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AN ESSAY

ON

THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY,

BY

4265.140

GEORGE A. BAXTER, D.D.

RICHMOND:

T. W. WHITE, PRINTER, OPPOSITE THE BELL TAVERN.

1836.

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July 8. 1899.

WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON

1899

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ESSAY, &c.

4265.140

It is believed, that no event since the war of the revolution, has so generally agitated the public mind as the late abolition movement. The excitement seems to have pervaded the whole of the United States, though as might have been expected, the feeling was most intense in the southern country. The northern people opposed the abolition doctrines, as unreasonable in themselves, and as calculated to sever the union; the southern people considered them as a weapon aimed at the very vitals of society,—as a spark thrown into a magazine, whose explosion would bring instantaneous destruction on every thing around it.

The abolition doctrines were of a tendency to excite the slaves to insurrection, and such things are always viewed with horror by the southern people. Every scheme of slave insurrection heretofore known in the south, has been so contrived, that the evil should break forth at midnight, with an indiscriminate slaughter of all the whites of every description, who came within the power of the insurgents. Such a movement, however, must soon recoil on the insurgents themselves. As the white people have generally the advantage in numbers, and incomparably the advantage in arms and military skill, as soon as the first shock was over, the tide of victory must turn in their favor; but, then, there is reason to apprehend that an exasperated multitude would commence a promiscuous slaughter of the slaves, without any distinction between the innocent and the guilty. When a war begins in barbarity, its atrocities will be retaliated, and it is likely to assume a barbarous character throughout its course. Indeed, the southern people have no idea that a servile war can be any thing else than a savage war,—a war of extermination, according to the power and success of the parties. They view such scenes in the same light in which Cicero viewed the conspiracy of Catiline. “Against

other evils," says the orator, "the commonwealth must protect itself when they arise, but provision must be made that this evil should never arise, or there will be no commonwealth to be protected."

Such were the sentiments which excited so much promptitude, or rather rashness, in the punishment of those suspected of abolition principles. This statement may afford some palliation, but cannot justify the unlawful punishments inflicted. The southern people ought to have defended their rights in a legal manner; if their laws were not sufficient for the case, they ought to have been made so; and if it were dangerous to wait for the meetings of the legislatures, county committees, and other self-created societies, should have restricted their measures to some mode of confinement, until the will of the legislatures could have been fairly expressed.

It should always be kept in mind, that in a free country, the worst thing that can happen, is the destruction of the authority of law. It may seem to be an innocent, or even a laudable thing, to punish a dangerous emissary; but let it be remembered, that there is no medium between the power of the law and the arbitrary power of men; and the arbitrary power of men, in whatever form, is despotism. When the mob rules, we have an hundred tyrants instead of one,—but the more numerous our tyrants, the worse our situation. Should it become common for unauthorized individuals to take the punishment of real or supposed crimes into their own hands, any thing might be made a crime, every thing would be unsafe, and the whole population must be divided into clans or parties for the purpose of defence or retaliation;—every thing must be thrown into jeopardy and confusion, and we would lose all the attributes of a civilized and christian people. These are considerations which ought to have prevented much that was done in the southern country. Some of our citizens seemed to lose sight of these principles in the moment of excitement, but since the alarm has somewhat subsided, these principles appear to be appreciated by the great body of the community.

Although the present alarm has subsided, the danger from abolition is not over. The party is even said to be increasing. I shall, therefore, examine the principles on which the party is

founded ; premising, however, in entering on the subject, that the business of slavery must be left entirely to the slave-holding states. It is a subject which people at a distance cannot understand, and with which they cannot interfere, without injury to society, and to the slaves themselves.

The abolitionist asserts, that slavery is wrong in the abstract ; that it is *malum per se*,—and that no man can possess a slave without moral criminality. If this position be just,—if there can be no slavery without guilt on the part of the master, the argument is brought to an end at once ; for whatever is criminal in the circumstances of the case, ought to be abandoned instantly. To support the assertion, that slavery is always wrong, they assume another position ;—that the slaves are fit for freedom, and that an immediate emancipation could take place without injury to society or to the slaves themselves. This, I apprehend, is the point on which the whole argument turns, and at which, the error of every honest abolitionist lies. For if an immediate abolition of slavery, would not only ruin society, but greatly injure the slaves themselves, then abolition is plainly not a duty. Duty requires no man to do evil ;—it never requires us to place our fellow-creatures in a worse situation than they at present occupy. It would be of no avail to say that the slaves are in a bad state already ;—if we do find a portion of our fellow-men in a bad state, no principle of moral duty would require, or even allow us, to make that state worse. In this reasoning I do not assume the principle of some philosophers, that *utility* is the foundation of morals. Moral obligation is founded in the *divine will* ; but utility, when clearly ascertained, is the rule or guide of moral actions. That expression of the divine will which requires us to love our neighbor, requires the performance of useful actions to our neighbor ; and therefore, if a scheme of emancipation would be greatly injurious to the slaves, the duty of the master would forbid such a scheme. This reasoning is, I think, as plain as any reasoning can be, and certainly proves that the relation of *master* is lawful, as long as the circumstances of the case make slavery necessary. Further than this, I do not wish my argument to be applied ; and I hope to show in the sequel, that as soon as the

