May 1855

19th

A Visit to the Colored People of Princeton.

I have been frequently in Princeton and always remarked the black fellows that seemed to cluster round the College, wait in public houses, etc. Inquired about the manners of their living—in what way they supported themselves, and what was their character generally? The answers were from students, and such persons as chance threw in the way of aspiring travelers, that they were a poor miserable degraded sort of beings, improvident, living from hand to mouth, all congregated together in what they called Negro Town.

I had observed my washwoman to be respectable in her deportment neat and clean in her appearance—also the waiters at the Hotel where I was staying, polite and civil, and altogether a very decent man. I saw a garrison of and much intelligence and propriety of behavior, running in the street one day a group of some five or six colored children, as if just out of school and dressed well, deputing themselves as well as white children, with their school bags on their arms, seeming to contain a good number of books. I wondered to myself how all this intelligence could be, and they had grown courteous, etc. I expressed the wish to see them at their homes, in this Negro town, and determined in my own mind should an opportunity ever offer, I would do so.

I made my intentions known to some southern students and asked for direction to this said Negro Town. They told me if I went there, I should disgrace myself, as no decent ladies ever went among such filthy low people—but if I would go, they would tell me where they lived. I wasained for Philadelphia, the 24th of May, 1855 and had the morning from 6 o'clock to 10 o'clock P.M. unoccupied. With the proper directions I said, I would call on as soon as I had taken my breakfast, for my visit to the Negro town.

I was just prepared for this visit by some conversation I had with...
some gentlemen a few evenings previous, at the St. Nicholas Hotel in New York. I was introduced in a private parlour to an old gentleman from Pennsylvania, and another from Maine. The then recent outrages in Kansas formed the principle topic for conversation, which very naturally ran into the slavery question. I was astonished at the sanguinary color of the northern fields. That there was no strong in slavery on the plantations of the South, and that the antithesis of interest for such a conclusion, be placed on the present condition of the Southern slave, and the belief they were well treated. She did not believe a word of their stories both, that said to the contrary — a person present remarked, that fine horses were sometimes much flamed, and all more, or less, valued. He pointed to the truth of Mrs.Noise's book, she had one by left unseamed musket that might be sold to make the fortune of the slave more trustful. The gentleman from Pennsylvania said that the slaves were far better off, than the poor white people. They were not capable of providing for themselves. They were better off than in Africa, and that it would be humane to bring them here and make them slaves. He believed that God had made them black for that purpose. They were inferior to us, and should be kept in order towards us. I asked him what he would make of what I had seen in Africa. He the most enlightened people on the African coast — the Egyptians, that God made of one blood all the nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth. And that of one of the wise men of the world. He said, that saying was preserved, and he did not believe that all were made originally alike. It was extraordinary, it is strange, because that upon a stock zero woman should go against slavery, and is a northern man for it! What has done now to the whites the separation of families — the taking away...
These were intelligent people, and yet so ignorant on the subject of slavery. Their observations showed this. One of them said, "he said no use in disturbing so happy a people as the slaves were—they would sing and dance and be merry, and yet would a polish girl was made about slavery. As for their being taught. They had teaching enough for their souls' salvation, and that was all that was necessary for them, since I asked that as to the point of view he advanced. They all said if they were to be taught, it was to be taught in a way that would not be offensive. And as to their religious instruction, there certainly was more attention bestowed on it now than formerly, but there were certain to facts within my knowledge where the last had been used and very severely used. We took long prayers meetings.

If these people had lived amongst slavery and had seen it in all its operation with minds impartial in judging of it—they would have thought differently."

To Negro Town. —

The first house I entered was in a little street opposite the college buildings. Between the street. It was a little confectionary store in a small front room, so close to the street a few steps, right by William Simpson, a colored man. I told him that I came from the south, where I had often been told that the free people of color living in the Southern States would not provide for themselves; that they lived in great poverty and wretchedness, and were shilly-shally unable to live otherwise. — that I had a great desire to see their condition.
myself, and had therefore called to see him, and intended to go in other houses.

I asked him if he could make out to support his family. For his usual stock of hard & taxes did not seem to be worth more than 10 or 15. --- What the devil for the rent of that house? He said I own it. Man, do you really? Yes! and I own a much better house than this which brings me rents. Well, I said, then I think you can make a living. --- Will you give me your name, and some address, and can you send me a list of all the names of some others, that I may visit, when I may find one? (supposing that this poor man, two houses, couldn't be equal to the place.) While he was looking up a piece of paper for me, and a pencil, a very tall looking woman --- probably his wife, presented herself at the door, opening in to the back room with some sowing in her hand, and said, I guess that you will not go into any of the houses of the colored people, that you will not find pen and ink, or paper and pencil. I took the paper and wrote with campian name on it and proceeded to Grieve at. After taking leave of my acquaintances, with renewed belief that the blacks are capable of taking care of themselves.

The next house I entered was Celine Braggs, a widow, with a number of children. She was almost white. She said her husband had left her. She looked poor, and unclean. The teeth in washing, the house had two rooms. --- The room was comfortable. Enough of furniture to be comfortable, but every thing looked neglected. She rented the rooms. --- The head of a purl.

