

**THE BIBLE AGAINST SLAVERY; A  
VINDICATION OF THE SACRED  
SCRIPTURES AGAINST THE CHARGE  
OF AUTHORIZING SLAVERY, A  
REPLY TO BISHOP HOPKINS**

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The Bible Against Slavery; A Vindication of the Sacred Scriptures Against the Charge of Authorizing Slavery, a Reply to Bishop Hopkins by Rev. J. B. Dobbins

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**REV. J. B. DOBBINS**

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*Camden, December, 1863.*

REV. J. B. DOBBINS.

DEAR SIR :—The undersigned are a Committee appointed by "Council No. 3, of Camden Union League of America, to confer with you upon the subject of publishing in pamphlet form, the series of articles which lately appeared in print, under the head of "Bible Views of Slavery," "Bishop Hopkins Reviewed," written as we understand by you.

It has been suggested to our Council, that if these articles (in a compact form,) were distributed, they would serve as an antidote to the so-called Scriptural, but mischievous tract above named, issued and circulated, so extensively by sympathizers with the accursed system of American Slavery. If, therefore, in accordance with your views, we shall be pleased to have you take the necessary steps for an early publication of the same.

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servants,

P. C. BRINCK,  
RALPH LEE,  
CHARLES A. SPARKS,  
COOPER P. KNIGHT,  
JACOB SIDES,  
SAML. HUFFY,  
JAS. H. CHAPPELL.

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*Camden, N. J., December, 1863.*

GENTLEMEN :

The articles to which you so kindly refer, and pay me the compliment of requesting me to publish in a more permanent form, were written at the request of several prominent citizens, who believed with myself, that the effort to secure for Slavery among the masses of the people, the sanction of the Bible, ought not to be allowed to pass unnoticed.

The Bishop has been met by several "indignant protests" and scathing rebukes, for his manifest sympathy with treason and zealous defence of its source, but there has been no serious effort, so far as I know, to show the fallacy of his argument, and thus rescue the Bible from the charge of subserving the Slave interest. This I deemed necessary, and have attempted in these articles: and since their publication in a more compact and accessible form has been asked for in an informal way by many intelligent persons, and requested by yourselves in behalf of your Association, I shall take pleasure in acceding to your request, and will have them so published as soon as practicable.

Very respectfully, yours,

J. B. DOBBINS.

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## THE BIBLE VIEW OF SLAVERY.

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MR. EDITOR :—Some of our pro-slavery townsmen, are industriously circulating a Tract, bearing the name of "John W. Hopkins, Bishop of Vermont," entitled "Bible View of Slavery," in which the Right Rev. gentleman labors to prove that American Slavery is not only not a "*via*" but perfectly coincident with the teachings and spirit of both the Old and New Testaments. The pamphlet is an octavo, of 16 pages, *only about four of which* are devoted to the Scripture argument, while the remaining pages are taken up with an elaborate denial of human equality, and that "self-evident" truth that "all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights ; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," and with stern denunciations of those fanatical and ignorant persons, who "attach an *inordinate* value to their personal liberty," and especially of our anti-slavery preachers, upon whom he declares "the present perilous crisis of the nation, casts a fearful responsibility." Is that remark, about "*inordinate*" attachment to personal liberty, meant to apply to Mr. Wall, Mr. Valandigham, and their friends? Alas I am afraid the good Bishop of Vermont has been betrayed into "political preaching;" for the pamphlet seems to be a political sermon, with the "Bible view of slavery" for the text.

I think that Messrs. Wharton, Browning & Co., (the men who applied to the Bishop for the privilege to print and circulate his Bible View as a political document,) might have done better for their cause so far as the "Bible View" is concerned by republishing either Alexander Stephens' or John Mitchell's argument on the same subject. To be sure these gentlemen are now both occupying official positions in the rebel capital, but their Bible arguments are in print, and easily accessible; and as I conceive, they are altogether better and more forcible presentations of that side of the question, than those of the Right Rev. Bishop of Vermont, who seems to possess on the subject, neither the information to be expected in the minister, nor the tact of the politician.

