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O U R D U T Y.

A FAST-DAY DISCOURSE.

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OUR DUTY.

WHAT is our duty now in reference to slavery? I seek to throw the light of God's word upon the question. No denunciations shall be uttered. No harsh terms shall be used. No impassioned appeals shall be made to stir up the emotions and blind the reason. The subject is so momentous, that everything low and exciting should be banished from the discussion of it. The more clearly we keep it in the light of the judgment-day the better. It is too often dealt with, as if it were a mere matter of this world, and had no responsibility attached to it, in connection with the world to come. It is derogatory to God, and ruinous to man, thus to consider it. The time-serving pleas of political selfishness may darken the mind, and pervert the conscience here; they will not cover the soul in the presence of God. At the judgment-seat of Christ, we shall receive the things done in the body, in relation to this matter. It is a great moral subject, with which the conscience has much to do. We cannot evade our accountability to God for our dealings with it. It is not something far off; it concerns each of us. Christian men should endeavor to keep the subject above the low level of partisan agitation. They should treat it in

a higher and more loving spirit, than moves upon the turbid pool of politics. They should seek to send the healing influence of God through that pool, as the angel of old did, when he troubled the water. After patient and conscientious thought in this spirit, I desire, mildly and calmly, without any rhetorical exaggerations, and without any of the tricks of the advocate, to present the naked truth as it appears to me, for my own guidance, and the guidance of others, who may be open to conviction. If my conclusions are wrong, no one will rejoice more than myself, should their utterance be like water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again.

My object is to show the mode in which the Word of God deals with slavery, as exhibited in the course that has been pursued by the Church, throughout its entire history; and the duty of the Christians of the United States now to apply that interpretation, practically, and in its broadest extent, to the Southern system, by throwing their influence in favor of general emancipation.

The Bible has undermined every system of slavery with which it has come in contact. The history of the Church of God shows, that its legitimate tendency is to restrain the masters, and to raise the enslaved, and break off their chains. It has always watched for opportunities to emancipate, first through the action of individual masters, and then, when high social interests would not be imperilled, through a general movement. In other words, the Christian conscience, enlightened by the Bible, has always striven to overcome slavery,

however it may have been for a time compelled to submit to it. And this, according to one of the sound principles of interpretation, is decisive as to what the real teaching of the Bible on the subject is.

When the Redeemer appeared on the earth, scarcely any traces of the existence of Jewish slavery remained. Whatever was the precise nature of the system that prevailed in Old Testament times, the regulations prescribed by God for its government were such, that, under their influence, it had ceased to exist. Under the laws of Moses, no domestic slave trade was authorized. There were no slave markets in Judea. "In no single instance do we find that the patriarchs either gave away, or sold their servants, or purchased them of *third* persons."* And in the law which God gave to Israel from Mount Sinai, stealing a man, and selling or merely having possession of him, was expressly declared to be punishable with death. The rights of servants were jealously guarded by the law. They were equally protected with their masters. Before the Lord, before the law, and before the judge, they were equal. In all their joys and sorrows, especially in the religious festivals, there was no difference between them. The servants were brought into the covenant with God. If they were beaten in such a way as to die, their masters were punished. Certain kinds of bodily injury, which did not result in death, as the loss of an eye, or even of a tooth, released them from their servitude. So liberal were the provisions of the law, that for nearly the half of their time they were

* Kitto's Cyclopædia, vol. ii. p. 774, under word "Slave."

relieved from their regular labour. Their religious instruction was made a matter of solemn obligation. Fugitives were not returned. And, finally, Jewish servants were free every seventh, and all others every fiftieth year.

Modern slavery could not exist under such regulations. They would plant the seeds of death in the system. If the rebellious States were willing to return to their allegiance, with the promise to apply those laws to their institution, (now retaining the seventh, but omitting the fiftieth year provision), and we could have any pledge that they would conscientiously conform to them, we might be safe in receiving them on such terms. It would perhaps be better than to insist on sudden emancipation; for God's way of dealing with evils is the best way. But what reliable pledge of faithfulness could we get from those who have already violated the most solemn of obligations? .

The foreign slave trade was abolished in 1808. If, along with that, these principles of the Mosaic law had been received by the American people, North and South; if then the nation had determined to deal with the slaves according to God's word, how different the history of our country would have been! How different the year of Jubilee, 1858, from what it was! The succession of compromises of principle, with the agitation and bitterness of feeling which they produced, would have been unknown. Civil war would not now be desolating the land. The suffering, wounded condition of our nation would not appear in the frightful words of Isaiah: "The whole head is sick, and the

whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores." The hundreds of thousands of young men who have fallen beneath the shock of battle, and gone down to an untimely grave, or been debilitated for life by hard exposure beneath a southern sun, would have been saved to us. The best blood of the republic would not have been poured out like water. In place of the evil passions which the war has engendered, we should be dwelling together in unity and peace, and should to-day be a nation of freemen, the wonder and admiration of the world. Alas! that men will try to be wiser than God. The more we see, the more we read, the more strongly convinced we are, that the great principles of the Jewish judicial law ought yet to govern nations.

