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SLAVERY:

ANCIENT

AND

MODERN

BY

JOHN C. KENWORTHY.

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SLAVERY: ANCIENT & MODERN.

HE truth shall make you free,' said Jesus. The ordinary expounders of this passage, as one hears them to-day in the churches and elsewhere, give a very curious interpretation of the word 'free.' They seem to think the 'freedom' of Christ gives you some kind of spiritual liberty, to reconcile you to the loss of bodily liberty. That is the notion of the comfortable people who take Christianity to be something with which to stop the mouths of poor people when they complain most bitterly of their oppression. But Jesus said "free," and He meant 'free.' Just that, and fully; free in body, and free in soul. He meant 'free' in every particle of possible social, economic and political significance of the word.

'The Truth' He said, 'shall make you free.' If there be one sin that is commoner than another amongst us, it is that of calling things by false names. There is a deed, for example, that we know to be wrong. 'Oh yes,' we say, 'we will give it up.' Then we proceed to find for it another name, and we go on doing the deed itself,

KMRR IMAG

light of heart. That is exactly what we have done with 'slavery,' the word and the thing.

Slavery! We think the term describes something of which the British people know nothing whatever, practically; whereas the probability is, that the English people know as much about slavery, by direct experience, as any people under the sun. We talk about English freedom, we sing our 'Rule Britannia! Britons never shall be slaves,' and all that sort of folly. But, if we ask ourselves, in a commonsense way, In what is our English freedom greater than the freedom of other countries? we find it to be just in this,—that we have a little more liberty to talk and move about, and we have no army conscription. They do not lock us up just so soon as they do in France or in Russia, for expressing our political opinions. We are at liberty to live in our own houses and to go pretty well where we like without police interference, (unless we trespass off the high road on to some landlord's property, and then we are promptly brought up). But if we rightly conceive of a real liberty, I ask, Where have we, in what have we, more liberty than other nations? The mass of the people in all countries do just the same things as they do in England; they work heavily from morning to night for a miserable pittance, and they go on with the same task all their lives. That is, when they can get work; when they cannot, they starve. I see no difference between our own and other countries in this respect; nor in the respect that to a few people, the privileged classes, we give not liberty, but licence; and licence of the broadest kind. These may go over the whole world for their pleasure, spend their years in nothing but wasting the produce of the labour of other people, and we say hardly a word about it; while for them, and for

their pleasure, we condemn the mass of the people to a state of real slavery.

There is a commonly current notion (handed down to us, I suppose, from the beginning of the century, when we had an agitation against negro slavery), that 'slavery' consists in one person having the power to sell or buy the perpetual right and control of the body of another. Now, look a little deeper than this notion. Why should some people want to possess, to own, the bodies of others? Simply because in those bodies there is packed up a quantity of labour-power. It is that labour-power which men wish to buy and sell and get into their own possession. We say, therefore, that the effect of slavery is, that a man's labour-power is taken possession of by another, and used for that other's purposes, and not for the man's own. Slavery we may then define as, *the condition of a person who is compelled to serve the will and profit of another*; and if you will take that as the essential fact of slavery, you will find that so long as there has been that something called 'civilisation,' just so long there has been slavery. Here I want to point out (I must do it, in passing, to clear up the ground), that slavery may be of two kinds; namely, chattel-slavery, and what I will call 'collective-slavery.' The first is where one individual owns the individual body of another. For instance A thus owns B. As A's 'slave,' B has to do exactly what A pleases, and all the results of B's labour are disposed of as A pleases. In the second case, a body of men may hold another body of men completely in their power; and such a 'collective-slavery' has a similar result to chattel-slavery. To-day, we live in a condition of purely collective-slavery, the ages of chattel-slavery and serfdom having passed away from our part of the world.

