

WHAT IS ABOLITION?

MANY falsehoods have been told about abolitionists and members of anti-slavery societies. It is but common fairness to hear what they have to say for themselves.

Before we enter upon the main question, viz. "What is abolitionism?" we will just state what *it is not*, that the minds of any who have had wrong views may be set right.

First, then, abolitionists do not preach *amalgamation*, or the mixture of the white and colored races. This misrepresentation has been got up by our enemies to prejudice people against abolitionists. They would make you believe that our object is to flood the North with a multitude of degraded beings from the South, coming to lay claim to all our rights as citizens, to be our rulers, our judges, our lawyers, and our physicians, and *to marry our sons and daughters!*

Abolitionists do not teach any such doctrine. They say nothing about the blacks intermarrying with the whites, because they consider that they have nothing to do with that question. That must be left to people to decide for themselves.

No one is so absurd as to suppose, that the blacks any more than the whites will ever mix in general society before they are qualified to do so

on equal terms. No one will ever be compelled, in this free country, to take a black wife or a black husband, depend upon it. But there is one thing which we wish every reader to understand fully. The abolitionists *do aim* at destroying the *amalgamation* which exists in the South, and which is almost *universal*. The abolition of slavery will do this, and nothing else will.

Secondly, neither do abolitionists desire the *dissolution of the Union*. They fully believe that, if ever the golden cord which holds these states together, is severed, it will be because of the existence of slavery. So far are they from desiring that the Union should be dissolved, they are among its firmest friends, and their great effort is to open the eyes of the community to the real danger which threatens the union of the states. They only repeat the sentiments of Franklin and Jay and other great men, who helped to form our present constitution. They feel that slavery is a worm eating at the root of the tree of liberty, and they are seeking to destroy it, before our liberties, bought at so great a price, shall be for ever destroyed.

Thirdly, neither do abolitionists hold to *exciting the slaves to murder their masters*. By no means! On the contrary, they all disclaim any thing like a resort to physical force, even to obtain freedom. Most of them adopt peace principles. Hence their great reliance is under God, upon the *power of truth*. This they believe to be a mighty

weapon when wielded by the arm of faith and love, and one which even slavery itself cannot long withstand. They hope by it to reach the conscience of the *slaveholder*, but make no appeals to the *slave*. All their arguments are directed to the *slaveholder*, their publications are sent to him, and the effect produced must be upon the *slaveholder's* heart and conscience.

We believe that so far from the discussion of this question having tended to excite insurrection at the South, it has tended, more than any thing else, to keep the slaves quiet and obedient. Because they know that efforts are making in their behalf, and any disorder among them would injure, and not advance their own cause. Even slaveholders have admitted this.

What, then, it will be asked, do abolitionists propose to do? We will endeavor, in a few words, to state their object, and then answer some objections commonly urged against their *doctrines and measures*.

I. *They wish to diffuse correct views as to what slavery is.* Many who profess to know much about slavery, when you come to ask them what they imagine slavery to be, will reply, "Oh! it is being compelled to work against your will." Others will say, "It consists in withholding certain natural rights." Others, "In not being eligible to office." Others, "In cruelty and oppression." "Privation of trial by jury." "Apprenticeship." "Bondage for crime,

&c. &c.” But these are only appendages, things which belong to some forms of servitude, while neither of them go to make a man a *slave*.

What, then, is slavery? We define it to be, the taking *man* and reducing him to the level of a *thing*: subjecting God's image, made for glory, honor, and immortality, to the rank of a commodity, to be bought and sold and bartered for filthy lucre. In this consists the very essence of slavery, that it takes away from man those things which distinguish him from the brute, thus leaving him subject to the avarice, lust, and cupidity of his fellow-man.

It being, then, the first principle of slavery to blot out the image thus stamped on man at creation, and make him a mere tool to answer the purpose of others, what, it may be asked, is the *actual condition* of the slave?

First, He is subject to the absolute and despotic sway of his master. So that, according to the laws of the state of Louisiana, “The master may sell him, dispose of his person, his industry, his labor; he can do nothing, possess nothing, nor acquire any thing, but which must belong to his master.” Slavery, then, puts it in the power of the master to do with the slave whatever he pleases. If he chooses to make him work eighteen hours a day the slave must obey; or to deprive him of necessary and wholesome food, the slave has no redress; or to sell him as he would a horse, the slave must submit.