When Christ commissioned his apostles to preach the gospel, an odious system of slavery existed in the Roman empire. To show what that system was, I quote from a German writer, who had none of the inducements to distort, to exaggerate, or to tone down, which American writers under their political influences might have.

"The slave in Rome was a chattel and a possession, had no individuality or 'caput'; whatever he earned belonged to his master, and he might be made a present of, lent, pawned, or exchanged. His union with a wife was no marriage, that is, was devoid of all its privileges and effects, and only a contubernium or cohabitation. A master might torture or kill his slave at will, there was no one to prevent his doing so, or to

bring him to account. The modes of torture and punishment were various and cruel, and the ordinary punishment of death was crucifixion. One cruel infliction frequently resorted to for female slaves, was chaining to a block of wood, which served the poor sufferer for a seat, and which she had to drag about with her day and night. Slaves in the country who had to till the ground, were chained by the foot, and kept at night in an ergastulum, or underground room. The Roman law inflicted the punishment of death for killing a plough-ox, while the murderer of a slave was called to no account whatever. It is in vain one looks for anything like common human feeling in the Roman slave-law of republican times, and that of the earlier empire. The breaking up of slave families was entirely in the hands of the merchant or the owner; husband might be separated from wife, and mother from children, all dispersed and sold off into the houses of strangers, and to foreign towns. Slavery is equivalent to death in the eye of the civil law, which does not admit the existence of a slave; which entirely avoids and annuls the contract of a master with his slave; gives the slave no action at law against him; admits not of adultery being committed by or with one of them, and compels female slaves to surrender themselves to their master's lust against their will." *Döllinger's "The Gentile and the Jew,"* vol. ii. p. 264.

How similar, in many of its features, is the slave code of the South! This was the system which met the apostles as they went from land to land on their heaven-born mission, and, under the inspiring influence

of the Holy Ghost, to teach men the truth as it is in Jesus. How did they deal with it? The passages in their writings which bear most directly upon it, which in a one-sided way are most frequently appealed to, but which ought not to be torn from the rest of the New Testament, or withdrawn from the influence of its general spirit, are these: 1 Cor. vii. 21—23; xii. 13. Gal. iii. 28. Eph. vi. 5—9. Col. iii. 11, 22; iv. 1. 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2, 9, 10. Tit. ii. 9. James v. 4—6. 1 Pet. ii. 18, 19, the Epistle to Philemon.*

It is not within my plan to give a minute explanation of these passages. Let one pregnant paragraph in reference to them be quoted: "Men dare seek in the New Testament the defence of slavery. The New Testament recommends patience, and not servitude. The duty of enduring does not infer the right of oppressing. Because a prisoner is enjoined not to burn his prison, is his captivity declared just. The apostles say to slaves, 'Be patient.' Did they say to masters, 'Buy, sell, whip, separate'? They recommend obedience to princes; yet the prince of that time was Nero: does this mean that they justify Nero?"†

We seek for the practical commentary of believers on the inspired teachings. They did not at once

* In the so-called "Canons of the Apostles," we find this sentence: "When slaves may seem to be worthy, who may be chosen for that degree (the order of the clergy) as also our Onesimus was, and the masters shall have consented, and given liberty, and dismissed them from their houses, it may be done." And there is a tradition, that the Onesimus of Philemon became a bishop of the Church in Ephesus. If the "canon" refers to that Onesimus, and if the tradition can be relied upon, they give the best practical commentary on the Epistle.

† Cochin, "Results of Slavery," p. 64.

demand the abolition of slavery. In the beginning they had not the power in the State to do it. They did not harshly denounce all slaveholders, as sinners above all men that dwelt on the earth. All slaveholders did not permit the system to run into its abuses. Emancipation was not made a condition of Church membership. But by giving juster views of the soul, and of the relation of all men to each other, and to God, and by inculcating the rights which belong to men as men, the removal of the evil was sought after.* Christian writers and preachers exhibited it as a paradox in the moral system. It was one of the sad effects of sin, and therefore to be removed by the gospel. "It was transgression and not nature that produced the name and condition of slavery." Under the influence of their teaching, emancipation was not rare. We read of masters, on their conversion and baptism, liberating all their slaves—in some cases to the number of 1250, and 1400. When Christianity became the established religion of the empire, on the conversion of Constantine, provision for

