

Dr. H.A. Ramsay's letter to Dr. James Bryan, on the Southern negro, etc.

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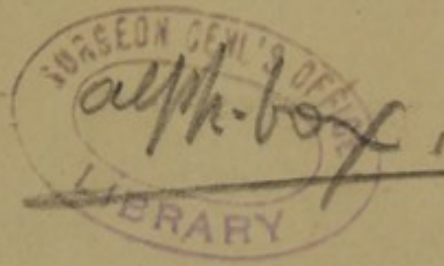
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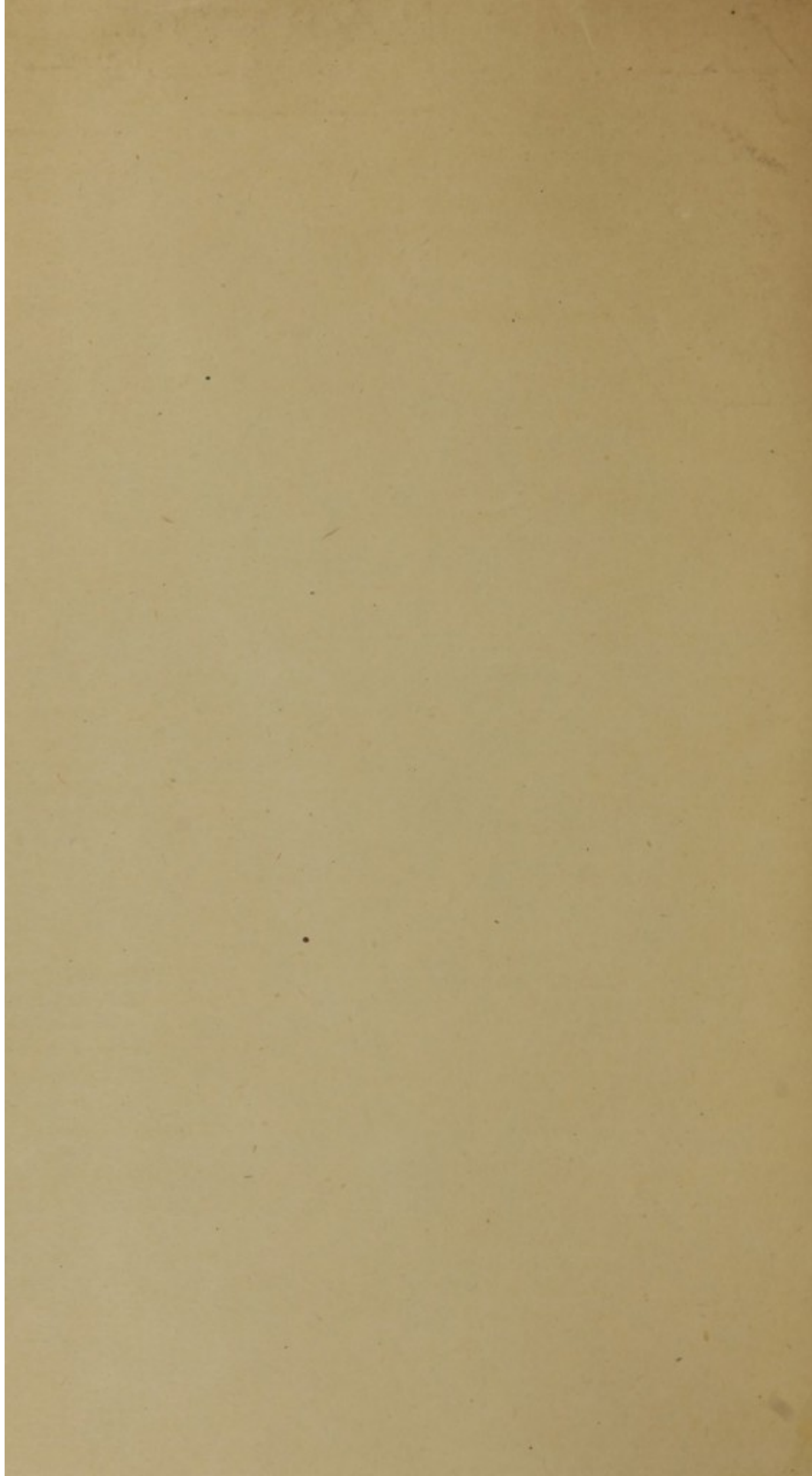
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RAMSAY (H.A.)