Second, We find that the *laws* of slaveholding states know no such thing as marriage among slaves. Hence these laws nullify the command of God, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife," and subject the whole slave population to a state of horrid, promiscuous intercourse.

Third, Masters are not prohibited by law from inflicting severe punishment upon their slaves, so as often to cause death. In South Carolina, "If a slave be killed on a sudden heat or passion, or by *undue correction*, the murderer is to pay a fine and be imprisoned six months." And not once in a hundred, can *white witnesses* be found to testify in case of the murderer; so that he most generally escapes unharmed.

Fourth, A slave has no legal protection whatever against any abuse and violence.

Fifth, Slaves have no control over their wives or children, and can own no property. They *may* be, and frequently *are* sold to brutal masters, torn from their families, and never permitted to see their faces again.

Sixth, Slaves are subject to tyrannical *laws* in the slave states. In Virginia, there are seventy-one offences punishable with *death*, when committed by slaves, which are only punished by *imprisonment* when committed by whites.

Seventh, Slaves are not permitted to have or to read the Bible. According to the laws of North Carolina, to teach a slave to read or *write*

or to sell or give him any book (Bible not excepted) is punishable with thirty-nine lashes, or imprisonment, if the offender be a free negro, but if a white, then with a fine of two hundred dollars. In Louisiana, the penalty for teaching a slave to read or write is one year's imprisonment. Thus are nearly three millions of God's accountable creatures prevented from obeying the command, "Search the Scriptures."

But—Eighth, The slaves can hold no religious meetings in many of the slave states, without the presence of several white men. In Virginia, *all evening meetings* are strictly forbidden.

II. We wish to bring men at the North to lift up their voices and cry aloud against this heinous system of oppression. The great difficulty is, to convince men of the necessity and duty of bearing testimony against this sin. But if slavery is what we have defined it to be; if it is such a system of abominations, concentrating in itself all that is bad, is it not plainly our duty to do all that we can to abolish it?

God has not left us in doubt on this point, when he has commanded us, "Thou shalt in *any wise* rebuke thy neighbor and not suffer sin upon him." We believe the upholders of slavery to be guilty of one of the greatest sins which can be committed against God. They are guilty of trampling upon the rights, the heaven-conferred rights of man, and subjecting him to an awful condition of physical, intellectual, and

moral degradation. And now, whatever we can do to unrivet these chains, we are morally bound to do. We want every man, woman, and child, in this land, that can understand what slavery is, and can feel for the oppressed, to raise his voice against it.

III. We wish *as soon as possible* to knock off the fetters from the limbs of the slave. When we use the term *immediate emancipation*, we do not mean to say that this *will* be done in a moment, but that it *ought* to be. Ministers preach the duty of immediate repentance and wish, though they do not expect that all sinners may repent at once. So abolitionists preach the doctrine of immediate emancipation. We know that we have to encounter strong prejudices, from education, habit, self-interest, force of public opinion, &c. But we believe that the only way to accomplish any great good is, to set *immediately about it*.

We can make no compromise with sin. If slavery is a *crying sin*, we hold that it is the slaveholder's duty straightway to abandon it. God abhors it, and he commands us to proclaim the truth in the ears of slaveholders, until "every yoke shall be broken, and the oppressed shall everywhere go free."

IV. Having stated our object, the question may be asked, how do you propose to accomplish it? We hope to accomplish it by the simple means which God has placed in our hands, the *unceasing proclamation of truth*. The

weapons of abolitionists are no armor forged by human hands, but those polished weapons of God's own workmanship, which are so powerful when wielded aright. Our only confidence is in the influence of correct principles, everywhere made known, and brought rightly to bear upon the minds and consciences of slaveholders.

Do you say, in opposition to our doctrines and measures, that *abolitionists want us to associate with the blacks, and to take them into our families ? This we will never consent to do ?*

Abolitionists never held any such doctrine as that men should intermarry with colored people, or take them into their families, unless they choose so to do. Abolitionists aim at destroying the *prejudice* which would shut out the colored man from our churches, our public conveyances, our public houses, and even from our burying-grounds, and treating colored men as whites ought to be treated, according to their moral characters. They say that prejudice is unjustifiable, and ought to be immediately abandoned. It is not the mere color of the skin which makes one man better than another in the sight of God.