slaves generally are prepared for emancipation, it will not be difficult to obtain the consent of their masters.

The question then between myself and the abolitionist, is this; whether the slaves have such fitness for freedom, that their emancipation could take place without injury to themselves, as well as to the community? I think the state of Virginia has made an experiment on this subject, which ought to be decisive. It is well known, that under the regal government, Virginia often remonstrated against the slave-trade, and that she put an end to it as soon as she became an independent state. At the close of the revolutionary war, schemes for the gradual abolition of slavery were projected by some of our leading politicians. One of those schemes may be seen in Jefferson's Notes; but the low state of the treasury, and the exhausted resources of the country, prevented the legislature from acting on the subject. Still, however, the spirit of the state was manifested by private acts of liberation; and in this way alone, I believe that Virginia has emancipated more slaves than any other state in the union. Fifty thousand of those manumitted Africans are yet in her own bounds; nine or ten thousand went to the state of Ohio, and three or four thousand to Indiana.

This process went on, unimpeded by law, until the public mind was fully convinced, that emancipation was not only dangerous to the community, but extremely injurious to the slave. The maxim with those liberated was, no slavery, no work; very few of them followed any regular business for a living; single men among them married slaves for their wives, to avoid the care of supporting a family; and the class generally sunk into an indolent and vagrant state, much more degraded and wretched, than that of the slaves themselves.

The conviction that their emancipation was premature, was not confined to the state of Virginia. The citizens of Ohio had as large a portion of the abolition spirit as any people in the union; but they were convinced, if we may judge from their legislative acts, that the colored people were unfit for freedom; for they passed severer laws against the admission of free colored people into their territory, than have ever been passed by Virginia. This experiment ought, I think, to decide the

question of immediate abolition. For, if the state of Ohio could not endure the admission of a few thousand liberated Africans, what would have become of Virginia, if she must have half a million within her boundaries? These facts prove that in reasoning on slavery, the evil is generally traced to the wrong source,—the evil lies in the character of the slave, and not in a few mistaken or tyrannical pages in the statute books of the slave-holding states; and that slave character must be elevated by civilization and christianity, before emancipation can be effected consistently with general happiness. If the southern slaves were emancipated in a body, and placed in a community by themselves, from their unwillingness to labor, they would sink into a savage state, and live by the chase or the spontaneous productions of the earth, or else they would establish new forms of slavery among themselves. The abolitionists have lately furnished us with an anecdote, which favors the last supposition. They tell us of an industrious colored woman who worked and bought her freedom;—she then went to work with new spirit and bought her husband. But the husband not being so thrifty as his wife, soon got into embarrassments and sold his wife to a trader, who carried her to Orleans, where she had her freedom to work out a second time. This anecdote was intended to illustrate the iniquity of the slave system in itself, but it shows distinctly, that the great evil of the system lies in the character of the slave.

If the slaves were emancipated in a civilized country where they formed a large proportion of the population, from the experiment already witnessed, they certainly would not sustain themselves by honest labor;—they would live by pillage and by robbery, until the whole community was ruined. I believe, indeed, that if a human legislator were authorized to pass over Africa, Asia, and a large part of Europe, and to abolish slavery as he went, that he would carry heavier judgments in his course, than the destroying angel of Egypt.

An attention to history will throw light upon this subject. The lowest condition of human nature is the savage state in which subsistence is obtained by hunting, and to this state the emancipated Africans of Virginia would inevitably sink, if not permitted to establish slavery among themselves. In the savage

state there is no slavery, except what is exercised on females and children, and there is no agriculture except what females and children perform. Their prisoners of war are immediately put to death.

In the next stage of society, agriculture is introduced and carried on by slaves, and for this purpose prisoners of war are spared and condemned to labor. I believe there is no case in which a semi-barbarous people carry on agriculture without slavery, or in which they spare their prisoners without enslaving them; and the motive which spares their prisoners, is the benefit of their agricultural services.

