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For the first time in half a century, McCabe's shocking description of the relationship of christianity to slavery is once again available.

# Christianity & Slavery



by

Joseph McCabe

See Sharp Press

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See Sharp Press ♦ Tucson, Arizona ♦ 1998

## Publisher's Note

During its day, the original publisher of this pamphlet, the Haldeman-Julius Company of Girard, Kansas, was the most important publisher of radical materials in the United States. From the founding of his company in 1919 until his early death in 1951—probably hastened by IRS harassment—E. Haldeman-Julius published more than 2500 books and pamphlets, many of which were written by anarchists, atheists, and socialists.

One of Haldeman-Julius's most important and most prolific writers was Joseph McCabe, the author of this pamphlet. In regard to Christianity and, especially, Catholicism, McCabe was perhaps the most learned atheist writer who ever lived. This was a result of his native gifts and his background—he was a former Catholic priest, fluent in Latin and several other languages, who had taught philosophy and ecclesiastical history in a Catholic college. During his lifetime (1867–1956) he translated dozens of books and wrote hundreds of his own books and pamphlets, all on various aspects of history, and a great many on religious topics. Perhaps his most important work was *A Rationalist Encyclopedia*, published in the World War II era, and of which he was editor.

The original edition of this work appeared in 1926, a time when McCabe was nearly 60, but still in his prime. *Christianity & Slavery* originally appeared as one of the Haldeman-Julius "Little Blue Books"—3¼" X 4¾" pamphlets printed on very cheap paper and set in 8-point type. (This is 8-point type.) For this edition I've reproduced the type from the Little Blue Book, but have blown it up to 125% of original size to increase readability.

I'm very happy to bring this pamphlet to light again, and thus introduce Joseph McCabe to a new generation of readers.

—Chaz Bufe, December 25, 1997

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## CHRISTIANITY AND SLAVERY

### CHAPTER I.

#### PAGANISM AND SLAVERY

About the year 100 A. D. two remarkable lectures on slavery were delivered in Rome. The central part of Rome was a very broad open space, the Forum, crowded with statues and works of art, lined with beautiful marble temples and public halls. In these halls lectures were delivered, just as they are in New York and Chicago today; and, as the Romans knew and practised shorthand as well as we do, many of the lectures have been preserved for us.

The orator to whom I now refer was the eloquent Greek Stoic, Dion Chrysostom, or "Dion of the Golden Mouth." He was no demagogue. At times you would see him driving about Rome with the great emperor, Trajan, of whom he was an intimate friend. He was the idol of the thoughtful section of the Roman nobility. And for the two days—the subject was too large for one day—Dion had announced as his subject "Slavery": a delicate topic, one would imagine, if pagan Rome were quite the slave-driving city it is commonly supposed to have been, unless the aristocratic orator intended to justify the institution for his aristocratic audience, every member of which owned many slaves.

But Dion, as we read in the extant lectures, denounced slavery as unjust. About the same time there was in Rome a very democratic poet named Juvenal who was putting in fiery verse, or satire, certain statements about the brutality of the Roman aristocrats to their slaves. Every religious writer in the world knows those Satires of Juvenal; although every classical authority in the world will warn you not to take their statements seriously. But no religious writer in the world seems ever to have heard of Dion Chrysostom and his denunciation of slavery.

It is quite formal, explicit and lengthy. It fills two lectures. Dion rightly says that, when the Romans adopted slavery, they were making a humane improvement upon an earlier custom. The older practice was to put to death men taken captive in war. The soldier's business

was to see that the fighters, or potential fighters, on the side of the enemy were annihilated. Then the Romans, as they became civilized, gave the captives their lives, but made slaves of them. The time has come, Dion says, to recognize a higher standard: "If this method of making slaves is not just, then all the other methods bear the taint of injustice, so that no one can truly be called a slave." Herē is an express and honorable condemnation of slavery, by a well-known friend of the Emperor, in the most public and effective circumstances, at a time when the Christians were a mere handful of obscure folk, mumbling a Greek liturgy and debating whether the end of the world was not at hand.

Strange that you never heard of this before, you may say. You were given the impression that the pagan world lived almost entirely on the labor of slaves, treated the slaves brutally, and never perceived the injustice and inhumanity of the arrangement. You thought that it was one of the specific services of Christianity to the world that it "broke the fetters of the slave." And I tell the religious reader once more, as I do in *The Degradation of Woman*, (Little Blue Book No. 1122) that what is still said on this subject from end to end of Christendom is *the exact opposite of the undisputed historical truth*.

I am, as I said, in four books examining four specific and important Christian claims of service to the race. The clergy claim that Christianity elevated woman; and we saw that it actually and demonstrably degraded woman (Little Blue Book No. 1122). Now we have the claim that the Church denounced and abolished slavery; and we shall see, on the same plain and incontrovertible historical evidence, that it never denounced slavery and had nothing to do with the abolition of it. Then we shall find exactly the same situation in regard to the claim that the Church gave the world schools (Little Blue Book No. 1128), taught the world purity, inspired art; fostered learning, or in any way helped civilization.

I do not love strong statements. They are apt to please the people of your own party, but alienate the sympathy of those whom you wish

to convince. Here, however, I deliberately say to the religious reader that the claims of service with which he is familiar are *the exact opposite of the truth*, and there is no dispute about the facts.

I proved that, surely, in *The Degradation of Woman* (Little Blue Book No. 1122). It is just as easy to prove that it is the reverse of the truth to say that Christianity abolished slavery and gave the world education; and I say this knowing well that H. G. Wells has endorsed the Christian claim. No one admires Wells' ability and service to this generation more than I do, but here he made, or borrowed, a statement which he had never examined. I have minutely examined these four claims and the original evidence in connection with them in a series of works—*The Bible in Europe*, *The Religion of Woman*, *Woman in Political Evolution*, *The Church and the People*, *The Influence of the Church on Marriage and Divorce*, *Crises in the History of the Papacy*, etc.—and I speak confidently. In this book I will show that the undisputed historical facts are that:

(1) The Greek and Roman moralists perceived the injustice of slavery, often denounced it, and rendered great services to the slave.

(2) No Christian leader denounced slavery until the ninth century, when the age of slavery was over.

(3) In the Christian Middle Ages the workers were far worse off, because nearly everyone was a serf, and serfdom was slavery under another name.

(4) The betterment of the condition of the workers has been won quite independently of religion and to an enormous extent in spite of the churches.

We are not concerned here with slavery in the pagan world, generally, but only in that part of the world, the Roman Empire, in which Christianity came to confront it. To try to make a point of the broad fact that paganism in general was based upon slavery and Christendom was not is foolish; and in any case we had better wait and see upon what kind of labor Christendom was based. The slave in Greece—he married, held property, and was humanely treated—was better off than the Christian serf. As to Egypt and Babylonia we

cannot say to what extent there was slavery and how slaves were generally treated.

Very different figures are given of the proportion of slaves in the Roman Republic and Empire. Recent authorities admit that all these figures are rash and most of them greatly exaggerated. It is safe only to say that probably there were more than two slaves to each free man in the hundred million people of the Empire. They were mostly farm-laborers in the provinces. A successful war might bring into the Empire a hundred thousand captives, and they were enslaved on the great imperial corn-estates or on private estates. In Rome there were between 300,000 and 400,000 free workers. It was on their labor that the city rested. The Roman slaves were mainly domestic, and they were not, as a rule, ill treated.

On the immense farms in the provinces the captured Gauls or Germans or Slavs were at first vilely treated. Lamentable as this was, it hardly becomes a Christian to throw stones. He forgets that while Romans were then only a few centuries removed from barbarism, Christendom, nearly two thousand years later, set up a system of black slavery with equally vile conditions.

Into this Roman world came the theories and sentiments of the Greek philosophers. The Roman fully recognized the superior culture of the older civilization across the Adriatic Sea, and it was not long before every educated Roman was either a Stoic or an Epicurean, or both; for they blended the two, taking the best qualities and omitting the defects of each. In practice, however, it was chiefly the Stoic ethic which informed their views on public questions.

It is amusing to read Christian writers on the Stoics. The popular writer and the preacher, of course, have never heard of the Stoics. Their views of ancient history are melodramatic, even comic. All the world was wicked and Polytheistic until the wonderfully original gospel of Christ came along. The Christian scholar knows better, and he has to notice the "stoic religion." He calls it a religion because he has to admit that its moral code was very high, as high as the Christian; and he is not willing to admit that there could be such a high code apart from religion. It was not a religion.

It never urged any man to worship the gods, if there were any, and it expressly dissociated the moral code from gods or anything spiritual. The Stoics were Materialists.

The complaint of the Christian scholar generally is that it was a very fine, but a very aristocratic, moral code. It was for the intellectuals, the educated. It was a philosophy. It was "cold." Christianity was warm, was simple, was calculated to appeal to the great mass of the people and get things done.

