

SOCIETY IN AMERICA

BY

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AUTHOR OF "ILLUSTRATIONS OF POLITICAL ECONOMY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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FROM THE BAG

[A]s for public and professional affairs,—
those may always gain full information
upon such matters, who really feel an
interest in them,— be they men or women.

Harriet Martineau

Society in America, volume I, at xii (1837)



MORALS OF SLAVERY

FROM VOLUME 2 OF *SOCIETY IN AMERICA*

Harriet Martineau

Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) was not an American, or a lawyer. She was British, and what we might call today a sociologist. But she was a devastatingly thoughtful and forceful critic of American law and society – from race-based slavery in the South (as shown starting at page 50 below)¹ to religious bigotry in Boston.² And she was a prominent campaigner against the disempowerment and mistreatment of women.³ And she was a leading figure in early efforts to create a transatlantic copyright regime.⁴ And she was one of the best-selling authors of the mid-19th century on the topics noted above and many others. But understanding influence in the law does not spring from simply counting positions taken or theories espoused or books sold. Perhaps an excerpt from a letter sent to her by one of her American friends and readers can give us a sense of Martineau's place in the mid-19th-century American legal world. The letter is reproduced on the next two pages, and is followed by the "Morals of Slavery" chapter from Martineau's multi-volume look at the United States in the 1830s, *Society in America*.

– The Editors

¹ Neal Kumar Katyal, *Men Who Own Women*, 103 Yale L.J. 791, 801-02 (1993).

² Philip Hamburger, *Illiberal Liberalism*, 12 J. Contemp. Legal Issues 693, 709 (2002).

³ *Political Non-Existence of Women*, in 1 *Society in America* 148 (1837).

⁴ Thomas Hoeren, *Charles Dickens and the International Copyright Law*, 63 J. Copyright Soc'y 341 (Spring 2016).

Harriet Martineau



Cambridge, November 3d, 1837

My dear Ms. Martineau:

I had the pleasure of receiving your work on "Society in America," which you so kindly presented to me some time ago. I had long before purchased the book and read it through, but I am nevertheless truly thankful for the present; I shall be proud to place it in my library as a token of your remembrance of me.

Long before this reaches you, you will have seen the various reviews of the work in the American periodicals; in some of them it is spoken of in terms of high praise; and in others again, with a mixture of praise and blame. In truth, the opinions expressed in it were calculated to offend the pride of some, and the prejudices of many, and it ought not to surprise you therefore, that though it has received the highest welcome from some of your friends, it has met with a different reception in different parts of the country. The opinions which you have so freely expressed on the topic of slavery have of course subjected you to the denunciations of the South. The details which you have so powerfully and eloquently given of the evils of that condition, are truly frightful to the humane and the thoughtful; and this vein of your reflections has infused its strong coloring into all your other disquisitions.

I perceive everywhere throughout the work, the depth of your feelings and the impress of your mind. Many of your suggestions are very striking and awakening; and many of them well fitted to be pondered on with intense deliberation by Americans. The parts of the work which are most interesting to me, however, are your exquisitely beautiful sketches of natural scenery, your graphic delineation of American peculiarities, and the free and lively manner in which you touch the topics of social intercourse, and rural and frontier life. I think you have been misled in regard to the supposed existence of habits of intemperance among our ladies. In all my long life I have never happened to know half as many instances of such persons in respectable stations in life, as you heard of in a single city. And as a general fact, I do not doubt that the women of America are as free from this vice as any on the face of the globe.

Morals of Slavery

In regard to your opinions on questions of politics and the Constitution of the United States, of course I am unable to agree with you. My opinions as to the Constitution and the powers of the general government have been often judicially expressed; and I belong to the school of Mr. Chief Justice Marshall. I am sorry that you entirely differ from him; I cannot but think too, that you have not taken a true view of the actual workings of our government, and that you have overlooked the terrible influence of a corrupting patronage, and the system of exclusiveness in official appointments, which have already wrought such extensive mischiefs among us, and threaten to destroy all the safeguards of our civil liberties. However, I have not perhaps any right to trouble you with my own views on these topics; and you know me well enough to understand, that while I claim for myself the right of an independent opinion, I concede it with the utmost cheerfulness, and in the most extensive sense, to others. The reformers in America are a very different class from the reformers in England. If you had been in America the last six months and seen the whole country thrown into the utmost confusion, and suffering the most irretrievable losses from the violence of party spirit, and the rash and extravagant projects of the administration, you would have learned, I think, that there may be a despotism exercised in a republic, as irresistible and as ruinous as in any form of monarchy. . . .

Why did not Sergeant Talfourd follow up his copyright speech with an Act to secure foreign authors? I doubt now if the American Congress will act on the subject, until Parliament has shown that it is willing to adopt the rule of reciprocity. My friend Mr. Sumner will hand you this letter, as I trust He is in all respects worthy of your confidence and kindness.

Believe me very truly and affectionately.

Your obliged friend,
Joseph Story.⁵



⁵ Letter from Joseph Story to Harriet Martineau (Nov. 3, 1837), in *2 Life and Letters of Joseph Story* 279-81 (1851) (William W. Story, ed.).

THIS TITLE IS NOT written down in a spirit of mockery; though there appears to be a mockery somewhere, when we contrast slavery with the principles and the rule which are the test of all American institutions:—the principles that all men are born free and equal; that rulers derive their just powers from the consent of the governed; and the rule of reciprocal justice. This discrepancy between principles and practice needs no more words. But the institution of slavery exists; and what we have to see is what the morals are of the society which is subject to it.

What social virtues are possible in a society of which injustice is the primary characteristic? in a society which is divided into two classes, the servile and the imperious?

