

November 23, 1863

(Letter with no envelope is on a large sheet of lined stationery folded in half and is written on four sides in ink.)

Stevenson, Ala.
Nov. 23rd, 1863

My Dear Mrs. Bingham;

Yours of the 15th was brought to me this morning while at breakfast – I had not expected so quick a response to mine of recent date & in as much as you have favored me promptly, now that evening affords me a little leisure I propose to test further your disposition – When your missive fell before me I was quizzing my new ebony & receiving some most comical replies – this “boy” – he has a wife & one child somewhere in rebeldom – fell into my family about three days since – He goes by the name of George Washington & was until a month since a “chattel” – He ran away from “Massa” when Sherman’s troops came through Alabama recently, joined the Yankees & now turns up a waiter & cook for your correspondent – He says his former massa made a house servant of him – He helped about the cooking & table – But a few years since he died after which young missus drew him & he became a field hand – Last Christmas – Missus husband being in the rebel army – he was hired out to a planter 20 miles away - & she the missus – took his wife & child away – he knows not whither – The planter who hired him often told him horrid stories about the Yankees – how they were ugly & would kill him – but he “neber blele’d so” – Night before last he asked me to get him a book – that is so he could learn to read – I had suggested no such thing to him & was pleased to promise affirmatively – He appears one of the quiet kind – ignorant as a horse - & yet about practical things with which (*Pg. 2*) he has had to do sufficiently sensible – It is most interesting to probe into the history of these colored fellows – You can soon see the scope of their thoughts & how the condition of their lives has bound them in darkness – Aside from some repulsiveness inseparable from the race they appear to command a decent respect with all – These darkies as a class are not, physiologically, so deficient as I had expected to find – On the contrary – a large majority have good craniums – intelligent faces – act like human beings & seem to appreciate kind treatment – The desire to be free is the deep, absorbing passion, which, twist & cross question them as you please, animates them & in almost every instance a shade of romantic adventure & experience comes out as you gather the story of their efforts – The struggle by which any human creature seeks to achieve a mastery over the evils that enslave or embitter life or degrade character is ever a noble one – We cannot fail, if susceptible of honorable emotions, to admire the aspiration of the humblest to rise – But the cherished wish of these down trodden people to put themselves where they can call their children & wives their own & never fails to kindle my sympathy – And when at last they realize the hour is come to break away from bondage I can not but rejoice to witness the success that rewards the

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attempt – Emancipation is a mighty word – What heart heaving's & intense mental experience – What measures of happiness & grand yearning are embraced in its meaning! Nor to these dusky serviles alone does it signify an expanding & more agreeable future – Such scenes as we witness of “white trash” – Women & children in tatters – coarse – tobacco ruminants – females I mean, that smoke & chew – with all the attendant evidences of a social status that hitherto has had fixed bounds – Emancipation (**Pg. 3**) is a potential word – This class perhaps would deny the statement & refuse to accept my conclusions – But, in my judgment, daily observation of what the whites have suffered from the fact of African slavery calls for as severe condemnation of the system as it merits from considerations affecting only the blacks – The oppressors heel rested not merely upon the necks of Hanes descendants – Japheth's paler skinned offspring also wear a chain where ever a nabob can traffick in & tyrannize over a subordinate race – Nothing is plainer than the blighting footprints by which slavery has traced its progress & influence upon business, social condition – public & private character – in fact everything that enters into the past & present history of this Southern country – But these people are learning a great lesson – I doubt whether any other method would have reached the masses – Every regiment of blue trousers is a schoolmaster & sooner or later no part of the confederacy – or rather of Uncle Sam's rebellious territory but will be reached & occupied by such an instructor –

There are some very comical shades that relieve the many tragic parts inwoven into our life here – It is amusing to see the citizens of this vicinity, men & women, as they daily come into Stevenson – Everybody native, if it is a possible thing, rides horseback – What little produce reaches the market comes horseback – Chickens, tied by the legs & suspended from the saddle or across the horse – corn meal – dried peaches, butter, such as goes by the name – potatoes – in fact anything saleable is transported on horseback – Frequently a woman, or a half dozen - for like their sisters every where they combine for promenades & shopping forays – is seen occupying the saddle – before here is a bag containing this or that article – on one arm is a basket, pail or napkin tied for holding – behind rides a girl or boy (**Pg. 4**) & often him another bag – The woman guides her animal with presence of mind through mud & amid throngs of mule trains & footmen & surrounded by the hurry & roughness incident to army operations carries herself unconcernedly - They mount & dismount but never get unhorsed – The beasts though are perfectly docile & understand the wants of the mistress – The other day I saw a woman, about thirty years old, sitting on the hunches beside what appeared to be her husband & in company with about 20 other men – She as well as they was chewing & spitting tobacco & seemed in no way abashed by her position – Her shoes were coarse & heavy – her dress calico – her bonnet a dirty, plain hood – but no shawl or extra covering – The party had come in from the mountains – were union people – she as much as they – for I heard expressions of satisfaction at the sight of some rebel prisoners - & probably in her sphere she acted up to the light & privileges accorded to her station – In many respects this case is a sample one representing poor southern women – I confess that my appreciation of New England maids & matrons suffers not by comparison with such

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specimens of chivalric production – for she is an indirect scion or rather fruit of “the Institution” – Hope you of the gentler sex North will not be enviously ambitious because your copartners down in these regions can puff a cigar & eject strong saliva –

After spinning so long a tale I bethink me that you asked several questions – I like soldiering here just about as well I did in Va. – Mud – horrors that is everywhere – at least in all places to which the army goes – Stevenson is not considered a very healthy place – but up at Chattanooga & among the mountains circumstances are favorable to health – But where ever we go I guess the army does its part of the dying – My health is good – had a few days of bowel looseness soon after coming here, but since enlisting I have not reported sick for a single day – I am no longer a member of Co. E – Took my new command Oct. 23rd, the day my commission arrived – Co. K is a good company & I hope to make it better – It is not so homogeneous as E – Have a good many nationalities represented besides New Britain – Really, can’t I claim a residence in your place on the strength of connection with some of your patriotic volunteers? Southington is so meanly copperheadish I feel ashamed of her - Mr. Bingham’s advice, not to get killed, is pertinent – If the rebs miss the mark as they did at Chancellorsville I am safe – But they shot very near – Don’t believe the bullet is made that shall take my life – But God reigns & I came to fight – Hope you won’t be wearied to death before getting to this little end – But this is the last line – It is long enough to say my benediction that embraces all in the Bingham homestead –

(Written sideways up right margin)

Truly Yours –
A. Upson