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THE  
INJUSTICE AND IMPOLICY  
OF THE  
SLAVE TRADE,

AND OF THE  
**Slavery of the Africans :**

ILLUSTRATED IN A  
**SERMON**

PREACHED BEFORE THE CONNECTICUT SOCIETY FOR THE  
PROMOTION OF FREEDOM, AND FOR THE RELIEF OF  
PERSONS UNLAWFULLY HOLDEN IN BONDAGE,  
AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING IN NEW HAVEN,  
SEPTEMBER 15, 1791.

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BY JONATHAN EDWARDS, D. D.

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## ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

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The author of this sermon was possessed of an intellect of the highest order. As a logician, he was probably inferior to no individual of the age in which he lived. Capable alike of the profoundest and most acute investigations, he brought the richest treasures from the deepest mines of truth, and exhibited them in a light which left no doubt of their character. In this discourse, his mighty powers are exerted for the relief of oppressed and bleeding humanity. His arguments to prove slavery inconsistent with the principles of christianity, appear to us irresistible. The writer is not reluctant to acknowledge his desire, that the sentiments of this discourse may obtain a universal prevalence in our country. For Christians at the South, he entertains the sincerest respect. On the subject of slavery, many individuals among them, he doubts not, maintain opinions entirely correct; others he believes are in error. Slavery, say they, is an evil which admits of no remedy—it must be endured. They fortify themselves in their conclusion, by the recollection, that servants were born in the house of Abram, and that Onesimus was restored by Paul to his master. The writer hopes that these persons will peruse this sermon with attention and candor. Let them not be offended with the plainness and severity of some of the remarks, but recollecting the time and place in which they were originally made, may they receive them in the spirit of Christian love.\* The editor has taken the liberty to exchange a few of the author's obsolete words, for more modern phraseology; also to omit a few sentences at the conclusion of the appendix. ΠΝΟΣΙΟΝ.

\* "There were giants in those days." *Ed. 3d. ed.*

The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade, and of the  
Slavery of the Africans.

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MATTHEW vii. 12.

Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

THIS precept of our divine Lord hath always been admired as most excellent; and doubtless with the greatest reason. Yet it needs some explanation. It is not surely to be understood in the most unlimited sense, implying that because a prince expects and wishes for obedience from his subjects, he is obliged to obey them: that because parents wish their children to submit to their government, therefore they are to submit to the government of their children: or that because some men wish that others would concur and assist them to the gratification of their unlawful desires, therefore they also are to gratify the unlawful desires of others. But whatever we are conscious, that we should, in an exchange of circumstances, wish, and are persuaded that we might reasonably wish, that others would do to us; that we are bound to do to them. This is the general rule given us in the text; and a very extensive rule it is, reaching to the whole of our conduct: and is particularly useful to direct our conduct toward inferiors, and those whom we have in our power. I have therefore thought it a proper foundation for the discourse, which by *the Society for the promotion of Freedom, and for the relief of persons unlawfully holden in Bondage*, I have the honor to be appointed to deliver, on the present occasion.

This divine maxim is most properly applicable to the slave trade, and to the slavery of the Africans. Let us then make the application.

Should we be willing, that the Africans or any other nation should purchase us, our wives and children, transport us into Africa and there sell us into perpetual and absolute slavery? Should we be willing, that they by large bribes and offers of a gainful traffic, should entice our neighbors to kidnap and sell us to them, and that they should hold in perpetual and cruel bondage, not only ourselves, but our posterity through all generations? Yet why is it not as right

for them to treat us in this manner, as it is for us to treat them in the same manner? Their color indeed is different from ours. But does this give us a right to enslave them? The nations from Germany to Guinea have complexions of every shade from the fairest white, to a jetty black: and if a black complexion subject a nation or an individual to slavery, where shall slavery begin, or where shall it end?

I propose to mention a few reasons against the right of the slave trade—and then to consider the principal arguments, which I have ever heard urged in favor of it. What will be said against the slave trade will generally be equally applicable to slavery itself; and if conclusive against the former, will be equally conclusive against the latter.

As to the slave trade, I conceive it to be unjust in itself—abominable on account of the cruel manner in which it is conducted—and totally wrong on account of the impolicy of it, or its destructive tendency to the moral and political interests of any country.

I. It is unjust in itself. It is unjust in the same sense, and for the same reason, as it is, to steal, to rob, or to murder. It is a principle, the truth of which hath in this country been generally, if not universally acknowledged, ever since the commencement of the late war, *that all men are born equally free*. If this be true, the Africans are by nature equally entitled to freedom as we are; and therefore we have no more right to enslave, or to afford aid to enslave them, than they have to do the same to us. They have the same right to their freedom, which they have to their property or to their lives. Therefore to enslave them is as really and in the same sense wrong, as to steal from them, to rob, or to murder them.

There are indeed cases in which men may justly be deprived of their liberty and reduced to slavery, as there are cases in which they may be justly deprived of their lives. But they can justly be deprived of neither, unless they have by their own voluntary conduct forfeited it. Therefore still the right to liberty stands on the same basis with the right to life. And that the Africans have done something whereby they have forfeited their liberty must appear, before we can justly deprive them of it; as it must appear, that they have done something whereby they have forfeited their lives, before we may justly deprive them of these.