And we may readily admit that Stoicism, as such, could never be the guiding principle of the world. It was an ethical exaggeration; and the mass of the people will in practice never tolerate moral exaggerations, Christian or otherwise. It was a philosophy, whereas the need was for a plain human rule of life, based upon experience. Yet the Christian scholar who talks learnedly about the futility of Stoicism is as blind as a bat. Stoicism simply transformed Roman sentiment by its doctrine of the equality and brotherhood of men. It had a magnificent practical triumph.

Let me again underline a truth which is a simple historical fact. *There have in history been two great periods of benevolence and social services: one was under the pagan Stoics and the other is under modern paganism.* The Christian Era lies between these two paganisms, and it has as poor a record of social service as one can imagine. You may learn the truth of this in regard to woman (Little Blue Book No. 1122). Now for the slave. Elsewhere you may learn about education (Little Book Book No. 1128) and philanthropy.

"It is an historical fact, supported by the most positive of evidence," says the Protestant historian Dr. E. Reich, "that slavery in the Roman Empire was mitigated by the noble philosophy of the Stoics, and not by the teaching of the Church Fathers, who never thought of recommending the abolition of slavery." (*History of Civilization*, p. 421.)

By the first century the Stoics, as we saw, openly condemned slavery. Other Greek moralists besides the Stoics condemned it. Plutarch condemned it. Epicurus had come near to condemning it three centuries earlier when he had

defined the slave as "a friend in an inferior condition"; and the Epicurean Hegesias had maintained that slaves were the equals of free men. Florentinus and Ulpian, the two famous Stoic jurists, declared that the enslavement of a man was against the law of nature, the supreme standard of the Stoic. Seneca insisted that the slaves were our "lowly friends," and he pleaded repeatedly and nobly for them. Pliny shows us in his letters that by the second century the slaves were very humanely treated even on provincial estates. Juvenal fiercely attacked inhumanity to slaves.

Yet I presume that all that any religious reader is likely to know about Roman slavery is that the rich patricians had large armies of slaves on their estates and treated them like cattle. He is never told that this refers to the early period of Roman expansion, and that before the end of the first century the slaves were, as we shall see, protected by law.

He has probably heard how Cato made some callous remark about his slaves; and he is not told that the pagan writer who has preserved it for us gives it expressly as an instance of "a mean and ungenerous spirit." Quite certainly he will have heard how rich Romans used to throw their slaves to the fishes; and he is never told that only one such case is recorded, and that the pagan writer who records it says that the patrician in question was "worthy of a thousand deaths" for his brutality (Seneca, *On Clemency*, I, 18). Thus is the faith defended.

I imagine that any thoughtful clergyman would refer me, for the Christian case against the pagans, to Brace's *Gesta Christi*. It is in this section a tissue of inaccuracies and sophistry. Mr. Brace first asks us to admire the thoughtfulness of Jesus in *not* condemning slavery, because it would have led to economic chaos. A lot Jesus, the prophet of poverty, the predictor of the end of the world, cared about economic chaos! Moreover, if any man supposes that a condemnation of slavery by Jesus would have influenced the Roman world before the fifth century, he has a singular idea of history.

Mr. Brace then placidly turns round on the pagans, who may be presumed to have had

some concern for economic stability, and censures them for not abolishing slavery! He is not even just to them. He tells us that old and infirm slaves were exposed on an island in the Tiber. Naturally: in the temples of Aesculapius, which were hospitals. He asks us to believe that Juvenal, the Bolshevik of the time, disdained slaves; and we find, on looking up the passage—to which Mr. Brace gives the usual wrong reference—that Juvenal has put the words into the mouth of a Roman aristocrat.

Mr. Brace recognizes the sentiments of the Stoics, but they had, he says, only a "superficial influence." Let us see. The Cornelian Law (B. C. 82) made the murder of a slave equally punishable with that of a free man. The Petronian Law (B. C. 32) forbade masters to send their slaves to fight wild beasts in the amphitheater. The Emperor Nero enabled the slave to appeal to court against bad treatment on the part of his master. The Emperor Hadrian abolished the old subterranean dungeons for slaves, renewed the laws which punished the murder of a slave or the use of slaves in the amphitheater, and banished a wealthy lady for cruelty to her slaves. The Emperor Antoninus Pius enacted that a slave who sought refuge from a cruel or hard master at an altar or an imperial statue should be sold to a new master. The Emperor Caracalla forbade parents to sell their children as slaves. The Emperor Diocletian forbade a man to sell himself as a slave, or a creditor to enslave a debtor. A dozen other laws protected the slave from injustice or vile treatment. An account of them will be found in the two principal works on slavery, Ingram's *Slavery and Serfdom* and Letourneau's *L'évolution de l'esclavage*.

The truth is that all the Christian writers on the subject are befogged by the old idea of the history of the world. The Roman Empire was wicked and polytheistic: Christianity was virtuous and zealous. We have seen how false this old picture is. Precisely in the time of Christ the Greco-Roman world was witnessing a remarkable moral and religious advance. Dr. John Oakesmith has a useful chapter (ch. 7) of his *Religion of Plutarch* on what he calls the "strenuous moral earnestness" that came over the Roman world just before the time of Christ, and I will quote his summary:

The moral reformation officially inaugurated by Augustus [27 B. C. to 14 A. D.] appears, in the light of these indications, as corresponding to an increased tendency to virtue actually leavening Greco-Roman society. The formal acts of the Caesar, the policy of his ministers, the religious sentiment of Horace and of Virgil, the Stoic fervor of Seneca and of Lucan, the martyr spirit of the Thraseas and the Arrias, the tyrannizing morality of Juvenal, the kindly humanity of Pliny the Younger, the missionary enthusiasm of Dion, the gentle persuasiveness of Plutarch, are all common indications of the good that still interfused the Roman world; all point, as indeed many other signs also point, to the existence of a widespread belief that virtuous ideals and virtuous actions were an inheritance of which mankind ought not to allow itself to be easily deprived.

The two leading recent works on the period, the French Academician G. Boissier's *Religion Romaine* and Sir Samuel Dill's *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, entirely agree with this. The idea of the age was high, and we find, in accordance with it, as Sir S. Dill says, that "the slave is treated by all the great leaders of moral reform as a being of the same mold as his master, his equal, if not superior, in capacity for virtue" (p. 3).

## CHAPTER II.

### THE GOSPEL AND THE SLAVE

I have amply proved the first of the four points which I set out to substantiate: the pagan moralists fully perceived the injustice of slavery and rendered great service to the slave. I have proved it not by searching the by-ways of history for neglected statements, but by summarizing the evidence which will be found in any technical work on slavery or any authoritative recent work on the period. There is no dispute about the matter.

There can be no doubt that, if the Roman Empire had continued and developed normally, slavery would have been abolished. Abolition would, as every American knows, have been a colossal task. It would have been far more terrible in Rome than in the southern States, because the entire Empire rested to a great extent upon slave-labor. The immense privileges even of the Roman working men were based upon the labor of slaves in the provinces.

Yet public feeling was profoundly affected by the Stoic principle, and the "manumission" of slaves—the grant or sale of freedom to them—was a daily occurrence. Even before Christ this liberation proceeded on so large a scale that the Emperor Augustus checked it for a time, on political grounds. The Stoics urged it and facilitated it, and the final term of the movement was certain.

Rome, however, fell upon evil days just at the time when the humanitarian gospel was accepted. The manhood of Italy, then of the provinces, was almost exhausted in war. The Empire was so vast, its frontiers so far-flung, that the military burden was terrible; and frontier-wars naturally increased as the military forces weakened. The third century was one of great poverty and confusion. In the fourth century there was a recovery, but the Empire was bleeding to death, and new formidable forces were advancing upon it.

Early in the fifth century it fell. The great slave-owners, the imperial estates and the wealthy Romans, were ruined. The whole economic system was shattered. The old slaves were not "freed": they found themselves free. No one "broke their fetters." They had no fetters. But the barbarians slew or sent into exile the owners, destroyed the connection of the provinces with Rome, and wrecked the administration of the estates. The slaves dispersed and there were now no Roman troops to prevent them.

Thus we can write the history of ancient slavery without any reference to Christianity. If it were not for this religious controversy which perverts the facts of history, the Christian religion would hardly be noticed in any complete and impartial study of Roman slavery. All that would be noted would be that some of the Christian Emperors of the fourth century issued edicts about the condition of slaves; though they are, as we shall see, much less important than the great measures of the pagan emperors. It would then be recorded that the new Christian masters of Europe, petty princes, bishops, abbots, and land-owners, continued to use slave-labor. But it was comparatively easy to deal with this new kind of slavery, and Christendom, tardily recognizing a little of the

Stoic ethic, turned, it into serfdom: which would have horrified the Stoics.

How, then, has this persistent belief that Christianity broke the fetters of the slave originated and been maintained? Naturally, in the same way as the belief that the Church emancipated woman. It is a quite modern belief. Until recent times nobody cared two pins about the social services of religion. Its business was to save souls. When men could no longer be prevented from attaching importance to social interests, however, the cry arose that religion was just the thing to serve us. The history of the past was caricatured. Already everybody believed that the era before Christ was dark and impotent, and the Christian Era brought a wonderful transformation. Part of this transformation, it was now said, was the uplifting of woman, the emancipation of the slave, the opening of schools, the purification of morals, the beginning of charity, and so on. Neither preachers nor their hearers read the facts of ancient history.

