

# BIBLICAL RECORDER.

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From the Christian Reflector.

TO THE REV. RICHARD FULLER D. D.

## LETTER VII.

MY DEAR BROTHER,—In my last letter I endeavored to illustrate the manner in which I suppose the New Testament to have prohibited the existence of Domestic Slavery. It is not by any precept forbidding it, but by the inculcation of such truths respecting the character, the value, and the responsibility of man, and his relation to his fellow man and to his maker, as are utterly inconsistent with the institution. The next question which naturally occurs is this, why was this mode of expressing the divine will adopted? This inquiry I propose to consider in the present letter. I fear that this correspondence is becoming wearisome by its length, and shall therefore, in the remarks that follow, study the utmost brevity.

You will perceive at once, that I am by no means obliged to reply to this inquiry. If such is proved to have been the method chosen by Omniscient Wisdom, we all concede that it must have been chosen for the best possible reason.—The fact is all that we need be anxious to discover. Nevertheless, if we are able to show probable reasons for the course adopted by inspiration, it may anticipate various objections that might otherwise suggest themselves.

I remark then in the first place, this mode of teaching is, in all respects, conformable to that universally adopted by the Saviour and his apostles. In the words of Archbishop Whately\* "it was no part of the scheme of the gospel revelation to lay down any thing approaching to a complete system of moral precepts; to enumerate every thing that is enjoined or forbidden by our religion, nor again to give a detailed general description of Christian duty—or to delineate after the manner of systematic ethical writers each separate habit of virtue or vice." "New and higher motives were implanted, a more exalted and perfect example was proposed for imitation, a loftier standard of morality was established, rewards more glorious and punishments more appalling were held out, and supernatural aid was bestowed, and the Christian with these incentives and advantages is left to apply for himself in each case, the principles of the Gospel. He is left to act at his own discretion, according to the dictates of his conscience; to cultivate Christian dispositions, and thus become a law unto himself." "Nay, still further, care was taken in the revelation of the New Testament to guard the disciples of Christ against expecting a system of precise moral enactments." For this reason the precepts which are given are sometimes contradictory, as when we are commanded to "let our light so shine before men," and also "not to let our left hand know what our right doeth." Sometimes the literal precept was extravagant and irrational, as when we are commanded to "pluck out a right eye," or "cut off a right hand." Sometimes the precept was in itself insignificant, as when we are told to "wash each others feet." In all these and similar cases, it is plain that we are taught to disregard the precept itself; and looking beyond it, to adopt as the rule of our universal conduct the principle which it is evidently intended to inculcate. If any one has any doubts on the mode of New Testament instruction in this respect, I beg him to read the essay, to which I have referred.

I think it must appear obvious to every reflecting mind that this is the only method in which a universal revelation, which should possess any moral stringency, could have been given, for all coming time. A simple precept, or prohibition, is of all things the easiest to be evaded. Lord Elphinstone says that "no man in England could construct an act of Parliament through which he could not drive a coach and four." We find this to have been illustrated by the case of the Jews in the time of our Saviour. The Pharisees, who prided themselves on their strict obedience to the letter, violated the spirit of every precept of the Mosaic code. Besides, suppose the New Testament had been intended to give us a system of precepts, there would be two courses which could have been adopted. The first would have been to forbid every wrong practice of that particular time, the second to go forward into futurity and forbid every wrong practice that could ever afterwards arise. If the first mode had been adopted, every wrong practice that might in after ages arise would have been unprovided for and of course unforbidden. If the second had been adopted the

New Testament would have been a library, more voluminous than the laws of the realm of Great Britain. Both of these courses would have been manifestly abused. The only remaining scheme that could be devised is, to present the great principles of moral duty, to reveal the great moral facts on which all duty must rest, the unchangeable relations in which moral creatures stand to each other, and to God, and without any precepts in each particular case to leave the course of conduct to be determined by the conscience of every individual acting in the presence of the all-seeing Deity. To illustrate the practical difference of these modes of teaching, I ask is there any danger that either you or I, acting in the spirit of the principle which teaches us, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, would violate any law of the United States? We have lived many years without even knowing what these laws are, and yet have never violated one of them. But yet the precepts which are intended to guard against such a violation are the study of a lifetime; and the number of them is annually increasing and must increase in order to render our rights in any manner secure.

