

SELECTIONS.

APPEAL IN BEHALF OF THE FUGITIVE.

Extract from a Tract—just published at the Anti-Slavery Office, 221 Washington Street, Boston—entitled, 'The Duty of Disobedience to the Fugitive Slave Act: an Appeal to the Legislators of Massachusetts, By L. MARIA CHILD.'

It is well known that Southerners have repeatedly declared they do not demand fugitives merely to recover articles of property, or for the sake of making an example of them, to inspire terror in other runaways; that they have a still stronger motive, which is to humiliate the North; to make them feel that no latitude limits their mastership. Have we no honest pride, that we so tamely submit to this? What lethargic disease has fallen on Northern souls, that they dare not be as bold for Freedom as tyrants are for Slavery? It was not thus with our fathers, whose sepulchres we whiten. If old Ben Franklin had stood as near Boston Court House as his statue does, do you believe he would have remained passive, while Sims, the intelligent mechanic, was manacled and driven through the streets, guiltless of any crime, save that of wishing to be free? My belief is that the brave old printer of '76 would have drawn down the lightning out of heaven upon that procession, with a vengeance.

What satisfactory reasons can be alleged for submitting to this degradation? What good excuse can be offered? Shall we resort to the Old Testament argument, that anodyne for the consciences of 'South-side' divines? Suppose the descendants of Ham were ordained to be slaves to the end of time, for an offence committed thousands of years ago, by a progenitor they never heard of. Still, the greatest amount of theological research leaves it very uncertain who the descendants of Ham are, and where they are. I presume you would not consider the title even to one acre of land satisfactorily settled by evidence of such extremely dubious character; how much less, then, a man's ownership of himself! Then, again, if we admit that Africans are descendants of Ham, what is to be said of thousands of slaves, advertised in Southern newspapers as 'passing themselves for white men, or white women'? Runaways with 'blue eyes, light hair, and rosy complexions'? Are these sons and daughters of our Presidents, our Governors, our Senators, our Generals, and our Commodores, descendants of Ham? Are they Africans?

If you turn to the favorite New Testament argument, you will find that Paul requested Philemon to receive Onesimus, 'no longer as a servant, but as a brother beloved.' Is that the way Southern masters receive the 'fugitives from injustice' whom we drive back to them? Is it the way we expect they will be received? In 1851, the intelligent young mechanic, named Thomas Sims, escaped from a hard master, who gave him many blows and no wages. By his own courage and energy, he succeeded in reaching our Commonwealth, where mechanics are not compelled by law to work without wages. But the authorities of Boston decreed that this man was 'bound to such service or labor.' So they ordered out their troops and sent him back to his master, who caused him to be tied up and flogged, till the doctor said, 'If you strike another blow, you will kill him.' 'Let him die,' replied the master. He did nearly die in prison, but recovered to be sold farther South. Was this being received as 'a brother beloved'? Before we send back any more Onesimuses, it is necessary to have a different set of Philemons to deal with. The Scripture is clearly not obeyed, under present circumstances.

If you resort to the alleged legal obligation to return fugitives, it has more plausibility, but has it in reality any firm foundation? Americans boast of making their own laws, and of amending them whenever circumstances render it necessary. How, then, can they excuse themselves, or expect the civilized world to excuse them, for making, or sustaining, unjust and cruel laws? The Fugitive Slave Act has none of the attributes of law. If two highwaymen agreed between themselves to stand by each other in robbing helpless men, women and children, should we not find it hard work to 'conquer our prejudices' so far as to dignify their bargain with the name of law? That is the light in which the compact between North and South presents itself to the minds of intelligent slaves, and we should view it in the same way, if we were in their position. Law was established to maintain justice between man and man: and this

Act clearly maintains injustice. Law was instituted to protect the weak from the strong; this Act delivers the weak completely into the arbitrary power of the strong. 'Law is a rule of conduct, prescribed by the supreme power, commanding what is right, and forbidding what is wrong.' This is the commonly received definition of law, and obviously none more correct could be substituted for it. The application of it would at once annul the Fugitive Slave Act, and abolish slavery. That Act reverses the maxim. It commands what is wrong, and forbids what is right. It commands us to trample on the weak and defenceless, to persecute the oppressed, to be accomplices in defrauding honest laborers of their wages. It forbids us to shelter the homeless, to protect abused innocence, to feed the hungry, to 'hide the outcast.' Let theological casuists argue as they will, Christian hearts will shrink from thinking of Jesus as surrendering a fugitive slave; or of any of his apostles, unless it be Judas. Political casuists may exercise their skill in making the worse appear the better reason still all honest minds have an intuitive perception that no human enactment which violates God's laws is worthy of respect. By what law of God can we justify the treatment of Margaret Garner? the surrender of Sims and Burns? the pitiless persecution of that poor little 'famished hand'?

There is another consideration, which ought alone to have sufficient weight with us to deter us from attempting to carry out this tyrannical enactment. All history, and all experience, show it to be an immutable law of God, that whosoever injures another, injures himself in the process. These frequent scuffles between despotism and freedom, with despotism shielded by law, cannot otherwise than demoralize our people. They unsettle the popular mind concerning eternal principles of justice. They harden the heart by familiarity with violence. They accustom people to the idea that it is right for Capital to own Labor; and thus, the reverence for Liberty, which we inherited from our fathers, will gradually die out in the souls of our children. We are compelled to disobey our consciences, and repress all our humane feelings, or else disobey the law. It is a grievous wrong done to the people to place them between these alternatives. The inevitable result is to destroy the sanctity of law. The doctrine that 'might makes right,' which our rulers consent to teach the people, in order to pacify slaveholders, will come out in unexpected forms to disturb our own peace and safety. There is 'even-handed justice' in the fact that men cannot aid in enslaving others, and themselves remain free; that they cannot assist in robbing others, without endangering their own security.

Moreover, there is wrong done, even to the humblest individual, when he is compelled to be ashamed of his country. When the judge passed under chains into Boston Court House, and when Anthony Burns was sent back into slavery, I wept for my native State, as a daughter weeps for the crimes of a beloved mother. It seemed to me that I would gladly have died to have saved Massachusetts from that sin and that shame. The tears of a secluded woman, who has no vote to give, may appear to you of little consequence. But assuredly it is not well with any Commonwealth, when her daughters weep over her degeneracy and disgrace.

In the name of oppressed humanity, of violated religion, of desecrated law, of tarnished honor, of our own freedom endangered, of the moral sense of our people degraded by these evil influences, I respectfully, but most urgently entreat you to annul this infamous enactment, so far as the jurisdiction of Massachusetts extends. Our old Commonwealth has been first and foremost in many good works; let her lead in this also. And deem it not presumptuous, if I ask it likewise for my own sake. I am a humble member of the community; but I am deeply interested in the welfare and reputation of my native State, and that gives me some claim to be heard. I am growing old; and on this great question of equal rights, I have toiled for years, sometimes with a heart sickened by 'hope deferred.' I beseech you to let me die on Free Soil! Grant me the satisfaction of saying, ere I go hence—

'Slaves cannot breathe among us. If their lungs Receive our air, that moment they are free!

'They touch our country, and their shackles fall!'

If you cannot be induced to reform this great wickedness, for the sake of outraged justice and humanity, then do it for the honor of the State, for the political welfare of our own people, for the moral character of our posterity. For, as sure as there is a Righteous Ruler in the heavens, if you continue to be accomplices in violence and fraud, God will not 'save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.'

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