

# What Evidence Do We Have That Frances Wright Personally Was An Epicurean?

**Post by “Cassius” of September 23, 2020 at 9:57 AM**

Just to seed this subforum with an opening post, I wanted to pose the question in the title. I have always found it disconcerting that other than "A Few Days In Athens" itself, there seems to be no - close to zero, and possibly zero - other writings by Frances Wright indicating that she was a devoted Epicurean, a self-proclaimed Epicurean, or even interested in Epicurus. I have not by any means made a complete survey of her other work, so I hope to be corrected on this, and that is the purpose of this thread. Given what I consider to be the incredible depth of insight of "A Few Days in Athens, combined with her young age at publication, and her known family associations with distinguished philosophers, I wonder if in addition to the fiction of it being a "found manuscript" from the ancient world, it might also be material that was produced in part or even in whole collaboratively with others. I have probably said this before here on the forum, but I find it highly strange that someone who had come to understand Epicurus so well would be able or willing to resist devoting a large part of her subsequent writing to the same subject. Certainly most of us here when we discover what Epicurus was really about have a long-term motivation to "spread the word" after that point.

I haven't had time to pursue this and doubt I will spend much time pursuing the question, because the book stands on its own and is a monumental addition to Epicurean literature no matter who wrote it or under what conditions. But if we were to identify others with whom Frances Wright corresponded who shared these views, then that might lead us to other material which would be worthwhile additions to our library -- again regardless of who wrote them.

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**Post by “Joshua” of September 23, 2020 at 1:11 PM**

This would be a subject worthy of a monograph; in lieu of such at present, I will take the thesis in defense of her authorship here.

I haven't read any of her other works at full length, but the evidence I've seen so far fairly convinced me.

Like Diogenes of Oenoanda, Wright was cosmopolitan. Born in Scotland and orphaned, she lived throughout her life in England and America, and for brief interludes in France. She traveled

even more widely; through Europe, through the United States and the frontier, south as far as Haiti, north into Canada. It might properly be said that she lived on the road.

In this capacity she was both writer and orator, and was the first woman in the country to lecture mixed company in public on subjects of morality and politics. She was in this respect a new Leontion, and suffered similar calumnies. She was also the first woman in America to edit a published journal.

She befriended Lafayette and Jefferson, Bentham and Mill. She attempted a utopian community for the betterment of African slaves, which failed. Even so, she supported other communities throughout her life. On her career she had this to say, in a letter to Lafayette:

#### Quote

Trust me, my beloved friend, the mind has no sex but what habit and education give it, and I who was thrown in infancy upon the world like a wreck upon the waters have learned, as well to struggle with the elements as any male child of Adam.

The biblical reference is superficial; more subtle is the allusion to Lucretius, whom she surely read. From Cyril Bailey's translation;

#### Quote

Then again, the child, like a sailor tossed ashore by the cruel waves, lies naked on the ground, dumb, lacking all help for life, when first nature has cast him forth by travail from his mother's womb into the coasts of light, and he fills the place with woful wailing, as is but right for one for whom it remains in life to pass through so much trouble.

Her allusion to this passage precedes Alfred Tennyson's (*In Memoriam*) by over twenty years.

Like Epicurus she was critical of superstition, critical of priests and clergy, and critical of the institution of marriage—and yet like Metrodorus she did marry, and bore a child.

It might rightly be said that she wrote out her Epicurean philosophy once (and rather completely), and gave the rest of her life to living it.

I agree with Cassius' concluding thoughts—more reading of her other works is in order!

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**Post by “Cassius” of September 23, 2020 at 1:37 PM**

There are definitely "lifestyle" arguments to be made, so good points. I hope we can find some - any would be a start - references in her other writings that would bear out her Epicurean orientation views specifically. That's the side that really troubles, me because surely we should be able to find some.

And your reference to her writing lots of things is what I understand too -- that's why among all that she is said to have written and done surely there are \*some\* specific statements about Epicurus.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of September 23, 2020 at 9:09 PM**

I found some time tonight to do some word searches through Frances Wright's "Course of Popular Lectures." Here is an excerpt with unmistakable similarities to Epicurus:

The proof comes with the assertion; the fact constitutes the truth.

But, you will say, there is other evidence than the physically tangible—other truths than those admitted through the senses. There is the more *immediate* and the more *remote* testimony of our senses; nothing more, nothing less. Will you appeal to numerical and geometrical truth? Had we no senses, could we know any thing of either? Were there no objects, no substances and existences around you, how could you conceive of number or of form? If the child see not *four things*, how shall he understand the meaning of *four*? If he see not two halves, put them together, divide them, compare them, measure, weigh them, how shall he *know* that two halves are equal to a whole? or a whole greater than its part? These are the simple

sensations and applies his experience to others, and sympathises in the pain or the **pleasure** he conceives them to feel. But, here are our moral truths also based upon fact. There is no test of these but experience. That is good which produces good; that evil, which produces evil; and, were our senses different from what they are, our virtue and our vice would be different also. Let us have done with abstractions! Truth is fact. Virtue is beneficial action; vice, mischievous action; virtuous feelings are those which impart **pleasure** to the bosom; bad feelings, those which disturb and torment it. Be not anxious in seeking your rule of life. Consult experience; your own sensations, the sensations of others. These are surer guides than laws and doctrines, and when



Course of Popular Lectures as Delivered by Frances Wright: With Three Addresses on Various ...



That came from here:  
<https://archive.org/details/coursepopularle00wriggoog/page/n84/mode/2up?q=Pleasure>

Another version: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug...&view=1up&seq=7>

But it is so odd -- in there is a reference, not to Epicurus, but to "Pestalozzi"?????

Were there no objects, no substances and existences around you, how could you conceive of number or of form? If the child see not *four things*, how shall he understand the meaning of *four*? If he see not two halves, put them together, divide them, compare them, measure, weigh them, how shall he *know* that two halves are equal to a whole? or a whole greater than its part? These are the simple truths conceived by the philosopher of nature, Pestalozzi. Here are the leading beauties of that system of experimental instruction which he so long strove to put in practice, and which time may enable others successfully to develop.