Now such being the mode in which it was necessary to make known to men the moral laws of the New Testament, it is plain that to this mode the instruction in respect to slavery must be subjected. If this form of wrong had been singled out from all the others, and had alone been treated preceptively, the whole system would have been vitiated. We should have been authorized to inquire why were not similar precepts in other cases delivered; and if they were not delivered, we should have been at liberty to conclude that they were intentionally omitted and that the acts which they would have forbidden were innocent. I cannot but consider this as a sufficient reason why no precept should be given on the subject of slavery, and why, like almost every other, certainly like every other social wrong, it should be left to the results of the inculcation of a moral principle.

There seem to me other reasons why this mode of instruction should be adopted in this particular instance.

1. The reason of the duty to abolish slavery is found in the moral relations and responsibilities of a human being. But these moral relations and responsibilities were at this time wholly unknown. This I have attempted to illustrate in my last letter. It was certainly reasonable to postpone the inculcation of the duty until the truths were promulgated on which this duty was founded. The fundamental truths of the declaration of independence had, during the previous struggles of our colonial history, become fully known and universally acknowledged. On the ground of these, our Fathers declared our connection with the mother country severed. But of what use would have been such a declaration if these principles had never been either promulgated or understood. Every one sees that such an act would have been ineffectual and absurd.

2. Again, slavery, at the time of our Saviour and Apostles, was a social evil. It was established by laws. The whole community enforced these laws on every individual. The master could only manumit such a portion of his slaves as the law permitted. He could go to no other country and then set them free, for the whole civilized world was under the same dominion. If he set them free contrary to law, they were liable to be reduced again to a worse bondage than that from which he had delivered them. Hence it was manifest that the system could only be abolished by a change in the public mind, by inculcating those principles which would show the whole community that it was wrong, and induce them, from a general conviction of its moral evil, to abandon it.

I can also perceive other practical benefits of great importance which would necessarily attend this method of abolishing slavery. To have inculcated the right of the slave to freedom, and the duty of the master to liberate him, absolutely and immediately, while both were ignorant of the principles on which the precept was founded, and wholly uninfluenced by these principles, must have led to a universal social war. The masters would not have obeyed the precept, the slaves would have risen in rebellion. This attempt had been frequently made before, and had been put down by horrible bloodshed. There is no reason to suppose that the same result would not have taken place again. Myriads of unarmed and ignorant slaves could never have stood the shock of the Roman legions, commanded by able generals and supported by the wealth of the empire. Hence, to have adopted the method of abolishing slavery by precept would have defeated the great object in view and rendered the condition of the slave worse than before. Such, in all cases except in insular situations, has been the result of servile insurrections.

The result of the abolition of slavery by the inculcation of the principles of the Gospel would be the reverse of all this. By teaching the master his own accountability, by instilling into his mind the mild and humanizing truths of Christianity; by showing him the folly of sensuality and luxury, and the happiness derived from industry, frugality and benevolence, it would prepare him of his own accord to liberate his slave, and to use all his influence towards the abolition of those laws by which slavery was sustained. By teaching the slave his value and his responsibility as a man, and subjecting his passions and appetites to the laws of Christianity; and thus raising him to his true rank as an intellectual and moral being, it would prepare him for the freedom to which he was entitled, and render the liberty which it conferred a blessing to him as well as to the state of which he now, for the first time formed a part.

Such was in fact the result of the promulgation of Christianity upon the Roman Empire. As the gospel spread from city to city, and began to exert an influence upon the public mind, the laws respecting slavery were gradually relaxed, and every change in legislation was in this respect a change for the better. This tendency continued and increased until, throughout the whole empire, slavery was at last abolished. And by the admission of all, this abolition was purely the result of the teachings of the gospel. And still more, it was first commenced, and its progress was accelerated by the noble example of the Christian church. To liberate their fellow men from servitude was, very early in the history of Christianity, deemed to be one of the most urgent duties of religious benevolence. Clemens, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, remarks: "We have known many among ourselves who have delivered themselves into bonds and slavery that they might restore others to their liberty." Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, expended his whole estate, and then sold himself, in order to accomplish the same object. Cyprian sent to the bishop of Numidia 2,500 crowns, in order to redeem some captives. Sozomen, the historian, says that after the Romans had taken 7,000 Persian captives, Acencius, Bishop of Amida, melted down the gold and silver plate of his church with which he redeemed the captives. Ambrose, of Milan, did the same in respect to the furniture of his church. It was the only case in which the imperial constitutions allowed plate to be sold. These facts sufficiently illustrate the manner in which the early church interpreted the teaching of the gospel respecting slavery, and also the effect which this teaching had upon their practice.

