

ART. II. — *Does the Bible sanction American Slavery?* By GOLDWIN SMITH. Cambridge: Sever and Francis. 1863.

Is African slavery, as it exists in our Southern States, an evil or a good thing? Is it, or is it not, consistent with a high sense of duty to man and to God, and with the requirements of that state of Christian civilization which the foremost nations of the world have now reached? So far as the practice of those nations and the opinion of the best and wisest men of Christendom are authority to decide this question, it is decided. There is not a slave in modern Europe. Even Russia, semi-barbarous as yet, has recently abolished serfdom, a very different thing from African slavery, because the serf had rights, and the relation between him and his master was the relation of man to man, not of man to merchandise. England, France, and Denmark have abolished slavery in their colonies. Effete and Catholic Spain, whose government does not represent its people, and derives no life-blood from free and enlightened opinion, permits it in the West Indies. So, within her own borders, does Brazil, Catholic and half-civilized also, a despotism, an offshoot of Spain and Portugal, and degenerated even below the parent stock by a mongrel mixture of races which renders her progress in social or political improvement a slow, if not hopeless task. So also the government of the United States has not merely tolerated, but maintained and protected slavery. And why? Because it had no control over the subject. The several States had this control; and those of them most advanced in wealth and liberal culture have prohibited slavery within their limits. The power of the central government might be exercised to prevent the extension of slavery. This, and the growth of Northern sentiment averse to the institution, caused the present war.

It is needless to cite eminent names. The list would include nearly all the great thinkers — philosophers, historians, and poets — who have been the guides of thought from the birth of Christ till the present time, and it would include the founders of our own government, and most of its distinguished statesmen, many of them slaveholders. Authority, therefore, that is

OldMagazineArticles.com

The North American Review: January, 1864

-page two of twenty-six and a half-

1864.]

THE BIBLE AND SLAVERY.

49

to say, human authority, is all on one side. Until recently, indeed, the abstract moral question was almost universally regarded as settled. Slavery is an evil and a wrong. Few were bold enough to deny this. The only question was, Can it be got rid of, without causing greater evils and wrongs than its own?

Abstract truth, more especially moral truth, finds easy entrance into the mind and conscience. But concrete truth, truth manifested in fact and action, when great interests are connected with error and wrong, is sure to be resisted. Pure thought, too, as it passes into conduct, loses something of its purity and beauty, and becomes often soiled by the dross of human passion and selfishness. Liberty, equality, and fraternity were favorite and fashionable themes for the *savans*, the court, and the noblesse of France, in the age that preceded the Revolution. But when they took the form of a demand for a republic, instead of monarchy and aristocracy, they suddenly lost their charm for these enlightened classes. When they afterwards assumed the form of Robespierre and the guillotine and a mob frenzied with license and howling for blood, their very names became odious to the old world. So, a few years ago, it was very easy and very common for Southern slaveholders to admit, that to treat human beings as property is wrong, and that slavery is injurious to the best interests of society, when these propositions were coupled with another, — that it is for the slave-owners to say when and how slavery is to be altered or destroyed. But the truth wore a different aspect

when a powerful party in the country demanded that the area of slavery should be restricted, and afterwards, as is now the case, that slavery itself should be abolished. Truth then became concrete, and instantly the pride of power and the lust of wealth arrayed themselves against it. It must also be said, that, when the pure and noble idea of liberty appeared, as it did among a small portion of this Northern party, in the guise of reckless abolition, heedless of consequences, and of a willingness, if not a desire and purpose, to light the flames of servile war in the South, freedom for the negro, like the liberty and equality of French Jacobins, unfortunately ceased to be a beautiful thing in the eyes of many even thoughtful

VOL. XCVIII. — NO. 202.

4

OldMagazineArticles.com

50

THE BIBLE AND SLAVERY.

[Jan.

men. Freedom, to be a blessing, must bless both parties, him who gives and him who receives. If it cannot do this, it is not freedom, but a mere transfer of power from one portion of society to another.

But this world is governed by a good God and by moral laws; and moral truth, whatever abuses may be for a time connected with it, must in the end triumph. Slavery, as established in the Southern States, is wrong, and injurious, because it is wrong, to the best interests of society, — to religion, to morals, to science, to literature, to the arts, to industry, — for these can flourish only under the right, under the rule of justice and truth. This is the rock on which the argument against slavery is built, and so long as the foundation remains, the edifice cannot be overthrown. The Southern people discovered this, and, as soon as slavery was seriously menaced, they abandoned the faith of their ancestors, and boldly announced to the world, that slavery is founded in truth and justice, that it is the basis of liberty and civilization, and a blessing wherever it exists. As they could not cite in support of these dogmas the opinion of the age, the practice of the most enlightened nations, or the writings of the wise and good here or elsewhere, they went at once to the fountain-head of spiritual truth and moral law, and boldly claimed for the institution the sanction of the Bible. Slavery, they said, is expressly permitted and ordained in the laws of Moses. Christ was silent on the subject, and it was recognized and impliedly approved by St. Paul.