When society is brought to a high state of civilization, such as has been attained by only a few of the European nations, slavery disappears of course, and for this reason, that free labor is better than slave labor. This high state of civilization is never attained without the aid of christianity. Science and literature might have refined the surface of society in Greece and Rome, but the lower orders were stupid and unimproved. There is no system but the gospel, which can extend its influence through the whole mass, and refine the fundamental elements of society to a high degree; and hence it appears, that no pagan nation has ever been free from slavery. Hallam tells us in his *Middle Ages*, that "in every age and country, until times comparatively recent, personal servitude appears to have been the lot of a large, perhaps the greater portion of mankind."*

These observations are not intended to check the benevolence which would relieve the miseries of the slave, but to turn it into the proper channel. The principles of human nature must be understood and regarded, in order to ameliorate its condition. I believe it to be a fact, that all the sufferings of mankind proceed from one uniform source; and that is, the depravity or moral corruption of our nature. So far as this can be removed by the influence of revealed religion, the liberty and happiness of society may be increased; but there is no greater evil than to give the multitude a degree of liberty, which they are unprepared to enjoy.

* *Middle Ages*, vol. 1, page 227, Phila. edition.

But the phrase, that slavery is morally wrong in the abstract, requires further consideration. It is a phrase well calculated to bewilder and perplex the mind,—to lead men into a long train of reasoning without knowing what they are talking about; but it contributes very little to the advancement of truth. Morality in the abstract, is unintelligible. The scriptures lay down some principles of duty, which as they relate to the mind, are universal and unchangeable; such as love to God, and love to man. But even here the principle is not taken in the abstract, for love is connected with its object. Love of itself, without reference to its object, may be considered in the abstract, but then we cannot pronounce it either right or wrong. The love of the divine law is morally right, but “the love of money is the root of all evil.” And as to a simple overt act, I know of no case in which we can pronounce it right or wrong in the abstract. The giving of a sum of money, is a simple action, but without the circumstances and motives, we can say nothing of its morality. It may be given to relieve the virtuous in distress, and then it is a good action;—but it may be given to bribe a witness, or to hire an assassin, and then it is wrong. Should the case of taking human life be brought before a jury, they could decide nothing on its merits, without the circumstances or motives. Should it be found that the man had taken his neighbor’s life with malice, it would then be murder. But should it appear that he was the sheriff of the county, who had hung a notorious criminal under the sentence and orders of the court, the act would then become lawful. In fact, I know of no simple overt act, of which we can predicate either right or wrong in the abstract.

I have dwelt the longer on this point, as the moral wrong of slavery, in the abstract, is a favorite phrase with the abolitionist; for this reason I have thought proper to show, that it is used without meaning. Others also who are opposed to abolition, have incautiously adopted the phrase, but they have done it at the expense of their cause; for if the thing be morally wrong in itself, without reference to circumstances, it must be immediately abandoned. In that case, the relation of master must always be unlawful, and no principle of duty will warrant its continuance. There is no consistent ground of opposing

abolition, without asserting, that the relation of master, is right or wrong according to circumstances, and that the examination of our circumstances is necessary to ascertain, whether or not it be consistent with our duty.

Were I to define slavery in its most abstract form, I would say, it is the government of men by physical force. If any one should condemn it under this abstract definition, he would at the same time condemn civil government; for that is also the government of men by physical force. Slavery and civil government, taken in the abstract, must go together. And in this view, politicians have pronounced them both necessary evils, because the moral corruption of man is the cause which makes them both necessary. This may, perhaps, be justified as a figurative expression, taking the cause for the effect; but, although the expression implies, that the cause which makes both slavery and government necessary, is an evil, it is not intended to mean, that it is morally wrong to sustain the relations to which they give rise. Slavery and civil government differ in this respect; the slave may receive such moral improvement as will make him more useful as a freeman than as a servant, and then slavery should be laid aside, but the moral improvement of society can never be such as to make government unnecessary.

There are two other arguments used by abolitionists in the discussion of this subject, to which I shall briefly attend. They tell us in the first place, that slavery always has its origin in violence and wrong, and therefore in its continuance, can never become right; and secondly, that liberty is the natural right of man, and that no human authority can deprive him of its exercise.

1. The first argument is, that slavery has its origin in violence and wrong, and therefore can never become right. That things founded in wrong can never become right, is a position which the ablest politicians deny. They, indeed, tell us, that if there were no prescription in politics, by which things once wrong could become right, every thing would be wrong in the claims and possessions of mankind, all over the world. Every nation has at times, had its affairs in a state of lawless confusion and usurpation; and if this confusion, could not in the course of things,

rise into order and justice, all the claims and civil rights of society would be founded in wickedness. The doctrine therefore cannot be true, that what was once wrong, must be wrong always.