The most obvious is Mercy. Nowhere, perhaps, can more touching exercises of mercy be seen than here. It must be remembered that the greater number of slave-holders have no other idea than of holding slaves. Their fathers did it: they themselves have never known the coloured race treated otherwise than as inferior beings, born to work for and to teaze the whites; helpless, improvident, open to no higher inducements than indulgence and praise; capable of nothing but entire dependence. The good affections of slave-holders like these show themselves in the form of mercy; which is as beautiful to witness as mercy, made a substitute for justice, can ever be. I saw endless manifestations of mercy, as well as of its opposite. The thoughtfulness of masters, mistresses, and their children about, not only the comforts, but the indulgences of their slaves, was a frequent subject of admiration with me. Kind masters are liberal in the expenditure of money, and (what is better) of thought, in gratifying the whims and fancies of their negroes. They make large sacrifices occasionally for the social or domestic advantage

of their people; and use great forbearance in the exercise of the power conferred upon them by law and custom.

At the time when the cholera was ravaging South Carolina, a wealthy slave-holder there refused to leave the State, as most of his neighbours were doing. He would not consent to take any farther care of himself than riding to a distance from his plantation (then overrun by the disease) to sleep. All day he was among his slaves: nursing them with his own hands; putting them into the bath, giving them medicine himself, and cheering their spirits by his presence and his care. He saved them almost all. No one will suppose this one of the ordinary cases where a master has his slaves taken care of as property, not as men. Sordid considerations of that kind must have given way before the terrors of the plague. A far higher strength than that of self-interest was necessary to carry this gentleman through such a work as this; and it was no other than mercy.

Again:— a young man, full of the southern pride, one of whose aims is to have as great a display of negroes as possible, married a young lady who, soon after her marriage, showed an imperious and cruel temper towards her slaves. Her husband gently remonstrated. She did not mend. He warned her, that he would not allow beings, for whose comfort he was responsible, to be oppressed; and that, if she compelled him to it, he would deprive her of the power she misused. Still she did not mend. He one day came and told her that he had sold all his domestic slaves, for their own sakes. He told her that he would always give her money enough to hire free service, when it was to be had; and that when it was not, he would cheerfully bear, and help her to bear, the domestic inconveniences which must arise from their having no servants. He kept his word. It rarely happens that free service can be hired; and this proud gentleman

assists his wife's labours with his own hands; and (what is more) endures with all cheerfulness the ignominy of having no slaves.

Nothing struck me more than the patience of slave-owners. In this virtue they probably surpass the whole christian world;—I mean in their patience with their slaves; for one cannot much praise their patience with the abolitionists, or with the tariff; or in some other cases of political vexation. When I considered how they love to be called “fiery southerners,” I could not but marvel at their mild forbearance under the hourly provocations to which they are liable in their homes.* It is found that such a degree of this virtue can be obtained only by long habit. Persons from New England, France, or England, becoming slave-holders, are found to be the most severe masters and mistresses, however good their tempers may always have appeared previously. They cannot, like the native proprietor, sit waiting half an hour for the second course, or see everything done in the worst possible manner; their rooms dirty, their property wasted, their plans frustrated, their infants slighted, themselves deluded by artifices,—they cannot, like the native proprietor, endure all this unruffled. It seems to me that every slave-holder's temper is subjected to a discipline which must either ruin or perfect it. While we know that many tempers are thus ruined, and must mourn for the unhappy creatures who cannot escape from their tyranny, it is evident, on the other hand, that many tempers are to be met with which should shame down and si-

* I went with a lady in whose house I was staying to dine, one Sunday, on a neighbouring estate. Her husband happened not to be with us, as he had to ride in another direction. The carriage was ordered for eight in the evening. It drew up to the door at six; and the driver, a slave, said his master had sent him, and begged we would go home directly. We did so, and found my host very much surprised to see us home so early. The message was a fiction of the slave's, who wanted to get his horses put up, that he might enjoy his Sunday evening. His master and mistress laughed, and took no further notice.

lence for ever the irritability of some whose daily life is passed under circumstances of comparative ease.

This mercy, indulgence, patience, was often pleaded to me in defence of the system, or in aggravation of the faults of intractable slaves. The fallacy of this is so gross as not to need exposure anywhere but on the spot. I was heart-sick of being told of the ingratitude of slaves, and weary of explaining that indulgence can never atone for injury: that the extremest pampering, for a life-time, is no equivalent for rights withheld, no reparation for irreparable injustice. What are the greatest possible amounts of finery, sweetmeats, dances, gratuities, and kind words and looks, in exchange for political, social, and domestic existence? for body and spirit? Is it not true that the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment?

This fallacious plea was urged upon me by three different persons, esteemed enlightened and religious, in relation to one case. The case was this. A lady of fortune carried into her husband's establishment, when she married, several slaves, and among them a girl two years younger than herself, who had been brought up under her, and who was employed as her own maid. The little slaves are accustomed to play freely with the children of the family – a practice which was lauded to me, but which never had any beauty in my eyes, seeing, as I did, the injury to the white children from unrestricted intercourse with the degraded race, and looking forward as I did to the time when they must separate into the servile and imperious. Mrs. — had been unusually indulgent to this girl, having allowed her time and opportunity for religious and other instruction, and favoured her in every way. One night, when the girl was undressing her, the lady expressed her fondness for her, and said, among other things: “When I die you shall be free;” —

a dangerous thing to say to a slave only two years younger than herself. In a short time the lady was taken ill,— with a strange, mysterious illness, which no doctor could alleviate. One of her friends, who suspected foul play, took the sufferer entirely under her own charge, when she seemed to be dying. She revived; and as soon as she was well enough to have a will of her own again, would be waited on by no one but her favourite slave. She grew worse. She alternated thus, for some time, according as she was under the care of this slave or of her friend. At last, the friend excluded from her chamber every one but the physicians: took in the medicines at the room door from the hands of the slave, and locked them up. They were all analysed by a physician, and arsenic found in every one of them. The lady partially recovered; but I was shocked at the traces of suffering in her whole appearance. The girl's guilt was brought clearly home to her. There never was a case of more cruel, deliberate intention to murder. If ever slave deserved the gallows, (which ought to be questionable to the most decided minds,) this girl did. What was done? The lady was tender-hearted, and could not bear to have her hanged. This was natural enough; but what did she therefore do? keep her under her own eye, that she might at least poison nobody else, and perhaps be touched and reclaimed by the clemency of the person she would have murdered? No. The lady sold her.

