

CHAPTER XV.

SLAVERY AND SLAVERY.

I MUST leave it to the reader to carry on in other directions, if he choose, such inquiries as those to which the last three chapters have been devoted.* The more carefully he examines, the more fully will he see that at the root of every social problem lies a social wrong, that "ignorance, neglect or contempt of human rights are the causes of public misfortunes and corruptions of government." Yet, in truth, no elaborate examination is necessary. To understand why material progress does not benefit the masses requires but a recognition of the self-evident truth that man cannot live without land; that it is only on land and from land that human labor can produce.

Robinson Crusoe, as we all know, took Friday as his slave. Suppose, however, that instead of taking Friday as his slave, Robinson Crusoe had welcomed him as a man and a brother; had read him a Declaration of Independence, an Emancipation Proclamation and a Fifteenth Amendment, and informed him that he was a free and independent citizen, entitled to vote and hold office; but had at the same time also informed him that that particular island was his (Robinson Crusoe's) private and exclusive

* They are pursued in more regular and scientific form in "Progress and Poverty," a book to which I must refer the reader a more elaborate discussion of economic questions.

property. What would have been the difference? Since Friday could not fly up into the air nor swim off through the sea, since if he lived at all he must live on the island, he would have been in one case as much a slave as in the other. Crusoe's ownership of the island would be equivalent to his ownership of Friday.

Chattel slavery is, in fact, merely the rude and primitive mode of property in man. It only grows up where population is sparse; it never, save by virtue of special circumstances, continues where the pressure of population gives land a high value, for in that case the ownership of land gives all the power that comes from the ownership of men, in more convenient form. When in the course of history we see the conquerors making chattel slaves of the conquered, it is always where population is sparse and land of little value, or where they want to carry off their human spoil. In other cases, the conquerors merely appropriate the lands of the conquered, by which means they just as effectually, and much more conveniently, compel the conquered to work for them. It was not until the great estates of the rich patricians began to depopulate Italy that the importation of slaves began. In Turkey and Egypt, where chattel slavery is yet legal, it is confined to the inmates and attendants of harems. English ships carried negro slaves to America, and not to England or Ireland, because in America land was cheap and labor was valuable, while in western Europe land was valuable and labor was cheap. As soon as the possibility of expansion over new land ceased, chattel slavery would have died out in our Southern States. As it is, Southern planters do not regret the abolition of slavery. They get out of the freedmen as tenants as much as they got out of them as slaves. While as for predial slavery—the attachment of serfs to the soil—the form of chattel slavery which existed longest in Europe, it is only of use to the proprietor where there is little

competition for land. Neither predial slavery nor absolute chattel slavery could have added to the Irish landlord's virtual ownership of men—to his power to make them work for him without return. Their own competition for the means of livelihood insured him all they possibly could give. To the English proprietor the ownership of slaves would be only a burden and a loss, when he can get laborers for less than it would cost to maintain them as slaves, and when they are become ill or infirm can turn them on the parish. Or what would the New England manufacturer gain by the enslavement of his operatives? The competition with each other of so-called freemen, who are denied all right to the soil of what is called *their* country, brings him labor cheaper and more conveniently than would chattel slavery.

That a people can be enslaved just as effectually by making property of their lands as by making property of their bodies, is a truth that conquerors in all ages have recognized, and that, as society developed, the strong and unscrupulous who desired to live off the labor of others, have been prompt to see. The coarser form of slavery, in which each particular slave is the property of a particular owner, is fitted only for a rude state of society, and with social development entails more and more care, trouble and expense upon the owner. But by making property of the land instead of the person, much care, supervision and expense are saved the proprietors; and though no particular slave is owned by a particular master, yet the one class still appropriates the labor of the other class as before.

That each particular slave should be owned by a particular master would in fact become, as social development went on, and industrial organization grew complex, a manifest disadvantage to the masters. They would be at the trouble of whipping, or otherwise compelling the

slaves to work; at the cost of watching them, and of keeping them when ill or unproductive; at the trouble of finding work for them to do, or of hiring them out, as at different seasons or at different times, the number of slaves which different owners or different contractors could advantageously employ would vary. As social development went on, these inconveniences might, were there no other way of obviating them, have led slave-owners to adopt some such device for the joint ownership and management of slaves, as the mutual convenience of capitalists has led to in the management of capital. In a rude state of society, the man who wants to have money ready for use must hoard it, or, if he travels, carry it with him. The man who has capital must use it himself or lend it. But mutual convenience has, as society developed, suggested methods of saving this trouble. The man who wishes to have his money accessible turns it over to a bank, which does not agree to keep or hand him back that particular money, but money to that amount. And so by turning over his capital to savings-banks or trust companies, or by buying the stock or bonds of corporations, he gets rid of all trouble of handling and employing it. Had chattel slavery continued, some similar device for the ownership and management of slaves would in time have been adopted. But by changing the form of slavery—by freeing men and appropriating land—all the advantages of chattel slavery can be secured without any of the disadvantages which in a complex society attend the owning of a particular man by a particular master.