Let us see for ourselves, as usual. What is there in the Bible that even tends to discourage or condemn slavery? Not a word from cover to cover. Apologists manage to find a word or two which they can twist into a desperate defense of woman, but there is not a single phrase, of Jehovah or Jesus or Paul, that they can, with all their ingenuity, represent as a condemnation of slavery or war, the two most colossal evils of the ancient world.

As I have said, one of the ablest of the apologists actually turns this silence of the Bible into a piece of high diplomacy. Jesus did not want to cause the economic ruin of the Empire, so he did not condemn slavery! How religious readers permit such stuff to be presented to them one cannot imagine.

A few years ago the Christian Evidence Society of Britain engaged a man to "answer" me on the subject of Christianity and woman. The paltry little booklet he produced was, of course, no answer at all. It was a jumble of statements which the man did not himself understand, seasoned with abuse and violence. But the most amusing part was an appeal for funds by a Dr. Ballard who wrote the introduction. He confessed that this sort of literature does not pay its way. One is not surprised.

There is no need for rhetoric. Jesus, believing that the end of the world was near, never troubled about any social question. I repeat frequently this reminder of his belief in the speedy dissolution of the world, which no apologist can explain away, because it is the key to the ethic of Jesus. It is panic-morality, and purely individualistic. The ship was sinking, and men must look to their individual safety. Why bother to chart the course for tomorrow? War, poverty, slavery, and ignorance would end, Jesus thought, in his own or the next generation. There was no need to paint a house that was on the verge of collapse.

Throughout the Bible slavery is as cheerfully and leniently assumed as are war, poverty, and royalty. In the English Bible there is frequent mention, especially in the parables, of "servants." The Greek word is generally "slaves." Jesus talks about them as coolly as we talk about our housemaids or nurses. Naturally, he would say that we must love them: we must love all men (unless they reject our ideas). But there is not a syllable of condemnation of the institution of slavery. Fornication is a shuddering thing; but the slavery of fifty or sixty million human beings is not a matter for strong language. Paul approves the institution of slavery, in just the same way. He is, in fact, worse than Jesus. He saw slaves all over the Greco-Roman world and he never said a word of protest.

As to the customary quibble, that these reforms were "implied" in the teaching of Jesus, it reminds me of Disraeli's famous joke. Asked his religion, he (being a Rationalist, yet a politician) said that he held "the religion of every sensible man." And to the question what that was he replied that no sensible man ever tells. It reminds me also of the great achievement of Pope Leo XIII, who at last (in the eighteenth century of Papal power) found the courage declare that the worker was entitled to "a living wage." But when the clergy found that working men of the nineteenth century were not so easily duped by phrases, and wanted to know what *was* a living wage, the Pope refused to answer the questions privately submitted to him.

Jesus certainly desired justice and charity. But the question precisely was whether slavery

was just or unjust, whether woman's position was just or unjust, and so on. A general insistence on justice settles no question. French, Germans, Austrians, English, and Americans were all equally convinced that they were just in the Great War; and their clergy, almost to a man, assured them that they were. In an industrial dispute both sides claim that they are just; and it is like blowing tobacco smoke upon a fire for the clergy to talk to them of justice.

But we need not linger here. The teaching of Jesus slowly spread over the Greco-Roman world. We are told (without proof, of course) that it was particularly attractive to slaves. However that may be, its supreme representatives, its most learned expositors, its most saintly and fearless interpreters, saw slavery everywhere. Did they denounce it? Here is another historical truth to underline: *For eight hundred years no Christian leader condemned slavery.* And here is one for the Roman Catholic: *No Pope ever condemned slavery.* In Rome the Pope saw more slavery than in any other city in the world. The life of Rome was based upon the labor of millions of slaves in the provinces. All the dreadful things quoted about pagan slavery are from Roman writers. And no Pope ever uttered a syllable of condemnation of slavery.

Negative statements are a little dangerous. I borrowed this statement, that no Christian writer condemned slavery until the ninth century, from Ingram's *Slavery and Serfdom*, which is the best authority on the subject. Then I waited for the reply. It came in a shabby booklet or pamphlet from the Christian Evidence Society; and it reminded me of the Irishman's complaint about his sandwich, that there was "so much mustard for so little mate." In quite a fury of righteous indignation the clerical writer exposed my "lies" to the contempt of the Christian world. He had found—or he confessed that some industrious theologian had found for him—one Christian condemnation of slavery in those eight hundred years!

Now, I did not profess to have read every page of every Christian work for eight centuries. I know the Migne collection of this literature as well as anybody, and have spent,

in all, many weary months over it. But it was fair to assume that theologians would long ago have quoted Christian condemnations of slavery, if there were any; and none had appeared. The great search now yielded a sort of condemnation of slavery in a work ascribed to Gregory of Nyssa, one of the least influential of the Fathers. How I would have treasured that solitary gem; but, alas, it was spurious. The authorship of the work is disputed, and the author, whoever he is, does not so much condemn slavery as an unjust institution, but attacks all holding of property, including slaves.

The Christian would find a sense of humor more valuable than many prayers. For more than eight hundred years all Christendom was silent about slavery, except that some unknown monk—the writer seems to be a monk—attacked the possession of slaves and of all other property. Then you are told, even by H. G. Wells, that Christianity abolished slavery. Surely, it is a matter for one's sense of humor?

I have said that the Christian, or more or less Christian, Emperors improved the lot of the slave. Not one of them spoke of it as the great lawyers Ulpian and Florentinus, or the philosophers Plutarch and Dion—"mere Stoics," these were—had done. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine were as silent as John Chrysostom, Clement of Alexandria, and Cyprian.

In point of fact, what the Christian Emperors did was slight, and it was generally in the interest of the Church. Not a word was said by any Pope or bishop or saint about the remaining serious hardships of slaves: they could not marry, they could (unlike free men) be tortured to get evidence, and they could be burned alive for false charges against their masters. Constantine even abolished some of the reforms. He again allowed parents to sell their children into slavery and permitted the finder of an exposed child to enslave it (and sell it as a slave). He passed a brutal law that if a Christian woman had intercourse with one of her slaves, both should be put to death.

The Emperor Gratian, who, at episcopal orders, began the persecution of the pagans, is said by Mr. Brace to have passed an excellent law setting free slaves who gave evidence against "those guilty of certain capital of-

fenses." Do Christian apologists ever tell the truth? The truth is that Gratian passed a new law freeing any slave who denounced his master for *treason*, but condemning him to be burned alive—a piece of savagery unknown in Rome—if he brought any other charge!

Brace equally misrepresents the "reforms" of Theodosius and Justinian. He says that Justinian allowed slaves to contract "a kind of marriage." Wonderful, isn't it? The world had to be Christian for a century and a half before Christians allowed slaves to contract "a kind of marriage." Until then they could go to hell their own way. Slaves are not remarkable for chastity. And, to crown the matter, this *contubernium* which Justinian (who had married a notorious prostitute) permitted was *not* marriage from the Christian point of view. As Dean Milman says, in his *History of Latin Christianity*, the Church did not recognize or bless the marriages of slaves until the ninth century. One would have thought that it would at least have looked after their souls.

What amazes one is the cool effrontery of the modern claim for early Christianity. Did it admit slaves to its ministry? No, said "St. Leo the Great," the most religious Pope of the fifth century, they must not be admitted "lest the sacred ministry be *polluted* by the vileness of their association." The Council of Chalcedon had said the same thing.

Did it allow slaves to marry free men or women? On the contrary, it forbade such marriages under the direst penalties. In the new Christian order of the sixth and seventh and eighth centuries the slave witness was still tortured, the slave accused of a crime was judged by a special procedure, the female slave was held so low that intercourse with her was not adultery in law, the children of slaves remained slaves.

The only thing claimed by any serious writer is that the Church encouraged owners to free slaves. So had the Stoics done, and owners had long ago found a free worker more profitable than a sullen slave. For a time the Church encouraged manumission because it turned the slave into a free Christian. When all were Christians, churchmen were not so eager. The Catholic historian Muratori finds

that the monasteries, which had large bodies of slaves, very rarely freed them.

The conversion of slavery into serfdom was, in fact, a very slow economic process. The destruction of the old system of slavery is clear enough. The entire economic system of which it was a part was destroyed. A man in Rome could no longer control a thousand slaves in the provinces. If anybody freed the Roman slaves, it was the barbarians.