We may illustrate this matter by supposing a government founded in conquest, arising out of an unjustifiable war. The authority of such government would be unlawful in its commencement; for when a war is unjust, all its consequences partake of that injustice. But when the order and institutions of the government, are so established as to promote peace and justice, and when it becomes manifest that human happiness would be more promoted by suffering it to stand, than by attempting a revolution, it is then a duty to acquiesce in the authority of the government and to acknowledge the lawfulness of its rights. This is one case, in which political philosophers speak of wrong becoming right.

But I will adduce another example, which may appear still plainer. The Norman conquest of England was one of the most downright robberies which ever appeared in history under the name of war. Yet that conquest changed almost all the land-titles of the kingdom; the rightful proprietors were generally driven off, and the followers of the conqueror put in possession of their property. This possession was mere robbery at first, but it is the foundation of the land-titles of England to the present day; and, certainly, no one would say that it is now a crime to hold landed property in England; if it were, it would be an equal crime to receive and live on the produce of that property,—for the receiver is as bad as the thief, and therefore to eat an English penny-loaf of bread, would turn an honest man into a robber.

But the land titles of our own country stand upon a similar footing. For centuries before the discovery of America, our lands were passing from one savage tribe to another, and no doubt, the transition was often made by violence; and even the lawfulness of the manner in which we obtained our lands from the savages has often been doubted. I believe it could be shown, that the state of Virginia purchased all the lands she possesses, but in the northern and middle states, possession was often obtained in a more summary way;—desirable territories were

seized, without any compensation to the former claimants. This by many persons is considered as an act of robbery; and yet such is the title by which hundreds of abolitionists in the free states are holding their lands at present; and when these people speak of *slavery*, they tell us that what begins in wrong can never become right.

2. But in the second place, we are told that all men are born free, and that no human authority can lawfully deprive a man of the exercise of liberty. The natural rights of man is a subject which has furnished matter for much speculation, and a great variety of conflicting theories. There is, however, one position which I believe no sober politician has ever denied; which is, that every community has a right to take care of itself, and to impose such restraints on all connected with it, as are necessary for its well being, and especially for its existence. If this position be denied, all civil governments are unjust, and the taxing of property, or the compulsion of men to fight in defence of their country, is unlawful. The principle of self-preservation will not justify the enormities by which slavery is generally introduced, but when the system is once introduced, and cannot be broken up without the ruin of the community, and of the slaves themselves, it will certainly justify its continuance, until suitable remedies can be applied.

I shall now proceed to examine this subject in the light of Divine Revelation, and this is surely the light in which it ought to be determined. I think it one of the worst symptoms of the present times, that there is so much tendency among religious teachers to become wise above what is written; and I have no doubt, that if the question of slavery had been honestly examined by the scriptures alone, we should have escaped much of that uneasiness, by which the public mind has been lately agitated, and the interests of the slaves themselves endangered. The truth is, that amid all the late discussions on slavery, I have seen but very little resort to scriptural argument, and even that little, on a plan which was entirely inadmissible. Sometimes the abolitionist takes his ground on the golden rule, "do to others as ye would they should do to you," and he applies this for the subversion of slavery. Sometimes he quotes the law of love, "love thy neighbor as thyself;" and this will abolish

slavery ; but in this reasoning, he perverts all the just principles of interpretation. The common rules of interpretation are, that general precepts are not to explain special decisions, but that special decisions are to explain and limit general precepts. Let us take for illustration, the case of creditor and debtor. The special decisions of scripture have determined, that duty requires a man to pay his debts, and of course, that the relation of creditor and debtor is lawful. But now bring in your golden rule, and tell the creditor, that if he were the debtor, he would probably wish that debt to be forgiven, and that, therefore, duty requires him to forgive all his just and lawful debts. Or suppose the case of judge and prisoner ; the scriptures have also made this a lawful relation ; yet the judge might be told that if he were the prisoner, he would wish, right or wrong, to be set at liberty, and that, therefore, duty requires him at all events to acquit the prisoner. Such an application of general precepts, to subvert special decisions and established relations growing out of them, would throw the whole world into confusion ; and it is equally improper to apply those general precepts to the subject of slavery, without considering the relations of the case.