Now, what does this world-wide and age-long circumstance of slavery arise from? Well, I do not think we have to look very far. It is the product of certain qualities in the minds and hearts both of the oppressors and the oppressed. The oppressor owns his slaves to gratify his lust of power, or his greed, or both. I do not know which of the two comes first, the greed or the lust of power, but it seems to me that these are the two roots out of which grows the oppressor. And the slave becomes possible through his own moral imperfections, exhibited in his ignorance and his helplessness. He does not know the way to liberty, he does not understand the situation, and he is unable to put himself right. He is weaker than the oppressor, mentally, if not physically, and he therefore cannot rise and redeem himself by force or skill. You have, then, one set of men, driven on by the lust of power and greed, maintaining mastery over another set, who allow the process by reason of their ignorance and helplessness.

How does slavery come into existence? How does it arise historically? To gain a lucid answer to these questions, we must look back to ancient times of tribal communism, through which all 'civilised' peoples appear to have at some early period passed. When a nation is still in infancy, a small and compact body, then the oldest man, or most respected man, is put at the head of the tribe, and the whole tribe live under him like a family under a father; getting on very tolerably indeed, as such tribes do even to-day in certain parts of the world called 'barbarous.' Slavery would arise through such tribes not having the sense and experience to adopt the communal life on a large scale, and establish a community of tribes; thus remaining apart, getting into quarrels,

and going to war one with another. In the earlier conditions, when warring tribesmen caught an enemy, they ate him: but later on it was found more profitable to use the captured man's labour for the captor's benefit. That is, broadly, how chattel-slavery originated.

But slavery on the great scale, collective-slavery, has a more extended horizon. We must again think of the period when men began to gather themselves together in settled abodes and in towns; when, from the simpler forms of tribal life, they passed into the more highly organised and complex life of the city, into 'civilisation.' In the earliest known records of cities, we find that from the earliest times chattel-slavery prevailed; and that wherever this chattel-slavery prevailed, there existed at the same time land-monopoly. The privileged people desired two things. First of all, they wanted their slaves' labour for their own profit; then, in order that the slaves might labour, their owners needed the land to put the labour upon. So it comes that chattel-slavery and land-monopoly go side-by-side.

The reason, economic of course, for the particular form of chattel-slavery in the earlier states of civilisation, was that, to get the product of another man's labour, it was needful to own the man's body; you had to put a collar round the slave's neck, and effectively 'possess' him, so that you might be able to say to him, 'You are mine, and if you do not behave as I bid you, I will lay the whip upon you, or perhaps have you put to death.' There was no other way, because if you let the man loose, he might run off into some wild part of the country, where he could pick up the means of making a much better subsistence for himself than he could have done as your slave. Such was for

the most part, the 'condition of labour' in a great city like Babylon, in Greece, in Rome, and as it is to-day in Asia and the East. The object is obvious. It was to apply, in a primitive and simple form, the doctrine of our political economists, which bids us to 'buy in the cheapest, and sell in the dearest, market.' It was to get the largest quantity of labour-power at the lowest cost of subsistence given to the labourer-slave. The exploiter, the monopolist, in those days found the need, as he does to-day, of 'cornering' something to secure his own advantage; and he cornered human labour at its source in human bodies and lives. To explain the matter in the terms of the definition of slavery already given, the exploiter sought to gain slaves, whom he might control to serve his will and his profit, instead of their own.

Christianity came into the world. It has had some influence as far as we are concerned; not yet winning practical victory, but exerting much direct and indirect influence. The world is beginning to think about Christianity, perhaps, by now. The Christian doctrine and life came into the world, and found civilisation accepting chattel-slavery as one of the unescapable economic laws, one of the edicts of the gods which there was no disputing. Opponents of Christianity often tell us that the early Christians made no agitation about slavery, that they did not institute a propaganda against the practice, and form an Anti-Slavery Society to issue leaflets and hold meetings to teach the duty of setting the slaves free. No, they did not. They did better than that. They were indeed Christians; and when men became Christian, no slavery remained among them. They lived themselves the life of Brotherhood which *is* freedom; and by their

lives, shook for the first time the foundations of slavery.

When the peoples of Europe reconstituted themselves upon the Feudal System, they did so under a much more powerful influence of Christianity than modern decriers of Feudalism imagine. They swept away the old idea of the chattel-slave, and in place of the ancient world's out-and-out bodily slavery, they produced serfdom. The feudally-organised peoples, conquering from country to country, said of those whom they conquered, 'The population belong to the land; it is right and proper that we should keep them settled on the land; it is right and proper that we, who have conquered the land, should have our wills of both land and people, and own the two.' So they turned the conquered people, whom they by law tied to the land, into serfs; they gave to slavery a new form and new name, and went on with the practice.