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## Post by "Cassius" of September 23, 2020 at 9:49 PM

We're going to need to be careful to steer clear of analyzing this from strictly political terms, but I am finding some interesting reading in this version of her "[course of popular lectures](#)"

divert public attention from examination of the political edifice. There, all and every thing resolves itself into chartered monopolies. There, no one imagines that abolition or anti-abolition signifies aught but clerical or federal intrigue; or that these find not their support in chartered companies in general. There, no man conceives that religious zeal means aught but stock-interest in the churches or favour in the church-building banks; that trade means aught but land-speculating or produce-monopolizing by aid of bank favour and long credits, nor

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It sounds like she has gotten herself deeply into the controversies around abolition, which I think I understood from reading about her career, but this part apparently seems to go in the direction of her seeing an even BIGGER problem in "chartered companies" and "banks," which I am gathering means that she is diagnosing overriding financial considerations are worse problems. I may be misreading this but I am gathering she is approaching this from an anti-Hamilton, pro Jeffersonian / Jacksonian perspective.

Not sure what I gather from that other than that she is super-wrapped up in lots of types of politics, but certainly from a perspective friendly to Jefferson and Jackson at least from an "anti-monopoly" perspective.

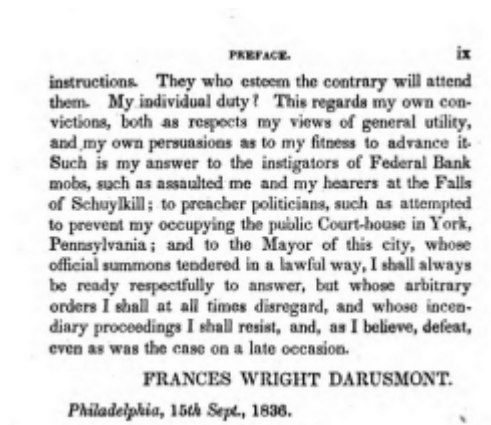
I may have misunderstood this by not reading the whole thing but her writing style does definitely seem similar to me with "A Few Days In Athens."

Ha - maybe we'll end up here with the example being - "Here's another person who thoroughly understands Epicurus and translates his advice in a very Julius Caesar / Cassius Longinus /

Thomas Jefferson "activist" kind of way.

And aside from the intrinsic merit of the substance of "A Few Days In Athens," her example of taking that knowledge and then "seizing the day" / channeling her energy into activism may be the ultimate lesson.

Maybe she WAS the full and complete genius behind A Few Days in Athens, maybe she DID understand Epicurus better than anyone else of her time, and maybe FOR THAT VERY REASON she became one of the leading social reformers and activists of her age! Is that possible????



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## Post by “Joshua” of September 23, 2020 at 10:00 PM

A good find Cassius, but rather sad—it seems to confirm DeWitt; "*It was the fate of Epicurus to be named if condemned, unnamed if approved.*"

Henry David Thoreau rode the 19th century lecture circuit as well. I am absolutely convinced from a comprehensive reading of his published works and private letters that he did not believe in a personal god, or in any hell or paradise, and yet he sometimes evokes this theme in his lectures—as when arguing against slavery, or pleading for the life of John Brown. A case of tailoring his message to his audience, I suppose. The Reform movement had strong ties to the Romantic movement in Europe and the Transcendentalists in America, as well as the Quaker and Unitarian churches.

Tell an audience of nineteenth century men and women that you are going to educate children on the model of the best philosophers in Europe, and they might applaud you. Tell them that the foundation stones of that philosophy were laid by Epicurus as a bulwark against Plato and religion, and the same audience might balk to hear it.

Pestalozzi, by contrast, was a Christian humanist trained for the clergy.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of September 23, 2020 at 10:27 PM**

#### [Quote from JJElbert](#)

it seems to confirm DeWitt; "It was the fate of Epicurus to be named if condemned, unnamed if approved."

Yes, Joshua -- exactly! Good point.

#### [Quote from JJElbert](#)

Tell them that the foundation stones of that philosophy were laid by Epicurus as a bulwark against Plato and religion, and the same audience might balk to hear it.

That would seem to be what is going on from what I am reading. Well I started to write "Yes Frances Wright was an abolitionist" -- but I have to take that back, from what I am reading so far she didn't like the term herself. She was definitely advocating for the eventual freedom of the slaves, but through a gradual educational / resettlement process -- at least in this volume. She's taking a VERY intellectual approach to the problem so the reason I am making the observation is that she seems pretty definitely to be calculating her words to suit her circumstances. She seems to have been prevented from speaking in many instances, so she was definitely having to measure her words.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of September 23, 2020 at 10:53 PM**

I am going back to her 1829 edition of her Course of Popular Lectures. This one contains an opening lecture on "knowledge" and I am finding this rings true to how I now read Epicurus. Don will recognize this as perhaps echoing our recent discussions on the passage translated as "mere words":

The field of knowledge is around, and about, and within us. Let us not be alarmed by sounding words, and let us not be *deceived* by them. Let us look to things. It is things which we have to consider. Words are, or, more correctly, should be, only the signs of things. I say they should be ; for it is a most lamentable truth, that they are now very generally conceived to constitute the very substance of knowledge. Words, indeed, should seem at present contrived rather for the purpose of confusing our ideas, than administering to their distinctness and arrangement. Instead of viewing them as the shadows, we mistake them for the substance ; and conceive that in proportion as we enlarge our vocabulary, we multiply our acquirements.

Further:

I shall have occasion, in a more advanced stage of our enquiries, to examine minutely the errors in the existing mode of instruction, and which are of a nature to perplex the human mind from infancy to age, and to make even learning an additional stumbling block in the way of knowledge. For the present, I would confine myself to the establishing the simple position, that all real knowledge is derived from positive sensations.

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LECT. I.] NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE. 31

tions of others, it is possible, while pretending to communicate knowledge, only to communicate belief. This we know to be the system pursued in all our schools and colleges, where the truths of the most demonstrable sciences are presented under the disguise of oral or written lessons, instead of being exposed, in practical illustrations, to the eye, and the ear, and the touch, in the simple, incontrovertible fact. This method, while it tends to hide and perpetuate the errors of teachers, so does it also inculcate credulity and blind belief in the scholar, and finally establishes the conclusion in the mind, that knowledge is compounded of words, and signs, and intellectual abstractions, instead of facts and human sensations.

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## Post by “Don” of September 23, 2020 at 11:14 PM

That sounds like Epicurus's injunction against education as indoctrination.

