

**CONSCIENCE AND THE CONSTITUTION:
WITH REMARKS ON THE RECENT
SPEECH OF THE HON. DANIEL WEBSTER
IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES
ON THE SUBJECT OF SLAVERY**

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Conscience and the Constitution: With Remarks on the Recent Speech of the Hon. Daniel Webster in the Senate of the United States on the Subject of Slavery by M. Stuart

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M. STUART

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CONSCIENCE AND THE CONSTITUTION

WITH

REMARKS ON THE RECENT SPEECH

OF THE

HON. DANIEL WEBSTER

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

ON THE SUBJECT OF

SLAVERY.

BY M. STUART

LATELY PROFESSOR IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AT ANDOVER.

Δούλος ἐκλήθης, μὴ σοι μελέτω.—PAUL.

BOSTON:

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1850.

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IN
MEMORY OF
HENRY VROOMAN

ANDOVER: JOHN D. FLAGG,
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED.

CONSCIENCE AND THE CONSTITUTION.

§ 1. *Introduction.*

I HAVE not selected a passage of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, to stand on my title page, without some hesitation. It is not because I am anxious about myself in the matter, that I have hesitated; for let my motto be whatever it might, unless it were some favorite passage of the so-called anti-slavery party, it would probably be read by one portion of the community, in their present state of excitement, with strong forebodings of a pro-slavery effort. Let it be so, then, if it needs must be. I am willing, for myself, to shoulder the burden, and to stand under it if I can. But I rather shrink from putting the great apostle in the fore-front of such a battle, and exposing him to the contumely which any one else must meet with, who perils a declaration of the same purport as his, on his own responsibility. The reader who does not understand Greek, may find a translation of Paul's words, in the first clause of 1 Cor. 7: 21. There it stands, as translated, in the following words: ART THOU CALLED, BEING A SERVANT, CARE NOT FOR IT. Had I adopted some motto devised by myself, expressed it in other words of just the same import as those of the apostle, and then placed this instead of the words of Paul at the head of my little pamphlet, I should unquestionably find that a cataract of obloquy and indignation would speedily be pouring upon me. Still I could have dared to commit such a deed, had I not deemed it more to my purpose to quote what Paul says, than to quote myself.

That the great apostle himself may be brought into some disrepute, among a certain class of readers, by my exposure of his sen-

timents on the present occasion, is what I fear; and this is the only ground of the hesitation to which I have adverted. If I know my own heart, I would sooner expose myself to contumely, than occasion its coming upon him. Still, he has a better shield to protect himself than I have; and his words are likely to stand, unchanged and unrepealed, when the lips and the pens of revilers will be beyond the reach of harming him or his doctrine.

It is not my present object to go minutely here into the interpretation of the words I have quoted, and of the surrounding context. This belongs to another part of my little work. I have produced the words of Paul at the beginning of my inquiries and remarks, that such of my readers as still preserve a regard for the apostle's words and sentiments, may reflect on the advice which he gives to those who are under the yoke of slavery and who have to bear its pressure, and ask themselves, whether those who do *not* bear the yoke, and are in no danger of having it put upon them, may not seriously inquire, whether the *μή σοι μὴλέτω* (*care not for it*) is not, on every ground, more applicable to them than to the sufferers. I know that there are many who will sneer at any one's suggesting, that a little more of the *laissez faire* would become them as believers in the Christian Scriptures. Yet such a suggestion seems to be needed; for even *religious* newspapers, not a few, appear utterly to ignore the apostle's words, and exhibit not a trace of ever having had cognition of them. Instead of "*not caring*," they occupy whole columns, yea whole broadsides, and now and then an *Extra* besides, with the most impassioned appeals and addresses, and with never ceasing contumely and vituperation, poured out in floods on all who, in this so-called *Land of Liberty*, use the liberty to differ from them in opinion. On all such, the rebuke of the apostle seems to be somewhat cutting. I cannot help it. I should be glad if that rebuke could be spared; for I do not court, and do not love, the business of applying it. I come to it with about as much reluctance, as Jeremiah (20: 7—10) felt to bring the message with which he was charged to the Jews. Probably I shall share the same fate that befel him.

Be this as it may, I have counted the cost, and am not satisfied that it should deter me from doing what I deem to be a sacred duty. It lies within my proper sphere of duty to hold up before the world the declarations and doctrines of God's eternal word; for I have