Once the actual destructive movements of the barbarians were over, Europe settled down in a new and half-barbaric economic system. Teutonic chiefs became princes, dukes, and counts, controlling large territories. A new brood of land-owners grew. Monasteries multiplied—I nearly said, miraculously; but there was no miracle. The fat, easy life attracted myriads of serfs and slaves; and they had gangs of real slaves to do the work for them on the estates given them. They had no taxes, no military burdens. Moreover, poverty was so great in the desolated continent that men everywhere sold themselves or their children into slavery. Lecky holds that in the Christian Europe of the sixth and seventh centuries there were more slaves than there had been in the pagan Roman Empire. The Catholic historian Guizot says that in the eighth and ninth centuries the Church consisted of "a population of slaves."

The true and typical attitude of the churchman is seen in Pope "St. Gregory the Great." Possibly some Catholic may be surprised at my effrontery in quoting Gregory. Did he not say in one of his letters that all men are "born free," that slaves are only such by "the law of nations," and that it is proper to free slaves? Oh, yes. I know the letter well: much better than the Catholic writers (and even Ingram, who, being a Positivist, favors the Church when he can) who quote it. The Pope is writing to two of his slaves. He is giving them their freedom. But this is the little suppressed fact—they have inherited money, and Gregory secures the money for the Church!

Pope Gregory, my Catholic friend, was the greatest slave-owner in the world in the sixth century. Announcing that the end of the world was to come in 600 A. D., he kindly allowed land-owners and slave-owners to hand over their

property to the Church—God would not damn the Church for its wealth—and enter monasteries. The Papacy soon had an income from land, of about \$2,000,000 a year; a stupendous sum in those impoverished days. Enormous numbers of slaves tilled the 1800 square miles of the Church's property. Gregory freed them occasionally: when they got money. *He never condemned slavery.* He would not allow any slave to become a cleric, and he expressly reaffirmed (*Epp.*, VII, 1) that no slave could marry a free Christian. See the piquant chapter (ch. IV) on the saint in my *Crises in the History of the Papacy*.

Rome had had a population of about one million people in pagan days. Under Pope Gregory it had a miserable, ragged, densely ignorant population of 40,000 souls. That is a fair illustration of what had happened in Europe. It was this appalling economic revolution that had ended the old slavery; and the same revolution inaugurated a new, if not larger, slavery.

The condemnation of slavery in principle had died with the Stoics. That is the second point of my demonstration. Until St. Wulstan, an obscure British monk of the ninth century, condemned the institution, all Christian leaders had supported it. Impossible? I repeat that apologists claim only two exceptions: St. Gregory of Nyssa, and the work referred to is pronounced by the authorities "probably spurious," and St. Gregory the Great, the greatest slave-owner in Europe! Nothing could be more false than to say, that Christianity condemned slavery. It was generally extinct when Wulstan at last discovered that it was against Christian principles.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE CHRISTIAN SERF

There is no period in history more obscure than the few centuries in which Europe descends from the height of Roman civilization to the morass of the Dark Ages. The world was too ignorant even to write decent chronicles. Mr. Lecky begins the second volume of his *History of European Morals* with one of

those obsequious tributes to Christianity, to "the beauty of its sacred writings," "the perfection of its religious services," which are so proudly quoted by religious apologists. They do not mention that four pages later Lecky says:

Few persons, I think, who had contemplated Christianity as it existed in the first three centuries would have imagined it possible that . . . its teachers should bend the mightiest monarchs to their will, stamp their influence on every page of legislation, and direct the whole course of civilization for a thousand years; and yet that the period in which they were so supreme should have been *one of the most contemptible in history*.

On the next page we are told that this period "should probably be placed, in all intellectual virtues, *lower than any other period in the history of mankind*"; and that "the two centuries after Constantine are uniformly represented by the Fathers as a period of general and scandalous vice."

But I speak of the appalling vices of the period in another volume. Its ignorance is freely admitted by all historians to have surpassed anything known within the limits of civilization. For the later part of the fifth century we have a work by a Gallic priest Salvianus. For the sixth century, and for France alone, we have the voluminous and abominably written "History" of Gregory of Tours. For the first half of the seventh century we have the very scanty chronicle, in equally bad Latin, of Fredigarius. Then there is nearly a century which is "an almost complete blank in trustworthy history," and after that again only an occasional monkish chronicle.

This is the period—admire, in passing, how the Church had "educated Europe"—when the new slavery turned into serfdom, and it is impossible to trace the evolution in detail. We know that by the tenth century "slavery" as such was generally abandoned. We know that in Europe as a whole it had been abandoned by the ninth century. We know that the change took place by the conversion of individual slaves into serfs. And, since all the slave-owners of the time were Christians, it follows that Christians—not Christianity—freed slaves of this new order.

That is the only sense in which any person can claim that Christianity abolished slavery; and it is a miserable fallacy. That, assuredly, is not what religious writers convey to their readers when they say that Christianity "broke the fetters of the slave." As I have said, no influential Christian ever condemned slavery in principle until the ninth century, and it then only lingered locally.

I turn again to Mr. Lecky's history, confident that he will say the most that can justly be said for the Church (to which he did not belong) and a good deal more. The influence of Christianity in this connection was, he says, "in the very highest degree important." Half of his proof consists of an argument that the Christian glorification of humility made an end of the old pagan contempt of the slave. In view of the language of Pope Leo I and the permanent attitude of the Church in scorning to admit slaves to the ministry or to allow them to marry free Christians, this is an extraordinary statement for a serious historian to make. The next proof is taken from the most discredited medieval legends of the early martyrs, who are described as manumitting slaves by the thousand! Beyond this Lecky gives only the fact that, as we know, the Christians of the time often gave liberty to their slaves; and he closes with a quotation from the Catholic historian Muratori which he leaves in Italian, but is well worth translating:

There was in these ancient times no secular lord, bishop, abbot, chapter of canons, or monastery that had not a number of slaves in their service. Very frequently the *seculars* used to give the slaves their liberty. Not so the churches and the monasteries: the reason of which was, in my opinion, that manumission is a species of alienation, and it was forbidden by the canons to alienate the property of the Church (*Dissert.*, XV).

And, since the Church was the author of its own canons, it follows that the clergy lagged far behind the laity in freeing slaves.

Lecky is more fortunate when he indicates causes of the development which had nothing whatever to do with religion. I have pointed out how the destruction of the fortunes of the wealthy Romans annihilated a vast amount of slavery. It had already at that time sunk con-

siderably, as there had long ceased to be a stream of war-captives flowing toward Rome. After the fall of Rome, in 410, this main source of slaves entirely disappeared. The world, as I said, passed into such a condition of disorder and brutality that large numbers sold themselves into slavery, but there was nothing like the great slave-holding class of earlier times. In addition, the new rulers of Europe freed slaves who joined their armies, and the population was so appallingly reduced that labor was no longer in the same position as when millions of powerful war-captives were available.

These political and economic circumstances caused and explain the transition. Before Christ was born, Roman landowners in increasing numbers had realized the higher value of a free worker. They paid the slaves, even in those early days, such wages that one could save enough in ten years to purchase his freedom. The Stoic lawyers fostered this manumission of slaves as much as Christian bishops ever did, and by the end of the fourth century even agricultural slavery had been greatly reduced. Some writers say the bulk of the agricultural workers had by that time become "colonists" (*coloni*); tied to their work on the land, but within those limits free men.

In the new or Christian order, which created a vast number of slaves instead of emancipating a vast number, this process continued. The workers, especially after the year 600 (when the Papacy owned regiments of slaves) were "freed," or they bought their freedom; but they remained chained to the soil in a particular locality. The new rulers, the imperfectly civilized (but thoroughly Christianized) Teutonic leaders, also increased their burdens as the feudal system developed. Abbots and bishops were, of course, feudal lords in the same sense as barons and dukes, and their serfs or vassals had no better conditions than the serfs of others. Broadly speaking—as both the beginning and ending of serfdom spread over several centuries—the great majority of the population of Europe were serfs from about the eighth to about the twelfth or thirteenth century, and many millions of them remained serfs long afterward.

If we want really to understand the human story, and are not content with ingenious arguments for phrases like "the abolition of slavery," this is the first point to understand. In pagan Europe there had been a very large population of free artisans, and they worked less and had more entertainment than any "proletariat" even of modern times. In the city of Rome alone there were large towns everywhere with large populations of free workers. In writing my *St. Augustine and His Age*, I made a careful study of Roman Africa (which is now mainly Algeria and Tunisia), and the impression you get is of a great network of towns with free populations, like a modern country.

All this was revolutionized by the downfall of Rome. The population of the imperial city itself fell from a million to fifty thousand. Very few other towns in Europe had thirty thousand inhabitants. In England as late as the thirteenth century there were only six towns with more than five thousand inhabitants. I do not like to give figures, as even the expert finds the literature of those illiterate ages too scanty for such a purpose, but it is safe to say that ninety percent of the people of Christian Europe had become agricultural workers, and that almost always meant serfs.

Well, what is a "serf"? The word really means "slave," and from our modern point of view the serf very decidedly *was* a slave. Writers who talk glibly about the breaking of his fetters never take the trouble to understand what a serf was. The slave was "freed," and the reader is asked to admire the beneficence of the religion that freed him. He gets a confused impression that the "emancipated" slave of the early Middle Ages experienced a change like that of the colored folk of the southern United States in 1865.

