

INFLUENCE
OF
Catholic Christian Doctrines
ON THE
EMANCIPATION OF SLAVES.

BY A MEMBER
Of the Sodality of the B. V. Mary, Church of the
Most Holy Redeemer.

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INFLUENCE OF CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES ON THE EMANCIPATION OF SLAVES.

SKETCH OF SOCIETY IN THE EARLY AGES OF CHRISTIANITY.

ALTHOUGH the Church has ever attached the greatest importance to the propagation of truth, although convinced that to destroy the shapeless mass of immorality and degradation that met her sight, her first care should be to expose error to the dissolving fire of true doctrines, she has not confined herself to this; but descending to real life, and following a system full of wisdom and prudence, she has acted in such a manner as to enable humanity to taste the precious fruit which the doctrines of the Redeemer produce even in temporal things. The Church has been not only a *great and fruitful school, but a regenerative association also*; she has not diffused her general doctrines by throwing them abroad at hazard, merely hoping that they would fructify with time; she has developed them in all their relations, applied them to all subjects, inoculated laws and manners with them, and realized them in institutions which afford silent but eloquent instructions to future generations. Previous to her being established by her divine Author, nowhere was the dignity of man acknowledged, slavery reigned everywhere; degraded woman was dishonored by the corruption of manners, and debased by the tyranny of man. The feelings of humanity were trodden under foot, infants abandoned, the sick

and aged were neglected, barbarity and cruelty were carried to the highest pitch of atrocity in the prevailing laws of war; in fine, on the summit of the social edifice was seen an odious tyranny, sustained by military force, and looking down with an eye of contempt on the unfortunate nations that lay in fetters at its feet.

In such a state of things it certainly was no slight task to remove error, to reform and improve manners, abolish slavery, correct the vices of legislation, impose a check on power, and make it harmonize with the public interest, give new life to individuals, and reorganize family and society; and yet nothing less than this has been done by the Catholic Church.

In confirmation of this historic truth, let us view the subject, which of all others, in our day and country, is of general interest and discussion, the subject of SLAVERY; inviting those who feel interest to know more fully the harmonizing effects of Christian civilization, to consult the work of Balmes, to whose untiring labor and erudition the subjoined compilation of proofs and observations are justly acknowledged.

When our Blessed Saviour commissioned his apostles to evangelize the nations, the number of slaves was immense; slavery was deeply rooted in laws, manners, ideas, and interests, individual and social; a fatal system, no doubt, but the eradication of which all at once, it would have been rash to attempt, as its roots had penetrated deeply and spread widely in the bowels of the land. In a census of Athens there were reckoned 20,000 citizens and 40,000 slaves; in the Peloponnesian war no less than 20,000 passed over to the enemy. This we learn from Thucydides. The same author tells us, that at Chio the number of slaves was very considerable, and that their defection, when they passed over to the Athenians, reduced their masters to great extremities. In general, the number of slaves was so very great everywhere that the public safety was often compromised thereby. Therefore it was necessary to take precautions

to prevent their acting in concert. "It is necessary," says Plato (*Dial.* 6, *de Leg.*) "that slaves should not be of the same country, and that they should differ as much as possible in manners and desires; for experience has many times shown, in the frequent defections which have been witnessed, among the Messenians, and in other cities that had a great number of slaves of the same language, that great evils result from it." Aristotle, in his *Government*, (b. i: c. 5) gives various rules as to the manner in which slaves ought to be treated; it is remarkable that he is of the same opinion as Plato, for he says; "That there should not be many slaves of the same country." He tells us in his *Politics* (b. ii: c. 7) "That the Thessalians were reduced to great embarrassments on account of the number of their Penestes, a sort of slave; the same thing happened to the Spartans on account of the Helotes. The Penestes have often rebelled in Thessaly; and the Spartans, during their reverses, have been menaced by the plots of the Helotes." This was a difficulty which required the serious attention of politicians. They did not know how to prevent the inconveniences induced by this immense multitude of slaves. Aristotle laments the difficulty there was in finding the best way of treating them; and we see that it was the subject of grave cares. I will transcribe his own words: "In truth," he says, "the manner in which this class of men ought to be treated is a thing difficult and full of embarrassment; for if they are treated mildly, they become insolent, and wish to become equal to their masters; if they are treated harshly, they conceive hatred, and conspire."