"Set sail in your own boat, free from all indoctrination!"

I'm certainly hearing strong albeit uncited echoes of Epicurus in Wright from your postings here.

## Post by "Cassius" of September 24, 2020 at 6:05 AM

There is now absolutely no doubt in my mind but that Frances Wright was the author of AFDIA. Not only is the writing style is there, but also much of the basic theory. More examples are below.

But rather than ending my feeling that something is strange here, my feeling of strangeness has at least doubled. I think Joshua has put his finger exactly on the issue with the DeWitt quote. Wright made the decision to bulldoze forward with the substance of Epicurean theory while at the same time dropping all attribution to its authors.

So yes it presumably must have been a factor that she decided the religious question was too hot to handle, and indeed the end of AFDIA does attack religion, but indicates that much more could be said about it - without carrying through in full force.

Interesting as that is, I think the question more important to consider is how this applies to the issue of those who see Epicurus devoted to "living unknown" and "avoiding politics" and pursuing "absence of pain" at all costs.

Here is someone who has shown a deep understanding and appreciation of what would appear to be every significant aspect of Epicurean philosophy at a level undocumented since the ancient world, and yet she uses that knowledge in a way that every respectable modern commentator for at least 500 years (with the exception of DeWitt) would hold to be totally unacceptable to Epicurus!

If that is the case (and I think we can document a mountain of evidence that it is) who is wrong about Epicurus? The non-DeWitt modern commentators, or Frances Wright, Thomas Jefferson, Julius Caesar, Cassius Longinus, and others we've only begun to discuss?

What we're seeing with Frances Wright in these passages is an amplification of Jefferson's words in his letter to William Short that he attributed specifically to EPICURUS:

"I take the liberty of observing that you are not a true disciple of our master Epicurus, in indulging the indolence to which you say you are yielding. One of his canons, you know, was that "that indulgence which prevents a greater pleasure, or produces a greater pain, is to be avoided." Your love of repose will lead, in its progress, to a suspension of healthy exercise, a relaxation of mind, an indifference to everything around you, and finally to a debility of body, and hebetude of mind, the farthest of all things from the happiness which the well-regulated indulgences of Epicurus ensure; fortitude, you know is one of his four cardinal virtues. **That teaches us to meet and surmount difficulties; not to fly from them, like cowards; and to fly, too, in vain, for they will meet and arrest us at every turn of our road. Weigh this matter well; brace yourself up...."**

From page 63 of the 1829 Courses of Popular Lectures:

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Now we stand in relation, more near or more remote, to all substances and all existences within the range of our observation; that is, to the whole of matter, of which whole we ourselves form a part.

We shall understand this relation more accurately if we bear in mind, that the simple elements of all things are eternal in duration and ever changing in position. We may analyze or decompose all substances, from the rocks of the mountain to the flesh of our own bodies; we may destroy sentient existences—the ox in the market, or the insect beneath our foot; we may watch the progress of rapid or more gradual decomposition by age or disease in our own bodies; but let us not imagine that here is destruction, here is only change. We may evaporate water into steam, or convert it into air; we may transform the blazing diamond into the elements of dull carbon; we may

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64 DIVISIONS OF KNOWLEDGE. [LECT. III.]

stop the current juices in the plant or the tree, and leave it fading and withering until we find only an earthy heap on the soil; we may arrest the action of organic life, and stretch the warm and sentient being a cold, dull clod of corruption at our feet—yet have we neither taken from, nor added to, the elements before us. We have changed one substance into other substances, ended one existence to start others into being. The same matter is there: its appearance only is changed, and its qualities diversified. These facts being so, as observation and experience attest, it follows, not merely that we form at this moment a part of one great whole, but that we ever have and ever shall form a part of the same. Under various forms, with varying qualities, the elements which now compose our bodies have ever held, and will ever hold, a place in the vast infinity of matter; and, consequently, ever mingled and mingled with the elements of all things, we stand, in our very nature, allied and associated with the air we breathe, the dust, the stone, the flower we tread; the worm that crawls the insect that hums around us its tiny song

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LECT. III.] DIVISIONS OF KNOWLEDGE. 65

ment. Easily, as pleasantly, should we tread all the paths of knowledge; and advancing, without check or back-sliding, become familiar with every object within the circle of each opening horizon, until the whole map of material existence, with all its occurrences and changes, lay revealed to our sight and apprehension. Then would our education be simply a voyage of discovery. We should have only to look within us and to look without us, to store up facts and to register them for future generations. Far other is our occupation now. Instead of establishing facts, we have to overthrow errors; instead of ascertaining what is, we have to chase from our imaginations what is not. Before we can open our eyes, we have to ask leave of our superstitions; before we can exercise our faculties, we have to ask leave of each other. When I think how easy and delightful the task would be to present you with a simple table of just knowledge—to arrange under the single head of MATTER AND ITS PHENOMENA, all the real objects of human investigation and real subjects of human enquiry;

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Post by “Cassius” of September 24, 2020 at 6:15 AM

I won't have time and it would take too much space to paste too many of these clips, but some are so blindingly obviously derived from Epicurus that I'd like to save people some time and post a few more:

Before we can proceed to examine our opinions, we must ascertain facts drawn from the attentive observation of matter. We must know the anatomy of the matter composing our own bodies, and that of the matter composing all other bodies. We must familiarize our senses and our understandings with the multiform and yet unvarying phenomena of nature. We must know what does happen and what does not happen. We must trace in the physical world, cause to cause; or, more properly, occurrence to occurrence; and whenever we do not perceive the clenching link between two occurrences, we must not imagine it; we must say we do not know it, and we must go, with our five senses open, in search of it. Had human beings, in all ages of the world, done this, where should we not now be in just knowledge? It is time that we seek out the right road. We have groped long enough in error; lived long enough in fairy land; dreamed more than enough of things unseen and causes unknown. We have, indeed, dreamed so much and observed so little, that our imaginations have grown larger than the world we live in, and our judgments have dwindled

Judgment based on analogy against past observations:

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Having obtained a general view of the philosophy of matter, we may then carry our investigations into the other branches of knowledge, according to our leisure, taste, and opportunity. We may apply ourselves to the past history of man, as handed down to us by tradition, oral or in writing; and comparing these traditions with what we know of the nature of man and the nature of things, of matter and its phenomena, we may judge of their credibility. If we are not prepared thus to judge by accurate analogy, we may receive every fable for matter of fact, swallow every fairy tale for true history, suppose every mythology sound philosophy, and mistake equally the tricks of conjurers and the phenomena of nature for miracles.

