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THE ELEMENTS

OF

MORAL SCIENCE.

BY

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relation which these regulations have established. The will of the society needs to be obeyed, unless it can be shown to be contrary to the will of God; and, to learn the will of God on the subject, our best appeal is to the Holy Scriptures.

In the first book of the Bible the origin of slavery is thus recorded: "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren."¹ This curse was denounced by the patriarch Noah, because of a crime committed by his son Ham, the father of Canaan; and it was probably recorded in part for the encouragement of the Israelites in their wars against the descendants of Canaan. The curse of Ham's transgression fell heavily on the Canaanites; but it was not confined to this branch of his family. The enslaved negroes in our midst are his descendants, and their condition agrees with this ancient prediction. The fact that the slavery of Ham's descendants was predicted, does not prove that the enslaving of them was right; for the crucifixion of Christ was predetermined in the counsels of God, and foretold by ancient prophets; and yet the agents in effecting it were held guilty for the act, which they are said to have perpetrated with "wicked hands."² But the words of Noah are more than a mere prediction. They are a denunciation of God's displeasure at the sin of Ham, and an explanation of the degradation which has fallen on his posterity.

As the sons of Adam are bound to submit patiently to the curse which requires them to earn their bread in the sweat of their face, so the sons of Ham are bound to submit patiently to the curse which has doomed them to bondage. To the sons of Adam, who come into the world depraved, the labor, which the curse

¹ Gen. ix. 25.

² Acts ii. 23.

denounced, is in fact a blessing; and its beneficial effects on the fallen race demonstrate that the offended Judge in the midst of wrath remembered mercy. So the bondage which Ham's descendants endure in our land is overruled by the wisdom and benevolence of Providence to their good. An alleviation of the curse which has fallen on them consists in the adaptedness of their mental constitution to endure the degradation of slavery; and they have, therefore, been preserved from the waste and prospective annihilation to which the Indian tribes of America have been subjected. The Africans have multiplied in their slavery; have been better provided for than they would have been in the land of their forefathers; have been protected from the tyranny of oppressive kings, and the miseries of desolating wars; and, above all, have been brought under the influence of the gospel, in circumstances far more favorable to their civilization and evangelization than heathen nations generally enjoy.

But these benefits, it may be said, were not contemplated by those who enslaved them. Granted; but they ought to be contemplated by every wise and benevolent friend of the African race. He may learn from the prophetic curse denounced by Noah, that their slavery is a part of the mysterious plan according to which God is governing the world; and he will be careful not rashly to oppose this plan, lest haply he be found fighting against God. The benevolent design of Providence in bringing the sons of Africa into bondage in the United States, is too manifest to be misinterpreted. It may be regarded as a stupendous missionary movement, accomplishing more in the evangelizing of the heathen than all the missionary operations of Christian churches throughout the world. Let no man oppose this movement by forbidding the holding of

slaves, until he can produce divine authority for the prohibition.

The book of Genesis presents a further account of slavery in the history of Abraham, the friend of God, and father of the faithful. This great and good man was commanded to circumcise the servants born in his house, and bought with money;¹ and, in the solemn covenant transaction in which this command was given, there is no intimation that the existence of slavery in his family was displeasing to God. What was the precise extent of Abraham's power over these servants, we have not the means of knowing. In many countries the power of life and death has been held by kings over their subjects, and by masters over their slaves. If one of Abraham's servants had perpetrated a crime worthy of death, what would have been the process of his trial and condemnation, we know not; but we know that the patriarch so far claimed a right over the lives of his servants that he employed them to the number of three hundred and eighteen² in military service against the five kings that invaded the country which he inhabited.

Numerous passages of the Old Testament contain historic references to slavery. In the law given by Moses, it was expressly provided that the Hebrews might take to themselves bond-men from the neighboring heathen nations;³ and in the decalogue, designed for universal and perpetual obligation, the relation of master and servant is as clearly recognised as that of husband and wife, or of parent and child; and the master's right of property in his servant is not only recognised, but also protected even against covetousness.⁴

In the New Testament we have frequent allusions to

¹ Gen. xvii. 13. ² Gen. xiv. 14. ³ Lev. xxv. 44. ⁴ Ex. xx. 10, 17.