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Dr. J. H. ...
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REMARKS

ON

Bishop Hopkins' Letter on the Bible View of Slavery.

IF this letter had been allowed to rest where it slept, after its first publication, there would have been no occasion for examining its positions and arguments. It is the recent reprint of it, with the author's express consent, for a special political purpose and with reference to the great national issue now pending, which gives it an accidental importance. The object of these remarks is not to answer its arguments in detail, but merely to offer some general considerations in regard to the Bishop's reasoning.

1. If the case of Noah's son Ham has any relation at all to African slavery, (a point by no means conceded,) the Bishop mistakes the divine prediction of an event for a warrant on the part of man to bring it to pass. If the prediction give the warrant, then the bondage of the Israelites for centuries in Egypt, which was foretold, was rightly brought about by "the king who knew not Joseph." The captivity of the Jews in Babylon was foretold by inspired prophets. Was Nebuchadnezzar, therefore, justified in destroying Jerusalem and carrying away the remnant of the people as slaves into his own land? The death of our Lord was foretold by prophets, and also by himself. Did that give warrant of right to them by

whose "wicked hands he was crucified and slain?" "It is appointed unto all men once to die." Does that make it right in the murderer for a selfish purpose to take the life of his neighbor? Now, when Noah foretold the oppressions to be suffered (not by Ham's descendants generally but) by Canaan his children, does that make it right that selfish and rapacious men should seize and hold them in bondage?

2. The case of the "bondmen" in Abraham's house and that of the same class under the law of Moses, are in one and the same category. In Abraham's times, slavery was tolerated on the same ground on which polygamy was borne with, which is, that society was then in its childhood. That may be excused in childhood, which in manhood cannot be allowed.

Moses' office was in part that of a teacher of religious and moral truth, and in part that of a civil legislator. His laws respecting bondmen or slaves belong to his civil polity. This polity was indeed divine, and therefore suited, in perfect wisdom, to its direct end. While moral laws cannot be changed, civil polity must vary according to the conditions and stages of the society and of the communities for which it is intended. What is fitted as polity for the Christian nations of Europe and America is not suited to our wild aborigines nor to the barbarous tribes of Africa. Wise (divinely wise) polity may, as to some evils, require, for a time, regulation rather than attempts at direct and forcible extirpation. Our own laws, as to titles to estates, confirm the claim which arises in some cases from quiet possession. To prevent the greater evil of vexatious and interminable litigation, the law allows the less evil of wrongful possession, in such cases, to give title against the rightful heir. So

again, our laws do not prevent, nor attempt to prevent, the separation, by their own act, of quarrelsome wives and husbands, but do interfere to regulate the evil. These laws do not allow divorce, at the will or caprice of either party or of both, nor do they allow polygamy. But in certain cases they allow divorce *a mensa et thoro*, without, however, in any case, justifying the quarrel or separation. Evils which mere legislation cannot prevent it may wisely regulate. In the matter of divorce, which, in society as constituted in Moses' time, could not be prevented by legislation, without greater evils to follow, the inspired lawgiver, "because of the hardness of the people's hearts," resorted to the policy of regulation. What Moses as a civil legislator allowed, our Lord, speaking not as a statesman, but as a teacher of eternal truth and right, did, in this case, disallow and abolish. Notwithstanding what the Bishop says, the great teacher did, in some things, set aside the civil laws of Moses, which were intended for the time of social weakness or imperfection, (or of "hardness of heart,") by the perfect code of moral and eternal right. Instead of prescribing, as Moses did, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," he commanded to "resist not evil." Instead of commanding, as Moses did, "the writing of a bill of divorcement," he declared a second marriage, after such separation, to be adultery.

Under the law of Moses, slavery, as an evil which could not be prevented by direct legislation, was borne with and regulated; but does any man, in his senses, believe that Moses meant to sanction it as a principle and a right, that human beings may be stolen or bred as cattle for sale and that human bondage may be extended to the world's bounds, and to the end of time.

as in itself just and righteous, and in its results good and happy for both master and slave ?

3. But it is said, that though slavery was found almost everywhere, in our Lord's time, he did not, in his teaching, forbid it, nor even allude to it; that the apostles, (St. Paul especially,) so far from requiring its abolition, gave such rules for both master and slave as, in effect, to warrant its continuance.

There are other evils, such as licensed prostitution, gladiatorial shows, and polygamy, which, though existing at the time, he did not specifically condemn, nor even allude to. Our Lord's direct purpose was not that of a social and political reformer. He declined all civil functions. When one said to him, "speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me," he answered, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" Even a case of adultery, as a question of civil law, he refused to decide. "Neither do I condemn thee," (that is, as to civil penalty,) said he to the guilty woman, "go and sin no more."

