

VI. *An Account of the White Negro shewn before the Royal Society: In a Letter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Morton, President of the Royal Society, from James Parsons, M. D. F. R. S.*

My Lord,

Read Jan. 31, 1765. **T**HE white boy, who was brought before this learned Society on Thursday last, came to me with his master on Sunday afternoon; and according, to the desire of your lordship and the gentlemen present, I made the necessary inquiry into the several circumstances relative to his being born of black parents; and find the following notices very satisfactory; to which I have added some observations which, I hope, will not be foreign to the subject.

It appears that the father and mother of this boy were brought down above three hundred miles from an in-land country to the Gold Coast in Africa, and were bought among a great number of others, and put on board a ship bound to Virginia; where they arrived in the year 1755.

They became the property of colonel Benjamin Chambers, of the Falling Springs, in Cumberland County, in Pennsylvania; and are now employed upon an estate in Virginia, which the colonel possesses in right of his lady, whom he married in that province, although

although he lives with his family in Pennsylvania, where he sold the boy to his present master; of which fact, I saw the bill of sale that passed between the colonel and him.

The father and mother of this child are perfectly black, and were both very young when landed; the woman not being above sixteen years old, and her husband not more than six years older; and when they landed, being asked, how far she was gone with child? answered, so as to be understood to mean, that she was with child something more than six moons, and that this was her first pregnancy. They also declared, that they had never seen a white person before they came to the shore where Europeans were employed in buying black slaves.

The present owner of this boy is Mr. James-Hill-Clark, whom I informed of what had passed between Dr. Franklin and myself, on Friday morning last on this subject; for I paid him a visit, and in the course of our conversation he informed me, that while he was in England before, he received a letter from his lady, in which was some of the wool of a white negro child's head, by way of curiosity; and when I mentioned it to Mr. Clark, he assured me that this very boy was shewed in Pennsylvania as a great rarity; and that, to his knowledge, the wool sent in the letter was taken from this child's head. He was born about six or seven weeks after his parents landed in Virginia, in the year 1755; and was purchased by Mr. Hill-Clark of colonel Chambers in 1764, so that he appears not to be quite ten years old; and his mother has had two children since, who are both as black as the parents.

Now, though this deviation of colour in the child, from the contrary hue of both parents, is very singular, and something preternatural, yet instances of the same kind have happened before. We had one about four years ago here in London, which was a white girl, something younger than this boy, but exactly similar in colour, wool, &c. and was said, by the person who made a shew of her, to have been the offspring of a black father and mother. I did not go to see her; but I read an advertisement, concerning her, several times in the public papers, wherein she was called a white negro girl; and was informed by those that saw her, that she answered the description in the advertisement very truly. She was shewn in town for some months every day.

To this remarkable case I shall subjoin two others, one of which I saw myself, and the other was given me by a gentleman of undoubted veracity; which, though they differ in some circumstances from the above, yet have so much relation to each other, as will prevent their being censured as digressions from the subject.

The first is of a black man who married a white woman in York several years ago; of which I had an account from an eye-witness. She soon proved with child, and in due time brought forth one intirely black, and in every particular of colour and features resembling the father, without the least participation from the mother. This was looked upon as a very singular case, because people naturally expect the issue of such a marriage would be tawny; which indeed is the usual effect produced by the congress of black and white persons.

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The second case was of a black man, servant to a gentleman who lived somewhere in the neighbourhood of Grays-Inn. This black man married a white woman, who lived in the same family; and, when she proved with child, took a lodging for her in Gray's-inn-lane; when she was at her full time, the master had business out of town, and took his man with him, and did not return till ten or twelve days after this woman was delivered of a girl, which was as fair a child to look at as any born of white parents, and her features exactly like the mother's. The black at his return was very much disturbed at the appearance of the child, and swore it was not his; but the nurse who attended the lying-in woman soon satisfied him; for she undressed the infant, and shewed him the right buttock and thigh, which were as black as the father, and reconciled him immediately to both mother and child. I was informed of the fact, and went to the place, where I examined the child, and found it true; this was in the spring of the year 1747, as my notes specify which I took upon the spot.

As I was willing to add as much as possible to the above account, I took an opportunity of enquiring about matters of this sort, in a worthy family who came to live in Red-Lyon-Square not many months ago; and had lived in Virginia several years in a conspicuous light; and was informed by the lady of the family of the two following curious particulars:

About nineteen years ago, in a small plantation near to that of this family, which belonged to a widow, two of her slaves, both black, were married;

ried; and the woman brought forth a white girl, which this lady saw very often; and as the circumstances of this case were very particular, I shall make mention of them here, both for the entertainment of the Society and to shew that this is exactly similar to the case of the boy before us. When the poor woman was told the child was like the children of white people, she was in great dread of her husband, declaring, at the same time, that she never had any thing to do with a white man in her life; and therefore begged they would keep the place dark that he might not see it. When he came to ask her how she did, he wanted to see the child, and wondered why the room was shut up, as it was not usual; the woman's fears increased when he had it brought into the light; but while he looked at it he seemed highly pleased, returned the child, and behaved with extraordinary tenderness. She imagined he dissimulated his resentment till she should be able to go about, and that then he would leave her; but in a few days he said to her: "You are afraid of me, and therefore keep the room dark, because my child is white; but I love it the better for that, for my own father was a white man, though my grandfather and grand-mother were as black as you and myself; and although we came from a place where no white people ever were seen, yet there was always a white child in every family that was related to us." The woman did well, and the child was shewn about as a curiosity; and was, about the age of fifteen, sold to admiral Ward, and brought to London in order to be shewed to the Royal Society; but, finding that one of the sailors had debauched

the girl and given her the pox, he soon put her under the care of a captain returning to America, and sent her back to her own country.

