

## THE STORY OF SLAVERY.

SOON after the Revolution, several slave-owning States prohibited the importation of slaves. The Constitution provided that Congress might suppress the slave-trade after the lapse of twenty years. But for the resistance of South Carolina and Georgia the prohibition would have been immediate. At length, at the earliest moment when it was possible, Congress gave effect to the general sentiment by enacting "that no slaves be imported into any of the thirteen United Colonies."

And why had this not been done earlier? If the colonists were sincere in their desire to suppress this base traffic, why did they not suppress it? The reason is not difficult to find. England would not permit them. England forced the slave-trade upon the reluctant colonists. The English Parliament watched with paternal care over the interests of this hideous traffic. During the first half of the eighteenth century Parliament was continually legislating to this effect. Every restraint upon the largest development of the trade was removed with scrupulous care. Every thing that diplomacy could do to open new markets was done. When the colonists sought by imposing a tax to check the importation of slaves, that tax was repealed. Land was given free, in the West Indies, on condition that the settler should keep four negroes for every hundred acres. Forts were built on the African coast for the protection of the trade. So recently as the year 1749 an Act



was passed bestowing additional encouragements upon slave-traders, and emphatically asserting, "The slave-trade is very advantageous to Great Britain." There are no passages in all her history so humiliating as these.

It is marvellous that such things were done, deliberately, and with all the solemnities of legal sanction, by men not unacquainted with the Christian religion, and humane in all the ordinary relations of life. The Inquisition inflicted no suffering more cruel than was endured by the victim of the slave-trader. Hundreds of men and women, with chains upon their limbs, were packed closely together into the holds of small vessels. There, during weeks of suffering, they remained, enduring fierce tropical heat, often deprived of water and of food. They were all young and strong, for the fastidious slave-trader rejected men over thirty as uselessly old. But the strength of the strongest sank under the horrors of this voyage. Often it happened that the greater portion of the cargo had to be flung overboard. Under the most favorable circumstances, it was expected that one slave in every five would perish. In every cargo of five hundred, one hundred would suffer a miserable death. And the public sentiment of England fully sanctioned a traffic of which these horrors were a necessary part.

At one time the idea was prevalent in the colonies that it was contrary to Scripture to hold a baptized person in slavery. The colonists did not on that account liberate their slaves. They escaped the difficulty in the opposite direction. They withheld baptism and religious instruction. England took some pains to put them right on this question. The bishops of the Church and the law-officers of the Crown issued authoritative declarations, asserting the entire lawfulness of owning Christians. The colonial legislatures followed with enactments to the same effect. The colonists, thus reassured, gave consent that the souls of their unhappy dependants should be cared for.



Up to the Revolution it was estimated that three hundred thousand negroes had been brought into the country direct from Africa. The entire colored population was supposed to amount to nearly half a million.

When America gained her independence slavery existed in all the colonies. No State was free from the taint. Even the New England Puritans held slaves. At an early period they had learned to enslave their Indian neighbors. The children of the Pilgrims owned Indians, and in due time owned Africans, without remorse. But the number of slaves in the North was always small. At first it was not to the higher principle or clearer intelligence of the Northern men that this limited prevalence of slavery was due. The North was not a region where slave labor could ever be profitable. The climate was harsh, the soil rocky and bleak. Labor required to be directed by intelligence. In that comparatively unproductive land the mindless and heartless toil of the slave would scarcely defray the cost of his support. At the Revolution there were half a million of slaves in the colonies, and of these only thirty to forty thousand were in the North.

It was otherwise in the sunny and luxuriant South. The African was at home there, for the climate was like his own. The rich soil yielded its wealth to labor in the slightest and least intelligent form. The culture of rice and tobacco and cotton supplied the very kind of work which a slave was fitted to perform. The South found profitable employment for as many Africans as the slave-traders were able to steal.

And yet at the Revolution slavery enjoyed no great degree of favor. The free spirit enkindled by the war was in violent opposition to the existence of a system of bondage. Everywhere in the North slavery was regarded as an objectionable and decaying institution. The leaders of the Revolution, themselves mainly slave-owners, were eagerly desirous



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that slavery should be abolished. Washington was utterly opposed to the system, and provided in his will for the emancipation of his own slaves. Hamilton was a member of an association for the gradual abolition of slavery. John Adams would never own a slave. Franklin, Patrick Henry, Madison, Monroe, were united in their reprobation of slavery. Jefferson, a Virginian, who prepared the Declaration of Independence, said that, in view of slavery, "he trembled for his country, when he reflected that God was just."

In the convention which met to frame a Constitution for America the feeling of antagonism to slavery was supreme. Had the majority followed their own course, provision would have been made then for the gradual extinction of slavery. But there arose here a necessity for one of those compromises by which the history of America has been so sadly marked. When it was proposed to prohibit the importation of slaves, all the Northern and most of the Southern States favored the proposal. But South Carolina and Georgia were insatiable in their desire for African labor. They decisively refused to become parties to a union in which there was to be no importation of slaves. The other States yielded. Instead of an immediate abolition of this hateful traffic, it was agreed merely that after twenty years Congress would be at liberty to abolish the slave-trade if it chose. By the same threat of disunion the slave States of the extreme South gained other advantages. It was at last enacted that a slave who fled to a free State was not therefore to become a free man. He must be given back to his owner. It was yet further conceded that the slave States should have increased political power in proportion to the number of their slaves. A black man did not count for so much as a white. Every State was to send members to the House of Representatives according to its population, and in reckoning that population five negroes were to be counted as three.



