Southwest, made to your government, so hideous that their suppression was a necessity; and in relating how the jungles which are encroaching upon the once smiling "coasts" of the Mississippi, in Louisiana, already envelope the graves of half the black population in that State! And the terrible inference from all this, which they intimate is, that the great and powerful North only permits these disasters because it intends them; that, not satisfied with the wide domain which Providence has assigned to them, they now pretend to liberate the slave whom they have seen too prosperous under his domestic servitude, in order to destroy him, and grasp, in addition, the soil which he has occupied.

Now, sir, it is incumbent on you, that the premises on which, with so dangerous a plausibility, they ground this tremendous charge, be effectually contradicted by happy and beneficent results. You must refute this monstrous indictment, and there is only one way to do it, by actually showing that you conserve and bless the African race, multiply their numbers, and confirm their prosperity on the soil, more than we have done. I repeat, the North must refute it thus. For, of course, every Northern man, while indignantly denying and abhorring it, admits (what is as plain as the sun at midday) that if the charge were indeed true, it would convict his people of the blackest public crime of the nineteenth century; a crime which would be found to involve every aggravation and every element of enormity which the nomenclature of ethics enables us to describe. It would be the deliberate, calculated, cold-blooded, selfish dedication of an innocent race of four millions to annihilation; the murder, with malice prepence, of a nation!

not by the comparatively merciful process of the royal Hun, whose maxim was, that "thick grass is cut more easily than thin," summary massacre; but by the slowly eating cancer of destitution, degradation, immorality, protracting the long agony through two or three generations, thus multiplying the victims who would be permitted to be born only to sin, to suffer and to perish; and insuring the everlasting perdition of the soul, along with the body, by cunningly making their own vices the executioners of the doom. It would include the blackest guilt of treason being done under the deceitful mask of benefaction and by pretended liberators. The unrighteousness of its motive would concur with its treachery to enhance its guilt to the most stupendous height; for upon this interpretation of the purpose of the North, that motive would be, first to weaken and disable its late adversary, the South, by destroying that part of the people which was guilty of no sin against you, and then, by this union of fraud and force, to seize and enjoy the space which God gave them, and laws and constitution guaranteed. This, indeed, would be the picture which these accusers would then present of your splendid act, that you came as a pretended friend and deliverer to the African, and while he embraced you as his benefactor in all his simple confidence and joy, you thrust your sword through and through his heart, in order to reach, with a flesh wound, the hated white man who stood behind him, whom you could not otherwise reach. The deed would receive an additional shade of blackness from every reproach which the North has ever uttered against us for our supposed oppression of the black man, from every profession of your superior humanity toward him—from every assertion of your superior civilization, light and Christianity. For, is it not the righteous penalty of the servant who knew the will of his Divine Master and did it not, to be beaten with many stripes? If the North should, indeed, after all its claims of the traits which exalt a people, have this most accursed deed fastened upon it, then would be fulfilled against it that awful warning which the Son of God thundered against the most boastful of the abusers of His teachings: "Thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell." And on the face of all the earth there has been no people since that doomed

race who said: "His blood be upon us and our children," against whom the voice of impartial history has pronounced deeper execrations than those which would await you. Once more, could such a crime be perpetrated and the dire judgments of God fail to follow? Could your posterity hope to escape the fated tread of that divine retribution which hitherto has pursued, with inevitable steps, the crimes of all the nations, from the primeval East to the farthest West, with the double scourges of God?

Up, then! honorable Sir: Yea, I would exclaim through you: Up! thou great, Christian North: cleanse thy skirts from this foul charge; deliver thy children from this fierce indignation of heaven by the splendid liberality and success of your efforts for the freedmen. Up and silence your accusers, by lifting these Africans, with the strong hand of your beneficence, to your own prosperity. Do not listen to these boding assertors of the impossibility of the exploit; but so lavish your enlightened care and labor, and wealth and love, as to compel impossibility itself.