Unable to employ themselves, the nominally free laborers are forced by their competition with each other to pay as rent all their earnings above a bare living, or to sell their labor for wages which give but a bare living; and as landowners the ex-slaveholders are enabled as before, to appropriate to themselves the labor or the produce of

the labor of their former chattels, having in the value which this power of appropriating the proceeds of labor gives to the ownership of land, a capitalized value equivalent, or more than equivalent, to the value of their slaves. They no longer have to drive their slaves to work; want and the fear of want do that more effectually than the lash. They no longer have the trouble of looking out for their employment or hiring out their labor, or the expense of keeping them when they cannot work. That is thrown upon the slaves. The tribute that they still wring from labor seems like voluntary payment. In fact, they take it as their honest share of the rewards of production—since *they* furnish the land! And they find so-called political economists, to say nothing of so-called preachers of Christianity, to tell them it is so.

We of the United States take credit for having abolished slavery. Passing the question of how much credit the majority of us are entitled to for the abolition of negro slavery, it remains true that we have abolished only one form of slavery—and that a primitive form which had been abolished in the greater portion of the country by social development, and that, notwithstanding its race character gave it peculiar tenacity, would in time have been abolished in the same way in other parts of the country. We have not really abolished slavery; we have retained it in its most insidious and wide-spread form—in a form which applies to whites as to blacks. So far from having abolished slavery, it is extending and intensifying, and we make no scruple of selling into it our own children—the citizens of the Republic yet to be. For what else are we doing in selling the land on which future citizens must live, if they are to live at all?

The essence of slavery is the robbery of labor. It consists in compelling men to work, yet taking from them all the produce of their labor except what suffices for a bare

living. Of how many of our "free and equal American citizens" is that already the lot? And of how many more is it coming to be the lot?

In all our cities there are, even in good times, thousands and thousands of men who would gladly go to work for wages that would give them merely board and clothes—that is to say, who would gladly accept the wages of slaves. As I have previously stated, the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics both declare that in the majority of cases the earnings of wage-workers will not maintain their families, and must be pieced out by the earnings of women and children. In our richest States are to be found men reduced to a virtual peonage—living in their employers' houses, trading at their stores, and for the most part unable to get out of their debt from one year's end to the other. In New York, shirts are made for thirty-five cents a dozen, and women working from fourteen to sixteen hours a day average three dollars or four dollars a week. There are cities where the prices of such work are lower still. As a matter of dollars and cents, no master could afford to work slaves so hard and keep them so cheaply.

But it may be said that the analogy between our industrial system and chattel slavery is only supported by the consideration of extremes. Between those who get but a bare living and those who can live luxuriously on the earnings of others, are many gradations, and here lies the great middle class. Between all classes, moreover, a constant movement of individuals is going on. The millionaire's grandchildren may be tramps, while even the poor man who has lost hope for himself may cherish it for his son. Moreover, it is not true that all the difference between what labor fairly earns and what labor really gets goes to the owners of land. And with us, in the United States, a great many of the owners of land are small

owners—men who own the homesteads in which they live or the soil which they till, and who combine the characters of laborer and landowner.

These objections will be best met by endeavoring to imagine a well-developed society, like our own, in which chattel slavery exists without distinction of race. To do this requires some imagination, for we know of no such case. Chattel slavery had died out in Europe before modern civilization began, and in the New World has existed only as race slavery, and in communities of low industrial development.