II. The slave trade is wicked and abominable on account of the cruel manner in which it is carried on.

Beside the stealing or kidnapping of men, women and children, in the first instance, and the instigation of others to this abominable practice; the inhuman manner in which they are transported to America, and in which they are treated on the passage and in their subsequent slavery, is

such as ought forever to deter every man from acting any part in this business, who has any regard to justice or humanity. They are crowded so closely into the holds and between the decks of vessels, that they have scarcely room to lie down, and sometimes not room to sit up in an erect posture; the men at the same time fastened together with irons by two and two: and all this in the most sultry climate. The consequence of the whole is, that the most dangerous and fatal diseases are soon bred among them, whereby vast numbers of those exported from Africa perish in the voyage: others in dread of that slavery which is before them, and in distress and despair from the loss of their parents, their children, their husbands, their wives, all their dear connections, and their dear native country itself, starve themselves to death or plunge themselves into the ocean. Those who attempt in the former of those ways to escape from their persecutors, are tortured by live coals applied to their mouths. Those who attempt an escape in the latter and fail, are equally tortured by the most cruel beating, or otherwise as their persecutors please. If any of them make an attempt, as they sometimes do, to recover their liberty, some, and as the circumstances may be, many, are put to immediate death. Others, beaten, bruised, cut and mangled in a most inhuman and shocking manner, are in this situation exhibited to the rest, to terrify them from the like attempt in future: and some are delivered up to every species of torment, whether by the application of the whip, or of any other instrument, even of fire itself, as the ingenuity of the ship master and of his crew is able to suggest or their situation will admit; and these torments are purposely continued for several days, before death is permitted to afford relief to these objects of vengeance.

By these means, according to the common computation, twenty-five thousand, which is a fourth part of those who are exported from Africa, and by the concession of all, twenty thousand, annually perish, before they arrive at the places of their destination in America.

But this is by no means the end of the sufferings of this unhappy people. Bred up in a country spontaneously yielding the necessaries and conveniences of savage life, they have never been accustomed to labor: of course they are but ill prepared to go through the fatigue and drudgery to which they are doomed in their state of slavery. Therefore partly by this cause, partly by the scantiness and badness of their food, and partly from dejection of spirits, mortification and despair, another twenty-five thousand die in the seasoning, as it is called, i. e. within two years after their arrival in America. This I say is the common computation. Or if we will in this particular be as favorable to the trade as in



the estimate of the number which perishes on the passage, we may reckon the number which die in the seasoning to be twenty thousand. So that of the hundred thousand annually exported from Africa to America, fifty thousand, as it is commonly computed, or on the most favorable estimate, forty thousand, die before they are seasoned to the country.

Nor is this all. The cruel sufferings of these pitiable beings are not yet at an end. Thenceforward they have to drag out a miserable life in absolute slavery, entirely at the disposal of their masters, by whom not only every venial fault, every mere inadvertence or mistake, but even real virtues, are liable to be construed into the most atrocious crimes, and punished as such, according to their caprice or rage, while they are intoxicated sometimes with liquor, sometimes with passion.

By these masters they are supplied with barely enough to keep them from starving, as the whole expense laid out on a slave for food, clothing and medicine, is commonly computed on an average at thirty shillings sterling annually. At the same time, they are kept at hard labor from five o'clock in the morning, till nine at night, excepting time to eat twice during the day. And they are constantly under the watchful eye of overseers and negro drivers, more tyrannical and cruel than even their masters themselves. From these drivers, for every imagined, as well as real neglect or want of exertion, they receive the lash, the smack of which is all day long in the ears of those who are on the plantation or in the vicinity; and it is used with such dexterity and severity, as not only to lacerate the skin, but to tear out small portions of the flesh at almost every stroke.

This is the general treatment of the slaves. But many individuals suffer still more severely. Many, many are knocked down; some have their eyes beaten out; some have an arm or a leg broken, or chopped off; and many, for a very small, or for no crime at all, have been beaten to death merely to gratify the fury of an enraged master or overseer.

Nor ought we, on this occasion, to overlook the wars among the nations of Africa, excited by the trade, or the destruction attendant on those wars. Not to mention the destruction of property, the burning of towns and villages, &c. it hath been determined, by reasonable computation, that there are annually exported from Africa to the various parts of America, one hundred thousand slaves,\* as was before observed; that of these, six thousand are captives of war; that in the wars in which these are taken, ten persons of the victors and vanquished are killed, to one taken; that, therefore the taking of the six thousand captives, is attended with the slaughter of sixty thousand of their countrymen. Now does

\* The extent of this horrid trade, is not to this day diminished.



not justice, does not humanity, shrink from the idea, that in order to procure one slave, to gratify our avarice, we should put to death ten human beings? Or that, in order to increase our property, and that only in some small degree, we should carry on a trade, or even connive at it, to support which, sixty thousand of our own species are slain in war?

These sixty thousand, added to the forty thousand who perish on the passage and in the seasoning, give us an hundred thousand who are annually destroyed by the trade; and the whole advantage gained by this amazing destruction of human lives, is sixty thousand slaves. For you will recollect, that the whole number exported from Africa is an hundred thousand; that of these, forty thousand die on the passage and in the seasoning, and sixty thousand are destroyed in the wars. Therefore, while one hundred and sixty thousand are killed in the wars and are exported from Africa, but sixty thousand are added to the stock of slaves.

Now when we consider all this; when we consider the miseries which this unhappy people suffer in their wars, in their captivity, in their voyage to America, and during a wretched life of cruel slavery: and especially when we consider the annual destruction of an hundred thousand lives, in the manner before mentioned; who can hesitate to declare this trade and the consequent slavery, to be contrary to every principle of justice and humanity, of the law of nature and of the law of God?

III. This trade and this slavery are utterly wrong on the ground of their impolicy. In a variety of respects they are exceedingly hurtful to the state which tolerates them.

1. They are hurtful, as they deprave the morals of the people. The incessant and inhuman cruelties practised in the trade and in the subsequent slavery, necessarily tend to harden the human heart against the tender feelings of humanity, in the masters of vessels, in the sailors, in the factors, in the proprietors of slaves, in their children, in the overseers, in the slaves themselves, and in all who habitually see those cruelties. Now the eradication, or even the diminution of compassion, tenderness and humanity, is certainly a great depravation of heart, and must be followed with correspondent depravity of manners. And measures which lead to such depravity of heart and manners, cannot but be extremely hurtful to the state, and consequently are extremely impolitic.

