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The De Christianizing of Slavery
The Historical Result of a Christian
"How Uncle Tom's Cabin De-christianized Slavery."

The relation of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" to the abolition of slavery not only in the United States but throughout the Christian world, is a very peculiar one. *Since the time of Luther no single person has been directly responsible for a result of such magnitude, as Mrs Stow.* *In no other modern instance is the sociological value of public sentiment so strongly shown; nor, for that matter, has any single* Great as were the services of Lincoln and his compeers in the events by which the institution of slavery was overthrown with us, a candid study of the moral forces on which those events rested shows that the greatest among them was the christian conscience of this unpretentious New England woman, whose intuitions became more potent than all the controversies of the pulpit and the forum. Her genius, in its religious imagination, cut the Gordian knot of Christian civilization and made Lincoln and Grant, Appomatox and the Constitutional Amendments possible. The merit of the early abolitionists is not lessened by this fact, since but for them she herself would have been an impossibility. Her pen was the instrument that rendered their thought effectual and brought about in a single decade what the most hopeful had not dared look for in a century. The marvel of this result can only be appreciated by a careful view of the attitude of

Christianity toward slavery from its earliest times down to the appearance of "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

The early church ~~was~~ more or less earnestly opposed to slavery--especially to the enslavement of believers. It is doubtful if its antagonism to the principle of human servitude went farther than this, but it ^{held} beyond question ~~held~~ that for one Christian to hold another in bondage was, at least, unseemly. There does not seem to have been any abhorrence of it as a wrong done the individual or a crime against manhood, ^{that is, sectually hateful.} ~~Also, the early church recognized the civil relation of the institution, and addressed its injunctions both to master and servant, prescribing the duty of each to the other.~~

In the latter days of the Roman Empire and the chaotic period which succeeded it, however, religious institutions became the recipient of gifts of slaves, as well as of lands and privileges, so that by the beginning of the ninth century the church was directly or indirectly committed to bondage of whatever character prevailed in the various countries where its abbeys and monasteries ^{But} were located. After the tenth century we find numerous papal utterances condemning the practice, and great stress laid on one element of objection not wholly religious: it is declared not only

to be obnoxious that one Christian should hold another in bonds, but that people of the same race and tongue should so degrade each other. This sentiment grew in strength under the spirit of religious and individual equality which was the keynote of the Reformation, and became the real impulse that caused the passing ^{away} of serfdom and other forms of feudal proprietorship in man, throughout the nations subject to its influence; and ripened, eventually, into the doctrine of the rights of man as the prime object of society and government, as proclaimed by the French philosophers of the eighteenth century, which found its first political expression in our Declaration of Independence, and a later and bloodier one in the French Revolution.

The emphasis placed on identity of race and creed as the sinful and abhorrent element of human bondage naturally prepared the way for an evasion by converse, -- to wit: that it be not wrong to enslave one of different race who is not a Christian. Hence the apparent contradiction of popes ~~es~~ fulminating for centuries against the enslavement of white believers, in the most seathing terms, and in 1482 granting to Prince Henry the Navigator the right to capture blackamoors in all that part of Africa lying beyond Cape Boyador, bring them to Europe and sell them as slaves and

giving the King of Portugal a perpetual and exclusive concession to continue the traffic. Prince Henry was at the head of the Order of Christ, one of the great military-religious societies of the day, and one of the professed purposes, and no doubt a most sincere and earnest one, of his explorations, was the spread of the Christian faith. This explains not only the approval Pope Eugenius IV gave to the project of enslaving--and converting--the luckless African, but the instant endorsement it received from the very peoples who were themselves, by force of Christian sentiment just breaking the bonds of individual and class dependency.

The four centuries ensuing, which may be termed the slave-era of modern civilization, were more pronouncedly "Christian" in character than any other period in history. However, the term was not identical in significance then as now. Theologically, it meant the same, of course. That is, it was the same system of Salvation. But so far as affairs terrestrial were concerned, it was almost antipodal. Everything was judged by its relation to the Christian dogma of future life and divine command to believe. Right, wrong, science, government,--everything, social and political, was tested by its attitude to the faith. "The Earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" was the foundation of ~~that~~ civilization ^{which} ~~that~~ came out of Rome,

and which, despite all revolt against dogma, had the stamp of Rome upon it

To this initial concept was added the plain deduction that Christianity, being the heir of God's favor and the representation of his power, was charged with doing his will upon the earth, especially in the conversion of the heathen. This gave Christian nations not only the right to control the earth, but also the people inhabiting it, whose duty was to believe in the Lord; or to be made to believe in Him by whatever means it was in the power of God's people to exercise to that end. It was an age of "Christian" rights, "Christian" duty, overtopping and eradicating rather than strengthening, ethical obligations. The faith had not been humanized. Its function was salvation, not justice from man to man nor regard for ^{the} earthly welfare of classes and peoples. The unbeliever had no rights, and it was the duty of the true believer to despoil, subjugate and oppress him in order to compel him to accept salvation, or to destroy him if he proved contumacious.

