A LETTER

TO

The Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England,

IN REPLY

TO THEIR "CHRISTIAN ADDRESS"

ON THE SUBJECT OF

SLAVERY IN THE SOUTHERN STATES.

BY MRS. JULIA GARDINER TYLER,
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To the Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England.

Your address to your sisters, the women of the United States, on the subject of domestic slavery, as it exists among us, which has appeared in our public journals, should be acknowledged by some one of the vast number of those to whom it is addressed, without awaiting the publication of the more formal communication. There are some of the concerns of life in which conventionalities are properly to be disregarded, and this is one of them. A reply to your address must necessarily be the work of some one individual among us, or must go altogether unperformed. Woman, in the United States, with but few exceptions, confines herself in that sphere for which the God who created her seems to have designed her. Her circle is, literally and emphatically, that of her family; and such she is content that it shall be. Within that circle her influence is felt over the relations of life, as wife, mother, mistress—and as she discharges the duty of one or all of these relations, so is she respected or otherwise. To cast a doubt upon her fidelity in any one of them, is to excite against her the odium of the community, and, in a great measure, to dethrone her from her high position. She knows nothing of political conventions, or conventions of any other sort than such as are held under suitable pastors of the Church, and are wholly directed to the advancement of the Christian religion. Such is emphatically the case with the women of the Southern States. Do you wish to see them, you must visit their homes. Do you desire to ascertain the nature of their employments, you must enter their family circles, and, believe me, good sisters of England, you would find in their Christian department, and perfect amiability of manners, enough, at once, to inspire you with the most exalted respect and esteem. You might find no spendid vestments of dress, no glittering diamonds, no aristocratic displays. No, the vestments they wear are those of meekness and charity, their diamonds are gems of the heart, and their splendor the neatness and order and contentment which everywhere greets the eye; and that neatness, that order, and that contentment is in nothing more observable than in the well-clothed and happy domestics who welcome your arrival, and heap upon you every comfort during your sojourn under the roofs of their masters. You will see then how utterly impossible it would be to expect the women of the United States to assemble in convention, either in person or by proxy, in order to frame an answer to your address. Nay, I must, moreover, in all frankness, declare to you, that the women of the South, especially, have not received your address in the kindest spirit. They regard it as entirely incompatible with all confidence in, or consideration for them, to invoke the interposition of the women of what are called the free States, in a matter with which they have no more to do than have yourselves, and whose interference in the question can produce no other effect than to excite disturbance and agitation and ill will, and possibly, in the end, a total annihilation of kind feeling between geographical sections. It is the province of the women of the Southern States to preside over the domestic economy of the estates and plantations of their husbands—it is emphatically their province to visit the sick, and attend to the comfort of all the laborers upon such estates; and it is felt to be but a poor compliment to the women of the South, to suppose it necessary to introduce other superintendence than their own over the condition of their dependants and servants. They see, too, or fancy they see, in the fact that the address which you have made them, was handed you already prepared for signature, by the editors of the newspaper press of England, and that, according to the admission of the Duchess of Sutherland in her opening address to your Convention, your Convention, itself, is but the offspring of the same political newspaper press—I say, they see enough in all this to excite not their sympathies, but their apprehensions. They also see, or fancy that they see, in your movement, the fingers of your greatest statesmen. The Countess of Derby, the Viscountess Palmerston, the Countess of Carlisle, Lady John Russell, not to
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mention others of distinction and notoriety, would scarcely be complimented by a supposition that they had signed or openly approved such an address without the concurrence of their husbands. The women of the Southern States are, for the most part, well educated; indeed they yield not in this respect to any female in the Annals of the United States in particular in the three continents. There can be no doubt that a ten-fold interest is found in our case, both in the rapid growth of the United States, and in the early development of that future which will clothe this country with all the elements of control in the affairs of the world. Governments and countries which are now looked upon as stars of the first magnitude, will ere long, if the United States roll on in their present orbit, be secondary and tertiary by the political circumference of the globe. This is quite as thoroughly known by us as by you, women of England, and therefore you should not be in the slightest degree surprised at the suspicion with which your address is regarded by all the thinking women of the South, but not by the Union. We know that there is but one subject on which there is a possibility of wrecking the bark of this Union—a possibility, however, which, I trust, is very remote—and to that very subject you have given your attention; and not only so, but have subscribed an address, not prepared by yourselves, as the emanation of your own susceptible hearts, but the admitted production of the newspaper press of England, which effects a most marvellous sensibility on a subject with which it has nothing properly to do—and all for ends which every reflecting person cannot fail to understand.