But, "*is not the black man naturally inferior to the whites,*" says one, "*and has not God made a plain distinction between the two, which we cannot destroy ?*" We answer, no. God made of "one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth." He has given the colored man naturally the same mind, that he has given to the white

man. The reason, we say, why many of them now appear to be inferior is a very plain reason. It is because they have been denied entrance to our schools and our seminaries, been forbidden by public sentiment to practice the common trades, and been degraded and oppressed by cruel laws, so that they could not rise, if they would. Abolitionists say, take away this prejudice, remove these oppressive laws, and then the colored man will have a fair opportunity, and see if he will not rise, as he has everywhere done when he had an equal chance. It seems very cruel to trample him into the dust, and then blame him for being where he is.

But the slaves are very well taken care of, we often hear said, and why make them worse off than they now are, by emancipating them?

What would you, my friend, consider good treatment, were you in the condition of the slave? Would you think it good treatment to be denied the use of your limbs, of your time, the privilege of having your wife and children around you, of attending church when you pleased, and reading the Bible and other books, and teaching your children to read? Would you think it enough to have a scanty allowance of food and clothing, or even an abundance, if, at the same time you knew that you were a *slave*, and must obey the will of a brutal master? What man here would be willing to *take the place of the slave?* Not one.

But, says another, the slavcholders are not so cruel as they have been represented. To be sure, all the slaveholders are not equally severe to their slaves. Some, perhaps, give them enough to eat, and drink, and wear, and do not overwork them. We do not say that every master is cruel to his slaves, more than every man is cruel to his horse. But we say, that *slavery*, say of it what you may, is A SYSTEM OF CRUELTY, OF OPPRESSION, AND ROBBERY, and it ought for ever to cease. We say the guilt of slavery consists in robbing a man of all he has, and making a brute of him, and as long as you deny him the use of his own limbs, wages for his labor, and opportunity to improve his condition, you *cannot treat him well as a man.*

But it is said, *it will do no good to discuss this subject at the North. How can we hope to abolish slavery?* We reply it will do *great good.* Every thing depends upon the stand taken by northern men on this question. A correct public opinion *here* will produce a correct public opinion throughout the country. As long as the North slumbers, and suffers the work of death to go on, there is no hope of deliverance. But let the North wake up, and bring in her united and decided testimony against slavery, and she will no longer stalk abroad as she now does, in open noon-day, but will seek to hide herself where light will no longer penetrate.

Slavery is one of the foulest deeds of darkness,

and nothing she more dreads than a free exposure to light.

Is it objected to the discussion of this question, that *we have nothing to do with slavery at the North?* *Northern men* are the last who should bring forward such an objection as this, as long as slavery owes its very continuance to the base connivance of northern men, and to their continued sanction and approval. It is a burning shame that we ever had any connexion with slavery, and a still greater reproach that we have done so little for its removal.

But it will be said, *we have always been opposed to slavery at the North*, and why do you want us to add any new testimony on this subject? We answer, let the mobs and newspaper assaults upon those who have labored to suppress this evil within the last three years, speak for themselves on that subject. The North opposed to slavery! when most of the persecution against abolitionists has come from *northern* editors and *northern men*! No! until the mobs of 1834 in New York, and the scenes of violence since, shall be blotted out of the records of history, let us not say that the North have always borne testimony against the sin of slavery. How little *practical evidence* have northern men given to the last half century that they have been opposed to slavery!

But, again, is it said, that the discussion of this subject *only irritates the minds of slaveholders*,

and can do no possible good! If these principles are, as we believe, based on eternal truth, can it be true that it will do no good to utter them in the ears of slaveholders, however they may seem now closed against them? See what has been done for temperance by speaking out plainly respecting the evils of intemperance.

It is not true that we have not succeeded in convincing slaveholders of the sinfulness of slavery and the necessity of its abandonment. Were we to appeal to facts on this subject, we could produce ample proof of the good effects of free discussion on the South. Mr. Birney, and others who have been brought up slaveholders, have come out nobly on the side of freedom, and are now decidedly in favor of immediate emancipation. To show that they are men of *deeds* as well as *words*, they have liberated their slaves, and paid them wages of labor. And it works well!

But it is said, that *we have no right to touch this question. We are interfering with the rights of property at the South.* Is it unlawful to persuade men to give up what does not morally belong to them? Besides, what right has the slaveholder to what he calls his property in man? Did God give him a right to enslave the bodies and souls of his fellow men and make them marketable commodities? No such right was ever bestowed. The slaveholder's only claim to the bodies of his slaves is, the right recognised

only among savages, the right of the *strongest*. Hence, we say that this is a *system of robbery* and as such, we feel it to be our duty mildly, yet forcibly, to bear witness against it, and beseech men to renounce it.

