

Letter from Charlotte Cowles to Samuel Cowles, April 12, 1841. The original letter is in the collection of the Connecticut Historical Society. The transcription is courtesy of the Connecticut Historical Society.

Mr. Samuel S. Cowles.

Hartford—

Conn.

Farmington April 12. 1841.

My dear good brother,

I am very glad if my account of the Africans has given you any pleasure, but pray what did you and your “few friends” think of the description of Banyeh? After it was finished, I thought I had been foolish to say so much, but you know when I admire, I love to lavish words. And the distance between an American young lady and a half-wild African boy is certainly sufficient to allow the former to admire the latter, if she will — so let that go.

Did I speak to you of the portrait of Cinque? Is it not splendid? He and all of them are highly delighted with it. If it were a mere fancy piece, it would be valuable as a specimen of the art; but the likeness is perfect, and the attitude most imposing — yet not too much so for him. The rest of the picture, which depended upon the artist’s taste, is all most admirable; the dress, the bamboo, and the African scenery in the back-ground. When it was shown to Cinque, he said, “oh, good, good.” I do not wonder he did.

They are extremely observing of the manners of white people, and very critical in their remarks upon them too. They know as well as we do who are ladies and gentlemen and who are not. They have been much annoyed by the multitudes

of people who have gone in to see them, and sometimes their patience can bear no more — at least Cinque's cannot. When persons come in whom he does not like, he will open the door and say, "go away, go away — What you come for? We no want you." But Mr Booth says that he really cannot reprove them for it, when their visitors are more unmannerly than they are, asking them all sorts of questions, many of which they have answered a thousand times before. One day Kinna said to him, "Mr Booth, suppose you go Mendi. Man say, Mr Booth, what your wife name? You go little way, another man say, Mr Booth, what your wife name? You go little more, another man say, Mr Booth, what your wife name? You like that Mr Booth?" Kinna did not refer to himself, but to Cinque, who has been much tried by the repetition of this question.

I need not add that it is very gratifying to them to have those whom they know to be their friends come and see them, and those with whom we are best acquainted are usually willing to talk with us on any subject. But their prudence and caution in avoiding the inquiries of strangers are really wonderful. If there is no other escape, they can pretend not to understand English. The feeling is very common, and I confess I had it myself until I saw so much of them, that such untutored beings cannot have those feelings of delicacy and sensitiveness that we possess; but they certainly have. They were talking the other day about going to church, and asking "what for white lady look so?" imitating the stretching and reaching of people to see them. One of the oldest and gravest of them said, "me know, they look see who look pretty."

Many persons still think that they are perfectly careless and happy here, because they are usually cheerful, but those who are acquainted with them know better. They have sad, sad days, when it is difficult for them to think of any thing but Mendi Land, and often they seem to feel that it is very uncertain which of them ever see it again. Kinna said the other day to Mr Booth, "long time before we go back. One man die — another man die — another — another — he no see Mendi any more. Oh we no know when we see Mendi." One of the most affectionate and

reflecting is the elder Fouli. Here is an exact copy of a note he gave to Mr Booth last Friday morning, written of course entirely spontaneously. That was rather a melancholy day with them all.

Dear mr Booth I will tell you some things what I think to day I think About my father and mother and my brothers and friend all them. I think About him to day so I feel sorry to Day I cannot tell for mendi people all my mind think so Dear teacher that all I tell you to Day I feel sorry to Day.

Though there is only one point of any kind, I think it will be easily understood, except perhaps the last line but one: to make the sense there should be periods after “all” and “so,” or “all” should be placed before “Mendi” and “my” emphasized.

Oh, how father would have loved them, and how much he would have done for them! Every time they come here we are reminded of that, and take the more pleasure in seeing them.

One evening, Kenyeh told us a great deal about her adventures, all the way from Mendi to Farmington. She said that at Lomboko she was burnt upon her shoulder with a red-hot pipe. I asked her to let me see the spot, not at all doubting her word. She looked up at me and said, You think me tell lie? you look then. And true enough, there is the scar, exactly the size and form of a pipe-bowl. Oh, we read and we talk about these things, but as long as we do not see the victims, we know nothing of them.

I really did not think of writing you another long letter on this subject so soon, but I could not stop. I hope we shall see you here on Wednesday, and Clarice Thursday evening, as you propose. Then we can tell you more than we can write.— Miss Sarah Porter has made me a very handsome offer to come to Phila. next fall and take Mary with me, but I shall not think of going. My place for the present is here and I wish to go no where else. — I am sorry to trouble you with another

errand, but it is unavoidable. Catharine Williams and Elizabeth Bodwell began to attend my school last week, and both are in immediate want of Pinnock's Goldsmith's England, latest edition. I did not know until yesterday that they were depending upon me to send for them. If you could bring them when you come, it will oblige me much.

Ever yours affectionately,

Charlotte L. Cowles

Tuesday morn_April 13_ It is unfortunate for your visit that Mr Booth is to be in New Haven through this week attending the examination of his class. Perhaps however the roads will be so dangerous that you will not be able to leave Hartford. I did not anticipate such a long and severe storm when I wrote yesterday afternoon. I should think there was snow enough for sleighs here now. — No doubt you can see the Africans, but it is losing half not to see them with their teacher. However, that will supply an inducement for you to come again very soon.