In the scriptural discussion of this subject, I shall confine myself principally to the New Testament. The Old Testament, indeed, teaches much on the subject of slavery, but the change of dispensation may throw perplexity on the subject, and make the arguments from that source less satisfactory to some minds ; from these embarrassments the New Testament's writings are entirely free, and they were delivered in circumstances so similar to ours, that it is perfectly wonderful their decision should be so much disregarded in the determination of this question. The slavery of the Roman empire, in the midst of which the apostles labored and planted their churches, corresponded with that of the southern states in most of its leading circumstances, and on those points in which it differed, it was evidently worse. Like our slavery, it originated in violence and injustice, for it arose out of those ambitious wars, by which Rome became the mistress of the world. It was also a slavery of buying and selling, which made the servant the property of his master ; it was more abundant than southern slavery, for some Romans had as many as twenty thousand

slaves ; it was also more oppressive, for the Roman master possessed the power of life and death, and according to heathen usage, often exercised that power in a most cruel manner ; and surely, when inspired men have pronounced the will of God respecting such a slavery as this, their decision must contain the rule by which masters and servants in our country ought to be governed.

In entering on the scriptural evidence of this subject, I will, in the first place, observe the obvious fact, that the apostles in a variety of places, give directions as to the mutual duties of masters and servants, without any intimation that the relation is unlawful, or that it is wrong to hold a slave. This of itself is sufficient to show, that their views and spirit, in relation to this matter, were very different from those of our modern abolitionists, and ought at least to produce a suspicion that the abolitionist is under some mistake. When Paul wrote his epistle to Philemon, to reconcile him to Onesimus, had he been an abolitionist, he certainly had a fine opportunity of informing his dearly beloved "brother and fellow-laborer" of the criminality of slavery. I take it for granted here, that Onesimus was a slave ; otherwise I can see no reason why Paul should assume the obligation to repay any loss Philemon might have sustained by his elopement. Had he been a hired servant, it would only have been necessary to have served out the stipulated term. But supposing, as we must, that Onesimus was a slave, and then the apostle, acting under the influence of the Holy Ghost, pursued a course directly the reverse of what a teacher in our day, acting under the spirit of abolition, would pursue.

In the 6th chapter to the Ephesians, 5th, 6th and 7th verses, the apostle uses this language : "Servants be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ. Not with eye-service as men-pleasers ; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not unto men." On this passage I will remark, that Paul teaches servants to obey their masters on earth, as the only way to please their master in heaven ; that they cannot please Christ, or expect to go to heaven, unless they render faithful service to their master on earth.

This certainly supposes that their master in heaven recognizes the authority of the master on earth, and of course that the relation is lawful. In the 2d chapter of 1st Peter, beginning at the 18th verse, there is a passage, so much in the spirit of that just quoted, that I do not think it necessary to insert it in this place.

The 6th chapter of 1st Timothy and first five verses, contains another portion of Paul's instruction on this subject, to which I wish to turn the attention of the reader. "Let as many servants as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather do them service because they are faithful and beloved partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but doating about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself." With respect to this passage, I suppose every scholar will admit, that the phrase in the 1st verse which is translated "servants under the yoke," if it does not mean slaves exclusively, yet that it comprehends slaves, and is an exhortation to them; and then the injunction to "count their own masters worthy of all honor," must establish the master's relation as lawful; for we cannot suppose that the Holy Ghost would require christians to *honor* what was wrong in the sight of God. Indeed, I do not believe it possible for any man cordially to honor what he does not believe to be right. We may honor a man for some things, whilst in other respects we condemn him; but as to those things for which we honor him, we must believe them to be lawful. It therefore appears plain, that the apostle determines the relation of master to be a lawful relation. I only mean, that slavery is lawful whilst necessary,—or that it is lawful to hold slaves, whilst that is the best thing that can be done for them.

There is one part of this quotation, from the third to the fifth

verse inclusive, which I would recommend to the serious attention of those who rashly promulge abolition sentiments. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine of godliness," &c. &c. &c. "from such withdraw thyself." These words certainly have some meaning,—they contain a rebuke, and a serious rebuke, which must fall somewhere; and I cannot conceive how Timothy could "withdraw" himself from a religious teacher, without passing on him something like a sentence of excommunication.

Some persons opposed to abolition principles, are unwilling to admit that the relation of master is lawful, because they suppose that such admission would make the system perpetual. But what then? If we do not suppose the system lawful during its necessary continuance, there must be no continuance,—what is unlawful must be abandoned instantly, and there is then no alternative but to ruin the southern country by an immediate abolition. But for my part I do not believe that the system of slavery will or can be perpetual in this country. Certain principles are lodged in the very structure of every society, which under the influence of christianity, will abolish slavery as soon as the slave is prepared for freedom; sooner than this, its abolition would be an injury even to the slave.

