

# **A Plea for the Poor, or a Word of Remembrance and Caution to the Rich**

**by John Woolman**

<http://www.umilta.net/woolmanplea.html>

## **Chapter One**

WEALTH DESIRED for its own sake obstructs the increase of virtue, and large possessions in the hands of selfish men have a bad tendency, for by their means too small a number of people are employed in things useful; and therefore they, or some of them, are necessitated to labour too hard, while others would want business to earn their bread were not employments invented which, having no real use, serve only to please the vain mind.

Rents set on lands are often so high that persons who have but small substance are straitened in hiring a plantation; and while tenants are healthy and prosperous in business, they often find occasion to labour harder than was intended by our gracious Creator.

Oxen and horses are often seen at work when, through heat and too much labour, their eyes and the emotion of their bodies manifest that they are oppressed. Their loads in wagons are frequently so heavy that when weary with hauling it far, their drivers find occasion in going up hills or through mire to raise their spirits by whipping to get forward. Many poor people are so thronged in their business that it is difficult for them to provide shelter suitable for their animals in great storms.

These things are common when in health, but through sickness and inability to labour, through loss of creatures and miscarriage in business, many are straitened; and so much of their increase goes annually to pay rent or interest that they have not wherewith to hire so much as their case requires. Hence one poor woman, in attending on her children, providing for her family, and helping the sick, does as much business as would for the time be suitable employment for two or three; and honest persons are often straitened to give their children suitable learning. The money which the wealthy receive from the poor, who do more than a proper share of business in raising it, is frequently paid to other poor people for doing business which is foreign to the true use of things.

Men who have large possessions and live in the spirit of charity, who carefully inspect the circumstance of those who occupy their estates, and regardless of the customs of the times regulate their demands agreeable to universal lovethese, by being righteous on a principle, do good to the poor without placing it as an act of bounty. Their example in avoiding superfluities tends to incite others to moderation. Their goodness in not exacting what the laws or customs would support them in tends to open the channel to moderate labour in useful affairs and to discourage those branches of business which have not their foundation in true wisdom.

To be busied in that which is but vanity and serves only to please the unstable mind tends to an alliance with them who promote that vanity, and is a snare in which many poor tradesmen are entangled. To be employed in things connected with virtue is most agreeable to the character and inclination of an honest man.

While industrious, frugal people are borne down with poverty and oppressed with too much labour in useful things, the way to apply money without promoting pride and vanity remains open to such who truly sympathize with them in their various difficulties.

## **Chapter Two**

The Creator of the earth is the owner of it. He gave us being thereon, and our nature requires nourishment which is the produce of it. As he is kind and merciful, we as his creatures, while we live answerable to the design of our creation, we are so far entitled to a convenient subsistence that no man may justly deprive us of it. By the agreements and contracts of our fathers and predecessors, and by doings and proceedings of our own, some claim a much greater share of this world than others; and whilst those possessions are faithfully improved to the good of the whole, it consists with equity. But he who with a view to self-exaltation causeth some with their domestic animals to labour immoderately, and with the moneys arising to him therefrom employs others in the luxuries of life, acts contrary to the gracious design of him who is the true owner of the earth; nor can any possessions, either acquired or derived from ancestors, justify such conduct.

Goodness remains to be goodness, and the direction of pure wisdom is obligatory on all reasonable creatures—that laws and customs are no further a standard for our proceedings than as their foundation is on universal righteousness.

Though the poor occupy our estates by a bargain to which they in their poor circumstance agreed, and we ask even less than a punctual fulfilling of their agreement, yet if our views are to lay up riches or to live in conformity to customs which have not their foundation in the Truth, and our demands are such as requires greater toil or application to business in them than is consistent with pure love, we invade their rights as inhabitants of that world of which a good and gracious God is proprietor, under whom we are tenants.

Were all superfluities and the desire of outward greatness laid aside and the right use of things universally attended to, such a number of people might be employed in things useful that moderate labour with the blessing of heaven would answer all good purposes relating to people and their animals, and a sufficient number have leisure to attend on proper affairs of civil society.

### **Chapter Three**

While our strength and spirits are lively, we go cheerfully through business. Either too much or too little action is tiresome, but a right portion is healthful to our bodies and agreeable to an honest mind.

Where men have great estates they stand in a place of trust. To have it in their power without difficulty to live in that fashion which occasions much labour, and at the same time confine themselves to that use of things prescribed by our Redeemer, and confirmed by his example and the example of many who lived in the early ages of the Christian church, that they may more extensively relieve objects of charity—for men possessed of great estates to live thus requires close attention to divine love.

Our gracious Creator cares and provides for all his creatures. His tender mercies are over all his works; and so far as his love influences our minds, so far we become interested in his workmanship and feel a desire to take hold of every opportunity to lessen the distresses of the afflicted and increase the happiness of the creation. Here we have a prospect of one common interest from which our own is inseparable—that to turn all the treasures we possess into the channel of universal love becomes the business of our lives. Men of large estates whose hearts are thus enlarged are like fathers to the poor, and in looking over their brethren in distressed circumstances and considering their own more easy condition, find a field for humble meditation and feel the strength of those obligations they are under to be kind and tender-hearted toward them.

Poor men eased of their burdens and released from too close an application to business are at liberty to hire others to their assistance, to provide well for their animals, and find time to perform those visits amongst their acquaintance which belongs to a well-guided social life.

When these reflect on the opportunity those had to oppress them, and consider the goodness of their conduct, they behold it lovely and consistent with brotherhood; and as the man whose mind is conformed to universal love hath his trust settled in God and finds a firm foundation to stand on in any changes or revolutions that happen amongst men, so also the goodness of his conduct tends to spread a kind, benevolent disposition in the world.

### **Chapter Four**

Our blessed Redeemer, in directing us how to conduct one towards another, appeals to our own feeling: “Whatsoever ye would that other men should do to you, do ye even so to them” [Mt. 7:12]. Now where such live in fullness on the labour of others, who have never had experience of hard labour themselves, there is often a danger of their not having a right feeling of the labourer’s condition, and therefore of being disqualified to judge candidly in their case, not knowing what they themselves would desire were they to labour hard from one year to another to raise the necessaries of life and to pay large rents beside—that it’s good for those who live in fullness to labour for tenderness of heart, to improve every opportunity of being acquainted with the hardships and fatigues of those who labour for their living, and [to] think seriously with themselves: Am I influenced with true charity in fixing all my demands? Have I no desire to support myself in expensive customs because my acquaintance live in those customs, Were I to labour as they do toward supporting them and their children in a station like mine, in such sort as they and their children labour for us, could I not on such a change, before I entered into agreements of rents or interest, name some costly articles now used by me or in my family which have no real use in them, the expense whereof might be lessened?

And should I not in such case strongly desire the disuse of those needless expenses, that less answering their way of life the terms might be the easier to me?

