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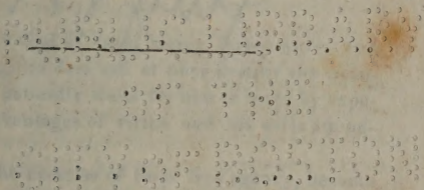
William Lloyd Garrison

THE POWERS THAT BE

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July 8, 1899

WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON

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The Powers that be are Ordained of God.

This proposition is fully admitted by non-resistants. There is no doubt that God ordains civil government. But *how* does he ordain it? This is fully explained by considering the operation of three uniform characteristics of the divine government over man.

1st. God chooses that men should be free agents, with power to do right or wrong, as they may be disposed.

2d. He has decreed that suffering shall always follow sin.

3d. Being a God of love, mercy, forbearance, and long-suffering, he does not at once destroy the transgressor, but patiently waits for him to learn by experience the advantages of virtue and the evils attending vice.

Men, in the exercise of their free agency, become dissatisfied with God's laws, and assume the right of legislating for themselves. They form constitutions and codes which they declare to be the supreme law of the land. They choose magistrates to execute these laws, and demand implicit obedience to their decisions. The laws being formed by worldly wisdom, enjoin some things contrary to the commands of God, and forbid some things that his law requires. But

when a Christian pleads the supremacy of God's law, as his excuse for disobeying some opposing ordinance of his fallible fellow-men, his excuse is not received; his plea of liberty of conscience is disregarded; and he is punished by fine and imprisonment for bearing true allegiance to the King of kings.

Such is the state of things in every human government. In every despotism the rulers usurp this power; in every free country, (so called,) the people usurp it, as they do in these United States of America.

How does God regard these proceedings of men? He is necessarily displeased with a course of conduct at once irreverent to him and injurious to themselves; he pities their folly and desires to recall them to obedience and happiness; he constantly calls upon them to repent, return, and submit themselves to his righteous government; and when they disregard his call, and deliberately persist in rebellion, as the readiest means of showing them their error, he suffers them to go on in the path they have chosen, until their sin brings forth its necessary fruit, evil and suffering; and that the relation of these two may be clearly seen, that the suffering may be shown to proceed from the sin, he forbids his servants to interfere with the process by violent resistance to the usurped authority, but commands them patiently to submit to the oppressions of those who call themselves kings, rulers and magistrates. These, meanwhile, seduced by wealth and power, become proud, haughty, ambitious; at first, perhaps, solicitous for the people's good, they soon get to regard that less, and their own interest more; until long possession of power enables them to claim and obtain enlarged authority, increased privileges, and greater respect and observance, all of which of

course involve a diminution of the rights and privileges of the people. Even in our own country, closely as the rights of the people are guarded, and short as is the period of one man's administration, we see what abuses may arise, and what evils to the public may ensue. This then is the means which God has appointed or ordained to teach men the evils of rejecting his laws, and setting up other rulers to reign over them. Thus, and in no other manner, does God ordain human government.

Take another illustration. Men, in the exercise of their free agency, seize their fellow-creatures, and compel them, contrary to all justice, to spend their lives in unrequited labor. God is constantly calling upon them, both by his written word and his living voice in their hearts, to break the yoke and let the oppressed go free. Though they refuse to do this, he still loves them, pities them, and desires to recall them to himself. And the next means he adopts of effecting this, is to show them, by experience, that in breaking his laws they injure themselves. He suffers them to pursue their dangerous experiment to the end, and thus shows them that the evils of slaveholding incalculably overbalance what they esteemed its advantages; that in the gradual deterioration of their lands, the corruption of their morals, the insecurity of their lives and property, the constant fears of insurrection and revenge, and the upbraidings of conscience, they actually lose very much more than they gain by withholding the hire of the laborer. And that the process by which he designs to teach this important lesson may not be violently interrupted, he forbids the oppressed to avenge their own wrongs, and force from their masters by violence that liberty which is their due. He

requires of slaves particularly and emphatically, what is enjoined in general terms upon all men, the love of enemies, the return of good for evil, the patient endurance of oppression for Christ's sake; he requires of them submission, obedience, and good service, while they are forcibly held in bondage; and thus, strange as it may seem to the political abolitionist, he countenances and ordains slavery in the same manner and to the same extent that he countenances and ordains civil government. Slaves are his ministers, instruments ordained by him to chastise the avarice and cruelty of the slaveholder, just as kings and governors are his ministers, instruments ordained by him to chastise the wickedness of those who rebel against him by substituting their own laws for his.

The particular attention of our readers is requested to the following comparison of the New Testament precepts respecting civil government, with those respecting servitude. It will be seen that Christians are forbidden to participate in the authority claimed by human governments, by expressions even more emphatic than those which forbid slaveholding.—To masters it is said, 'Render unto your servants that which is just and equal.' But if any are found wicked enough to violate this command, they are left to reap the fruits of their evil doings, and God then addresses himself to the oppressed—'Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear: not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.'

Hear now what Jesus says to his disciples, respecting the civil authority: 'Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they

that are great exercise authority upon them. *But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.* If any bearing the name of Christians are found wicked enough, after this command, to accept the office of ruler or governor, they must do it, and must account to God for it. Nothing further is said to them. No directions are given them respecting the administration of an office which is in itself rebellion against the supreme; but God then turns to the subject, and forbids violent resistance to this usurped authority, giving at the same time the assurance that he need not fear the violence of the ruler, since however great his power may be, it is within the power of God and made subservient to his designs. 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.'

We see, then, the nature of what is falsely maintained to be God's approbation of civil government and of slavery. He forbids violent interruption of the former, as of the latter, not because either is in accordance with his will, but first because such violence would be contrary to the law of love, and next that the violation of his laws may be manifestly shown to produce evil and not good to those who violate them, even under the most favorable circumstances.

It is admitted by a writer against non-resistance, that, in establishing government by his providence, God does not necessarily show his approbation of all forms of it. Yet this is the very truth, the proclamation

of which by non-resistants has caused so much outcry and alarm among the advocates of our government.— The governments of the earth, like all its other institutions, are under the control of God's providence, and good is wrought out from them, as from all other things, for *his* people. Yet when we look at the government of Turkey, we see that its principles and practice are so plainly in opposition to God's will, that we hesitate not to say that it is a wicked government, and that the progress of Christianity will necessarily overthrow it. Again, on looking at the Constitution, laws, and actual government of the U. States of America, we see so much that is contrary to God's laws, both in letter and spirit, that we cannot for a moment doubt that it is a grossly wicked government, and that it must pass away before the rising beams of the Sun of Righteousness. And the same thing we find on examining the existing government of every nation on earth. And *therefore* it is, that true allegiance to God requires us to refuse allegiance to them.

C. K. W.