To the members of the
Georgia State Med. Soc.





V
DR. H. A. RAMSAY'S

LETTER

TO

DR. JAMES BRYAN,

ON THE

SOUTHERN NEGRO, ETC.

FROM THE

PHILADELPHIA MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.

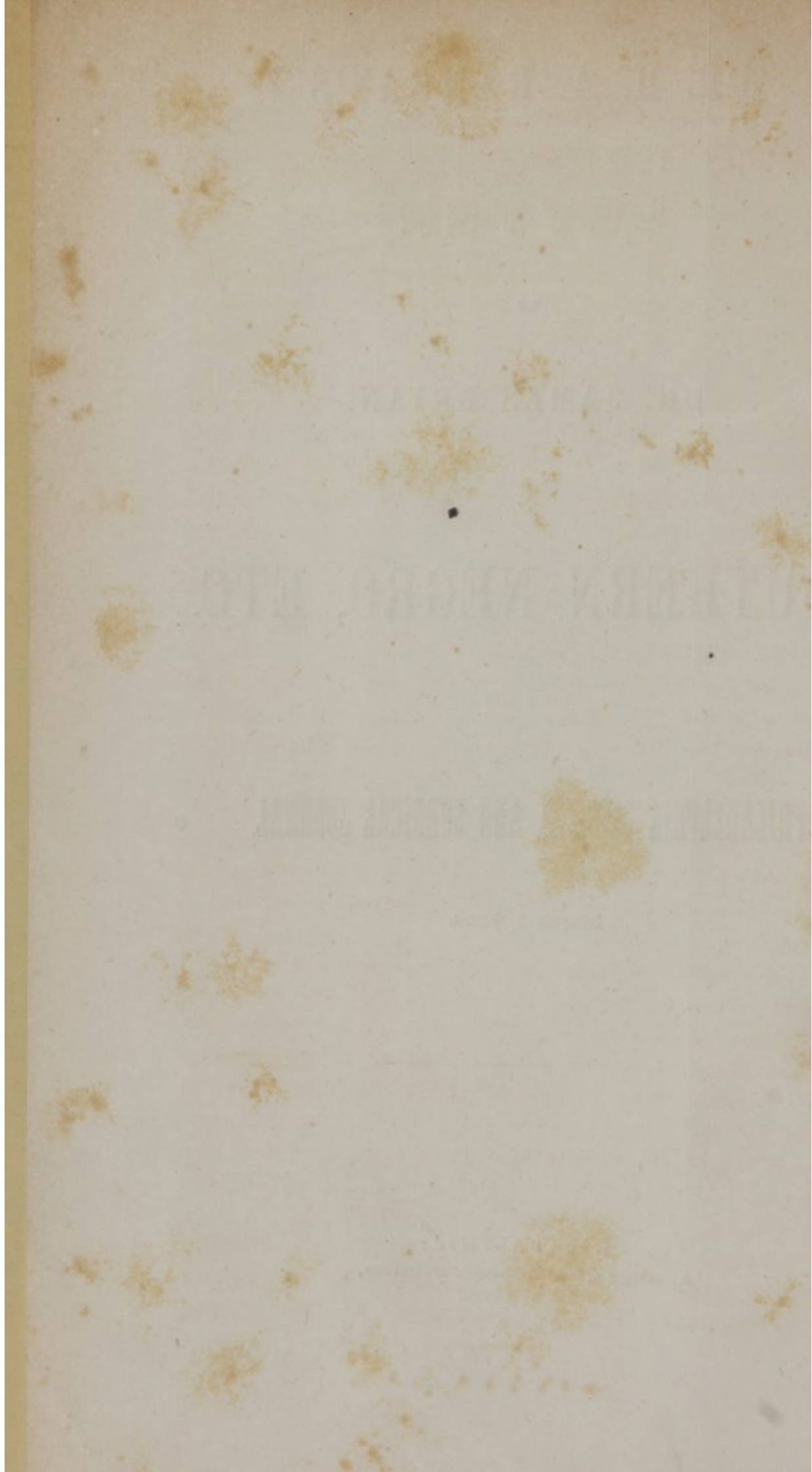
March 1, 1853.

30298
Washington, D.C.

PHILADELPHIA:

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1853.



PECULIARITIES OF THE NEGRO.