The principle on which I rely with most confidence, for the removal of slavery in a christian way, is this, that free labor is better than slave labor. This principle is I believe sanctioned by the authority of all modern philosophers; and wherever free labor can be had, it is sanctioned by experience. If a southern gentleman should inherit a landed estate in England, and if the laws should permit him to take his slaves there to work it, he would not do so; he could work it with twice, or perhaps five times the profit by free labor, which it would yield under slave labor. Indeed a man thus circumstanced, would, for his own interest alone, set his slaves at liberty, rather than retain them in a country where free labor was abundant; and the fact undoubtedly proves, that as soon as our slave laborers are prepared to become useful free laborers, emancipation will take place, in accordance both with the interest and the wishes of the master. Indeed the facts of the last age establish this

point. When the state of Virginia in a few years subsequent to the revolutionary war emancipated more than fifty thousand slaves, what was it that stopped the process? It was merely the discovery that the slaves were unfit for freedom. Had the slave laborer been qualified to take his place in society as a useful free laborer, I doubt whether Virginia at this day might not have been numbered among the free states.

I am aware that many believe at present, that emancipation can never take place with a view to the continuance of the slaves in our own country. But this opinion has arisen from the experiment of emancipating slaves before they were qualified to be freemen. Let the slaves once become a civilized and christian people, and I suspect the opinion will disappear; it has certainly been proved in many instances that two different castes can live comfortably in the same country; the descendants of the English and Germans have often done so in the United States.

But the question may be asked, whether the slave ever can be prepared for freedom, whilst he continues in slavery? On this point I think there ought to be no doubt. The benign principles of christianity, brought fully to bear in a scriptural manner on both master and servant, will effect the object; it has already accomplished that purpose, within a few centuries, in the British dominions, and a few other countries; and in its future progress through the world, with greater power than has heretofore been witnessed, I have no doubt it will banish slavery from the face of the whole earth.

This glorious effect, however, will, I believe, be produced by the gospel in its own way; not by moving the question of abolition, and filling our domestic relations with strife, but by the inculcation of its principles on the primitive plan, so as to humanize the master, and prepare the slave to become a more useful character as a freeman, than he can be as a servant. The gospel will cure the diseases of society, as the skilful physician does those of the human body, by removing the cause of disease; and when those causes are removed from the character of the slave, which make slavery necessary, it will become the interest of the whole society that the laboring part

of the population should be freemen, and it will not be long before society will discover its own interest.

Doctor Wayland, although an advocate for the doctrines of abolition, comes near what I think the truth upon this point. He says it was the object of the gospel to remove slavery by a peaceful and quiet operation on the minds and passions of men. And after proving (as he thought) the criminality of holding a slave, he uses this language: "For if it (the gospel) had forbidden the evil, instead of subverting the *principle*; if it had proclaimed the unlawfulness of slavery, and taught slaves to resist the oppression of their masters; it would instantly have arrayed the two parties in deadly hostility, throughout the civilized world"—"and the very name of the christian religion would have been forgotten amidst the agitations of universal bloodshed."* Now why do not the abolitionists follow what one of their ablest writers supposes to have been the plan of the inspired teachers, and avoid "*proclaiming the unlawfulness of slavery*," lest they should array masters and servants in deadly hostility, and prevent all the good effects of the gospel? Why do they not practise this reserve in writing books, as the inspired writers did?

I cannot believe with Doctor Wayland, that the apostles thought one thing, and appeared by their silence to teach another, or that they considered slavery as wrong, and always avoided pronouncing it wrong; but I do fully believe, that all religious teachers in a slave-holding country must avoid proclaiming "the unlawfulness of slavery," or they will defeat all the benefits of religious instruction. Proclaiming the unlawfulness of slavery, is the direct way of exciting slave insurrection, and ever since that practice has been known, the southern country has been in a state of agitation; insurrections of the most destructive character have been projected, and not many years since one has actually taken place. It cannot therefore be supposed, that masters or citizens will concur in a plan of religious teaching, or permit it to take place, when it is fraught with such deadly consequences.

But this doctrine of the unlawfulness of slavery, is equally

* Elements of Moral Science, page 225.

pernicious in its direct influence on the slaves themselves. For it is not to be supposed that slaves will receive religious instruction which is prepared or favored by masters whom they are taught to consider as unjust robbers. It is on this account that I deplore the circulation of abolition doctrines more than on any other; they present the strongest barrier against the diffusion of that christian influence, which is the only remedy for the evils of a slave-holding country. It is on this account that I have attempted to rectify the mistakes of the abolition system; and I can see no cure for the evils impending, but to take the ground which the scriptures evidently warrant; that the relations of slavery are lawful, whilst they are necessary, and that our first duty to the slaves is to improve their characters by christianizing them. In this discussion I am principally pleading the cause of the slave; for although abolition principles may disturb the interests of the master, yet if domestic commotions should be excited, the slave must be the greatest sufferer. It never was known that a slave community was able to fight their way to freedom.

