

**SLAVERY: ITS ORIGIN, NATURE,  
AND HISTORY, CONSIDERED IN  
THE LIGHT OF BIBLE TEACHINGS,  
MORAL JUSTICE, AND POLITICAL  
WISDOM**

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Slavery: Its Origin, Nature, and History, Considered in the Light of Bible Teachings, Moral justice, and political wisdom by Thornton Stringfellow

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**THORNTON STRINGFELLOW**

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# SLAVERY:

## ITS ORIGIN, NATURE, AND HISTORY,

CONSIDERED IN

### THE LIGHT OF BIBLE TEACHINGS, MORAL JUSTICE, AND POLITICAL WISDOM.

**LOVE** the motto, not **LIBERTY**.

*OBJECT.*—Truth spoken in Love on the subject of Abolitionism. Its character freely, thoroughly to be discussed in the light of God's word, but with careful avoidance of personalities or ascription of motives. Hoping all things. Thinking no evil.

BY

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## EXTRACT FROM ADDRESS OF PROF. S. F. B. MORSE.

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It cannot but be obvious to all intelligent minds, that among the complex questions which have so long agitated the whole land, and which have mingled their discordant elements in producing the present alarming political condition of the country, so deeply distressing to every patriotic mind, the moral and religious question of slavery stands forth most prominent. Indeed, it is the fundamental question, and demands, first of all, a satisfactory settlement; for on the right decision of this moral and religious question depend all the other questions relating to slavery. Whether slavery, or the condition of being held in subjection to the will of another, is a divine institution, sanctioned by laws and commands, and regulated from the earliest times, or is forbidden as a *sin*—as a violation of the laws of God—is surely a fundamental question. Difference here, at the start, is antipodal. The course of conduct pursued by the believers in these two extremes, must of necessity lead to results as diverse as light from darkness. Until this point is satisfactorily settled we cannot reach the expediency or in expediency, the advantage or disadvantage, of this system of servitude. If it is a *sin*, if the Bible shows it to be a *sin*, the controversy is settled; we can have no compromise with *sin*; we have nothing to do with it but to forsake it. Hence all whose consciences sustain them in that view of the question are at least consistent in their zealous opposition to slavery, and their determination to uproot it everywhere and at all hazards. On the other hand, if God has shown in his word and by his providence, that servitude or slavery, in its various modifications of form and duration, and of mild or severe character, has, from the beginning of the world, been an essential feature in His government of man; that viewed from a loftier stand-point than is circumscribed by earth or time, there are benevolent ends in part comprehensible even by our short-sightedness, and only attainable by this system, then they whose consciences sustain them in this view of the question, will be cautious how they rudely and recklessly fight against God and destroy it with violence. A glance at the character of the litigants on this question, show ranged on each side of the two opposing opinions, men of the highest intellectual and moral character. Rash, indeed, would it be to charge either party with hypocrisy. There is no need for such an uncharitable assumption. The humble seeker after truth will not suffer its golden sands to escape him, even if he has to separate them, with labor, from the mire of human weakness and error, and hence he may not neglect the extremest views of the bitterest opponents. Yet mindful of our own weakness and of our need of enlightenment, to what standard, but God's word, shall we appeal as the arbiter in such a controversy? "To the law and to the testimony."

# SLAVERY AND GOVERNMENT.

## CHAPTER I.

*What Slavery is—What Freedom is—None are 'born' free: all are 'born' slaves—Slavery a necessity—Why the white race is invested with political freedom at twenty-one—Why it is withheld from the black race for life—Slavery is just, and why—None are born equal: inequality the ground of social happiness—What government is: what its object is: where it originated: by whom it should be exercised, and why—Inferiority of the black race: the proof of it.*

It is not many years since our brethren at the North engaged in a crusade against Slavery; because (as they said) it was denounced in every page of the Bible as the greatest sin on earth.

