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CHRISTIANITY

AND

SLAVERY.

BY

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"Slave-owners are worthy of all honor."—PAUL.

Slavery—"That execrable sum of all villainies."—JOHN WESLEY.

"Slavery is no evil, and is consistent with the principles of revealed religion; all opposition to it arises from fiendish fanaticism."—Rev. J. THORNWELL, Wesleyan (Tract 19, "500,000 Strokes for Freedom").

"Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, should be slaveholders; yes—I repeat it boldly—there should be members, and *deacons*, and *elders*, and *bishops*, too, who were slaveholders."—Rev. W. WINANS, Wesleyan (Ibid).

"If by one prayer I could liberate every slave in the world, *I would not offer it.*"—GARDNER SPRING, D.D. (Ibid).

"In ancient Mexico no one could be born a slave."—BANCROFT'S "Native Races of Pacific States," Vol. II., 221.

CHRISTIANITY AND SLAVERY.

CHRISTIANS—even some who ought to know better—are very angry with me because I hold and declare that Christianity favors slavery. Instead of waxing wrath will they do their best to refute my opinion? And, that they may have the best of opportunities to do so, I subjoin the evidence on which that opinion is grounded.

1. Abraham, the friend of God, had slaves “born in his house,” and “bought with his money” (Genesis xvii., 12, 13). And it is evident that he claimed and exercised the right to do as he pleased with them, for when he submitted to the barbarous rite of circumcision, the slaves were subjected to the same. Hagar, too, was evidently a slave, at the entire disposal of her master and mistress.

Now, since Abraham was God’s friend, had God considered slavery a wrong, he would, I presume, have mentioned it to the Patriarch. And as Jesus, according to orthodoxy, was living at that time, and as much Abraham’s friend as his Father, he, too, tacitly approved of Abraham’s slavery. It is useless to plead that this slavery was not so bad as that of America; for you cannot prove that—it *may* have been worse. The case of Hagar shows what sort of slavery it was. And a man who could, with impunity, sacrifice his only son (as Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac) was hardly the man to value the life of a slave, except commercially.

2. By the law of Moses, divinely inspired, be it remembered, a man might sell his own daughter (Exodus xxi., 7). It is curious, too, to note in passing, that that crude code, so much bepraised by Jews and Christians—the Ten Commandments—contains no hint that parents owe any duty to their children.

3. A Hebrew slave might claim his liberty if owned by a countryman, at the end of six years’ bondage. But if he married after his slavery began he could not take his wife

and children with him ; they belonged to his master, and he must "go out by himself" (Exodus xxi., 2—4). I can think of few things more atrocious than this ; perhaps Christians can. And it should not be forgotten that it was the "spirit of Christ" which inspired the prophets (1 Peter i., 11), and Moses among the rest, I presume.

4. A Hebrew slave-master might kill his slave with impunity, provided he took time enough. "And if a man smite his servant, or his maid (saints might strike females !) with a rod, and he die under his hand ; he shall surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if *he continue a day or two*, he shall not be punished : for he is his MONEY" (Exodus xxi., 20—21). In these verses we see the worst features of slavery. (1) A man might whip his slaves, male or female, and to any extent short of murder *on the spot*. Here is no shadow of provision made for any justice to the slave ; he is not a man, he is only "money." (2) Life and death were in the hands of the owner. In what part of the world has slavery taken a worse form ? How can Christians pretend that their religion is opposed to slavery, when their God gave such instructions to Moses ? Let them have the decency to repudiate the Bible before they grumble at our criticisms on their religion !

5. The following verses are also exceedingly plain and equally atrocious:—"Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you ; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land : and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession ; they shall be your bondmen for ever : but over your brethren, the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigor" (Leviticus xxv., 44—6). No doubt a thorough-going defender of the Bible could easily preach an abolition sermon from these three verses, and prove therefrom that slavery is contrary to the whole tenor of the Bible and an abomination in the sight of the Lord.

6. Joshua, not able to kill the Gibeonites, enslaved the whole tribe ; and made them "hewers of wood and drawers

of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose" (Joshua ix.). Here we find slavery *consecrated*. They were "cursed;" and without being asked whether they believed in the Lord or not the whole nation is compelled, as a punishment, and as a punishment for daring to save their own lives by the only way known to them—for this they are condemned to serve the Lord! A back-handed compliment, surely, to their deity and religion! Or, if their God sanctioned it, it shows that in those days he was quite willing to be served even by slaves. This view of the case is proved by Numbers xxxi., where the Lord's portion or "tribute" of the captive Midianites was 32, out of 32,000 (v. 40).