Slavery is a mixed case, being partly a political, partly a social, and partly a moral question. As a political and social question, neither our Lord nor his apostles, being not political legislators nor directly social reformers, would touch. They taught the oppressed to "resist not evil," and rather to "suffer for well-doing" than to assert their rights. Their instructions and rules had reference to men in their relations, chiefly to God, and in their personal and private capacity, rather than in their public or civil relations. While they taught the oppressed and wronged to bear meekly their lot, it by no means follows that they justified the wrong-doer and oppressor.

Again: our Lord and his apostles sought to remove

evils from society, by teaching truth and principles and by propagating the spirit of godliness, rather than by attacking those evils specifically and directly, and in detail. What so comprehensive and morally beautiful as the laws, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Then come the maxims: "All ye are brethren;" "in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, bond nor free, for all are one in Him." The truths and principles thus taught and carried out in their proper spirit, did gradually and silently, but with divine power, change the foundation and structure, and the whole face of society, and are destined to greater effects for good in future. The inspired teachers dealt with slavery and with political usurpation and ferocious despotism, (Nero's, for instance, existing at the time,) and with social and political evils generally, as things to be not justified, but endured, until, by the advance of the doctrines and spirit of the Gospel, they should die out, as poisonous trees killed in the root. New wine must not be put into old bottles. There are noisome sores which break out on the surface of the body, as symptoms of internal disease of constitution, and which are to be cured, not by local remedies directly applied, but by medicines which, being fitted to restore and invigorate the general health, strike at the root of the mischief. It is one thing to endure for a time the evil of slavery, which, in some states of society, cannot be removed at once, without overthrowing the foundations of the social structure, and quite another thing to defend and seek to perpetuate it, as in itself just, right, and good. Can any one doubt, that if the doctrines and spirit of Christianity pervaded and controlled the foundation and structure of society, slavery would be dried

up in its source? Slavery comes into being by force and wrong, such as could not be, were the spirit of the Gospel to master the hearts of men. There are principles or instincts of common sense, which no subtleties of logic can master. Whatever may be the learning and ingenuity which can bend particular passages of the Bible to the defense of slavery, somehow the whole tenor of the Scriptures, as read by the unsophisticated, common mind, will turn against the institution. Galileo, charged with heresy and imprisoned, for teaching that the earth revolves daily on its axis, was made by punishment to deny what he had demonstrated, but when out of prison again, and allowed to put his foot on the ground, he came back to his belief, and exclaimed, "it does go round, after all." Take off from the Bible the restraint of ingenious criticism, and, after all, it does teach that the oppressor should let the oppressed go free. In the air of the Bible we feel the instincts of freedom. This, it may be said, is yielding not to argument, but to feeling. But, says Coleridge, "feeling is sometimes the deeper reason."

4. The Bishop justifies or excuses the forced labor of the slave, by what he alleges as the analogous case of the labor of the poor free man, forced upon him by his poverty. Does the Bishop indeed mean to say that the two cases are analogous? The necessity of labor in the case of the slave, comes of the act of a fellow-man, who, by original violence, holds power over his neighbor and uses it for a selfish end. In the case of the poor free man, the necessity comes of the act of God. However the divine hand may *afflict* any one for fatherly discipline, yet the maxim of the law is, "the act of God *wrongs* no man." The act of God by lightning, may destroy my house, or by disease may take from me a limb, and I am

thereby afflicted and called on to bow meekly my head to my heavenly Father's will. But is this case like that of a fellow-man who, for a selfish purpose, or in malice, masters me and deprives me of my property or the fruits of my labor? While the act of God *wrongs* me not, though it take from me not only possessions, but health and life, the act of man may be a wrong for which I may cry aloud for redress. God, in his wise and gracious sovereignty, does assign to multitudes of men the condition in which labor and toil must be endured as a necessary means of getting a livelihood. But may I, therefore, assume divine prerogatives, and, for my own selfish ends, reduce my neighbor to a servile condition, and compel him to labor for me without wages, and then by laws, perpetuate that condition for himself and his children after him, for all time to come? Besides, will the Bishop maintain that the labor of the poor free man, borne cheerfully, as his divinely appointed lot and requited by proper wages, is the same thing as the task of the slave, to which he is driven by the arbitrary will of his neighbor, and that without requital?