The conclusions to which, I trust, you have now come with me, are briefly these, that the North is bound by the logic of events and of its own acts to become the chief guardian and nurse of the freedmen. That the South is, without its own fault, disabled from doing more than a very little of this work in future. That the North must do more for them than the South ever did, and that in the proportion of her own superiority over us, as that superiority is asserted by herself, and of the advantage and justice which freedom possesses, according to her, over slavery, that the North cannot throw on the African, unaided, the task of securing his own destiny, nor plead that the attainment of social prosperity is a thing which cannot be done for those who do not effect it for themselves; because these are just the points which the South urged against this change and which the North denied in insisting upon it, and because you alone are the authors of the change. That your section has thereby incurred a sacred obligation to bestow on the African a well being higher than that of the state from which you took him, no matter how much it may cost you. And that, if the North fails in this, it confesses itself an enormous criminal.

Here, then, is your task, and these are its conditions. There is no more sincere aid which I can render you in it than to give you a sober sketch of its real difficulties, and with this I shall close.

One of your difficulties is in the thriftlessness of the Africans themselves, and their want of intelligent foresight; a trait which was caused, not by domestic servitude, but by the savage condition from which they were taken, and which we had partially corrected when they were taken out of our hands. (For this is just the character which all savages exhibit, and especially those of the torrid climes, which know no winter.) Our system assigned an effectual remedy for the mischievous effects of this trait by making it the interest and duty of every slave owner, and of all his adult children and heirs to teach the servant care and industry, and to guard against his thriftlessness. How you are to repair it under your system I, of course, must not presume to dictate. I will only venture to say that the correction of it must manifestly require a vast amount of careful and patient tutelage of a multitude of hands. The census returns of 1850 gave the South two hundred and eighty thousand slave owners. Every one of these, with their wives, many of their adult children and a multitude of overseers and agents were interested teachers and guardians of the African, and many of them exceedingly diligent, and devoted all their time to this work. Hence it is manifestly a very moderate estimate that your bureau must employ in the tutelage and guardianship of these helpless people not less than a quarter of a million of persons, and as the powerful motive of interest and property is extinguished they must all be of better average character than Southern slave owners to do their work as well without that motive as these did with it. They must be all of thorough integrity and intelligence.

Another of your difficulties will be found in the enormous misconceptions which now fill the minds of the freedmen. The mischief of one of these I have already indicated. It suited your purposes, during the season of strife, diligently to teach the negro that the white people of the South were their oppressors and enemies. Well, sir, they have learned your lesson effectually, and will not speedily unlearn it. The conse-

quence is that you have thereby stripped yourself of the aid of eight millions of white people in your arduous task, and these, the white people among whom the larger part of the freedmen still live, among whom alone are to be found persons familiar with African character, and among whom alone has there ever been, or will there ever be an ingenuous personal affection for individuals of that race. We have lost the ability to guide, counsel, or instruct them.

The larger part of them evidently confound liberty with license; and to them, liberty means living without earning a living. Accustomed to see their masters performing little manual labor (because they were necessarily occupied with the more important, and often more arduous, labor of superintendence), the freedmen assume that, to be free, is to be like their masters in the former particular. They forget this little difference, that a man cannot be usefully occupied in the labor of superintendence, when he has nobody to superintend. Your first task, sir, will be to convince them of this mistake, and, as I have proved, you are bound to do this, without causing or permitting them to suffer any painful consequence of this error:

Your emissaries, armed and clerical, diligently taught them that all the labor rendered by them in servitude was uncompensated; and that every dollar of the proceeds of that labor taken by the landholder, was a robbery from them. (A good and certain home and livelihood at all times, sustenance for their families, provision for their decrepitude, and maintenance for those they left behind them are, in the eyes of these philosophers, no compensation at all, even for that labor which is least skilled; because, I presume, they were so secure and regular. And it is the established doctrine of the Abolition school, that, while labor is entitled to wages, capital is not; in accordance with which truth, those good people, as is well known, always lend out their money for nothing, and pay away the whole profits of their costly factories in wages to operatives.) The consequence of this doctrine among the freedmen is this: They argue that all the property in the country being the fruit of their unrequited labor, they may now help themselves to a fair return, whenever and however they can. Hence a habit of what we old fashioned Southerners used to call

"theft," which renders them of rather doubtful utility as hired laborers. You will have a great deal of trouble, sir, in correcting this mistake; and again, I urge that you are bound to do this, without permitting or causing the freedmen to taste any of its bitter consequences. For, I reason of this as of all other misconceptions which they learned of you, that you are solemnly bound not to let them suffer for what was your error. What, will you punish them for believing you? It would be a monstrous iniquity. You have this task then, gently to educate them out of this innocent mistake of stealing everything which comes to their hand, by "moral suasion," without stocks, whipping posts, jails, or any such harsh measures; and meantime, to generously repair all the evil consequences of those thefts, to themselves or others, out of your own inexhaustible pockets. Do you not think, sir, that to effect this the "school-master" will have to go "abroad" pretty considerably?