7. The whole Israelitish state or government was, like Oriental governments generally, a pure despotism, where the king was supreme, and the people all slaves, entirely at the disposal of their lord. Samuel well describes this feature of the state when protesting against the kingship (1 Samuel viii., 10—18). Solomon could build his temple and other works only by the aid of forced labor; and he enslaved the descendants of the Canaanites for that purpose (1 Kings ix., 15—22). I do not remember that the Lord ever found fault with this arrangement, nor did he decline to own a temple raised by unwilling slaves, and possibly by men who regarded him as an abomination. Will Christians explain this?

Perhaps I may be told that Hebrew slaves were all liberated in the Year of Jubilee. But I am not aware that that year ever arrived until the whole nation, slaves, masters, and all, were carried into captivity. It is singular that the Bible nowhere, so far as I remember, records the celebration of the Jubilee. The Old Testament certainly protests vigorously against slavery—when the writers and their friends are the victims. It was a dreadful thing for the Egyptians to enslave the family of Jacob; but Joseph, though once sold himself, actually bought up the whole of Egypt, the whole of the cattle, the whole of the money, and the whole of the people as the property and slaves of Pharaoh. Yet "the Lord was with him."

Perhaps—nay, for certain—Christians will urge that the New Testament is essentially opposed to all slavery. If so,

then (1) It cannot have been inspired by the same God who gave the Old; unless (2) that God became somewhat civilized and improved in morals in the interval between the writing of the two books. (3) Any being opposed to slavery would have repudiated the parts of the Old Testament above referred to and quoted, if he had known them. Was this ever done by the God or Gods of the New Testament? (4) If Jesus was opposed to slavery, why did he not say as much? The world was then full of the horrid thing. Why did he not lift his voice against it? Instead of fulminating anathemas against unbelief and hurling threats against riches, why did he never say, "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a slave-owner to enter into the Kingdom of God"? This would have stamped him a philanthropist, and a lover of liberty. Let his followers explain how he missed so grand an opportunity. He who uttered the parable of the Laborers, where those who worked but one hour received the same wage as those who worked the whole day, because, forsooth! the master wished it so, could have had no conception of liberty and the rights of man. He who uttered the sentiments of Matthew xxii., 1—7, and endorsed them as the policy of his own projected kingdom, must have been a bitter foe to liberty. What liberty can there be when a city is liable to a worse doom than that of Sodom for rejecting the missionaries of Jesus? Or where individuals are liable to be damned for unbelief? It is an outrage on common sense to affirm that he who could threaten as Jesus did was a friend of liberty.

The New Testament nowhere forbids slavery, or even discountenances it. How was it Jesus omitted all mention of it when he preached his Sermon on the Mount? or when he spoke parables founded on the relation of owner and slave, as that of the talents? The language of the New Testament is saturated with the principles of slavery, while those of liberty scarcely appear. The word *δοῦλος* (*doulos*) occurs about 117 times in the Greek Testament, and always has the meaning of *slave*—at least I am able to find no exception. On the other hand, the word *μισθιος* (*misthios*), a hired man, occurs but twice at most. *Doulos* not merely denotes the slaves of men but even of the Lord; indeed, *κύριος* (*kurios*), or lord or owner, and *δοῦλος* (*doulos*)

or *slave*, are corresponding words, and the one implies the other. There cannot be a lord without a slave, nor slave without a lord. Christianity is but a gigantic system of the most absolute slavery on the one hand, and of the most absolute despotism on the other. The Lord owns, in the most complete sense, all his servants, and can do with them whatsoever he will. Hence Paul does not blush to dub himself the SLAVE of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans i., 1). Such a man knew not the meaning or the value of liberty; he was content to be a chattel.

But the New Testament acquiesces in slavery, and enjoins its continuance, as the following texts will show: "Ye slaves, submit to your owners according to the flesh, with FEAR and TREMBLING, in the simplicity of your hearts, as to the Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of the God from the soul; with good will, slaving unto the Owner, and not to men; knowing that whatever good a man does the same shall he receive from the Owner, whether he be bond or free. And you owners, do the same thing to them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your Owner is in the heavens, and that there is no respect of persons with him" (Eph. vi., 5—9). I have revised this text in rather a literal fashion, but no Greek scholar can say that I have strained it.

