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*For Mrs Schockcraft
with respects of
- Genl Stewart -*

LETTER TO JOHN L. CAREY,

ON THE

SUBJECT OF SLAVERY.

BY

DR. R. S. STEUART.

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LETTER.



DODON, AUGUST 30, 1845.

MY DEAR SIR,—

When I addressed you in March last, very far was it from my thoughts to appear before the public, even in so good a cause as the one to which my letter had reference; but as you have thought proper to publish that letter as introductory to your excellent remarks on Slavery in Maryland, I feel it to be due to you to acknowledge my acquiescence, and also to state distinctly my readiness to share fully the responsibility of the publication. In calling your attention to this matter, it was equally far from my thoughts to excite angry feelings in any portion of our slaveholders, and never could I have dreamed that a charge of political design could be imputed to either you or myself in proposing the discussion of this question. Indeed I can not but hope, even now, that many who have so inconsiderately taken up this impression will, on second thought, do us more justice, and ultimately will come to regard this question as one not only apart from all party strife, but intimately connected with the moral, social, and political welfare of the citizens of Maryland. In your remarks you have, in my humble opinion, stated fully all the possible advantages belonging to the institution of Slavery; at the same time you have pointed out with clearness and force some of the strongest objections inherently connected with it; I am therefore greatly at a loss to understand why exception should be taken to any thing contained in your publication. Indeed I have learned, within a few days, from a friend, that my letter has in fact given more dissatisfaction than your "Remarks."

It is, sir, on this account, as well as for the reasons above stated, that I feel called upon to come out frankly to say what are my views and sentiments touching this matter, trusting to the good sense and good feelings of my friends and neighbors to receive in a proper spirit that which I am sure, if rightly understood, will find a ready response in the bosom of every one. Politics I have never meddled with, though no man can feel a warmer desire to witness the prosperity of his country, and especially of our own fair portion of the union, than myself. It is in consideration of the welfare and the happiness of this our own commonwealth, that I have been induced (contrary to the habits of my life) to communicate to you my desire to see the subject of Slavery properly discussed and duly considered by those whom it most concerns. Convinced therefore, as I am, of the correctness of my motives, and of the truth of the principles advocated, I claim from those who have objected to my letter a fair and patient hearing.

Is there a man in Maryland, is there a single man connected with slavery who does not feel its existence to be a curse upon our beautiful land? Is there one who has not many a time, and oft, expressed a fond hope that he might live to witness the consummation of its extinction, and the entire exodus of the negro race from among us? If there is such a man, I have never met with him here, however current such may be in latitudes more south. Indeed it is impossible for a man of sound judgment and feelings "to look on this picture and on that," to behold the power and prosperity of Pennsylvania and Ohio, for instance, in comparison with our own state, and not feel the deepest regret for our deficiencies. In doing so, the suggestion will naturally arise in his mind that some cause, powerful and all-pervading, must exist to produce so marked a difference of condition. While these states have rapidly progressed in population and domestic improvements, Maryland, by much the elder member of the union, possessed of the finest location and climate in the world, and of as generous and intelligent a people as any state can boast of, has remained comparatively stationary.

This we have the mortifying proof of in the last census which you quote, showing we have increased but a little more than one third for fifty years ; that in nine counties the white population has decreased by twenty thousand, and that our whole number of inhabitants would have been stationary had it not been for the great increase in the city of Baltimore, and the partial increase in four or five counties.