We may then peruse with equal interest and advantage the narratives of travellers, and engage in general reading with little risk of taking facts for granted without evidence,

This is aimed at the church, but does it not remind you of Torquatus criticizing Plato in "On Ends"?

But, it may be asked, how are the generality of men, and, more especially, of women, to find time and opportunity for such preparatory investigations as we acknowledge to be absolutely indispensable? Should we discover that they now spend more time and more opportunity in useless investigations, than they need devote to the most useful; that they now waste more anxious thought, more

LACT. III.] DIVISIONS OF KNOWLEDGE. 69

precious time, and more hard earned money in fruitless enquiry—enquiry which never can be answered, and whose answer, if possible, could profit them nothing—than would suffice to gratify every laudable curiosity, and store their minds with knowledge, whose utility should be felt at every moment of their lives—should we discover this, would there be no effect made to turn time and opportunity to better account, and to divert thought and money into the more useful channel?

We speak of enquiry. Behold! my friends, a subject for it! Ask yourselves how ye employ your leisure hours—how ye employ your leisure day, the first of the week! Ask, for what have ye raised spacious buildings through your cities and villages, and for what ye pay a host of teachers, interested, as we have seen—as we have proved—in deceiving you!

Compare that to "You are pleased to think him uneducated. The reason is that he refused to consider any education worth the name that did not help to school us in happiness. Was he to spend his time, as you encourage Triarius and me to do, in perusing poets, who give us nothing solid and useful, but merely childish amusement? Was he to occupy himself like Plato with music and geometry, arithmetic and astronomy, which starting from false premises cannot be true, and which moreover if they were true would contribute nothing to make our lives pleasanter and therefore better? Was he, I say, to study arts like these, and neglect the master art, so difficult and correspondingly so fruitful, the art of living?"

This is SO good:

Such being my motives, such my object, I must entreat you to enquire what the knowledge is, that you learn from your spiritual teachers. "The knowledge by faith," they will answer for you. "And faith," they will add, "is the knowledge of things unseen." Can there be any such knowledge? I put it to your reason. Knowledge we have shown to be ascertained facts. Things unseen! Can human understanding know any thing about them? More I will ask: could it be of any utility were even such knowledge possible? And do ye hire teachers to teach you nonexistent knowledge, impossible knowledge, and knowledge which, even under the supposition of its possibility, could serve no conceivable purpose? We are on the earth, and they tell us of heaven; we are human beings, and they tell us of angels and devils; we are matter, and they tell us of spirit: we have five senses whereby to admit truths, and a reasoning faculty by which to build our belief upon them; and they tell us of dreams dreamed thousands of years ago, which all our experience flatly contradicts.

Longer version of excerpt already cited:

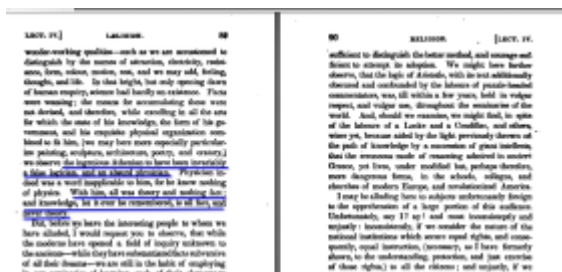
The proof comes with the assertion; the fact constitutes the truth.

But, you will say, there is other evidence than the physically tangible—other truths than those admitted through the senses. There is the more immediate and the more remote testimony of our senses; nothing more, nothing less. Will you appeal to numerical and geometrical truth? Had we no senses, could we know any thing of either? Were there no objects, no substances and existences around you, how could you conceive of number or of form? If the child see not four things, how shall he understand the meaning of four? If he see not two halves, put them together, divide them, compare them, measure, weigh them, how shall he know that two halves are equal to a whole? or a whole greater than its part? These are the simple truths conceived by the philosopher of nature, Pestalozzi. Here are the leading beauties of that system of experimental instruction which he so long strove to put in practice, and which time may enable others successfully to develop.

## Post by “Cassius” of October 4, 2020 at 8:19 PM

I told Elayne that I would read some more into Frances Wright to see if I could pull out particularly interesting sections of her "Courses of Popular Lectures." References here are to [the PDF located here](#).

Here is a notation as to one such section, in Volume I -



I find this very strange. She has published an entire book praising Epicurus to the skies, and putting in his mouth exactly the words that science should be observation, and not theory, which IS consistent with Epicurus' viewpoint.

How then to explain these paragraphs, in which she slams Athenian philosophers without mentioning the exception of Epicurus, and she mentions only Aristotle (I think it is fair to say that that's a negative reference, but it's not clear to me)?

And as the text continues she then turns to praising Pestalozzi, the Christian. Hopefully by the end of this chapter on "religion" it will be clear why she is doing this.

Great line here, as to "Castles in the Air" on page 93:

Knowledge signifies *things known*. Where there are no *things known*, there is no *knowledge*. Where there are no *things to be known*, there *can be no knowledge*. We have observed that every science, that is, every branch of knowledge, is compounded of certain facts, of which our sensations furnish the evidence. Where no such evidence is supplied, we are without *data*; we are without first premises; and when, without these, we attempt to build up a *science*, we do as those who raise edifices without foundations. And what do such builders construct? *Castles in the air*.

OK this is important. As the chapter closes, it is clear what is going on -- she has decided that she is going to take the position simply that I DON'T KNOW - and she's not going to take a position on anything other than what she can see in this world -- and in the absence of anything said here, she does not even seem to be taking a position on life after death.