### THE MEANING OF THE WORD SERVANT.

He sets out by affirming that "the term *servant* commonly employed by our translators has the meaning of *slave* in the Hebrew and Greek originals, as a general rule where it stands alone."

Now the best authorities tell us that *ebed* the Hebrew word

translated servant is the only word used in the Hebrew to express all the relations of servitude of every sort, that the verb *abad* means to work, to labour, and the noun *abad* means a laborer; and that it is applied to a person who performs any kind of service.

Dr. Elliott, who possesses not only an American, but also a European reputation for Biblical researches, in this line, says: "Indeed the Hebrew language had no single word to denote a slave; and the context or peculiar phraseology must be aduced to show that slavery or slave is intended as no single word, will answer this purpose."

This author says "the same remark will apply to the Greek word *doulos*—a servant and *douleo* to serve. These words are applied to any sort of service or servants. But there is a Greek word which properly means a slave; this is the word *andrapodon*. The Greeks used the word *doulos* to express a servant in the most general sense while the word *andrapodon* properly means a slave." And the latter word does not occur in the Greek New Testament. So much for his initial misrepresentations of the "Hebrew and Greek originals."

If an intelligent man, in teaching a foreigner our language, should affirm that the word *servant*; because sometimes used to express the relation of slave; "has the meaning of slave in the English language as a general rules when it stands alone," a thoughtful person could scarcely avoid suspecting him with designing to misrepresent and thus to mislead those who might accept his definition.

And the violation of truth is not less flagrant in the Bishop's declaration that the term *servant* commonly employed by our translators has the meaning of *slave* in the Hebrew and Greek originals where it stands alone—a *slave* in his sense of the word being one bound by the law to *involuntary* "servitude for life," and whose condition descends "to his offspring."

#### THE CURSE OF CANAAN.

He next comes to the curse pronounced by Noah upon Canaan, Gen. 9: 25. We shall find hereafter from the history of this case, a very strong argument against the presumption that the Bible countenances personal slavery at all. At present I desire simply to state what has never been disproved, viz. : that the Africans (for whose enslavement this text is held as the authority) are *not descended from Canaan*; and I believe it is as clear a proof of the Divine authority for the murderous outrages of the rioters of New York, as for the enslavement of *negroes*. Canaan had *ten* sons who were fathers of as many tribes dwelling principally in Palestine and Syria. It is believed that Canaan himself lived and died in Palestine, which from him was called the land of Canaan. The only descendants of Canaan (according to Granville Sharp,) who occupied any portion of Africa, were the Carthaginians, a colony on the sea coast.

They were a free people and rivalled at one period even the Roman commonwealth in power. The Africans are principally descended from the three other sons of Ham, viz. : Cush, Mezrain and Phut. This opinion is supported by all the very best authorities to which I have had access on this subject, such as Granville Sharp, Jacob Bryant, Richard Watson, &c.

It will be seen that the text in question has no relevancy whatever to the question of *negro* slavery, whatever else it may be supposed to prove.

**THEY SHALL BE YOUR BONDMEN FOREVER.—Lev. 25 : 44-6.**

Passing some minor texts for the present, I shall now proceed to the consideration of the passage in Levit. 25 : 44-46, which the Right Rev'd. advocate for the oppression of the poor, (a thing which this very lawgiver positively condemns, Ex. 22 : 21, and 23 : 9.) thinks is "too plain for controversy."

The material points in this passage are in the 44th and 46th verses—"Both thy bond men and bond maids which thou shalt have shall be of the heathen that are round about you, of them shall ye buy bond men and bond maids. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you to inherit them for a possession ; they shall be your bond men forever."

