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LETTER OF MERLE D'AUBIGNÉ, D.D.

THE following letter is from the pen of Rev. J. H. MERLE D'AUBIGNÉ, D.D., of Geneva. But it is not only the voice of the historian of the Reformation;—the Protestantism of Europe here speaks to the Protestantism of America from a revered seat of our common faith, in tones so conciliatory and Christlike, that the most sensitive can not take offense. Will not the reader prayerfully consider this appeal, and also bring it to the knowledge of the church with which he is connected?

To the Evangelical Christians of the United States of America.

Dearly beloved brethren in Christ, our all-sufficient Saviour and common Head:

THE Evangelical Christians of Geneva frequently return thanks to God for having, in the days of Calvin, kindled that torch in their city, whose salutary light has spread throughout Europe, and reached your far-distant shores. They also give thanks to the Lord, that in these latter days, when the word of truth is penetrating into all nations of the earth, He has placed a powerful focus in North-America; and has sent the children of God from your churches both to enlighten the ancient countries of the East, where the Apostles themselves preached the Gospel, and to bring many souls out of heathen darkness

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to the Lord and Saviour. The work of propagating Christianity in all the world, is, in our opinion, dear brethren, the principal vocation which has been allotted to you from on high. Thus every thing which can strengthen the hands of American Christians is, we think, an advantage to the whole world; whilst any thing which would weaken them is a real loss, a matter of grief, not to you alone, but to us, and to all mankind.

Now, dear brethren, we desire to express to you a thought which often presses itself upon our hearts. We fear that the laws which establish and regulate Slavery in several of your States, are a source of weakness, not only in your own dear country, but to her legitimate influence over other nations. We know that there are Christians in the United States who possess slaves, and we would not offend them. "Honor all men," says the Scripture, (1 Peter 2: 17,) and above all, we wish to do so "to them that have obtained a like precious faith with us." (2 Peter 1: 1.) We would assure them we come not to speak with them as enemies, but as brethren. We do not claim the right of imposing our opinion with authority upon them;—the Pope of Rome alone believes that he has that power;—and we do not doubt that those among you who differ from us on this subject, are sincere and upright in their opinions. However, if we would speak in love, we must also speak in truth, and with that precious liberty which belongs to Christians. We know, moreover, that the city of Calvin is an object of deep and brotherly sympathy in America. Your citizens who visit us, are continually giving us fresh proofs of this, and this circumstance excites a hope that our request will find some favor in your eyes. But, we repeat, we do not pretend to teach you, but to give you a cordial token of our brotherly love.

Beloved brethren, if it is true, not only that Slavery is established in several of your States, but that in many

places it is unlawful to instruct the children of slaves, or even for the parents to attend public worship; if it is true that the ties of husband and wife, parent and child, are often violently severed; if it is true that the master acquires the property and possession of a woman as if she were his own wife; if other facts, which we prefer not to describe here, are true—we ask ourselves, and we would also ask you, if such laws are compatible with the eternal principles of Christianity, which we all are bound to obey?

We might doubtless bring forward other arguments. We might remind you that Slavery is contrary to natural rights, and that all men having freedom alike, none can be deprived of that liberty unless forfeited by some criminal act; that the rights of property in men and in things are widely different, and that no man is allowed to sell a human being as he would a material object. We might say, with Montesquieu, that Slavery is hurtful alike to the slave and to the master; to the master especially, because he acquires all sorts of vices with his slaves. He becomes proud, hasty, passionate, hard, voluptuous, cruel. We might add, with that illustrious author, that in every country, however severe the toil which society exacts, its fruits may be obtained from freemen, by encouraging them with rewards and privileges, adapting the labor to their strength, by bringing to their aid machinery which art invents, and which, we might add, art has invented abundantly since the days of that great writer. But we prefer waiving such material considerations, and dwelling upon our argument in a Christian point of view.

We acknowledge, dear brethren, that Slavery is not explicitly abolished in the New Testament. We see that Christian masters are not prohibited from having slaves, (Col. 4: 1; Eph. 6: 9;) and that slaves are exhorted to submission and fidelity, (Eph. 6: 5, 8; Col. 3: 22, 25; Titus 3: 9, 10; 1 Peter 2: 5, 18.) Yes, slaves ought to

be obedient and faithful, and nothing should be said which could drive them to revolt; that is certain; and yet it is as certain that Slavery is opposed to the true spirit of Christianity.