Here Paul either dared not recommend abolition, or was not enlightened enough to understand its value; in the former case he was a coward, in the latter a semi-barbarian. In Colossians iii., 22—25, he gives nearly the same injunction to the slaves. 1 Timothy vi., 1—5, runs thus: "Let as many as are slaves under the yoke count their own despots (Greek, *despotas*) WORTHY OF ALL HONOR, that the name of God and his teaching be not blasphemed. Nor let those who have believing despots despise them because they are brethren; but rather slave for them, for those who reap the benefit are faithful and beloved. These things teach and exhort. If anyone teach otherwise, and does not come in to the sound doctrine which is of our Owner, Jesus Christ, and to the teaching which accords with religion, he is stupid, knowing nothing, distressed about questions and word-battles, whence come envy, strife, blasphemies, evil surmisings, perverse disputes, among men of corrupt mind, and destitute of the truth, imagining that the religion is gain."

Here (1) slaves are bidden to remain as they are, and count their owners worthy of all honor. If a slave owner is worthy of all honor, there can be nothing wrong in slavery, except the bad conduct of the wicked slaves. (2) The owners here referred to were, some of them, Christians. Had Christianity been opposed to slavery, this could not have been. Christians still hold slaves in some parts, and they can defend their conduct by the New Testament. (3) The latter part of the passage is levelled against abolitionists: they dispute, they raise questions, they disturb existing institutions, they oppose slavery, and have evidently been tampering with the slaves; and the owners have as evidently appealed to Paul to fulminate anathemas against them. Hence the great Apostle of the Gentiles hurls his thunderbolts at those "stupid," "know-nothing," "corrupt-minded," men, who would overturn society by liberating the slaves. Paul was not an abolitionist when he wrote those verses, and had he lived in modern England, how he would have lashed the "stupidity" and "corrupt-mindedness" of those notorious "know-nothings," Clarkson, Wilberforce, Buxton, and others, who wrought the death of that Christian institution, slavery, in the British Colonies! Had Paul lived in America a few years back most likely Jeff Davis had never been heard of, and Paul might have been elevated to the throne of a slavedom.

In the Epistle to Titus (ii., 9) Paul holds the same language:—Slaves must submit to their own despots; must please them in all things; must not reply when corrected; must not steal, but be noted for fidelity. All this implies that slavery was proper, that one man might justly own another: the poor slave, who had been stolen, must not steal; he who had no social or political rights, no property, himself the property of another—this poor chattel is commanded to obey, and to behave himself well, for the sake of the doctrine of God! Thus this man teaches that his great father in heaven, as he calls his deity, approves of the most heinous of all known crimes, slavery, and will hold the slave guilty who purloins his owner's goods, or fails to slave for that owner to his utmost power!

Thus I have shown what Christianity, as exhibited in the New Testament, thinks of slavery. And now we may glance at the Church in later ages. Guizot, while claiming for the

Church much of the credit of abolishing slavery, says: "It has been often asserted that the abolition of slavery in modern Europe was exclusively owing to Christianity. I think that is saying too much. Slavery long existed in the heart of the Christian society, without greatly exciting its astonishment, or drawing down its anathema. A multitude of causes, and a great development in other ideas of civilisation, were required to eradicate this evil of evils, this iniquity of iniquities" ("History of Civilisation." Edition, Chambers, 1848, pp. 108—9).

The Church, in respect to slaves, was far behind the empire. Slave marriages were not recognised by either State or Church for many centuries. "In the old Roman society in the Eastern Empire this distinction between the marriage of the free man and the concubinage of the slave was long recognised by Christianity itself. These unions were not blessed, as the marriages of their superiors had soon begun to be, by the Church. Basil, the Macedonian, (A.D. 867—886), first enacted that the priestly benediction should hallow the marriage of the slave; but the authority of the emperor was counteracted by the deep-rooted prejudices of centuries." (Milman's "Latin Christianity." Vol. II., p. 15.)

In this the Church followed Moses (Exodus xxi., 4). And Jesus and his Apostles forgot to throw out the slightest hint on this most important social subject. If the West Indian and American planters held loose views on sexual morality, as regards the slaves, the Bible certainly was not calculated to correct them.*

If Christianity was opposed to slavery, or the chief instrument of its abolition, how was it it did not begin sooner? How was it it took so long to accomplish the work? Had the Bible condemned the crime instead of enjoining and encouraging it, no doubt it would have influenced the Church in the right direction. But the Church encouraged and practised slavery, until the humanity of the world compelled a change.