The other account is, that admiral Franklin had taken a Spanish ship, in war time, and brought her into Carolina; and, upon searching, found a picture of a boy who was as beautifully mottled all over with black and white spots as any dog that ever was seen; it is uncertain which was the ground, or which colour the spots were of; but this lady says, that several copies of the picture were taken in Carolina; and that they said it was the portrait of a child born of negro parents upon the Spanish main; the ship was bound to old Spain; and this lady does not doubt but the admiral may have the picture in his custody now. If these facts are ascertained by these two gentlemen, they will be worth recording with the present subject, which I will take the trouble of enquiring into further.

These deviations of colour are indeed very extraordinary among the African negroes, but they are not peculiar to them; some parts of America have also similar variations from the common colour of the inhabitants; and as I esteem it a great happiness when I can contribute to the entertainment of this learned body, I cannot excuse myself from adding to the above, what Mr. Wafer's account of the Isthmus of America gives us upon the like objects in that country. See page 134 of his Description, &c. London, printed for Knapton in Paul's Church-yard, in 1699; where, after having described the natural copper-coloured complexion of the people, he says, "There is one complexion so singular among a sort
" of

“ of people of this country, that I never saw nor
 “ heard of any like them in any part of the world.

“ They are white, and there are of them of both
 “ sexes; yet there are but few of them in compa-
 “ rison of the copper-coloured, possibly but one to
 “ two or three hundred. They differ from the
 “ other Indians chiefly in respect of colour, though
 “ not in that only. Their skins are not of such a
 “ white, as those of fair people among Europeans,
 “ with some tincture of a blush or sanguine com-
 “ plexion; yet neither is it like that of our paler peo-
 “ ple, but it is rather a milk-white, lighter than
 “ the colour of any Europeans, and much like that
 “ of a white horse.

“ For there is this further remarkable in them,
 “ that their bodies are beset all over, more or less,
 “ with a fine short milk-white down; for they are
 “ not so thick set with this down, especially on the
 “ cheeks and forehead, but that the skin appears dis-
 “ tinct from it. Their eye-brows are milk-white
 “ also, and so is the hair of their heads, and very
 “ fine withal, about the length of six or eight inches,
 “ and inclining to a curl.

“ They are not so big as the other Indians; and
 “ their eye-lids bend and open in an oblong figure,
 “ pointing downwards at the corners, and forming
 “ an arch or figure of a crescent with the points
 “ downwards. From hence, and from their seeing
 “ so clear as they do in a moon-shiny night, we
 “ used to call them moon-eyed. For they see not
 “ well in the sun, poring in the clearest day; their
 “ eyes being but weak, and running with water if
 “ the sun shine towards them; so that in the day-

“ time they care not to go abroad, unless it be a
 “ cloudy dark day. Besides, they are a weak people
 “ in comparison of the others, and not very fit for
 “ hunting, or other laborious exercises, nor do they
 “ delight in any such. But, notwithstanding their
 “ being thus sluggish and dull in the day-time,
 “ yet, when moon-shiny nights come, they are all
 “ life and activity, running abroad into the woods,
 “ and skipping about like wild bucks, and running
 “ as fast by moon-light, even in the gloom and
 “ shade of the woods, as the other Indians by day,
 “ being as nimble as they, though not so strong and
 “ lusty. The copper-coloured Indians seem not to
 “ respect them so much as those of their own com-
 “ plexion, looking on them as something monstrous.
 “ They are not a distinct race by themselves; but
 “ now and then one is bred of a copper-coloured
 “ father and mother; and I have seen a child of less
 “ than a year old of this sort.

“ Some would be apt to suspect they might be the
 “ offspring of some European father; but besides that
 “ the Europeans come little here, and have little com-
 “ merce with the Indian women when they do
 “ come; these white people are as different from the
 “ Europeans, in some respects, as from the copper-
 “ coloured Indians in others. And, besides, where an
 “ European lies with an Indian woman, the child is
 “ always a Mostese, or Tawny, as is well known to
 “ all who have been in the West-Indies, where there
 “ are Mostesas, Mulattoes, &c. of several gradations
 “ between the white, and the black or copper-co-
 “ loured, according as the parents are, even to de-
 “ compounds,

“ compounds, as a Mulatto-Fina, the child of a Mulatto man and Mostefa woman, &c.

“ But neither is the child of a man and woman of these white Indians white like the parents, but copper-coloured as their parents were. For so Lacenta told me, and gave me this as his conjecture how these came to be white, that it was through the force of the mother’s imagination looking on the moon at the time of conception; but this I leave others to judge of. He told me withal that they were but short-lived.”

N. B. Lacenta was the king of the Indians among whom Mr. Wafer lived.

If my time would have permitted, I should have made some remarks upon these several cases; but I must seize some other opportunity for this purpose; and am,

My Lord,

Your Lordship’s most respectful

and most humble servant,

J. Parsons.

Wednesday, Jan. 30, 1765.