* Jerome, born in the year 331, suggests a pregnant reason for the advice which is given to slaves. "The apostle here provides that the doctrine of God may not be blasphemed in anything; if believing slaves become useless to their masters. For he who is about to permit his other slaves to become Christians, may begin to repent of his intention through those who have already become so. But if he sees that these have been improved, and from being unfaithful have become faithful servants, not only will he wish that his other slaves may believe, but even he himself may perhaps be a partaker of salvation." And Augustine, who lived in the same century, addressing the Church, says: "Thou teachest slaves to adhere to their masters, not so much from the necessity of their condition as from the pleasure of their office. Thou, in consideration of that Supreme God, who is their common Lord, makest the masters to be placable to their slaves, and more *inclined to consult than to coerce them.*" What kind of slavery would that make?

emancipation with religious forms was made by law. Then, "cases of emancipation became more frequent. The biographer of St. Samson Xenodochus, a contemporary of Justinian, says of him: 'His troop of slaves he would not keep, still less exercise over his servants a lordly authority; he preferred magnanimously to let them go free, and gave them enough for the necessities of life.' Salvianus, a Gallic presbyter of the fifth century, says, that slaves were emancipated *daily*. On the other hand, very much was done by the Church to prevent the increase of slavery; especially in the way of redeeming prisoners, to which sometimes the gold and silver vessels of churches were applied." . . . The Church, "although naturally conservative, and decidedly opposed to all radical revolution and violent measures, nevertheless, in its inmost instincts and ultimate tendencies, favored universal freedom, and by raising the slave to a spiritual equality with the master, and treating him uniformly as an immortal being, capable of the same virtues, blessings, and rewards, it placed the hateful institution of human bondage, then universally prevalent, in the way of gradual mitigation, and ultimate extinction."* And the system went down before the advancing progress of Christianity.†

* Princeton Review, January, 1864, pp. 28, 29.

† The code of Justinian, the civil law of Rome systematized under Christian influence in the sixth century, exhibits the teaching of Christianity very decidedly against the old Roman and the modern Southern view. It declares, in reference to slavery, that "by the law of nature all were born free," while "slavery became established by the law of nations:" the nations and God against each other! And then there is this significant provision in regard to

But sin is continually reproducing itself in its vilest forms. The overthrow of the Roman empire, and the invasion of the Barbarians, brought in another system of slavery, under whose withering upas influence, Europe lay for centuries. But still, the protest of the gospel was uttered. From the third to the twelfth centuries, thirty-seven Councils are cited, which rendered decisions in favor of slaves. Amid the darkness and corruption of the Church, says Guizot, "the clergy in general, and especially several popes, enforced the manumission of slaves as a duty incumbent on laymen, and loudly inveighed against the scandal of keeping Christians in bondage." Again, the gospel proved victorious. By the twelfth century, that form of slavery had almost been expelled from Europe. "Christianity," said Richard Henry Lee, in Virginia in 1761, "by introducing into Europe the truest principles of universal benevolence and brotherly love, happily abolished slavery."*

A mistaken philanthropy began, and commercial cupidity carried on, the introduction of African slavery into this continent. But its whole history has been one unceasing strife between it and the gospel. The Colonists foresaw its evils, and resisted it, but to no

the most innocent form of slavery: "If any one is so demented as to exchange liberty for slavery, by selling himself, the contract shall not be binding, but, on the contrary, shall be annulled, and both he who is the betrayer of his own liberty, and he who was a party to the *crime*, shall be chastised by scourging, and the intended slave shall remain a freeman."

Says Guizot: "It was by putting an end to the cruel institution of slavery that Christianity extended its mild influence to the practice of war; and that barbarous art, softened by its humane spirit, ceased to be so destructive."

* Bancroft, vol. iv. p. 422.

avail; it was forced upon them by foreign legislation. "There is not in all the colonial legislation of America one single law which recognizes the rightfulness of slavery in the abstract."* When the colonies came to form an independent government of their own, it was generally understood that the institution was to be but temporary. One great object that they had in view was so to construct their government as to lead to its gradual abolition. Whether right or wrong, they thought it had struck its roots so deep among them that it could not be suddenly torn up. The statesmen of the Revolution and of the Constitution agreed on the matter. The Christian Churches, with one consent, declared it to be the solemn duty of Christians to labor for its removal. Hence provision was made for the abolition of the slave trade in 1808, in the hope that the supply ceasing, the system would weaken. The example was followed by European nations, the trade was declared piratical, emancipation acts were passed, until the Southern States, Spain, and Brazil, were left standing alone as the only slave-holding countries in nominal Christendom.†

* Bancroft, vol. iii. p. 409.