Here then we may have the ultimate dividing line and where she decided to depart from Epicurus:

other words to express the same ideas. For myself, pretending to no insight into these mysteries, possessing no means of intercourse with the inhabitants of other worlds, confessing my absolute incapacity to see either as far back as a first cause, or as far forward as a last one, I am content to state to you, my fellow creatures, that all my studies, reading, reflection, and observation, have obtained for me no knowledge beyond the sphere of our planet, our earthly interests, and our earthly duties; and that I more than doubt, whether, should you expend all your time and all your treasure in the search, you will be able to acquire

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any better information respecting unseen worlds, and future events, than myself. Whenever you shall come to the same conclusion, you will probably think the many spacious edifices which rear their heads in your city, are somewhat misapplied, and the time of the individuals who minister therein somewhat misemployed: you will then doubtless perceive that they who wish to muse, or pray, had better do it after the manner designated by the good Jesus, namely, by entering their closet and shutting the door; and farther perceive, that the true bible is the book of nature, the wisest teacher he who most plainly expounds it, the best priest our own conscience, and the most orthodox church a hall of science. I look round doubtless upon men of many faiths, upon calvinists, unitarians, methodists, baptists, catholics, and I know not what beside, and yet, my friends, let us call ourselves by what names we will, are we not creatures occupying the same earth, and sharing the same nature? and can we not consider these as members of one family, apart from all our speculations respecting worlds, and existences, and states of being, for which, in ages past, men cut each other's throats, and for which they now murder each other's peace?

This exchange from Chapter 14 of A Few Days In Athens always bothered me, because it seemed that she was putting words in Epicurus' mouth that seemed clearly different from what we know about his positions from the ancient texts. I always wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt that somehow she thought there was a way to reconcile this with what he wrote, but now I see that she simply decided to write her own position in as his. Here is the text:

Quote

“On leaving you, last night,” said Theon, “I encountered Cleanthes. He came from the perusal of your writings, and brought charges against them which I was unprepared to answer.”

“Let us hear them, my Son; perhaps, until you shall have perused them yourself, we may assist your difficulty.”

“First, that they deny the existence of the gods.”

“I see but one other assertion that could equal that in folly,” said Epicurus.

“I knew it,” exclaimed Theon, triumphantly; “I knew it was impossible. But where will not prejudice lead men, when even the upright Cleanthes is capable of slander!”

“He is utterly incapable of it,” said the Master ; “and the inaccuracy, in this case, I rather suspect to rest with you than with him. To *deny* the existence of the gods would indeed be presumption in a philosopher; a presumption equaled only by that of him who should *assert* their existence.”

“How!” exclaimed the youth, with a countenance in which astonishment seemed to suspend every other expression.

“As I never saw the gods, my son,” calmly continued the Sage, “I cannot *assert* their existence; and, that I never saw them, is no reason for my *denying* it.”

“But do we believe nothing except that of which we have ocular demonstration?”

“Nothing, at least, for which we have not the evidence of one or more of our senses; that is, when we believe on just grounds, which, I grant, taking men collectively, is very seldom.”

Display More

Continuing on:

So she DOES mention Epicurus, at least once, and approvingly, however short;

lives seem to have equalled all that we can show in modern generations of good and wise. Such appears to have been the modest and benevolent Socrates: such, more especially, appears to have been the mild, unassuming, reasonable Epicurus, in whose ethics, as imperfectly conveyed to us, we find the science first based upon its just foundation—the ascertained consequences of human actions.

The moderns, whether we look to the numerous family of Christian nations, or to the equally numerous family who have followed the standard of Mohammed, have un-

But oh my my -- can it really be true that she is going to base her morals on "good" and 'beneficial' without further definition?

What then is MORALS?

A rule of life.

How formed? from what deduced?

From the consequences of actions as ascertained through our sensations, and our observations of the sensations of others.

Actions which produce good, we call moral actions; actions which produce evil, immoral actions. Revolve the

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LECT. V.]

MORALS.

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matter as we may, we can come to no other rational conclusion. The word MORALS, then, is employed to designate a course of actions, whose effects are beneficial to ourselves and others. In other words, they constitute a rule of life drawn from the ascertained consequences of actions. The rule is simple. If we never look out of it, we can never go wrong in morals.

Y

This is not directly related to investigating FW's thought process but it is too good not to include:

But let us here observe, that to secure for ourselves that seemly propriety which constitutes the rule of temperance, we must as little incline to the extreme of fanatical self-denial as to that of indulgence. We must govern and not crucify the appetites which, forming a part of our being, can as little be stifled as palled, without injury to our physical, moral, and mental health. It has been the requiring the annihilation instead of the just government of the human passions, which has nourished the belief, so slanderous to our nature, that they were beyond the control of our reason. Oh! let but reason be appealed to, and we shall acknowledge, for we shall see and feel her power!

Well i did not expect THIS --- almost a precursor or shade of Ayn Rand in discussing self-interest, but stated in a much better way (Not sure if this comment is an aside or not, but i do personally think that this is the correct way to interpret Epicurus.)

In seeking that principle of our nature which leads the heart of man to sympathize with that of his fellow; if extolled the heart in excess, or to drop the tear in sympathy; philosophers have strangely disagreed. Men, without adhering to the various arguments and speculations which have more frequently tended to confuse the intellect than to develop the fact, we may remark, that the many who have agreed in referring all our noblest actions and most beautiful feelings to the single motive of attaining our own individual good, regard at the same, as inseparable basis of morals; since even self-love and self-interest, rightly understood, would naturally lead to justice, benevolence, etc. through truth, morality, and unobscured humanity. And such decisions is the truth. A simple but separate calculation of selfish consequences, would lead inevitably to the exhibition of every amiable feeling, and provision of every action beneficial to society. For, as we have previously required, how come we at a knowledge of virtue? By our sensations. What constitutes moral good? A course of actions producing beneficial results. What moral evil? A course of actions whose results are injurious. There must, therefore, be some standard of utility, and all of us can testify, that never does the human breast shrivel with pure delight, than when man has been instrumental to the happiness of his fellow man. The pleasure derived from any selfish enjoyment does with the immediate sensation; but that shared with others, or that imparted to others, even with temporary loss or inconvenience to ourselves, will live in the memory to the latest period of existence, and thus the human mind, advanced with steps to its

Then she continues on to discuss what is essentially a feeling-based "moral sense" - very similar to Jefferson's formulation which I'll quote here from the Peter Carr letter:

:  
*He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science. For one man of science, there are thousands who are not. What would have become of them? Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong, merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his Nature, as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality, and not the [beautiful], truth, &c., as fanciful writers have imagined. The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body. This sense is submitted, indeed, in some degree, to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is required for this: even a less one than what we call common sense. State a moral case to a plowman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, & often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules."*

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## Post by "Cassius" of October 5, 2020 at 4:07 PM

I doubt it is wise or helpful to go too far into discussion of Frances Wright's political opinions, but I do want to save people some time so they don't have to read the full books without some guidance or markers ahead of time. I will LIST a few choice excerpts to show her views, which seem to have been intended to promote a very radical and very sweeping overthrow of almost every aspect of existing society:

(1) Starting around page 166, in the chapter "Existing Evils." Not just universal public schools as we might think of them today, but very strongly regimented public schools for children in which parents are allowed minimal interference, and apparently minimal contact with their children:

But, as our time is short, and myself somewhat fatigued by continued exertions, I must hasten to the rapid development of the system of instruction and protection which has occurred to me as capable, and alone capable, of opening the door to universal reform.