This kind of apology is totally dishonest. I have before me a little book of this kind issued by the English Christian Evidence Society, mainly in criticism of myself. The writers of the Society are men of no serious cultivation or scholarship, and one has to make large allowances for their ignorance of the historical and scientific themes they handle—as in the case of Fundamentalist literature in America.

But the bluff, insolence, and recklessness of these "religious" booklets are astonishing. It opens fire at once with "audacity and perversity of modern anti-Christian propagandism," "general untruthfulness," "malignant libel," and sustains these manners of the hobo to the end. And these are the men who are busy assuring believers that the Church uplifted woman, freed the slave, educated the world. . . . They have not even sincerity and intelligence enough to ask themselves how, in that case, the Dark Ages came into existence.

Let us, as usual, try to get at the realities behind words. We do not know what proportion of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire were slaves about the year 400, when Christianity obtained power. Two slaves to one free worker would, at that time, be a generous estimate. By the year 900, after five centuries of Christian power, there were no longer "slaves," but nine-tenths of the population of Europe were "serfs."

What was the difference? The serf now had "freedom": but he was chained to his particular job in a particular locality, and soldiers would hunt him down like a deserter if he tried to break away. He was "his own master"; but he was bought and sold with the estate on which he lived, and he was forced to reap his lord's corn as well as his own and fly to the colors as soon as his lord saw fit to get up a bloody brawl. He had "a house of his own"; and it was filthier and more unhealthy than the quarters of most slaves had been in the fourth century. He had "a wife and family"; and if he dared to resent the philandering of the lord, abbot or baron, or baron's steward, with his wife or daughter, he would be flogged or murdered. St. Bede tells us that in Anglo-Saxon England, his own country, it was "the inveterate custom" for a noble to take to his castle any young woman he fancied and "sell her when she becomes pregnant." In France we find a law passed as late as 1579 that serfs, or vassals—there had been a fresh "emancipation"—were in future to be "married," not merely coupled like dogs by their masters.

The life of the vast majority, or somewhere about nine-tenths, of the workers of Europe

under this new Christian regime was horrible. They worked, as Harold Rogers has shown, on more than 300 days in the year, from sunrise to sunset. They were utterly despised and most brutally treated by their masters. Their liberty was a sheer illusion. This was the real "brotherhood of men under the fatherhood of God." This is the historical reality behind that pretty phrase, "the abolition of slavery." What really happened was that, instead of captured barbarians being enslaved to work for Romans, now nine-tenths of the population of the Christian countries were enslaved.

But, the next cry is, the Church emancipated the serfs. We are told, as usual, how Saint This and Abbot That urged the better treatment or the liberation of serfs. As if the appearance of a dozen decent men in six or seven centuries redeemed the entire Church! The Church never condemned serfdom any more than it had condemned slavery. The overwhelming majority of the clerical lords were as unjust as all other masters. When the liberation of the serfs began, the clerical and monastic owners were, as in the case of the slaves, the last to liberate. Eccardus, in his *Geschichte des niederen Volkes* (p. 186), finds it stated in the chronicles that "the Church everywhere opposed serfdom *except in the case of its own estates.*" And the word "everywhere" is untrue. Abbots and bishops who did anything for the serf are rare exceptions.

Finally, it was, again, political and economic causes that ended serfdom. Serf-owners were finding, as the Roman slave-owners had done, that one got more value out of a really free and happy worker. Large numbers of serfs laboriously saved the money to buy freedom for themselves and their children. Nobles who were setting out for the costly adventure of the Crusades sold freedom to vast numbers of serfs. Spendthrift kings sold them freedom by the ten thousand. Then there was the increasing jealousy and hostility of kings, nobles, and towns. A king, a noble, or a town would liberate the serfs of a whole region in order to make more difficult the passage of the army of a rival across that region. The liberation of serfs, on religious grounds, was a mere

trifle compared with the effect of these economic and political causes.

So from the thirteenth century onward serfdom gradually disappeared. How little religion had to do with it is plainly shown by the unevenness of the development. In profoundly religious Russia serfdom lasted until 1861. In the middle of the nineteenth century 42,500,000 serfs were bought, sold, and brutally exploited in Russia, as badly as ever slaves had been in Rome. They had to wait, not for a realization of the true Christian spirit, but for a large growth of skepticism in St. Petersburg and Moscow, before they could get elementary human rights.

In France serfdom lasted on a very large scale—one bishop had 40,000 serfs in the eighteenth century—until the Revolution. In Austria also it lasted until the eighteenth century. In parts of England it lasted until the sixteenth century. In Prussia until the nineteenth century. The change was a gradual process from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, without one single authoritative declaration from either the Catholic or Protestant church or any leader in either church.

Well, says the Roman Catholic, we at least gave the free workers of the Middle Ages their wonderful guilds. You did nothing of the kind, my friend. They were of pagan origin; and your Church viciously attempted to stifle them in their cradle.

A remark in Dr. C. Gross's important work on the guilds (*The Guild-Merchant*) moved me at one time to make some research into their origin. Some writers think them a natural and original growth in the soil of the Middle Ages. Some think that they came from old German fraternities. Some believe that they are a development of what survived of the old Roman trade unions or colleges (see Little Blue Book No. 1078). Dr. Gross does not accept this third theory, but he makes this curious statement: "Imbued with the idea of the brotherhood of man, the church naturally fostered the early growth of guilds and tried to make them displace the old heathen banquets." After what I have said about the condition of nine-tenths of the men, women, and children of Christendom in those days even a religious reader will

merely smile if I call this "imbued with the idea of the brotherhood of man," a piece of piffle, rubbish, or bunk. It is the usual game of paying a tithe to the Church. But I was intrigued by these "old heathen banquets" which had to be "displaced." What heathen banquets were there to be displaced at the end of the eighth century, when the guilds are first mentioned? And how does a trade union replace a banquet?

So it all came out. As I say in my book on Rome (Little Blue Book No. 1078), in Greek and Roman workers had regular trade associations with periodical suppers and patron deities. These still existed in the Eastern, or Byzantine, Roman Empire in the tenth century, but it is, or was, generally supposed that Europe lost them in the ruin of the Roman Empire. As we saw, however, the literature of Europe is so poor and meager after the fifth century that we could easily lose sight of them.

What we do know is this. The first mention of guilds—called *Gildoniae*—is in the Capitularies of Charlemagne, at the year 779. It is a severe prohibition of people "conspiring together in guilds" and taking oaths. In the years 805 and 821 this prohibition was repeated, and savage penalties were attached to it. Charlemagne had died in 814, and it was the Church which was continuing the opposition of the guilds, as it had dictated the measures of Charlemagne. Then we find a Synod held at Nantes in the year 852 legislating in the same sense. It attacks the associations "popularly called guilds [*gildoniae*] or confraternities." It forbids them to hold suppers, and speaks severely of priests who get drunk and sing ribald songs at these suppers. It directs that the confraternities must not in future meet unless a priest is present, and it orders the members to attend church regularly.

This is the whole of the earliest evidence about the guilds, and it makes three things certain:

- (1) The Church quite clearly did not found the Guilds.
- (2) The Church absolutely and violently opposed the Guilds for nearly a century after we first learn of them.

(3) The Church failed entirely to suppress them, so it began to assume control of them.

And the most reasonable, indeed the only reasonable, theory of this violent opposition is that the guilds were pagan. If anybody supposes that the Church would condemn oaths because they were blood-curdling, or suppers because they were drunken, he must know as much about the Middle Ages as an eighteen-year-old nun does. Everybody fed, and drank, and swore most grossly. I show in *New Light on Witchcraft* (Little Blue Book No. 1132), that paganism survived in the Middle Ages to an extent far beyond what historians used to imagine, and everything here points to such a survival. The guilds are a reappearance of the old Roman "colleges," and they retained a pagan character. What Dr. Gross confusedly calls "old heathen banquets" are precisely the suppers of the early guilds. The decrees say so.

The evidence I have given, which I dug out of the *Capitularia* of Charlemagne and the *Capitula Synodica* of Hincmar, is earlier than any quoted in the works of Gross, Walford, Eberstadt, Mueller, or any other authority on guilds. So do not quote their opinions as to the origin of guilds against me. Their studies begin at the time when the Church, unable to suppress, had captured the guilds; as they captured everything in the Middle Ages. For a time the workers then made the guilds very effective organizations, until, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they degenerated and were abandoned. All that the Church did was, for its own sake, to adopt them and put a coat of Christian paint on them.

In fine, while we admire the work which the guilds did for two or three centuries, let us keep some sense of proportion. The craftsmen of the guilds were a very small fraction of the population of Europe.

We have no statistics, but the religious apologist cannot escape on that account. Even in the early part of the nineteenth century, when machinery had already begun to displace domestic industries, the agricultural workers alone were one-third of the whole. In the Middle Ages a vast amount of work which is now done by "skilled workers" was done by the women in the home or by serfs. Indeed, some

industries, such as brewing, were left to women. The craftsmen who formed guilds were just the smiths, carpenters, masons, butchers, and a few other bodies of workers in the towns. Certainly they were, in the days of the guilds, not one-tenth of the community.