† It will not be presumptuous for a member of another branch of the Church to throw into a note two or three remarks on the "View" of the venerable Bishop Hopkins. Is there not a glaring inconsistency in it? The bishop does not content himself with maintaining that the mere relation of master and slave is not necessarily sinful. He does not simply claim that the Bible tolerates it. But in reference to African slavery especially, he declares that God has commanded it. "The Almighty foreseeing this total degradation of the race, ordained them to servitude or slavery under the descendants of Shem and Japheth, doubtless because *he judged it to be their fittest condition.*" (*Bible View*, p. 7. The italics are the Bishop's.) And yet he emphasises the fact that he is and has been in favor of the abolition of the system, whenever

The motive power in the modern emancipation movements is indicated in an extract which specially refers to English action:

"It was Christianity that first abolished the trade, and then emancipated the slaves. There were two

Southern statesmen become willing. If God has authorized it by an express command, if "he judges it to be their fittest condition," what right has any one, in any circumstances, to favor the abolition of it?

Again: Is the corner-stone of the argument in regard to African slavery theologically sound? We suppose that "Noah's curse" is a prophecy, of the utterance of which Ham's conduct was the occasion. Assuming that it could be conclusively proved that the African race is the one upon which the burthen of it falls, (though years ago, if my memory is not treacherous, I heard such a man as Dr. Leighton Wilson, now in the South, combat the position from the pulpit,) does the utterance of a prophecy, foretelling what shall be, invest it necessarily with the authority of a rule for us, and relieve from guilt those who are the instruments of its fulfilment? Prophecy is not in this way a rule of duty. The whole course of history is mapped out in God's mind. If the foretelling of an act or state of things justifies the men who are instrumental in producing it, then the most sinful things may be brought under the command of God. Christ suffered death because he bare our sins. God designed that he should be crucified by the men who put him to death. He declared beforehand that it should be done according to His will. But that made the murderers none the less guilty. Even if God designed to permit the enslavement of the Africans, because of their "total degradation," that would not excuse the men who for their selfish purposes, and without any intention of executing God's will, much more without any clear commission from Him, began or continue the enslavement of the doomed ones, with the iniquitous denial of the most sacred human rights.

It is very hard to see how the curse of Noah, in its direst form, can justify the Southern slave codes. To be a "servant of servants" does not imply a violation of the law of marriage, the forcible separation of husbands and wives, and of parents and minor children, the withholding of just compensation, the denial of instruction, and other iniquities which undeniably exist with the sanction of law in parts of the Southern system. To be consistent, if you will rest African slavery upon Noah's curse, take the mode in which God regulated that curse as it fell upon the Canaanites whom he allowed the Israelites to secure for bondsmen. Those regulations, (some of which are exhibited on page 5, above,) may be a practical commentary on the curse. They exhibit the kind of bondage which God permitted under it. Any system that pleads

long battles, and two glorious victories. The first secured that no more African men should be stolen from their homes and carried into bondage by British ships; the second procured the actual freedom of all who had been already bought, or born in bondage, throughout the dominions of the crown. No fact in recent history is more certain than this, that it was the love of Christ that gave the impulse to that holy war, and the Scriptures that directed its course. The lives of its heroes are the biographies which Christians put into the hands of the young, in the hope of winning them to a Saviour, and without reference to the question of slavery. Clarkson and Cowper, Wilberforce and Buxton, the army that overcame slavery, the chiefs and the men, were a Christian army. The force that burst its bloody bonds was the force of truth, deposited from the Scriptures into human hearts, and becoming vital in believing men. The explosive energy which prevailed to heave up and cast away the mountain weight of self-interest opposed, was the conviction of Chris-

Divine authority because of the curse should follow the commentary in regulating itself. But that would have cut up Southern slavery, root and branch, long ago.

Again, while the Bishop contends that no sin attaches to the relation of master and slave in itself, he admits that "a physical evil it may be," and in treatment there may be sin enough, as in any other relation. But the danger of sinful treatment is very great; and the relation is against the law of nature. It stands therefore on a different footing altogether from natural relations which may yet be perverted into injury. Hence the mode of dealing with them should be different. The same principles which call upon us to struggle against the abuses of the other relations, while the relations themselves are preserved, would lead us to endeavor not merely to remove the evils of slavery, but the system itself, because its tendency naturally is to perversion and injury, and it belongs not to the condition in which God made man.

tians, that slavery is against the word and will of God."*

Thus there has been an antagonism between the Gospel and slavery, in every form which it has worn. Christianity has all along been carrying on a work of sapping and mining against the great evil. Let men discuss as they may the meaning of particular passages in the Bible, the people of God in all ages have practically interpreted the scope of the whole. Said Robertson, the historian: "It is not the respect inspired by any particular precept of the gospel; it is the general spirit of the Christian religion which, more powerful than all written laws, has banished slavery from the earth."