I was actually called upon to admire the lady's conduct; and was asked whether the ingratitude of the girl was not inconceivable, and her hypocrisy too; for she used to lecture her mistress and her mistress's friends for being so irreligious as to go to parties on Saturday nights, when they should have been preparing their minds for Sunday. Was not the hypocrisy of the girl inconceivable? and her ingratitude for her mistress's favours?

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No. The girl had no other idea of religion,— could have no other than that it consists in observances, and, wicked as she was, her wickedness could not be called ingratitude, for she was more injured than favoured, after all. All indulgences that could be heaped upon her were still less than her due, and her mistress remained infinitely her debtor.

Little can be said of the purity of manners of the whites of the south; but there is purity. Some few examples of domestic fidelity may be found: few enough, by the confession of residents on the spot; but those individuals who have resisted the contagion of the vice amidst which they dwell are pure. Every man who resides on his plantation may have his harem, and has every inducement of custom, and of pecuniary gain,* to tempt him to the common practice. Those who, notwithstanding, keep their homes undefiled may be considered as of incorruptible purity.

Here, alas! ends my catalogue of the virtues which are of possible exercise by slave-holders towards their labourers. The inherent injustice of the system extinguishes all others, and nourishes a whole harvest of false morals towards the rest of society.

The personal oppression of the negroes is the grossest vice which strikes a stranger in the country. It can never be otherwise when human beings are wholly subjected to the will of other human beings, who are under no other external control than the law which forbids killing and maiming;— a law which it is difficult to enforce in individual cases. A fine slave was walking about in Columbia, South Carolina, when I was there, nearly helpless and useless from the following causes. His master

* The law declares that the children of slaves are to follow the fortunes of the mother. Hence the practice of planters selling and bequeathing their own children.

was fond of him, and the slave enjoyed the rare distinction of never having been flogged. One day, his master's child, supposed to be under his care at the time, fell down and hurt itself. The master flew into a passion, ordered the slave to be instantly flogged, and would not hear a single word the man had to say. As soon as the flogging was over, the slave went into the back yard, where there was an axe and a block, and struck off the upper half of his right hand. He went and held up the bleeding hand before his master, saying, " You have mortified me, so I have made myself useless. Now you must maintain me as long as I live." It came out that the child had been under the charge of another person.

There are, as is well known throughout the country, houses in the free States which are open to fugitive slaves, and where they are concealed till the search for them is over. I know some of the secrets of such places; and can mention two cases, among many, of runaways, which show how horrible is the tyranny which the slave system authorises men to inflict on each other. A negro had found his way to one of these friendly houses; and had been so skilfully concealed, that repeated searches by his master, (who had followed for the purpose of recovering him,) and by constables, had been in vain. After three weeks of this seclusion, the negro became weary, and entreated of his host to be permitted to look out of the window. His host strongly advised him to keep quiet, as it was pretty certain that his master had not given him up. When the host had left him, however, the negro came out of his hiding-place, and went to the window. He met the eye of his master, who was looking up from the street. The poor slave was obliged to return to his bondage.

A young negress had escaped in like manner; was in like manner concealed; and was alarmed by constables, under the

direction of her master, entering the house in pursuit of her, when she had had reason to believe that the search was over. She flew up stairs to her chamber in the third story, and drove a heavy article of furniture against the door. The constables pushed in, notwithstanding, and the girl leaped from the window into the paved street. Her master looked at her as she lay, declared she would never be good for anything again, and went back into the south. The poor creature, her body bruised, and her limbs fractured, was taken up, and kindly nursed; and she is now maintained in Boston, in her maimed condition, by the charity of some ladies there.

The following story has found its way into the northern States (as few such stories do) from the circumstance that a New Hampshire family are concerned in it. It has excited due horror wherever it is known; and it is to be hoped that it will lead to the exposure of more facts of the same kind, since it is but too certain that they are common.

A New Hampshire gentleman went down into Louisiana, many years ago, to take a plantation. He pursued the usual method; borrowing money largely to begin with, paying high interest, and clearing off his debt, year by year, as his crops were sold. He followed another custom there; taking a Quadroon wife: a mistress, in the eye of the law, since there can be no legal marriage between whites and persons of any degree of colour: but, in nature and in reason, the woman he took home was his wife. She was a well-principled, amiable, well-educated woman; and they lived happily together for twenty years. She had only the slightest possible tinge of colour. Knowing the law that the children of slaves are to follow the fortunes of the mother, she warned her husband that she was not free, an ancestress having been a slave, and the legal act of manumission

having never been performed. The husband promised to look to it: but neglected it. At the end of twenty years, one died, and the other shortly followed, leaving daughters; whether two or three, I have not been able to ascertain with positive certainty; but I have reason to believe three, of the ages of fifteen, seventeen, and eighteen: beautiful girls, with no perceptible mulatto tinge. The brother of their father came down from New Hampshire to settle the affairs; and he supposed, as every one else did, that the deceased had been wealthy. He was pleased with his nieces, and promised to carry them back with him into New Hampshire, and (as they were to all appearance perfectly white) to introduce them into the society which by education they were fitted for. It appeared, however, that their father had died insolvent. The deficiency was very small: but it was necessary to make an inventory of the effects, to deliver to the creditors. This was done by the brother,—the executor. Some of the creditors called on him, and complained that he had not delivered in a faithful inventory. He declared he had. No: the number of slaves was not accurately set down: he had omitted the daughters. The executor was overwhelmed with horror, and asked time for thought. He went round among the creditors, appealing to their mercy: but they answered that these young ladies were “a first-rate article,” too valuable to be relinquished. He next offered, (though he had himself six children, and very little money,) all he had for the redemption of his nieces; alleging that it was more than they would bring in the market for house or field labour. This was refused with scorn. It was said that there were other purposes for which the girls would bring more than for field or house labour. The uncle was in despair, and felt strongly tempted to wish their death rather than their surrender to such a fate as was before them. He told them, ab-

ruptly, what was their prospect. He declares that he never before beheld human grief; never before heard the voice of anguish. They never ate, nor slept, nor separated from each other, till the day when they were taken into the New Orleans slave-market. There they were sold, separately, at high prices, for the vilest of purposes and where each is gone, no one knows. They are for the present, lost. But they will arise to the light in the day of retribution.

