

***WILLIAM
I. BOWDITCH***



***SLAVERY AND
THE CONSTITUTION***

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EAN 8596547369547

DigiCat, 2022

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NOTE.

Page 45 was struck off before I became aware that "Master Auld" *now* shelters Douglass's grandmother under his own roof. We are glad of the fact, and respect Master Auld for his change. But the case of Douglass's grandmother is by no means a solitary instance of cruel treatment. I might easily adduce others equally cruel, though not told with nearly so much feeling.

W. I. B.

SLAVERY AND THE CONSTITUTION.

CHAPTER I.

"SLAVERY AGREEABLE TO GOD'S PROVIDENCE"!

"Thus did Jehovah stereotype his *approbation* of domestic slavery"!—*Rev. President Shannon, of Bacon College, Ky.*

"Here we see *God dealing in slaves*; giving them to his own favorite child [Abraham], a man of superlative worth, and as a reward for his eminent goodness."—*Rev. Theodore Clapp, of New Orleans.*

Nearly three millions of men, women, and children are held in slavery in the Southern States, not by the ignorant

and brutal alone, but by enlightened Christian bishops, ministers, and church members of all denominations; whilst men and women of cultivated minds, refined manners, and delicate tastes, indignantly deny that slaveholding is wrong.

The Right Rev. George W. Freeman, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Arkansas and Texas, whilst a minister at Raleigh, N.C. Nov. 27, 1836, preached two discourses on the character of slavery and the duties of masters. In these ("A Reproof of the American Church, by the Bishop of Oxford; with an Introduction, by an American Churchman;" New York, 1846, p. 6) he declared "that no man, nor set of men in our day, unless they can produce a new revelation from Heaven, are entitled to pronounce slavery wrong;" and that "*slavery, as it exists at the present day, is agreeable to the order of Divine Providence.*" The Right Rev. Levi S. Ives, Bishop of the diocese, was present; and, though a northern man, has in writing published that he listened to them "with most unfeigned pleasure"! (Ib. p. 7.) They were afterwards published with the bishop's note of approbation, under the title, "The Rights and Duties of Slaveholders." They were also printed in South Carolina, and distributed gratuitously as a tract by the Society for the Advancement of Christianity,—a society composed of clergymen and laymen, with Bishop Bowen at their head. (Ib. pp. 7, 8.) Rev. Theodore Clapp,[\[A\]](#) the Unitarian minister of New Orleans, says ("Slavery, a Sermon delivered in the First Congregational Church in New Orleans, April 15, 1838," p. 11), "The same *God* who gave Abraham sunshine, air, rain, earth, flocks, herds, silver, and gold, *blessed him with a donative of slaves.*" Ib. p. 33: "To succeed, then, in putting

down every thing like servitude, you must annihilate the word of God." Bishop Hedding, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, says ("The Church as it is," p. 50), "The right to hold a slave is founded on this rule, 'Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so unto them.'" The funds of churches and theological institutions are not unfrequently invested in slaves. Sometimes these slaves are hired out at auction, and from their earnings the salaries of the clergymen and professors are paid! At other times, they are sold in order to change the investment! Thus, in the "Charleston Courier," Feb. 12, 1835, there is advertised for sale, by Thomas N. Gadsden, "a prime gang of ten negroes, accustomed to the culture of cotton and provisions belonging to the Independent Church in Christ Church parish"! ("The Church as it is," p. 72.) No *incredible* story, therefore, was told by the fugitive slave, who gave as his reason for not receiving the Lord's Supper, "I could not bear to go forward, and receive the communion from vessels which were the purchase of my brother's blood." In the memorial of the Presbytery of Georgia to the Presbyteries of the Southern States in 1844, on the religious instruction of the negroes, it is stated that slaves are "connected with our churches; nay, more, they are owned by our church members and by our ministers."—"What is it," asks the Rev. Dr. Albert Barnes (Sermon in Philadelphia in 1846, "The Church as it is," p. 81), "that lends the most efficient sanction to slavery in the United States? What is it that does most to keep the public conscience at ease on the subject? What is it that renders abortive all measures to remove the evil?... It is the fact that the system is

countenanced by good men; that bishops and priests and deacons, that ministers and elders, that Sunday-school teachers and exhorters, that pious matrons and heiresses, are the holders of slaves; and that the ecclesiastical bodies of the land address no language of rebuke or entreaty to their consciences." More evidence to the same point might be adduced, if thought necessary.