Unhappily the ruling sentiment of the South has for years been departing from the almost universal doctrine on the subject. In virtue of the peculiar character of our national Constitution, it has claimed that the people

* Arnot's Illustrations of the Book of Proverbs, ii. 251.

I once heard the remark made somewhere, that Satan would mount every whiskey barrel in the country, and preach temperance in the most ultra form, if he could prejudice the people against the cause on account of his apparent connection with it. The fact that advocates of unchristian *isms*, of various kinds, appear among the extreme opponents of slavery, is used as an argument in favor of the system. We have met with a pamphlet which contends that opposition to slavery is a creature of Tom Paine and Voltaire infidelity! It may be well to note, that Gibbon, in connection with his insidious assaults upon Christianity, throws his shield over slavery. "He endeavors to extenuate the horrors of the slave's situation, and of the treatment he endures; he seems to consider their cruel treatment as being *justified by necessity*. He then sets forth with a minute exactness the slightest alleviation of a condition so deplorable. He attributes the progressive amelioration of slavery to the *virtue* or to the *policy* of the *sovereigns*, and entirely passes over in silence, the most efficacious cause, Christianity; which, after having rendered the slaves less unhappy, has contributed at last to release them wholly from their sufferings and their chains."—Guizot's Note on chap. ii. of "Decline and Fall."

of the United States generally had no right to interfere with it; and it has been gradually veering around to a defence of the system as right, and as one that should be extended. We were embarrassed by a conflict between constitutional and Gospel obligations. The wheels within the wheel of our political system were in the way of anything being legally done by us. Unless we desired to give up the Union, with all its advantages, we were bound to let the slave States retain the system if they desired to do so. The principles of the Gospel could not be carried out through the general government. It was not certain that any attempted interference would succeed, while it was very certain that it would bring great troubles upon the country. But now these difficulties have been removed. The rebellion has, in the providence of God, placed us in a position in which we are at liberty to act up to the dictates of our consciences, under the teaching of the word of God.

Whatever were their differences of opinion on the abstract question of involuntary servitude, the Christian people of the country have always believed that the system as it has existed in the South was an evil. The slave-laws in many of the States are odious infringements upon the law of God. And slavery in its mildest form is in danger of running into sinful excesses. But any proposition to interfere with it by law, while the men of the South were unwilling, brought up this question: to secure a doubtful good, should the country throw away the Union with all its blessings, and accept disunion or a war with all its woes? In the exercise

of what they thought a sound judgment, the Christian people of the North refused to touch the matter. As to any moral influence, the waywardness and hot-headedness of comparatively a few fanatical extremists prevented that. But now, without any seeking of ours, and in order to maintain a most unchristian view of slavery, the rebellious States have broken the national compact. Our national obligations to them have gone with it. They have deliberately thrown away all the advantages which, they declared, it secured to them with the force of national law and national honor. They have recklessly and wickedly brought on the evils which the people dreaded, and which kept the mass of them from agitating the matter. The country has already suffered more than could have been anticipated from any direct action of ours. Slaveholders have precipitated themselves into the woes from which we would have saved them, and they have brought those woes upon the whole country in such a way, and to such an extent, that every plea for the further toleration of their peculiar institution has been taken away. To its other sins it has added this above all, that it has cast the land into a desolating war. Its advocates, too, have changed the nature of the question, by declaring that the system should not only be tolerated, but conserved and extended. The slaves must never expect deliverance on earth. No end to the system can be looked for. Pandora, long ago, uncovered the jar, and permitted the worst evils to fly over the land; but hope was retained to afford some slight alleviation. Now, that must be lost. The insurgents

have even blasphemously taken an expression which is sacred in the Christian conscience, as applying to Christ, and declared that their system is the stone which the builders rejected, but which is now to be made the head of the corner. The Union was not made on that principle. Slavery attempting to break the Union, the Union must crush it. "The interests of peace and of social order are identified with the success of the cause of emancipation," and no constitutional obligation is in the way. The national safety demands the extirpation of slavery: those who believe slavery to be an evil, must honestly take advantage of the national circumstances to advocate the extirpation. The Christians of the loyal States have the right to say to the government: if you believe that the Union must be restored and your authority asserted over the whole country, we demand that we shall not again be brought into a position in which we shall in any way be compelled to uphold the odious features of this Southern institution, or give it abroad the sanction of connection with us. If those States are to be brought back, we ask that measures shall be adopted which shall sweep away for ever this unchristian system, so that our consciences may no longer be in a strait betwixt two—having a desire to remove the system, but hampered by legal restraints. We have heretofore been willing, in ignorance of the worst points of slavery, to leave it to the men of the South, trusting that they would so act as gradually to mitigate and ultimately to extinguish it, as the gospel would teach them to do. But they have departed from the principles of the gospel. They have avowed a