If a wealthy man, on serious reflection, finds a witness in his own conscience that there are some expenses which he indulgeth himself in that are in conformity to custom, which might be omitted consistent with the true design of living, and which was he to change places with those who occupy his estate he would desire to be discontinued by them—whoever are thus awakened to their feeling will necessarily find the injunction binding on them: “Do thou even so to them.”

Divine love imposeth no rigorous or unreasonable commands, but graciously points out the spirit of brotherhood and way to happiness, in the attaining to which it is necessary that we go forth out of all that is selfish.

## **Chapter Five**

To pass through a series of hardships and to languish under oppression brings people to a certain knowledge of these things. To enforce the duty of tenderness to the poor, the inspired Lawgiver referred the children of Israel to their own past experience: “Ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” [Ex. 23:9]. He who hath been a stranger amongst unkind people or under their government who were hard-hearted, knows how it feels; but a person who hath never felt the weight of misapplied power comes not to this knowledge but by an inward tenderness, in which the heart is prepared to sympathy with others.

We may reflect on the condition of a poor, innocent man, who by his labour contributes toward supporting one of his own species more wealthy than himself, on whom the rich man from a desire after wealth and luxuries lays heavy burdens. When this labourer looks over the means of his heavy load, and considers that this great toil and fatigue is laid on him to support that which hath no foundation in pure wisdom, we may well suppose that there ariseth an uneasiness in his mind toward those who might without any inconvenience deal more favourably with him. When he considers that by his industry his fellow creature is benefited, and sees that this man who hath much wealth is not satisfied with being supported in a plain way—but to gratify a wrong desire and conform to wrong customs, increaseth to an extreme the labours of those who occupy his estate—we may reasonably judge that he will think himself unkindly used.

When he considers that the proceedings of the wealthy are agreeable to the customs of the times, and sees no means of redress in this world, how would the inward sighing of an innocent person ascend to the throne of that great, good Being, who created us all and hath a constant care over his creatures. By candidly considering these things, we may have some sense of the condition of innocent people overloaded by the wealthy. But he who toils one year after another to furnish others with wealth and superfluities, who labours and thinks, and thinks and labours, till by overmuch labour he is wearied and oppressed, such an one understands the meaning of that language: “Ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

As many at this day who know not the heart of a stranger indulge themselves in ways of life which occasions more labour in the world than Infinite Goodness intends for man, and yet are compassionate toward such in distress who comes directly under their observation, were these to change circumstances a while with some who labour for them, were they to pass regularly through the means of knowing the heart of a stranger and come to a feeling knowledge of the straits and hardships which many poor, innocent people pass through in a hidden obscure life, were these who now fare sumptuously every day to act the other part of the scene till seven times had passed over them, and return again to their former estate, I believe many of them would embrace a way of life less expensive and lighten the heavy burdens of some who now labour out of their sight to support them and pass through straits with which they are but little acquainted.

To see our fellow creatures under difficulties to which we are in no degree accessory tends to awaken tenderness in the minds of all reasonable people, but if we consider the condition of such who are depressed in answering our demands, who labour out of our sight and are often toiling for us while we pass our time in fullness, if we consider that much less than we demand would supply us with all things really needful, what heart will not relent, or what reasonable man can refrain from mitigating that grief which he himself is the cause of, when he may do it without inconvenience? I shall conclude with the words of Ezekiel the prophet (Chap. 34, verse 18), “Seemeth it a small...” etc. [“thing unto you to have eaten up the poor pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures?”]

## Chapter Six

People much spent with labour often take strong drink to revive them. Were there more men usefully employed and fewer who eat bread as a reward for doing that which is not useful, then food or raiment would, on a reasonable estimate, be more in proportion to labour than it is at present. In proceeding agreeable to sound wisdom, a small portion of daily labour might suffice to keep a proper stream gently circulating through all the channels of society; and this portion of labour might be so divided and taken in the most advantageous parts of the day that people would not have that plea for the use of strong liquors which they have at present.

Question: If 4 men, each working 8 hours in a day, raise 200 bushel of rye in 60 days, how many hours must 5 men work to do the same business in the same time? Answer 6 h. 24 m. The quantity of rum and spirits imported and made in these colonies is great! Nor may we suppose that so many thousand hogsheads of this liquor can be drank every year in our country without having a powerful effect on our manners. When people are spent with action and take these liquors not only as a refreshment from past labours but to support them to go on without nature having sufficient time to recruit by resting, it gradually turns them from that calmness of thought which attends those who steadily apply their hearts to true wisdom. The spirits scattered by too much bodily motion in the heat and again revived by strong drink—that this makes a person unfit for serious thinking and divine meditation I expect will not be denied; and as multitudes of people are in this practice who do not take so much as to hinder them from managing their outward affairs, this custom requires our serious thoughts. But as through divine goodness I have found that there is a more quiet, calm, and happy way intended for us to walk in, I am engaged to express what I feel in my heart concerning it.

As cherishing the spirit of love and meekness is our duty, so to avoid those things which they know works against it is a duty also. Every degree of luxury of what kind soever and every demand for money inconsistent with divine order hath some connection with unnecessary labour. By too much labour the spirits are exhausted and people crave help from strong drink; and the frequent use of strong drink works in opposition to the Holy Spirit on the mind. This is plain when men take so much as to suspend the use of their reason, and though there are degrees of this opposition, and a man quite drunk may be furthest removed from that frame of mind in which God is acceptably worshiped, yet a person being often near spent with too much action and revived by spirituous liquors without being quite drunk inures himself to that which is a less degree of the same thing, and which by long continuance does necessarily hurt both mind and body. There is in the nature of people some degree of likeness with that food and air to which they from their youth have been accustomed. This frequently appears in such who by a separation from their native air and usual diet grow weak and unhealthy for want of them. Nor is it reasonable to suppose that so many thousand hogsheads of this fiery liquor can be drank by us every year and the practice continued from age to age without altering in some degree the natures of men and rendering their minds less apt to receive the pure Truth in the love of it.

As many who manifest some regard to piety do yet in some degree conform to those ways of living and of collecting wealth which increaseth labour beyond the bounds fixed by divine wisdom, my desire is that they may so consider the connection of things as to take heed, lest by exacting of poor men more than is consistent with universal righteousness they promote that by their conduct which in words they speak against.

To treasure up wealth for another generation by means of the immoderate labour of such who in some measure depend upon us is doing evil at present, without knowing but that our wealth, thus gathered, may be applied to evil purposes when we are gone. To labour too hard or cause others to do so, that we may live conformable to customs which Christ our Redeemer contradicted by his example in the days of his flesh, and which are contrary to divine order, is to manure a soil for the propagating an evil seed in the earth.