2. The trade is impolitic, as it is so destructive of the lives of seamen. The ingenious Mr. Clarkson hath, in a very satisfactory manner, made it appear, that in the slave trade alone, Great Britain loses annually about nineteen hundred seamen; and that this loss is more than double to the loss annually sustained by Great Britain in all her other trade taken to-

gether. And, doubtless, we lose as many as Great Britain, in proportion to the number of seamen whom we employ in this trade. Now can it be politic to carry on a trade which is so destructive to that useful part of our citizens, our seamen.

3. African slavery is exceedingly impolitic, as it discourages industry. Nothing is more essential to the political prosperity of any state, than industry in the citizens. But in proportion as slaves are multiplied, every kind of labor becomes ignominious: and in fact in those of the United States, in which slaves are the most numerous, gentlemen and ladies of any fashion, disdain to employ themselves in business, which in other states is consistent with the dignity of the first families and first offices. In a country filled with negro slaves, labor belongs to them only, and a white man is despised in proportion as he applies to it. Now how destructive to industry in all of the lowest and middle class of citizens, such a situation and the prevalence of such ideas will be, you can easily conceive. The consequence is, that some will nearly starve, others will betake themselves to the most dishonest practices, to obtain the means of living.

As Slavery produces indolence in the white people, so it produces all those vices which are naturally connected with it; such as intemperance, lewdness and prodigality. These vices enfeeble both the body and the mind, and unfit men for any vigorous exertions and employments either external or mental; and those who are unfit for such exertions, are already a very degenerate race; degenerate, not only in a moral, but a natural sense. They are contemptible too, and will soon be despised even by their negroes themselves.

Slavery tends to lewdness, not only as it produces indolence, but as it affords abundant opportunity for that wickedness, without either the danger and difficulty of an attack on the virtue of a woman of chastity, or the danger of a connection with one of ill fame. And we learn the too frequent influence and effect of such a situation, not only from common fame, but from the multitude of mulattoes in countries where slaves are very numerous.

Slavery has a most direct tendency to haughtiness also, and a domineering spirit and conduct in the proprietors of the slaves, in their children, and in all who have the control of them. A man who has been bred up in domineering over negroes, can scarcely avoid contracting such a habit of haughtiness and domination, as will express itself in his general treatment of mankind, whether in his private capacity, or in any office civil or military with which he may be vested. Despotism in economics naturally leads to despotism in politics, and domestic slavery, in a free government is a perfect solecism in human affairs.

How baneful all these tendencies and effects of slavery must be to the public good, and especially to the public good of such a free country as ours, I need not inform you.

4. In the same proportion as industry and labor are discouraged, is population discouraged and prevented. This is another respect in which slavery is exceedingly impolitic.— That population is prevented in proportion as industry is discouraged, is, I conceive, so plain that nothing needs to be said to illustrate it. Mankind in general will enter into matrimony as soon as they possess the means of supporting a family. But the great body of any people have no other way of supporting themselves or a family than by their own labor. Of course, as labor is discouraged, matrimony is discouraged and population is prevented. But the impolicy of whatever produces these effects will be acknowledged by all. The wealth, strength, and glory of a state depend on the number of its virtuous citizens: and a state without citizens is at least as great an absurdity as a king without subjects.

5. The impolicy of slavery still further appears from this, that it weakens the state, and in proportion to the degree in which it exists, exposes it to become an easy conquest. The increase of free citizens is an increase of the strength of the state. But not so with regard to the increase of slaves.— They not only add nothing to the strength of the state, but actually diminish it in proportion to their number. Every slave is naturally an enemy to the state in which he is holden in slavery, and wants nothing but an opportunity to assist in its overthrow. And an enemy within a state, is much more dangerous than one without it.

These observations concerning the prevention of population and weakening the state, are supported by facts which have fallen within our own observation. That the southern states, in which slaves are so numerous, are in no measure so populous, according to the extent of territory, as the northern, is a fact of universal notoriety: and that, during the late war, the southern states found themselves greatly weakened by their slaves, and therefore were so easily overrun by the British army, is equally notorious.

From the view we have now taken of this subject, we scruple not to infer, that to carry on the slave trade, and to introduce slaves into our country, is not only to be guilty of injustice, robbery and cruelty toward our fellow men; but it is to injure ourselves and our country; and therefore it is altogether unjustifiable, wicked and abominable.

Having thus considered the injustice and ruinous tendency of the slave trade, I proceed to attend to the principal arguments urged in favor of it.

1. It is said, that the Africans are the posterity of Ham, the son of Noah; that Canaan, one of Ham's sons, was

cursed by Noah to be a servant of servants; that by Canaan we are to understand Ham's posterity in general; that as his posterity are devoted by God to slavery, we have a right to enslave them. This is the argument: to which I answer:

It is indeed generally thought that Ham peopled Africa; but that the curse on Canaan extended to all the posterity of Ham is a mere imagination. The only reason given for it, is, that Canaan was only one of Ham's sons; and that it seems reasonable that the curse of Ham's conduct should fall on all his posterity, if on any. But this argument is insufficient. We might as clearly argue, that the judgments denounced on the house of David, on account of his sin in the matter of Uriah, must equally fall on all his posterity.— Yet we know, that many of them lived and died in great prosperity. So in every case in which judgments are predicted concerning any nation or family.

