

Roanoke Island, N.C. "Sunny Side"
February 12th, 1865

It is with much pleasure that I seat myself to acknowledge the reception of the clothing from Plymouth Church. It is a source of much gratification to me, to know that the ladies of your society feel so much interest in our people. Next to the strength we desire each day directly from Him whence cometh all our help, I think nothing so sustains and cheers us, as the kindly sympathy and remembrance of friends at the North. Please tender to the ladies of your society our hearty thanks for the fruits of their bounty and industry, which we are now enjoying. The denim dresses are particularly adapted to the wants of a majority of the women—to the very class who stand so much in need of assistance. They are those who were "field hands" under their masters, and who have yet to learn the proper manner of treating any garment less substantial than homespun or denim. Among them the dresses are doing excellent service. I cannot wish any greater pleasure in return for your benevolence than that you might enjoy the distribution, and realize with us, how much more blessed it is "to give than to receive." It was a very happy moment to me, when I could say to a poor creature, "Keep your money," as she offered me her only dollar, telling me her sad story of destitution; her earnest "God bless you, and de dear ladies too" was only one of the voices that ascend daily to call down blessings on you and yours. The under garments were invaluable and the patterns in all cases well chosen. I would suggest that the flannels be of the colored material, as the white is soon soiled in the cabins of the greater part of those who stand in need of charity. The stockings donated would be more useful if they were of a larger size, inasmuch as the foot capable of wearing those very ones, is rarely shod. If covering can be provided for the feet of the older ones, "who have to knock about cold days to tote wood and water"—the little ones are well content to go bare.

You are correct in your inferences that some are able to sew; and not only this, but also to cut and fit neatly. We have all grades of society in our colony, from the intelligent, the favorite house or body servant, down to the benighted ones, who reply, with stupid looks of bewilderment, when questioned of their knowledge of God, "Dunno, Missus—never heern tell; so faithfully has the master's character been reproduced in the servants!

The greater proportion of the men are employed either by the military, or by Capt. James, in the Contraband Department. These are able to provide for their families, to a considerable extent, and it is to them that the new goods, such as the piece denims, flannels and shoes are sold. Of the latter I have ventured to distribute some gratuitously, for I felt sure of the approbation of the officers of the Society, in so doing. The needy ones are the families of those who are absent in the army, and I do feel a double pleasure in giving to and in working for one who is both a freedman and a soldier.

[“From Miss Ella Roper,” *American Missionary* 9 (April 1865): 77-78.]