The next house I visited was a widow. The children were healthy. She had seven children. It was a snug little house, front, and back room. The children looked healthy. The mother had gone out to clean house, the oldest daughter was taking care of the children. The house had two stories, one. --- There was a garden. The house and lot they owned but not chiefly land for. Things here were not in very good order, but plenty of bedding and all kinds of furniture to be comfortable.
The next house was "Flora Bantings", an old Maid. There was a bell. Ringing it, and there came to the door a lady from another woman. She invited me to enter most cordially. She seated me in a front sitting-room, one of which was her dining room, and still back of that, her kitchen. On her front centre table lay a handsome Bible — above on the sideboard, and hanging on the side with other books of that character, together with the "Almanac" and I think the "New York Observer". I'll remark in every house a Bible, sofa, handsome chairs, carpet, with ornamental little things, composed the furniture, and the side board and other suitable articles composed that of the dining room. With her true spirit of visiting him, I think I shall not in every house, the servant to take great pleasure in showing me her apartments and her garden. Her kitchen was neatness itself. She owned the house and lot. It was 100 feet deep, 60 feet front, it was well improved & ornamented with shrubbery in such frontiers as not converted to more profitable uses.

The next house belonged to James Treutel. Margaret his wife. It was the same sized lot as "Flora Bantings", offering a large garden, which was well improved. Treutel furnished well, with chairs, sofa, mirror, books on centre table, back dining room — every thing comfortable and neat — but not equal to "Flora" —

The next house belonged to Joseph Striker, & Rachel his wife. The same sized lot as the other two, 60 feet deep, 60 feet front, with some good trees. All three owned them, and they looked alike. All cultivated well. Books were on the centre table — always the Bible. Things did not look as neat and orderly as at the two other places. Their books were out place but they supplied me with a good jam and portable infustion.
The next house was Matthias Davenport's - he had a wife and three children. He did not own the house. They did not appear to be as well off as the other families of furniture in the rooms, but more in confusion. There was one room with a chest of drawers, a table, a chair, a bed, and a few other things. Always pen or pencil, and a Bible.

The next house went on.

These eight houses were all on one side of green street. Then I crossed over on the other side and had to walk going in to some houses, because there was furniture. The houses that looked very much improved I entered. They were lots of equal size, and houses about equal. They belonged to Henry Loving and his wife - Charles Loving, her second husband - These two places exceeded all others I had seen. Margaret, Henry Loving's wife, was a very intelligent woman. She took me in to her parlor, that might be called genteelly furnished for any white people in similar circumstances. On the table between the windows, under a large mirror, were the nicest china articles of various tones and patterns - handkerchiefs, china cups, always comfits and books, and then in the back room, sideboard, and dining room furniture. Mrs. Katy, Margaret's servant, was arranging, scrubbing in the front yard. It was laid out with large well. I went to the door of Charles Loving but did not go in. It was used equal to his brother.

Then I came out of green street, and went into John's Alley - REV. Clay lived on the corner - the was busy preparing her dinner. Which looked very good, and sent forth a fragrance that created a desire for some of it. They lived on the floor, but roomed to have every thing occupying. Comfort. They did not own the house. Henry of points was a good looking two story house - small with every thing around it, looking in good order. Time would not allow to go in it. I asked Mr. Clay who occupied it? She said Mrs. A. B. Beechman and that she owned the house and lot.

Next door Mr. Geddes lived - she did not own the house, but the owner was a colored man.
Next door lived Gilbert Reden—he did not own the house—both these
houses are small, and looked rather poor compared to others—

Next door Samuel Scudder lived—he has a comfortable house and gar-
den and owns it—he carries the mail & papers—he has a large family—a
member of grown girls—they do ornamental work & Scott Modes—often played the
piano

There is a two other small houses in John Alley, into which I could not go for want
of time—they looked to be of the poorest order

In all I noticed fourteen dwellings of these colored people, and whether within
myself I could truthfully or think that they were so wretched and destitute.

The only satisfactory explanation I could make to myself was that the contrast that
occurred the white population met be constantly mingling between
their own splendid mansions and the humble homes of the
poor black man—could they go on the Plantations and see how the
slaves live and then compare them with these homes of the poor colored people
of Princeton—they would see the difference. It is no criterion to judge of the
comfort of slaves—to see them as house servants—though sometimes they are treated
bad enough—neither is it a criterion to make up a judgment to go on
some few Plantations where they are comparatively treated well—but in
order to know what slavery really is; slaves must stay in its midst for
years—observe its operations in all its different phases. They will
then see the worst step houses of the slaves; the degraded, and crushed con-
dition, of their moral, and natural feelings; they will see the reasons for
their living and standing and cheating and abusing in so many ways.
They will see them torn from their dearest relations, without daring to utter a single
complaint, or seek a sympathizing word. They will see that such are the lightest
most unseemly consequences of slavery—and not the fault of the slave.
My object was to compare the comforts of the free black of the free states, with the slaves of the slave states.

The poorest house that I saw in Princeton was Cabina Buziers. It was crowded with children. It was far superior for comfort than the very best that I saw on any plantation in any slave state. Here are house servants in cities and plantations that have in some comfortable places, but the generality of their comforts in plantations consist of a Blanket or two, some little utensils for cooking, Pitch Bucket and a stick or two. All such utensils consit of a long regular line of whitewashed shacks will present a beautiful subject to the beholder in forming these large plantations.

The colored people of Princeton have a Church, Old School Presbytery. It is Headed by the College sometimes attend it. The LORD is very kind to them. They have a Sunday school of over one hundred scholars. It is Headed to me that some of them are very intelligent Christians, and that there were among them worth ten thousand dollars.

I record these facts to show that these poor miserable people (as they were called) lived in their own comfortable homes, with no one to control them, or make them afraid while the generality of Southern slaves are in miserable huts, or cabins, with the bare necessities, but none of the comforts, of life. On some plantations we saw long rows of cabins, neatly whitewashed - but they are like whitewashed sepulchers.