

"UNCLE TOM" AND THE
"CHURCH."

(From "The Churchman's Magazine.")

We believe it was Captain Basil Hall who remarked that mistakes and misapprehensions of meaning were far more apt to rise, in the course of conversation, between Englishmen and Americans than between Englishmen and natives of the European continent. This remark is, to a certain extent, perfectly just, and at the same time the reason of its justice is obvious. An Englishman in France or Germany prepares to encounter a foreign language, and accordingly arms himself with the requisite dictionaries or interpreters, unless he has artificially acquired the language beforehand. But an Englishman in America finds his own mother-tongue spoken with a certain degree of purity, and with few provincial idioms; yet while the same words are used, many of those words are used with variations in regard to their signification, which to the newly-arrived traveller, are singularly bewildering and puzzling. The American for example, speaks of a certain district of country as producing no *corn*. The Englishman with his own eyes sees the same district covered with rich crops of wheat or oats. Has the American tried to deceive him? By no means. The language of America applies the word *corn* exclusively to what we denominate *Indian corn* or *maize*, while the Englishman applies it to grain in general.

One of our American Bishops who visited England last summer unintentionally confused the minds of an attentive audience by speaking, in the course of his excellent address, of a village of his diocese in which he regretted to say, there were no less than ten or a dozen *clergymen*, each with his separate place of worship. The confusion would have been instantly removed, if an interpreter could have explained that in the common language of the Americans the word *clergyman* indicates indifferently a minister of the Church and a preacher of any sectarian party, however heterodox.

A similar confusion has been produced in the English mind by the use of the word "Church" in Mrs. Stowe's remarkable work entitled "Uncle Tom." The idea has been conveyed that the persons in America who worship according to the Prayer-book, who receive the Thirty-nine articles, and who are governed by bishops, are preeminently guilty in regard to American slavery.

Now we assure our readers that we abhor slavery in every shape, and that we desire to see all persons free in the best and highest sense of the word. But we think it highly important that English Churchmen should know the true position of their brethren in America in regard to the frightful evil in question.

As the English word *corn* has been contracted in its meaning to signify in America only *maize*, so the word "Church" has been expanded to include every sect which in any sense chooses to be considered Christian. When Mrs. Stowe therefore accuses the "Church" of participating in the guilt of slavery, she desires to be understood as accusing Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Mormons, Universalists, Unitarians, Congregationalists, &c. &c. equally with that class of Christians who in England are properly known as the "Church," and who in America are denominated the "Episcopal Church."

The accusation, on the whole, is not devoid of justice, amounting, as it does, simply to an assertion that great numbers of persons in America who profess to be Christians have acquiesced in the general tone of public opinion respecting slavery. But we must bear in mind, that as America inherited the English Church as well as English dissent, and English heresy, and English infidelity, so she also inherited English slavery. The thirteen American States which acquired their independence in 1783 were up to that period English slave-holding colonies, just like the West Indies and other possessions of Great Britain, in which slavery was commercially profitable.

But, it may be asked, why has not Christian feeling led to the abolition of slavery in America as in the West Indies? The answer is, that Christian feeling has not possessed the same advantages in the former case as in the latter. We know not how far the is-

ted Christian feeling of the West Indies alone might have succeeded in producing an aversion to slavery and its attendant evils. But we know that the final emancipation was effected by the Christian feeling of the mother country itself, a country without slaves and possessing no very direct interest in slavery. The resistance of distant and feeble colonies succumbed before the determined will of the British nation expressed in Parliament.

If the American revolution had never taken place it is very questionable whether even the British Parliament could have effected any very material alteration in the condition of the slave. If Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and other southern States, were now British colonies, the negro to this day would in all probability continue to be a mere chattel, not only in those vast and fertile regions, but in the small localities of Barbadoes and Jamaica. The interests of the cotton planter superadded to those of the cultivator of sugar, would have been enough to silence the cry of humanity even among the Lords and Commons of England.

When the thirteen American colonies became independent, they were much in the same position as the West Indies would have been, if separated, while in their slave-holding condition, from the control of the mother country. To outward appearance, the abolition of slavery among them was eminently improbable, considering how the vast majority of men are governed by the temporal interest and how few even among Christians are willing to take a high and consistent ground of self-renunciation. The new American government was also confessedly a mere federal compact between the original colonies, by which each of the new states was guaranteed the possession of its own laws and institutions. In the northern states the climate forbade the culture of sugar, cotton, and tobacco; and slave labour was consequently unprofitable. Here, therefore, Christian feeling was assisted by external causes, and slavery was gradually abolished after the separation from England. In the southern portions of the confederacy the case was wholly different, and Christian feeling generally adapted itself to surrounding circumstances.

We have remarked that the federal government of the United States is little more than a compact between separate and independent states with a view to certain special purposes. Hence the power of Congress is by no means equivalent to that of the British Parliament. If the majority of Congress were to desire the abolition of slavery, they could not abolish it even in one unwilling state without a revolution. Slavery, if abolished, must be abolished hereafter as heretofore, by the separate action of individual states in their respective local legislatures.

The only hope of the American negro under Providence, is in a change of public opinion. Such a change has been going forward rapidly of late, and the immense circulation of Mrs. Stowe's work in America, is an additional proof of this progress. Even the "Fugitive Slave Law" is an instance in point, being the result of a compromise between the two parties in Congress, by which the newly-acquired states and territories bordering on the Pacific are declared to be for ever exempt from slavery. Thus, at the cost of much suffering to individuals vast countries like California, Oregon, Utah, and New Mexico, are delivered from a curse which extends to the white as well as to the black in more equal proportion than is usually supposed.