It is allowed in this argument, that the curse was to fall on the *posterity* of Ham, and not immediately on Ham himself. If otherwise, it is nothing to the purpose of the slave trade, or of any slaves now in existence. It being allowed, then, that this curse was to fall on Ham's posterity, he who had a right to curse the whole of that posterity, had the same right to curse a part of it only, and the posterity of Canaan equally as any other part; and a curse on Ham's posterity, in the line of Canaan, was as real a curse on Ham himself, as a curse on all his posterity would have been.

Therefore we have no ground to believe, that this curse respected any others, than the posterity of Canaan, who lived in the land of Canaan, which is well known to be remote from Africa. We have a particular account, that all the sons of Canaan settled in the land of Canaan; as may be seen in Gen. x. 15—20. "And Canaan begat Sidon his first born, and Heth, and the Jebusite, and the Emorite, and the Girgasite, and the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite, and the Arvadite, and the Zemorite, and the Harmathite; and afterward were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad. And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou goest to Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest unto Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lashah." Nor have we account that any of their posterity except the Carthagenians afterward removed to any part of Africa: and none will pretend that these peopled Africa in general; especially considering, that they were subdued, destroyed and so far extirpated by the Romans.

This curse then of the posterity of Canaan had no reference to the inhabitants of Guinea, or of Africa in general; but was fulfilled partly in Joshua's time, in the reduction and servitude of the Canaanites, and especially of the Gibeonites; partly by what the Phenicians suffered from the Chaldeans,



Persians and Greeks; and finally by what the Carthaginians suffered from the Romans.

Therefore this curse gives us no right to enslave the Africans, as we do by the slave trade, because it has no respect to the Africans whom we enslave. Nor if it had respected them, would it have given any such right; because it was not an institution of slavery, but a mere prophecy of it. And from this prophecy we have no more ground to infer the right of slavery, than we have from the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, or by the Romans, to infer their right respectively to destroy it in the manner they did; or from other prophecies to infer the right of Judas to betray his master, or of the Jews to crucify him.

2. The right of slavery is inferred from the instance of Abraham, who had servants born in his house and bought with his money. But it is by no means certain, that these were slaves, as our negroes are. If they were, it is unaccountable, that he went out at the head of an army of them to fight his enemies. No West India planter would easily be induced to venture himself in such a situation. It is far more probable, that similar to some of the vassals under the feudal constitution, the servants of Abraham were only in a good measure dependant on him, and protected by him. But if they were to all intents and purposes slaves, Abraham's holding of them will no more prove the right of slavery, than his going in to Hagar, will prove it right for any man to indulge in criminal intercourse with his domestic.

3. From the divine permission given the Israelites to buy servants of the nations round about them, it is argued, that we have a right to buy the Africans and hold them in slavery. See Lev. xxv. 44—47. "Both thy bondmen and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy, bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families, that are with you, which they begat in your land; and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen forever: but over your brethren the children of Israel ye shall not rule one over another with rigor." But if this be at all to the purpose, it is a permission to every nation under heaven to buy slaves of the nations round about them; to us, to buy of our Indian neighbors; to them, to buy of us; to the French to buy of the English, and to the English to buy of the French; and so through the world. If then this argument be valid, every man has an entire right to engage in this trade, and to buy and sell any other man of another nation, and any other man of another nation has an entire right

to buy and sell him. Thus according to this construction, we have in Lev. xxv. 43, &c. an institution of an universal slave trade, by which every man may not only become a merchant, but may rightfully become the merchandize itself of this trade, and may be bought and sold like a beast. Now this consequence will be given up as absurd, and therefore also the construction of scripture from which it follows, must be given up. Yet it is presumed, that there is no avoiding that construction or the absurdity flowing from it, but by admitting that this permission to the Israelites to buy slaves has no respect to us, but was in the same manner peculiar to them, as the permission and command to subdue, destroy and extirpate the whole Canaanitish nation; and therefore no more gives countenance to African slavery, than the command to extirpate the Canaanites, gives countenance to the extirpation of any nation in these days, by an universal slaughter of men and women, young men and maidens, infants and sucklings.

4. It is further pleaded, that there were slaves in the time of the apostles; that they did not forbid the holding of those slaves, but gave directions to servants, doubtless referring to the servants of that day, to obey *their masters*, and *count them worthy of all honor*.

To this the answer is, that the apostles teach the general duties of servants who are righteously in the state of servitude, as many are or may be, by hire, by indenture, and by judgment of a civil court. But they do not say whether the servants in general of that day were justly holden in slavery or not. In like manner they lay down the general rules of obedience to civil magistrates, without deciding concerning the characters of the magistrates of the Roman empire in the reign of Nero. And as the apostle Paul requires masters to *give their servants that which is just and equal*, (Col. iv. 1.) so if any were enslaved unjustly, of course he in this text requires of the masters of such, to give them their freedom. Thus the apostles treat the slavery of that day in the same manner that they treat the civil government; and say nothing more in favor of the former, than they say in favor of the latter.

Besides, this argument from the slavery prevailing in the days of the apostles, if it prove any thing, proves too much, and so confutes itself. It proves that we may enslave all captives taken in war, of any nation, and in any the most unjust war, such as the wars of the Romans, which were generally undertaken from the motives of ambition or avarice. On the ground of this argument we had a right to enslave the prisoners, whom we, during the late war, took from the British army; and they had the same right to enslave



those whom they took from us; and so with respect to all other nations.

5. It is strongly urged, that the negroes brought from Africa are all captives of war, and therefore are justly bought and holden in slavery. This is a principal argument always urged by the advocates for slavery; and in a solemn debate on this subject, it hath been strongly insisted on, very lately in the British parliament. Therefore it requires our particular attention.