Nor is this suspicion in any degree removed by the fact on which you predicate your address; viz: the fact that your country inflicted on her then colonies the "curse" of slavery in opposition to their frequent and solemn protests. In the historical fact you are certainly correct. The example of a free, prosperous and great people, among whom all artificial distinctions of society are unknown; where preferment is equally open to all, and man's capacity for self-government is recognized and conclusively established. The women of the United States foresee this, and they also thoroughly comprehend the fact, that all confederacies have heretofore, in the history of the world, been broken up and despaired of by the machinations of foreign governments; and if such traffic could only be expelled from this country by the force and power of the sword, Your Kings and Queens, sustained by your Parliament and people, entered into treaties, and formed contracts, for the purpose of reaping a rich harvest of profit from the trade—all nations have their ends; but there is one reason to suppose that the people of the present generation are better, more moral and more Christian, than all who have gone before them—that your right reverend Bishops and Prelates are more pure and orthodox than all their predecessors; the nobles and gentry, whose titles which stipulated a monopoly of the trade in close partnership between those royal personages, to the exclusion of all the world beside. Yes, you are altogether correct in ascribing whatever their not imputing of crime, in the present condition of the Southern States, to your own England. The colonies remonstrated, and remonstrated in vain, until, driven to desperation by her persevering and unyielding policy, they severed the bonds that bound them to England, and established their independence, and abolished the slave trade by their only resource—the power of the sword. The great slave market in which England had enjoyed a monopoly, was thus lost to her; and from that moment, no one nation or people have done that which there was something rather immoral in the traffic. Before the slave ship was a stately argosy laden with treasure. The groans of its unhappy victims could not be heard above the surges of the ocean. Soon after, a faint cry could be heard, borne on the winds from Africa's coast; and now, the Parliament House resounds with the clanking of the chains and the cries of the victims. Such the mighty influence of the American Revolution, which by the power of the sword, wielded in that ever-glorious struggle. I desire to tell you, women of England, plainly, that your address, prepared not by yourselves, but by others, comes, therefore, to us, laden with suspicions, when you advert, as the groundwork of your interference with our domestic institutions, to the fact of the former criminality of England.

Would England, with a continuance of a monopoly, break a part of her broad acres up to the present day, have so imposed herself in sackcloth and ashes, as she now has done? Where was her humanity and her Christian philanthropy for the long period of 150 years? Our ancestors on this side of the Atlantic thundered, through the power of the sword, at the doors of her Parliament House, and at the gates of her Royal Palaces; and yet, for all that long period, she had no ears to hear, no heart to understand. No sympathy, and no philanthropy, such as now exists, found place in the stately palace. How has happened all this? It would be well for you to enquire. Doubtless some of your distinguished husbands can give you plausible explanations—at least such as will content politicians on your side of the water. The editors of the newspaper press can come again to your aid. They have no scruples to convince us, that the people of the present generation are better, more moral and more Christian, than all who have gone before them—that your right reverend Bishops and Prelates are more pure and orthodox than all their predecessors; the nobles and gentry, whose titles, which stipulated a monopoly of the trade in close partnership between those royal personages, to the exclusion of all the world beside. Yes, you are altogether correct in ascribing whatever their not imputing of crime, in the present condition of the Southern States, to your own England. The colonies remonstrated, and remonstrated in vain, until, driven to desperation by her persevering and unyielding policy, they severed the bonds that bound them to England, and established their independence, and abolished the slave trade by their only resource—the power of the sword. The great slave market in which England had enjoyed a monopoly, was thus lost to her; and from that moment, no one nation or people have done that which there was something rather immoral in the traffic. Before the slave ship was a stately argosy laden with treasure. The groans of its unhappy victims could not be heard above the surges of the ocean. Soon after, a faint cry could be heard, borne on the winds from Africa's coast; and now, the Parliament House resounds with the clanking of the chains and the cries of the victims. Such the mighty influence of the American Revolution, which by the power of the sword, wielded in that ever-glorious struggle. I desire to tell you, women of England, plainly, that your address, prepared not by yourselves, but by others, comes, therefore, to us, laden with suspicions, when you advert, as the groundwork of your interference with our domestic institutions, to the fact of the former criminality of England.

