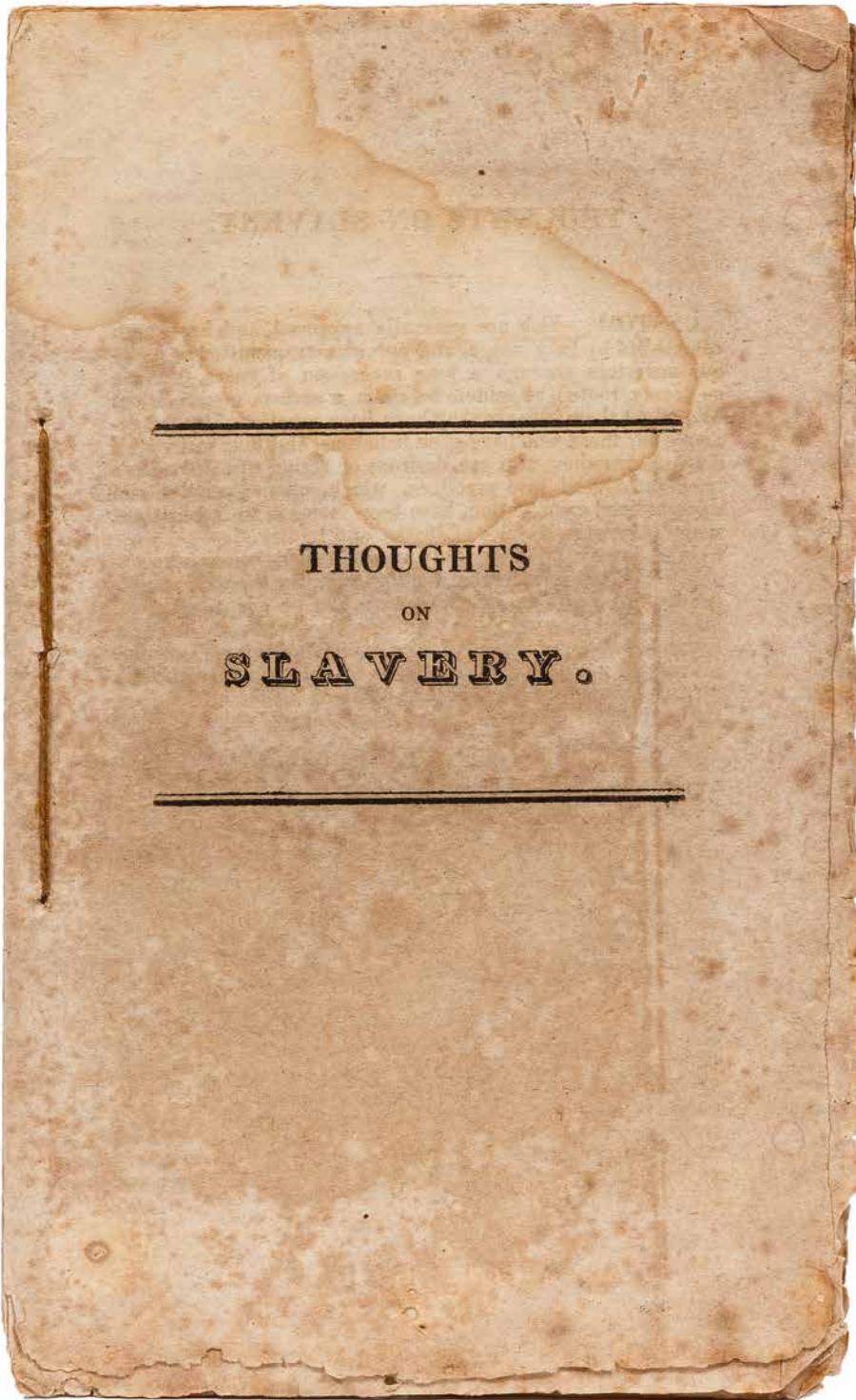


[Thomas Jefferson]

Thoughts on Slavery

[Philadelphia?: not identified] [1822]

\$10,000



First edition. Octavo (20 x 12 cm / 8" x 4.75"). Stitched, untrimmed. pp. [1-2] 3-23 [24 (blank)]. An early light stain, scattered foxing, very good. According to Joseph Smith's catalogue, this pamphlet was printed "about 1822 ... in Philadelphia, though not stated so". It includes extracts from letters and reports of the *African Institution* (one of which is dated 1820); and extracts from Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Very scarce. OCLC locates only two copies.