When abolition was proposed it was Christians who most strenuously resisted it; and in doing so they entrenched themselves in Bible ground, and fought with weapons drawn

* See Appendix.

from Holy Writ. A few examples shall close this pamphlet. The quotations are selected from "Five Hundred Thousand Strokes for Freedom," London: W. and F. Cash, 5, Bishopsgate Street, and Tweedie, 337, Strand, 1853. This work comprises 82 Anti-slavery tracts, edited by Wilson Armistead, Leeds. Tract 5, page 2, reports that at that period the various Protestant Ministers and Church members held no less than 660,563 slaves in America. No doubt they understood the letter and spirit of the Bible as well as the abolitionists. If not, how and why not? The Rev. James Smylie, A.M., of the Amity Presbytery, Mississippi, is reported to have said: "If slavery be a sin, and advertising and apprehending slaves, with a view to restore them to their masters, is a direct violation of the divine law, and if the buying, selling, or holding of a slave, for the sake of gain, is a heinous sin and scandal, then verily three-fourths of all the Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, in eleven States of the Union are of the devil. They hold, if they do not buy and sell slaves, and with few exceptions, they hesitate not to apprehend and restore runaway slaves when in their power." Tract 8, p. 20.

The Charleston Union Presbytery, 7th April, 1836, "Resolved, that in the opinion of this Presbytery, the holding of slaves, so far from being a sin in the sight of God, is nowhere condemned in his holy word: that it is in accordance with the example and consistent with the precepts of patriarchs, apostles, and prophets," etc. Ibid. p. 23.

The Missionary Society of the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, by their board of managers, said: "We denounce the principles and practice of the abolitionists *in toto*. . . . We believe that the holy scriptures, so far from giving any countenance to this delusion, do, unequivocally, authorise the relation of master and slave." Ibid.

The Hopewell Presbytery, South Carolina, issued a document affirming that "Slavery has always existed in the Church of God, from the time of Abraham to this day." Ibid.

The Presbyterian Synod of Virginia "Resolved, unanimously, that we consider the dogma, that slavery as it exists in the slave-holding States is necessarily sinful, and ought to be immediately abolished, and the conclusions which

naturally follow from that dogma, as directly and palpably contrary to the plainest principles of common sense and common humanity, and the clearest authority of the word of God." Ibid.

Professor Hodge, Princeton (N. J.) Presbyterian Theological Seminary, published an article in the *Biblical Repertory* containing this: "At the time of the advent of Jesus Christ slavery in its worst forms prevailed over the world. The Savior found it around him in Judea, the apostles met with it in Asia, Greece and Italy. How did they treat it? Not by denunciation of slave-holding as necessarily sinful." P. 24.

The *Quarterly Christian Spectator*, New Haven (Ct.), a Congregational paper, in 1838, said: "The Bible contains no explicit prohibition of slavery; it recognises, both in the Old Testament and in the New, such a constitution of society, and it lends its authority to enforce the mutual obligations resulting from that constitution." P. 24.

T. R. Dew, Professor in William and Mary College (Episcopalian), said: "Slavery was established by divine authority among even the elect of heaven, the children of Israel." P. 25.

D. R. Furman, Baptist, in an exposition of the views of his Church, addressed to the Governor of South Carolina, in 1833, said: "The right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example." Ibid.

Tract 45 quotes the following from the *Boston Emancipator*, 1846, "Rev. Dr. Taylor, at the head of the Theological School of Yale College, stated, in a lecture before the Theological Class, that he had no doubt if Jesus Christ was now on earth, that he would, under certain circumstances, become a slave-holder!"

Perhaps the following is the very "richest" morsel in this collection: "Advertisement in the *Religious Herald*, a Virginia paper. 'Who wants 35,000 dollars in property? I am desirous of spending the remainder of my life as a missionary, if the Lord permit, and therefore offer for sale my farm, and the vineyard, adjacent to Williamsberg, containing 600 acres, well watered, and abounding in marl; together with all the crops, stock and utensils thereon. Also my house and lot in town, fitted up as a boarding establishment, with all the furniture belonging to it. ALSO ABOUT

40 SERVANTS (*slaves*), MOSTLY YOUNG and LIKELY, and RAPIDLY INCREASING IN NUMBER AND VALUE. To a kind master, I would put the whole property at the reduced price of 35,000 dollars, and arrange the payment to suit purchasers, provided the interest be annually paid.—S. JONES.” Tract 76.

I have not met with the biography of this saint; but it is to be hoped the Lord did “permit,” and that he entered the mission field and proved successful in “winning souls.” Probably, before now, he is in glory with the sainted Abraham and other slave-holding “brethren” of Bible times.

What can Christians reply? The Bible unmistakably commits itself to, encourages, and enjoins slavery; some of the most devoted Christians (to wit, S. Jones, the intending missionary,) have held slaves, and defended themselves by Bible teachings. Do they not understand the Bible as correctly as modern defenders of the faith, or as abolitionists? Are they less honest?