theory which is diametrically against the Bible. To sustain that theory they have appealed to arms. Having taken the sword, let the system perish with the sword. If our fathers were wrong in making the Constitution so as to shield slavery, let us now correct the wrong. The rashness of the slaveholders has opened up to us a way of escape from our difficulties, and given us a right to claim that the principles of the gospel shall have free course and be glorified.

We can recognize the hand of the Lord in bringing us to this. "Whom the gods destroy, they first make mad," was a heathen saying. When men persist in sin, against the light which God has given them, he lets them go on until they precipitate themselves into such a position that, amid great convulsions, they either destroy themselves, or with much suffering to themselves, destroy their sin. "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." The men of the South have sinned in endeavoring to plead the Divine authority for their system of slave laws. Perhaps, through a mistaken charity, the men of the North have sinned in assisting to cover up the monstrous evils of the institution. Now God is punishing us all. Their own infatuation is cursing the rebellious States. For our association with them we are bitterly suffering. But through it all, God is working out his purpose, and saying to us, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof."

The Church of God, with the exception of the small

fraction in the insurgent States, is at one, on this subject. Its branches in Europe, have for years, censured us for our complicity with slavery. Knowing nothing of our difficulties, they have been even uncharitable in their expressions and in their acts. With all the mistaken sympathy which exists abroad for the insurgents, there is no departure from the condemnation of slavery on the part of Christians. There is a singular unanimity in the Church in the loyal States, as to our present duty. All its great national branches have spoken out in the clearest terms. The General Assembly of our Old-school Presbyterian Church, which has often had the title of *conservative* applied to it as a stigma, and which has ever been called pro-slavery, because it would not be swayed by passing excitement, from what, it thought, was the scriptural mode of dealing with the subject, at its meeting in May last, uttered these weighty words:

“The time has at length come, in the providence of God, when it is His will that every vestige of human slavery among us should be effaced; and every Christian man should address himself, with industry and earnestness, to his appropriate part in the performance of this great duty.”

He is a very bold, a very rash, a very self-confident man, who arrays himself on the side of the Southern faction, against the Church universal.

The practical interpretation of the Bible, by the people of God, and the providence of God, thus indicate the general duty. In the discharge of it, what policy should be advocated?

In my pulpit ministrations, I have abstained from referring to any of the acts of the Executive on the subject. They were professedly based on military necessity. The right of the President to initiate them was an open question. Not only did his political opponents deny their constitutionality, but a large branch of his supporters contended that such measures as the emancipation and the amnesty proclamations were beyond his power, and belonged to Congress. The question was one on which thoroughly loyal men might differ. Whatever was my opinion, I would not broach it in the house of God. But the Constitution of the United States makes provision for amendments to its article. It seems to me, that it is a Christian duty, at least to advocate such an amendment, as will effect this purpose. Already, slavery is gone from the District of Columbia. It has been banished from all the national domain. It is not legal to return fugitives. Never again can we permit these things to be. And now that our hands have been loosed from the obligation not to touch the evil in the limits of the slave-holding States, we should be disgraced in the sight of Heaven, and before the nations of the earth, if we should go back to the house of bondage, or have a partnership share in the profits of an unchristian system. Whether emancipation should be immediate or not, let an enlightened Christian policy decide. Standing on the ground of the Bible, I can make no dogmatic assertion. The great point is, let the measures which are adopted be sure of accomplishing the purpose with the least harm to masters and slaves alike. Let nothing be done

which will cast the slaves into a worse condition than that in which they now are.

One great demand of justice must be met. The slaves of the South will not be fit to take care of themselves at once, and as freemen. This is the great reason why the American people never voluntarily advocated immediate emancipation. Perhaps they were wrong. Watching very carefully against the gulf of Charybdis we have run within reach of the snaky heads of Scylla. The cruel loss of his companions from his vessel caused bitter pain in the heart of Ulysses. What lamentation is throughout our land! Through the absence of mental and religious instruction, the mass of the slaves will be found to be like depraved children. They will need a checking, restraining, guiding hand. It will be the solemn duty of the government and of the Christians of America to put them in the way of supporting themselves, and to provide for their instruction. Already there are many freedmen. We are told that a large part of them are in a worse condition than they were when in slavery. There may be some truth in the allegation. What measures should be adopted is one of the most momentous questions that the war will leave upon our hands. It will call for the dispassionate examination of the greatest minds among us. Enough to say now, that the freedmen have claims upon us which even the advocates of slavery, and the opponents of the government cannot resist. We help the suffering without enquiring how their troubles came upon them. And in some degree we are responsible for the sad position of these men. The Christian