But some persons tell us, that all which the scriptures have taught on the subject of slavery, will not make the relation of master lawful, or authorize the holding of a slave. The scriptures command the servant to obey his master on earth, in order to please his master in heaven. This certainly looks like a sanction to the master's authority. They teach servants "to count their own masters worthy of all honor;" and when it is recollected, that no christian can cordially honor what he does not approve, we would certainly suppose that the Holy Ghost would not require us to honor what was wrong in the sight of God. When the scriptures command private individuals to "honor the king," we always believe that the command makes the authority of civil government lawful. When it requires children to "honor their parents," this gives a full sanction to the parental relation.

But it is said that the scriptures required christians to "honor the king," and to "obey the powers that be," when Nero was Emperor, and that this was certainly not intended to justify the crimes of Nero. This matter however is easily explained, by a practical distinction which is made all over the

world. Nero as a private character, was a monster of wickedness; but as the Roman Emperor, he was entitled to the respect and obedience of christians; the command to obey him, made his civil authority lawful, without justifying his private crimes. All men in all countries make this distinction between the private and the official characters of their rulers, and the mind of a child is competent to do so. Many individuals may have serious objections to the private character of the magistrate, or the king, but they know that this does not release them from obedience to his official decisions.

Dr. Wayland has asserted,* that the apostles taught servants to obey and honor their masters, on the same principle that our Saviour commanded his disciples to repay evil with good, or when smitten on one cheek, to turn the other; and therefore the command will not justify the authority of the master. We admit that our Saviour's rules on this point require individuals to give up something of their supposed rights for the sake of peace; and although it be difficult to determine how far the point of christian forbearance should be carried, yet the rules themselves carry the impress of heavenly wisdom. All men in judging of their own claims, carry them too far; and unless we come to the settlement of differences, prepared to give up something of our supposed rights, each party would exact too much, and the difference could not be peaceably settled. But if we apply the apostolic teaching on the Doctor's plan, then the mystery is, why did the apostles confine all their commands to the one side? The masters were members of the church as well as the servants;—one class was under the instruction of the apostles as much as the other; and if the apostles considered the master's claim as unjust, it would have been as easy and as natural to have required the master to forbear the exercise of an unlawful authority, as to have required the servant, when smitten on one cheek to turn the other, or to obey an unlawful authority. Had Paul visited a christian church, in which he found one half of the members treating the other half with unlawful violence, would he have confined all his exhortations to the suffering party? or would he not have also admonished the aggressors to lay aside their violence?

* Elements of Moral Science, page 226.

But perhaps Doctor Wayland supposes, that masters were sufficiently instructed as to the unlawfulness of their authority by the golden rule and the law of love, for he says these "precepts of the bible are diametrically opposed to slavery."* I have considered this matter already, and have shown that the golden rule or the law of love was not intended to subvert the established relations of society, and that the creditor was merely bound by them to treat the debtor with benevolence as a debtor, the judge to treat the prisoner with kindness as a prisoner, and the master to be kind to the servant as a servant. But now let us suppose with Doctor Wayland, that the golden rule and the law of love were intended by Heaven absolutely to forbid slavery, I would then ask, was it not the duty of the apostles to cause the church so to understand those laws? And if the church did so understand them, how then could men who were living in the open and habitual violation of one of the first laws of Heaven be retained in the church? Could the church continue men in its communion, who were living in the violation of a law which made them worse than robbers, and equal to man-stealers? The truth is, the principles of abolition, even in the hands of so able a writer as Doctor Wayland, cannot be reconciled with the principles of the gospel. They are evidently two sets of principles, which must come from systems "diametrically" opposite to one another.