I rejoice in abolition; but I am bound to say that it is decidedly anti-Christian. Will some good theologian show that I am in error?

A P P E N D I X .

NOT expecting my article to be republished from the *N. R.*, I omitted, for brevity's sake, much matter that might have been inserted. The following are a few specimens.

SLAVE MARRIAGES.

"The Savannah River (Baptist) Association, in 1835, in reply to the question: 'Whether, in a case of involuntary separation of such a character as to preclude all prospect of future intercourse, the parties ought to be allowed to marry again?' *Answered*: 'That such a separation among persons situated as our slaves are, is civilly a separation by death, and they believe that, *in the sight of God*, it would be so viewed. . . . The slaves are not free agents, and a dissolution by death is not more entirely without their consent, and beyond their control, than by such separation.'"

The Shiloh Baptist Association held similar views upon this subject; and the Rev. C. Jones, 'who was an earnest and indefatigable laborer for the good of the slave,' says of the slave marriage, "'It is a contract of convenience, profit, or pleasure, that may be entered into and dissolved at the will of the parties, and that without heinous sin, or injury to the property interests of anyone.'" "Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin," p. 393.

"The Rev. R. J. Brickenridge, D.D., says, 'The system of slavery denies to a whole class of human beings the sacredness of marriage and of home, compelling them to live in a state of concubinage; for, in the eye of the law, no colored slave-man is the husband of any wife in particular, nor any slave-woman the wife of any husband in particular; no slave-man is the father of any children in particular, and no slave-child is the child of any parent in particular.'" *Ibid*, p. 406.

I quote the above to show how atrociously and completely

the American Christians executed the Mosaic and Christian principles of slavery. We are frequently informed that Christianity is the safeguard of the family, the bulwark of marriage. But this religion, in its ancient form, repudiates the idea of slave marriage in its proper sense (Exodus xxi., 3—5); in its New Testament form it tacitly endorses the law of Moses on the subject; the marriage of slaves was not recognised in the early Church, nor in the churches of America. Thus in ancient, mediæval, and modern times this divine religion, this source of all blessings, this miraculous system of doctrines and duties, has denied all liberty, and even the advantages and rights of decency, to countless millions of those beneath its sway. All its atrocities and horrors it has perpetrated at the suggestion, the command, or connivance of its divine book, and in the very name of its God—a God whose temples were shambles, whose priests were wholesale butchers, whose attendants have ever been slaves—a God who solemnly revealed to Moses a whole system of sacred cookery and devotional millinery, but forgot to reveal the principles of right, of honor, of justice, of liberty, or of decency.

DEFENCE OF SLAVERY.

I might fill many pages with quotations showing how Christians have pummelled abolitionists with Bible principles, and how other Christians have vainly tried to parry those divine blows. When Clarkson's Bill for the abolition of the slave trade was carried to the House of Lords it is well-known that Lord Chancellor Thurlow denounced it as contrary to the Bible—as it really was.

“The noblest eloquence was expended upon this subject (the abolition of the slave trade) in vain At first all the country gentlemen rose *en masse* against any interference with it. The commercial body fought for it as if it were a balance of exchanges in perpetuity. The lawyers defended it as they would an entail. The army and navy stood up for it as they would for the honor of the British flag. . . . And then there were many strictly Christian people who, like ants, made it a solemn law to themselves to follow in the track over which the burden of their faith was first carried, and who, holding the same belief that was held before the Flood, were convinced, and not to be put out of

their conviction by any human means, that the slave trade (or slavery, for it was all one to them) was an old Scriptural Institution, &c." "Bell's Life of Canning," pp. 214—5.

"The greatest stress of all was laid upon the antiquity of slavery. This was a difficulty which paralysed many persons of tender conscience. They felt with you, that slavery was cruel, that it blighted human beings, crushed the god-like part of them, and reduced them to the condition of the lower animals. But it was a *Sacred Institution*—it had flourished in the earliest ages—it had a *divine origin*—and was *tabooed* by the consecrating hand of time." Ibid, p. 218.

Just so; not the hypocrites, but the sincere and "conscientious" believers in the Bible opposed abolition out of respect to their divine book. And they were right, if the book is right. This is proof positive that the Bible and its influence tended only to prolong the evils of slavery; and that the system would have had no feasible defence amongst an enlightened people but for the Bible. Christians must have felt, and did feel, that, in consenting to abolish slavery, they were presuming to know better than their very God, who sanctioned and enjoined it. What that Deity must think of his presumptuous servants I do not pretend to know. With what face they can meet him after deliberately helping to destroy one of his institutions, is their concern, not mine.