And thus we see that the very reason why this mode of teaching was adopted, was to accomplish the universal abolition of slavery. A precept could not have done this, for in the changing condition of human society, the means would have easily been devised for eluding it. But by teaching truths, the very truths in which Christianity consisted, utterly and absolutely opposed to slavery, truths founded in the essential moral relations of creatures to their creator, it rendered it certain that when Christianity was understood and obeyed, this institution could not exist. Thus the principles of the gospel have once abolished slavery from the face of the earth. They have almost done it for the second time. May we not hope that the work will be speedily accomplished, and accomplished forever.

And here I think that the New Testament, having adopted this as the correct and only universal mode of accomplishing this object, is perfectly consistent with itself, in giving no precept to Christian masters. The gospel is a universal rule. It prescribes no moral duty for one man, and excuses from that duty another, when both are under the same circumstances. If it prescribed the duty of manumitting their slaves to Christian masters, it must have prescribed it to all masters, that is, it must have adopted that other mode of teaching, by precept, instead of teaching by principle. It therefore left the whole matter to the operation of principle, and the manner in which that principle was acted upon by Christians, I have already illustrated. In all this I see nothing but the benevolence and long mindedness of the Deity. God treats his intelligent creatures according to the nature which he has given them. He reveals his will. He promulgates truth of universal efficacy, but frequently allows long time to elapse before the effect appears, in order that that effect may be the more radical and comprehensive.

These seem to me to be sufficient reasons for the mode of teaching which the New Testament has adopted in respect to slavery. On this subject I do not see that there can be any question between us. I have always remarked that our Southern brethren are especially opposed to immediate abolition. They consider it absurd, ruinous, inhuman, and destructive to Society itself. They also declare that if abolition is ever to be accomplished, by means of the inculcation of principles which naturally lead to it; and not by force of arms, or by the passage of arbitrary acts.—It would then seem peculiarly unreasonable for them to assert that there is only one method in which the abolition could with benevolence to all parties be accomplished, and then to assert that the gospel could not certainly mean to abolish it, because it had adopted this very method.

Before leaving this part of the subject, it may be well to consider very briefly in what manner the principles we have been discussing, bear upon the question of slavery in our Southern States.

In the first place, if slavery be inconsistent with the principles of the gospel, it is wrong, and God requires us to abandon it. And besides, God does not require us to abandon it, simply because we are Christians, but because we are men, his creatures, and because it is at variance with the moral law under which we are created. If it be asked when I ask again, when is it our duty to obey God? Is it not our duty always and every where, semper et ubique, as soon as we hear his commandments. A reason that would be sufficient for delaying to obey God for a moment, would be sufficient reason for disobeying him forever. If the physical act to which his commandment tends, be in any respects out of our power, we are to act honestly and in his fear, from the principle of obedience, and remove as far as possible, every obstacle that exists to the perfect obedience of the commandment.

2. What are we to learn from the manner which the gospel adopted to accomplish the abolition of slavery? I answer, we are at liberty to use the same manner, in just so far as our cir-

cumstances and those of the early Christians correspond.

The reason for the gradual abolition of slavery under the gospel, was that all parties were ignorant of the principles on which the rights and duties, and responsibilities of men were founded.—The world then knew of nothing better than polytheism, and all the absurdities of heathen mythology. It was necessary that this darkness should be dispelled, before the moral light could shine upon slavery, or almost any other wrong.—Slavery was then universal, and there existed small opportunity to know its moral evil in the sight of God. The case with us is different. We have from our earliest youth been instructed in the gospel of our salvation. The fundamental principles on which our duty rests, are as familiar to us as household words, we have only to apply them to our particular case, and the will of God in respect to us cannot be mistaken. Nay, we, in our declaration of independence, have already acknowledged the very principles now in question. We have seen slavery abolished all around us. There is therefore no need for delay for the purpose of inculcating on us the principles on which duty rests.