But if we do imagine slavery without race distinction in a progressive community, we shall see that society, even if starting from a point where the greater part of the people were made the chattel slaves of the rest, could not long consist of but the two classes, masters and slaves. The indolence, interest and necessity of the masters would soon develop a class of intermediaries between the completely enslaved and themselves. To supervise the labor of the slaves, and to keep them in subjection, it would be necessary to take, from the ranks of the slaves, overseers, policemen, etc., and to reward them by more of the produce of slave labor than goes to the ordinary slave. So, too, would it be necessary to draw out special skill and talent. And in the course of social development a class of traders would necessarily arise, who, exchanging the products of slave labor, would retain a considerable portion; and a class of contractors, who, hiring slave labor from the masters, would also retain a portion of its produce. Thus, between the slaves forced to work for a bare living and the masters who lived without work, intermediaries of various grades would be developed, some of whom would doubtless acquire large wealth.

And in the mutations of fortune, some slaveholders would be constantly falling into the class of intermediaries,

and finally into the class of slaves, while individual slaves would be rising. The conscience, benevolence or gratitude of masters would lead them occasionally to manumit slaves; their interest would lead them to reward the diligence, inventiveness, fidelity to themselves, or treachery to their fellows, of particular slaves. Thus, as has often occurred in slave countries, we would find slaves who were free to make what they could on condition of paying so much to their masters every month or every quarter; slaves who had partially bought their freedom, for a day or two days or three days in the week, or for certain months in the year, and those who had completely bought themselves, or had been presented with their freedom. And, as has always happened where slavery had not race character, some of these ex-slaves or their children would, in the constant movement, be always working their way to the highest places, so that in such a state of society the apologists of things as they are would triumphantly point to these examples, saying, "See how beautiful a thing is slavery! Any slave can become a slaveholder himself if he is only faithful, industrious and prudent! It is only their own ignorance and dissipation and laziness that prevent all slaves from becoming masters!" And then they would indulge in a moan for human nature. "Alas!" they would say, "the fault is not in slavery; it is in human nature"—meaning, of course, other human nature than their own. And if any one hinted at the abolition of slavery, they would charge him with assailing the sacred rights of property, and of endeavoring to rob poor blind widow women of the slaves that were their sole dependence; call him a crank and a communist; an enemy of man and a defier of God!

Consider, furthermore, the operation of taxation in an advanced society based on chattel slavery; the effect of the establishment of monopolies of manufacture, trade and

transportation; of the creation of public debts, etc., and you will see that in reality the social phenomena would be essentially the same if men were made property as they are under the system that makes land property.

It must be remembered, however, that the slavery that results from the appropriation of land does not come suddenly, but insidiously and progressively. Where population is sparse and land of little value, the institution of private property in land may exist without its effects being much felt. As it becomes more and more difficult to get land, so will the virtual enslavement of the laboring-classes go on. As the value of land rises, more and more of the earnings of labor will be demanded for the use of land, until finally nothing is left to laborers but the wages of slavery—a bare living.

But the degree as well as the manner in which individuals are affected by this movement must vary very much. Where the ownership of land has been much diffused, there will remain, for some time after the mere laborer has been reduced to the wages of slavery, a greater body of smaller landowners occupying an intermediate position, and who, according to the land they hold, and the relation which it bears to their labor, may, to make a comparison with chattel slavery, be compared, in their gradations, to the owners of a few slaves; to those who own no slaves but are themselves free; or to partial slaves, compelled to render service for one, two, three, four or five days in the week, but for the rest of the time their own masters. As land becomes more and more valuable this class will gradually pass into the ranks of the completely enslaved. The independent American farmer working with his own hands on his own land is doomed as certainly as two thousand years ago his prototype of Italy was doomed. He must disappear, with the development of the private ownership of land, as the English yeoman has already disappeared.

We have abolished negro slavery in the United States. But how small is the real benefit to the slave. George M. Jackson writes me from St. Louis, under date of August 15, 1883:

During the war I served in a Kentucky regiment in the Federal army. When the war broke out, my father owned sixty slaves. I had not been back to my old Kentucky home for years until a short time ago, when I was met by one of my father's old negroes, who said to me: "Mas George, you say you sot us free; but 'fore God, I'm wus off than when I belonged to your father." The planters, on the other hand, are contented with the change. They say: "How foolish it was in us to go to war for slavery. We get labor cheaper now than when we owned the slaves." How do they get it cheaper? Why, in the shape of rents they take more of the labor of the negro than they could under slavery, for then they were compelled to return him sufficient food, clothing and medical attendance to keep him well, and were compelled by conscience and public opinion, as well as by law, to keep him when he could no longer work. Now their interest and responsibility cease when they have got all the work out of him they can.