It is a common boast in the south that there is less vice in their cities than in those of the north. This can never, as a matter of fact, have been ascertained; as the proceedings of slave households are, or may be, a secret: and in the north, what licentiousness there is may be detected. But such comparisons are bad. Let any one look at the positive licentiousness of the south, and declare if, in such a state of society, there can be any security for domestic purity and peace. The Quadroon connexions in New Orleans are all but universal, as I was assured on the spot by ladies who cannot be mistaken. The history of such connexions is a melancholy one: but it ought to be made known while there are any who boast of the superior morals of New Orleans, on account of the decent quietness of the streets and theatres.

The Quadroon girls of New Orleans are brought up by their mothers to be what they have been; the mistresses of white gentlemen. The boys are some of them sent to France; some placed on land in the back of the State; and some are sold in the slave-market. They marry women of a somewhat darker colour than their own; the women of their own colour objecting to them, “ils sont si dégoutants!” The girls are highly educated, externally, and are, probably, as beautiful and accomplished a set of women as can be found. Every young man early selects

one, and establishes her in one of those pretty and peculiar houses, whole rows of which may be seen in the Remparts. The connexion now and then lasts for life: usually for several years. In the latter case, when the time comes for the gentleman to take a white wife, the dreadful news reaches his Quadroon partner, either by a letter entitling her to call the house and furniture her own, or by the newspaper which announces his marriage. The Quadroon ladies are rarely or never known to form a second connexion. Many commit suicide: more die brokenhearted. Some men continue the connexion after marriage. Every Quadroon woman believes that her partner will prove an exception to the rule of desertion. Every white lady believes that her husband has been an exception to the rule of seduction.

What security for domestic purity and peace there can be where every man has had two connexions, one of which must be concealed; and two families, whose existence must not be known to each other; where the conjugal relation begins in treachery, and must be carried on with a heavy secret in the husband's breast, no words are needed to explain. If this is the system which is boasted of as a purer than ordinary state of morals, what is to be thought of the ordinary state? It can only be hoped that the boast is an empty one.

There is no occasion to explain the management of the female slaves on estates where the object is to rear as many as possible, like stock, for the southern market: nor to point out the boundless licentiousness caused by the practice: a practice which wrung from the wife of a planter, in the bitterness of her heart, the declaration that a planter's wife was only "the chief slave of the harem." Mr. Madison avowed that the licentiousness of Virginian plantations stopped just short of destruction;

and that it was understood that the female slaves were to become mothers at fifteen.

A gentleman of the highest character, a southern planter, observed, in conversation with a friend, that little was known, out of bounds, of the reasons of the new laws by which emancipation was made so difficult as it is. He said that the very general connexion of white gentlemen with their female slaves introduced a mulatto race whose numbers would become dangerous, if the affections of their white parents were permitted to render them free. The liberty of emancipating them was therefore abolished, while that of selling them remained. There are persons who weakly trust to the force of the parental affection for putting an end to slavery, when the amalgamation of the races shall have gone so far as to involve a sufficient number! I actually heard this from the lips of a clergyman in the south. Yet these planters, who sell their own offspring to fill their purses, who have such offspring for the sake of filling their purses, dare to raise the cry of “amalgamation” against the abolitionists of the north, not one of whom has, as far as evidence can show, conceived the idea of a mixture of the races. It is from the south, where this mixture is hourly encouraged, that the canting and groundless reproach has come. I met with no candid southerner who was not full of shame at the monstrous hypocrisy.

It is well known that the most savage violences that are now heard of in the world take place in the southern and western States of America. Burning alive, cutting the heart out, and sticking it on the point of a knife, and other such diabolical deeds, the result of the deepest hatred of which the human heart is capable, are heard of only there. The frequency of such

deeds is a matter of dispute, which time will settle.* The existence of such deeds is a matter of no dispute. Whether two or twenty such deeds take place in a year, their perpetration testifies to the existence of such hatred as alone could prompt them. There is no doubt in my mind as to the immediate causes of such outrages. They arise out of the licentiousness of manners. The negro is exasperated by being deprived of his wife,— by being sent out of the way that his master may take possession of his home. He stabs his master; or, if he cannot fulfil his desire of vengeance, he is a dangerous person, an object of vengeance in return, and destined to some cruel fate. If the negro attempts to retaliate, and defile the master's home, the faggots are set alight about him. Much that is dreadful ensues from the negro being subject to toil and the lash: but I am confident that the licentiousness of the masters is the proximate cause of society in the south and south-west being in such a state that nothing else is to be looked for than its being dissolved into its elements, if man does not soon cease to be called the property of man. This dissolution will never take place through the insurrection of the negroes; but by the natural operation of vice. But the process of demoralisation will be stopped, I have no doubt, before it reaches that point. There is no reason to apprehend serious insurrection; for the negroes are too degraded to act in concert, or to stand firm before the terrible face of the white man. Like all deeply-injured classes of persons, they are desperate and cruel, on occasion, kindly as their nature is; but as a class, they have no courage. The voice of a white, even of a lady, if it were authoritative, would make a whole regiment of rebellious slaves throw down their arms and flee. Poison is the weapon that suits

* I knew of the death of four men by summary burning alive, within thirteen months of my residence in the United States.

them best: then the knife, in moments of exasperation. They will never take the field, unless led on by free blacks. Desperate as the state of society is, it will be rectified, probably, without bloodshed.