This open vindication of the rightfulness of slaveholding is by no means confined to persons residing at the South. In the year 1847, the Rev. Geo. W. Blagden, of Boston, who delivered the last Dudleian Lecture in Harvard University, defended slavery from the Bible, in the pulpit of Old South Church, that second cradle of Liberty! Only last winter (1848), a gentleman of this State, of high legal attainments, at present connected with the Law School in Harvard University, in conversation hesitated not to declare to us his opinion, "that it was not *desirable* that slavery should cease"! And Dr. Taylor, of Yale College, at the head of the theological department, instructs his pupils, candidates for the ministry, that, "if Jesus Christ were now on earth, he would, under certain circumstances, become a slaveholder"! ("The Church as it is," p. 95.)

Open defenders of slavery are therefore found among the foremost of the leaders in Church and State. And how few of the opponents of the system have a deep, ineradicable conviction, that slaveholding is wrong under *all* circumstances! Our object is to create and deepen this conviction.

To prove our position, we shall not rely upon the physical condition of the slaves. Notwithstanding the fact is

otherwise, we are willing to suppose that every slave is comfortably housed, and has sufficient food and clothing. These may give

"Ease to the body some, none to the mind
From restless thoughts."

Even if in a comfortable house, the slave is homeless! No joys cluster around *his* hearthstone! *He* has no wife to share his sorrows, or to partake his joys; for neither law nor public opinion sanctions the marriage of slaves! The very children whom the slave presses to his heart are not regarded, either by law or public sentiment, as his dear children, but only as part of the stock of the plantation! Mother and children may be, and are, sold at auction, and separated from him and from each other for ever! And yet the heart of the slave-mother yearns for her children as much as the heart of the white mother.

By giving me a spiritual nature capable of improvement, God has made it my duty to strive to improve myself,—has declared that I have a natural right to improve myself, and that any wanton or unnecessary infringement of this right is a wrong. No man has the right to prevent me, or the meanest slave, from earnestly seeking after wisdom; to prevent me, or the meanest slave, from becoming pure in heart; or to deaden my affections, or those of the humblest slave that walks. In keeping a slave ignorant or impure, or in blunting his affections, even though he is well fed, clothed, and housed, violence is offered to his nature; his God-given *rights* are infringed; a *wrong* is done!

Slaveholding is wrong under *all* circumstances, because it either darkens the minds, brutalizes the souls, and

deadens the affections of the slaves, or, without any necessity, renders such spiritual death not merely possible, but almost inevitable. If it is wrong to murder the body, how much more wrong is it to murder the soul! Slaveholding is murder of the soul!

CHAPTER II.

DIRECT MENTAL INSTRUCTION OF SLAVES.

"It is universally the fact throughout the Slaveholding States, that either custom or law prohibits them [*i.e.* the slaves] the acquisition of letters."—*Report made to Synod of South Carolina and Georgia in 1833.*

At a recent annual meeting of the American Colonization Society, the Rev. Joel Parker, D.D. of Philadelphia, a member of the Presbyterian Church, speaking of the instruction of the colored race, is reported to have used the following language:—"There seems to me, in connection with this subject, a beautiful illustration of what Hall calls 'a fetch in Divine Providence.' God had a design in bringing these people to this country in the way he did. We cannot probably comprehend the whole of it; but this we can see, he has secured the education of those who, to all human appearance, would not and could not have been educated in any other way. There are now in this country more than three hundred thousand Africans who can read and write, who could not have done it if it had not been for the slave-trade. There are many in this country and in Liberia who are capable of preaching the gospel, editing papers, and

performing all the duties of civil life, who must have remained in total darkness but for this trade. How came this people by all this knowledge? Did anybody go to Africa and teach them? No! It has been done by slavery.... And now we send them back to Africa, with a preparation for doing a great work there, which we never could have imparted to them in any other way.... In this view of the subject, we may perceive at least one good which slavery has done to Africa; and the question may with propriety be asked, whether it has not done for Africa more good than harm."