At Rome, the multitude of slaves was such that when, at a certain period, it was proposed to give them a distinctive dress, the Senate opposed the measure, fearing that if they knew their own numbers the public safety would be endangered; and certainly this precaution was not vain, for already, a long time before, the slaves had caused great commotions in Italy. Plato,

in support of the advice just quoted, states, "that the slaves had frequently devastated Italy with piracy and robbery." In more recent times, Spartacus, at the head of an army of slaves, was the terror of that country for some time, and engaged the best generals of Rome. The number of slaves had reached such an excess, that many masters reckoned them by hundreds. When the Prefect of Rome, Pedanius Secundus, was assassinated, four hundred slaves who belonged to him were put to death (*Tac. Ann.* b. xiv). Pudentila, the wife of Apulcius, had so many that she gave four hundred to her son. They became a matter of pomp, and the Romans vied with each other in their number. When asked this question, *Quod pascit servos?* How many slaves does he keep? according to the expression of Juvenal, (*Sat.* iii: v. 140,) they wished to be able to show a great number. The thing had reached such a pass that, according to Pliny, the cortege of a family resembled an army.

It was not only in Greece and Italy that this abundance of slaves was found; at Tyre, they arose against their masters, and, by their immense numbers, they were able to massacre them all. If we turn our eyes towards barbarous nations, without speaking of some of the best known, we learn from Herodotus that the Scythians, on their return from Media, found their slaves in rebellion, and were compelled to abandon their country to them. Cæsar, in his Commentaries (*de Bello Gall.* iib. vi.), bears witness to the multitude of slaves in Gaul. As their number was, everywhere, so considerable, it is clear that it was quite impossible to preach freedom to them without setting the world on fire. Society itself, indeed, thus endangered, would have been put on its guard against principles favoring liberty; it would have regarded the attempt with prejudice and suspicion, and the chains of servitude, instead of being loosened, would have been the more firmly riveted. Out of this immense mass of rude, savage men, set at liberty

without preparation, it was impossible for social organization to arise ; for social organization is not the creation of a moment, especially with such elements as these ; and in this case, since it would have been necessary to choose between slavery and the annihilation of social order, the instinct of preservation, which animates society as well as all beings, would undoubtedly have brought about the continuation of slavery where it still existed, and its reëstablishment where it had been destroyed. Those who complain that Christianity did not accomplish the work of abolishing slavery with sufficient promptitude, should remember that, even supposing a sudden or very rapid emancipation possible, and to say nothing of the bloody revolutions which would necessarily have been the result, the mere force of circumstances, by the insurmountable difficulties which it would have raised, would have rendered such a measure absolutely useless. Let us lay aside all social and political considerations, and apply ourselves to the economical question. First, it was necessary to change all the relations of property. The slaves played a principal part therein ; they cultivated the land, and worked as mechanics ; in a word, among them was distributed all that is called labor ; and the distribution being made on the supposition of slavery, to take away this would have made a disruption, the ultimate consequences of which could not be estimated. I will suppose that violent spoliations had taken place, that a repartition or equalization of property had been attempted, that lands had been distributed to the emancipated, and that the richest proprietors had been compelled to hold the pickaxe and the plough ; I will suppose all these absurdities and mad dreams to be realized, and I say that this would have been no remedy ; for we must not forget that the production of the means of subsistence must be in proportion to the wants of those they are intended to support, and that this proportion would have been destroyed by the abolition of slavery. The production was regulated, not exactly according to the number of the indi-

viduals who then existed, but on the supposition that the majority were slaves; now we know that the wants of a freeman are greater than those of a slave.