Such who enter deep into these considerations and live under the weight of them will feel these things so heavy and their ill effects so extensive that the necessity of attending singly to divine wisdom will be evident, thereby to be directed in the right use of things, in opposition to the customs of the times, and supported to bear patiently the reproaches attending singularity. To conform a little to a wrong way strengthens the hands of such who carry wrong customs to their utmost extent; and the more a person appears to be virtuous and heavenly minded, the more powerfully does his conformity operate in favour of evil doers. Lay aside the profession of a pious life and people expect little or no instruction from the example. But while we profess in all cases to live in constant opposition to that which is contrary to

universal righteousness, what expressions are equal to the subject, or what language is sufficient to set forth the strength of those obligations we are under to beware lest by our example we lead others wrong.

## Chapter Seven

“This kind goeth not out but by prayer” [Mt. 11:21].

In our care for our children, should we give way to partiality in things relating to what may be when we are gone, yet after death we cannot look at partiality with pleasure. If by our wealth we make them great without a full persuasion that we could not bestow it better, and thus give them power to deal hardly with others more virtuous than they, it can, after death, give us no more satisfaction than if by this treasure we had raised these others above our own and given them power to oppress ours.

Did a man possess as much good land as would well suffice twenty industrious, frugal people, and expect that he was lawful heir to it and intend to give this great estate to his children, but found on a research into the title that onehalf this estate was the undoubted property of a number of poor orphans who, as to virtue and understanding, to him appeared as hopeful as his own children—this discovery would give him an opportunity to consider whether he was attached to any interest distinct from the interest of those children. Some of us have estates sufficient for our children and for as many more to live upon did they all employ their time in useful business and live in that plainness consistent with the character of true disciples of Christ, and have no reason to believe that our children after us will apply them to benevolent purposes more than some poor children who we are acquainted with would, if they had them; and yet, did we believe that after our decease these estates would go equally between our children and an equal number of these poor children, it would be likely to give us uneasiness. This may show to a thoughtful person that to be redeemed from all the remains of selfishness, to have a universal regard to our fellow creatures, and love them as our Heavenly Father loves them, we must constantly attend to the influence of his Spirit.

When our hearts are enlarged to contemplate the nature of this divine love, we behold it harmonious; but if we attentively consider that moving of selfishness which would make us uneasy at the apprehension of that which is in itself reasonable, and which being separated from all previous conceptions and expectations will appear so, we may see an inconsistency in it, for the subject of such uneasiness is in future, and would not affect our children till we were removed into that state of being where there is no possibility of our taking delight in any thing contrary to the pure principle of universal love.

As that natural desire of superiority in us, being given way to, extends to such our favourites whom we expect will succeed us, and as the grasping after wealth and power for them adds greatly to the burdens of the poor and increaseth the evil of covetousness in this age, I have often desired in secret that in looking toward posterity we may remember the purity of that rest which is prepared for the Lord’s people, the impossibility of our taking pleasure in any thing distinguishable from universal righteousness, and how vain and weak a thing it is to give wealth and power to such who appear unlikely to apply it to a general good when we are gone.

As Christians, all we possess are the gifts of God. Now in distributing it to others we act as his steward, and it becomes our station to act agreeable to that divine wisdom which he graciously gives to his servants. If the steward of a great family, from a selfish attachment to particulars, takes that with which he is entrusted and bestows it lavishly on some to the injury of others and to the damage of him who employs him, he disunites himself and becomes unworthy of that office.

The true felicity of man in this life, and that which is to come, is in being inwardly united to the fountain of universal love and bliss. When we provide for posterity and make settlements which will not take effect till after we are centered in another state of being, if we therein act contrary to universal love and righteousness, such conduct must arise from a false, selfish pleasure in directing a thing to be done wrong, in which it will be impossible for us to take pleasure at the time when our directions are put in execution. For if we, after such settlement and when too late for an alteration, attain to that purified state which our Redeemer prayed his Father that his people might attain to—of being united to the Father and the Son—a sincere repentance for all things done in a will separate from universal love must precede this inward sanctification; and though in such depth of repentance and reconciliation all sins are forgiven and sorrows removed, that our misdeeds heretofore done could no longer afflict us, yet our partial determinations in favour of such whom we loved in a selfish love could not afford us any pleasure. And if after such selfish settlement our wills continue to

stand in opposition to the fountain of universal light and love, there will be an impassable gulf between the soul and true felicity, nor can anything heretofore done in this separate will afford us pleasure.

## Chapter Eight

To labour for an establishment in divine love where the mind is disentangled from the power of darkness is the great business of man's life. Collecting of riches, covering the body with fine-wrought, costly apparel, and having magnificent furniture operates against universal love and tends to feed self, that to desire these things belongs not to the children of the Light.

He who sent ravens to feed Elijah in the wilderness, and increased the poor widow's small remains of meal and oil, is now as attentive to the necessities of his people as ever, that when he numbers us with his people and saith, "Ye are my sons and daughters" [2 Cor. 6:18]—no greater happiness can be desired by them who know how gracious a Father he is.

The greater part of the necessities of life are so far perishable that each generation hath occasion to labour for them; and when we look toward a succeeding age with a mind influenced by universal love, we endeavour not to exempt some from those cares which necessarily relate to this life, and give them power to oppress others, but desire they may all be the Lord's children and live in that humility and order becoming his family. Our hearts being thus opened and enlarged, we feel content in a use of things as foreign to luxury and grandeur as that which our Redeemer laid down as a pattern.

By desiring wealth for the power and distinction it gives and gathering it on this motive, a person may properly be called a rich man, whose mind is moved by a draft distinguishable from the drawings of the Father and cannot be united to the heavenly society, where God is the strength of their life, before he is delivered from this contrary drawing.

"It is easier," saith our Saviour, "for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" [Mk. 10:25]. Here our Lord uses an instructing similitude, for as a camel considered under that character cannot pass through a needle's eye, so a man who trusteth in riches and holds them for the sake of the power and distinction attending them cannot in that spirit enter the kingdom. Now every part of a camel may be so reduced as to pass through a hole as small as a needle's eye, yet such is the bulk of the creature, and the hardness of its bones and teeth, that it could not be completed without much labour. So man must cease from that spirit which craves riches, and be reduced into another disposition, before he inherits the kingdom, as effectually as a camel must cease from the form of a camel in passing through the eye of a needle.

When our Saviour said to the rich youth, "Go sell that thou hast and give to the poor" [Mk. 10:21], though undoubtedly it was his duty to have done so, yet to confine this of selling all as a duty on every true Christian would be to limit the Holy One. Obedient children who are entrusted with much outward substance wait for wisdom to dispose of it agreeable to his will, in whom "the fatherless findeth mercy" [Hos. 14:3]. It may not be the duty of every one to commit at once their substance to other hands, but rather from time to time to look round amongst the numerous branches of the great family, as his stewards who said, "Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me" [Jer. 49:11]. But as disciples of Christ, however entrusted with much goods, they may not conform to sumptuous or luxurious living. For if possessing great treasures had been a sufficient reason to make a fine show in the world, then Christ our Lord, who had an unfailing storehouse, and in a way surpassing the common operations in nature supplied thousands of people with food, would not have lived in so much plainness.