What truth or sincerity is there in thus magnifying the services of the guilds to a tenth and hiding out of sight the misery and crushing burdens of the nine-tenths? What regard for historical facts is there in the claim that the Church gave even these workers their guilds? What moral principle justifies a writer in saying that "the church" of "Christianity" accomplished one or another reform because a member of the Church—an abbot or a bishop—here and there urged the reform, while thousands of abbots and bishops exploited the workers for every one that helped them, and the official spokesmen of the Church were dumb? Yet that is how, at every step, the case for Christianity in regard to the abolition of slavery and serfdom and the improvement of the lot of the workers is made up. And even a case thus dishonestly pleaded is damned by one massive fact: the condition of the workers of Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Before we reach this, however, let us glance at the relation of Christianity to black slavery.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### BLACK SLAVERY

Throughout this essay I am opposing historical facts to rhetoric. It is easy to argue theoretically in favor of Christianity. Quite certainly it taught that God was the father of all, and therefore all men were brothers. The orator is rarely aware that the Roman, Greek, Persian, Babylonian, and Egyptian religion, had equally taught that God was the father of all, and the Stoics had emphasized that all men were brothers; so his argument is, to him and his hearers, most convincing. Christianity brought into a world of slaves the sublime doctrine of the brotherhood of men, and, behold, within a few centuries of the attainment of power by Christianity, slavery was no more. Very simple and persuasive: as long as you

refuse to inquire what precise causes ended slavery and what succeeded it.

The historical facts make a mockery of all this rhetoric, and we come now to a fact which distresses even the most resolute apologist. I have several times referred to the ingenuity in perverting the truth of Mr. Brace, whose *Gesta Christi* is understood to be a particularly sober and informed defense of Christianity. But Mr. Brace recoils from the task of justifying the Churches in face of black slavery. It was "the most dreadful curse that has perhaps ever afflicted humanity," and "the guilt of this great crime rests on the Christian Church as an organized body" (p. 365); because the secular powers expressly consulted the higher clergy as to their right to commit the crime:

Let us not exaggerate even in our confessions. Sometimes it is a tricky way of securing pardon. Black slavery was by no means "the most dreadful curse that has ever afflicted humanity." During the three hundred years that it lasted it brought unspeakable misery upon millions of Africans. After making every allowance for the humanity of good masters, it was responsible for a mass of suffering comparable with that of the slaves of the Roman Republic. But it was not a worse curse than serfdom, which enslaved almost the whole population of Europe, while Popes and bishops were silent, during four or five centuries, and, in the case of the largest country, Russia, during a thousand years. Admitting the second point in an indictment does not annul the first.

It would, in fact, be difficult for any apologist above the lowest level of culture and sincerity to acquit Christianity of "the guilt of this great crime." It began with the discovery of America. Native labor was at first employed, especially in the West Indies, to extort wealth from the earth for the European conquerors. Feudalism, in other words, was applied to them. But mining in particular proved deadly to them, and the Christian conquerors looked round for a supply of hardier and more profitable labor.

The Portuguese then "owned" a considerable stretch of the African coast, and the suggestion was promptly made that regiments of the Afri-

can natives, of magnificent physique, should be employed. It was a Christian bishop, Bartolomé de las Casas, who made the suggestion, in the interest of the American natives whom he had in charge. But it could be realized only by enslaving the Africans. Black slaves were already well known. African tribes, like the Romans, spared the lives of war-captives to make slaves of them. Arab traders took these over and distributed them in Mohammedan lands. Christian visitors to the East had long been familiar with them.

The Spanish authorities, who liked the suggestion, consulted the Catholic hierarchy; and that hierarchy betrayed the principles of Jesus once more. On the one hand, they replied, with perfect truth, that the Church *had never condemned slavery*. On the other hand, they discovered the most useful truth that this would enable the Church to baptize and convert immense numbers of the blacks, who showed no eagerness for baptism and conversion, and that this eternal gain to the African outweighed all the paltry human advantages of freedom in his native home. So the trade began. Had the Catholic Church—not this or that cleric, but the Catholic Church either in Spain or Rome—forbidden the traffic, it would never have begun. But Popes and archbishops closed their consecrated lips, and took their large share of the gold of the Indies. The brotherhood of men is a sublime doctrine—for the use of apologists. Practical churchmen forgot it from the fourth century to the nineteenth, when revolution reminded them of it.

And the Churches were still silent when the greed of the traders led to horrors surpassing those of any ancient slavery. A voyage across the Atlantic was costly and comfortless for all in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and so the cheapest vessels were literally packed with the human victims who had been torn from their homes in Africa. Pent up in the stifling holds, terrified at the unknown violence of the sea, they sickened and died in thousands in the course of the voyage.

Protestant England is as much involved in the crime as Catholic Spain and Portugal. Between 1680 and 1780 the English possessions in America imported 2,130,000 Africans; and, while

ultra-pious Spain drafted the treaties of this bloody traffic "in the name of the Most Holy Trinity," Captain Hawkins of England gave such names as *Jesus* to the ships in which these brutalities were perpetrated, and piously served out to his officers and men such maxims as "Serve God daily" and "Love one another."

The callousness of the whole of Christendom to this protracted and abominable outrage is an ironic answer to every claim that religion broke the fetters of the slave. In the year 1760 there were no less than 80,000 black slaves in the city of London itself. It was not until several years after that date that the secular authorities, not the Church, forbade slavery in England. France and other countries were even later in discovering that Jesus had condemned slavery. In 1708 the British Parliament had expressly authorized the traffic. Indeed, Mr. Brace tells us that the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Lands, which sent out missionaries to tell the bewildered blacks how superior Protestantism was to Catholicism, had slaves on its own plantations in Barbadoes and did not even supply religious instruction to these slaves.

Even if we were to admit that Christianity "broke the fetters of the slave," at least as regards this modern slavery, any boast on the part of its apologists would be ironic. It would be an insult and an injury to the cotton-growers of America as a body to suggest that cruel treatment of the slaves was general amongst them. Moncure D. Conway, who was born in Virginia in 1832 and had vivid personal recollection of the slave-owning days, told me that kind treatment of the slaves was a tradition in his family and in many others. But the traffic had begun, as I said, in the early part of the sixteenth century, and a record of all the cruelty and brutality from that time to abolition would certainly fill a volume as repulsive as any that could be compiled.

And this crime had been initiated entirely by Christians, after an express consultation of their ministers, and the brutalities were committed entirely by Christians, with the silent approval of every minister in Christendom. Three centuries of Popes, archbishops, and bishops smiled upon the institution. Ancient

Roman slavery, about which we hear so much, had actually begun as a humane improvement upon the earlier barbaric practice of cutting the throats of prisoners. It had, further, been at first devoid of brutality. But this new slavery was deliberately set up by Christian men in a free world, its single motive being greed, its pretext a piece of hypocrisy, its procedure brutal in the extreme, and its corrupt profit shared by the clergy and the Churches themselves.

Whether or no a larger sum of cruelty was involved in these three and a half centuries of black slavery than in ancient Roman slavery no man can say. But it moves us to ironic laughter when, after this deliberate inauguration of slavery in its worst form in a more enlightened age, we hear Christian apologists boasting that *their* religion suppressed slavery. The Pope drew too much gold from France and Spain and Portugal to interfere with its tainted sources. The heads of the English Church were too closely allied with the ruling class and the wealthy to remind them of the glorious doctrine of the brotherhood of men. Nor were the non-episcopal Protestant Churches which arose toward the close of the period more sensitive to the crime which disgraced their religion. Not only did bishops of the American Episcopal Church in the south own slaves like any other "gentleman," but the Baptists owned 225,000 and the Methodists 250,000 slaves. Every Church in America was paralyzed by a deliberate difference of opinion, in the full light of the nineteenth century, as to whether the principles of Jesus did or did not involve a condemnation of slavery. Yet in spite of all this, in spite of the silence of every Christian leader in a slave-owning world for eight centuries after Christ, in spite of the silence of every Christian minister during many farther centuries of serfdom, the glib modern apologist asks us to admire the moral power and effectiveness, the superiority of the Stoic doctrine of brotherhood, of his Christian doctrine of the common fatherhood of God.

Any Christian reader I may have must not suppose that I am charging his modern writers and preachers with hypocrisy. They do persuade themselves, as a rule, of the truth of their

claims. But, surely, the plain facts of history evince that they have either a lamentably scanty knowledge of the subjects with which they deal so dogmatically or a sense of proportion which renders their judgment useless.