If all this be true, those who accept the Bible as their rule of conduct must bow to its authority. But before yielding to a conclusion which justifies oppression and condemns all that has been done to emancipate the negroes, it is well to inquire what sort of slavery was established by the Old Testament and recognized by the New, in what respects it differs from African slavery in the South, and whether any obligation is imposed upon us to perpetuate the latter.

The storm of war that is sweeping over our country has excited discussion on many questions vital to the interests of the people. This discussion is one of its compensations. Our whole system of government is on trial, investigation is compelled by the emergency of danger, new views are suggested,

OldMagazineArticles.com

The North American Review: January, 1864

-the fourth of twenty-six pages

1864.]

THE BIBLE AND SLAVERY.

51

weak points may be discovered, and in the collision of free thought, stimulated by great events and the jeopardy of great interests, old errors, hoary prejudices, and forms whose use has past, may be destroyed, as decayed trees of the forest are prostrated by a tempest, to make room for a new growth. Slavery, as the cause of the war, has received especial attention. Its Southern friends are indeed silent for a time, being fully occupied in defending it on bloody battle-fields. But it has advocates in our Northern States and in Europe; for the slave power had grown to such bulk, that it had become the basis of a political party in the North and of vast commercial interests in France and England. The argument drawn from the asserted sanction of the Bible has been revived, and the discussion which has ensued has had the good effect of enlarging our knowledge and vindicating the truth.

Among the publications induced by this controversy, the best we have seen is a little volume written in England, the title of which we have placed at the head of this article. As it is the production of a foreigner, it is likely to have the greater influence, because no sectional or partisan prejudice can be imputed to its author. Mr. Goldwin Smith is Professor of History at Oxford, and has a distinguished reputation, at home and abroad, of which this work is not unworthy. It is marked by clearness of thought and statement, extensive learning, liberal views, an elevated tone of thought befitting the topic, the earnestness of conviction, and a simple, grave, and forcible style. Critical and historical knowledge is necessary to understand many parts of the Bible, and this sort of knowledge is by no means universal, even among the educated. Most men, indeed, who condemn slavery, feel sure that it cannot be sanctioned by the Holy Scriptures, because it is opposed to the spirit and teachings both of the Old and the New Testament. Many are, however, not convinced, but puzzled, by the texts cited by the advocates of slavery. It is important, therefore, to show that the slavery of the South is not the slavery of the Bible; and this has been done by Mr. Smith.

There are two kinds of liberty, — political and personal. The former consists in a share of political power. To gain it, to keep it, and to exercise it for the good of society, implies a

OldMagazineArticles.com

The North American Review: January, 1864

-the fifth of twenty-six pages-

52

THE BIBLE AND SLAVERY.

[Jan.

degree of intelligence never possessed by a barbarous people, and by certain classes only of the more civilized. As nations advance in wealth and knowledge, this intelligence is more largely diffused. Intelligence means the power to think, and thinking produces the desire for action. As soon, therefore, as any portion of the people emerges from ignorance and poverty, public affairs become the objects of its intelligent curiosity and thought, and it demands the right to influence the action of government. When the masses of the people, or a portion of it, sufficient to represent the great interests of the nation, possess this right, such a people is said to possess political liberty. But those to whom this privilege is not extended are governed entirely by the will of those who possess it, or of one man, if he alone possesses it. Political liberty, therefore, or power over the conduct of government, is enjoyed now, as always, by a very small proportion of mankind. Free government belongs only to the most enlightened nations, to the most highly organized races. They only have been able, after a long and painful progress, to appreciate and desire it, to win and keep it. To be governed by the few, in all public affairs, is and always has been the lot of the vast majority of men.

Personal liberty is the power which a man has over himself, over his own actions and destiny, so far as these are not controlled by general laws affecting the whole community. Intelligence, combined with moral force, — what is called ability, — is the condition on which this sort of liberty can be enjoyed; for power is the inseparable attribute of ability, and loss of power of the want of it. Personal liberty is thus, like political liberty, the boon of advancing civilization, because civilization, by increasing the objects of desire and effort, stimulates and exercises varied talent. In the early stages of society, bodily strength and courage conferred power, because man was engaged in a struggle for subsistence with the untamed forces of nature and with fellow-men as savage as himself. The weak, therefore, sought the protection of the strong, because dependent upon, or the servants of, the strong. When communities were formed into nations, laws and policy were required, and demanded a new sort of ability, and intellect was enfranchised from the dominion of force. The security afforded by national

OldMagazineArticles.com

The North American Review: January, 1864

-the sixth of twenty-six pages-

1864.]

THE BIBLE AND SLAVERY.

53

power and law developed industry and the arts. These enabled multitudes to take care of themselves, who were before dependent on individuals for protection. For the power of the individual was substituted the power of government, representing society, and men became personally free, masters of themselves, and governed, not by individual will, but by law, which, whether made by themselves or not, was the law for all.