What we equitably possess is a gift from God to us; but by the Son all things were created. Now he who forms things out of nothing—who creates and, having created, doth possess—is more truly rich than he who possesseth by receiving gifts from another. If depth of knowledge and a high title had been sufficient reasons to make a splendid show, he would have made it. He told the woman of Samaria sundry things relative to her past life, made mention of the decease of Lazarus, and answered the scribe who accounted him a blasphemer, without information, and having the spirit without measure knew what was in man. The title of Lord he owned, nor was it ever more justly given to any—that in riches and wisdom and greatness there was none on earth equal to him; and as he lived in perfect plainness and simplicity, the greatest in his family cannot by virtue of their station claim a right to live in worldly grandeur without contradicting his doctrine who said: "It is enough for the disciple to be as his master" [Mt. 10:25].

## Chapter Nine

When our eyes are so single as to discern the selfish spirit clearly, we behold it the greatest of all tyrants. Many thousand innocent people under some of the Roman emperors, being confirmed in the truth of Christ's religion from the powerful effects of his Holy Spirit upon them, and scrupling to conform to heathenish rites, were therefore, by various kinds of cruel and lingering torments, put to death, as is largely set forth by Eusebius. Now if we single out Domitian, Nero, or any other of these persecuting emperors, the man, though terrible in his time, will appear a tyrant of small consequence compared with the selfish spirit. For though his bounds were large, yet a great part of the world were out of his reach; and though he grievously afflicted the bodies of those innocent people, yet the minds of many were divinely supported in their greatest agonies and being faithful unto death were delivered from his tyranny. His reign though cruel for a time was soon over, and he, considered in his greatest pomp, appears to have been a slave to the selfish spirit. Thus tyranny, as applied to a man, rises up and soon hath an end. But if we consider the numerous oppressions in many states and the calamities occasioned by nation contending with nation in various parts and ages of the world, and remember that selfishness hath been the original cause of them all; if we consider that such who are finally possessed with this selfish spirit not only afflict others but are afflicted themselves and have no real quietness in this life nor in futurity, but according to the saying of Christ have their portion in that uneasy condition "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" [Mk. 9:48]; under all these circumstances how terrible does this selfishness appear?

If we consider the havoc that is made in this age, and how numbers of people are hurried on, striving to collect treasures to please that mind which wanders from perfect resignedness, and in that wisdom which is foolishness with God are perverting the true use of things, labouring as in the fire, contending with one another even unto blood, and exerting their power to support ways of living foreign to the life of one wholly crucified to the world; if we consider what great numbers of people are employed in different kingdoms in preparing the materials of war, and the labour and toil of armies set apart for protecting their respective territories from the incursions of others, and the extensive miseries which attend their engagements; while many of those who till the lands and are employed in other useful things—in supporting themselves, supporting those employed in military affairs, and some who own the soil—have great hardships to encounter through too much labour; while others in several kingdoms are busied in fetching men to help labour from distant parts of the world, to spend the remainder of their lives in the uncomfortable condition of slaves, and that self is at the bottom of these proceedings—amidst all this confusion, and these scenes of sorrow and distress, can we remember the Prince of Peace, remember that we are his disciples, and remember that example of humility and plainness which he set for us, without feeling an earnest desire to be disentangled from everything connected with selfish customs in food, in raiment, in houses, and all things else; that being of Christ[']s family and walking as he walked, we may stand in that uprightness wherein man was first made, and have no fellowship with those inventions which men in the fallen wisdom have sought out. In the selfish spirit standeth idolatry. Did our blessed Redeemer enable his family to endure great reproaches, and suffer cruel torments even unto death, for their testimony against the idolatry of those times; and can we behold the prevalence of idolatry though under a different appearance, without being jealous over ourselves lest we unwarily join in it?

Those faithful martyrs refused to cast incense into the fire, though by doing it they might have escaped a cruel death. Casting sweet-scented matter into the fire to make a comfortable smell—this considered separate from all circumstances—would appear to be of small consequence; but as they would thereby have signified their approbation of idolatry, it was necessarily refused by the faithful. Nor can we in any degree depart from pure universal righteousness and publicly continue in that which is not agreeable to the Truth, without strengthening the hands of the unrighteous and doing that which in the nature of the thing is like offering incense to an idol.

Origen, a primitive Christian, it is reported of him that in a time of unwatchfulness, being under great difficulty, he took incense into his hand, and a certain heathen to forward the work took hold of his hand and cast the incense into the fire on the altar, and that through thus far complying, he was released from his outward troubles, but afterward greatly bewailed his condition as one fallen from a good estate to that which was worse. Thus it appears that a small degree of deliberate compliance to that which is wrong is very dangerous, and the case of Origen carries in it an admonition worthy of our notice.

## Chapter Ten

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” [Mt. 10:29].

The way of carrying on wars, common in the world, is so far distinguishable from the purity of Christ’s religion that many scruple to join in them. Those who are so redeemed from the love of the world as to possess nothing in a selfish spirit, their “life is hid with Christ in God” [Col. 3:3], and these he preserves in resignedness, even in times of commotion. As they possess nothing but what pertains to his family, anxious thoughts about wealth or dominion hath little or nothing in them to work upon, and they learn contentment in being disposed of according to his will who, being omnipotent and always mindful of his children, causeth all things to work for their good. But where that spirit which loves riches works, and in its working gathers wealth and cleaves to customs which have their root in selfpleasing, this spirit, thus separating from universal love, seeks help from that power which stands in the separation; and whatever name it hath, it still desires to defend the treasures thus gotten. This is like a chain where the end of one link encloses the end of another. The rising up of a desire to attain wealth is the beginning. This desire being cherished moves to action, and riches thus gotten please self, and while self hath a life in them it desires to have them defended.

Wealth is attended with power, by which bargains and proceedings contrary to universal righteousness are supported; and here oppression, carried on with worldly policy and order, clothes itself with the name of justice and becomes like a seed of discord in the soil; and as this spirit which wanders from the pure habitation prevails, so the seed of war swells and sprouts and grows and becomes strong, till much fruits are ripened. Thus cometh the harvest spoken of by the prophet, which is “a heap in the day of grief, and of desperate sorrow” [Is. 17:11].