There are many texts in the New Testament which make this plain. Does not St. Paul say to the Christian slave, that if he can *obtain his freedom*, he is to take advantage of it? (1 Cor. 7: 21.) "The Apostle thus demonstrates that liberty is not only good, but also more advantageous than slavery," says Calvin. Is it not also evident that slaves who have become Christians, should be regarded by their masters *as brethren*, according to the Epistle to Philemon? Does not the same Apostle, in another place, say that before the Lord in heaven *the slave is as the free*? (Eph. 6: 9.) Do not the Scriptures elsewhere declare that the slave and the free share in the same blessings of God in Jesus Christ, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, one God, blessed for ever? Is *He* not the true and living God of the black as well as of the white man? If the Eternal Son, who is God for ever and ever, became man, was it not for the Greek as well as the Jew, for the slave as well as the free? Does not the righteousness which was acquired on the cross by the atoning blood of the Lamb, cover the sins of the one as well as of the other? Does the Holy Spirit, which changes the hearts of all in whom he dwells into temples of the Holy Ghost, make any distinction of color? Ought we not to exclaim now with the primitive Christians: "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be bond or free"? (1 Cor. 12: 13.) "There is neither bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all." (Col. 3: 11.)

Such being the teaching of the Scriptures, do you not think with us, beloved brethren, that these principles suppress the spirit of Slavery, and only leave its name and appearance? Do you not believe that since God, our common Father, bestows the tender sympathies of his

love equally upon the slave and the free, we their brethren can not refuse the precious boon of liberty to those who are deprived of it? If Christ has made them free, shall not *we* free them also? Christianity in general did not lay violent or imprudent hands on civil institutions, but spread its principles everywhere, and gave precepts to all men, the application of which was gradually to bring about the suppression of all abuses.

These considerations are important; but, we repeat, what particularly induces us to make an appeal to your consciences, is the system of laws, manifestly opposed to the precepts of Christianity, with which several of your States have been obliged to burden their legislation, in order to maintain Slavery in the midst of you. It is not necessary to enumerate these laws; we know them from official documents published in Europe, and which have caused both astonishment and grief to the friends of religion, morality, and liberty. We are aware these laws do not exist in a good many of your States; we know that, with the exception of one or two laws, legislation on Slavery is local, instituted in their sovereign power by those States alone which maintain Slavery. But that in no way prevents us from freely expressing the sentiments which animate us, either to just and moderate men, who doubtless are to be found in abundance in the Southern States, or to all the Christians of the American Union.

If we mistake not, there are three classes of opinions and of persons in the United States, as to the present subject; one is decidedly against Slavery, another is decidedly in its favor; but there is a medium class which hesitates; and we think the moment has arrived when all those who belong to that class ought to decide before God and their conscience, wisely, but with courage and firmness. Between Christianity on one side, and utilitarianism on the other, we do not think that Christians should hesitate.

The two great features which characterize the United States, and which form the essence of your people, are they not, honored friends—the Gospel and Liberty! And are you not called upon both to enjoy these two blessings for yourselves, and to testify to others how happy are those nations who possess them, and thus to be the means of spreading them in the world? Now it is precisely the Gospel and Liberty which are implicated in this question. The maintenance of Slavery must hinder the growth of these two great principles. The most eminent writers have shown that if Slavery may be excused in despotic States, it is in conflict with the essence of democracy, and that if it is more or less natural amidst Mohammedans and Pagans, it is impossible to justify it amongst Christians, and above all amongst Protestants. Yes, it is now in your power, dear American friends, to render the most brilliant homage, the most signal service, to the cause of the Gospel of Protestantism and of true Liberty. Will you hesitate?

How often we have mourned to see Roman Catholics and partisans of arbitrary governments triumph in pointing to the existence of Slavery in the United States! How often have we been tempted to exclaim: “Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines triumph.” (2 Sam. 1: 20.)

Dear brethren, listen to these voices, which come from a far distant land at the foot of the Alps, from the city of the Reformation, and are raised in concert with those in France and other countries. We would entreat you by the most precious interests; in the name of the prosperity of the Union, of the peace, of the glory of your country; in the name of the cause of true liberty; and, above all, of the holy and great cause of Christianity;—to do all in your power, with an unflinching fidelity, to bring about the suppression of Slavery and the establishment

of social liberty in your country. Let it be done with wisdom, with kindness, with justice, without disturbing the public peace, but, notwithstanding, as promptly and as universally as possible.

Should this step offend you, dear brethren, we pray you to forgive us. We conjure you to bear with us. We say with St. Paul to the Corinthians, "If we are foolish, it is for the love of you;" it is, we believe, for the glory of Jesus Christ; it is because we thought that God, in a special manner, had called us so to do.

We live in solemn times. A new era is dawning on this question, not only in your country but in the whole civilized world. Universal attention is aroused. Everywhere public opinion pronounces with decision on this subject. The time is certainly come when America must give satisfaction to the claims of Christianity. We know that it is not easy to find the means of attaining that end. There will be many shoals and difficulties; but we know that your people have more courage than any others to surmount all these obstacles, and that the Lord will give the victory to those who are on his side. Let nothing stop your progress; combat Slavery in the spirit of the Gospel, and not in a mere worldly spirit. Seek, above all, the means of attaining this excellent end in a spirit of prayer. Look to the Word of God, to the spirit of Christianity, to the requirements of morality and liberty, and to Jesus the Redeemer, and thus go forward in the Lord's name. May God be your strength in this great, salutary, just, and Christian work. Let us assure you that such shall be our constant prayer!

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all,
Amen!

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