It may be said that it is doing an injustice to cite extreme cases of vice as indications of the state of society. I do not think so, as long as such cases are so common as to strike the observation of a mere passing stranger; to say nothing of their incompatibility with a decent and orderly fulfilment of the social relations. Let us, however, see what is the very best state of things. Let us take the words and deeds of some of the most religious, refined, and amiable members of society. It was this aspect of affairs which grieved me more, if possible, than the stormier one which I have presented. The coarsening and hardening of mind and manners among the best; the blunting of the moral sense among the most conscientious, gave me more pain than the stabbing, poisoning, and burning. A few examples which will need no comment, will suffice.

Two ladies, the distinguishing ornaments of a very superior society in the south, are truly unhappy about slavery, and opened their hearts freely to me upon the grief which it caused them,— the perfect curse which they found it. They need no enlightening on this, nor any stimulus to acquit themselves as well as their unhappy circumstances allow. They one day pressed me for a declaration of what I should do in their situation. I replied that I would give up everything, go away with my slaves, settle them, and stay by them in some free place. I had said, among other things, that I dare not stay there, — on my own account,— from moral considerations. “ What, not if you had no slaves?” “No.” “Why?” “I could not trust myself to live where I must constantly witness the exercise of irresponsible power.” They

made no reply at the moment: but each found occasion to tell me, some days afterwards, that she had been struck to the heart by these words: the consideration I mentioned having never occurred to her before!

Madame Lalaurie, the person who was mobbed at New Orleans, on account of her fiendish cruelty to her slaves,— a cruelty so excessive as to compel the belief that she was mentally deranged, though her derangement could have taken such a direction nowhere but in a slave country;— this person was described to me as having been “very pleasant to whites.”

A common question put to me by amiable ladies was, “Do not you find the slaves generally very happy?” They never seemed to have been asked, or to have asked themselves, the question with which I replied:— “Would you be happy with their means?”

One sultry morning, I was sitting with a friend, who was giving me all manner of information about her husband’s slaves, both in the field and house; how she fed and clothed them; what indulgences they were allowed; what their respective capabilities were; and so forth. While we were talking, one of the house-slaves passed us. I observed that she appeared superior to all the rest; to which my friend assented. “She is A.’s wife?” said I. “We call her A.’s wife, but she has never been married to him. A. and she came to my husband, five years ago, and asked him to let them marry: but he could not allow it, because he had not made up his mind whether to sell A.; and he hates parting husband and wife.” “How many children have they?” “Four.” “And they are not married yet?” “No; my husband has never been able to let them marry. He certainly will not sell her: and he has not determined yet whether he shall sell A.”

Morals of Slavery

Another friend told me the following story, B. was the best slave in her husband's possession. B. fell in love with C., a pretty girl, on a neighbouring estate, who was purchased to be B.'s wife. C.'s temper was jealous and violent; and she was always fancying that B. showed attention to other girls. Her master warned her to keep her temper, or she should be sent away. One day, when the master was dining out, B. came to him, trembling, and related that C. had, in a fit of jealousy, aimed a blow at his head with an axe, and nearly struck him. The master went home, and told C. that her temper could no longer be borne with, and she must go. He offered her the choice of being sold to a trader, and carried to New Orleans, or of being sent to field labour on a distant plantation. She preferred being sold to the trader; who broke his promise of taking her to New Orleans, and disposed of her to a neighbouring proprietor. C. kept watch over her husband, declaring that she would be the death of any girl whom B. might take to wife. "And so," said my informant, "poor B. was obliged to walk about in single blessedness for some time; till, last summer, happily, C. died." — "Is it possible," said I, "that you pair and part these people like brutes?" — The lady looked surprised, and asked what else could be done.

One day at dinner, when two slaves were standing behind our chairs, the lady of the house was telling me a ludicrous story, in which a former slave of hers was one of the personages, serving as a butt on the question of complexion. She seemed to recollect that slaves were listening; for she put in, "D. was an excellent boy," (the term for male slaves of every age.) "We respected him very highly as an excellent boy. We respected him almost as much as if he had been a white. But, &c. —"

A southern lady, of fair reputation for refinement and cultivation, told the following story in the hearing of a company, among whom were some friends of mine. She spoke with obvious unconsciousness that she was saying anything remarkable: indeed such unconsciousness was proved by her telling the story at all. She had possessed a very pretty mulatto girl, of whom she declared herself fond. A young man came to stay at her house, and fell in love with the girl. "She came to me," said the lady, "for protection; which I gave her." The young man went away, but after some weeks, returned, saying he was so much in love with the girl that he could not live without her. "I pitied the young man," concluded the lady; "so I sold the girl to him for 1,500 dollars."

I repeatedly heard the preaching of a remarkably liberal man, of a free and kindly spirit, in the south. His last sermon, extempore, was from the text "Cast all your care upon him, for He careth for you." The preacher told us, among other things, that God cares for all,— for the meanest as well as the mightiest. "He cares for that coloured person," said he, pointing to the gallery where the people of colour sit,— "he cares for that coloured person as well as for the wisest and best of you whites." This was the most wanton insult I had ever seen offered to a human being; and it was with difficulty that I refrained from walking out of the church. Yet no one present to whom I afterwards spoke of it seemed able to comprehend the wrong. "Well!" said they: "does not God care for the coloured people?"

Of course, in a society where things like these are said and done by its choicest members, there is a prevalent unconsciousness of the existing wrong. The daily and hourly plea is of good intentions towards the slaves; of innocence under the aspersions of foreigners. They are as sincere in the belief that they are in-

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jured as their visitors are cordial in their detestation of the morals of slavery. Such unconsciousness of the milder degrees of impurity and injustice as enables ladies and clergymen of the highest character to speak and act as I have related, is a sufficient evidence of the prevalent grossness of morals. One remarkable indication of such blindness was the almost universal mention of the state of the Irish to me, as a worse case than American slavery. I never attempted, of course, to vindicate the state of Ireland: but I was surprised to find no one able, till put in the way, to see the distinction between political misgovernment and personal slavery: between exasperating a people by political insult, and possessing them, like brutes, for pecuniary profit. The unconsciousness of guilt is the worst of symptoms, where there are means of light to be had. I shall have to speak hereafter of the state of religion throughout the country. It is enough here to say that if, with the law of liberty and the gospel of peace and purity within their hands, the inhabitants of the south are unconscious of the low state of the morals of society, such blindness proves nothing so much as how far that which is highest and purest may be confounded with what is lowest and foulest, when once the fatal attempt has been entered upon to make them co-exist. From their co-existence, one further step may be taken; and in the south has been taken; the making the high and pure a sanction for the low and foul. Of this, more hereafter.