And yet at that time, and for years after, the opinion of the South itself regarded slavery as an evil, thrust upon them by England, difficult to be got rid of, profitable, it might be, but lamentable and temporary. No slave-holder refused to discuss the subject or admit the evils of the system. No violence was offered to those who denounced it. The clergy might venture to preach against it. Hopeful persons might foretell the approach of liberty to those unhappy captives. Even the lowest of the slave-holding class did not yet resent the expression of such hopes.

But a mighty change was destined to pass upon the tone of Southern opinion. The purchase of Louisiana opened a vast tract of the most fertile land in the world to the growth of cotton. The growth of cotton became profitable. Slaveholding became lucrative. It was wealth to own a little plantation and a few negroes. There was an eager race for the possession of slaves. Importation alone could not supply the demand. Some of the more northerly of the Southern States turned their attention to the breeding of slaves for the Southern markets.

During many years the leader of the slave-owners was John C. Calhoun. He was a native of South Carolina, a tall, slender man, with an eye whose wondrous depth and power impressed all who came into his presence. Calhoun taught the people of the South that slavery was good for the slave. It was a benign, civilizing agency. The African attained to a measure of intelligence in slavery greatly in advance of that which he had ever reached as a free man. To him, visibly, it was a blessing to be enslaved. From all this it was easy to infer that Providence had appointed slavery for the advantage of both races; that opposition to this heaven-ordained institution was profane; that abolition was merely an aspect of infidelity. So Calhoun taught. So the South learned to believe. Calhoun's last speech in Congress warned the North



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that opposition to slavery would destroy the Union. His latest conversation was on this absorbing theme. A few hours after, he had passed to where all dimness of vision is removed, and errors of judgment become impossible !

It was very pleasant for the slave-owners to be taught that slavery enjoyed divine sanction. The doctrine had other apostles than Mr. Calhoun. Unhappily it came to form part of the regular pulpit teaching of the churches. It was gravely argued out from the Old Testament that slavery was the proper condition of the negro. Ham was to be the servant of his brethren. Hence all the descendants of Ham were the rightful property of white men. The slave who fled from his master was guilty of the crime of theft in one of its most heinous forms. So taught the pulpit. Many books, written by grave divines for the enforcement of these doctrines, remain to awaken the amazement of posterity.

The slave-owners inclined a willing ear to these pleasing assurances. They knew slavery to be profitable. Their leaders in Church and State told them it was right. It was little wonder that a fanatical love for slavery possessed their hearts. In the susceptible, ease-loving minds of the slave-owning class, it became in course of years almost a madness, which was shared, unhappily, by the great mass of the white population. Discussion could no longer be permitted. It became a fearful risk to express in the South an opinion hostile to slavery. It was a familiar boast that no man who opposed slavery would be suffered to live in a slave State. And the slave-owners made their word good. Many suspected of hostile opinions were tarred and feathered and turned out of the State. Many were shot ; many were hanged ; some were burned. The Southern mobs were singularly brutal, and the slave-owners found willing hands to do their work. The law did not interfere to prevent or punish such atrocities. The churches looked on and held their peace.



As slave property increased in value, a strangely horrible system of laws gathered around it. The slave was regarded not as a person, but as a thing. He had no civil rights ; nay, it was declared by the highest legal authority that a slave had no rights at all which a white man was bound to respect. The most sacred laws of nature were defied. Marriage was a tie which bound the slave only during the master's pleasure. A slave had no more legal authority over his child " than a cow has over her calf." It was a grave offence to teach a slave to read. A white man might expiate that offence by fine or imprisonment ; to a black man it involved flogging. The owner might not without challenge murder an unoffending slave ; but a slave resisting his master's will might lawfully be slain. A slave who would not stand to be flogged might be shot as he ran off. The master was blameless if his slave died under the administration of reasonable correction,— in other words, if he flogged a slave to death. A fugitive slave might be killed by any means which his owner chose to employ. On the other hand, there was a slender pretext of laws for the protection of the slave.

The practice of the South in regard to her slaves was not unworthy of her laws. Children were habitually torn away from their mothers. Husbands and wives were habitually separated and forced to contract new marriages. Public whipping-houses became an institution. The hunting of escaped slaves became a regular profession. Dogs were bred and trained for that special work.

These things were done, and the Christian churches of the South were not ashamed to say that the system out of which they flowed enjoyed the sanction of God !

There were indeed good masters and mistresses in the South, who sympathized with their slaves and whom the slaves loved. There were plantations where Christian principles governed,—Acacias in this most beautiful of lands. But



the death of one of these masters, and a transference of property, might change all this happiness and peace. The whole system was evil, and the conscientious portion of the slave-owners felt it to be so.