Is this or is it not in some way caused by slavery ? I call upon every one to ask himself the question. In my humble opinion it is, for it is a matter of common observation that white laborers will not settle where slaves occupy the soil, however partially they may do so among free negroes. The white man shrinks from a union of labor with those who are regarded by their masters as an inferior race, and gradually he comes to regard *labor itself* as degrading, and fit only for those whom heaven has stamped with a color darker than his own. And indeed, as you very properly remark, slave labor, protected and sustained by the capital and intelligence of the master, is a powerful opponent, however easily the white laborer may supplant the unsustained labor of the free negro ; hence probably the rationale of the loss of twenty thousand white inhabitants in the nine counties ; they could not or would not work with slaves, and have gone elsewhere. Every one knows that our climate and soil are congenial to the increase of blacks as well as whites, and the question is often asked, What becomes of the increase ? As regards the slaves, many have been sent to the south, and not a few have absconded. Of the free blacks, many have gone to the north, and some have gone to Africa ; but as regards the whites, those who have not found homes in Baltimore, have emigrated to the far west to support themselves by honorable toil where labor is not regarded as a degradation. There is perhaps not a county in the state that has not, during the last fifty years, suffered this constant drain upon its white population, and it would not be extravagant to presume that several hundred thousand inhabitants are wanting who should be now upon our soil. Let us reflect for a moment what would

be the condition of our state if these her children had not become exiles from their homes. Would not our lands and water-courses have become tenanted and owned by them, and such other population as a free state draws to itself, so that, instead of the three hundred and sixteen thousand white inhabitants (the sole fruits of more than two centuries of occupancy and cultivation of our soil), we would most certainly have had at least double that number, and probably many more? Who can contemplate such a probability and not feel the deepest regret? Our taxes, now a burthen to the few, would be a mere circumstance to the many; our state debt would in fact be comparatively nothing, and our credit would be as high as our honor deserves to have it. Land would be double its present value, and every man, from the manufacturer to the farmer, would feel his improved condition, and rejoice that all enjoyed alike.

What landed man does not now feel the depressed state of real property? We all see, when a farm is offered for sale, how long it hangs in the market even at a moderate price; a moment's reflection will explain the reason; it is because there are so few purchasers, so few farmers and yeomen in the country to create a competition for land, and hence too the want of life and enterprise in the large slaveholding sections of our state. It is not the want of capital; the land is the capital; many owners would be glad to rent their fields to industrious, intelligent tenants if they could be found, confident that a rent could be obtained at least equal to their present profits, and assuredly with far less trouble and anxiety. Who would not rejoice to see our land smiling with neat farm-houses and well cultivated fields, such as delight the eye of the traveller in almost every free state of the union? And who would not rejoice to behold public *education*, that blessing far beyond all mortal wealth, rising and expanding with every thing else, and shedding its influence upon all alike? Then would we enjoy the greatest of blessings, that of being but *one people*, bound by the same ties and the same affections. But what do we behold instead of this desirable picture? Extensive

half-cultivated fields in many parts of the state, dilapidated negro log huts, a dirty, slovenly negro population on whom we can not bestow the blessings of education, and, in fact, whose happiness depends on their humility and their ignorance. But there is one more view of this subject that we should not close our eyes upon; it is the political effect of our paucity of numbers in regard to our national representation. Some few years since, with less population than we now possess, our number of representatives in the hall of congress was eight; then the ratio of representation was about fifty thousand; now the ratio of representation is about seventy-two thousand, and our number of members is reduced to six. Before many years the ratio of representation will be raised to one hundred thousand, and it is much to be feared our representation will then be reduced to four, and this while the free states more especially are increasing in population so rapidly that, notwithstanding the augmenting ratio of representation, they claim at each successive period an increase of representatives. Already the larger states overshadow the smaller, and what will the consequence be when the disproportion is still greater? Let us weigh this matter well, and let us examine and see whether we can not in our *gallant* little state do something to raise our white population to six or eight hundred thousand, that we may, among other advantages, at all times make a proud and a dignified presence in our national assembly.

Confident am I, if my fellow-citizens will but calmly and kindly reflect upon all these things, they will see the whole question in the same light that I do, and, instead of spurning my suggestion, will generally admit that it is a consummation most devoutly to be wished for.