Captives in a war just on their part, cannot be justly enslaved; nor is this pretended. Therefore the captives who may be justly enslaved, must be taken in a war unjust on their part. But even on the supposition, that captives in such a war may be justly enslaved, it will not follow that we can justly carry on the slave trade, as it is commonly carried on from the African coast. In this trade any slaves are purchased, who are offered for sale, whether justly or unjustly enslaved. No inquiry is made whether they are captives in any war; much less, whether they were captivated in a war unjust on their part.

By the most authentic accounts, it appears that the wars in general in Africa are excited by the prospect of gain from the sale of the captives of the war. Therefore those taken by the assailants in such wars cannot be justly enslaved. Besides these, many are kidnapped by those of neighboring nations; some by their own neighbors; and some by their kings or his agents; others for debt or some trifling crime are condemned to perpetual slavery; but none of these are justly enslaved. And the traders make no inquiry concerning the mode or occasion of their first enslavement. They buy all that are offered, provided they like them and the price. So that the plea, that the African slaves are captives in war, is entirely insufficient to justify the slave trade as now carried on.

But this is not all; if it were ever so true that all the negroes exported from Africa were captives in war, and that they were taken in a war unjust on their part; still they could not be justly enslaved. We have no right to enslave a private foe in a state of nature, after he is conquered. Suppose in a state of nature one man rises against another and endeavors to kill him; in this case the person assaulted has no right to kill the assailant, unless it be necessary to preserve his own life. But in wars between nations, one nation may no doubt secure itself against another, by other means than the slavery of its captives. If a nation be victorious in the war, it may exact some towns or a district of country, by way of caution; or it may impose a fine to deter from future injuries. If the nation be not victorious, it will do no good to enslave the captives whom it has taken.

It will provoke the victors, and foolishly excite vengeance which cannot be repelled.

Or if neither nation be decidedly victorious, to enslave the captives on either side can answer no good purpose, but must at least occasion the enslaving of the citizens of the other nation, who are now, or in future may be in a state of captivity. Such a practice therefore necessarily tends to evil and not good.

Besides; captives in war are generally common soldiers or common citizens; and they are generally ignorant of the true cause or causes of the war, and are by their superiors made to believe, that the war is entirely just on their part. Or if this be not the case, they may by force be compelled to serve in a war which they know to be unjust. In either of these cases they do not deserve to be condemned to perpetual slavery. To inflict perpetual slavery on these private soldiers and citizens is manifestly not to do as we would wish that men should do to us. If we were taken in a war unjust on our part, we should not think it right to be condemned to perpetual slavery. No more right is it for us to condemn and hold in perpetual slavery others, who are in the same situation.

6. It is argued, that as the Africans in their own country, previously to the purchase of them by the African traders, are captives in war; if they were not brought up by those traders, they would be put to death: that therefore to purchase them and to subject them to slavery instead of death, is an act of mercy not only lawful, but meritorious.

If the case were indeed so as is now represented, the purchase of the negroes would be no more meritorious, than the act of a man, who, if we were taken by the Algerines, should purchase us out of that slavery. This would indeed be an act of benevolence, if the purchaser should set us at liberty. But it is no act of benevolence to buy a man out of one state into another no better. Nay, the act of ransoming a man from death gives no right to the ransomer to commit a crime or an act of injustice to the person ransomed. The person ransomed is doubtless obligated according to his ability to satisfy the ransomer for his expense and trouble. Yet the ransomer has no more right to enslave the other, than the man who saves the life of another who was about to be killed by a robber or an assassin, has a right to enslave him. The liberty of a man for life is far greater good, than the property paid for a negro on the African coast. And to deprive a man of an immensely greater good, in order to recover one immensely less, is an immense injury and crime.

7. As to the pretence, that to prohibit or lay aside this trade, would be hurtful to our commerce; it is sufficient to ask, whether on the supposition, that it were advantageous to

the commerce of Great Britain to send her ships to these states, and transport us into perpetual slavery in the West Indies, it would be right that she should go into that trade?

8. That to prohibit the slave trade would infringe on the property of those, who have expended large sums to carry on that trade, or of those who wish to purchase the slaves for their plantations, hath also been urged as an argument in favor of the trade. But the same argument would prove, that if the skins and teeth of the negroes were as valuable articles of commerce as furs, and elephant's teeth, and a merchant were to lay out his property in this commerce, he ought by no means to be obstructed therein.

9. But others will carry on the trade, if we do not. So others will rob, steal and murder, if we do not.

10. It is said, that some men are intended by nature to be slaves. If this mean, that the author of nature has given some men a license to enslave others; this is denied and proof is demanded. If it mean, that God has made some of capacities inferior to others, and that the last have a right to enslave the first; this argument will prove, that some of the citizens of every country, have a right to enslave other citizens of the same country; nay, that some have a right to enslave their own brothers and sisters. But if this argument mean, that God in his providence suffers some men to be enslaved, and that this proves, that from the beginning he intended they should be enslaved, and made them with this intention; the answer is, that in like manner he suffers some men to be murdered, and in this sense, he intended and made them to be murdered. Yet no man in his senses will hence argue the lawfulness of murder.

11. It is further pretended, that no other men, than negroes, can endure labor in the hot climates of the West Indies and the southern states. But does this appear to be fact? In all other climates, the laboring people are the most healthy. And I confess I have not yet seen evidence, but that those who have been accustomed to labor and are inured to those climates, can bear labor there also. However, taking for granted the fact asserted in this objection, does it follow, that the inhabitants of those countries have a right to enslave the Africans to labor for them? No more surely than from the circumstance, that you are feeble and cannot labor, it follows, that you have a right to enslave your robust neighbor. As in all other cases, the feeble and those who choose not to labor, and yet wish to have their lands cultivated, are necessitated to hire the robust to labor for them; so no reason can be given, why the inhabitants of hot climates should not either perform their own labor, or hire those who can perform it, whether negroes or others.