This is illustrated again in the controversy about the abolition of black slavery. A whole literature has been written about it, and in the dust of the controversy the Churches contrive to divert the attention of their followers from their immeasurable guilt for the initiation and long continuance of the crime. It is emphasized that an English churchman, Mr. Wilberforce, was one of the great figures in the abolition movement. If the name of a single clergyman—one in twenty thousand—occurs in the early annals of the movement, *he*, not the 19,999, represents "Christianity." The honorable part borne by the Quakers and many of the Unitarians of America is stressed; and it is concealed that the Church folk of a hundred years ago would, if they had had the power, have burned these men at the stake as apostates from Christianity. Lincoln, Lloyd Garrison, and all the prominent figures in the movement are represented, on worthless evidence, to have been actuated by Christian belief. The final stage of the movement, when certainly large bodies of Christians supported it, is taken as typical; and the reader is not reminded that every reform movement gets the support of the Churches in its final stage, lest one more victory of humanity unaided by religion should have to be inscribed in the pages of history.

In short, it is a characteristic controversy about religion: dust, smoke, fire, flat contradictions, and verdict of "not proven." What is the common sense view of the matter?

First, whatever merit Christianity may have had from the last quarter of the eighteenth century onward, its action cannot alter or atone for its colossal guilt during the preceding two and a half centuries. And this has a direct bearing on the general question of Christianity and slavery. It proves to demonstration that the Gospels, the Epistles of St. Paul, the early Fathers, the Church Councils, and the entire series of Christian leaders and writers during eighteen hundred years had never condemned slavery. The Christian abolitionists had no previous judgment to appeal to.

Secondly, when it is said that the protest which at last arose was due to a tardy appreciation of the true bearing of the Christian message, the claim plainly overlooks a most important historical fact. It was in 1787 that the first group was formed in England, to agitate for the suppression of the slave-trade. Slavery was already forbidden in England, so it argues no moral superiority on the part of England that it inaugurated the reform. It is always much easier to feel a righteous indignation about the conduct of another nation.

But consider the date, 1787; two years before the outbreak of the French Revolution, eleven years after the American Declaration of Independence. A new force quite different from the Christian ethic had appeared in the world. The same preacher who tells you that the abolition-movement was born of a late appreciation of the Christian spirit tells you, another Sunday, that the French Revolution was born of the opposite spirit, the Rationalism of the eighteenth century. The movement which had begun with Voltaire (see *The Revolt Against Religion*, Little Blue Book No. 1007) had, long before 1787, become entirely anti-Christian and humanitarian. It had spread to England, where it gave birth to Liberalism, and to America, where it inspired a large number of the leading revolutionaries. This new humanitarian movement, directly born of "infidelity," at once attacked slavery. Whatever one may say about its errors, with which I will deal later, the French Revolution, in its best (and almost solidly anti-Christian) elements, shamed the long and cowardly acquiescence of the French Church by announcing and inaugurating a series of great social reforms.

What a case the Christian apologist would have if the position were reversed: if the initiators of the modern slavery movement had been pagans, if all the slave-owners and their priests for two centuries and a half had been pagans, if Christianity had then appeared about the middle of the eighteenth century and its appearance had been followed by the birth of the abolition movement! We can imagine the eloquence, the scorn of opposition, of the Christian writer if that were the historical situation. But because the new spirit which *did* appear in the

middle of the eighteenth century was Rationalist humanitarianism, the rules of logic are reversed, and we are told to believe that this new spirit had nothing to do with the abolition movement which followed.

These broad truths are more helpful than heated disputes about details of the abolition movement. They are undisputed; and they are tremendously significant. They mean a great deal more than does the fact that William Wilberforce was a Christian—one in ten millions.

On the details of the movement, therefore, I will say little, but a few points should be noted. Every religious writer on the subject speaks about Wilberforce: first, last, and all the time. Wilberforce the devout member of the Church of England. . . . Well, I just open my old Encyclopaedia at the name Wilberforce—the point is not important enough for further research—I read that William Wilberforce was very pious as a boy, but that in youth "the religious impressions he had received were soon dissipated by a life of gaiety," and that *it was precisely at this time that he began to denounce the slave trade!*

Next I repeat that Ingram's *Slavery and Serfdom* is the chief work in English on the whole subject, and that the author makes more concessions than he ought to do to Christianity, yet he sums up:

The Christian Churches in the slave states scandalously violated their most sacred duty, and used their influence in the maintenance of slavery, the ministers of religion declaring it to be sanctioned by Scripture, and sometimes even encouraging the atrocities resorted to in defense of the system (p. 194).

Mr. Brace, the very determined Christian apologist, adds, speaking of the Churches of the north: "The organized Church, in many of its branches, became arrayed against true Christianity." A funny sentence, that; and the historical facts at the back of it are still funnier. The only "branches" of "the Church"—which is "the Church," by the way?—which were not "arrayed against true Christianity" were the Quakers and (in much less degree) the Unitarians, who were then scornfully denied the name of Christian. Of the American Episcopal Church, then the most powerful in

the country, Wilberforce himself said: "She raises no voice against the predominant evil; she palliates it in theory, and in practice she shares in it." Dr. Barnes, a Presbyterian, said: "There is no power out of the Church that could sustain slavery an hour if it were not sustained in it." Theodore Parker, who knew, said: "If the whole American Church [Churches] had dropped through the continent and disappeared altogether, the anti-slavery cause would have been further on."

At the best, and beyond the shadow of controversy, the American Churches were paralyzed by bitter dissensions on the subject. Not only did large numbers of their wealthier members own slaves, but Churches did. And what, you will ask, was the attitude of Rationalism?

Let us first get things in their proper proportions. Rationalists were an exceedingly small body, and not in the least organized, in the early part of the nineteenth century. They had no corporate funds, no spokesmen, and no societies; and the general public regarded them with suspicion or derision. Rationalism as such, moreover, has no gospel or dogmas. In so far as he was a Rationalist, a critic of theology, a man's principles did not compel him to work for humanity; while the Christian professes that his principles do thus oblige him.

Yet the contrast is eloquent. The overwhelming majority of the Christians were indifferent or hostile. The great majority of the known Rationalists were for reform. The entire body of the Christians had contemplated slavery without a murmur, indeed with profit and satisfaction, for two centuries and a half. The Rationalists of America attacked it almost as soon as they were born. The authoritative exponents of Christianity were the clergy, and in the long list of early reformers given by Ingram there occurs the name of only *one* clergyman. But the authoritative exponents of Rationalism were generally on the side of reform.

The great workers in the abolition movement were Rationalists to an extent out of all proportion to the tiny Rationalist body. Lloyd Garrison's children confess in their four-volume life of him that he had "quite freed himself from the trammels of orthodoxy" (IV, 336) and

never went to church. Lincoln himself was an advanced Rationalist. The spirit which fought and annihilated the Christian-created black slavery of modern times was the spirit which framed the American Constitution and the French Revolutionary Constitution: the spirit of man.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE CHURCHES AND THE WORKERS

Back of all these quibbles and squabbles about Jesus and Paul, Gregory of Nyssa and Wulstan, William Wilberforce and Lloyd Garrison, is a poignant and immense human tragedy. It is the larger part of the tragedy of human history which Winwood Reade called the *Martyrdom of Man*. It was bad enough in pagan days but humanity, in Europe, was then young and had to learn wisdom. It was worse a thousand years later, when nine-tenths of Europe were serfs. It was still terrible at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In one of my most recent books, *A Century of Stupendous Progress*, I have shown that the workers of England a hundred years ago worked, on the average, at least fourteen hours a day, six days a week, for an average wage of certainly less than three dollars a week; that most of the children of England over the age of six (and many under it), of both sexes, worked twelve or thirteen hours a day, six days a week, for about two cents a day; that the conditions of workshop and home were vile beyond description, that holidays were only two days a year besides Sundays, that food was dear and of the poorest description, and that manners were correspondingly brutal and morals rare. I proved this from contemporary documents, and no one doubts it. The British worker was then, it is true, in a slightly worse position than the American worker, but he was better off than any other worker in the world.

I invite the reader to get that point clearly. In the year 1826 nine-tenths of the men of Europe, and a very high proportion of the women, worked ninety hours a week, in filthy conditions, under brutal masters, for a little

over two and half dollars a week. They lived mainly on bread, potatoes and water. Meat, milk, sugar, tea and fruit they rarely tasted. Not five in a hundred of them could read or write. Their amusements were of the coarsest description. Their sex morals were atrocious. Yet they were no worse off than in previous centuries of the Christian Era. Professor Harold Rogers' *Six Centuries of Work and Wages* shows that for England, and Brissot's *Historie du travail* shows it for Europe generally. And at that time Christianity had dominated Europe for more than a thousand years.

There is the full irony of the Christian claim. It emancipated the slaves, you say. It did not; but in any case it created the new slavery of serfdom and later the martyrdom of the black race. It emancipated the serfs, you protest. It did not; but it witnessed the evolution of the serfs into these "free" workers of a century ago, brutalized by excessive labor, shut out from all knowledge, deprived of the least voice in the control of their own affairs. It is a mockery to talk about the social service of Christianity, to remind us how it taught the brotherhood of man.

But we have to complete our study by finding who *did* help the workers of the world to reach a higher level.