If we may believe this spiritual teacher, the Being who made of one blood all the nations of men, the common Father of us all, himself designed the scheme by which millions of men, women, and children were torn from their homes and friends, and all they held dear, and brought to this country, through all the horrors of the middle passage, where a terrible death relieved on an average at least one fifth of the victims from a scarcely less terrible life,—for this end in part, that, after two centuries of wrongs, not even a tithe of their descendants might be returned to the land of their fathers, to teach the Africans the religion of their oppressors! A truly touching example of God's loving-kindness and tender mercy to all his children!

That many slaves have been instructed to the extent stated by Dr. Parker is true; but they have been educated, not in consequence, but in spite, of slavery. So hostile to mental culture is slavery, that but a slight examination is needed to satisfy us that it is neither profitable nor safe to educate a slave beyond a certain point. Without *some* education, a slave would be worse than valueless. Far the

larger number of them, as field slaves, are simply taught to use the hoe, and other instruments of agriculture. Others are brought up as carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, house-servants, &c. Frederick Douglass earned a dollar and a half a day at caulking; whilst William Craft, as a cabinet-maker and occasional waiter at an hotel, supported himself, and paid his owner twenty dollars a month for the right to use his own muscles. We occasionally meet with such advertisements as the following, cut from the "New Orleans Picayune," of Oct. 18, 1846:—

"CREDIT SALE OF VALUABLE NEGRO MECHANICS, &c.—By Beard, Calhoun, and Co. auctioneers, will be sold at auction, on Tuesday the 20th October, at twelve o'clock, at Banks's Arcade, the following valuable slaves:—Ezekiel, 25 years, *a superior carpenter*, fully guaranteed; Jacob, 25 years, *a superior carpenter and wheelwright*, fully guaranteed; Dick, 35 years, *a superior carpenter and wheelwright*, fully guaranteed; Charles, 28 years, *engineer and rough carpenter*; Charles, 22 years, *field hand*, fully guaranteed, excepting slightly ruptured; Sancho, 26 years, *good house carpenter*, fully guaranteed; Maria, mulattress, 28 years, *first-rate washer and ironer*, fully guaranteed; Maria, negress, 13, child's nurse, fully guaranteed.

"Terms: Twelve months' credit for notes drawn and endorsed to the satisfaction of the vendor, with mortgage on the property, bearing interest eight per cent per annum, from date of sale until paid. Slaves

not to be delivered until the notes are approved of. The servants can be seen on the morning of sale. Act of sale before D. I. Ricardo, notary public, at the expense of the purchaser."

In the same paper, Alexander Daggett advertises "for sale a negro man, *a first-rate blacksmith*." In the "Richmond Whig" of Jan. 25, 1848, Benjamin Davis advertises for sale a negro man "who is a first-rate carpenter by trade; also a rough blacksmith." In the "Charleston (S.C.) Mercury," Thomas W. Mordecai, broker and auctioneer, under date Sept. 1, 1847, advertises at private sale—

"An uncommonly prime and likely black man, about 22.

A prime woman, a superior washer, and good cook and farm hand.

A very prime axeman and field hand.

A superior man-cook."

It is not, however, necessary to teach a slave-mechanic or field hand, or even "a prime woman," to read or write, in order to make him or her a profitable investment. If we suppose William Craft's value as a slave to have been two thousand dollars, his master received from his investment *only* twelve per cent *clear profit*! Yet William could neither read nor write. He was a valuable working machine. To have him educated farther, to have taught him to read or write, would have lessened his market value. To teach a slave these things is to teach him his rights, and to make him keenly feel his wrongs. Mrs. Hugh Auld taught Frederick

Douglass his letters before slavery had hardened her naturally kind heart. She gave him the inch, as he says, and no precaution could prevent his taking the ell. He taught himself to read and write, and thus describes the effect produced by reading a book called "The Columbian Orator." This book contains one or more of Sheridan's speeches, and a dialogue between a master and his slave, wherein the slave is made to refute all the arguments usually brought forward in support of slavery.

"The more I read," he says ("Narrative," p. 40), "the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery. I loathed them as being the meanest as well as the most wicked of men. As I read and contemplated the subject, behold! that very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I could at times feel that learning to read had been a curse, rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own,—any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my

condition that tormented me. There was no getting rid of it."

