

**NEGRO SLAVERY
UNJUSTIFIABLE:
A DISCOURSE**

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Negro slavery unjustifiable: a discourse by Alexander McLeod

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ALEXANDER MCLEOD

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NEGRO SLAVERY
UNJUSTIFIABLE.

A DISCOURSE

BY THE LATE

REV. ALEXANDER McLEOD, D.D.,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW YORK.

"Whosoever looketh unto the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein; he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work; this man shall be blessed in his deed."—JAMES i. 25.

1802.

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

The first edition of this Discourse was printed in this city just fifty-eight years ago. It has been often published since, both in this country and in Europe; and as often it has received the commendation of the philosopher, and patriotic statesman, as well as the christian to whom its demonstrations are more immediately addressed. A copy of the first edition was sent to Thomas Jefferson, and was the occasion of a correspondence between him and its author, on the whole subject of the colored race in the United States, and the best means of doing it good. Another copy found its way into the hands of that celebrated philanthropist, Henry, Count Gregoire of France. He speaks of it in highly complimentary terms, and "couples its author with Mr. Jefferson, as a defender of the rights of humanity."

Dr. Alexander McLeod was well known in the city of New York for many years, as an eloquent preacher, able theologian, and clear and earnest writer on the morals of politics. As a true patriot he reproved the faults of his adopted country, while he defended her rights. But he never wrote a line for faction, or to encourage the mere party politician. Carrying out the creed of his church, he tried all things by the Bible, and proclaimed its supremacy as well over social institutions, as over personal character. There were but few, in the day when he wrote, to vindicate slavery in America as right and beneficial in itself, much less as approved in divine revelation. It was then,

F. H.

rather viewed, even by its apologists, as an admitted evil of which it was difficult to dispose, than a good deserving perpetuation. Now it is extensively proclaimed to be a political necessity, a moral institution, a Bible appointment. Against such deceptive error, the Discourse brings to bear its strong batteries of Scripture logic, sustained by historical fact, and economical deduction. And it shows that "the practice of buying, holding, or selling our unoffending fellow creatures as slaves is immoral," and of course dangerous to the individual, and the community in which it exists. Referring to the remedy, the Discourse advises no violence, no insurrection, no sudden disruptions of the bonds of society, but the influence of humanity and justice, persuasions of the gospel, and the power of prayer to Him who rules the nations, and can bring the greatest good out of the greatest evil. In the notes, which are valuable, the opinions of such well known statesmen and divines as Thomas Jefferson, Dr. Jedediah Morse, and Dr. Samuel Miller are presented. These deserve to be pondered now.

ADVERTISEMENT.

The Author of this Discourse had a call presented to him, in November, 1800, to take the pastoral charge of a congregation in the county of Orange, in the State of New York. He perceived among the subscribers the names of some whom he knew to be holders of slaves. He doubted the consistency of enslaving the negroes with the Christian system, and was unwilling to enter into a full ecclesiastic communion with those who continued the practice. He hesitated to accept the call, but took an early opportunity of writing to the Elders of the Church, and of intimating to the Presbytery his sentiments respecting slavery.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church has judicially condemned the practice, and warned their connections against it. This produced an additional evidence of the force of Christian principle. It triumphed over self-interest; and, in several parts of the United States have men sacrificed, on the altar of religion, the property which the civil law gave them in their fellow men. There is not a slave-holder now in the communion of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

A sense of duty determined the author to commit this Discourse to the press. In the publication of it he has particularly in view the instruction and establishment of those inhabitants of Orange who have placed themselves under his pastoral care. Through them he addresses all into whose hands the Discourse may come.

If the Redeemer shall be pleased to bless it, and render it the means of ameliorating the bondage, or of procuring the liberty of any miserable African, the Author shall receive more than a recompense.

THE PRACTICE
or
HOLDING MEN IN PERPETUAL SLAVERY
CONDEMNED.

"He that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death."—Exon. xxi. 16.

God is omnipotent. His omnipotence is necessary, and independent of every other being. He is the source from which all power flows. Whatever physical force can be exerted by man, is derived from his Maker. In the exercise of natural power, man is under a law to God. He is indeed a free agent; but the divine law circumscribes his sphere of action, and marks out boundaries which he cannot pass with impunity. To exert his natural powers under the direction of law is right: to exercise any powers derived from God, contrary to his declared will, is wrong. Whatever is included in the grant God has made to the human family, is one of the *rights of man*; and beyond this grant, contrary to God's law, man cannot claim a right, until he shakes off his dependency, and elevates his own authority until it become paramount to that which is exercised by Jehovah. Whosoever attempts to deprive any of the human family of the former, or put him in possession of the latter, is guilty of treason against Heaven, unless he is expressly com-

missioned, in this particular instance, to contradict the general principles of law, by the same great authority from which the law derives its binding force. He who, without this authority, breaks over the barriers of law, and, with physical force, deprives his neighbor of liberty or property, is an enemy to God and to man; much more so he who commences an unprovoked attack on any of his fellow men, and, with lawless power, steals him from his connections, barter him for some other commodity, or forces him to labor for the benefit of another, and that other an *enemy*, who has committed, or countenanced the commission of the theft.

The divine law declares this a crime, and prescribes the punishment. *He who stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.*

This law was given to the Hebrews as a body politic; but it proceeds on a moral ground, and is, consequently, obligatory still on every subject of moral government.

He who acknowledges the morality of the eighth precept of the decalogue, will not require another proof of the morality of the conduct recommended in the text. If he who steals my purse, my coat, or my horse, be guilty of an immorality, he cannot be innocent who robs me of my father, my brother, my wife, or my child. Against this principle an inspired apostle directs his argument, in his Epistle to Timothy. 1 Tim. i. 9. *Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient—for MAN STEALERS—and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine. Man stealing is classed with the most detestable crimes. It is considered not only reprehensible among the ancient He-*

brews, but a moral evil in every age, and in every nation.

From the text, I consider myself authorised to lay before you the following proposition :

The practice of buying, holding, or selling our unoffending fellow creatures as slaves is immoral.

The text will certainly support this proposition. According to the common principles of law, the receiver of stolen goods, if he know them to be such, is esteemed guilty as well as the thief. The slave-holder never had a right to force a man into his service, or to retain him, without an equivalent. To sell him, therefore, is to tempt another to sin, and to dispose of that for money, to which he never had a right.

The proposition does not militate against slavery under every form. By no means. A man, by the abuse of his powers, to the injury of society, may forfeit liberty, and even life: he may deserve slavery in the fullest sense of the word, in order that his punishment may be a sanction to the law—may be an example to others—and may compensate, as much as possible, for the injuries done to society. By “innocent fellow creatures,” in the proposition, it is not designed to teach that any of the human race is so in relation to the divine law: it is not to be understood in a moral, but in a political sense. As the subjects of Jehovah’s government, we are all guilty, and deserve to perish. We have merited eternal imprisonment from Him. But, in relation to civil society, men are deemed innocent unless they have violated its laws. These are assuredly entitled to personal freedom.

It is intended, in this Discourse, to *confirm the doctrine of the proposition—to answer objections to it—and make some improvement of it.*