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compeers of high and low degree: that England, when she had the power to prevent the introduction of negroes into the United States, most obstinately refused to do it; but now that she is deprived of her authority, either by the action of her own heart, or by the action of the hearts of her citizens, she is ready to weep tears, and complains over the injustice and the wrong. The crocodile, good sisters of England, is said to cry most piteously, but woe to the unhappy traveller who is beguiled by its tears!

I have attempted to deal candidly with you in disclosing some of the grounds of the suspicions which, in the estimation of many, attach to your proceedings. I will go farther, and inform you that it is better for both you and us, that we abstain in future, from all possible interference with each other, in the domestic concerns of our respective countries. In the first place, such interference comes with ill grace from either of us, and can be received with no favor. In morals, we believe ourselves quite your equals, and, therefore, it sounds harshly in our ears to be admonished by you of our sins, real or imaginary. There is a proud heart in the American breast, which rebels against all assumption on the part of others, although they may wear ducal coronets, or be considered the stars of fashion in foreign courts. Manage your own affairs as best you may, and leave ours as we may think proper. Each of us will find abundant employment in the performance of our respective duties. If you wish a suggestion as to the suitable occupation of your idle hours, I will point you to the true field for your philanthropy; the inhabitants of the British West India Islands. It is not necessary to dwell on your own sufferings. You have sufficiently drawn and given false coloring, as they are licensed to do; but be not deceived into the belief that the heart of man or woman, on this side of the Atlantic, is either more obdurate or cruel, than on yours. There is no reason, then, why you should leave your fellow subjects in misery at home, in order to take your seat by the side of the black man on the plantations of America. Even if you are horror-stricken at the highly colored picture of human distress, incident to the separation of husband and wife, and parents and children under the system of slavery—a thing, by the way, of rare occurrence among us, and then attended by peculiar circumstances—you have no occasion to leave your own land for a similar, and still harsher, and more unjust exercise of authority. Go, and arrest the proceedings of the bloody deed; received his last breath, and consigned his remains to the bosom of St. Paul's Cathedral. He has made England what she is, great and powerful. Shall he, not, after all this, be permitted to enjoy the sunshine of home, with his wife and little ones, for a single day? He has perilled his life for England—he has returned from a five years' absence in distant seas—his wife and children look with rapture upon his weather-beaten countenance—he holds the loved ones in his embrace; but the press-gang comes, and his fitful dream of happiness is over. If he resists, there are fetters for his limbs! If he talks of England's proudly boasting common law, there is no law for him. Magna Charta is a farce, and the Petition of Right a mockery, as far as he is concerned. Go, sisters of England, to your Queen, your Prime Minister, your Parliament and your Courts, and ask their interference to arrest this moral and political iniquity, and you will be told, "Woman should have no concern with politics—look back to your drawing-rooms and nurseries."

For another subject quite as fruitful of sympathy, I need only refer you to the condition of Ireland, with its population but recently starving for food, which was freely supplied from our granaries, and at this moment craved money from avaricious landlords, who, to extend the area of grazing lands, are levelling their humble cottages to the ground, and sending them forth to die upon the public highways. Women of England! go thither with your tender charities. There, on the roadside, sinks an attenuated and waning humanity, stretched there, in the cold, dreary, and withering child to her breast, while the unhappy husband and father, himself foodless and rainless, sheds drops of agony over the heart-rending scene. Spare from the well-fed negroes of these States, one drop of your superabundant sympathy; to pour into the bitter cup which is overflowing with sorrow and tears. Poor, suffering, down-trodden Ireland! land of poetry and song, of noble feeling and generous emotions—birthplace of the warrior, the statesman, the orator, where is no room for you in the sympathizing heart of the civilized world? Let the Celtic race be driven by starvation, from the land of their fathers, and its exodus would be regarded not with sorrow, but with joy and gladness by the secret heart of England. "Religious toleration" is but an unmeaning phrase with the people of Great Britain—it extends not beyond the lips. A difference in creed has been the death-blow to Ireland.