In one of his novels, Capt. Marryat tells of a school-master who announced that he had abandoned the use of the rod. When tender mothers, tempted by this announcement, brought their boys to his institution, he was eloquent in his denunciations of the barbarism of the rod; but no sooner had the doors closed upon them than the luckless pupils found that the master had only abandoned the use of the rod for the use of the cane! Very much like this is our abolition of negro slavery.

The only one of our prominent men who had any glimmering of what was really necessary to the abolition of slavery was Thaddeus Stevens, but it was only a glimmering. "Forty acres and a mule" would have been a measure of scant justice to the freedmen, and it would for a while have given them something of that personal independence which is necessary to freedom. Yet only for a

while. In the course of time, and as the pressure of population increased, the forty acres would, with the majority of them, have been mortgaged and the mule sold, and they would soon have been, as now, competitors for a foothold upon the earth and for the means of making a living from it. Such a measure would have given the freedmen a fairer start, and for many of them would have postponed the evil day; but that is all. Land being private property, that evil day *must* come.

I do not deny that the blacks of the South have in some things gained by the abolition of chattel slavery. I will not even insist that, on the whole, their material condition has not been improved. But it must be remembered that the South is yet but sparsely settled, and is behindhand in industrial development. The continued existence of slavery there was partly the effect and partly the cause of this. As population increases, as industry is developed, the condition of the freedmen must become harder and harder. As yet, land is comparatively cheap in the South, and there is much not only unused but unclaimed. The consequence is, that the freedmen are not yet driven into that fierce competition which must come with denser population; there is no seeming surplus of labor seeking employment on any terms, as in the North. The freedmen merely get a living, as in the days of slavery, and in many cases not so good a living; but still there is little or no difficulty in getting that. To compare fairly the new estate of the freedmen with the old, we must wait until in population and industrial development the South begins to approach the condition of the North.

But not even in the North (nor, for that matter, even in Europe) has that form of slavery which necessarily results from the disinheritance of labor by the monopolization of land, yet reached its culmination. For the vast area of unoccupied land on this continent has prevented the full

effects of modern development from being felt. As it becomes more and more difficult to obtain land, so will the virtual enslavement of the laboring-classes go on. As the value of land rises, more and more of the earnings of labor will be demanded for the use of land—that is to say, laborers must give a greater and greater portion of their time up to the service of the landlord, until, finally, no matter how hard they work, nothing is left them but a bare living.

Of the two systems of slavery, I think there can be no doubt that upon the same moral level, that which makes property of persons is more humane than that which results from making private property of land. The cruelties which are perpetrated under the system of chattel slavery are more striking and arouse more indignation because they are the conscious acts of individuals. But for the suffering of the poor under the more refined system no one in particular seems responsible. That one human being should be deliberately burned by other human beings excites our imagination and arouses our indignation much more than the great fire or railroad accident in which a hundred people are roasted alive. But this very fact permits cruelties that would not be tolerated under the one system to pass almost unnoticed under the other. Human beings are overworked, are starved, are robbed of all the light and sweetness of life, are condemned to ignorance and brutishness, and to the infection of physical and moral disease; are driven to crime and suicide, not by other individuals, but by iron necessities for which it seems that no one in particular is responsible.

To match from the annals of chattel slavery the horrors that day after day transpire unnoticed in the heart of Christian civilization it would be necessary to go back to ancient slavery, to the chronicles of Spanish conquest in the New World, or to stories of the Middle Passage.

That chattel slavery is not the worst form of slavery we know from the fact that in countries where it has prevailed irrespective of race distinctions, the ranks of chattel slaves have been recruited from the ranks of the free poor, who, driven by distress, have sold themselves or their children. And I think no one who reads our daily papers can doubt that even already, in the United States, there are many who, did chattel slavery, without race distinction, exist among us, would gladly sell themselves or their children, and who would really make a good exchange for their nominal freedom in doing so.

We have not abolished slavery. We never can abolish slavery, until we honestly accept the fundamental truth asserted by the Declaration of Independence and secure to all the equal and unalienable rights with which they are endowed by their Creator. If we cannot or will not do that, then, as a matter of humanity and social stability, it might be well, would it avail, to consider whether it were not wise to amend our constitution and permit poor whites and blacks alike to sell themselves and their children to good masters. If we must have slavery, it were better in the form in which the slave knows his owner, and the heart and conscience and pride of that owner can be appealed to. Better breed children for the slaves of good, Christian, civilized people, than breed them for the brothel or the penitentiary. But alas! that recourse is denied. Supposing we did legalize chattel slavery again, who would buy men when men can be hired so cheaply?