Such has been the progress of society from the family to the tribe, to the nation, to established government, and from the arts of war to the arts of peace. During the whole of this progress, force of mind and force of character have always conferred power. The weak have ever been the servants of the strong, under the name of slaves, serfs, or vassals, because dependent on the strong; and servitude is another name for dependence. Not until society became stronger than any individual could men become free. And their freedom consisted in this, that, in return for protection, they gave service, duty, fealty, and obedience, not to a master or lord, for his own benefit, but to a king, magistrate, or ruling class; in short, to government, for the benefit of all, because it represents all.

Servitude, therefore, or the subjection of man to man, does not contradict the laws of nature. It represents the relation of weakness to strength. It has existed in all ages, and in all nations at some period of their growth. The condition of its presence is the existence of a class unfit to enjoy personal liberty, or the want of power in government to protect the rights of individuals; for personal liberty is a right, for those who can use it without injury to themselves or others. In the former case, personal liberty may be denied or restricted by law, and according to the necessity for that law, its humanity and justice, will the government that makes it be judged. It must not be a selfish law, intended exclusively for the benefit of the governing party, for power is eternally coupled with duty and responsibility. The ability to do good implies the obligation to do good, and he who has control over the happiness of another is a tyrant and a criminal, if in exercising that control he seeks only his own interest. The laws of the most enlightened nations give power to husbands over wives, to parents over children, to masters over apprentices. But

OldMagazineArticles.com

The North American Review: January, 1864

-the seventh of twenty-six pages-

54

THE BIBLE AND SLAVERY.

[Jan.

the power is intended for the benefit of both parties, and it is therefore carefully guarded and restricted so as to secure that benefit.

These are plain and simple principles, which, though often violated by human selfishness and passion, have always been vindicated and established more firmly by the consequences of such violation. No philosopher or moralist, whose name has become eminent, and held its place through the centuries as a spiritual guide and teacher, has ever advocated selfishness as a virtue, or denied the doctrine that all power, whether of an individual or of government, is trust-power, to be exercised for the well-being of both the governing and the governed party; that a king ought to be the father of his people; that a ruling class ought to rule for the benefit of all classes; that the lord is bound to his vassal in mutual and reciprocal obligation, the master to his servant.

But the world has never been governed by philosophers, and history is a terrible record of disobedience to these precepts by those who have governed it, whether one or many, princes or parliaments, lords or masters. It is a record, too, of the punishment that waits on crime. An unjust and oppressive government cannot prosper, cannot endure. Sooner or later it is destroyed by the moral force of mankind, either from within or from without, by a domestic or a foreign power.

We have in this country four millions of negroes. They are of a race inferior to ours. They are, therefore, it is said, unfit to enjoy political liberty, or to exercise power over government. If this be so, they are rightfully deprived of that power, both for their own good and ours, and we of the superior race may govern them politically for the good of both. We are told, also, that they are unfit to enjoy personal liberty, to exercise power individually over themselves, to be governed each by his own will under the law. Is this true? Let us grant it. What, then, is the duty of the superior race which has power over the negro? Does not the possession of this power, by every principle of justice and humanity, make it a trustee for the negro? What is meant when it is said that the negro is unfit for personal liberty? Is it not that he is unable to take care of himself, — that he

OldMagazineArticles.com

The North American Review: January, 1864

-the eighth of twenty-six pages-

1864.]

THE BIBLE AND SLAVERY.

55

requires a care-taker, a guide, a support, as a child does? Are not those, therefore, who have power over him, who claim and take that power, bound to furnish the guardianship he needs, for his benefit, and, since his conduct and condition affect their interests, for their own also?

How have we of the white race performed this duty?

This question is answered by the Constitution of the United States, which permitted the slave-trade for twenty years, and slavery forever, slaves being regarded by both as articles of merchandise, existing wholly for the benefit of their owners. It is answered by the decision of the Supreme Court in the case of Dred Scott, in which the Chief Justice declares, that the public opinion of the civilized world at the time the Constitution was made, and which it was intended to express, and which is therefore binding on us, regarded negroes "as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which a white man was bound to respect, and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his" (the white man's) "benefit. He was bought and sold, and treated as an article of merchandise and traffic, whenever a profit could be made by it." Mr. Justice Daniel, in the same case, declares that a slave, under our law, "is strictly property, to be used in subserviency to the interests, the convenience, or the will of his owner."

The question is also answered by the laws of the Southern States, all of which proclaim that a slave is in all respects a chattel personal, and by the opinion of Judge Ruffin of North Carolina, quoted by our author (pp. 27, 28): "The question before the court has been assimilated at the bar to the other domestic relations, and arguments drawn from the well-established principles which confer and restrain the authority of the parent over the child, the tutor over the pupil, the master over the apprentice, have been pressed upon us. The court does not recognize their application. There is no likeness between the cases. They are in opposition to each other, and there is an impassable gulf between them. The difference is that which exists between freedom and slavery, and a greater cannot be imagined. In the one, the end in view is the happiness of the

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