The first thing in this passage which seems to favor slavery, is the expression "*buy*;" but buying in these laws when used of servants was not of a third party but of the servant himself. The stranger bought the Hebrew, but it was of himself, Lev. 25 : 47. Joseph bought the Egyptians for Pharaoh, but he bought them of themselves, Gen. 47 : 19-23. Hence the selling was nothing more than a contract between the seller and the buyer; and the thing sold was not the man, but his service for a limited term—so much service for so much money. Thus one might "*buy*" a Hebrew servant, but not for a longer period than six years, (Ex. 12 : 2 and Deut. 15, 12;) and even the Bishop will not insist that buying in this case implied slavery.

There are two cases where persons might be sold by third parties. The *thief* might be sold for a term long enough to make legal restitution, if he were not otherwise able to satisfy the law, (Ex. 2 : 23;) but this was in the way of penalty for his crime. The father might sell his daughter, but not as a slave, but for a wife to either the master or his son. But the selling in the case of servants was not done except by themselves, and then it was nothing more than a contract to render service for a consideration. We have no instance of the sale of a slave by his master under the Jewish law.

The second point which seems to countenance the slave theory is, "Ye shall take them for an inheritance for your children forever." Having proved that the service contemplated was voluntary and paid, and that therefore the *enslavement* of the heathen was not the thing designed, we must look for another meaning;



and the only one consistent with the tenor of these laws clearly is—"Forever or through all the future you and your children shall procure the services of the heathen round about for the menial work necessary to be done in your families." If God's law had not forbidden chattel slavery, it is incredible that a man accustomed to his liberty should voluntarily sell his children through all their generations into hopeless slavery.

That the service here authorized is not slavery but a voluntary and limited servitude, will be abundantly established by the following considerations :

First. If slavery had been here established there must have been in after times a large body of slaves in Judea, as was the case in Egypt, Rome, and Greece, and as there is now in the United States. Slavery has existed in this country only two hundred and forty years, and we have now some four millions of these unhappy beings, the increase in the last sixty years being more than *three millions*. Now if from a single vessel-load of slaves there should have come, in two hundred and forty years, four million, and that too in spite of a continuous series of legal restrictions and prohibitions by both the Federal and State governments ; how is it that after slavery had been in existence nearly sixteen hundred years with no opposition and all the support of the Divine sanction, (according to the Bishop's theory) there were really no slaves in Judea in the time of Christ ?

The only servants, says a good authority, mentioned in the narratives of the Evangelists, except where the words occur in Christ's parables, are the Centurian's servant miraculously healed, and the servants of the high priest's palace, (Matt. 8 : 5 ; Mark 14 : 65 ; Luke 22 : 50,) and there is no evidence that these were slaves. "In the period elapsing from the close of the Old Testament canon till the birth of Christ," says Dr. Elliott, "there are no declarations to be found in the Apocryphal books, or in Josephus which declare or intimate that slavery existed among the Jews. Hence our Saviour, as his ministry was exercised among the Jews never came in contact with slavery among them." The Bishop affirms that Christ "lived in the midst of slavery," and that it was in full existence at the time (of Christ) in Judea" and seems to think he proves it by quoting from Gibbon a declaration that it existed in *Rome!*—a fact never disputed, and which he might have saved himself the trouble of proving. Why did he not tell us how many slaves there were in *Judea* in the time of Christ, or at the period when the Jews ceased to be an independent nation, or at any previous period instead of telling how many there were in the Roman Empire ? That would have been pertinent, as it was not slavery according to the Roman, but slavery by Jewish law, that he undertook to establish. That he did not give us the number of

slaves among the Jews is the proof that he could find no record of any, as he is entirely too much in earnest to make out his case to omit a fact so conclusive in his argument. The increase of slaves in all slave countries has been a very serious and difficult question and their numbers have not escaped the attention of the historian. The Bishop has given us the instance of Rome with her sixty millions. Three hundred years before Christ there were twice as many slaves as freemen at Athens, and we are told that the Lacedemonian youth trained up in the practice of deceiving and butchering slaves, were from time to time let loose upon them and at one time murdered three thousand in one night, and we are all familiar with the cruel edict of the Egyptian king in dooming his male Hebrew infant slaves to death simply to prevent their increase. And here the Bishop would have us believe that slavery had existed in Judea for nearly sixteen hundred years, and yet is not able to give us the name of a single author who tells us anything of their numbers and condition or even speaks of them!