In lieu of all common schools, high schools, colleges, seminaries, houses of refuge, or any other juvenile institution, instructional or protective, I would suggest that the state legislatures be directed (after laying off the whole in knowledge or knowledge) to separate, at suitable distances, and in convenient and healthy situations, establishments for the general reception of all the children resident within the said school district. These establishments to be devoted, severally, to children between a certain age. Say, the first, infants between two and four, or two and six, according to the density of the population, and such other local circumstances as might render a greater or less number of establishments necessary or practicable. The next to receive children from four to eight, or six to twelve years. The next from twelve to sixteen, or to an older age if found desirable. Each establishment to be furnished with instructors in every branch of knowledge, intellectual and operative, with all the apparatus, land, and conveniences necessary for the best development of all knowledge; the same, whether operative or intellectual, being always calculated to the age and strength of the pupils.

To obviate, in the commencement, every evil result possible from the first mixture of a young population, so variously raised in error or neglect, a due separation should be made in each establishment; by which means those entering with bad habits would be kept apart from the others until corrected. How rapidly reform may be effected on the plastic disposition of childhood, has been sufficiently proved in your houses of refuge, more especially when such establishments have been under liberal superintendance, as was formerly the case in New-York. Under their orthodox directors, those asylums of youth have been converted into jails.

It will be understood that, in the proposed establishments, the children would pass from one to the other in regular succession, and that the parents, who would necessarily be resident in their close neighborhood, could visit the children at suitable hours, but in no case, interfere with or interrupt the rules of the institution.

In the older establishments, the well directed and well protected labor of the pupil would, in time, suffice for, and, then, exceed their own support; when the surplus might be devoted to the maintenance of the infant establishments.

(In these nurseries of a free nation, no inequality must be allowed to enter.) End at a common board: closed is

a common path, making restlessness with simplicity and convenience; raised in the exercise of common duties, in the acquirement of the same knowledge and practice of the same industry, varied only according to individual taste and capabilities; in the exercise of the same virtues, in the enjoyment of the same pleasures; in the study of the same nature; in pursuit of the same object—their own and each other's happiness—say I would not such a race, when arrived at manhood and womanhood, work out the reform of society—perfect the free institutions of America?

(2) The following is not a political opinion, but it is so pointed an indictment of speculation about the nature and origin of the universe that I have to include it as significant to her perspective:

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these walls what are to us all realities, and will yield to us all useful truths. The field of nature is before us in its sphere; the world of the human heart is with us to examine. In these lie for us all that is certain, and all that is important.

What matter to us by what, by whom, for how long, how, whence, in what limits of space, through what extent of time, the vast eternal, in which our aims glimmer, permeate its revolutions, is peopled with sentient creatures. How may we decide whether grass, or ferns, or beings uncounted and uncounted, live, and breathe, and exist in life through all the bright worlds which meet our mortal senses? Nay, or could we decide, how should the knowledge profit us in this our removed, but, to us, all sufficient sphere? Were our human attainments, indeed, commensurate with human observations, and our human wisdom all sufficient for our human exigencies, there might these be unnecessary for our borrowing the kaleidoscope of fancy, and gazing through it, into the unseen and beyond the seen. Were all our human duties understood and fulfilled, all the joys of earth developed, and its woes removed, then might these speculations be more exorable, which now meet our senses and our aspirations from the sphere we occupy, and the fellow creatures, whose wants, interests, joys and sorrows should be all our own.

The law for us are then the forms of human knowledge and human happiness, let nature with all her unexplained phenomena—in earth with all her wrongs and all her miseries—in our own hearts with all their bitterness—our own minds with all their passions, love, wisdom and sin. Oh, then, let us, in this place at least, by ceaseless dreaming and apply to observing! Not that I would presumptuously dispute, or unduly reason, with the dreams of any fellow creature: I would simply lead all to

(3) And she carries that forward to advocate a kind of tolerance, that it does not matter if we disagree so long as we keep our opinions about speculations to ourselves (?)

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it is our object to conciliate, and divide where we are assembled to unite.

Permit me here to reiterate an observation which I have already had frequent occasion to prefer, that the only sure way to correct erroneous opinions is to present facts to the mind. The more we know, the less, in the popular sense of the word, do we believe. The better we understand the phenomena of nature in the visible and tangible world without us, and in the mental, moral, and physical world within us, the more just and perspicuous must be all our ideas.

It is possible, indeed, to subvert, by process of reasoning, many human superstitions, and to confute by the *ad absurdum* many books, maxims, and statutes honored as wise, or worshipped as divine. But let us remember, that to expose errors is not necessarily to distinguish truths; a train of deductive logic may suffice for the one, but dispassionate observation and accurate knowledge can alone suffice for the other.

OK at this point I have finished reading the first book of lectures. There is some in it about slavery, but not really a lot, as I would have expected based on reputation. It is really a much deeper blueprint for full societal revolution based on overthrowing the church and existing systems of culture and business, with emphasis on her theory that it is knowledge/observation that much be expanded, while speculation on religious and other matters that cannot be answered should be minimized. I see no discussion whatsoever of the issue of life after death.

Now on to the second book of lectures.

This is just SO fascinating. Wright's target is indeed going to be slavery, but she is not content just to oppose slavery - she sees the source of the movement toward war -- on both sides -- as caused by financial interests / financial speculators / banks which she identifies as a movement of the "chartered monopolies" promoting their own interests:



ten more than myself) proposed for its means, well directed, or what might express it better, enlightened and thoroughly disciplined labor; and, for its compound object, the improvement of the Negro, morally, intellectually, and industrially, (without which emancipation must ever be a work of anarchy,) and the colonization without the limits of the United States. The soul of the plan contemplated, was agricultural, and otherwise, industrial schools, in which each generation might repay the cost of its raising, training, outfit, and all other expenses before colonization. Viewing, as I have ever done, all human reform as a work not governmental or controlling, but educational, administrative, and industrial, I could never propose to myself or others, any measures that should run counter to public opinion or national sentiment.