DEAR BRYAN:—I make it an invariable rule, in science, to declare no man's opinions erroneous until I have tested them in a proper crucible; consequently I am not wholly prepared to controvert your opinion with regard to the crossing of the white and black races, nor am I entirely impressed with the tenability of your position. It is true, in the South, we have any number of mulattoes, but no data have been preserved upon the question in issue; hence, I should forbear an appeal in that direction, as truth is of essential importance in a matter of such intrinsic interest. I will remark, however, that you seem to misconceive my point in the essay you so kindly noticed in your Journal of the 15th ult. When speaking of amalgamation, I was only discussing the intelection of the Negro, and adverted to amalgamation incidentally, and not with reference to a progressive perpetuation of the races in a physico-vital sense. While I am rigidly opposed to an amalgamation of the races upon physiological principles, I believe, like yourself, there is a natural repugnance to it, yet I am not insensible to a fact in natural history, which I conceive well established, *that the animal kingdom requires crossing to perpetuate their species, and a manifest violation of this law will terminate in a rapid declension of the animal race. This position refers only to the same race or species, not to consanguineous relationship; nor is it applicable to races of a different character which involve the mixing the different bloods; hence, you see I am rather inclined to your position, but not totally so, from a want of data.* I will illustrate my position in animal crossing, by a personal observational fact. In 1846 I purchased from a gentleman in Lincoln county, Georgia, a flock of fine goats, one male and four ewes. In the process of time I had many kids, as the female goat is quite prolific in this clime. I made it a rule to castrate all my male kids for table use, reserving the females for rearing. In 1848 I observed my stock began to degenerate, my kids were smaller, wanting in vigor,

and apparently puny; I turned out another kid *male*, but all to no purpose, so far as retrieving my lost ground in a generative sense was concerned. I saw evidently that my goats would become extinct, unless I adopted some speedy recuperative policy. I therefore procured a male goat of a different breed, and a manifest improvement in my stock was soon discovered. I did not retain my flock sufficiently long to have a complete consummation of my hopes, as I did not kill my *old male goat*, and disposed of the whole of them to a gentleman in the vicinity ere the entire flock exhibited renewed vigor from the crossing; but the gentleman to whom I sold castrated the original males and retained the one I had secured, which restored and regenerated the entire stock, and I have never seen a *healthier, more robust or vigorous* flock of goats than he has at this time. The same thing is observable in the raising of fowls, and the crossing of the feathered tribe is proverbial among the old ladies of the South; indeed, instances of its necessity are common in every poultry yard. The *hog, cow, sheep and horse*, we presume, are amenable to the same law. Now, if this law of crossing cannot be deviated from with impunity in animals, can it in man? We are inclined to think man cannot violate it without an infringement upon his primeval laws. We see it in every phase of life, where white persons of proximate consanguinity become allied, matrimonially, the progeny are defective, to some extent, in a physical or mental way. The same thing prevails with the Negro, as far as we know.

Intimately connected with this question is the subject of marriage, or in a Biblical sense, who may and who may not marry. The Levitical decrees, in our conception, are erroneous upon this ~~point~~. Their plain intent was indubitably to prescribe that *blood relatives should not marry*; but they have run aground, to some extent, upon this point. For instance, the decree says, thou shalt not marry thy wife's sister; this is an error, there is no *blood relation with a man and his Sister-in-law*, and there is no scientific impediment to such a marriage. With first cousins there is a blood relationship and there is no excuse for such marriages, for they are apt to produce mental and physical degeneracy in the offspring. We merely advert to this subject, to

Question

defend the scientific aspect of the question and correct a great and prevalent error, upon which the most learned divines have differed. A lady may marry her brother-in-law with moral and scientific impunity; a man may marry his sister-in-law with equal validity, for they are no *blood kin*; but first cousins, who are blood relations, should beware how they trample upon scientific precepts. I do not recollect seeing much of this *blood kin* marrying among our negroes, they are less inclined to it than whites; but I have no doubt but were they to infringe upon the consanguineous errors, it would produce the worst sort of *idiocy*, or *mental obtundity*. I knew one white man, (and I loathe his name!) who violated this sacred law with his daughter, the result was an idiotic child, I was informed. We demur at the Mosaic law, only upon scientific grounds, which we *believe* are impregnable. They were intended only for *blood kin* and no other, in our opinion; and this is the true philosophy of the question, founded upon physiological results.