Oh, that we who declare against wars and acknowledge our trust to be in God only, may walk in the Light and therein examine our foundation and motives in holding great estates! May we look upon our treasures and the furniture of our houses and the garments in which we array ourselves and try whether the seeds of war have any nourishment in these our possessions or not. Holding treasures in the self-pleasing spirit is a strong plant, the fruit whereof ripens fast. A day of outward distress is coming and divine love calls to prepare against it! Harken then, Oh ye children who have known the Light, and come forth! Leave everything which our Lord Jesus Christ does not own. Think not his pattern too plain or too coarse for you. Think not a small portion in this life too little, but let us live in his spirit and walk as he walked, and he will preserve us in the greatest troubles.

## Chapter Eleven

“The heavens, even the heavens, are the Lord’s, but the earth hath he given to the children of men.” Ps. 115:16.

As servants of God, what land or estate we hold, we hold under him as his gift; and in applying the profits it is our duty to act consistent with the design of our benefactor. Imperfect men may give on motives of misguided affection, but Perfect Wisdom and Goodness gives agreeable to his own nature. Nor is this gift absolute, but conditional, for us to occupy as dutiful children and not otherwise, for he alone is the proprietor. “The world,” saith he, “is mine, and the fullness thereof.” Ps. 24:1. The inspired Lawgiver directed that such of the Israelites who sold their inheritance should sell it for a term only, and that they or their children should again enjoy it in the Year of Jubilee, settled on every fiftieth year. “The land shall not be sold forever, for the land is mine,” saith the Lord, “for ye are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev. 25:23), the design of which was to prevent the rich from oppressing the poor by too much engrossing the land. And our blessed Redeemer said: “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled” [Mt. 5:18]

Where divine love takes place in the hearts of any people, and they steadily act on a principle of universal righteousness, there the true intent of the Law is fulfilled, though their outward modes of proceeding may be distinguishable from one another. But where men are possessed by that spirit hinted at by the prophet, and looking over their wealth, say in their hearts, “Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?” [Amos 6:13]—here they deviate from the divine law and do not account their possessions so strictly God’s, nor the weak and poor entitled to so much of the increase thereof, but that they may indulge their desires in conforming to worldly pomp. And thus where house is joined to house and field laid to field till there is no place, and the poor are thereby straitened, though this be done by bargain and purchase, yet, so far as it



stands distinguished from universal love, so far that woe prefixed by the prophet will accompany their proceedings.

As he who first formed the earth out of nothing was then the true proprietor of it, so he still remains; and though he hath given it to the children of men, so that multitudes of people have had sustenance from it while they continued here, yet he hath never aliened it; but his right to give is as good as at the first, nor can any apply the increase of their possessions contrary to universal love, nor dispose of lands in a way which they know tends to exalt some by oppressing others, without being justly chargeable with usurpation.

## **Chapter Twelve**

If we count back one hundred and fifty years and compare the inhabitants of Great Britain with the natives of North America on the like compass of ground, the natives I suppose would bear a small proportion to the others. On the discovery of this fertile continent, many of those thick-settled inhabitants coming over, the natives generally treated them kindly at the first, and as those brought iron tools and a variety of things convenient for man's use, these gladly embraced the opportunity of traffic and encouraged these foreigners to settle. I speak only of improvements made peaceably.

Thus our gracious Father, who at the same time beholds the situation of all his creatures, hath opened a way from a thick-settled land and given us some room on this. Now if we attentively consider the turning of God's hand in thus far giving us room on this continent, and that the offspring of those ancient possessors of the country (in whose eyes we appear as newcomers) are yet owners and inhabitors of the land adjoining to us; and that their way of life, requiring much room, hath been transmitted to them from their predecessors and probably settled by the custom of a great many ages; under these considerations we may see the necessity of cultivating the lands already obtained of them and applying the increase consistent with true wisdom, so as to accommodate the greatest number of people it is capable of, before we have any right to plead, as members of the one great family, the equity of their assigning to us more of their possessions and living in a way requiring less room.

Did we all walk as became the followers of our blessed Saviour, were all those fruits of our country retained in it which are sent abroad in return for such strong drink, such costly array, and other luxuries which we should then have no use for, and the labour and expense of importing and exporting applied to husbandry and useful trades, a much greater number of people than now reside here might with the divine blessing live comfortably on the lands already granted us by these ancient possessors of the country.

If we faithfully serve God, who hath given us some room on this land, I believe he will make some of us useful amongst them, both in publishing the doctrines of his Son our Saviour, and in pointing out to them the advantages of replenishing the earth and subduing it.

Some I expect will be careful for such poor people abroad who earn their bread in preparing and trading in those things which we, as true disciples living in a plainness like our Heavenly Pattern, should have no use for. But laying aside all superfluities and luxuries, while people are so much thicker settled in some parts than in others, a trade in some serviceable articles may be to mutual advantage and carried on with much more regularity and satisfaction to a sincere Christian than the trade now generally is.

One person in society continuing to live contrary to true wisdom commonly draws others into connection with him; and where these embrace the way this first hath chosen, their proceedings are like a wild vine which, springing from a single seed and growing strong, the branches extend, and their little twining holders twists round all herbs and boughs of trees where they reach, and are so braced and locked in that without much labour or great strength they are not disentangled. Thus these customs, small in their beginning, as they increase they promote business and traffic, and many depend on them for a living. But as it is evident that all business which hath not its foundation in true wisdom is unbecoming a faithful follower of Christ, who loves God not only with all his heart, but with all his strength and ability to labour and act in the world; and as the Lord is able to, and will, support those whose hearts are perfect toward him, in a way agreeable to his unerring wisdom; it becomes us to meditate on the privileges of his children, to remember that where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, and that in joining to customs which we know are wrong, there is a departing from the purity of his government and a certain degree of alienation from him.

To lay aside curious, costly attire, and use that only which is plain and serviceable, to cease from all superfluities and too much strong drink, are agreeable to the doctrines of our blessed Redeemer, and if in the

integrity of our hearts we do so, we in some degree contribute toward lessening that business which hath its foundation in a wrong spirit; and as some well-inclined people are entangled in such business and at times desirous of being freed from it, such our ceasing from these things may be made helpful to them; and though for a time their business fail, yet if they humbly ask wisdom of God and are truly resigned to him, he will not fail them nor forsake them. He who created the earth and hath provided sustenance for millions of people in past ages is now as attentive to the necessities of his children as ever. To press forward toward perfection is our duty, and if herein we lessen some business by which some poor people earn their bread, the Lord who calls to cease from these things will take care of those whose business fails by it, if they sincerely seek to him.

If the connections we have with the inhabitants of those provinces and our interest considered as distinct from others engage us to promote plain living in order to enrich our own country, though a plain life is in itself best, yet by living plain in a selfish spirit we advance not forward in true religion. Divine love, which enlarges the heart toward mankind universally, is that alone which can rightly stop every corrupt stream and open those channels of business and commerce where nothing runs that is not pure, and so establish our goings that when in our labour we meditate on the universal love of God and the harmony of holy angels, this serenity of our minds may never be clouded in remembering that some part of our employment tends to support customs which have their foundation in the self-seeking spirit.