5. The Bishop justifies or excuses the separations of husbands and wives, and of parents and children, which occur in slavery, especially through sales of slaves, by what he considers the analogous case of separations of members of families in free communities. These latter separations take place when husbands go from home, even to foreign lands for trade, and when poor men are constrained to go abroad to find employment, or are obliged to hire out or bind their children to serve strangers, or to become apprentices to master mechanics; separations too, which in many cases are for life. Let us ask again, can the Bishop mean to put the cases as analogous? If, through the

dispensation or act of God, I am left in poverty and obliged to go from my family for a time to find means of living, or to send away my children to be hired or indentured for a time for a livelihood, is it the same thing as if my neighbor by forcible mastery seize and sell me and my wife and children, as chattels, to be divided and finally separated in disregard of the marriage tie, and of all the relations and affections and duties of domestic life? The poor free man accepts his lot of need, as one assigned by the act of a wise and gracious Father in heaven; a lot, too, in which the ties and sanctities of conjugal and domestic life are owned and blessed, though some of the enjoyments of them may, for a time, be postponed by the Divine dispensation.

6. The Bishop, in order to make out his case before the American people, who hold the principle of popular or democratic sovereignty in government, finds it needful to dispute the ruling positions of the Declaration of Independence, which that immortal document declares to be "self-evident truths." These "self-evident truths" are, that "all men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." These, so far from being self-evident, the Bishop says, "are no truths at all." His reasons for saying so are a marvel. He denies that men are created equal, "for they come into the world in all imaginable differences, in mind and body, and characteristics of social position," and he illustrates the matter by reference to the inequalities between "the son of the Esquimaux or Hottentot, and the heir of the American statesman or British peer." He shows, that by sin men have forfeited their right to life and liberty; and that in all countries,

even our own, the political positions and rights of men are as unequal as their conditions in other respects. To the arguments of the Bishop, under this head, we reply :

1st. The signers of the Declaration of Independence did not mean, nor presume that any one would ever imagine they meant, to affirm the absurd proposition, that all men are created equal, in their personal endowments, bodily and mental. To be equal in that sense, all men must be born equally well-favored in limbs and faces ; equally vigorous in health, and equally gifted in mind. We acquit—all will acquit—our political fathers of the charge of mere absurdity. They did affirm truly, equality of all men by creation, in the sense explained ; that is, equality of “right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” so far as it is a question of man’s claim of power over his fellow-man. Has not the Esquimaux or Hottentot, by the fact of creation, an equal “right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” with the American statesman, or the British peer ? Has any one authority to deprive his brother-man of this right, merely because that brother happens to be “an Esquimaux or a Hottentot ? Many years ago, a committee of the British House of Commons was charged with an inquiry into the conduct of sailors, toward the savage inhabitants of the South Sea Islands, then just discovered. Witnesses testified that when those savages were drawn in crowds to the shore, by the sight (strange to them) of ships of war, musket shot and cannon were fired into them, merely that it might be seen what effect would be produced on their ignorant minds by the terrific proof of civilized power.* The instincts of all

* The inhuman wretches who committed the wanton outrage called it coolly, “peppering the rascals.”

humanity would cry out against the outrage; for those aborigines, poor savages though they were, had an "inalienable right," given by the Creator, "to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The Bishop denies equality of *political* rights to all men. As to the question of fact, all do not enjoy them. But what has taken them away? Is it the act of creation? or is it the act of man? So far as the act of creation affects the question, all men have equal rights. Conventional agreements, or institutions or force, may deprive some of their natural rights, but that comes not of creation. Every human being, not an idiot or insane, is a proper person, not a chattel, and has received from his Maker the rights of a person, and all have received them equally.

The Bishop argues against the equality of political rights on the ground that all men are not equally endowed, or fitted for offices of trust, and therefore are not equally entitled to them. The signers of the Declaration of Independence did not stultify themselves by saying they are. Offices are not gifts of nature or creation, but of conventional arrangement, and do not at all touch the question of the right given by creation, to all men equally, "to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

2d. We answer secondly, the Bishop again confounds that most important distinction, already noted, between the act of God in allotting our condition and the act of man. The undoubted inequalities in the bodies, health, minds, and localities of men which he adduces to show that men are not equal by birth, are made by the act of God and touch not the question of men's relations to each other nor their equality of personal rights. Does the Bishop mean to say that because God allots to some

health and great endowments, and to others weakness of body and mind, that therefore all are not, as to their human brother's authority in the matter, entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?" Because God disposes of men's persons and conditions as pleases him in his wise sovereignty, may I therefore deal according to my pleasure with those over whom I have the mastery by force or fortune?