I know the temper of my countrymen well; they are rather hot and somewhat rash, but they are high-minded, just, and capable of the highest and noblest moral actions. It is well known there would have been but one opinion upon the subject of slavery in Maryland, but for the insane interference of that party that has inflicted, I may say, a longer servitude upon the negro. Until these fanatics sprung up there was a large party openly for eman-

icipation, looking forward to it with pleasure, and ready to aid in every proper way that could secure the object. But since then, for most obvious reasons, they have retreated from their position, and now maintain the strictest neutrality. But it seems to me the time has now come for restoring things to where they were some twelve or fifteen years ago; that is, to allow emancipation to progress by the natural course of circumstances, I mean at the pleasure of the slaveholder, unrestrained by legislative enactments or by popular prejudice, excepting always that degree of restraint which police government may render necessary.

At first I fear this proposition will startle some of our good citizens, and they will exclaim against it; but I beg them to pause and consider calmly the reasons and motives of this suggestion,—policy, humanity, and self-interest. There can be no just ground for excitement or displeasure in the business. If I am right in my views and sentiments, all parties must and will, in due time, come to agree with me. If I am wrong (and I am entirely willing to submit to the decision of public opinion), my suggestion will soon fall to the ground, and there will be an end of the matter. For what have we to dread from the abolitionists? and as to the negroes, the poor timorous wretches feel and *know* our *power* too well to think of aught else than patient, humble submission. We have our foot upon their necks, and they can never rise until we give them leave; and, so long as we are compelled to hold them in slavery, they must be held with a *strong rein* and *by a strong hand*. As a man, I can not feel indifferent to the wants and sufferings of any portion of the human race; and for those unfortunate beings bred amidst our domestic ties and relations, in common with most slaveholders, I feel all the compassion their situation calls for; but I have no scruple in avowing that I never will hesitate for one moment between their fortunes and the interests of our own race, of those with whom I am connected by consanguinity and natural identity; and in this, let me now remark, consists the difference between a Maryland emancipationist and an abolitionist. The latter, by some

morbid arrangement of his *tastes* and *faculties*, prefers the welfare of the negro to that of his own fraternity. The former prefers his own brotherhood, though never disinclined to exercise benevolence towards the negro when it can be done without danger to those who are nearer and dearer. And this, sir, brings me to that part of your remarks where you admonish us to be mindful of our duty in protecting and preserving this large and dependent family from the consequences of a rash philanthropy. You even express the opinion that slavery is the only means of saving them from utter annihilation, and you call it in fact the *bulwark* of the whole colored race, standing between them and destruction.

Most undoubtedly, if it is a paramount consideration to preserve and perpetuate the negro race in the State of Maryland, (which may God, in his mercy, forbid,) no device could be more cunningly framed than this institution, as it now exists among us. The children are carefully nurtured until 10 years of age; adults are seldom over-tasked; at 60, or there about, they are for the most part allowed to relax their toil, and generally spend the residue of a long life in quiet and ease. The female especially enjoys a health and constitutional vigor that those of her sex of gentle blood may reasonably admire and envy. All are well fed, and procreation thrives accordingly. The hardships and sufferings incident to Indian life, by which the numbers of this noble race are kept in check, our slaves are totally exempt from—and it can not be doubted that our State would ere this have been overrun by them, as by a plague of locusts, had not the redundancy been absorbed, from time to time, by the great demands of the South. Now, my dear sir, I must say, with due respect for your gentleness and humanity, that this view of Slavery does not present much likelihood of a speedy removal of the mass from our soil; without which it is in vain to hope for any great or distinguished improvement in our State, and which if we seriously contemplate, we must assuredly abandon the idea of protecting the colored race by the continuance of this institution; we must, in fact, allow them *gradually*

to pass into a new form of society—into a state of existence *less calculated* to preserve and increase their numbers, and by which they will be brought to feel the influence of the circumstances you dread so much. But I will not expatiate upon this mode of circumscribing the increase of the colored race,—the fact is universally admitted,—nor will I attempt to moralize upon it. We must do what seems best for the occasion, and most proper for the future welfare of our commonwealth—leaving the consequences (beyond our speculation) to an all-wise and merciful Providence, on which we may fully rely to bring things to a just and happy conclusion.