If our traders went to the coast of Africa to murder the

inhabitants, or to rob them of their property, all would own that such murderous or piratical practices are wicked and abominable. Now it is as really wicked to rob a man of his liberty, as to rob him of his life; and it is much more wicked, than to rob him of his property. All men agree to condemn highway robbery; and the slave trade is as much a greater wickedness than highway robbery, as liberty is more valuable than property. How strange is it then, that in the same nation highway robbery should be punished with death, and the slave trade be encouraged by national authority.

We all dread political slavery, or subjection to the arbitrary power of a king or of any man or men not deriving their authority from the people. Yet such a state is inconceivably preferable to the slavery of the negroes. Suppose that in the late war we had been subdued by Great Britain; we should have been taxed without our consent. But these taxes would have amounted to but a small part of our property. Whereas the negroes are deprived of all their property; no part of their earnings is their own; the whole is their master's. In a conquered state we should have been at liberty to dispose of ourselves and of our property in most cases, as we should choose. We should have been free to live in this or that town or place; in any part of the country, or to remove out of the country; to apply to this or that business; to labor or not; and excepting a sufficiency for the taxes, to dispose of the fruit of our labor to our own benefit, or that of our children, or of any other person. But the unhappy negroes in slavery can do none of these things. They must do what they are commanded, and as much as they are commanded, on pain of the lash. They must live where they are placed, and must confine themselves to that spot, on pain of death.

So that Great Britain in her late attempt to enslave America, committed a very small crime indeed in comparison with the crime of those who enslave the Africans.

The arguments which have been urged against the slave trade, are with little variation applicable to the holding of slaves. He who holds a slave, continues to deprive him of that liberty, which was taken from him on the coast of Africa. And if it were wrong to deprive him of it in the first instance, why not in the second? If this be true, no man has a better right to retain his negro in slavery, than he had to take him from his native African shores. And every man who cannot show, that his negro hath by his voluntary conduct forfeited his liberty, is obligated immediately to manumit him. Undoubtedly we should think so, were we holden in the same slavery in which the negroes are: And



our text requires us to do to others, as we would that they should do to us.

To hold a slave, who has a right to his liberty, is not only a real crime, but a very great one. Many good Christians have wondered how Abraham, the father of the faithful, could take Hagar to his bed; and how Sarah, celebrated as an holy woman, could consent to this transaction: Also, how David and Solomon could have so many wives and concubines, and yet be real saints. Let such inquire how it is possible, that our fathers and men now alive, universally reputed pious, should hold negro slaves, and yet be the subjects of real piety? And whether to reduce a man, who hath the same right to liberty as any other man, to a state of absolute slavery, or to hold him in that state, be not as great a crime as concubinage or fornication. I presume it will not be denied, that to commit theft or robbery every day of a man's life, is as great a sin as to commit fornication in one instance. But to steal a man or to rob him of his liberty is a greater sin, than to steal his property, or to take it by violence. And to hold a man in a state of slavery, who has a right to his liberty, is to be every day guilty of robbing him of his liberty, or of manstealing. The consequence is inevitable, that other things being the same, to hold a negro slave, unless he have forfeited his liberty, is a greater sin in the sight of God, than concubinage or fornication.

Does this conclusion seem strange to any of you? Let me entreat you to weigh it candidly before you reject it. You will not deny, that liberty is more valuable than property; and that it is a greater sin to deprive a man of his whole liberty during life, than to deprive him of his whole property: or that man stealing is a greater crime than robbery. Nor will you deny, that to hold in slavery a man who was stolen, is substantially the same crime as to steal him. These principles being undeniable, I leave it to yourselves to draw the plain and necessary consequence. And if your consciences shall, in spite of all opposition, tell you, that while you hold your negroes in slavery, you do wrong, exceedingly wrong; that you do not, as you would that men should do to you; that you commit sin in the sight of God; that you daily violate the plain rights of mankind, and that in a higher degree, than if you committed theft or robbery; let me beseech you not to stifle this conviction, but attend to it and act accordingly; lest you add to your former guilt, that of sinning against the light of truth, and of your own consciences.

To convince yourselves, that your information being the same, to hold a negro slave is a greater sin than fornication, theft or robbery, you need only bring the matter home to

yourselves. I am willing to appeal to your own consciences, whether you would not judge it to be a greater sin for a man to hold you or your child during life in such slavery, as that of the negroes, than for him to indulge in one instance of licentious conduct, or in one instance to steal or rob. Let conscience speak, and I will submit to its decision.

This question seems to be clearly decided by revelation. Exod. xxi. 16. "He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death." Thus death is, by the divine express declaration, the punishment due to the crime of man stealing. But death is not the punishment declared by God to be due to fornication, theft or robbery in common cases. Therefore we have the divine authority to assert, that man stealing is a greater crime than fornication, theft or robbery. Now to hold in slavery a man who has a right to liberty, is substantially the same crime as to deprive him of his liberty. And to deprive of liberty and reduce to slavery, a man who has a right to liberty, is man stealing. For it is immaterial whether he be taken and reduced to slavery clandestinely or by open violence. Therefore if the negroes have a right to liberty, to hold them in slavery is man stealing, which we have seen is, by God himself, declared to be a greater crime than fornication, theft or robbery.

Perhaps, though this truth be clearly demonstrable both from reason and revelation, you scarcely dare receive it, because it seems to bear hardly on the characters of our pious fathers, who held slaves. But they did it ignorantly and in unbelief of the truth; as Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon were ignorant, that polygamy or concubinage was wrong. As to domestic slavery, our fathers lived in a *time of ignorance which God winked at; but now he commandeth all men every where to repent of this wickedness, and to break off this sin by righteousness, and this iniquity by showing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening out of their tranquility.* You therefore to whom the present blaze of light, as to this subject, has reached, cannot sin at so cheap a rate as our fathers.