The degradation of the women is so obvious a consequence of the evils disclosed above, that the painful subject need not be enlarged on. By the degradation of women, I do not mean to imply any doubt of the purity of their manners. There are reasons, plain enough to the observer, why their manners should be even peculiarly pure. They are all married young, from their

being out-numbered by the other sex: and there is ever present an unfortunate servile class of their own sex to serve the purposes of licentiousness, so as to leave them untempted. Their degradation arises, not from their own conduct, but from that of all other parties about them. Where the generality of men carry secrets which their wives must be the last to know; where the busiest and more engrossing concerns of life must wear one aspect to the one sex, and another to the other, there is an end to all wholesome confidence and sympathy, and woman sinks to be the ornament of her husband's house, the domestic manager of his establishment, instead of being his all-sufficient friend. I am speaking not only of what I suppose must necessarily be; but of what I have actually seen. I have seen, with heart-sorrow, the kind politeness, the gallantry, so insufficient to the loving heart, with which the wives of the south are treated by their husbands. I have seen the horror of a woman's having to work,— to exert the faculties which her Maker gave her;— the eagerness to ensure her unearned ease and rest; the deepest insult which can be offered to an intelligent and conscientious woman. I know the tone of conversation which is adopted towards women; different in its topics and its style from that which any man would dream of offering to any other man. I have heard the boast of the chivalrous consideration in which women are held throughout their woman's paradise; and seen something of the anguish of crushed pride, of the conflict of bitter feelings with which such boasts have been listened to by those whose aspirations teach them the hollowness of the system. The gentlemen are all the while unaware that women are not treated in the best possible manner among them: and they will remain thus blind as long as licentious intercourse with the lowest of the sex unfits them for appreciating the highest. Whenever their society shall

take rank according to moral rather than physical considerations; whenever they shall rise to crave sympathy in the real objects of existence; whenever they shall begin to inquire what human life is, and wherefore, and to reverence it accordingly, they will humble themselves in shame for their abuse of the right of the strongest; for those very arrangements and observances which now constitute their boast. A lady who, brought up elsewhere to use her own faculties, and employ them on such objects as she thinks proper, and who has more knowledge and more wisdom than perhaps any gentleman of her acquaintance, told me of the disgust with which she submits to the conversation which is addressed to her, under the idea of being fit for her; and how she solaces herself at home, after such provocation, with the silent sympathy of books. A father of promising young daughters, whom he sees likely to be crushed by the system, told me in a tone of voice which I shall never forget, that women there might as well be turned into the street, for anything they are fit for. There are reasonable hopes that his children may prove an exception. One gentleman who declares himself much interested in the whole subject, expresses his horror of the employment of women in the northern States, for useful purposes. He told me that the same force of circumstances which, in the region he inhabits, makes men independent, increases the dependence of women, and will go on to increase it. Society is there, he declared, “always advancing towards orientalism.” “There are but two ways in which woman can be exercised to the extent of her powers; by genius and by calamity, either of which may strengthen her to burst her conventional restraints. The first is too rare a circumstance to afford any basis for speculation: and may Heaven avert the last!” O, may Heaven hasten it! would be the cry of many hearts, if

these be indeed the conditions of woman's fulfilling the purposes of her being. There are, I believe, some who would scarcely tremble to see their houses in flames, to hear the coming tornado, to feel the threatening earthquake, if these be indeed the messengers who must open their prison doors, and give their heaven-born spirits the range of the universe. God has given to them the universe, as to others: man has caged them in one corner of it, and dreads their escape from their cage, while man does that which he would not have woman hear of. He puts genius out of sight, and deprecates calamity. He has not, however, calculated all the forces in nature. If he had, he would hardly venture to hold either negroes or women as property, or to trust to the absence of genius and calamity.

One remarkable warning has been vouchsafed to him. A woman of strong mind, whose strenuous endeavours to soften the woes of slavery to her own dependents, failed to satisfy her conscience and relieve her human affections, has shaken the blood-slaked dust from her feet, and gone to live where every man can call himself his own: and not only to live, but to work there, and to pledge herself to death, if necessary, for the overthrow of the system which she abhors in proportion to her familiarity with it. Whether we are to call her Genius or Calamity, or by her own honoured name of Angelina Grimke, certain it is that she is rousing into life and energy many women who were unconscious of genius, and unvisited by calamity, but who carry honest and strong human hearts. This lady may ere long be found to have materially checked the "advance towards orientalism."

Of course, the children suffer, perhaps the most fatally of all, under the slave system. What can be expected from little boys who are brought up to consider physical courage the highest

attribute of manhood; pride of section and of caste its loftiest grace; the slavery of a part of society essential to the freedom of the rest; justice of less account than generosity; and humiliation in the eyes of men the most intolerable of evils? What is to be expected of little girls who boast of having got a negro flogged for being impertinent to them, and who are surprised at the “ungentlemanly” conduct of a master who maims his slave? Such lessons are not always taught expressly. Sometimes the reverse is expressly taught. But this is what the children in a slave country necessarily learn from what passes around them; just as the plainest girls in a school grow up to think personal beauty the most important of all endowments, in spite of daily assurances that the charms of the mind are all that are worth regarding.

The children of slave countries learn more and worse still. It is nearly impossible to keep them from close intercourse with the slaves; and the attempt is rarely made. The generality of slaves are as gross as the total absence of domestic sanctity might be expected to render them. They do not dream of any reserves with children. The consequences are inevitable. The woes of mothers from this cause are such that, if this “peculiar domestic institution” were confided to their charge, I believe they would accomplish its overthrow with an energy and wisdom that would look more like inspiration than orientalism. Among the incalculable forces in nature is the grief of mothers weeping for the corruption of their children.