But does not *the constitution sanction slavery* ? No! the constitution, to be sure, says something about *persons held to service*, but not a word about master and slave. But what if it did sanction the existence of slavery, could that make right, wrong, or wrong, right? We say that slavery is *wrong, and therefore ought to be abolished*.

But the constitution secures to every citizen full liberty of speech and of the press. Certainly, then, it cannot be *unconstitutional* for us to endeavor to show our southern brethren wherein consists the wrong of holding men as slaves. We have long disclaimed any right of interference by law with slavery in the several states. But we have not resigned, nor will we ever resign, our right freely to discuss this subject, and to endeavour to convince men of their duty.

Again, says another, *the blacks if emancipated, will flood the North, and hence emancipation is unsafe*. There is no ground for believing that if emancipation were to take place to-day, the slaves would not be far better off, and more contented to work on the soil, than they now are. They have been brought up in a southern clime, there is their home, there they have labored and toiled together, and there all their associations

centre. Now emancipate them, and pay them wages, and they would choose to live where their fathers lived, and die where they died, and lay their bones by their side. Besides, the blacks have so long been upon the soil, and have become so adapted to it by constitution and habit, that they are the only proper laboring class in that community. The constitution of the whites could not well endure the fatigue necessary to the cultivation of the southern soil. Again, if the colored people ever were to leave the southern states, their place must be supplied with emigrants from Europe. Does the South prefer exchanging the colored for an Irish population?

We hear it sometimes said, *the slaves, if set free, cannot take care of themselves. Why, then, throw them all at once, loose upon the community?* But this objection goes upon a mistaken supposition. It supposes that the slaves, under the stimulus of the lash, will work, and support both their masters and themselves, but take them out from under this stimulus, and let them feel that their bodies and limbs are their own, and it would make them indolent, and incompetent to support themselves. Ask the free working men at the North which stimulus is the best for them, the whip, or wages?

But, says another, *the slaves are not prepared for freedom.* We must take time to educate them, and then they will be fitted to enjoy their rights. Abolitionists contend that they are as

much prepared *now*, as they ever will be, while they are slaves. You cannot educate a slave to be a freeman. What! to bring men to appreciate their rights, shall we rob them of the last vestige of those rights, manacle and fetter them, put them under a system which shuts them out from the light of science, of civilization, of morality, and then say we are *educating* them for freedom! No! give them the Bible, restore to them their free-agency, take them out from under illegal and place them under legal restraints, and then see whether they will not rapidly rise to the level of good citizens.

But it is asked, *does not the Bible sanction slavery?* If Jesus Christ and his apostles and holy men of old did not disapprove of it, why should we make so much ado about it? It is often asserted, but no proof whatever brought forward, that Jesus Christ and the apostles sanctioned slavery. If "doing to others, as you would that others should do to you," and "loving your neighbor as yourself," are the doctrines of slaveholders, then Christ undoubtedly did preach up slavery. But I never yet heard of a slaveholder who quoted these words as authority for holding slaves!

Again, if the command given by the apostle Paul to masters, "Render unto your servants that which is *just and equal*," were fully carried out by all who accuse him of being a supporter of slavery, I should like to know whether men could rob their fellow-men of body and soul and

all they have, and then say they have only carried out the apostle's direction.

The truth is, though the New Testament does not mention the word *slavery*, any more than it mentions *piracy*, which was very common in those days, it lays down rules for our guidance which cut up both slavery and piracy by the roots. It may be added, that slavery did not exist in Judea in the days of Christ.

But, says one, did not Paul send Onesimus, a runaway slave, back to his master Philemon? True, Paul *did advise* Onesimus, after his conversion, to return to his former master. But was it as a slave that Philemon was to receive him? No! by no means! What says Paul in the epistle? "Receive him *not now as a servant*, but above a servant, a BROTHER BELOVED." "If thou count me a partner, receive him as *myself*." A rule very few slaveholders will adopt! And one that would not be of much assistance in riveting the chains upon their slaves.

The Old Testament and the New are both plain and emphatical in their denunciations against oppression. "He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall *surely be put to death*:" Ex. 21: 16. "Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to *loose the bands of wickedness*, to undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free?" Isa. 58: 6.