Thus one mischievous mistake chases another through their ignorant minds, fostered by designing and malicious men; and each one is a fatal obstacle in that path of sober industry where alone their welfare is to be found. You have a great task, sir, in causing them to unlearn these misconceptions. How many embarrassing self-contradictions your people will have to make in performing that task, it is not for me to indicate.

Another of your difficulties will be found in the necessity for the displacement of a very large part of the black labor and population in many districts of the South. My own county may be taken as a fair example of the other parts of Virginia. There were in it about eight thousand blacks. Our wisest men of business are unanimous in declaring that under the new system of hiring labor, the industrial pursuits of the county cannot employ profitably more than one-third (some say not more than one-fifth) of the former labor; at prices which will give subsistence to the blacks. And their opinion is manifestly correct, because every business man who is questioned, individually, declares that he is constrained to reduce the labor employed by him in some such ratio. Now, this fact is not cited by me to argue from it the superior economy and productiveness of the former system, in that it was able to employ, upon the same soil, in a remunerative manner, three times or five times as

much labor. (And that the employment of it was remunerative is proved beyond a cavil by the prosperity of employers and laborers.) The only use I make of the fact is to show that two-thirds of this black population should at once emigrate; or it becomes unemployed, destitute, suffering and vicious. But the local attachments of the African are predominant; and that spirit of adventure and enterprise, which carries the Virginian to the front wave of every tide of pioneer population, is as foreign to his nature as frost is to his fervent native clime. The temper of the negro is to do just what he has been used to, and nothing else. Here, sir, you have a problem which will tax your ingenuity and force; how to displace two-thirds of the half million of blacks in Virginia to a new soil, when they do not wish to go, have no capital, and are deficient in knowledge and thrift; and to do this without a result of widespread destitution, domestic distress, disease and death.

But, perhaps, the greatest of your difficulties is the one which has been hitherto least appreciated—the novelty of your task. You, sir, are appointed to do what no other mortal has hitherto done successfully: to transmute four millions of slaves, of an alien race and lower culture, all at once into citizens, without allowing them to suffer or deteriorate on your hands. You have no precedents to guide you. You cannot resort to the pages of political history to find there the lights which may show you your momentous duties. But there is no other guide in political science. The machinery of moral causes, which forms a political society, is too complex for any finite mind to foresee, by its *a priori* speculations, what wheels will be moved by the spring which he touches. His only safe guide is the experience of previous results under similar conditions. If he attempts to act beyond this his action is, in the worst sense, *experiment*; a blind guess, leading him by haphazard to unforeseen results. In the sciences of material things, these experiments have been useful and are legitimate. The philosopher may properly deal thus with his metallic ore; he may venture his unproved hypothesis concerning it; he may submit it to new solvents, or acids, or fires; oftentimes he will find that his hypothesis is false and leads to nothing; but sometimes he will find that it is the occasion of stumbling upon the key to one of

nature's precious secrets. Now, his justification is that the ore which he eats with corrosive acids, or melts in his furnace, suffers nothing in this blundering process of questioning after new truth. It has no nerves to be fretted under his handling; no heart to be wrung; no sentient or intellectual destiny to be perverted or destroyed under his mistakes, and, above all, no immortal soul to be lost in his hands. But, in social science, mere experiments are crimes; for the subjects of them are immortal intelligences, endowed by God with a moral destiny, with hearts to bleed under errors, and never-dying souls to be lost. Fearful, then, is the responsibility of him who handles a social revolution new in the history of man. He must march; yet he cannot know whether or not the path which he selects will lead him over the bleeding hearts and ruined destinies of his own charge. For such, the only adequate director is the Spirit of God; and his best resort is prayer. To that resort I sincerely and solemnly commend you; and close by subscribing myself, Your very obedient servant,

Sept. 12, 1865.

ROBERT L. DABNEY,
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