It appears to me that every attempt to reconcile abolition principles with the writings of the New Testament, detracts much from the scriptures as an infallible rule of faith and practice. If we suppose that the apostles considered slavery as a moral evil, but concealed their sentiments, because slavery was sanctioned by the Roman law, or because the denunciation of it would have made the christian religion unpopular, and have exposed its teachers to persecution, this would give the apostles a temporizing character, which they did not deserve, and which would leave us uncertain how to understand them in a multiplicity of cases. The apostles as inspired men had the subject of slavery fairly before them; these apostles retained slaveholders in the church, and treated them as "dearly beloved"

* Elements of Moral Science, page 223.

brethren and "fellow laborers;"* they taught servants to "obey their masters on earth," as the only way to please their master in heaven, and to "count their own masters worthy of all honor;" and if under all this, there was a concealed opinion that the slave-holder was as bad as the robber or man-stealer, we certainly need an *infallible interpreter* now, to tell us what the apostles really meant. The truth is, the loose manner in which ultra men are treating the scriptures in the present day, making them signify any thing, or nothing, as suits their purpose, is well calculated to unsettle the public mind, and prepare our country for receiving the dogmas of popery. The apostles in their teaching never did spare crimes, because they were sanctioned by the Roman law: the idolatry of the heathen was as firmly sanctioned by law as any thing could be.

Doctor Wayland supposes, that in some cases slaves may be unfit for freedom or self-government; but this unfitness for freedom, he tells us, arises from the act of the master, not from their own act; and therefore in such cases the master may hold them until prepared for freedom, "not, however, on the ground of right over them, but of obligation to them."† This doctrine, however, would turn the master into the slave, and the slave into the master; and I deny the soundness of the doctrine, by denying the fact on which it is predicated. The slaves were not made unfit for freedom by their southern masters; they were more unfit for freedom when they came from Africa than they are now. The population of Africa are three-fourths of them in slavery now, and if that slavery were abolished, it would ruin their agriculture, and inflict a deep injury on the whole country. Here seems to be the point at which the error of many of our northern brethren lies: they appear to think that any people, however barbarous, are qualified for liberty and self-government, unless their present masters have destroyed that qualification, by holding them in servitude. But how will they reconcile this with the fact, that slavery abounds so much all over the world; and especially when we all believe that free labor is better than slave labor, if the slave be only fit for freedom? Can they suppose that the whole world

* See Paul to Philemon.

† Elements of Moral Science, page 228.

has been blind to its own interest, (I say nothing of humanity,) in reducing men to slavery, when their labor would have been so much more profitable as freemen, had they been fit for freedom? There must be some cause for this universality of human practice.

I believe that the true ground of scripture, and of sound philosophy, as to this subject, is, that slavery is lawful in the sight of heaven, whilst the character of the slave makes it necessary. This is the only ground on which we can justify civil government. Civil government when viewed in its pillories and its jails, its penitentiaries and its gallowses, presents an aspect to the human mind as revolting as even slavery itself: but it is lawful, because the depravity of man makes it necessary. Slavery is also lawful whilst it is necessary, or whilst it is the best thing that can take place, even for the slave himself. But we consider the slave as a man, and we trust that the application of christian principles to both master and servant, will hasten the day of general emancipation. This is the great duty of the southern churches: a duty in which they have been too slow; for the neglect of which they have incurred great guilt; and in the performance of which they have been much hindered by rash abolition movements.

The present state of the world is a state of agitation. Religious men, and political men;—men who consult the prophecies, or who consult human nature, are all looking out for great changes to come on the earth. At this time I earnestly wish the southern churches to awake to their duty, and especially to the duty of giving religious instruction to the colored people. We know not what revolutions may be at the door, but there is one anchor of hope; God has never given up a nation to destruction, or even to very severe judgments, in which there has been a numerous church, faithful in the performance of its duties. The church is the salt of the earth,—ten righteous men would have saved Sodom. But if the southern churches should neglect the important duty of christianizing the slave population, it is easy to see how that despised people may be made the instruments of our chastisement; and should the process be retarded by abolition sentiments, the authors of those sentiments will participate largely in the guilt.

I will remark in conclusion, that the errors of abolition appear to me to have arisen principally from two sources: in the first place, the teaching of scripture has been too much overlooked, and in its place human philosophy has been substituted. In the second place, sufficient attention has not been bestowed on the characters of men, in their different stages of civilization. There is certainly a condition of human nature, in which men will not labor for their subsistence without compulsion; and if emancipated in that state, without sufficient property to support them, they will either steal or perish. This is precisely the condition of the southern slaves, and therefore an immediate abolition would be their destruction. The principles of christianity, properly applied, will cure these evils; but they must be applied in the manner of the inspired teachers, without moving the question of abolition, or "*proclaiming the unlawfulness of slavery.*" Dr. Wayland has correctly observed, that if the apostles, in the primitive age, had "proclaimed the unlawfulness of slavery," they would have arrayed the feelings of masters and servants against one another, and destroyed all the benefits of christian instruction. The same thing is as true now as it was in the primitive times, and nothing is more fatal to the interests of both master and servant than abolition principles.