Again slavery was then, and it is now, a social evil. It is established and maintained by the power of society, and it can be abolished only by legislation. The case was the same in the early ages of Christianity. There is however, this one remarkable difference. Then the laws were nothing but the published will of a despot. The subject had no power to make or unmake them. It is by no means the same with us. We make our own laws. Every citizen who exercises the right of suffrage is himself responsible for every law that is made, unless he has put forth his full constitutional power to prevent it. Hence a grave responsibility rests upon every Christian citizen in respect to the laws by which he is governed. If he favor or if he do not remit laws at variance with the gospel which he professes, he is responsible to God for all the wrong which the laws create.

In a word I believe that slavery is forbidden in the Scriptures just as almost every other sin is forbidden; that is, by the inculcation of moral principles which are utterly at variance with it. Is not this the almost universal method of the New Testament teaching? Do you not, my brother, so interpret it? When you attempt to teach men that they are sinners against God, do you enunciate the precepts which they have broken, or do you set before them the character of God and the universal relations to him? If their conduct has been at variance with all these relations, does not their own conscience pronounce them guilty? The case is, as I esteem, similar here: God has thus taught us that slavery is wrong, a violation of his most holy law. And if so it is our duty at once to abandon it.

The manner in which this is to be done may, I apprehend, vary with our circumstances. Such, I think, we may believe to be the teaching by example of the New Testament. A man, I suppose, delivers himself from the guilt of slavery, at the very moment when he, in the sight of God, renounces all right in his fellow man, and acts in sincerity of heart, in the presence of his Judge, in conformity with that renunciation. The manner of his acting out this renunciation may, however, vary with the circumstances of the case. All that the gospel requires is, that, unbiassed by interest, unmoved by persecution, he carry out the principles of the gospel wherever they may lead him. He is to do this as an individual, with respect to those whom he now believes that he has unjustly held in bondage. He is to do it in respect to the community whom, by his former precept and example, he has either led into or confirmed in error. He is to bear his testimony to the truth, whatever it may cost him. So soon as the church of Christ acts upon these principles, our land will be freed from the sin of slavery. Until she do this, the stain of blood guiltiness, and if it be a sin at all it is a sin of appalling magnitude, is found on her garments.

I think I can illustrate my view of this subject by a familiar example. I am obliged to take a case which we all know to be sinful for the sake of the illustration. I do not intend to do it offensively. Suppose a man to have been guilty of great dishonesty. He holds in his hands the property of several of his fellow men, of which he has obtained possession unjustly. He repents of his sin, and wishes to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. I tell him that he has offended God, and injured his neighbour, that he has not a right to hold a farthing or a fraction of all this part of his possessions. The moment he repents of this sin, and in the sight of God renounces all right in this property, and holds it only for the good of the rightful owner, he ceases to be guilty of the sin of dishonesty. But to carry out this principle may be a work of time and labor. One whom he has defrauded may be his next door neighbor. To him he will make restitution immediately.—Another may live a thousand miles off. To him he will restore his own in such manner as will most directly and safely accomplish the object. The property of another may have been inherited by heirs; to these he will restore their portion according to the principles of law and justice. He may thus be obliged to hold this possession in his own hands for some time after he has renounced all right to it as his own. He holds it however, not for his own benefit, but merely for the sake of being the better enabled to do justice. He is innocent of dishonesty in just so far as he thus holds it. If he allow any unnecessary delay to intervene, if because the rightful owner does not know of his loss, if because he cannot restore it to day he resolve that he will not restore it at all, or if

to secure he finds some difficulty in carrying out the principle of right, he quickly retrace into his former state and using his own and for his own benefit, what on the eternal principles of justice, belongs to another, in the sight of God and man he is guilty of dishonesty.