If, at the present time, after eighteen centuries, when ideas have been corrected, manners softened, laws ameliorated; when nations and governments have been taught by experience; when so many public establishments for the relief of indigence have been founded; when so many systems have been tried for the division of labor; when riches are distributed in a more equitable manner; if it is still so difficult to prevent a great number of men from becoming the victims of dreadful misery, if that is the terrible evil, which, like a fatal nightmare, torments society, what would have been the effect of a universal emancipation, at the beginning of Christianity, at a time when slaves were not considered by the law as *persons*, but as *things*; when their conjugal union was not looked upon as marriage; when their children were property, and subject to the same rules as the progeny of animals; when, in fine, the unhappy slave was ill-treated, tormented, sold, or put to death, according to the caprices of his master? Is it not evident that the cure of such evils was the work of ages? Do not humanity and political and social economy unanimously tell us this? If mad attempts had been made, the slaves themselves would have been the first to protest against them; they would have adhered to a servitude which at least secured to them food and shelter; they would have rejected a liberty which was inconsistent even with their existence. Such is the order of nature: man, above all, requires wherewith to live; and the means of subsistence being wanting, liberty itself would cease to please him. It is not necessary to allude to the individual examples of this, which we have in abundance; entire nations have given signal proofs of this truth. When misery is excessive, it is difficult for it not to bring with it degradation, stifle the most generous sentiments, and take away the magic of the words independence and

liberty. "The common people," says Cæsar, speaking of the Gauls, (lib. vi., de Bello Gall.) are almost on a level with slaves; of themselves they venture nothing; their voice is of no avail. There are many of that class, who, loaded with debts and tributes, or oppressed by the powerful, give themselves up into servitude to the nobles, who exercise over those who have thus delivered themselves up the same rights as over slaves.

These observations, supported by facts that no one can deny, evidently show that Christianity has displayed profound wisdom in proceeding with so much caution in the abolition of slavery. It did all that was possible in favor of human liberty; if it did not advance more rapidly in the work, it was because it could not do so without compromising the undertaking—without creating serious obstacles to the desired emancipation.

MEANS EMPLOYED BY THE CHURCH TO ENFRANCHISE SLAVES.

Let us now see what was the conduct of the Church with respect to the abolition of slavery.

The first thing that Christianity did for slaves, was to destroy the errors which opposed, not only their universal emancipation, but even the improvement of their condition; that is, the first force which she employed in the attack was, according to her custom, the *force of ideas*. This first step was the more necessary, as the same thing applies to all other evils, as well as to slavery; every social evil is always accompanied by some error which produces or foment it. There existed not only the oppression and degradation of a large portion of the human race, but, moreover, an accredited error, which tended more and more to lower that portion of humanity. According to this opinion, slaves were a mean race, far below the dignity of free-men: they were a race degraded by Jupiter himself, marked by a stain of humiliation, and predestined to their state of abjection and debasement. A detestable doctrine, no doubt, and contradicted by the nature of man, by history and experience; but which, nevertheless, reckoned distinguished men among its defenders, and which we see proclaimed for ages, to the shame of humanity and the scandal of reason, until Christianity came to destroy it, by undertaking to vindicate the rights of man. Homer tells us (*Odys.* 17) that "Jupiter has deprived slaves of half the mind." Plato ventures to advance that "in the minds of slaves, there is nothing sound or complete; and that a prudent man ought not to trust that class of persons."

Now Christianity raises its voice, and by the first words it pronounces on slaves, declares them equal to all men in the dignity of nature, and in the participation of the graces which

the Divine Spirit diffuses upon earth. We must remark the care with which St. Paul insists on this point ; it seems as if he had in view those degrading distinctions which have arisen from a fatal forgetfulness of the dignity of man. The Apostle never forgets to inculcate to the faithful that there is no difference between the slave and the freeman. " For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jew or Gentile, whether bond or free." (1. Cor. xii : 13.) " For you are all children of God, by faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew, nor Greek ; *there is neither bond or free* ; there is neither male or female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. iii : 26-28.) " Where there is neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian or Scythian, bond or free ; but Christ all and in all." (Colos. iii : 11.) The heart dilates at the sound of the voice thus loudly proclaiming the great principles of holy fraternity and equality. After having heard the oracles of Paganism inventing doctrines to degrade still more the unhappy slaves, we seem to awake from a painful dream, and to find ourselves in the light of day in the midst of the delightful reality. The imagination delights to contemplate the millions of men who, bent under degradation and ignominy, at this voice raised their eyes towards Heaven, and were animated with hope.