The editor may be also unaware that my own people, in compliance with public sentiment, and in keeping with my own pledge to the citizens of the slave state in which my experiment was attempted, were removed to the island of Hayti. And since I have been led to advert to this subject, let me here submit, in testimony to the honorable and much slandered character of the southern planter, that never, during the whole course of my journeyings and residence in the south, although my general sentiments and purpose were understood, did I ever experience slight but respectful treatment, and cordial, open-hearted hospitality. There is a tone of thought and a mode of proceeding, with regard to all questions, that in America will disarm prejudice, and conciliate good feeling; and, were such sought and followed by all who desire human reform, pretended philanthropists and intriguers, foreign and domestic, would be distinguished on the instant, and consequently quieted and disarmed.

Here are her views on what would happen after emancipation, and her views on racial developments later:

xiv APPENDIX TO THE PREFACE.

ten more than myself) proposed for its means, well directed, or what might express it better, enlightened and thoroughly disciplined labor; and, for its compound object, the improvement of the Negro, morally, intellectually, and industrially, (without which emancipation must ever be a work of anarchy,) and the colonization without the limits of the United States. The soul of the plan contemplated, was agricultural, and otherwise, industrial schools, in which each generation might repay the cost of its raising, training, outfit, and all other expenses before colonization. Viewing, as I have ever done, all human reform as a work not governmental or controlling, but educational, administrative, and industrial, I could never propose to myself or others, any measures that should run counter to public opinion or national sentiment.

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Let us discuss in conclusion, first, to whatever 'emancipation' and the editor may wish, the consequences possible, such as we state in the present degraded state of human nature, that is, to the belief in human improvement. Whatever feeling of these men had the human nature in the history of the future, or that it will be able to do better, than what, up to this time, has, for the most part, been the history of the past, and the history of the future, will be to my mind evident, and will, I expect, in the course of time, become true to all that the friends of the colored race population may be affected, at one and the same time, with the conviction and enthusiasm, and with the improvement and the civilization and refinement, and with the improvement and the refinement. The development of the slave or colored race, as we see it in no discourse on abolition, would be a new promise, and it is not that country the north, which alone have sought relief from the misery of their own evils, and the sleeping and the sleeping of their own condition.

Chambers, June 2, 1838. F. W. D.

Post by "Cassius" of October 5, 2020 at 9:40 PM

Just a few more clips from the Second collection of Frances Wright's popular discourses:

and even in the Congress of the nation." Second, in the hope of convincing those numerous lovers of liberty and justice who, as it seems to me, sometimes agitate the question without duly understanding all its bearings—in the hope, I say, of convincing such that the mode in which the abolition of slavery is now advocated is neither desirable in itself nor possible of execution; that the means by which this evil may be effectually and benevolently approached are different from all that has been imagined, and are such that, when understood, and when circumstances shall be ripe for their application, will convert our southern country into a garden; will at one and the same time prepare its territory for enlightened white labor, and its black population for emancipation, colonization, and self-government.

I shall discuss the question of chartered monopolies for reasons too numerous and weighty to recite here. Let one of these suffice. Monopoly, under one form or another, constitutes the whole evil of civilized society throughout the globe. As being the opposite of justice it is every where in conspiracy against human happiness, but, in this country, so being in further conspiracy against the political institutions, it is necessarily at variance with public order and acknowledged law. This position is terrible, and there is here wherewith to turn pale with fright. But what has to be done? Disarm the evil? Were this the wisest, instead of the most foolish, course to pursue, it is now shut against us. The truth is flagrant, and every honest man in the country is, more or less, awake to it. What alternatives then remain? There are three. The one is the moral, and political, and industrial prostitution of the Republic. It is becoming entirely, what it is now in part, a tributary of the old world. Tributary in its territory, in its productions, in its energy, in its science, to the aristocracy and financial scheming of Europe. A feeder of home extortioners and foreign absentee, even like unto

She was definitely on Jefferson's side against Hamilton:

honestly, until the close of the war. The great struggle by the sword over, the people went home to their families and their labours, and the half-measure men, joining with whitewashed Tories, set to the patching up private fortunes at expense of the public good. America's good Genius was then absent. Thomas Jefferson was in France with Benjamin Franklin. Franklin, old in years and services, returned but to pay the debt of nature; and Thomas Jefferson returned, as he himself tells us, too late to prevent the scheme of Hamilton. What followed the adoption of the Hamilton financial system, formed after that of Great Britain, with such alterations and modifications as the nature of American institutions and the character of the American people rendered indispensable—what followed this, we shall not now trace. Suffice it that from stock-jobbing, banking, and consequent land-jobbing, the party misnamed Federal, and which ought to have been named European or monarchist, proceeded to aim a blow at American government, which recoiled on its own head. That blow was the attempt to exalt legislative authority over constitutional power: in plain language, the attempt was to subvert American government, and to place in its stead a government cast in the mould of that of England. It is important to our object that this matter be clearly understood.

**My friends; in all diseases, before recourse may be had to a remedy, it is indispensable to understand the nature of the malady to be treated. That American society is sick, sick to danger, all minds of ordinary observation and reflection can distinguish. That its sickness has source in the financial system which now governs the world, the same minds are for the most part aware.**

But the question of European influence, the existence of faction, and the possibility of treason, constitute only a part of the evil and the danger before us.

Numerous are the body of men throughout the nation, who, spurning the bonds of foreign financial slavery; who, honestly indignant at seeing their country's wealth turned in full tide into the thirsty treasuries of European monarchy and aristocracy, yet deem it constitutional, in the face of American history, in the face of this righteous instrument, the law of their country and the inspired scripture of Human-kind, to establish and to foster a system of American financial slavery, in which Americans only are to figure as tyrants, but Americans always as slaves.