been a preacher of the gospel, according to the best of my knowledge and ability, for more than forty-five years. More than forty of these have been spent on the study of the Bible; and the consequence has been, that this book has taken a paramount place in my reverence, and in my sense of duty to obey it. Statesmen and jurists may discuss the great questions, now occupying all heads and all hearts, with much force and eloquence. They have done so, on both sides. Never, since the Declaration of Independence, and the formation of the United States Constitution, has there been so much deep feeling excited, or so much effort called forth. But there is, for all who profess a reverence for the Scriptures, another aspect of the great questions in agitation than that which statesmen and jurists, hampered by parliamentary tactics, can venture themselves to discuss. The majority in all our legislative bodies, as I fear, would look upon a man who should address *scriptural* arguments to them in the halls of legislation, as if he had risen from the dead, after having once been a member of the Long Parliament, in the time of Oliver Cromwell; and all the names which Butler has conjured up in his *Hudibras*, or Dr. South in his *Sermons*, or Tory writers in their diatribes, and have bestowed on the Puritan legislators, would be added to the name of the luckless wight who should once make such an appeal. Yet, forsooth, we are in a *Christian land!* Is this really so? Then may those whose life has been devoted to the teaching and diffusing of Christianity be pardoned, for sounding the words of prophets and apostles in the ears of our great community. I claim that right. I expect, however, to be condemned by some, and perhaps maligned by others, for exercising that right. No matter. It is but of little consequence what becomes of me, if the teachings of "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God" may come in their simplicity and power and authority before the public, in any manner that will attract their attention. It is too late for me to cast off the authority of that Gospel, or to shun my responsibility for proclaiming it. It would be reproachful to me in the highest degree, if I should desert the cause which I have so long and so deliberately espoused, in the day of assault or of peril.

By this time some of my readers will begin to inquire, perhaps with a degree of wonder, what has led me to such an introduction to what I have to say, on the present occasion. I feel that some apology for, or rather that some account of, my proem is due to

them. I will narrate briefly and simply what has called me out, and led me to the utterance of the preceding sentiments.

I have never been a *politician*, at least, I have never been what the world usually styles a politician. In my early days, while in my college-studies, and afterwards in the study of the law, I was warmly engaged against the Jeffersonian politics and administration. When I became a pastor of the First Church at New Haven, in Connecticut, I renounced all active pursuit of politics. I never preached a political sermon in my life. Usually I did not go to any meetings for the election of state or town officers. My people were somewhat divided in politics, and I did not like unnecessarily to offend those who differed from me, by voting against their wishes; for such was the violence of party in Jefferson-times, that offence would of course have been taken. But I never shunned voting, because I feared the consequences as to myself. It was principally because my vote was altogether unnecessary, and therefore (in my circumstances) inexpedient, there being then an overwhelming majority in Connecticut of anti-Jeffersonians. I have been more than forty years a resident and freeman in this commonwealth. During all that period, I have never voted at the elections, more than some ten or twelve times. In seasons of what I thought to be peril, I began to vote somewhat regularly; and it was under the imperial reign of Gen. Jackson, that I commenced such an exercise of my franchise-rights. But I never preached politics, or taught them, in public. I have frequented the Lecture-room, in the Theological Seminary here, near forty years; yet I believe none of all my pupils will charge me with occupying their time in political lectures. I have never written a political piece for our newspapers or magazines; except in one case now to be mentioned. In that one case, I put my hand to a *critique* on a speech of Mr. Webster, delivered at Andover; and subjoined a defence of Mr. Webster's course, in the matter of continuing to hold office under President Tyler. The people of the glorious old Bay State had been led, at that time, by the newspapers, (some of which were filled with inuendos against Mr. Webster made by interested politicians), into a disapprobation of Mr. Webster's course then, in like manner as I believe them now to be misled. When the whole case was fairly laid before them, they hastened, as a body, and with that noble spirit which they cherish, to do him justice; I hope they will not refuse the like

justice on the present occasion, if as good an account can be given of Mr. Webster's course.

If it was a sin in me, who happened, (from circumstances unsought for and unexpected, and, I may add, quite peculiar in my life), to become acquainted with the true history of Mr. Webster's Secretaryship — if it was a sin to develop the matter to the public, so be it. I do not reproach myself as yet, however, for such a sin, because I have never been able to see any atrocity in helping to do justice to a man, to whom the public were so much indebted. After a short period, from that day to this, I have neither heard nor seen any reproach to Mr. Webster, from any respectable quarter, for the course he then pursued. Yet for myself I did not, for a time, escape severe censure, on the part of some of my fellow citizens. Anonymous letters full of reproaches were sent to me; various newspaper paragraphs, for my edification, were carefully despatched to me by mail, fraught with bitter and sometimes malignant vituperation. Yet I survived. When the tornado had passed, I rose gently up, and finding no very serious bruises, I went quietly along my humble and peaceful way, as usual.

Since then, I have never meddled with politics. I have been engaged, when able to study, in other matters that I relished far more; and if I did not understand them better, it was my own fault. My increasing age and my many infirmities have given me a disrelish for the *mêlée* of political contest. It was not until within a few weeks, that I ever thought of approaching the arena of that contest, even near enough to look on and see what was doing. Unluckily for my quiet, the paper expressing approbation of Mr. Webster's late Speech was presented to me by a friend, and I was asked whether I agreed sufficiently with his views to sign it. My ready reply was in the affirmative. I put my name to the paper, and there I hope and wish it may stand. It is not a pledge, as I view the matter, that I am ready to support every shade of sentiment, on every topic upon which Mr. Webster's speech touches. That gentleman is the last man who would demand the surrender of their own individual views from his friends. But it is a pledge that I did, and it still signifies that I do, from the bottom of my heart, assent to, and agree with, all the important parts of Mr. Webster's reasoning in general; and specially, it indicates my assent to his aim and desire to cherish our Union as inviolable, and to persuade both parties to make all