It was with this teaching of Christianity as with all generous and fruitful doctrines ; they penetrate the heart of society, remain there as a precious germ, and, developed by time, produce an immense tree which overshadows families and nations. When these doctrines were diffused among men, they could not fail to be misunderstood and exaggerated. Thus there were found some who pretended that Christian freedom was the proclamation of universal freedom. The pleasing words of Christ easily resounded in the ears of slaves : they heard themselves declared children of God, and brethren of Jesus Christ ; they

saw that there was no distinction made between them and their masters, between them and the most powerful lords of the earth ; is it then strange that men only accustomed to chains, to labor, to every kind of trouble and degradation, exaggerated the principles of Christian liberty, and made applications of them which were neither just in themselves, nor capable of being reduced to practice? We know, from St. Jerome, that many hearing themselves called to Christian liberty, believed that they were thereby freed. Perhaps the Apostle alluded to this error when, in his first epistle to Timothy, he said, “Who-soever are servants under the yoke, let them count their masters worthy of all honor ; lest the name of the Lord and His doctrines be blasphemed.” (1 Timothy, vi. i.) This error had been so general, that after three centuries it was still much credited ; and the Council of Gangres, held about 324, was obliged to excommunicate those who, under pretence of piety, taught that slaves ought to quit their masters, and withdraw from their service. This was not the teaching of Christianity ; and we have clearly shown that it would not have been the right way to achieve universal emancipation. Therefore this same Apostle, from whose mouth we have heard such generous language in favor of slaves, frequently inculcates to them obedience to their masters ; but let us observe, that while fulfilling this duty imposed by the spirit of peace and justice which animates Christianity, he so explains the motives on which the obedience of slaves ought to be based, he calls to mind the obligations of masters in such affecting and energetic words, and establishes so expressly and conclusively the equality of all men before God, that we cannot help seeing how great was his compassion for that unhappy portion of humanity, and how much his ideas on this point differed from those of a blind and hardened world. There is in the heart of man a feeling of noble independence, which does not permit him to subject himself to the will of another, except when he sees that the claims

to his obedience are founded on legitimate titles. If they are in accordance with reason and justice, and above all, if they have their roots in the great objects of human love and veneration, his understanding is convinced, his heart is gained, and he yields. But if the reason for the command is only the will of another, if it is only man against man, these thoughts of equality ferment in his mind, then the feeling of independence burns in his heart, he puts on a bold front, and his passions are excited. Therefore, when a willing and lasting obedience is to be obtained, it is necessary that the man should be lost sight of in the ruler, and that he should only appear as the representative of a superior power, or the personification of the motives which convince the subject of the justice and utility of his submission; thus he does not obey the will of another because it is that will, but because it is the representative of a superior power, or the interpreter of truth and justice; then man no longer considers his dignity outraged, and obedience becomes tolerable and pleasing.

It is unnecessary to say that such were not the titles on which was founded the obedience of slaves before Christianity: custom placed them in the rank of brutes; and the laws, outdoing it if possible, were expressed in language which cannot be read without indignation. Masters commanded because such was their pleasure, and slaves were compelled to obey, not on account of superior motives or moral obligations, but because they were the property of their masters, horses governed by the bridle, and mere mechanical machines. Was it, then, strange that these unhappy beings, drenched with misfortune and ignominy, conceived and cherished in their hearts that deep rancor, that violent hatred, and that terrible thirst for vengeance which at the first opportunity exploded so fearfully? The horrible massacre of Tyre, the example and terror of the universe, according to the expression of Justin; the repeated revolts of the Penestes in Thessaly, of the Helotes in Sparta; the defec-