As a necessary result of his learning to read, Douglass loathed slavery, and detested his enslavers. If he had never read, his eyes would never have been fully opened to the extent of his wrongs; and what is true of him is true of all other slaves. *Any* slave who can read Sheridan's denunciations of slavery must, like Douglass, loathe his condition, and detest his oppressors.

But a slave who loathes his condition, and detests his oppressors, will be refractory and disobedient. A late writer in the "Charleston Mercury" admits this when he remarks ("William Jay's Letter to Bishop Ives," 1848, p. 12):—

"It has been the policy of this State not to admit the teaching to the slaves, either of reading or writing. We all know why this is so. It needed no great scope of argument to satisfy those who framed our laws, that the expansion of intellect, the hundred influences which education generates, would be very inconsistent with habits of obedience, which was the corner-stone of the institution."

Such a slave will also try to escape at every fair opportunity; and, being able to write passes or forge free papers, the chances for successful escape are very much increased. The owner's hold upon him becomes daily more and more precarious, and consequently the slave's value as property daily diminishes. So true is this, that in Louisiana a buyer may legally refuse to take a slave, if he has only

"absented himself from his master's house twice for several days, or once for more than a month." The "Civil Code" (Art. 2496, 2505) declares that the "vice of character," as it is called, which is proved by either of these Acts, renders the slave absolutely useless, or renders his use so inconvenient or imperfect that it must be supposed no one would buy a slave who was known to have this vice.

Every particle of instruction given to a slave beyond what is consistent with his remaining a passive and obedient, working machine, is so much money taken from the master's pocket. Nobody wants to invest his money in a slave who is refractory or disobedient, or who runs away at every opportunity,—unless, indeed, he buys the stock, in consequence, at very much under par! The value of Douglass as a slave decreased just as fast as his manhood increased; and Capt. Price now candidly avows, that he hesitated some time before he invested seven hundred dollars in William W. Brown; for William was a noted runaway! The love of money impels the slaveholders to keep their slaves in ignorance.

Not only this, but an educated slave, who loathes his condition and hates his oppressors, is an unsafe member of a household or a community. His means for taking a fearful vengeance are ample, and what consideration shall stay his hands? None but an educated slave can plan or head an insurrection. Such are the ones who always do take active part in rebellions. The house-servants constitute everywhere the most educated class. None are more dreaded than they, for this reason in part, and partly because of their living under the same roof with their masters. In a pamphlet

published in Charleston, S. C. in 1822, p. 14, by Gen. Thomas Pinckney, speaking of house-servants, he remarks:

—

"They are the most dangerous. Their intimate acquaintance with all the circumstances relating to the interior of the dwellings, the confidence reposed in them, *and the information they unavoidably obtain from hearing the conversation and observing the habitual transactions of their owners, afford them the most ample means for treacherous bloodshed and devastation.* The success, therefore, of servile conspiracies mainly depends on this class for taking off, by midnight murder, their unsuspecting owners; and the late trials, by exhibiting so large a portion of this description among the ringleaders of the conspiracy, afford a melancholy proof of their promptitude to become actors in such scenes."—
William Jay's Letter, &c. p. 9.

The love of life itself, the desire for the safety of their wives and children, impels the slaveholders to keep their slaves in ignorance.

Two of the strongest motives which can be brought to bear upon man, the love of money and the love of life, are therefore constantly urging the slaveholder to darken the minds of his slaves. If the former of these motives leads to the commission of so much wrong everywhere, what will not both motives together accomplish to the injury of the slave? But the slaveholders have not been willing to trust wholly to these motives, strong though they are. In many of the

States, it is a penal offence to teach a slave to read or write; and, where laws of this kind do not exist, custom, as universal, powerful, and remorseless as the law, accomplishes the same wrong. The following are some of these laws:—

The "Revised Statutes" of NORTH CAROLINA, chap. 34, sec. 74 ("Revision of Stat." 1830, chap. 6, §1), provide that

"Any free person who shall hereafter teach, or attempt to teach, any slave within this State to read or write, the use of figures excepted, or shall give or sell to such slave or slaves any books or pamphlets, shall be liable to indictment in any court of record in this State having jurisdiction thereof; and, upon conviction, shall, at the discretion of the court, if a white man or woman, be fined not less than one hundred dollars, nor more than two hundred dollars, or imprisoned; and, if a free person of color, shall be fined, imprisoned, or whipped, at the discretion of the court, not exceeding thirty-nine lashes, nor less than twenty lashes."

