

Roanoke Island, *July 7, 1864*

My Dear Mrs. Leigh:

Again have I seated myself to notify you of our whereabouts, and of the manner in which the Lord has led us. Since I wrote you from Beaufort, my cup has been a mingled one; for the two months last past, afflictions and mercies have been blended, although blessings have largely predominated.

REUNION.

I was made very happy by being permitted to return to Roanoke Island, and here find so many of our Plymouth people; but I could not but feel sad at seeing their destitute condition, and find them again looking to me for clothing, while I was empty-handed, and nearly as destitute as they. I feel that it was just right, that we should be able to sympathize with them in their losses, for, while they come to me from day to day and tell me of their destitution, I now know in some measure what they mean; and I could not heartily and sincerely sympathize with them, and exhort them to trust in God, except I had learned to do so myself. I must acknowledge that, during all my sojourn in Beaufort, it required effort daily to submissively trust. I was continually wondering what we should do if sick; I could trust, while well, but it was necessary for me to be taught to trust under all circumstances, and my Heavenly Father saw fit to lay me upon a bed of sickness, very soon after I returned to the island, in order to teach me the lesson.

USEFUL DISCIPLINE.

I was very sick of malarial fever, so violently was I attacked, that I felt that my work was done on earth, I was entirely prostrated, helpless, as an infant, and yet, God raised up kind friends to watch over me as tenderly as though I had been among those friends who have known me at home. Surely, "His goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life." I did not know how little we really need before, even in sickness. I feel that the lessons that I have learned are invaluable. I think that God's dealings with me are just what I needed to fit me for usefulness in the important work in which he has called me to labor. His precious nearness to me, in sickness which, at the time, I felt was to lead me through the "Dark Valley," has given me an assurance of his willingness to be with me, and care for me, and I now feel that I can meet these poor, disheartened, discouraged people, and earnestly urge them to trust in God, under all circumstances, and although I can do nothing else for them, I can do that with an earnestness which I have never had before. My recovery has been very rapid, almost miraculously so; I am now very well, and nearly as strong as before my sickness, am able to labor constantly. We are very happy in our home. The weather is oppressively warm yet our home is so pleasantly situated on the shore of the sound, that we feel but little inconvenience, except at noon-day, when we keep within doors as much as possible.

CASES OF SUFFERING

I find here much destitution, and suffering in consequence, and am many times in the day made to feel thankful that it is warm weather. I hope, ere winter approaches, we shall have the

means at hand of relieving some of the destitution, or numbers must perish. I could tell you of many scenes that would touch your sympathies, but it would be the oft-told tale, and I forbear.

ORPHAN ASYLUM NEEDED

The homeless ones, the orphans, excite my own sympathies most. I hope, before winter comes, we will have for them a home, an asylum, where they can be made comfortable, and instructed in those truths that shall make them free.

JIM

One bright little boy was brought to me this morning, with nothing but the remnant of an old flannel shirt to cover him, he had been abandoned by those who brought him from slavery, has neither father or mother, says his name is Jim, and they sold his mammy away from him, when he first heard tell of the Yankees. I asked him what he could do, he says, "I can pull weeds and grass for pigs, right smart, and hold the calves while they milk the cows." But when I asked him, who made him, his reply was "I never hearn tell." I have set Aunt Sarah at work with him with a tub of water, soap, fine comb, and scissors, and I must set my wits at work to find something to cover him with. He appears to be about six years of age, is black and very bright.

Friday noon, July 8th.

I have been interrupted, or otherwise so closely engaged, that I have been unable to resume my pen. Our Jim is at length fitted out in a new suit of clothes. But alas the labor it has cost; his little pants consist of twelve pieces, but he is clean and tidily clad, and very happy, so much so, that we do not know how to part with him; he follows me step by step, quietly watching an opportunity to do something for me, and when asked now what he can do proudly answers: "I can wait upon Mrs. Freeman." Oh, that I had a house large enough to take all the homeless ones. But I know, my Father's house is large enough: "There is room enough, and to spare."

I must stop here to tell you how glad the arrival of the mail has made me, by bringing letters from many friends, and, among others, Mr. Leigh's kind letter, so full of sympathy, and kindness, accompanying my brother's, which led me to exclaim involuntarily: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." I fear, that my friends have had too much anxiety on my account. I hope they will constantly keep before their minds, and the public mind, the wants of these poor down-trodden people. I fear much more for them than for myself: for I fear the increasing magnitude of the wants on this island will be lost sight of, in contemplation of other and larger fields. This, at present, is the only safe asylum in all North Carolina, and God is lifting the yoke, and soon I feel that there will be a great rush of those who are held by the last firm grasp of expiring slavery.

Yours truly,
S. P. Freeman.

[“Roanoke Island: Letter From Mrs. Freeman,” *The Freedmen's Advocate* 1 (August 1864): 25-26.]