tions of Chio and Athens ; the insurrection under the command of Herdonias, and the terror which it spread in all the families of Rome ; the scenes of blood, the obstinate and desperate resistance of the bands of Spartacus ; was all this anything but the natural result of the system of violence, outrage, and contempt with which slaves were treated ? Such is the nature of man, whoever sows contempt and outrage will reap fury and vengeance. Christianity was well aware of these truths ; and this is the reason why, while preaching obedience, it took care to found it on Divine authority. If it confirmed to masters their rights, it also taught them an exalted sense of their obligation. Wherever Christian doctrines prevailed, slaves might say : “ It is true that we are unfortunate ; birth, poverty, or the reverses of war have condemned us to misfortune, but at least we are acknowledged as men and brethren ; between us and our masters there is a reciprocity of rights and obligations.” Let us hear the Apostle : “ You, servants, obey those who are your masters, according to the flesh with fear and trembling, in the simplicity of your hearts, as to Jesus Christ himself. *Not serving to the eye, as it were pleasing men,* but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God, from the heart. With a good will serving, as to the Lord, and not to men. Knowing that whatsoever good things any man shall do, the same shall he receive from the Lord, *whether he be bond or free.* And you, masters, do the same thing to them, forbearing threatenings, knowing that the Lord both of them and you is in heaven, and *there is no respect of persons with Him.*” (Eph. vi. 5–9.) In the Epistle to the Colossians he inculcates the same doctrine of obedience anew, basing it on the same motives ; for, to console the unfortunate slaves, he tells them : “ You shall receive of the Lord the reward of inheritance : serve ye the Lord Christ. For he that doth wrong shall receive for that which he hath done wrongfully, and there is no respect of persons with God.” (Colos. iii. 24, 25) and addressing himself

to masters: "Masters, do to your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven." (iv. 1.)

The diffusion of such beneficent doctrines necessarily tends to improve greatly the condition of slaves; their immediate effect was to soften that excessive rigor, that cruelty which would be incredible if it were not incontrovertibly proved. We know that the master had the right of life and death, and that he abused that power even to putting a slave to death from caprice, as Quintus Flaminius did in the midst of a festival. Another caused one of these unfortunate beings to be thrown to the fishes, because he broke a glass of crystal. This is related of Veditius Pollio; and this horrible cruelty was not confined to the circle of a few families subject to a master devoid of compassion; no, cruelty was formed into a system, the fatal but necessary result of erroneous notions on this point, and of the forgetfulness of the sentiments of humanity. This violent system could only be supported by constantly trampling upon the slave; and there was no cessation of tyranny until the day when he, with superior power, attacked his master and destroyed him. An ancient proverb said, "So many slaves so many enemies." We have already seen the ravages committed by men thus rendered savage by revenge, whenever they were able to break their chains; but certainly, when it was desired to terrify them, their masters did not yield to them in ferocity. At Sparta, on one occasion when they feared the ill-will of the Helotes, they assembled them all at the temple of Jupiter, and put them to death. (Thucyd. b. iv.) At Rome, whenever a master was assassinated, all his slaves were condemned to death. We cannot read in Tacitus without a shudder (Ann. l. xiv. 43) the horrible scene which was witnessed when the prefect of the town, Pedanius Secundus, already alluded to, was assassinated by one of his slaves. Not less than four hundred were to die; all, according to ancient custom, were to be led to punish-

ment. This cruel and pitiable spectacle, in which so many of the innocent were to suffer death, excited the compassion of the people, who raised a tumult to prevent this horrid butchery. The Senate, in doubt, deliberated on the affair, when an orator named Cassius maintained with energy that it was necessary to complete the bloody execution, not only in obedience to the ancient custom, but also because without it it would be impossible to preserve themselves from the ill-will of the slaves. His words were all dictated by injustice and tyranny; he sees on all sides dangers and conspiracies; he can imagine no other safeguards than force and terror. The following passage is above all remarkable in his speech, as showing in a few words the ideas and manners of the ancients in this matter: "Our ancestors," says the senator, "always mistrusted the character of slaves, even of those who, born on their possessions and in their houses, might be supposed to have conceived from their cradle an affection for their masters; but as we have slaves of foreign nations, differing in customs and religion, this rabble can only be restrained by terror." Cruelty prevailed, the boldness of the people was repressed, the way was filled with soldiers, and the four hundred unfortunate beings were led to punishment.