One of the absolutely inevitable results of slavery is a disregard of human rights; an inability even to comprehend them. Probably the southern gentry, who declare that the presence of slavery enhances the love of freedom; that freedom can be duly estimated only where a particular class can appropriate all social privileges; that, to use the words of one of them, “they know

too much of slavery to be slaves themselves,” are sincere enough in such declarations; and if so, it follows that they do not know what freedom is. They may have the benefit of the alternative,— of not knowing what freedom is, and being sincere; or of knowing what freedom is, and not being sincere. I am disposed to think that the first is the more common case.

One reason for my thinking so is, that I usually found in conversation in the south, that the idea of human rights was — sufficient subsistence in return for labour. This was assumed as the definition of human rights on which we were to argue the case of the slave. When I tried the definition by the golden rule, I found that even that straight, simple rule had become singularly bent in the hands of those who profess to acknowledge and apply it. A clergyman preached from the pulpit the following application of it, which is echoed unhesitatingly by the most religious of the slaveholders:— “Treat your slaves as you would wish to be treated if you were a slave yourself.” I verily believe that hundreds, or thousands, do not see that this is not an honest application of the rule; so blinded are they by custom to the fact that the negro is a man and a brother.

Another of my reasons for supposing that the gentry of the south do not know what freedom is, is that many seem unconscious of the state of coercion in which they themselves are living; coercion, not only from the incessant fear of which I have before spoken,— a fear which haunts their homes, their business, and their recreations; coercion, not only from their fear, and from their being dependent for their hourly comforts upon the extinguished or estranged will of those whom they have injured; but coercion also from their own laws. The laws against the press are as peremptory as in the most despotic countries of

Europe: * as may be seen in the small number and size, and poor quality, of the newspapers of the south. I never saw, in the rawest villages of the youngest States, newspapers so empty and poor as those of New Orleans. It is curious that, while the subject of the abolition of slavery in the British colonies was necessarily a very interesting one throughout the southern States, I met with planters who did not know that any compensation had been paid by the British nation to the West India proprietors. The miserable quality of the southern newspapers, and the omission from them of the subjects on which the people most require information, will go far to account for the people's delusions on their own affairs, as compared with those of the rest of the world, and for their boasts of freedom, which probably arise from their knowing of none which is superior. They see how much more free they are than their own slaves; but are not generally aware what liberty is where all are free. In 1834, the number of newspapers was, in the State of New York, 267; in Louisiana, 31; in Massachusetts, 108; in South Carolina, 19; in Pennsylvania, 220; in Georgia, 29.

What is to be thought of the freedom of gentlemen subject to the following law? "Any person or persons who shall attempt to teach any free person of colour, or slave, to spell, read, write, shall, upon conviction thereof by indictment, be fined in

* No notice is taken of any occurrence, however remarkable, in which a person of colour, free or enslaved, has any share, for fear of the Acts which denounce death or imprisonment for life against those who shall write, print, publish, or distribute anything having a tendency to excite discontent or insubordination, &c.; or which doom to heavy fines those who shall use or issue language which may disturb "the security of masters with their slaves, or diminish that respect which is commanded to free people of colour for the whites."

a sum not less than two hundred and fifty dollars, nor more than five hundred dollars.”*

What is to be thought of the freedom of gentlemen who cannot emancipate their own slaves, except by the consent of the legislature; and then only under very strict conditions, which make the deed almost impracticable? It has been mentioned that during a temporary suspension of the laws against emancipation in Virginia, 10,000 slaves were freed in nine years; and that, as the institution seemed in peril, the masters were again coerced. It is pleaded that the masters themselves were the repealers and re-enactors of these laws. True: and thus it appears that they thought it necessary to deprive each other of a liberty which a great number seem to have made use of themselves, while they could. No high degree of liberty, or of the love of it, is to be seen here. The laws which forbid emancipation are felt to be cruelly galling, throughout the south, I heard frequent bitter complaints of them. They are the invariable plea urged by individuals to excuse their continuing to hold slaves. Such individuals are either sincere in these complaints or they are not. If they are not, they must be under some deplorable coercion which compels a large multitude to hypocrisy. If they are sincere, they possess the common republican means of getting tyrannical laws repealed: and why do they not use them? If these laws are felt to be oppressive, why is no voice heard denouncing them in the legislatures? If men

* Alabama Digest. In the same section occurs the following: “That no cruel or unusual punishment shall be inflicted on any slave within this territory. And any owner of slaves authorising or permitting the same, shall, on conviction thereof, before any court having cognizance, be fined according to the nature of the offense, and at the discretion of the court, in any sum not exceeding two hundred dollars.”

Two hundred dollars’ fine for torturing a slave: and five hundred for teaching him to read!

complainingly, but voluntarily, submit to laws which bind the conscience, little can be said of their love of liberty. If they submit involuntarily, nothing can be said for their possession of it.

What, again, is to be thought of the freedom of citizens who are liable to lose caste because they follow conscience in a case where the perversity of the laws places interest on the side of conscience, and public opinion against it? I will explain. In a southern city, I saw a gentleman who appeared to have all the outward requisites for commanding respect. He was very wealthy, had been governor of the State, and was an eminent and peculiar benefactor to the city. I found he did not stand well. As some pains were taken to impress me with this, I inquired the cause. His character was declared to be generally good. I soon got at the particular exception, which I was anxious to do only because I saw that it was somehow of public concern. While this gentleman was governor, there was an insurrection of slaves. His own slaves were accused. He did not believe them guilty, and refused to hang them. This was imputed to an unwillingness to sacrifice his property. He was thus in a predicament which no one can be placed in, except where man is held as property. He must either hang his slaves, believing them innocent, and keep his character; or he must, by saving their lives, lose his own character. How the case stood with this gentleman, is fully known only to his own heart. His conduct claims the most candid construction. But, this being accorded as his due, what can be thought of the freedom of a republican thus circumstanced?