Church has here its greatest missionary field, which it must assiduously cultivate. The cost of doing all that will be needed will be enormous. Perhaps the lands of the South can be managed so as to meet it. But however this may be, "our country ought to be governed in this manner by no other consideration than an honest and impartial regard to the happiness of the injured party, uninfluenced by the expense or inconvenience which such a regard may involve."*

But we are not called upon to advocate the political or social equality of the freedmen, or of the black race generally. The question of suffrage is not a moral question. It is one of political expediency. No religious principle is involved in it. The strongest opponent of slavery may consistently deny it. No wrong is inflicted upon women because they cannot vote. No wrong is inflicted upon foreigners, because they cannot vote, until they have resided five years in the country. No wrong is inflicted upon American born males, because they cannot vote until they reach the age of twenty-one years. If I were to go to England, I could not become a citizen without a special license from the crown, and I might live there all my life without being naturalized. The question is a political one, and to be determined altogether by political considerations. With the sternest opposition to slavery, I am opposed to giving the blacks this privilege as well. It would be inexpedient. It would in the end be disastrous to the best interests of the country. The true policy is, to do

* General Assembly of 1818.

nothing to encourage them to remain here, but rather to give them every inducement to colonize, where they may have a government with all political rights of their own. This, with other considerations, has made me somewhat suspicious, as to the propriety of employing negroes as soldiers. As far as the insurgents are concerned, there can be no objection to it. But I foresaw that upon it would be based an argument for the right of suffrage. A standing army of negroes would fill me with alarm. The only thing that allays my fears now, is the hope, that the government will so arrange the colored troops, as not to permit too many of them to be together, and without the restraint of white troops. It will scarcely do, to talk about gratitude for their deliverance from slavery restraining them from any injurious schemes, or from becoming the tools of some ambitious leader who might gain their confidence. That is a rope of sand on which we should not desire to see the national life suspended.

If the views which have been advanced are correct,

(a) We should cheerfully bear with the sacrifices that may be necessary to bring about such a settlement of our national difficulties as they demand.

This war is terrible. The sight might well make angels weep. The God of peace speedily send us a lasting peace! It would not have been Christian to enter upon the war for the purpose of abolishing slavery. It has been forced upon us in the interests of the Southern system, and it is now but Divine justice, that that should be destroyed by the war. Still, if the people of the United States were to say that they did

not think the national life worth the struggle, we should protest against the firing of another gun. We would not advocate the prosecution of the war for the emancipation of the slaves. But, believing, as the American people do, that their Union cannot be lightly thrown away, and that rebels in arms have divested themselves of every shadow of a right to the protection of a system which is against the spirit of our religion, and which has also shown itself to be against the genius of republican institutions, we cannot, in conscience, favor a settlement which will leave that system intact. We are shut up to this position. "The issue has been fairly presented. Either our national life or slavery must be extinguished." And as slavery is, in its best aspect, the source of great evils, while the national life is an incalculable blessing, the former must go down.

Is the end in view worth all the cost of treasure and of blood which has already been poured out, and which must yet flow? Are we called upon to make all this sacrifice that a few millions of blacks may be freed? Since God has permitted this to come upon us we must not murmur. If, because of our sins, this is His way of removing the great evil from the land, we must willingly drink of the cup. Death is better than sinful dishonor—any amount of suffering better than sinful disgrace. Better for this land to become a bleak and barren desert, than for the people to look back from the plough and refuse to do the will of God. Better for each of us to make sacrifices in our daily life, in the cost of living, in suffering of body, in anxiety of mind,

and even to go down to the grave deprived of every cent that we have, provided we have a good conscience therewith, than to give our feeble support to any policy which merits the condemnation of God. "Yield not to disasters, but press onward the more bravely."

(b) These views should influence our exercise of the right of suffrage. The ministry ought not to array itself on the side of any political party. It ought not to declare itself either Democratic or Republican. It should, with boldness, declare itself Christian and patriotic. And it may with all propriety assert, as a rule of duty for Christian citizens, that measures which embody the teachings of the Gospel should be supported, and those that are arrayed against the Bible be rejected. And now, if the question of taking legal steps for emancipation under the Federal Constitution should be presented to us, it seems to me that we can as Christians act but in the one way.