But methinks I hear some say, I have bought my negro; I have paid a large sum for him; I cannot lose this sum, and therefore I cannot manumit him. Alas! this is *hitting the nail on the head.* This brings into view the true cause which makes it so difficult to convince men of what is right in this case. You recollect the story of Amaziah's hiring an hundred thousand men of Israel, for an hundred talents, to assist him against the Edomites; and that when by the word of the Lord, he was forbidden to take those hired men with him to the war, he cried out, "But what shall we do for the hun-



dred talents, which I have given to the army of Israel?" In this case, the answer of God was, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." To apply this to the subject before us, God is able to give thee much more than thou shalt lose by manumitting thy slave.

You may plead, that you use your slave well ; you are not cruel to him, but feed and clothe him comfortably, &c. Still every day you rob him of a most valuable and important right. And a highwayman, who robs a man of his money in the most easy and complaisant manner, is still a robber ; and murder may be effected in a manner the least cruel and tormenting ; still it is murder.

Having now taken that view of our subject, which was proposed, we may in reflection see abundant reason to acquiesce in the institution of this society. If the slave trade be unjust, and as gross a violation of the rights of mankind, as would be, if the Africans should transport us into perpetual slavery in Africa ; to unite our influence against it, is a duty which we owe to mankind, to ourselves, and to God too. It is but doing as we would that men should do to us. Nor is it enough that we have formed the society ; we must do the duties of it. The first of these is to put an end to the slave trade. The second is to relieve those who, contrary to the laws of the country, are holden in bondage. Another is to defend those in their remaining legal and natural rights, who are by law holden in bondage. Another, and not the least important object of this society, I conceive to be, to increase and disperse the light of truth with respect to the subject of African slavery, and so prepare the way for its total abolition. For until men in general are convinced of the injustice of the trade and of the slavery itself, comparatively little can be done to effect the most important purposes of the institution.

It is not to be doubted, that the trade is even now carried on from this state. Vessels are from time to time fitted out for the coast of Africa, to transport the negroes to the West Indies and other parts. Nor will an end be put to this trade, without vigilance and strenuous exertion on the part of this society, or other friends of humanity, nor without a patient enduring of the opposition and odium of all who are concerned in it, of their friends and of all who are of the opinion that it is justifiable. Among these we are doubtless to reckon some of large property and considerable influence. And if the laws and customs of the country equally allowed of it, many, and perhaps as many as now plead for the right of the African slave trade, would plead for the right of kidnapping us, the citizens of the United States, and of selling us into perpetual slavery. If then we dare not incur the displeasure of such men, we may as well dissolve the society, and leave the slave trade to be carried on, and the negroes to be kid-

napped, and though free in this state, to be sold into perpetual slavery in distant parts, at the pleasure of any man, who wishes to make gain by such abominable practices.

Though we must expect opposition, yet if we be steady and persevering, we need not fear that we shall fail of success. The advantages, which the cause has already gained, are many and great. Thirty years ago, scarcely a man in this country thought either the slave trade or the slavery of negroes to be wrong. But now how many and able advocates in private life, in our legislatures, in Congress, have appeared and have openly and irrefragably pleaded the rights of humanity in this as well as other instances? Nay, the great body of the people from New Hampshire to Virginia inclusively, have obtained such light, that in all those states, the further importation of slaves is prohibited by law. In Massachusetts and New Hampshire, slavery is totally abolished.

Nor is the light concerning this subject confined to America. It hath appeared with great clearness in France, and produced remarkable effects in the National Assembly. It hath also shone in bright beams in Great Britain. It flashes with splendor in the writings of Clarkson and in the proceedings of several societies formed to abolish the slave trade. Nor hath it been possible to shut it out of the British parliament. This light is still increasing, and in time will effect a total revolution. And if we judge of the future by the past, within fifty years from this time, it will be as shameful for a man to hold a negro slave, as to be guilty of common robbery or theft.\* But it is our duty to remove the obstacles which intercept the rays of this light, that it may reach not only public bodies, but every individual. And when it shall have obtained a general spread, shall have dispelled all darkness, and slavery shall be no more; it will be an honor to be recorded in history, as a society which was formed, and which exerted itself with vigor and fidelity, to bring about an event so necessary and conducive to the interests of humanity and virtue, to the support of the rights, and to the advancement of the happiness of mankind.

\* This time is at hand!

## APPENDIX.

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SOME objections to the doctrine of the preceding sermon, have been mentioned to the author, since the delivery of it. Of these it may be proper to take some notice.

1. The slaves are in a better situation than that in which they were in their own country ; especially as they have opportunity to know the Christian religion and to secure the saving blessings of it. Therefore it is not an injury, but a benefit to bring them into this country, even though their importation be accompanied and followed with slavery. It is also said, that the situation of many negroes under their masters is much better, than it would be, were they free in this country ; that they are much better fed and clothed, and are much more happy ; that therefore to hold them in slavery is so far from a crime, that it is a meritorious act.

With regard to these pleas, it is to be observed, that every man hath right to judge concerning his own happiness, and to choose the means of obtaining or promoting it ; and to deprive him of this right is the very injury of which we complain ; it is to enslave him. Because we judge, that the negroes are more happy in this country, in a state of slavery, than in the enjoyment of liberty in Africa, we have no more right to enslave them and bring them into this country, than we have to enslave any of our neighbors, who we judge would be more happy under our control, than they are at present under their own. Let us make the case our own.—Should we believe that we were justly treated, if the Africans should carry us into perpetual slavery in Africa, on the ground that they judged that we should be more happy in that state, than in our present situation ?