But the nations of the conquerors prided themselves upon being freemen, neither slaves nor serfs; and in this partial form the idea of popular freedom was revived. Here was the world's gain. Even in its mildest mode, however, serfdom did not suit the tastes of our English people at all; and during two or three centuries of our history, under the vigorous striving of the people, our ancestors, serfdom showed an increasing tendency to disappear. There came a time, which lasted through those two bright centuries of our history, the fourteenth and fifteenth, when serfdom was practically abolished, and the English were a free people, owning their own land and therefore owning themselves. Those two-hundred years were exceptional in the history of Europe, where for the most part serfdom kept a much longer and stronger

hold. We know how serfdom survived in France until the end of last century, and we know how, under the curse of that form of slavery, the whole of France's political institutions went down in blood and flame.

The object of serfdom was, then, the same as slavery. The lord had the land and had the man; and the man did his lord's will, and not his own. The serf got the lowest possible subsistence, and the lord got what amount of profit could be extracted from the serf's labour.

To-day, we boast that we have abolished slavery and serfdom. What we ought to boast, is, that we have really given new names to old things; that we have put the old names aside, got rid of the now ugly-looking words themselves, and kept the fact. Our ideas of 'freedom' are not changed very much; we have not yet attained to the conception of a society in which every individual is at liberty to freely use his needed share of earth, and to do as he himself sees fit with his life and labour. Our superstition still is that weakness and poverty ought to, and must, revere power and property.

I remember when I was a boy, a boast used to be made of the fact, that at the beginning of this century, Wilberforce and other 'great, noble, enlightened men' had moved 'the generous heart' of the English people, and had abolished slavery, (that is, chattel-slavery), once and for all. Why were they able to do this? Because the Lancashire cotton-mills were then proving that white wage-slavery is better and more profitable than the old form of chattel-slavery. In the United States of America: a country founded by the most enlightened of our own people, the best hearts and souls of us, who were driven away by religious persecution two hundred years since: actual chattel-

slavery existed up to thirty years ago. Curiously enough, it was the hard North that turned against that slavery, and the gentler South that remained in favour of it. Why? Because slavery continued profitable to the old-fashioned Southerners, but the Northerners had discovered that nominally-free wage-labour is cheaper than the old chattel-slavery. The pocket and the conscience were agreed; and here was a really great opportunity of glorifying God on the cheap. The mistaken agitations of a few enthusiastic but uninformed worshippers of the Prince of Peace assisted: and chattel-slavery in the States was drowned in the blood of nigh a million of men.

To-day, the state of things economic is changed. Of old, both in the times of chattel-slavery and of serfdom, you needed, I said, a collar round the neck of the man himself, and a parchment, or some other token, in the strong box at home, to certify that the State supported your claim upon him. As a peaceful citizen, you needed the State's help before you could really own your slave, and compel his labour to your profit. But the slave-owners do not want these things any longer. Population has increased enormously, and has, in our part of the world, taken up all the vacant land. There is practically no place now to where the slave who seeks escape from our society can go. True, he is free to move, and has the liberty of wandering the high road, if he will; but once let him leave the road, and trespass on the landlord's property, and, as we have already noted, along comes the policeman (every country district has its policeman), who walks him off, saying, "Go back to the high road. That is all there is for you in this country."

No need to own the slave's body in England,

for there is an unlimited supply of such bodies to be picked up at the price of a slave's keep, for your use while you want them, and to be thrown away when you have done with them. To-day, if you wish to make bread, clothes, houses, or any necessary article, you must be the controller of a capital of hundreds, or thousands, or tens of thousands, of pounds, before you can think of going into successful business. The working people do not possess such capital. But other people, a small body only, do; and those capital owners, property owners, who have the land and the nation's tools in their possession, compel the working classes to serve their will and profit, just as effectively as though they had collars of brass and chains of iron upon the bodies of the workers.

