

From Frederick Starr to Dear Father

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Weston

January 15th 1855.

Dear Father,

In this letter I enclose a bank note of 5\$ Dollars on Sockett's Harbor bank. It was considered doubtful here, and its age seemed to make it beyond the notice of our present Bank Detectors. It belongs to a gentleman to whom I feel under some obligation, and I told him I would send it to you and that you would find out, whether it was good, and that you would return to me its value (whatever it may be) in bills of banks that you know to be good. I hope you will find it good.

As soon as the Self Defensives had exonerated me by their vote from being an abolitionist, I proceeded to give them my opinions on the subject of Slavery or in other words to define my position. I urged them in the outset to consider what could properly be expected and demanded from a man born & educated in the north who should come to the south to reside. I told them that it was unreasonable to expect that more change of latitude or longitude would change a mans opinions or principles, that in the heart of a true American love for his country would burn as warmly when in central Asia or Africa as at home, and a christian would as much among heathen pray & adore God as with his brethren. Neither was it reasonable to expect that time would change a mans opinions & principles, but if there was nothing else to bear upon then save time they would be age grow more firm & obstinate. Now if I should be in the north & one of Mr[.] Vineyards sons should come there to transact business or practice a profession and should, presently finding it more popular, than to defend Southern institutions, become a ranting abolitionist, I should set down against him one of three things[:] either first that he had no brains, or second that he was a hypocrite & was destitute of principle or third that he could be bought & sold in the market for money. And when a man from the north comes to the south and contrary to nature, to education and his own previous life, he becomes a ranter in

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favor of slavery I give him the same opinion and look upon him with distrust[.] I would not trust my money or anything he could harm within his reach..No! This is what the South has a right to demand of any man who comes to reside there. That he will regard the laws under which he voluntarily brings himself, that he will not be a disturber of the peace of the community nor disturb the legal rights of any man. This the south has a right to expect, but it has no right to expect that a man will lay aside or change his opinions & principles, because he may go where others differ from him and an honest man cannot change his principles as to the rectitude of things in one or two or three years.

At this point a gentleman crowded down the middle aisle & wished permission to interrupt me & ask a question. I told him certainly. he said if he understood me, if I said it needed as many as 40 or more years to modify a change the opinions of men in reference to the subject of slavery. I told him that was what I said: that the opinions of men rested on certain data & when that was changed, the opinion must change with it, and that in reference to Slavery, a Northern mans principles (if he had any), could not change in one or two or five days, or weeks or months or years.

He replied that Mr. Starr you know that men at the North are very ignorant in reference to the institution of Slavery, they believe there is a vast amount of cruelty, destitution & starvation in the south which does not actually exist. Now when a man comes to the South, and finds how things actually are, can he not change his opinions of Slavery in a few 2 or 4 months. I replied, Before answering I would inquire who is the gentleman by whom I have the pleasure of being [chatecized?] He answered "Rev[.] Mr. Irish" and a dozen voices called out "Irish," "Mr. Irish," [""]Rev[.] Irish &c [.]" I replied "Indeed! I am

happy to make your acquaintance Mr. Irish. I have often heard of you but have never enjoyed the pleasure of an introduction before. Mr. Irish permit me to inquire what section of the country you are from[.] He answered "New York, Western New York, Erie County near Buffalo.["]

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Well sir I will now reply to your questions. You ask if a man in his ignorance of slavery should come to the south whether he could not change his opinions in a few months. Now my first answer although in different words, answers your question. Food and drink[,] Garmants and lashes & mental & moral degradation are but the visible manifestations of Slavery. Now when a man has read novels on the subject in which extreme cases are brought together or when he reads books which are compiled collections of all the horrors and barbarities of slavery, and considers that every slave is the victim and every master a fiend, when such a man comes to the south, it does not & it need not take 4 months nor 4 weeks nor 4 days for him to change his opinion[.] the data upon which it was founded although perhaps all true was presented in such a manner and so carelessly examined that he made false conclusions as to what slavery is to the eye & ear.

But sir I came to this country with no such opinions to change. I came and found it just what I had anticipated; I came and visited it and was satisfied. What were your opinions when you came I know not, If you came expecting to find the slaves with no clothing but a narrow strip of Cotton for the loins, Emaciated & skeletons through starvation from the avarice of their masters, Or one wound & gore of blood from their head to their heels through the wanton cruelty of their masters, I think that one hours residence was enough to change your opinions but perhaps months were necessary. But Sir I deny the ignorance in the north in regard to slavery which you assume exists there. And it [is] also wrong in judging of Northern opinion to take slavery in Missouri & especially in the Platte purchase as a specimen of the institution[.] it is here of a milder type than any where else in the nation and it is useless to deny that. But the argument that entirely refutes the charged ignorance of the north is this. Who makes the laws of the United States. There are 13,000,000 northerners to six or seven Southerners[.] they always controll the Congress of the United States, and the North passes all your laws for the protection[,] the defence[,] the extention of Slavery, and their constituents elect them, and this proves that were the north all solid abolitionists & ig-

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norant fanatics these men would never be elected.

I do not know that I ever publicly before was guilty of sophistry, but I was in fine flow of feeling language & thought and I felt as if that Irish-man would not make half a meal for me, and I was bound to clean him out entirely, he slunk back into the crowd[.] afterward he came up and talked with me a few moments but has never since made it convenient to meet me. He lost ground in ten minutes then that he will not get back again in 20 years. There is a saying in this country that was applied to him by every body. "It was not his say then" signifying that he was the wrong person, in the wrong place, with the wrong motives, at the wrong time, in the wrong circumstances and against the wrong man, & that he would have done well to have held his tongue.

I further remarked, that a mans opinions might change in reference to the physical phenomena of Slavery with every change in the data. But there was something else in slavery. There were the principles of humanity, justice & right & wrong involved and these constitute its essence, and I repeat that it is not to be expected that a man who from infancy has been brought up in the midst of slavery, and by his parents, his teachers[,] his legislators[,] his ministers has been brought up to believe it right and whose personal interest all lies in its continuance[,] who has learned by heart every argument for its defence & who considers them unanswerable, it is unreasonable to think that he can lightly or, in one, two, three, or four years, change them. And on the other hand a man brought up thus in the North but

upon the other side cannot change his opinions either in a moment.

I came to this country expecting to live here, willing to lay aside my educational & philosophical & ethical opinions concerning Slavery[.] I came to preach the Gospel, to interfere with no mans rights, but with what little ability I possessed to do good to all both to master & slave. You have today heard from me the most objectionable things that I have done. If I have interfered with the institution you have heard how and what it was, and by your unanimous vote have exonerated me from any evil or improper action or intention.

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