We take it for granted, then, that a mixing of proximate bloods in the same race, is detrimental to its perpetuation, while a crossing of bloods in the same race that are not connected by consanguineous relationship, is equally essential to a perpetuation of races, in man and animals. The question of the crossing of the *white* and *black* is entirely a different issue, involving other opinions; it is a point of different races, and adverse bloods, not controlling the question of consanguineous mixing. In the South a mixing of *white* and *black* bloods is not an unusual occurrence; but how far this crossing controls the question of *vitality* and *perpetuation*, I am not able to say with any degree of certainty. The progeny of the negress by the *white man generally marks the features of the father, more profoundly than those of the mother*; and we observe the same thing in the *white woman*, who has had a successful congress with the male negro; at least this is the result of my observation; yet I will say, that it is not so common by far, here, for *white women* to have children by negro men, as it is for *white men* to beget them by a negress; and it is only the lowest class of females that indulge in such disreputable proceedings. Yet there are cases of it within my personal knowledge. I will here suggest some points relative to this question of mixing, in the

white and *black*, which may not have been noticed previously by writers upon the subject, from the fact that the negro issue has ever been a vexed question, upon which scientific men and politicians were loth to dwell; hence, the record upon many of the peculiarities of the race is sparse. It has been mentioned to me by intelligent and observing planters, that mulattoes were *shorter lived* than the pure race. How far the crossing of the races controls the question of vitality, I am not able to determine, as there are no statistics upon the point; but I am convinced the mulatto is more subject to *nervous disorders* than the negro, and he possesses a peculiar *constitutional erethism* which it is difficult to encounter, and hard to control, in disease. The mulatto is less *robust*, *more delicate*, *punier*, and *more capricious*, than the negro. In form, social qualities and intelligence, he is a superior being to the real Ethiopian; indeed, the real mulattoes of the South seem to have a sort of instinctive repugnance to the real negroes, and do not like, as a general rule, to associate with them. Making a short digression here, I will remark, a number of years since I became professionally acquainted with a family cross of the *Negro* and *Indian*—the latter gently preponderating. I have attended the mother in sickness, and in repeated attacks I was the attendant of the daughters, particularly one of them. The last mentioned was the hardest patient to cure I ever met; let her attack be mild or malignant, it seemed never to be much under the influence of medicine—there was a peculiarity of system inducing an arterial velocity, which I could never regulate or control by medication, and which I attributed to the peculiar physical organization of the patient, arising from the crossing of the bloods. I have never met a patient which so obstinately resisted the influence of remedies, who was untainted by blood crossing; nor have I ever seen a case, under any circumstances, which offered such a manifest indifference to prescription, and recover. I may have erred in the opinion I have given, but I have heard the same thing suggested by an intelligent practitioner who subsequently attended the same patient, and other members of the family, and I am deeply impressed with the conviction of its validity. But to our original point, that a *mixing of the white and black races would soon run out*. As previously said, this involves the question of differential races in

blood, as well as color. The admission of your position does not at all impair the palpable differences of anatomical structure in the two races, but merely exemplifies the physical integrity and superiority of one over the other. I am not, however, fully prepared to sustain or deny the ground you assume, yet I am somewhat leaning towards the conclusion, that a crossing of the bloods would merge the *negro in color* entirely into the white race, for reasons I have hinted at in a preceding part of this letter. The intelligence of the Negro would be improved, but in other respects, judging from observation, he would be infinitely worsted. The amalgam I should regard a very objectionable one, the coin would be spurious, and we are bound by all moral and physical principles to resist its introduction at every hazard, and to the last extremity.

This "*Negro concern*" is a sensitive matter in any phase; it is to be regretted it is a "*bone*" of contention, for it stultifies argument and suppresses observational facts. It is to be hoped a better day is at hand for us, in reference to the scientific investigation of this subject, and I trust, ere the revolution of another year, the Colleges of our country will take the necessary steps for establishing chairs in their respective schools, for its elucidation upon anatomical grounds, and independent of fanaticism. We have more to fear from fanatics in science and politics, North and South, than from all other sources, in the correct delineation of this question. We have ever thought, and now believe, *anatomical science* the legitimate plan for its correct *adjudication*. It is not to be presumed that you of Pennsylvania should be pro-slavery men, who have been reared amid the influences of general freedom; nor is it plausible, that we of the South, who have been raised under the auspices of slavery, should regard it an evil, or consider the Negro an equal. Although we were regarded, in the Southern parlance, a "*Fire-eater*" of the Democratic school, yet we are conservative enough to take a calm, candid and liberal view of the Negro question. This is the highest ground which can be assumed upon this vexed question, and we believe it is in consonance with the opinion of Dr. Nott, of Mobile, and the illustrious Dr. Cartright. For our own part, we would scorn to hold a being in servitude that we believed God had not specially adapted

for it. It has existed in all ages, and in the South we firmly think it rests by irremediable fate, and would only be blotted out to the injury of the colored race, who are incompetent, from all investigations of experience, to perform the duties of independent people, owing to their physical differences of structure. *We are open to conviction.*