It is safe to say that the old forms of slavery were abolished, not merely because there was seen to be no advantage left in them, but because of the discovery of actual advantages in the new wage-slavery. This is distinctly perceptible from the history, that most instructive history, of the cotton industry in Lancashire. One advantage of the new system of slavery is this: that you need no longer care for the physical or moral welfare of your slave. You simply stand at the mill-door and take him in on Monday morning, and dismiss him, on Monday night perchance, when you do not want him any longer. In so doing, you simply obey economic laws. Harsh, are they, these economic laws? You did not make them; God made them, as He made these 'hands' also. Let God look after his own!

Then, as another advantage, it is also discovered that not only do you get rid of an unpleasant and too costly responsibility for the maintenance of

your slave, but you actually have a new and stronger means of compulsion to urge on his labour. The slave of old knew that he had a market value; that if he was put on the block, and the auctioneer stood over him and said 'How much?' so long as he had some life in him, some power to use his limbs, there was somebody who would give something for him. And this being so, the slave knew it to be his master's interest to give him food and shelter, as to a horse or cow; therefore he did not worry about his subsistence for the morrow. After all, notwithstanding the horrors depicted in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' the old days on the cotton plantation were infinitely more pleasant for the black slave, than the new days in the manufacturing town are for the white slave.

Over the new slave is always that fear of starvation. What a spur to make a man work! The classes of this country are, in hard practice, day after day, saying to the masses, (mostly unconsciously, as people who know not what they do, but sometimes in actual speech and writing), 'If you do not work to-day on our terms, you may go and starve.' The workman comes in on very nearly those terms, and does to-day more than the work of the old slave; getting for it probably even less wages than the slaves got in kind and comfort.

Let me try and prove what the position really is, by our previous definition, which says that slavery is the condition of a person who is forced to serve another's will and to work for another's profit. First of all, this question. Whose will do the mass of the workers of this country serve? Their own wills? Surely not! If workpeople did their own wills, is it imaginable for a moment that they would toil for the hours they do? Is it for his

own pleasure that a man turns out at five or six o'clock in the morning, starts work at six or seven, and continues at it until five or six o'clock in the evening? Of course not; very, very few men ever did that of their own free wills! Is it of their free wills that the operatives go into the weaving mills, and attend daylong to those spindles that fly round with an almost miraculous monotony of speed? Is it by their own wills that they are put under a nervous tension which destroys their energies and their capacities by the time they reach forty or fifty? Is it by their own wills that they use their fingers in such a manner that when they are forty or so they lose their quickness and the fineness and delicacy of their touch, and are turned adrift in favour of younger 'hands'? Surely it is not of their choice, that the workers crowd into unhealthy places to work; that they live in slums; that they take a job on Monday morning, uncertain whether or not it will cease at dinner-time. They do not make such arrangements as all these, or the arrangements would be very different! But who did make them? Their owners, the slave-owners of England! It is they who command the working classes, 'You shall come in at sunrise and work to sunset. You shall attend to hundreds or thousands of spindles more than you ought to do; you shall work under unhealthy conditions; you shall live in a slum; you shall submit to all that our struggle for profit demands; you shall submit to many things worse than ever chattel-slaves were called upon to suffer.'

And what gain shall the slave, the worker, have? Those who enquire in the next slum or row of cottages, may find the answer. A bare living in the best of times; and when out of work, star-

vation, sometimes to death. And out of such penury, profit is still made for the same class of people who always got it,—for the modern slave-owners, those who through owning land and capital, own the bodies and lives of the rest of men. You can see these exploiters' profits spent in mansions, palaces, and luxury of all sorts; in the whole wasteful living of the idle classes of rich people. And the slaves get only that bare subsistence-wage!

We commit our sins, these days, on a large scale. That is the difference between ancient and modern slavery. Where the old world took men one by one and apportioned them to individual owners, we take the whole mass of the people and make them slaves to a class.