In the first place, the Reformation did nothing for them. There had already begun a movement in the life of Europe—a movement quite distinct from Christianity and hostile to it—which was the first flush of a new dawn, upon the Dark Ages. The Moors of Spain had given Christendom an object lesson in civilization: the humanists of the Renaissance conjured up before it the long-buried civilizations of Greece and Rome.

But the Reformation, necessary and important as it was, was a reaction both in culture and social idealism.

Luther and his colleagues primarily sought to concentrate the attention of men on the Bible and on their immortal souls. You are proud of it? Very good; but you cannot have your bread buttered on both sides. The more a man cares for our immortal souls, the less he cares about our mortal bodies.

At first Luther showed a human concern about the exploitation of the mass of the people. A German noble had said contemptuously of the German peasants—then the great majority of the nation: "They will never rise unless you cut a slice off their buttocks"—to put it as politely as possible. They rose, however, and they claimed Luther's sympathy. After some hesitation he harshly condemned the insurrection. He discovered that the Bible ordered them to be "subject to all higher authorities." In July, 1624, he wrote to the nobles of Saxony: "They must be crushed, strangled, and spitted, wherever it is possible, because a mad dog has to be killed." He defended serfdom, saying that to abolish it would be "against the gospels and robbery." In later years he wrote: "All their blood is on my head, but I leave it to the Lord God, who bade me speak thus." Melancthon was no better. He said: "The Germans are always such ill-bred perverse, bloodthirsty folk that they must be kept down more stringently than ever." Eccardus, in his *Geschichte des niederen Volkes*, is quite candid about the kind of "brotherhood" which the great Reformers learned from their profound study of the Gospels.

If any change is claimed by any historian of labor, it is that during the three centuries after the Reformation the condition of the workers grew steadily worse. Let not the Catholic rejoice, however. It was just the same in Catholic and Protestant lands, as Brissot shows in his *Histoire du travail*. There were economic causes of this which we cannot discuss here. As to religion, we have only to say that bishops and priests continued their absolute and universal indifference to the martyrdom of the mass of the race. Strong language? Name, if you can, one who acted otherwise.

The first attempt at reforms was made by the French Revolution. This at once conjures up visions of bloodshed and orgies in the minds of religious readers, who read about it only in religious works, hear about it in sermons, and see it on the screen. I am going to devote a book to it later, and show that the horrors were mainly due to the later revolutionaries, and that the first half of the French Revolution was a sober and beneficent movement led

almost entirely by Rationalists. The way had been prepared for its best work by the great Rationalists, or Encyclopedists, of the eighteenth century. Voltaire had been concerned mainly with superstition, though he has a fine record of humanitarian service, but the later and more radical unbelievers, just before the Revolution, were strong humanitarians; and they were all what we now call Agnostics or Materialists. The early leaders of the Revolution—Mirabeau, Talleyrand, Sieyès, Lafayette, Desmoulins, Mounier, Danton, Petion and Barnave—merely developed their ideas; and all these men in turn were either Deists or Agnostics. A Christian like the Abbé Gregoire was a very rare bird amongst the revolutionaries; and he was angrily disowned by the Church.

Again let me ask the religious reader to look at this broad and uncontroverted situation frankly. The millions of workers of France were in a lamentable plight. Twenty million people lived on the land, owned only two-fifths of it, and bore an intolerable burden of taxes for Church and State. Two hundred thousand priests, monks, and nuns owned a fifth of the land, and paid no taxes. Yet all these exponents of the Gospel had for ages ignored the condition of the people and the gross injustice of their rulers, and only a few of the common clergy, sons of the people themselves, joined in the sound part of the Revolution. It was a handful of skeptics, of Atheists and Materialists and Voltaireans, who gave the world the creed of the Rights of Man. Remember this the next time you hear an eloquent sermon on the horrible possibilities of Materialism. Remember, too, that the Stoics, the only previous body of idealists who had moved the world, were Materialists.

The work of the Revolution was murdered. Church and Royalty combined to put their white hands round the neck of humanity. America, fortunately, had won independence of Europe, and the reaction did not spread to the United States. But the White Terror ironically calling itself "the Holy Alliance," spread over the whole of Europe. The workers sank back into the dark and sullen attitude from which the clarion call of the Revolution had

momentarily raised them. Not a priest or minister of the Gospel in the world pleaded for them. Remember that also when next you are invited to compare the fruits of Christianity and Materialism.

In the recent work of mine to which I have referred, *A Century of Stupendous Progress*, I have proved that the world has made more progress in the last hundred years—economically, socially, morally and intellectually—than in the previous fourteen hundred years of Christian power. One of the most distinguished living British economists, Sir Josiah Stamp, says that the British worker of today is four times as well off as the worker of a century ago. I have proved that this is true, in every respect; and it is true of civilization generally. Who did it?

If we were to argue in the manner of religious writers, the answer would be prompt and simple. Skepticism, of course. The new force in the world was Rationalism. Christianity had been tried for fourteen centuries and had failed dismally. The only thing that I can imagine any sincere and informed person saying for it is that it saved the souls of a large number of men. He could not even say that it improved the morals of Europe. Well, we have much doubt today even about the saving of souls, but assuredly it did not save bodies. Then Rationalism appeared, and—the world leaped onward and made far more progress in a century than it had done in fourteen centuries.

But the Little Blue Books do not follow the clerical standard of argumentation. We must analyze patiently. And it becomes at once apparent that science did most of the work. I should scarcely have the patience to discuss here the opinion of any man who claimed that the Church gave the world science, so we will leave it that the extraordinary increase of wealth and comfort was due to secular science. We have, however, to inquire how it was that the workers and the small middle class secured so much from this new wealth, as I have shown in my book. Science has nothing to say to the distribution of wealth.

Next, education was the great redeeming force. I devote a special book, *The Church and*

*the School* (Little Blue Book No. 1128), to the question of education, so I dismiss it here with the anticipatory declaration, which will be proved beyond the shadow of a doubt, that education was won for the mass of the people mainly by Rationalism, in spite of the Churches.

In short, the real question from our present point of view is: In what proportion were the social idealists who got these new forces applied to the uplifting of the workers Christians, and in what proportion were they non-Christian or anti-Christian? And please remember the perspective of the question. At the end of the eighteenth century perhaps five percent of the world was Rationalist and ninety-five percent Christian. In the hard period from 1820 to 1840, when the work entailed heavy sacrifices, perhaps ten percent of Europe was Rationalist and ninety percent Christian. From 1840 to 1880, still a desperate period for idealists, the Christians were at least in a majority of seventy or eighty percent. In our time they are, taking one advanced country with another, in a minority of thirty to forty percent.

And the historical facts show that of those social idealists with whom I am here concerned—not mere philanthropists like Howard or Elizabeth Fry, or workers in a very narrow field like Shaftesbury, but men and women who fought for the betterment of the workers as a mass—the overwhelming majority were Rationalists at a time when Rationalists were only five or ten percent of the whole community; that the great majority were still Rationalists in the second half of the nineteenth century; and that it is only in recent times, when reform movements were successful and the Churches were losing members very heavily, that we have discovered such a thing as social idealism and “social experts” in the Christian bodies.

For England I have shown that in the first period the men and women of most influence were Paine, Byron, Shelley, Priestley, Horne Tooke, Erasmus Darwin, Godwin, Hardy, Holcroft, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Hardy's opinion about religion is not recorded. Priestley was a Unitarian: which was not then regarded as Christian. Not one of the others was a Christian.

The reaction against the French Revolution hardened the Churches in their attitude toward reform. The bishops of the English Church opposed all reform. Lord Brougham, noticing that they avoided supporting even a temperance bill, said fierily that “only two out of six-and-twenty Right Reverend Prelates will sacrifice their dinner and their regard for their belly—to attend and vote.” Lord Shaftesbury angrily described the clergy—and he was a bigoted Christian—as “timid, time-serving, and great worshipers of wealth and power.” “I can,” he said, “scarcely remember an instance in which a clergyman has been found to maintain the cause of laborers in the face of pew-holders.” I take the quotation from *The Bishops as Legislators*, by Joseph Clayton, a devout member of the Church of England; and his book is a scorching indictment of his Church. He praises Shaftesbury at least; but Shaftesbury opposed every reform movement except his own, in favor of children, and he was so hated by the workers of London that he had to barricade his house against them. In short, one Wesleyan clergyman, Stephens, and late in the nineteenth century one Anglican clergyman, Kingsley, worked for reform; and their Churches persecuted them. That is the record for more than half a century.

I have in my *Church and the People* given the full evidence for my statements. When reform was arduous, very few Christian laymen figured in it. They and their clergy swarmed into it when it became successful, and the workers were deserting the churches in millions. All over Europe—there was not the same battle to fight in the United States—the great fighters were anti-Christian in the overwhelming majority. As to the Papacy, which now says flattering things to the workers of America, the kind of thing a young man says to a young lady who has inherited a fortune, it has the blackest record of any section of Christendom. It murdered, as long as the world would allow it, those who fought for the rights of man. So had Christianity done from the first.

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