Side by side, yet ranged as hostile parties, each struggling for supremacy in this world of equal rights and equal chances, appear at this hour, two devastating armies in the field. Each carries in front its distinctive banner, the one inscribed "Bank of the United States;" the other, "States' Chartered Monopolies." The first assaults this instrument in its twofold provisions, undermining national independence, and violating Justice; the

The first great object, therefore, of the Federalist, or American division of the colonial monarchist party, was to strengthen their numbers by importation from abroad and corruption at home. Under plea of aiding the national instruction, necessarily much neglected during the revolutionary struggle, professors and preachers were sought in Great Britain, and thus the darkness of English Tory universities and royalist Scotch Calvinism was brought to quench the light and the fire of the spirit of '78.

The arch Federalist, Gouverneur Morris, a man of more wit than faith, political intrigue than religion, had shipped for the United States, by aid and through influence of Lord Melville, the famous Dundas of Pitt's administration, two score and upwards of fire and brimstone Presbyterians. I hold this fact from the lips of the venerable Dundas, the last act of whose life was consistent with its whole tenor.\* The arrival of these frighteners of women and children, and European perverters of America's youth, will be found noticed in the files of the Aurora.

To the party's manoeuvres of that period may be traced the close connexion between financial scheming, peisany intriguing, and youthful education—the banks, the churches, the colleges, and Sunday-school unions, out of which grew the famous Christian party in politics.

Having inspected the origin and rise of the Party by whom was brought to bear the Hamilton financial scheme, we will now proceed to investigate the nature, object, and effects of that scheme itself.

This scheme, as first attempted under forms openly European—such as a funded debt, an expensive administration, a standing army, an imposing navy, and all the regular artillery of arbitrary laws, restricted press, taxation, vexation, personal arrest, imprisonment, and transportation, was frustrated by the nation, with Thomas Jefferson at its head, in 1801. The same scheme, as next attempted by the United States Bank, in financial correspondence and conjunction with the agents and controllers of the governments of Europe—namely, with Messrs. Rothschild and their whole fraternity of stockholders, stock makers, and stock loaners—This second edition of the Hamilton financial scheme, as got up, at and since, the treaty of Ghent, yet lives, and lives in open defiance of the law of America's government, and the voice of America's people.

We have seen that the first scheme of the Party was to establish a strong government, armed with direct power—in one word, a monarchy; that same, no less than that thing, being openly advocated by Hamilton and

globe. Such is the consort of the Bank of the United States. Such is the union subsisting between the old Hamilton, American federal, and now *whig federal* financial scheme on the one hand; and the old Pitt, British tory, and now *whig European* financial scheme on the other. The names and the tactics of the parties on both sides of the ocean, though changed for the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time, ever designate a set of men and a scheme of politics having in view the same objects with those proposed by the old parliament of George the Third; namely, the subjugation of the whole industry and credit of the civilized earth to one monstrous consolidated monopoly-monarchy. A monarchy whose throne of thrones is in London, whose prime ministers are Messrs. Rothschild & Co., and whose vice-kings and viceregerents are the ministers of finance, boards of trade, branch banks and bank presidents, who dictate the policy of state cabinets throughout the world. Such is the scheme which America's national Executive

Here Frances Wright tells us how she really feels on the issue of what to do with the chartered banks:

hazards of financial consolidation. These financiers love passages, so dear to the followers of Hamilton, are to a free nation the embrace of the boa constrictor, which enfolds but to crush. The subject is too serious for pleasantry, or we might subjoin that any approach towards any intimate financial communion between America and Europe must be like a marriage between an old rake and a young heiress. On one side youth, health, and fortune, on the other decrepitude and debts. It is easy to see on which side must be all the advantages, and on which all the hazard and the loss. No, my friends! whatever financiers, interested in the funds of the institution, or politicians interested in its principles, may advance, the Bank, mis-called of the United States, and more justly called of the Holy Alliance, is a drain upon the nation's wealth, a tax, and a foreign tax, upon the people, a foe to the institutions, in one word, an enemy to the country. To destroy it, citizens of Pennsylvania! be your first object. To destroy it root and branch. No bargaining, no compromise. Here are no claims to settle. Here is no contract; or, if there be one, it stands between treason on the one hand and invasion on the other: let the parties settle it between them. The enemy once destroyed, the snake not scotched but killed, let America arrange her own affairs with the good of humankind in her heart; and

The final essay in Volume 2 is "The Sectional Question: On Southern Slavery" =

with a view to its remedy. Having studied the north, I proceeded to examine the south, widely and closely; and, the longer to approach my object, became a southern citizen and even a slaveholder. It was neither disease, nor loss, nor disappointment, though, of course, I experienced all, that arrested my design. I persevered with good hope and good courage, until I discovered that I had committed, at the very end, Negro slavery, like all other special or partial questions, is never rightly understood until the whole body of the subject be present to the mind. The more I considered the evil of slavery, and appreciated it in comparison with the other evils that curdle the face of society, the more distinctly I perceived there to have not only the same root, but to be, in fact, only different phases of one and the same thing.

My friends: the evil which corrupts and corrodes human society is the degradation of human labor; its amelioration in some countries, its rejection in all. Nearly every where throughout the globe, at epochs more or less remote, it has existed in the earlier stage of degradation; namely, positive enslavement. To it succeeded, however, that, in this society, it never would or could have existed in that stage but from the circumstances which induced, and the inevitable power which formed, contrary to the habits, principles and feelings of the early colonists, the introduction of the African children of Africa into the North American continent. But, once introduced, the position of the master, and of the slave, rose, because one of great complication. In the one appeared the choice and the object of all the white civilized nations of Europe; in the other the unchosen,

The African race, more intimately associated with America's political and social state, will demand, both for its own good and the good of the white population, as still dependent on its labor, a gradual but efficient preparation for enfranchisement and colonization.

I have no other objection to enter into full details on this head but that, at the present moment, they would be premature. One thing at a time and all things in order. We have to emancipate, to regulate, to elevate, and to stimulate the industry of the north; that done, the south, whose statesmen, as a body, have ever been the highest souled, the most national, and the most republican that this nation has produced, will see, effectually and honorably, to wipe off the stain from their escutcheon; to turn to good—to a source of wealth and gigantic internal improvement, the evil which weighs upon them; and, at one and the same time, to cancel the wrong inflicted during a course of ages by the white race on the black, and to pour from their shores a reflux tide on Africa of intelligent industry and conquering civilization!

Ok that pretty much sums up the second collection, which seems much shorter than the first, unless the version I have is an abridgement.