You foretell in strong language, but not too strong, the inevitable course of events that must befall the free negro population (if they blindly refuse to quit Maryland), when it comes fully into contact with white labor, which by an invariable law always comes to meet it, and never fails to supplant it, sooner or later. Already, as you have remarked, white labor has driven the black from many employments in New York and Philadelphia, and even on Fell's Point may be witnessed the same result, in consequence of the late rapid increase of German and Irish emigrants; indeed we need only look at the last census to ascertain that in Baltimore the increase has been as 2 to 20 in favor of the whites. To my mind the reasons adduced by you to prove the necessity of retarding emancipation, are the very strongest to show the propriety of encouraging it, because they point out clearly that state of things in the vista which *alone* will compel the colored man to look to Africa, as his only hope of preservation and of happiness. To one who takes but a partial view of the relations of the two colors, and whose feelings of benevolence are bounded by personal motives and considerations, this course of action may seem too stern and uncompromising; but to one who takes a more general survey of all the premises, and truly desires the greatest amount of good to the greatest number, it will I am sure appear to be the best for all the parties concerned. It can not be denied that the question is fraught with great difficulties and perplexities—but to

my judgment, look at it in any way we please, it will be found that this course of procedure, in connection with *renewed and extended efforts at Colonization*, will in all human probability, and at no very distant period, secure the removal of the great body of the African people from our State. It appears to me the President of the Maryland Colonization Society, with his usual sagacity and decision, points to this in his address, where he says “the object of Colonization is to prepare a home in Africa for the free colored people of the State, to which they may remove when the advantages which it offers—and above all the pressure of irresistible circumstances in this country, shall excite them to emigrate.”

In proposing to countenance a gradual emancipation in Maryland, I propose nothing *new*, but merely a return to the ancient and time honored custom of our land; I propose it not only for the ultimate good it may, and I trust will at some future day, accomplish for the negroes themselves; but especially to promote the *freedom* and *independence* of our own color. For who does not know that the slaveholder who does his duty to himself, to the negro, and to his community, is almost as much a slave as the slave himself? *He* certainly has far more care and anxiety than the negro, who seldom looks forward to the morrow.

Nevertheless, I would at this time ask for no more than to sanction, by more distinct authority, that which almost daily takes place, as you show by the statement made to the commissioners of the State Colonization Fund, by which it appears nearly 3000 manumissions have taken place in the last 13 years, notwithstanding all the difficulties thrown in the way by legislative enactments. I would merely ask that each and every slaveholder be permitted to exercise his own free will and pleasure in the matter, without fear on his part, or dread on that of the manumittee, of any exercise of power to compel him to leave the State, but that it may be left to time, and natural circumstances to force this issue. No one need dread any sudden or great additions to the class of free negroes, as an immediate consequence of

such a *course*—as property *Slaves* have an established value, and we all know men part not with their goods and chattels, but by slow and measured steps. The law as it now stands seems to me to have an unnecessary aspect of severity, to say the least of it. It effects but little, and evidently is not in accordance with public sentiment; this is proven by its frequent and open evasion, attributable no doubt to the regard which even the ministers of the law entertain for the privileges of humanity. But on this part of the subject I desire to say as little as possible; it involves domestic rights and private feelings, and should be left to that still small voice that whispers to every man in his hours of calmness of reflection.

I have thus, in as brief a space as possible, given an outline of what was upon my mind when I proposed, in my former letter to you, to consider this question in reference to its policy, humanity and self-interest; and, fully conscious of my inability to do it justice, my greatest regret is, that it has not been left to other and abler hands. Your opinion that it is not desirable to establish a paper for the diffusion of information on this question, has great weight with me, and I am ready to acknowledge the force of your reasons. We will therefore dismiss the inquiry for the present, trusting that the little we have said may not be misunderstood; on the contrary that it may induce those who are intimately connected with Slavery to study the question, and to find out whether any other plan, than the one suggested, can be devised to promote the prosperity and happiness of our native State.

With sentiments of renewed respect,
I remain very truly yours,

R. S. STEUART.

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