Chap. 111, sec. 27 (Statute, 1830, chap. 6, § 2), provides that,—

"If any slave shall teach, or attempt to teach, any other slave to read or write, the use of figures excepted, he or she may be carried before any justice of the peace, and, on conviction thereof, shall be sentenced to receive thirty-nine lashes on his or her bare back."

In SOUTH CAROLINA, the "Negro Act" (1740, § 45; "2 Brev. Dig." 243), provides that—

"All and every person and persons whatsoever who shall hereafter teach, or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write; every such person and persons shall, for every such offence, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money."

In ALABAMA (Statute, 1832, chap. 8, § 10; "Clay's Digest," p. 543, § 24),—

"Any person or persons who shall attempt to teach any free person of color, or slave, to spell, read, or write, shall, upon conviction thereof by indictment, be fined in a sum not less than two hundred and fifty dollars, nor more than five hundred dollars."

In GEORGIA ("Penal Code approved Dec. 23, 1833," 13th div., sec. 18; "Prince's Digest," p. 658; "William A. Hotchkiss's Codification," 1845, p. 772),—

"If any person shall teach any slave, negro, or free person of color, to read or write either written or printed characters, or shall procure, suffer, or permit a slave, negro, or person of color, to transact business for him in writing, such person so offending shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and, on conviction, shall be punished by fine, or imprisonment in the common jail of the county, or both, at the discretion of the court."

In MISSISSIPPI ("Howard & Hutchinson's Laws," p. 673),

"No slave or free person of color can be employed in the setting of types in any printing office."

In MISSOURI, the "Revised Statutes" (chap. 8, sec. 10, p. 117) provide that,—

"When an apprentice is a negro or mulatto, it shall *not* be the duty of the master to cause such colored apprentice to be taught to read or write, or a knowledge of arithmetic; but he shall be allowed, at the expiration of his term of service, a sum of money in lieu of education, to be assessed by the county court."

The Act of 1847 (approved Feb. 16, § 1) reads,—

"No person shall keep or teach any school for the instruction of negroes or mulattoes in reading or writing in this State."

Other similar laws might be produced; but these suffice to exhibit, in a clear light, the opportunities presented for the mental instruction of slaves! In some States, it is unlawful to teach even a FREE colored person to read or write!

That these laws have been almost universally respected and obeyed, there is no room to doubt. No one has given more attention to this subject than the Rev. Chas. C. Jones, of Savannah, Ga. In 1842 he published, at Savannah, a work, containing the result of his researches, entitled "The

Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States." In this work, p. 115, he says, "The statutes of our respective Slave States forbid all knowledge of letters to the negroes; and, where the statutes do not, custom does. It is impossible to form an estimate of the number of negroes that *read*. My belief is, that the proportion would be expressed by AN ALMOST INCONCEIVABLE FRACTION. The greatest number of readers is found in and about towns and cities, and among the FREE negro population some two or three generations removed from servitude."—As a confirmation of this testimony of Mr. Jones, we know no greater proof that the degraded class in any community is almost wholly uneducated, than that a large portion of the privileged class is so. The law of compensation is divine. We cannot degrade or brutalize our fellow-men, without degrading or brutalizing ourselves. Now, we find that, in the Slave States, almost one tenth of the free *white* population over twenty years of age are unable to read and write! To some persons this may seem a small proportion; but, in the Free States, with all our ignorance, there are less than one in one hundred and fifty! and Horace Mann, the best authority on this subject, says that "at least four fifths of these are foreigners, who ought not to be included in the computation." In Connecticut, out of 163,843 free persons over twenty years of age, there are only 526 who are unable to read and write; while, in the model Slave State of South Carolina, out of only 111,663 free white persons over twenty years of age, there are 20,615 who cannot read and write! "In South Carolina," says Theodore Parker, "out of each 626 free whites more than twenty years of age, there are more than 58 wholly unable