I reason not with you on the subject of our domestic institutions. Such as they are, they are ours. "We fear the Greeks through bearing presents." Never was adage more applicable—although professing friendship and sympathy, we cannot consent that England shall mix herself up with our concerns. That property has descended from father to son, and becomes the property of the nation, as a thing of wealth. We desire no intrusion of advice as to our individual property rights, at home or abroad. We meddle not with your laws of primogeniture and entail, although they are obnoxious to all our notions of justice, and are in violation of the laws of nature. Would the noble ladies of England feel no resentment, if we should address them upon those subjects? And yet is there a certainty that our voice would not be heard by the tolding and landless millions, in favor of a system which we consider more wise, more just, and more consistent with the holy word of God? We, however, preach no crusade against aristocratic establishments. It is enough that we do not allow them to exist among ourselves. We are content to leave England in the enjoyment of her peculiar institutions; and we insist upon the right to regulate ours without her aid. I pray you to bear in mind, that the golden rule of life is for each to attend to his own business, and let his neighbor's alone! This means peace, love, friendship. The opposite means hatred, ill-will, contention—destroys the amity and friendship which still exists among the different branches of discord among nations. I must also say to you frankly, that we regard England as an indifferent adviser on the subject of negro slavery. Her statesmanship, if it be judged by her course of policy in regard to the West India Islands, would give her no consul to their affairs—she is not inclined to be a good adviser, and ruin and desolation, evidences of a wise and sound policy. No, we prefer to follow our own conception of what it is proper for us to do. Our eyes are turned across the ocean; not in the direction of England and Africa. The footprints of our policy are seen in the colonies there established, already become independent States—in the voluntary emancipation of slaves by our citizens as preparatory for emigration to Africa—a course of emancipation which from 1790 to 1830, has increased our table in Virginia, of free negroes, in the ratio of 3 per cent., while the white population has only increased 10 ¼ per cent., and the slaves but 64% per cent. These interesting statistics, I extract from a memorial recently
presented to the Legislature of Virginia, asking additional aid to further the colonization of freed negroes in Liberia. Thus we seek to retribute the wrongs done by England to Africa, by returning civilization for barbarism—Christianity for idolatry. We desire no such boon as England bestowed on her Islands—no blight so abiding, no mildew so destructive—no ultimate war between the races, bloody, desolating, and finally annihilating. Steam is conquering distance, and Africa will be brought nearer and nearer to our shores with each revolving year—and the results of a policy, at once wise and discreet, commencing with slaveholding Virginia, and extensively adopted by the people of the United States, will claim, sooner or later, the admiration of mankind.

America might love England if England would permit her. A common descent, a common language, mutual interests, and to a great extent a common heritage of freedom, should draw the two nations together. The disposition of the Southern mind (I speak what I do know) is closest friendship with England. Nearly all of the Southern people are the descendants of the first settlers. They have kindred blood, almost unmixed by emigration, flowing in their veins. Their interests lead them to cherish the principles of free trade. Their cotton, their rice, and other productions of the soil, find extensive markets in Great Britain. They would have them still more free—still more widely open. For myself, when I have visited England, it has been with emotions of reverence growing out of the recollections of the historic page. Westminster Abbey, with its undying memorials—the noble monuments of the past scattered over the face of the country—the very ruins spoke of an ancestry alike dear to the American and Englishman. My intermixture of Scotch blood, derived from a leader of two Scottish clans, who lost life, castle, and estate in the wars of King Charlie, with the pure Anglo-Saxon, in no degree abated my ardor and enthusiasm, when I looked upon these memories of the mighty past, in which so many of us here claim a common interest with you. But, if England will sever these ties; if, instead of cultivating good feeling with us, she chooses rather to subject us to taunt, to ridicule, to insult in its grossest form; and, above all, improperly to interfere in our domestic affairs;—if she scatters her nobility among us, first to share our hospitality and then to abuse us;—if, what is still worse, she sends her emissaries, in the persons of members of Parliament, to stir up our people to mutiny and revolt;—if, what is quite as objectionable, her public press shall incite her women, and the more illustrious for birth the worse it makes the matter, to address us homilies on justice, humanity, and philanthropy, as if we had not, like themselves, the advantage of civilization, and the lights of Christianity; with all the desire to cultivate relations of undying amity, the men of the United States, deriving their spirit from their mothers and their wives, may be forced into the adoption of a very different feeling with regard to Great Britain.

JULIA GARDINER TYLER.

SHERWOOD FOREST, VIRGINIA, JAN. 24, 1853.