If slavery had existed through more than fifteen hundred years throughout the territories of Israel, their numbers must have been enormous, and cotemporary history *could* not have ignored its existence as it has not in those countries where it did exist though at much earlier periods than the time of Christ.

In the next place slavery is rendered impossible by the divine prohibitions and restrictions found in the Mosaic code. In Ex 21 : 16, we have this law, "He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand he shall surely be put to death." This law is substantially repeated in Deuteronomy and is not directed against stealing a Hebrew as such, but against stealing *a man*; that it was not for the benefit of the Jews alone, is made further evident by the fact that Paul, after Judaism had been superseded, placed this crime among the greatest possible offences against divine or human law. 1 Tim. 1 : 9, 10. The things specifically forbidden are stealing, selling and holding man, and the penalty for the violation is the highest known to the law,—*death*. Now stealing, selling and holding men are so obviously the *three grand essential elements* of slavery, that where they are forbidden slavery is an impossibility. Liberty belongs to man by natural and divine law, and by all just human laws, and as to steal according to Blackstone is "to take that which belongs to another without his consent," slavery must necessarily originate in *theft*. I suppose that even those northern parasites of the slave system are hardly brazen enough to insist that men ever of their own free choice consented to be taken and sold into perpetual slavery, and that their enslavement is therefore not a violation of the law against man-stealing. Dr. R. C. Breckinridge, a Kentuckian and uncle to the Ex-Vice-President, and now traitor General Breckinridge, says, in answer to all these special pleadings in favor of

the system, "Out upon such folly! The man who cannot see that involuntary domestic slavery as it *exists among us* is founded on the principle of *taking by force that which is another's* has *simply no moral sense.*"

Purchase implies sale; but if God has authorized the buying of a man, how can he in the name of justice and consistency brand the selling as a capital offence, since that is essential to the transaction! Will those modern Shylocks who insist upon "the law" please explain how they can get their pound of flesh from this living body without "one drop of blood?" How they can buy in accordance with God's laws when these laws under the heaviest penalties forbid the sale? The fact is there were no sales and hence as Dr. Elliot well says, "In the whole history of the Jews there is no mention of slaves as an article of commerce. There is no mention of them in the goods received. There is no instance of public sales. We have no mention of either a market-place for slaves nor of slave merchants. There were, we allow, such compacts as were necessary in fixing the terms of service between different classes of servants and their masters, in reference to the various times and conditions of service, but no sales of men as property." "Nor was there any foreign slave trade between the Jews and other nations. To facilitate trade Solomon built Tadmor or Palmyra and Geber on the Red Sea. Yet in every allusion to the trade carried on with these and other nations there is no allusion to the traffic in slaves. There is mention of gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks, but no allusion to a commerce in slaves. If slavery existed among the Jews there must have been some account of the traffic in slaves, but as there is an absence of all this the conclusion is that the trade did not exist; and slavery could not exist without a slave trade of some sort."

And this law equally forbids the *holding* of the stolen man. "By this law," says Dr. Clark in his commentary upon it, "every man-stealer and every receiver of the stolen person should lose his life no matter whether the latter stole the man himself or gave money to a slave captain or negro-dealer to steal for him." If all the holders of stolen men in our own country had been put to death, the few sympathizers with treason among us like this Bishop might have found something to do besides denouncing the purest patriots of the country as responsible for all the horrors of this desolating rebellion, and thus mislead the honest and well-meaning masses by means of ugly names; but men with such low views of the value of personal liberty and of their selfish instincts, would not probably have been better employed.

It is not surprising that the brethren of this Bishop in the ministry of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Philadelphia, to the number of 79, including the Bishop of the Diocese, should feel compelled to make their "public protest" against "this defence of Southern Slavery," and to declare that "as ministers