

Letter from Charlotte Cowles to Samuel Cowles, April 8, 1841. The original letter is in the collection of the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History. The transcription is courtesy of the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History.

Mr. Samuel S. Cowles.

Hartford—

Conn.

Farmington April 8th 1841.

Thursday evening.

My dear brother,

I received yours this morning. It being rainy yesterday, Sarah Ann did not come to school, and so it was not sent. If I had not supposed from Clarice's letter that you were to be absent all this week, I should have written to you several days since, for there are so many things to tell you about these Africans that I really longed to have you know how we and they are going on. But first, lest I should forget it, — we liked the paper very much, and it was put on last Saturday. The Doctor's family commenced moving Tuesday, and are now a good deal settled. Mrs Seymour seems quite at home here. Sarah Goodman and Charlotte have gone to West Hartford, to return next Monday, when her school commences in the new room.

I do wish you could be here, to enjoy as we do seeing these poor beings. Kenyeh (we have at last learned to spell her name) is very happy with us, and we have become acquainted with the greater part of them for their coming here so much to see her. Every day we have troops of them calling, usually but for a few minutes; and we are all satisfied of one thing at least, — that there is as great

variety of personal appearance and of talent and character among black people as among white. On the afternoons of Saturday and Monday, about sixteen or eighteen of them were here piling wood. You would have been delighted see them. Only two could pile, and all the rest were running and jumping, some carrying two or three sticks at arms' length, some with as much as they could possibly take and one stick in the right hand to drive the others along, and one with a wheelbarrow pretending to run over the rest. After they had worked an hour perhaps, they came down to the house and we gave them some refreshments on Saturday: — the next time we did not, as Mr. Booth objected to it, wishing to have them feel that grateful returns are due from them to their white friends. So they sang Langsyne in the hymn “When I can read my title clear,” insisting upon our singing with them.

We are interested in them all; it is sad how[?] now to think of their forlorn condition in this land of strangers, and most affecting to talk with them, and to see them come in procession to church and sit listening so attentively to the words of life which they can understand so little. I cannot realize that any of them are the same beings whom I saw in the Hartford jail — except and indeed Grab-eau — so changed in their whole appearance, in complexion, manners and even features. They looked then a dusky yellow, like some of our mulattoes, and very disagreeable, but now they are so black and some of them so handsome that I can hardly believe I ever saw them before. I said we were interested in them all, but we have our favorites, of course. And now I want to have you tell me which were your favorites when they were in Hartford, to see if any of them are the same. There was one very slender one, a laughing genius and very bright, whom you pointed out to me, but I cannot remember his name. Pray tell me so that I may look him out.

Kinna is now at the head of affairs next to Cinque, and in many things Cinque takes his advice. It is really wonderful to hear him read, and to see how he understands everything — a day or two since when he was here I asked him to read the seventeenth chapter of John, and looked over him to ask him questions upon the meaning of the verses; but I thought it all too simple to venture to expect so much

doubt of his understanding as to ask him, until he came to the twelfth verse. Then I said, Kinna, who was the son of perdition? "I thought it was Judas," answered he as promptly as any one could have done. I confess I was astonished. He is one of the four whom Mr Booth thinks are sincere Christians; Ceci and Fouli are two of them, and the other I do not remember. The little boy Ka-le we are very much attached to, and also little Fouli, about fifteen or sixteen years of age. Ya-bo-i also comes very often, and we like him very much. He is one of the chief fun-makers of the company. Grab-eau looks and acts just as he used to in Hartford, and he is the only one. Two or three of them sung one of their Mendi songs to us the other day; it is the first time I ever heard a wild song, and the effect was [missing] fine. It was alternate solos and choruses, and many of the cadences were very sweet. — Cinque is as choice of his dignity as ever, yet he is often very affable, but none of them are so easy to converse with as Kinna because he speaks English so much more fluently — He is so modest and gentle too, and every one thinks him very fine-looking. Little Fouli is all animation and yet so timid, and little Ka-le is so very bright, and Ya-bo-i is so full of good humor. — I do not know how to say enough about any of them. But Mary's and my principal favorite, just now at least, is one whom I never heard mentioned. His name is sometimes spelled Ba-gua, but it is entirely unpronounceable, so we call it Banyeh. He is about eighteen, and the most splendid specimen of African beauty I ever saw. I have read in books of this style of beauty, but I never before believed it possible for an African to be very handsome. But if any one sees no beauty in his beaming face and sparkling eyes, all I can say is that their prejudices control their whole souls and even their fancies. If he were painted for an Othello, the whole beau monde would be delighted. The most remarkable thing about him however is a certain dashing elegance of manner which none of the others possess at all — which is indeed the rarest accomplishment in the most polished society. — You will think me very foolish if I expatiate longer. I did not say that he was the most timid of all the creation; it is seldom you can get a sight of him for more than a minute at a time, for as soon as he meets your eye he shrinks away. We do not feel very much acquainted with him, for this reason, although he has

been here very often, but he seems very sprightly and as full of the spirit of gentle kindness as the rest. — Kinna is the one most universally admired, and that he is a genius there is no question. They are all very scrupulously obedient to their teacher, and to their consciences. Their strictness in regard to truth and honesty is almost amusing, it goes so much beyond ours. One of them picked up a newspaper wrapper in the street the other day, and Cinque made him go straight back and lay it down where he found it. — At New Haven, they had family prayers conducted by one of their number night and morning, as their teacher could not be with them, but now that Mr Booth conducts them, they still, of their own accord, continue their own as before, earlier in the morning and later in the evening than his. I believe he did not know this until a week or two since he went to their room one evening after he had left them for the night, and found them assembled and Kinna, praying in English, with so much devotion and propriety, that he could not for some time believe his own senses. They read their bibles a great deal, and five or six of the best scholars study every evening till nine o'clock. — After all, can you begin to realize that these interesting creatures are but a very small specimen of the victims which the merciless slave- trade is every week — now, this very moment — seizing and destroying! The idea of Cinque and Kinna and Banyeh toiling on a plantation seems incredible. I feel that I never had the least conception before of the horrors of that accursed business, or of the mass of misery that exists in this world; and now, how inadequate! — But I must close. I hope you will very soon come and see us and our Mendi friends. Now that Clarice is gone, you can perhaps come with less self-denial. — The Philosophy was just what I wanted and I was glad to find the price so low, for it is a book that ought to be extensively known. Ever yours C.L.C