Has it come to this? In order to shield African slavery in our land, must we not only ignore the fundamental principles of the American Revolution, but tear out the very corner-stone of our national constitution, and cast it aside as worthless? On the Bishop's ground, the resistance of the American people to British taxation was not merely a mistake but a pure rebellion, which, on no ground of truth or of natural rights, can be justified. Is this the light in which the American people are to look upon the deed of their fathers in signing and following up the principles of the Declaration of Independence? Again: the Bishop would have us believe that because the Declaration was historically prior to the present Constitution of the United States, therefore the framers of the latter ignored or repudiated the former. Did they indeed, while building up a government professedly on the popular will, withdraw silently, but purposely, the very foundation on which the structure rested? And now must our national fabric tumble and be dashed to pieces, because by the Bishop's argument it has not, and never had, a basis in Bible truth nor in sound reason? And is all this to be looked upon with complacency by our people themselves, and, above all, by that portion of them who, because of alleged specialty in caring for popular rights, are the Democracy *par excellence*? What

is this image of American freedom here before us? Is it a celestial being, a goddess, having a face radiant with love and peace, smiling on the poor and oppressed of all nations, and of every blood and complexion, holding firmly the scepter of power for their protection, and as she moves in our midst, exhaling fragrance from her robes of purity, and scattering gifts to all from her horn of plenty? or is it a Cyclops, the veritable Polyphemus, monster in size and shape, and without sight, groping to seize and devour the unfortunate stranger who had thought to find refuge in his abode? (*Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum.*)

We may now offer a few concluding remarks.

1. As to the Bishop's honesty in his views, who doubts it? Unhappily, however, honesty in holding opinions is not the test of their truth. Our Lord said to his disciples, "The time cometh when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." St. Paul, while "being exceedingly mad against the Christians, he persecuted them even unto strange cities," "verily thought with himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Inquisitors who racked and burned persons accused of heretical pravity, honestly thought they were doing what the Bible taught them to do.

2. The Bishop thinks that, some things being granted, such as the consent of slaveholders, emancipation might be allowed. This consent is what those wishing to rid our land of slavery have ever desired, and sought by argument and persuasion to get. But is it to be expected that on the Bishop's ground, this consent will ever be given? Is it not on this very ground indeed that the consent has been loudly refused? And has not the

refusal, on this same ground, been more and more vehemently and passionately maintained from year to year, as the arguments for the consent have been pressed? What a man acquires and holds rightfully as property, and may rightfully hand down to his children and heirs forever, he is not likely to part with upon a courteous suggestion of good-will.

3. The Bishop hears and believes that the slaves in our Southern States are "the happiest laborers in the world." They are well fed and clothed, and are cared for in sickness and age, without thought or anxiety or responsibility on their part. We do not mean here to discuss the question of fact, whether or not they are thus happy, a matter which their sullen looks, described by Dr. Russell, the *Times'* correspondent, and the stringent measures needful to prevent their running off, make doubtful. But allowing the word happy, in some sense, to be used of their condition and their temper of mind, we reply, children are said to be happier than adults and simpletons happier than either. It is alleged that even wild Indians are, in *some sense* of the word, happier than men in civilized life. We may even say that horses and mules and oxen are, in some sense, the happiest laborers in the world, the happy negro slave himself not excepted. Who gave me or any man or any community the right to determine what kind of happiness my neighbor, whether Anglo-Saxon, Asiatic, or African, British peer, or Esquimaux, shall have? Because in my use of the word happy, the child and the simpleton and the wild man of the forest are happier than other classes of men, have I therefore the right, if I have the power, to reduce my neighbor to such a condition of happiness?

The happier the slave in his degradation. "the more's the pity." The most pitiful thing in the simpleton's case is his peculiar "happiness." I deprive my neighbor of everything which elevates and makes him a person, a man; then I claim the right to do this, because, by blinding or debasing his mind, and keeping him in ignorance of his proper aims and aspirations, I can make him content in his degradation. We have heard of heirs of great estates kept, by the cunning fraud of relatives, in the happiest ignorance of their right to the inheritance. It may be true that they were happier in poverty, without their rightful possessions, than many who, with large inheritances, are tempted into paths of dissoluteness. But does that make it right to keep back from them what is their due?

4. The Bishop's ground as to slavery was repudiated by leading men among slaveholders in the South, from the first days of our national existence until some thirty years ago, and by very many until a much later date. We name, among them, Washington, Jefferson, Patrick Henry, George Mason, Madison, Chief Justice Marshall, and Henry Clay. They held slavery to be an evil and a wrong, for which they wished and hoped that, in no long time, the remedy of a mode of emancipation would be found. As to what the Bishop says of Mr. Jefferson's upholding slavery in fact, it is sufficient to repeat what, as all the world knows, Mr. Jefferson himself says, (in his celebrated "Notes on Virginia,") in regard to the wrong of the institution: "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just." Looking to a possible conflict between masters and slaves, he adds, "I know of no attribute of the Almighty that can be on our (the

master's) side." We only add here, if the Bishop's ground as to slavery be true and good, the African slave-trade could be rightfully reopened.