Friends, look around you. What we have so far considered, is the real position of affairs. Many reformers, of one school and another, are always discussing the question, What is to be done? And I think our world is again about to make some discovery of the root of the disease. We have long detected how the evil works in Acts of Parliament, in Governments and the whole organisation and outward machinery of society. We have discovered these wrongs, which are outward and visible; some of us, perhaps, consider that in them we have indeed the causes of the disease. But others of us are beginning to look beyond the outward organisation and machinery of Society, and to discover that the actual roots of evil are in the hearts and lives of men themselves; in the spirit of man; below the mere show of human affairs, which are simply the phenomena, the manifestations, of the life, soul, spirit, that are within us. Jesus gave the answer to the problem of undoing slavery when He said 'The truth shall make you

free.' He preached a true 'science of life.' He said, 'Look at facts, admit facts, put them together, compare them, reason from them, learn from them, and by such a progress in truth you shall become free.' He spoke of Himself, His teaching, the love and wisdom which He made manifest in His life, as 'the way,' *the* way, in which humanity must, and will, travel. 'The truth, the life, the inner spirit and passion of existence,' He said, 'here they are. Take my teaching, my doctrine, which is truth, and this truth shall make you free.' I know that sounds very hazy to many people; and that something like it is being said regularly in most of the churches and chapels. But there is a way of interpreting this utterance which is honest, and leaves no haze. If you interpret it as pointing to the 'science of life,' then, reasoning from the facts of life, you will discover this,—which Jesus also most plainly taught,—that all social institutions, to be wise, and therefore righteous, must be based upon the equality of man with man, and must be governed by brotherly love. Again interpreting rightly, we see that our whole system of law and legality, old traditions and parchments, vested interests and private property, is swept aside by this principle as so much rubbish and dust; and in place of it we are given that one and supreme law of love. Humanity's old dead past must disappear for ever, and leave us free to momentarily renew our relations one with another by the play of truth and love in their fulness. This truth *can* make us free.

But how are we further to expound this doctrine to the people? We do indeed want to find a remedy for their, for our, woes. It seems to me that one of the things we have to teach,—to believe and practise for ourselves, and to lead

others to believe and practise,—is this,—that they are slaves, and they only, who would be slave drivers themselves if they could. Now, this sounds hard, but it is fact, that the mass of the people of England are in slavery, because they themselves have no better hope than that of owning other people when they shall have the chance. This teaching of Jesus is the *only* law of liberty. It is that which says to every man, "Hands off your neighbour. Let him alone to look after himself. See that *you* are true, see that *you* are right, and let every man have his equal, full, and perfect freedom." When we cast out the idea of making laws for, and regulating the lives of, one another, and are content to be ourselves what we ought to be; when each one seeks to direct and to govern others by the force of his own life and example, and in no other way,—then shall we indeed begin to feel the freedom that truth brings us. True freedom is of the soul, and brings with it the freedom our bodies need. Let me say here and now, that while we who hold these views are behind no man in believing that the body must be set free, we say that bodily liberty is but a little thing compared with the liberty of the soul. If we cannot get liberty for our souls, let us never hope of getting it for our bodies. We are slaves in our souls first, and in our bodies afterwards.

And finally, wherein is it, that we, who, having some liberty and some means, would with these like to do so much for the cause of humanity and righteousness, wherein is it that we are hampered and helpless? Surely we are in bondage to our fears! We are bound by the fear of death; we say, 'I must take care of this precious body of mine; feed it well and keep it going rightly; and really I think I had better tell a lie, bow down to

Mammon, occasionally, where that may be needed in the interests of this earthly body.' We are in fear of the world. We think that if we insist upon being simply right and true, the world will not like us. Yes, that is sober fact; but it remains to be proved that we ought to fear the world's dislike.

"He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

When we come to understand this doctrine of Jesus, we shall discover its meaning to be that, whether we are rich, and afraid we shall lose our property by becoming righteous, or whether we are poor, and afraid we may become still poorer; we have to learn to cast aside those fears, and to realise that there is a God in heaven and on earth, a God everywhere; a God who is Love. And when we adopt the plan of Jesus; when we insist, at all costs, upon living by the law of truth and love; we then shall know that we have found the way into all happiness and peace; and whatever our bodily condition in the world is, we are henceforth, by power of soul, free men. And only those who are thus free, are able to wield the powers that will kindle the soul of mankind to freedom.

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