While we admit that the "Church" in Mrs. Stowe's sense of the word, has been far too acquiescent in reference to the evils of slavery, we must remind the reader that even in this latitudinarian "Church," many exceptions must be made in favour of a higher tone of sentiment. The Methodists, and other denominations, have admitted into their conferences and assemblies the question of the sinfulness of slavery, and have endured the consequence in the sundering of their sects into smaller fragments, north and south respectively. The Roman Catholics, without maintaining the principle of abolition, have treated the slave as possessed of an immortal soul, and have sustained him in his relations as a husband and a father. Even the wretched impostor Joseph Smith, the head of the Mormons, and consequently, one of Mrs.

Stowe's "Church," expressed, in the plainest terms, his disapprobation of American slavery and of its attendant evils.

But our readers will ask, what is the aspect of our own Church in America, commonly called the "American Episcopal Church," in reference to slavery? Like the Mother Church in England, and like other branches of the Catholic Church, she has never by any corporate act, denied the lawfulness of slavery in the abstract. The private opinions of her members have, no doubt, differed upon this subject; but they have never allowed it to convulse the Church. Her bishops, clergy, and laity, north and south, continue on terms of unity and brotherly love, in which particular she presents a marked contrast to most other denominations calling themselves Christian.

In the slave-holding States generally, our Church is comparatively a feeble body, far weaker and less influential than in the north. Those immense southern regions, more than ten times the size of Great Britain, contain fifteen of our bishops, and between five and six hundred clergy. These persons are not probably inferior in Christian character to any clergy in Christendom. In becoming ministers of religion, they have sacrificed the worldly advantages which America presents so freely to the enterprising in other lines of life. Some respect therefore, is due to their opinion, as to the proper course of a Christian minister in slave-holding country.

We believe that we may state with truth, that their uniform course hitherto has been to avoid all direct attacks upon the principle of slavery, and to confine themselves to the general inculcation of Christian truth and duty. The service of the Church, the sacraments, and other holy ordinances, and the stated preaching of the Gospel, cannot be without their effect in rendering masters kind and gentle, and in supplying hope and consolation to the slave. There is reason to believe, that in "Episcopalian" congregations much has been done to convey Christian instruction to the negroes, and to mitigate the sufferings which under the American system of slavery cannot altogether be avoided.

The Bishop of our Church in Louisiana, for example, has inherited large estates, and probably several hundreds of slaves. By the laws of Louisiana (if we are not mistaken,) emancipation has been rendered impossible. The bishop does what remains in his power and determines that such power as he has shall be employed for the good of his dependents. He builds numerous chapels in various parts of his estate, employs laborious clergymen and teachers and exercises like Abraham a paternal as well as an ecclesiastical supervision over the servants "born," almost literally, "in his house."

The Bishop of Virginia emancipated his slaves on condition of their removal to Liberia in Africa, thereby sacrificing thousands in pecuniary value, and rendering himself comparatively a poor man in an unendowed Church. We recollect also the bishop of Kentucky, paying to the slave employed in his household the same amount of wages which he paid to their owners for their hire—thus giving from motives of conscience, two days' compensation for one day's work. We were acquainted with a clergyman in Virginia who at one time, possessed a handsome property in the form of slaves. From a sense of Christian duty, he emancipated them all, "doing unto them as he would wish others to do to himself." Till late in life he continued a poor clergyman, dependent on the contributions of a country parish. His emancipated negroes became wretched vagabonds, and often no doubt, bitterly regretted their former days of servitude. Ultimately by a second marriage he again acquired a considerable slave property. But, profiting by past experience, he granted no second emancipation, but confined himself to the promotion of the temporal and spiritual welfare of his people, and a provision, by will, designed to secure to them comfortable situations in the event of his decease.

Considering the manifold difficulties of the case, we are not surprised that many thoroughly conscientious persons adopt this latter course in preference to any other. Many of the negroes utterly object to Liberia, on the ground that America is their own native country, where they desire to live and die. The situation of the free negro in the United

States, is, in some respects, as distressing as that of the slave; while in Canada, the climate is, on the whole, decidedly unsuitable.

For our own parts, we conceive that the peculiar prejudice of the American people, in regard to African descent, must be surmounted, before the coloured race can be materially advanced in the social scale. Next we may hope for the enactment of laws, on the part of the several states forbidding the separation of husbands and wives, and the unnecessary scattering of families. At the same time, we may trust that the rigour of the laws may be relaxed, which forbid the effectual education of the labouring class. Should circumstances, as may be expected, depreciate the value of slave-labour to any considerable extent, we may hope that finally the slave states will enact that all negroes born after a certain time shall become free at a specified period of life. Their own circumstances would, in such case, be little changed; for they would naturally continue to work for hire on the same estate, where previously they laboured in servitude. In the course of years they might become an intelligent, contented, and happy peasantry.

But for such a change as this, or for any real change for good in the condition of the American slave, we must look to Christian principle upon public opinion, within the American people themselves. Any direct interference on the part of foreign nations, or individuals, is certain to awaken feelings of resistance on the part of the sensitive and independent people of the United States. Mrs. Stowe is an American and a lady, and writes primarily for the Americans. We are aware that her work, is, in many respects, open to criticism; and that there are persons of repute in her own country who denounce it as one-sided and exaggerated. The very discussion in America of the great questions raised upon the book, will not be without its advantage; especially if we, in England, can abstain from forcing upon the Americans our crude opinions upon a subject, the difficulties of which few of us can comprehend. In God's own time, and mainly we believe through the influence of His One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Redeemer shall "bind up the broken-hearted, shall proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

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