### **Chapter Thirteen**

While our minds are prepossessed in favour of customs distinguishable from perfect purity, we are in danger of not attending with singleness to that Light which opens to our view the nature of universal righteousness.

In the affairs of a thick-settled country are variety of useful employments besides tilling the earth: that for some men to have no more land than is necessary to build on and to answer the occasions relative to the family may consist with brotherhood; and from the various gifts which God hath bestowed on those employed in husbandry, for some to possess and occupy much more than others may likewise. But where any on the strength of their possessions demands such rent or interest as necessitates those who hire of them to a closer application to business than our merciful Father designed for us, this puts the wheels of perfect brotherhood out of order and leads to employments the promoting of which belongs not to the family of Christ, whose example in all parts being a pattern of wisdom, so the plainness and simplicity of his outward appearance may well make us ashamed to adorn our bodies in costly array or treasure up wealth by the least degree of oppression.

The soil yields us support and is profitable for man; and though some possessing a larger share of these profits than others may consist with the harmony of true brotherhood, yet that the poorest people who are honest, so long as they remain inhabitants of the earth, are entitled to a certain portion of these profits, in as clear and absolute a sense as those who inherit much, I believe will be agreed to by those whose hearts are enlarged with universal love.

The first people who inhabited the earth were the first who had possession of the soil. The gracious Creator, and owner of it, gave the fruits thereof for their use. And as one generation passed away, another came and took possession; and thus through many ages, innumerable multitudes of people have been supplied by the fruits of the earth. But our gracious Creator is as absolutely the owner of it as he was when he first formed it out of nothing, before man had possession of it. And though by claims grounded on prior possession great inequality appears amongst men, yet the instructions of the great proprietor of the earth is necessary to be attended to in all our proceedings as possessors or claimers of the profits of the soil.

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” [Ps. 37:23], and those who are thus guided, whose hearts are enlarged in his love, give directions concerning their possessions agreeable thereto; and that claim which stands on universal righteousness is a good right, but the continuance of that right depends on properly applying the profits thereof.

The word right is commonly used relative to our possessions. We say a right of propriety to such a dividend of a province or a clear, indisputable right to the land within such certain bounds. Thus this word is continued as a remembrancer of the original intent of dividing the land by boundaries, and implies that it was designed to be equitably or rightly divided, to be divided according to righteousness. In this—that is, in equity and righteousness—consists the strength of our claims. If we trace an unrighteous claim and find gifts

or grants to be proved by sufficient seals and witnesses, this gives not the claimant a right, for that which is opposite to righteousness is wrong, and the nature of it must be changed before it can be right.

Suppose twenty free men, professed followers of Christ, discovered an island unknown to all other people, and that they with their wives, independent of all others, took possession of it, and dividing it equitably, made improvements and multiplied. Suppose these first possessors, being generally influenced by true love, did with paternal regard look over the increasing condition of the inhabitants, and near the end of their lives gave such directions concerning their respective possessions as best suited the convenience of the whole and tended to preserve love and harmony, and that their successors in the continued increase of people generally followed their pious examples and pursued means the most effectual to keep oppression out of their island. But [suppose] that one of these first settlers, from a fond attachment to one of his numerous sons, no more deserving than the rest, gives the chief of his lands to him, and by an instrument sufficiently witnessed strongly expresses his mind and will. Suppose this son, being landlord to his brethren and nephews, demands such a portion of the fruits of the earth as may supply him and his family and some others; and that these others, thus supplied out of his store, are employed in adorning his buildings with curious engravings and paintings, preparing carriages to ride in, vessels for his house, delicious meats, fine-wrought apparel, and furniture, all suiting that distinction lately arisen between him and the other inhabitants; and that having this absolute disposal of these numerous improvements, his power so increaseth that in all conferences relative to the public affairs of the island, those plain, honest men who are zealous for equitable establishments find great difficulty in proceeding agreeable to their righteous inclinations while he stands in opposition to them. Suppose he, from a fondness for one of his sons, joined with a desire to continue this grandeur under his own name, confirms chief of his possessions to him, and thus for many ages, on near a twentieth part of the island there is one great landlord and the rest generally poor oppressed people; to some of whom from the manner of their education, joined with a notion of the greatness of their predecessors, labour is disagreeable; who therefore by artful applications to the weakness, unguardedness, and corruption of others, in striving to get a living out of them increase the difficulties amongst them; while the inhabitants of the other parts who guard against oppression and with one consent train up their children in plainness, frugality, and useful labour live more harmonious.

If we trace the claim of the ninth or tenth of these great landlords down to the first possessor and find the claim supported throughout by instruments strongly drawn and witnessed, after all we could not admit a belief into our hearts that he had a right to so great a portion of land, after such a numerous increase of inhabitants.

The first possessor of that twentieth part held no more we suppose than an equitable portion; but when the Lord, who first gave these twenty men possession of this island unknown to all others, gave being to numerous people who inhabited this twentieth part, whose natures required the fruits thereof for their sustenance, this great claimer of the soil could not have a right to the whole, to dispose of it in gratifying his irregular desires; but they, as creatures of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth, had a right to part of what this great claimer held, though they had no instruments to confirm their right.

Thus oppression in the extreme appears terrible, but oppression in more refined appearances remains to be oppression, and where the smallest degree of it is cherished it grows stronger and more extensive: that to labour for a perfect redemption from this spirit of oppression is the great business of the whole family of Christ Jesus in this world.

## **Chapter Fourteen**

### **ON SCHOOLS**

When we are thoroughly instructed in the kingdom of God, we are content with that use of things which his wisdom points out, both for ourselves and our children, and are not concerned to learn them the art of getting rich, but are careful that the love of God and a right regard for all their fellow creatures may possess their minds, and that in all their learning their improvements may go forward in pure wisdom. Christ our Shepherd being abundantly able and willing to instruct his family in all things proper for them to know, it remains to be our duty to wait patiently for his help in teaching our families and not seek to forward them in learning by the assistance of that spirit from which he gave his life to redeem us.

It was his own saying that the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of Light, and it appears by experience that in awakening and cherishing the spirit of pride and the love of praise in

children they may sometimes be brought on in learning faster than they would otherwise; but while in learning any art or science they accustom themselves to disobey the pure Spirit and grow strong in that wisdom which is foolishness with God, they must have the painful labour of unlearning a part of what they thus learned, before they are adopted into the divine family. It is therefore good for us in schools and in all parts of education to attend diligently to the principle of universal Light, and patiently wait for their improvement in the channel of true wisdom, without endeavouring to get help from that spirit which seeks honour from men. (It is through a deviation from the pure Light that people desire help from the spirit of this world in pushing forward their children in learning, that they may save out of their education to support ways of life less plain and simple than what our Holy Pattern has laid down for us.) Children in an age fit for schools are in a time of life that requires the careful and patient attendance of their tutors, and such a diligent observation of their several tempers and dispositions as that they may be enabled rightly and seasonably to administer to each individual.