5. The proper question before the American people on the matter of slavery, ever since the first discussion, has not been whether or not the evil might be endured for a time, that is, until, with mutual regard to both master and slave, it could be happily removed; but whether it shall be perpetuated and extended indefinitely. If from the outset, or at any time before the present, the slaveholders had candidly said, this institution is an evil and wrong to the slaves, (a disease in our social and political system,) which we have unhappily inherited, and which we purpose, by just and wise measures, to remove as soon as possible; and then if they had been seen to be honestly preparing both themselves and their slaves for the happy day of emancipation, the class of "abolitionists," in an offensive sense, would never have been heard of. Abolitionists' might then have been known, in the matter of slavery, as followers of Washington, and Jefferson, and Patrick Henry. If the opponents of slavery had seen a definite time and a definite mode of emancipation of all slaves fixed upon, they would not only have been patient in waiting for the happy era, but have clapped their hands for joy. They would have been liberal, too, both as to the time and the mode of the blessed consummation.

But when slaveholders took Bishop Hopkins' ground, and persisted (as well they might on that ground) in a determination, energetic, and passionately fierce, to perpetuate it and extend it as right and just, and good for all parties concerned, the case was changed. The conflict became a grave one, especially when slaveholders

refused all offers of concession or accommodation, short of a recognition of slavery as a national institution, with the right to give it, within the American domain, universality and perpetuity. In a political sense, it was to be an article of the catholic creed, handed down from the times of Abraham, and held as wide as the world. The case then came up for ultimate judgment. Instead of allowing it to go before the tribunal of the public sentiment of the world, to be disposed of quietly by plea and argument, they appealed to the sword. To show they were in earnest, they hurled contempt and defiance at the national authority, raised armies, seized national property, post-offices, custom-houses, and military posts, erected powerful batteries, and finally bombarded Fort Sumter. The nation, until then patient, and fondly hoping for a peaceful solution of the great question, was startled and suddenly awaked by the loud call of war. The summons had to be obeyed, for it was peremptory and *subpœna*, (the penalty was national dissolution,) and the nation went before the terrific tribunal which, for the trial of slavery, slaveholders themselves raised on the battle-field. If the sword now be the arbiter of slavery's cause, the institution itself, which made the appeal, must abide the award.

There is another tribunal which, not so hasty nor peremptory as that of the battle-field, is yet more decisive and fearful as to the wrong of slavery. It is that of christianized public sentiment. Sections and parties may, through prejudice, and for a present end, be made to forego great, and just, and patriotic aims, and discipline and tact may for a time control the political balance. But what is partial and partisan must be temporary.

Moral and religious convictions are deeper than all mere parties, and though slow in their growth to maturity, yet are mighty. They strike their roots into the depths of our common nature, and when quickened, nurtured, and matured by the word and Spirit of God, no power on earth can resist them. This is specially the case, when conflict and persecution have given them firmness and strength. Before them the abominations, moral and political, of Pagan Rome, fixed by the growth of ages, under the protection of despotic power, gave way. Christianity, as it was the greatest moral and religious power, became, in the Christian Cæsars, the greatest political power on earth. Moral and religious convictions have changed the heart of society, and stamped an indelible character on the civilization of Europe and America. It is not partisan nor sectional prejudices and interests, but moral and religious sentiments on the question of slavery, which are now stirring the national mind to its depths. Doubtless there are mere politicians or partisans who strive to control or guide the great movement for their own partial and selfish ends. So it has ever been. When the children of Israel, under divine guidance, were going out from bondage in Egypt, "a mixed multitude" went with them, who "fell a-lusting in the wilderness." But the deep religious convictions of honest minds (call them fanatical, if you please, the name does not affect the truth) are not matters of party nor of policy. They arise from deep and unchangeable elements of our nature, wrought on by eternal truth. They move onward, slowly, it may be, but with a steadiness and force which yields to no opposition. Persecution gives them the more distinct-

ness and power. They are the file to the teeth of the viper. Woe to the party which sets itself against them. When Henry IV. of France was, for political reasons, trying to beat down the honest religious convictions of his subjects in Navarre, Beza said to him, "Sire, you strike an anvil which has worn out many hammers!"

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