

The Debate Over Slavery

The Spectator, December 6, 1859, p. 2, c. 1

We have never entertained a doubt that the condition of the Southern slaves is the best and most desirable for the negroes, as a class, that they have ever been found in or are capable of. There is abundant evidence to prove that the black man's lot as a slave, is vastly preferable to that of his free brethren at the North. A Boston paper of recent date tells of a likely negro man, twenty-eight years old, who purchased his freedom in Virginia and removed to Boston.—He is sober, industrious and willing to work, but instead of meeting with sympathy from the Abolitionists, he had been deceived, cheated and driven from their presence. The writer describes him as bemoaning his hard lot, weeping like a child, lamenting that he had ever left his former master, and declaring that if he had the means he would gladly return to the old Virginia plantation. And this, we have reason to believe, is not an isolated case, but the experience of a large majority of emancipated slaves and run-away negroes in the Northern States.

But the most remarkable testimony on the subject, is borne by no less a personage than the notorious Henry Ward Beecher. In a recent sermon, Mr. Beecher says the free colored people at the North "are almost without education, with but little sympathy for ignorance." "They cannot even ride in the cars of our city railroads. They are snuffed at in the house of God, or tolerated with ill-disguised disgust." The negro cannot be employed as a stone mason, bricklayer, or carpenter. "There is scarcely a carpenter's shop in New York in which a journeyman would continue to work if a black man was employed in it." There is scarcely one of the common industries of life in which he can engage. "He is crowded down, down, down, through the most menial callings to the bottom of society." "We heap upon them," says Beecher, "moral obloquy more atrocious than that which the master heaps upon the slave. And notwithstanding all this, we lift ourselves up to talk to the Southern people about the rights and liberties of the human soul, and especially the African soul."

Every word of this is no doubt true, and yet even Mr. Beecher is an agent of the "under ground railroad," actively engaged in fomenting dissatisfaction among slaves, and stealing them away from the section where they have protection and sympathy, only that they may become, in other regions, objects of atrocious moral obloquy. Such is the philanthropy of Abolitionism!

The intelligent, christian slave-holder at the South is the best friend of the negro. He does not regard his bonds-men as mere chattel property, but as human beings to whom he owes duties. While the Northern Pharisee will not permit a negro to ride on the city railroads, Southern gentlemen and ladies are seen every day, side by side, in cars and coaches, with their faithful servants. Here the honest black man is not only protected by the laws and public sentiment, but he is respected by the community as truly as if his skin were white. Here there are ties of genuine friendship and affection between whites and blacks, leading to an interchange of all the comities of life. The slave nurses his master in sickness, and sheds tears of genuine sorrow at his grave. When sick himself, or overtaken by the infirmity of age, he is kindly cared for, and when he dies the whites grieve, not for the loss of so much property, but for the death of a member of the family.--This is the relation which slaves generally, and domestic servants universally, sustain to their white masters.

There is a vast deal of foolish talk about the delights of freedom and the hardships of slavery. In one sense no one, white or black, is free in this world. The master orders his slave to work in a certain field, when he perhaps would prefer to go elsewhere--this is slavery. But is the master free to do as he pleases! Not so.--He is driven by as stern a necessity to labor with his hands or confine himself to business, as the slave ever feels. We are all therefore slaves.--But when the man, whatever his complexion, recognizes the fact that his lot is ordained of God, and cheerfully acquiesces, he becomes a free man in the only true sense. He then chooses to do and to bear what otherwise might be irksome and intolerable.

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