Were we thoroughly weaned from the love of wealth and fully brought out of all superfluities in living, employments about vanities being finished and labour wanted only for things consistent with a humble, self-denying life, there would on a reasonable estimate be so much to spare on the education of our children that a plain, humble man with a family like himself might be furnished with a living for teaching and overseeing so small a number of children that he might properly and seasonably administer to each individual, and gently lead them on as the Gospel Spirit opened the way, without giving countenance to pride or evil emulation amongst them.

The management of children being sometimes committed to men who do not live under the seasoning virtue of Truth is a case that requires our serious consideration, for that it is our indispensable duty to use our utmost endeavours in their education to bring them into an acquaintance with the inward work of grace; and where a tutor is not experienced in this work, their spirit and conduct in directing and ordering the children does often make impressions on their tender, inexperienced minds to their great disadvantage.

Again, where pious men enter into this employ, they sometimes find it difficult to support their families without taking charge of so great a number that they cannot so fully attend to the spirit and disposition of each individual as would be profitable to the children. A large number of children in a school is often a heavy weight on the mind of an honest tutor, and when his thoughts and time are so much taken up in the more outward affairs of the school that he cannot so attend to the spirit and temper of each individual as to administer rightly and seasonably in the line of true judgment, there the minds of children often suffer and a wrong spirit gains strength, which frequently increases difficulties in a school and like an infection spreads from one to another.

A man influenced by the spirit of Truth, employing his time in tutoring children, while he hath only such a number that the manifestation of divine strength in him is superior to the instability in them, this good spirit in which he governs does measurably work on their minds and tends to bring them forward in the Christian life. But where the straitness of a man's circumstances, joined with the small wages set on teaching children, proves a temptation and so enters into his heart that he takes charge of too many for the measure of his gift, or where the desire for wealth so corrupts the heart of any that they take charge of too many, here the true order of a Christian education is lost. But where a man hath charge of a number too great for that degree of strength with which the Lord hath endowed him, he not only suffers as to the state of his own mind, but the children suffer also; and government not being supported in the true Christian spirit, the pure witness is not reached in the minds of the children.

To educate children in the way of true piety and virtue is a duty incumbent on all of us who have them; and our Heavenly Father requires no duties of us but what he gives strength to perform, as we humbly seek to him: that though to the eye of reason the difficulties appear great in many places which attend instructing our children in useful learning, yet if we obediently attend to that wisdom which is from above, our gracious Father will open a way for us to give them such an education as he requires of us.

And here I may say that my mind hath been sorrowfully affected on account of some who from a desire for wealth, a desire to conform in living to those ways distinguishable from the true Christian spirit, exert themselves in things relating to this life, and do not enough lay to heart the suffering condition of youth in many places, through want of pious examples and tutors whose minds are seasoned with the spirit of Truth.

Are great labours performed to gain wealth for posterity? Are many supported with wages to furnish us with delicacies and luxuries?

Are monies expended for colours to please the eye, which renders our garments less serviceable? Are garments of a curious texture purchased at a high rate, for the sake of their delicacy?

Are there various branches of workmanship only ornamental—in the building of our houses, hanging by our walls and partitions, and to be seen in our furniture and apparel? And amidst all these expenses which the pure Truth does not require of us, do we send our children to men to get learning who we believe are not influenced by the spirit of Truth, rather than humbly wait on the Lord for wisdom to direct us in their education?

To commit children to the tuition of men who we believe are not rightly qualified to lead them on in the true Christian life, I believe no pious man will say is required of us as a duty. To do evil that good may come of it is contrary to the doctrine of Christianity; that when times are so cloudy that we cannot go forward in the way of clearness and purity, it behooves us in the depth of humility to wait on the Lord to know his mind concerning us and our children.

## **Chapter Fifteen**

### **ON MASTERS AND SERVANTS**

“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.” Eph. 6:5.

It is observable in several places where the apostle writes to servants that he labours: to direct their minds to the true Light, that in labouring in the condition of servants they might as the apostle expresseth it, “do the will of God from the heart” (Eph. 6:6), that their labours might not be like those of men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart fearing God, and that in whatsoever they did they might “do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” Col. 3:23.

As the pure principle of righteousness is the foundation whereon the pure in heart stand, so their proceedings are consistent herewith; and while they encourage to an upright performance of every reasonable duty on one hand, they guard on the other against servants actively complying with unrighteous commands, doing service “as to the Lord and not unto men” (verse 7), by which we are instructed in the necessity of a humble walking before God, that by faithfully attending on the leadings of his Holy Spirit, our senses may be “exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb.5:14). And that as the righteous commands of masters ought to be obeyed because they were righteous, so on the contrary, such commands of men which could not be performed without disobeying God were not sufficient authority for a servant of Christ to proceed upon, but herein we ought to obey God rather than men.

The present concern of my mind is that all who are in the station of masters may seriously consider this subject and demand nothing of servants which is unreasonable, or that in the performance of which they must necessarily act contrary to universal righteousness.

A pious father hath a conscientious care for his children, that by his labours they may be rightly educated and have some things which necessarily relate to their first settling in the world. But where a man seeth his righteous intentions perverted and his labours made to serve purposes which are not equitable and hath no hopes of a remedy, his case is very grievous; for here however disposed to labour, he cannot labour “heartily as to the Lord and not unto men.”

To comply with demands which are not equitable is afflicting to a well-disposed mind, and for a man in power to demand service of another without proposing an equitable reward appears to me to have the spirit of persecution in it. Upright men labouring in temporal affairs have in view to do good thereby; they labour because they are convinced it is their duty. But where labours; not equitably due are required of them to gratify the covetous, luxurious, or ambitious designs of others, this lays conscientious men under great difficulty. If they comply not, they are liable to punishment, and if they do that which they believe is not right for them to do, they wound their own souls.

## **Chapter Sixteen**

To keep Negroes as servants till they are thirty years of age and hold the profits of the last nine years of their labour as our own, on a supposition that they may sometime be an expense to our estates, is a way of proceeding which appears to admit of improvement.

## REASONS OFFERED

1. Men of mature age who have walked orderly and made no contract to serve—that they are entitled to freedom I expect is generally agreed to, and to make them serve as slaves nine years longer may be to keep them slaves for term of life. They may die before that age and be no expense to us, and may leave children to whom, with reason, they might in their last sickness desire to give the monies they had earned after they had paid for their own education.

2. The labour of a healthy, industrious Negro man for nine years, I suppose at a moderate computation, may not be less than fifty pounds proclamation money, besides his diet and clothing. Now if this money be earned either in the service of the man who educated him or laid by in yearly proportion under the care of the said man, and put out at a moderate interest for the Negro's use, and to be applied to his future necessities or to such honest purposes as he by his last will might direct, this would appear to us a more brotherly way of proceeding were we in the Negro's condition.