As to the opportunity which the negroes in this country are said to have, to become acquainted with Christianity ; this with respect to many is granted : But what follows from it ? it would be ridiculous to pretend, that this is the motive on which they act who import them, or they who buy and hold them in slavery. Or if this were the motive, it would not sanctify either the trade or the slavery. We are not at liberty to do evil, that good may come ; to commit a crime more aggravated than theft or robbery, that we may make a proselyte to Christianity. Neither our Lord Jesus Christ nor any one of his apostles has taught us this mode of propagating the faith.

2. It is said, that the doctrine of the preceding sermon imputes that as a crime to individuals, which is owing to the state of society. This is granted; and what follows? It is owing to the state of society, that our neighbors the Indians roast their captives: and does it hence follow, that such conduct is not to be imputed to the individual agents as a crime? It is owing to the state of society in Popish countries, that thousands worship the beast and the image; and is that worship therefore not imputed as a crime to those, who render it? Read the Revelation of St. John. The state of society is such, that drunkenness and adultery are very common in some countries; but will it follow, that those vices are innocent in those countries?

3. If I be ever so willing to manumit my slave, I cannot do it without being holden to maintain him, when he shall be sick or shall be old and decrepid. Therefore I have a right to hold him as a slave. The same argument will prove, that you have a right to enslave your children or your parents; as you are equally holden to maintain them in sickness and in decrepid old age. The argument implies, that in order to secure the money, which you are afraid the laws of your country will some time or other oblige you to pay; it is right for you to rob a free man of his liberty or be guilty of man stealing. On the ground of this argument every town or parish obligated by law, to maintain its helpless poor, has a right to sell into perpetual slavery all the people, who may probably or even possibly occasion a public expense.

4. After all, it is not safe to manumit the negroes: they would cut our throats; they would endanger the peace and government of the state. Or at least they would be so idle, that they would not provide themselves with necessaries: of course they must live by thievery and plundering.

This objection requires a different answer, as it respects the northern, and as it respects the southern states. As it respects the northern, in which slaves are so few, there is not the least foundation to imagine, that they would combine or make insurrection against the government; or that they would attempt to murder their masters. They are much more likely to kill their masters, in order to obtain their liberty, or to revenge the abuse they receive, while it is still continued, than to do it after the abuse hath ceased, and they are restored to their liberty. In this case, they would from a sense of gratitude, or at least from a conviction of the justice of their masters, feel a strong attachment, instead of a murderous disposition.

Nor is there the least danger, but that by a proper vigilance of the selectmen, and by a strict execution of the laws now existing, the negroes might in a tolerable degree be kept from idleness and pilfering.



All this hath been verified by experiment. In Massachusetts, all the negroes in the commonwealth were by their new constitution liberated in a day: and none of the ill consequences objected followed either to the commonwealth or to individuals.

With regard to the southern states, the case is different.—The negroes in some parts of those states are a great majority of the whole, and therefore the evils objected would, in case of a general manumission at once, be more likely to take place. But in the first place there is no prospect, that the conviction of the truth exhibited in the preceding discourse, will at once take place in the minds of all the holders of slaves. The utmost that can be expected is, that it will take place gradually in one after another, and that of course the slaves will be gradually manumitted. Therefore the evils of a general manumission at once, are dreaded without reason.

If in any state the slaves should be manumitted in considerable numbers at once, or so that the number of free negroes should become large; various measures might be concerted to prevent the evils feared. One I beg leave to propose: That overseers of the free negroes be appointed from among themselves; who shall be empowered to inspect the morals and management of the rest, and report to proper authority, those who are vicious, idle, or incapable of managing their own affairs, and that such authority dispose of them under proper masters for a year or other term, as is done, perhaps in all the states, with regard to the poor white people in like manner vicious, idle, or incapable of management. Such black overseers would naturally be ambitious to discharge the duties of their office; they would in many respects have much more influence than white men with their countrymen: and other negroes, looking forward to the same honorable distinction, would endeavor to deserve it by their improvement and good conduct.

But after all, this whole objection, if it were ever so entirely founded on truth; if the freed negroes would probably rise against their masters, or combine against government; rests on the same ground, as the apology of the robber, who murders the man whom he has robbed. Says the robber to himself, I have robbed this man, and if I let him go he will kill me, or he will complain to authority, and I shall be apprehended and hung. I must therefore kill him. There is no other way of safety for me. The coincidence between this reasoning and that of the objection under consideration, must be manifest to all. And if this reasoning of the robber be inconclusive; if the robber have no right on that ground to kill the man whom he hath robbed; neither have the slave holders any more right to continue to hold their slaves. If

the robber ought to spare the life of the man robbed, take his own chance, and esteem himself happy if he can escape justice; so the slave holders ought immediately to let their slaves go free, treat them with the utmost kindness, by such treatment endeavor to pacify them with respect to past injuries, and esteem themselves happy, if they can compromise the matter in this manner.

In all countries in which the slaves are a majority of the inhabitants, the masters lie in a great measure at the mercy of the slaves, and may most rationally expect, sooner or later, to be cut off, or driven out by the slaves, or to be reduced to the same level and to be mingled with them into one common mass. This I think is by ancient and modern events demonstrated to be the natural and necessary course of human affairs. The hewers of wood and drawers of water among the Israelites, the Helots among the Lacedemonians, the slaves among the Romans, the villains and vassals in most of the kingdoms of Europe, under the feudal system, have long since mixed with the common mass of the people, and shared the common privileges and honors of their respective countries. And in the French West Indies the mulattoes and free negroes are already become so numerous and powerful a body, as to be allowed by the National Assembly to enjoy the common rights and honors of free men. These facts plainly show, what the whites in the West Indies and the southern states are to expect concerning their posterity, that it will infallibly be amalgamated with the slave population, or else they must quit the country to the Africans, whom they have hitherto holden in bondage.

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