Passing over the perils, physical and moral, in which those are involved who live in a society where recklessness of life is treated with leniency, and physical courage stands high in the

list of virtues and graces,— perils which abridge a man's liberty of action and of speech in a way which would be felt to be intolerable if the restraint were not adorned by the false name of Honour,— it is only necessary to look at the treatment of the abolitionists by the south, by both legislatures and individuals, to see that no practical understanding of liberty exists there.

Upon a mere vague report, or bare suspicion, persons travelling through the south have been arrested, imprisoned, and, in some cases, flogged or otherwise tortured, on pretence that such persons desired to cause insurrection among the slaves. More than one innocent person has been hanged; and the device of terrorism has been so practised as to deprive the total number of persons who avowedly hold a certain set of opinions, of their constitutional liberty of traversing the whole country. It was declared by some liberal-minded gentlemen of South Carolina, after the publication of Dr. Channing's work on Slavery, that if Dr. Channing were to enter South Carolina with a body-guard of 20,000 men, he could not come out alive. I have seen the lithographic prints, transmitted in letters to abolitionists, representing the individual to whom the letter was sent hanging on a gallows. I have seen the hand-bills, purporting to be issued by Committees of Vigilance, offering enormous rewards for the heads, or for the ears, of prominent abolitionists.

If it be said that these acts are attributable to the ignorant wrath of individuals only, it may be asked whence arose the Committees of Vigilance, which were last year sitting throughout the south and west, on the watch for any incautious person who might venture near them, with anti-slavery opinions in his mind? How came it that high official persons sat on these committees? How is it that some governors of southern States made formal application to governors of the northern States to pro-

cure the dispersion of anti-slavery societies, the repression of discussion, and the punishment of the promulgators of abolition opinions? How is it that the governor of South Carolina last year recommended the summary execution, without benefit of clergy, of all persons caught within the limits of the State, holding avowed anti-slavery opinions; and that every sentiment of the governor's was endorsed by a select committee of the legislature?

All this proceeds from an ignorance of the first principles of liberty. It cannot be from a mere hypocritical disregard of such principles; for proud men, who boast a peculiar love of liberty and aptitude for it, would not voluntarily make themselves so ridiculous as they appear by these outrageous proceedings. Such blustering is so hopeless, and, if not sincere, so purposeless, that no other supposition is left than that they have lost sight of the fundamental principles of both their federal and State constitutions, and do now actually suppose that their own freedom lies in crushing all opposition to their own will. No pretence of evidence has been offered of any further offence against them than the expression of obnoxious opinions. There is no plea that any of their laws have been violated, except those recently enacted to annihilate freedom of speech and the press: laws which can in no case be binding upon persons out of the limits of the States for which these new laws are made.

The amended constitution of Virginia, of 1830, provides that the legislature shall not pass "any law abridging the freedom of speech or of the press." North and South Carolina and Georgia decree that the freedom of the press shall be preserved inviolate; the press being the grand bulwark of liberty. The constitution of Louisiana declares that "the free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the invaluable rights of man;

and every citizen may freely speak, write, and print, on any subject, being responsible for the abuse of that liberty.” The Declaration of Rights of Mississippi declares that “no law shall ever be passed to curtail or restrain the liberty of speech, and of the press.” The constitutions of all the slave States contain declarations and provisions like these. How fearfully have the descendants of those who framed them degenerated in their comprehension and practice of liberty, violating both the spirit and the letter of their original Bill of Rights! They are not yet fully aware of this. In the calmer times which are to come, they will perceive it, and look back with amazement upon the period of desperation, when not a voice was heard, even in the legislatures, to plead for human rights; when, for the sake of one doomed institution, they forgot what their fathers had done, fettered their own presses, tied their own hands, robbed their fellow-citizens of their right of free travelling, and did all they could to deprive those same fellow-citizens of liberty and life, for the avowal and promulgation of opinions.

Meantime, it would be but decent to forbear all boasts of a superior knowledge and love of freedom.

Here I gladly break off my dark chapter on the Morals of Slavery.



A POSTSCRIPT FROM THE EDITORS

And here we have, as if to vindicate Martineau on many of her points, an item printed in the July 28, 1837 issue of the *Natchez, Mississippi, Weekly Courier and Journal*, commenting on her recently published book, *Society in America*:

Morals of Slavery

HENRY A. WISE.

From a late London Paper.

The people of the United States need not be very angry about the infamous libels which Miss Martineau has heaped upon their press, and upon some features of American life, in her new work entitled "Society in America." This female, who always chooses to write upon subjects which men only can understand, and that women cannot with decency discuss, alleges that she had a better opportunity than most travellers of collecting accurate information relative to manners and customs in the great Trans Atlantic Republic, because she is deaf, and carries a most excellent and very large ear trumpet; but with occasionally a gleam of good sense, her work abounds in illogical conclusions, false philosophy, palpable contradictions, and downright nonsense. The everlasting old lady pamphleteered the English people till they would swallow her crudities no longer; but under the patronage of Lord Brougham her diatribes against the Poor Laws, her Malthusian twaddle about a surplus population, and her detestable doctrines upon "a moral check to matrimony," have done an immense deal of mischief here. It is to this female that we, in a great measure, owe the atrocious Whig "Amendment" of the Poor Laws, with its brutal Bastille "dietary tables," and the separation, in direct opposition to the express command of God, of husbands from their wives, and mothers from their children. We perceive that she now denounces the American people because women have no hand in the making of the laws. She would have, it would appear, the wives and daughters of American citizen, invited to engage in all the turmoil, speechification and drunkenness of contested elections; and it would even seem that, according to this lady-like scribbler upon which she is profoundly ignorant, women ought to be returned as Members of Congress! Heaven knows, the gentle creatures exercise influence enough in these matters, without being dragged forward in person. At a contested election, "the lady's man" generally carries the day.

WASHINGTON AND BONAPARTE

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