The Bible has been examined, and it has been found that slavery is fully sanctioned by it. Nevertheless, this crusade has waxed warmer against slavery, as a sin of the deepest dye; because it was a sin (as they have said) against a higher law than the Bible. No appeal is now made to the Bible, but to consciences begotten by infidelity. By this new conscience every question of right and wrong is to be tried, and every penalty inflicted. These crusaders have adopted as their Bible, on the subject of slavery, Mr. Jefferson's declaration, that "all men are born free and equal." It may not be amiss then to try this new Bible by the common sense and the common observation of all men—to see whether it ought to have preference over the old Bible, before we throw the old one away, as our brethren of the North do when it conflicts with their new anti-slavery Bible. First, then, let us inquire,

What is Slavery in the United States?

*Answer.*—It is a system of personal servitude, under a form of government adopted for the African race, the leading principle of which belongs to every form of government among men.

*Question.*—What is that leading principle?

*Answer.*—It is submission to, and control by the will of another. This is the essential principle of all forms of government; and without it there can be no government. It is the principle ordained of God for the government of a family. Its administration is given of God to the heads of families, who have instinctively accepted and acted upon it in all ages and countries.

*Question.*—What is the amount of power in their hands to enforce obedience over children and slaves? And what is the object aimed at in its exercise?

*Answer.*—The amount of power in their hands to enforce obedience

over children and slaves, is limited to the use of all *necessary and proper* means to secure obedience, and the object aimed at in its exercise, is to develop their faculties, and fit them to take care of families, and discharge political duties.

*Question.*—What is a slave in the United States?

*Answer.*—A slave, according to the Federal Constitution, is a person who owes service or labor to another person. In the language of the Scriptures, he is a "man's money."

*Question.*—What is an apprentice in the United States?

*Answer.*—An apprentice according to the Constitution, is a person who owes service or labor to another person.

*Question.*—Does a child stand in the same relation to his father, (as regards service and subjection to his will,) that an apprentice or slave does to his master?

*Answer.*—Yes, until he is twenty-one years old.

*Question.*—Is this service, or labor of children, apprentices, and slaves, legal property in the United States?

*Answer.*—Yes, it is so declared by the laws of every State in the Union, except as to slaves, and by the slaveholding States as to them.

*Question.*—What is the difference, then, between a slave and a white minor who is called free?

*Answer.*—The difference is that a slave of the black race owes labor and subjection to his master for life; while the white minor and apprentice only owe service and subjection until they are twenty-one years old.

*Question.*—Has a parent a legal property right in the service or labor of his child, and a legal right to control him and coerce him to obedience without his consent?

*Answer.*—Yes, he has exactly the same property right in the service or labor of his child until he is twenty-one years old, and exactly the same right to control him, and to coerce obedience to his authority until that time, that the master has in and over his slave.

*Question.*—Has the parent of the child, and the master of the slave, unlimited discretion in compelling obedience to their authority?

*Answer.*—No. Both the parent and the master are restricted by statute laws, and judicial decisions, to the use of such means only as are necessary and proper to secure obedience. Both parents and masters are responsible to the State for the exercise of means that are improper and unnecessary to secure this end.

*Question.*—Why does the law give freedom to the white race at the age of twenty-one, and withhold it from the black race during life?

*Answer.*—Because experience teaches that the white race can be prepared in that time to take charge of families, and perform the duties of citizens; while, on the other hand, experience demonstrates that the black race cannot be prepared during a whole life to take charge of families, or perform the duties of citizens.

*Question.*—But if they could be prepared in that time to use freedom for their own good, and that of the community, would it be right to accord it to them?

*Answer.*—It certainly would accord with Christian obligation. The only safe guide we have in a family, or State, by which to decide the amount of self-control or freedom to which men or minors are entitled under any form of government, is experience: that, and that only, will tell us how much of freedom they can use as a good to themselves, in subordination to the general good of the family, or State. When freedom is not a good to both, it is a duty to withhold it.

*Question.*—If self-control constitutes freedom, and control by another constitutes what is properly called slavery, then is not every person to the extent of that control a slave, whether he be called free or bond?



*Answer.*—Certainly he is a slave, whether so called, or not. The name does not always indicate truly the actual condition of persons in a particular relation of life.

*Question.*—Is the citizen who owes allegiance to the State for life, as properly a slave to the State for life, as the African, who owes service or labor to his master for life?