Such, my dear brother, seem to me some of the reasons why the Scriptures selected this mode of teaching us our duty on this subject, and of the bearing which this mode of teaching should have upon our present practice.

I am, my dear brother, yours, with every sentiment of Christian affection,

THE ACTOR OF THE MORAL SCIENCE.

## COMPLAINERS.

With this class of men, it cannot be denied that our country is abundantly stocked. To them it is a matter of little importance, that they occupy through the favor of Providence, as goodly a land as the sun shines upon—that they have a constitutional government which guarantees to them civil, social, and religious liberty, and protects them in the enjoyment of all their rights, and the prosecution of all their lawful enterprises—that they sit under their own vine and fig trees, unmolested and fearless, and enjoy the fruits of their labour independently of ill will or the lordly power of their neighbours.—All this, and much more, fails to prevent the most bitter complainings of their hard lot, because, forsooth, there are others of their fellow citizens more successful in business than themselves, or better able to command the luxuries and elegancies of life.—Their spirit differs little from that of the proud Amalekites of old, whose wealth and honours gave them no pleasure, so long as Mordecai sat in the king's gate, and refused to do him reverence. Their difficulties lie within them rather than around them.

Let them look at facts like those which happen to fall at this moment under our eye. Thousands of laborers in England, Scotland, and France, earn but four or five shillings in a week, though their work confines them from twelve to fifteen hours a day. Their sole subsistence is bread and water, or potatoes and salt, and wild fruits. In Norway and Poland, the ordinary food of peasantry is either bread and gruel of oatmeal, or cabbage and potatoes, without butter or meat, and an occasional mixture of dried fish. In Denmark and Russia, the rich men and nobles hold all the land, and the peasantry residing on it are bought and sold, as part and parcel of the estate. A majority of them have only cottages to live in, occupied by the family, and the domestic animals together.—Fear, if any, have any other beds than bare boards, and no other food than black bread, cabbage, and other vegetables. In Austria, it is scarcely better. The dress of the Swedish peasantry is prescribed by laws and hard bread, dried fish, and gruel, without meat comprise all their food. The common people of Hungary are worse off still. The nobles own the land, work not at all, and pay no taxes; but the labouring classes repair the highways, maintain the soldiery, pay one-tenth of their labour to the Church, and one ninth to proprietor of the land they occupy.

It might not be unwise for "complainers" among ourselves, to study somewhat "the manners and customs"—the privations and sufferings of other nations, before they settle down in the conclusion that their condition is quite intolerable. Let them carefully survey their miseries—lift their hearts to God, and labour for the most that parish-eth not, and they will complain no more.—Boston Recorder.

## THE MAGNETIC TELEGRAPH.

The Baltimore American thinks a comparison of the two systems of the Magnetic Telegraph, as in operation in this country and Great Britain respectively, leaves no room to doubt as to the great superiority of our own. The editors have seen a series of plates representing the British system and the mode of working it. It is complicated in its structure and less efficient than Mr. Morse's. The operator sends with an index before him, by which he is to guide his movements; and by means of a corresponding index at the other end of the line the characters or symbols are pointed out as the magnetic influence operates. It is thus requisite that observers be always present at both ends of the line, and if the observer is not watchful, he may miss some of the information indicated by the telegraph.

The system of Prof. Morse is more simple in its construction. It works with facility and certainty, and inscribes the information it communicates in permanent characters upon paper so that if no one is watching at the moment, the record of every word transmitted by it is to be found faithfully preserved. The operator of this system along the line between Washington and Baltimore has proved its wonderful powers to the astonishment of every beholder.

Such are the important advantages which this great invention of the age secures, that no government mindful of the value of such an improvement, will be likely to neglect its use. In Great Britain the extension of the system is going on rapidly. A magnetic telegraph is about to be established between London and Portsmouth—the expenses to be defrayed principally by the Admiralty. In all the lines projected or established in England the Government takes care to have a control.—Es. paper.

CHURCH TITLE.—A book was published during the time of Cromwell, with the following title: "Eggs of Charity, sown by the Churches of the Continent and sent with the Winds of Divine Love.—Thus ye see, &c."

\*Biblical Repository, before cited, Oct. 1833. Art. Roman Slavery.