If the Negro is naturally my equal, in intelligence, etc., and is capable of self-government, *why ^{not} emancipate him?* But, until that can be proven, I maintain, as a scientific man, that I am morally bound to preserve him in humane servitude. This, Dear Bryan, is about the opinion of nine-tenths of our people; so go to work, upon a fair basis, and let us see who errs and who does not. But in examining this question of the races, we should not defend our points upon an isolated case, for there are modifying and exceptional circumstances in every condition of life. From the disjointed letter I have penned, you see I am not sufficiently posted to venture a categorical opinion upon the running out of the races upon the crossing of the blood of the white and black; but my positions may be reduced to the following order:

1st. That the crossing of the same species, disconnected by blood relationship, in man, animals and fowls, is essential to their perpetuation.

2d. That the crossing of the same species, proximately connected by blood, has a deleterious influence upon them.

3d. That the crossings of the white and negro might merge the black race into the white, but it would be infinitely worse for the negro.

4th. That the negro is physically superior to the mulatto, while the latter has more intelligence and prettier features.

5th. That amalgamation is objectionable, under any circumstances.

I might have added something more about the peculiarities of the morbid condition of the mulatto, but I have made this note already too prolix, and I shall reserve it for another time, should my leisure permit me to indulge in that way. Hoping this dull scroll may find you in the same *conservative mood* my pamphlet did, I subscribe myself with renewed assurances, in haste,

Your friend,

H. A. RAMSAY.

TO THE MEMBERS

OF THE

GEORGIA STATE MEDICAL SOCIETY.

Gentlemen :

At your recent Meeting in Savannah, I am informed, upon the presentation of my *withdrawal*, one Dr. R. D. ARNOLD, a sort of would-be "Sir Oracle," objected to the withdrawal, and preferred a charge against me for a *Violation of the Code of Ethics*, in criticising *certain members and abuses of the said Society*. Without any hesitation whatever, I castigate the charge as *vindictive and false*, and only existing in his own idle brain, from the promptings of malice. I have violated no Code of Ethics. I acknowledge fealty to the American Code of Medical Ethics; upon it I act, and invite a rigid scrutiny into all my professional acts, from proper sources. But I have no idea Dr. Arnold, or the Medical Society of Georgia, are the proper tribunals to try any man upon an Ethical question; hence I renounce all *allegiance* to that body; and for the reasons that among its membership is one or more *Patent Medicine Venders*, and I think the fastidious man of etiquette, Dr. Arnold, *the Gasometer*, has his name swung to the wrapper of a certain "*secret nostrum*," recommending the "*precious draps*;" while Dr. DUGAS, one of the committee to try me, is in open and gross violation of the Code, by offering in his Journal, *to operate on patients gratis, and board them in the bargain*. What does he pay when a fellow boards himself? Besides this, Dr. Dugas has had a puff flying in the newspapers from an *Editor he invited to see his operations*. The puff reflects upon the diagnosis of a distant brother; and there is attached to the puff a long "*outlandish*" name for the tumor, probably manufactured to give it the character of a miraculous proceeding. What call you this, Brethren? Who has violated the Code? Nor is this all. Another member has had going the rounds of the newspapers, *an Operation for Stone*. *It was peculiarly and dreadfully large, and the operation miraculously successful—When I am told from a most reputable source, there was no stone taken from the bladder—the operation was a blank*. What call you this? Who violates the Code?

Did not one of the Faculty of the Medical College of Georgia write a long article, puffing his College and its Faculty, in the Georgia Constitutionalist? Was this ethical? Who violates the Code? Is it Ethical to *slander* a brother's fame before a Medical Society of which he is not a member, and that, while he is lying in an almost dying condition in twenty miles of the place of meeting? Probably some *Preacher* in the Society can answer this question. Hypocrites are usually good expounders of Ethical questions, when interested. Brothers! who has violated the Code? Let the Macon meeting determine. Would not these deviations have excluded any *village, country or city* physician in Georgia, other than the violators, from the Society? Ought the body to be admitted a Delegation in the American Medical Association? I shall prefer charges against DUGAS, GARVIN, ARNOLD, and others, for *gross* violations of the Code, etc. I wish every man to know one *fact*. These fellows always attack me *secretly*, and just before the meeting of the American Medical Association. What is this for? and what does it indicate? Every man of common sense knows it is *malicious, dastardly and designing*. Gentlemen, don't let the sun go down upon your wrath. I am not in the least alarmed: but in the words of Randolph, "*I am as cool as the center seed of a cucumber*."