*Answer.*—Certainly, he is as much a slave to the State, though he be called a freeman. The State subjects men while within her jurisdiction to her control, and claims a right to their service in whatever form she may in her sovereignty be pleased to call for it; so the master subjects his slave to his control, and claims a right to his service in whatever form he may call for it.

*Question.*—But is not this service or labor to the State, and this subjection to her authority, all voluntary on the part of the white race?

*Answer.*—It is not more voluntary with the white minor, and the female half of the white race, than with the black slave. Both may quietly submit to it, while neither may like it. The white minor and the black slave are both born equally subject to absolute control without their consent. Both are born in a state of domestic bondage, one for life to his master, the other for twenty-one years to his father. When this age is reached, he who has been in domestic bondage up to this time, silently acquiesces in subjection to the State, which now binds him for the balance of his life to service and subjection, as the African is bound to his master for the balance of his life. The State, who is the master of the citizen, and the man, who is the master of the slave, is rightfully clothed with authority the world over to maintain dominion over both. This authority, or power to govern them, is from God. It was given to Adam before the first child was born. God said to Eve that Adam should rule over her. This included the family and the State. From my knowledge of both races in the United States, I am of opinion that the per cent. of Africans who are satisfied with their domestic bondage, is much greater than the per cent. of the white race who are satisfied with their political bondage.

*Question.*—How is this to be accounted for?

*Answer.*—Because domestic bondmen are parts of families for whose comfort ample provision is made. They are supplied with good homes, with all the necessary wants of themselves and their families for life, in sickness and in health, in infancy and in old age,—with an entire exemption from anxious care; while political bondage subjects the citizen to pecuniary burdens and an oppressive competition, which leaves him too often without a home and a comfortable supply for his necessary wants. In addition to this, political bondage subjects the citizen to all the perils attendant upon war, and a due execution of the law, from all of which the African slave, in domestic bondage, is entirely exempted.

*Question.*—But if "all men are born free and equal," does it not follow that children must be released from parental authority and service, apprentices from service and subjection to masters, and citizens from subjection to States, as soon as slaves from subjection and service to their masters?

*Answer.*—Yes, all this follows as a necessary consequence if all men are born free and equal.

*Question.*—Well, is it not true that all men are born free and equal?

*Answer.*—No. Every man who ever raised, or saw an infant man raised to manhood, knows that it is not true.

*Question.*—What is freedom?

*Answer.*—It is defined to be "independence," "liberty," "exemption from control." Man, when born, is the most dependent creature on earth. He must be deprived of all liberty, to save his life.

*Question.*—Can he be deprived of all liberty, and still be free?

*Answer.*—He must be controlled in every thing.

*Question.*—Is he still exempt from control?

*Answer.*—There has never been an assertion made and believed, which all might know with so much certainty to be untrue. Man, when born, is helplessly dependent; free to do nothing without permission, and entirely under parental control, until he is given up to the control of the State, which holds him under control until death. If this constitutes freedom, then all men are born free, but not otherwise.

The second thing affirmed in this Declaration of Independence, and which with the above error, has been adopted by a portion of our countrymen as a part of their Bible, is, that "all men are born equal." I will only reply in language which all men know to be true, that they are not born intellectually equal; that they are not born morally equal; that they are not born politically equal; that they are not born equal in social position, or advantages; nor are they in any other sense equal, as integral parts of earthly governments, of which I can conceive, from their birth until their death. And yet a belief in these abstractions, these palpable falsehoods, is at the bottom of a crusade against organized society and constitutional liberty in the United States, which aims at the destruction of all the safeguards of life and property, and a universal overthrow of law and order, save that of the "higher law" of every murderer's conscience. We have lately had a specimen of the conscience which this "higher law" produces. It was exhibited in the person of John Brown and a few others.