To soften this cruel treatment, to banish these frightful atrocities, the Church used her every endeavor. She devoted all her efforts to improve as much as possible the condition of slaves; in punishments she caused mildness to be substituted for cruelty; and what was more important than all, she labored to put reason in the place of caprice, and to make the impetuosity of the masters yield to the calmness of judges; that is to say, she every day assimilated the condition of slaves more and more to that of freemen; by making right and not might reign over them. The Church never forgot the noble lesson which the Apostle gave when writing to Philemon, and interceding in favor of a fugitive slave named Onesimus; he spoke in his

favor with a tenderness which this unhappy class had never before inspired: "I beseech thee," he says to him, "for my son Onesimus. Receive him as my own bowels; no more as a slave, but as a most dear brother. If he has wronged thee in any thing, or is in thy debt, put that to my account." (Epis. to Phil.) The Council of Elvira, held in the beginning of the fourth century, subjects the woman who shall have beaten her slave so as to cause her death in three days, to many years of penance; the Council of Orleans, held in 549, orders that if a slave guilty of a fault take refuge in a church, he is to be restored to his master, but not without having exacted from the latter a promise, confirmed by oath, that he will not do him any harm; that if the master, in violation of his oath, maltreat the slave, he shall be separated from the communion of the faithful and the sacraments. This canon shows us two things; the habitual cruelty of the masters, and the zeal of the Church to soften the treatment of slaves. To restrain this cruelty, nothing less than an oath was required; and the Church, always so careful in these things, yet considered the matter important enough to justify and require the invocation of the sacred name of God.

CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT.

While improving the condition of slaves and assimilating it as much as possible to that of freemen, it was necessary not to forget the universal emancipation ; for it was not enough to ameliorate slavery, it was necessary to abolish it. The mere force of Christian notions, and the spirit of charity which was spread at the same time with them over the world, made so violent an attack on the state of slavery, that they were sure sooner or later to bring about its complete abolition. It is impossible for society to remain for a long time under an order of things which is formally opposed to the ideas with which it is imbued. According to Christian maxims, all men have a common origin and the same destiny ; all are brethren in Jesus Christ ; all are obliged to love each other with all their hearts, to assist each other in their necessities, to avoid offending each other even in words ; all are equal before God, for they will be judged without exception of persons. Christianity extended and took root everywhere — took possession of all classes, of all branches of society ; how, then, could the state of slavery last — a state of degradation which makes man the property of another, allows him to be sold like an animal, and deprives him of the sweetest ties of family and of all participation in the advantages of society ? Two things so opposite could not exist together ; the laws were in favor of slavery, it is true ; it may even be said that Christianity did not make a direct attack on those laws : But, on the other hand, what did it do ? It strove to make itself master of ideas and manners, communicated to them a new impulse, and gave them a different direction. In such a case, what did laws avail ? Their rigor was relaxed, their observance was neglected, their equality began to

be doubted, their utility was disputed, their fatal effects were remarked, and they gradually fell into desuetude, so that sometimes it was not necessary to strike a blow to destroy them. They were thrown aside as things of no use ; or, if they deserved the trouble of an express abolition, it was only for the sake of ceremony ; it was a body interred with honor.

But let it not be supposed, after what has been said, that in attributing so much importance to Christian ideas and manners, it is meant that the triumph of these ideas and manners was abandoned to that force alone, without that coöperation on the part of the Church which the time and circumstances required. Quite the contrary : the Church called to her aid all the means the most conducive to the desired result. In the first place, it was requisite, to secure the work of emancipation, to protect from all assault the liberty of the freed—liberty which unhappily was often attacked and put in great danger. The causes of this melancholy fact may be easily found in the remains of ancient ideas and manners, in the cupidity of powerful men, the system of violence made general by the irruption of the barbarians, in the poverty, neglect, and total want of education and morality in which slaves must have been when they quitted servitude. It must be supposed that a great number of them did not know all the value of liberty ; that they did not always conduct themselves, in their new state, according to the dictates of reason and the exigencies of justice ; and that, newly entered on the possession of the rights of freemen, they did not know how to fulfil all their new obligations. But these different inconveniences, inseparable from the nature of things, were not to hinder the consummation of an enterprise called for both by religion and humanity, and it was proper to be resigned to them from the consideration of the numerous motives for excusing the conduct of the enfranchised ; the state which these men had just quitted had checked the development of their moral and intellectual faculties.