Smith, *Friends' Books* I, p. 92.

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THOUGHTS ON SLAVERY.

CUSTOMS which are generally approved, and have been established by long usage, and opinions transmitted to us by our ancestors through a long succession of years, become so deeply rooted, as seldom to claim a serious investigation. We adopt them because they have been sanctioned by the example of those who have gone before us, and thus many well disposed persons, who are desirous of acting uprightly, have been introduced into practices, which, upon a candid and unprejudiced examination, have been found to be inconsistent with the great principles of Justice and Equity.

It is, however, both our duty and interest, as beings accountable to an Almighty Creator, rightly to employ the understanding he hath given us, in endeavouring to be acquainted with his will, and in examining the nature and tendency of those things which we practise. For as the judgments of God are all without partiality, as justice is an immutable principle, which cannot be warped aside to suit our views and actions, so every man's deeds will be tried by the infallible standard of truth.

Though persons of most religious societies, and men of high reputation in the world, give the influence of their example to things which are demonstrably wrong; yet that, neither diminishes the turpitude of such actions, nor makes the final consequences less dreadful than they otherwise would be.

A wise man, impressed with the truth of these observations, will lay aside the influence of example, the bias of inclination, and the prejudices which education may have instilled into his mind; and endeavour so to regulate his conduct as best to discharge his duty to God, and to his fellow creatures.

In applying these observations to the momentous subject of involuntary servitude, we may remark, that persons who hold slaves are variously circumstanced, and there may be amongst them, those who are sincerely desirous of managing wisely in this difficult matter; but truly the general disadvantages under which the poor Africans lie, as relates both to their moral and religious improvement; the hardness of their servitude, and the grievous sufferings which they endure, are sufficient to awaken our tenderest sympathy and commiseration; and

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call for a solemn inquiry how far our conduct toward them, is consistent with the great fundamental principle of the religion of Jesus, viz. "*Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.*" We cannot deny that they are rational, intelligent beings, and we have the same reasons for believing they are possessed of immortal souls, as that we ourselves are; consequently, they must be equally the objects of His divine care and regard, who is swayed by no distinctions either of nation or colour. He made all nations upon the earth of one blood, they are all His children, provided for by His bounty; and He has repeatedly declared himself to be no respecter of persons. When we reflect upon these things, and consider that we are all sojourners in this world, that we are subject to like infirmities and disorders of body, like frailties and afflictions of mind, the same death, the same judgment, and that one Almighty Being is judge and lord over all; an idea of general brotherhood almost involuntarily arises, and we feel a disposition to be easily touched with the sufferings of each other. But if we forget these things and look chiefly at our outward circumstances, constantly retaining in our minds the great disparity between the situation of the slaves and our own; together with our more extensive improvements in things natural and divine, we are apt to entertain fond notions of our own superiority and importance, and are greatly in danger of erring in our conduct towards them.

Life and liberty are the natural and unalienable rights of all men. We receive them from God, and no individual, nor any community can justly deprive us of the enjoyment of them. Liberty was esteemed by the inspired Law-giver, so precious and valuable a possession, that those who wrongfully deprived men of it, were sentenced to the same punishment as they who committed murder. "He that stealeth a man," says the Jewish law, "and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, shall surely be put to death:" and of such importance was this part of their polity considered, that Paul, the learned Jew, in giving a brief account of the uses of the law, declares it was made for men-stealers.

Whatever nicety of distinction we may make between going in person to catch slaves, and buying them of those who have captured them, it is plain to every reasonable man, that such distinction exists in words only; in point of guilt the actions are equally culpable. That the inhabitants of Africa enjoyed under their governors as much freedom as many of the white nations in Europe is certainly true, and as they have been brought from thence against their will, and placed in ser-