The African was a heathen and so fit for spoilation: he was of another race: and thus Negro slavery as an eminently Christian institution as established.

What would have been the result if the ^{known} world had remained as it then

was, it is hard to guess. It could not have taken any secure hold in Europe because her supply of dependent labor was even then greater than there was means or opportunity to utilize. Nor could slavery of just that description exist where the population was already congested perilously near the limit of agricultural supply and among peoples where every man was expected to be a soldier as well as a producer.

The discovery of the New World supplied both a motive and an opportunity for instant expansion. Greed, the universal source of collective wrong, saw fabulous profit in bringing African cheap labor to the mighty task of subduing the primeval forests, while religion condoned the wrong because of the added opportunity it gave for the victim's salvation. The fearless Las Casas aroused a sentiment against the enslavement of the native races, and their intractability made it unprofitable, but every European nation that claimed a part of the new world accepted the African as a God-given bondsman. The denunciation of Canaan and the curse of Ham were quoted as evidences of divine approval, and descent from the unfortunate son of the intoxicated patriarch being assumed, the rest was easy and it became a matter of duty to fulfill the divine anathema as well as to reduce to the state of grace the unhappy heir of divine displeasure.

This was the status of thought touching the matter when the speculations of the French Philosophers concerning the rights of man began to ~~an~~ make appeal to the civilized conscience. Unfortunately, the friends of man were then accounted the enemies of God. The free-thinker was looked upon as an evil doer, his rejection of Christian ^{tenets} ~~tenets~~ being regarded as the greatest possible crime against society. "Tom Paine, the infidel", one of the institution's ^{earliest and} boldest opponents, was denounced hardly less bitterly for his unbelief than for his assaults on it. "Abolition" and "infidelity" came to be almost synonymous terms to the popular mind, not because all abolitionists were infidels, by and means, but because so many infidels were abolitionists.

Though Whitfield advocated slavery as a means of grace to whites and blacks alike, Wesley denounced it, ^{but} ~~though~~ his followers in America did not; The Quakers alone as a sect, were consistently united against it. But though the Constitution of the United States was its Gibraltar, the Supreme Court its ^{and} servant, all parties its tools, by far the most powerful force in perpetuating the iniquity against man, was the Christian sentiment of the civilized world. Such is the history of the Christianization of sla-

very, a fact so well ^{estab} accomplished that when in 1851 the publication of a single book accomplished almost in an hour what a century of controversy could never have affected, it can only be called a miracle, -- the De-christianization of slavery, from which its overthrow resulted as a necessary and unavoidable consequence.

Men comprehend the truth only as they are fitted to receive it, and fifty years ago it was just becoming recognized by an active minority of the churches that the Master's teaching everywhere enjoined equality of right and identity of obligation, setting aside no rich with special duties, no poor with specific ills, no assured inheritors of ^{pride} ~~control~~ or of contumely. With this ^{as an} undercurrent of ^{general} thought, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" suddenly revealed to every mind the essentially un-christian character of slavery as practiced in America. Every page of the book, every line almost, rings with the inconsistency of ^{life} every phase of slavery with the Christ-idea. The characters are all Christian types -- or potential types -- with unchristian contrasts. We see and admire the Christ-like resignation of the slave, the Christian slave; ^{we} ~~the~~ pity of the Christian master, and weep with the woe of the Christian slave-mother, whose child was legally fatherless, name =

less; hate the unchristian brute who in half a hundred languages is called "the fiend Legree", and applaud the Christian citizen who puts his duty to his God above obedience to law. In short, there is a ceaseless panorama of the Christian slave community. There ~~were~~ ^{are} no "situations", no denunciations, nothing that could not be paralleled in actual, commonplace life, nothing but truths told in the simplest manner by a pen guided by a mind calm, merciful, full of love for all mankind.

Every reader knew instinctively that the indictment was just; the Christian arraignment of a "Christian" institution. All saw that murder, adultery, torture, broken hearts and embruted lives were the unavoidable results of any slavery, even the most merciful and "Christian", and that such evils could not be tolerated, most of all when inflicted by one ^{≠ true} believer on another, be his race what it may.

It is doubtful if the book could have been written by any one but a woman, with a woman's pitying instincts and loving blindness, and peculiar limitations of experience, joined with a most supreme Christian hope and faith. It was the lens which focussed the rays from "the great white throne" upon the slaves fetters until they melted beyond human power to ever forge again, for with the prop of religious approbation ^{removed}, the institution fell into disgrace.

in every civilized nation, and the word is obsolete in all languages of Christendom, except as a descriptive term of a past condition, ^{for} the genius of a Christian woman showed that no man for whom Christ died could be rightously held by another's will--though a Christian will--with no more moral or ethieal privileges than ^{are granted to} any unthinking creature of lowest scale on the ladder of life.

Albion W. Tourgée.