This specimen is much admired by all of the same faith and order—so much so, that he is regarded by them as the second Saviour of the world,—who is destined to be as much honored for substituting his own conscience for the Bible, as Jesus Christ has been for giving eternal life to them that love him; and who prove that love, as the Bible directs, by yielding a willing obedience to law and order in all the relations of life. And because of this assumed freedom and equality, with certain assumed unalienable rights, the conclusion is drawn, according to this new political Bible, that all good government must originate in the consent of the governed. But seeing—as we all must see—that none are born either free or equal; and that subjection to government from birth is a universal necessity; it is not true that government originates in the consent of the governed. The African slave is as free to choose his government as the white minor, until the white minor reaches twenty-one years of age. At that age he *acquires* a right, in most of our States, to make, or aid in making improvements in the laws; but he can never acquire a right to abolish government, for that is God's ordinance, and cannot be rightfully abolished.

Two questions are appropriate at this point:—What is government? And what is its origin?

*Answer.*—Government is control; it is the opposite of freedom, or a right to do as we please. It is power to compel obedience to the will of a superior. Where did it originate? It originated in the will of God; and was ordained as soon as sin entered into the world, by an express delegation of power to Adam to rule his family. Family government is the true model of all government. There never has been, or can be a family where it does not co-exist. If societies or nations were all dissolved, this government would still exist. Its powers, objects, and administration would remain the same.

Family government is a necessity in nature. Every new family instinctively assumes it because it is God's ordinance. It is the best model of a State. Here the principles and objects of government are first learned. Without this school the idea of government could not be known.

Adam's family were parts of himself; and so of all families. This is the Divine guarantee for a right use of family authority. The impulses

of nature constitute the guarantee that the divinely constituted head will rule the family in righteousness, and not abuse his authority in chastizing for disobedience.

Family government cannot be dispensed with; without it, the world would be depopulated. It is the nursery and school-room in which the materials for large families or States, must of necessity be prepared. A well-governed family is the best model for a State which exists among men. It is in the family that every human being learns the nature, the necessity, and the objects of government, and the necessity for such modifications as *experience* suggests. Here we learn that government must begin in absolute despotism, instead of absolute freedom. Here we learn that all men are born slaves to parents, that parents have a right to their service; and a right to control them until they are qualified to raise families, and use political freedom. All self-control, which is freedom, is cruelty to the infant man, and utterly inconsistent with doing to others "as we would they should do unto us." It is here we learn to what extent authority may be relaxed in subordination to the general good, that what would be a good to one would be an evil to another; that the object of government is to prevent the evil, to promote the good, and to educate the body and mind. It is here we learn that the government suited to one individual, or family, would be very unsuitable to another. That the amount of self-control to which some members entitle themselves in a family, can never be safely granted to others. It is in the family we learn to love each other, to sympathize with each other, to do justice, to speak truth, what virtue is, what vice is, what personal and property rights are, what law is, what authority is, and how, and why it should be used in enforcing law. It is here we learn that age ought to control infancy, that wisdom ought to control ignorance, and that liberty of action and opinion should be accorded by a standard that experience only can furnish. It is in the family that we learn that there is a God, our responsibility to Him, and the principles contained in his word for the moral and social control of the world. It is here we learn the qualifications which fit us to raise families, and meet the responsibilities of political freedom. And here we learn that wisdom, experience, and the highest degree of interest in the well-being of those to be governed, are necessary qualifications in those who govern. This government has been sanctioned by the States of the Federal Union for every white family and their slaves.

If we war against domestic, or family government, because it claims service or labor of the African slave for life, and subjects him to the control of a master, must we not, for the same reason, wage war against it for exacting service or labor from our children, and subjecting them to our control until they are twenty-one years old? And must we not wage war against all governments which sanction the same principle, and do the same thing, as every government has done since the world began? And when this war is successfully ended against all control, except our own wills, or the new conscience of the "higher law" Bible, will there be any government left on earth to control, or prevent any being from doing all that a depraved nature may prompt him to do?

But it is said that slavery is unjust; inasmuch as it takes from the slave his labor, and the control of himself, both of which it is said belong to him. Let us examine this objection.

*Question.*—What is justice?

*Answer.*—Locke says, "it is that virtue by which we give to every man that which is his due." Shakspeare says "it is retribution;" which Bacon defines to be, "return accommodated to the action." Both definitions claim for the slave—whether the white minor, or the black African—an equivalent for the services they render, and the submission to which they are subjected.