(c) We should endeavor to impress these views upon others. Be firmly persuaded in your own minds as to the rule of duty, and then calmly and kindly, but zealously and earnestly, seek to persuade your friends and neighbors. Social influence should always be exerted on the side of the right. But it should be done with charity and courtesy. Earnestness and anger are not twin brothers. Zeal and unkindness are not associates. Loyalty to government and to great principles, and ostracism of those who may differ as to modes of exhibiting that loyalty, do not necessarily go together. On the contrary, angry passion is frequently a sign of a bad argument, or of the consciousness of a weak side, or at

least of a failure in maintaining it against an opponent. Truth, while firm and earnest, may be mild, and calm, and gentle. Our great national question is a complicated one. The solution of it is mixed up with difficult political considerations. Honest Christian men, under their prejudices, their previous training, their associations, may differ in their conclusions. I believe the views which I have presented are right. I would desire to impress them upon others. But if I cannot succeed in every particular, I will put the best construction upon the conduct of those who differ from me, and treat them with that love which suffereth long and is kind.

In regard to questions which must yet come before us, we shall greatly need to be under the influence of this spirit. Differences of opinion, ought not to sever friendly ties, or interfere with the amenities of social life. If Paul once differed from Peter, and withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed, he was yet to the impetuous apostle "our beloved brother Paul." Let us maintain and inculcate our opinions with Christian urbanity. In the application of well-established principles, there is room for us all to think that we may be wrong. Therefore, be kind while decided, forbearing while firm, not easily provoked while active in duty.

(d) We should be earnest in prayer. God is leading us by a way that we know not. The way appears very dark. God alone can take us safely over it. Dangers are behind us, before us, around us. The sea is very stormy. The ship of state is dashing wildly. We can

hear the breakers. Other nations have split upon such breakers, and gone down. Shall we escape, and carry our precious treasures into the harbor of peace? God knows. The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Let us, then, pray without ceasing, that he will be very forgiving and very favorable to us; that he will keep us in the truth, purging our minds from error, if we are, in this matter, under its influence; that he will unite the Church and the nation upon the sure foundation of His own revealed word; that, as difficulties arise, He will bestow upon our rulers the wisdom necessary to solve them; and that very soon, out of the mist which envelopes our nation in the sight of the world, she may look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners.

An opportunity is presented to us, which comes not often to a nation. If we rise to the height of it, generations yet unborn shall call us blessed. If we fall below it, better for us that we had never been born. Duty and safety unite in urging us to take measures for the removal of what is at once a low state of civilization, and a violation of the law of God.* We are invited to take away our reproach from among the nations. What is needed, is that we should be fully united among ourselves, and humble and obedient towards God. When the doubts and difficulties that surround the undertaking would produce hesitation, let us be stimulated to firmness and persistency by the

* "It is not many years since he (Dr. Thornwell) said to us, that slavery was a low state of civilization, and must of necessity come to an end"—*Princeton Review*, July, 1864, p. 549.

words which a forcible Christian writer in England penned some thirty years ago, while the controversy in regard to colonial emancipation was raging in his country: "To those religious men who are laboring for the emancipation of the negroes, amid the doubts and difficulties with which every great political measure is beset, it must needs be an inspiring thought, that to rescue a race of men from personal slavery, and to raise them to the rank and self-respect of independent beings, is, in the strictest sense of the word, a God-like task, inasmuch as it is a task which, God's book tells us, God himself has accomplished."* If the cost of treasure and of blood, the ruin in the South, and the suffering in the North, stagger us, let us remember, that in bringing His oppressed people out of the house of bondage, God had to send the ten plagues upon the oppressors, winding up with the death of the first-born in every house, and followed by the drowning of the whole of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea; and that the liberated people themselves had to pass forty weary years in the wilderness, and to go through many severe battles, before their deliverance was complete. If we should be tempted to advocate a settlement which would leave us where we were, or in a worse position than that in which we were, on this great moral question, let us receive a warning from the thirty-fourth chapter of Jeremiah. When danger was imminent, and Jerusalem was threatened by an armed enemy, the Jews complied with the word of the Lord, and liberated the men and women who were illegally

* *Guesses at Truth*, p. 35.

held in bondage by their brethren. But when the danger appeared to have cleared away, they turned and reduced to subjection those whom they had let go free. For that, the Lord proclaimed the renewal of the war, the desolation and depopulation of their cities, the burning of Jerusalem, the utter overthrow of the kingdom. Our national difficulties may be settled in such a way, as to rivet the chains of the enslaved the more securely. Led thus far in the path of justice and humanity, we may, through fear or through false principles, fall back and continue in bondage our suffering fellow-men of the South; but, if we do, before long, the peace which we purchase may be broken by the fulfilment of this proclamation from Heaven:

“Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbor; behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.”