3. Pure goodness tendeth to beget its own likeness; and where men are convinced that the conduct of those who have power over them is equitable, it naturally yields encouragement for them to provide against old age. The pure witness being reached, a care is thereby incited that they may not become a burden on the estates of those whom they have found to be honest men and true friends to them. But where men have laboured without wages nine years longer than is common with other men amongst whom they dwell, and then set free, and at going off are assured that those who so detained them are largely in their debt, but expect not to recover the debt except they become needy when unable to help themselves such would naturally be induced to think this treatment unbrotherly, to think of the reasonableness of their wages being some time paid, to think that the estate in which they laboured might reasonably assist them in old age, and thus be tempted to decline from a wise application to business.

4. If I see a man want relief and know he hath money in my hands which must some time be paid with reasonable use, either to him or to others by his direction, there appears in this case no temptation to withhold it at the time I saw that he wanted it. But if selfishness so far prevailed in me that I looked upon the money which I had in trust with a desire to keep it from the true owner, and through the strength of desire joined with expectation, at length so far considered it a part of my estate as to apply it in promoting myself or my family in the world, and therewith entered into expenses which a humble follower of Christ might have shunned—here, by joining with one temptation there is great danger of falling into more, and of not attending to the wants of the man who had monies in my hands with that care and diligence as I might have done had the tempter found no entrance into my mind.

5. If we righteously account for the monies which we have in security, with a reasonable use thereon, and frugally expend the whole in relieving the man who earned it; and more being wanted, the public refuseth to bear any part of the expense; if our estates have not been benefited aforetime by the labours of his fathers nor ancestors, this appears to be a case wherein the righteous suffer for the testimony of a good conscience, and from which if faithfully attended to they might in time, I trust, hope for relief.

6. The Negroes have been a suffering people, and we as a civil society are they by whom they have suffered. Now where persons have been injured as to their outward substance and died without having recompense, their children appear to have a right to that which was equitably due to and detained from their fathers. My heart is affected with sorrow while I write on this subject, on account of the great injuries committed against these Gentiles, and against their children who have been born in that captivity which is an unrighteous captivity. When the ancestors of these people were imported from Africa, some I believe bought them with intent to treat them kindly as slaves. They bought them as though those violent men had a right to sell them, but I believe without weightily considering the nature and tendency of such a bargain, and thus building on an unrighteous foundation, a veil was gradually drawn over a practice very grievous and afflicting to great numbers of the Gentiles. A care is now reviving in many places that this veil may be yet further removed, and that this disorder may be searched to the bottom; and my concern is that we may not only bear in mind that the Negroes have been a suffering people under us as a civil society, but that we may in true humiliation feel for that pure influence which alone is able to guide us in the way where healing and restoration is experienced.

7. Having thus far spoken of the Negroes as equally entitled to the benefit of their labour with us, I feel it on my mind to mention that debt which is due to many Negroes of the present age. Where men within certain limits are so formed into a society as to become like a large body consisting of many members,

here whatever injuries are done to others not of this society by members of this society, if the society in whose power it is doth not use all reasonable endeavours to execute justice and judgment, nor publicly disown those unrighteous proceedings, the iniquities of individuals becomes chargeable on such civil society to which they remain united. And where persons have been injured as to their outward substance and died without having recompense, so that their children are kept out of that which was equitably due to their parents, here such children appear to be justly entitled to receive recompense from that civil society under which their parents suffered.

My heart is affected with sorrow while I write on this subject, on account of the great injuries committed against these Gentiles and against their children born in captivity. Had the active members in civil society when those injuries were first attempted united in a firm opposition to those violent proceedings, had others in a selfish spirit attempted the like afterward and met with a firm opposition, and been made to do justice to the injured persons till the prospect of gain by such unrighteous proceedings appeared so doubtful that no further attempts had been made—how much better had it been for these American colonies and islands?

Some, I believe, bought those poor sufferers with intent to treat them kindly as slaves. They bought them as though these violent men had had a right to sell them, but, I believe, without entering deep enough into the consideration of the consequence of such proceedings. Others, I believe, bought them with views of outward ease and profit; and thus those violent men found people of reputation who purchased their booty and built on that purchase as a foundation to exercise the authority of masters, and thus encouraged them in this horrible trade, till their proceedings were so far approved by civil society as to consider those men as members without proceeding to punish them for their crimes; and hence a veil was in some measure drawn over a practice the most foreign to righteousness, and the face of things so disguised that under the most lamentable injustice but few appeared to be alarmed at it or zealously labour to have justice done to the sufferers and their posterity.

These poor Africans were people of a strange language and not easy to converse with, and their situation as slaves too generally destroyed that brotherly freedom which frequently subsists between us and inoffensive strangers. In this adverse condition, how reasonable is it to suppose that they would revolve in their distressed minds the iniquities committed against them and mourn!—mourn without any to comfort them?

Though through gradual proceedings in unrighteousness dimness hath come over many minds, yet the nature of things are not altered. Long oppression hath not made oppression consistent with brotherly love, nor length of time through several ages made recompense to the posterity of those injured strangers. Many of them lived and died without having their suffering case heard, and determined according to equity; and under a degree of sorrow on account of the wantonness, the vanity, and superfluity too common amongst us as a civil society, even while a heavy load of unrighteous proceedings lies upon us, do I now under a feeling of universal love and in a fervent concern for the real interest of my fellow members in society, as well as the interest of my fellow creatures in general, express these things.

Suppose an inoffensive youth, forty years ago, was violently taken from Guinea, sold here as a slave, laboured hard till old age, and hath children who are now living. Though no sum may properly be mentioned as an equal reward for the total deprivation of liberty, yet if the sufferings of this man be computed at no more than fifty pounds, I expect candid men will suppose it within bounds, and that his children have an equitable right to it.

Fifty pounds at three percent, adding the interest to the principal once in ten years appears in forty years to make upward of one hundred and forty pounds.

Now when our minds are thoroughly divested of all prejudice in relation to the difference of colour, and the love of Christ in which there is no partiality prevails upon us, I believe it will appear that a heavy account lies against us as a civil society for oppressions committed against people who did not injure us, and that if the particular case of many individuals were fairly stated, it would appear that there was considerable due to them.

I conclude with the words of that righteous judge in Israel: “Behold here I am; witness against me before the Lord and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it to you.” 1 Samuel 12:3.

Source: *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, ed. Phillips P. Moulton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); originally published posthumously 1793, but believed to have been written around 1763-64. I read this text at first in its first edition at Pendle Hill. It is one of the deepest texts in the world, like that of Leo Tolstoy's *Christ's Christianity*.