As to myself, I have never assailed the Medical Society of Georgia. I have spoken of some of its abuses, and I have spoken plainly of those who had misrepresented me. The first was my right as a member; the second was a personal privilege; and I would like to know by what authority the Medical Society of Georgia can interfere in my personal transactions. At the meeting in 1852, the same ground was *assumed and defended by Dr. R. D. Arnold*. Apart from these facts, there are others more forcible. I entered the Society in April, 1852; in June early, 1852, I sent in my withdrawal; and my pamphlet on the *Negro*, containing the basis of these charges, was written in November following. Parliamentary usage will grant me my withdrawal,

and nothing but injustice or tyranny, can prevent me from obtaining it. But in addition to all this, whatever I may have said at any time, was in *self-defence*. This principle is unalienable; and I shall exercise it, regardless of *men, consequences* or *Medical Societies*, whenever assailed by people worthy of notice. I shall show at Macon a little *morceau* which was unprovoked, and which Dr. Arnold may not know of. There is another aspect of the case which I must not omit to name. I object to *malicious men* or *ethical violators*, or *patent medicine sellers* trying or arraigning me. In the spirit of the Code these are not competent. Then we live in a land where all men have a right of *selecting their peers* to commit their fate to, and no *malicious* man is good evidence or a fit jurymen in our courts against an accused.

If I have violated any ethical precept, show it, and "*I'll sin no more.*" But I do not conceive a Society, which promotes its members for violating a *Code* which it has adopted, and then arraigns another for *the mere expression of a personal feeling* and an observance of the code, a fit tribunal to try any Republican of the 19th century. All I ask of the Medical Society of Georgia is, an *abidance by the code, equal privileges* for me and my brethren, in our *cities, villages* and *country*. The record shows the independent men in these localities have not had it. I ask for brethren in Macon, Columbus, Atlanta, Griffin, Athens, Augusta and other places, their just position in the Society; and do not run into peculiar ranks in Savannah and Augusta for all the official favors of the body. I want the Society to be the exponent of Georgia Medicine. I want and strive to elevate Southern Science: and I want to see such men as *Gorman, Hosey, Moore, Long, Willingham, Dearing, Paul Eve, Phinizy, Acce, Ridley, Banks, O'Keefe, Ogilby, Lamar, Strohecker*, and a host of others invited to a common banquet, and asked to assist in promoting Georgia Medicine. I do not like to see every President and all the Orators come from the city of Savannah and the Medical College of Georgia. It looks like partiality, and one is apt to think there is juggling in the matter. When I see this, then all my opposition ceases, I am then willing to co-operate, provided you stand by the *Ægis* of safety, the Aaron's rod of the Society—the *Code*; provided no man treads upon my *toes*; if he should, depend upon it, in the Society or out, I shall *kick him*.

In conclusion, when Dr. Arnold writes preambles about me, I ask him to write down everything; and do not omit an essential modification, for he may rest assured, I think the man

"Who would stab my name,
"Would stab my person too,"

did not the hangman lie in the way. I shall notice this matter in extenso at Macon. In the mean time I will say, I am the ardent friend of Southern Medical Literature. I am a Georgian by birth and education. I long to see my native state take a high stand in Medical Science; but it will never be realized as long as there is so much *bickering, envy* and *strife* among the various members of the fraternity. I shall go to Macon to bury my prejudices upon the altar of Science. If I have erred, correct me; but in doing it please exhibit no partiality, but pluck the beam from other men's eyes; and recollect I am an independent man, and not to be

"Hawked at or spit upon by a neighing J———s."

To conclude, I repeat that, under present circumstances, we must look to the Journalism of the Southwest, West and North, if we wish justice and fairness to Southern men, or design to build up Southern Medical Literature. An appalling picture—but true as Holy Writ. God send less Malevolence and more *Science among us!*

With kind thoughts for my friends, and contempt for my assailants,

H. A RAMSAY.

Thompson, Ga., May 7, 1853.