The liberty of newly emancipated slaves was protected against the attacks of injustice, and clothed with an invincible sanctity, from the time that their enfranchisement was connected with things which then exercised the most powerful ascendancy. Now the Church, and all that belonged to her, was in this influential position ; therefore the custom, which was then introduced of performing the manumission in the churches, was undoubtedly very favorable to the progress of liberty. This custom, by taking the place of ancient usages, caused them to be forgotten ; it was, at the same time, a tacit declaration of the value of human liberty in the sight of God, and a proclamation, with additional authority, of the equality of men before Him ; for the manumission was made in the same place where it was often read, that before Him there was no exception of persons ; where all earthly distinctions disappeared, and all men were commingled and united by the sweet ties of fraternity and love. This method of manumission more clearly invested the Church with the right of defending the liberty of the enfranchised. As she had been witness to the act, she could testify to the spontaneity and the other circumstances which assured its validity ; she could even insist on its observance, by representing that the promised liberty could not be violated without profaning the sacred place, without breaking a pledge which had been given in the presence of God himself. The Church did not forget to turn these circumstances to the advantage of the freed. Thus we see that the first Council of Orange, held in 441, ordains, in its 7th canon, that it was necessary to check, by ecclesiastical censures, whoever desired to reduce to any kind of servitude slaves who had been emancipated within the enclosure of the church. A century later we find the same prohibition repeated in the 7th canon of the fifth Council of Orleans, held in 549.

The protection given by the Church to freed slaves was so manifest and known to all, that the custom was introduced of

especially recommending them to her. This recommendation was sometimes made by will, as the Council of Orange, just quoted, gives us to understand; for it orders that the emancipated who had been recommended to the Church by will, shall be protected from all kinds of servitude, by ecclesiastical censures.

But this recommendation was not always made in a testamentary form. We read in the sixth canon of the sixth Council of Toledo, held in 589, that when any enfranchised persons had been recommended to the Church, neither they nor their children could be deprived of the protection of the Church; here they speak in general, without limitation to cases in which there had been a will. The same regulation may be seen in another Council of Toledo, held in 633, which simply says, that the Church will receive under her protection only the enfranchised of individuals who shall have taken care to recommend them to her.

In the absence of all particular recommendations, and even when the manumission had not been made in the Church, she did not cease to interest herself in defending the freed, when their liberty was endangered. He who has any regard for the dignity of man, and any feeling of humanity in his heart, will certainly not find it amiss that the Church interfered in affairs of this kind; indeed, she acted as every generous man should do, in the exercise of the right of protecting the weak. We shall not be displeased, therefore, to find in the twenty-ninth canon of the Council of Agde in Languedoc, held in 506, a regulation commanding the Church, in case of necessity, to undertake the defence of those to whom their masters had given liberty in a lawful way.

The zeal of the Church in all times and places for the redemption of captives has no less contributed to the great work of the abolition of slavery. We know that a considerable portion of slaves owed their servitude to the reverses of

war. The mild character which we see in modern wars would have appeared fabulous to the ancients. Woe to the vanquished! might then be said with perfect truth; there was nothing but slavery or death. The ancients were always in excess, either in cowardice or ferocity; between these two extremes there is a middle way, and that has been taught to mankind by the Christian religion. Christianity, in accordance with its principles of fraternity and love, regarded the redemption of captives as one of the worthiest objects of its charitable zeal. Whether we consider the noble traits of particular actions, which have been preserved to us by history, or observe the spirit which guided the conduct of the Church, we shall find therein one of the most distinguished claims of the Christian religion to the gratitude of mankind.

A celebrated writer, M. de Chateaubriand, has described to us a Christian priest who, in the forests of France, voluntarily made himself a slave, who devoted himself to slavery for the ransom of a Christian soldier, and thus restored a husband to his desolate wife, and a father to three unfortunate orphan children. The sublime spectacle which Zachary offers us, when enduring slavery with calm serenity for the love of Jesus Christ, and for the unhappy being for whom he has sacrificed his liberty, is not a mere fiction of the poet. More than once, in the first ages of the Church, such examples were seen; and he who has wept over the sublime disinterestedness and unspeakable charity of Zachary, may be sure that his tears are only a tribute to the truth. "We have known," says St. Clement the Pope, "many of ours who have devoted themselves to captivity, in order to ransom their brethren." (*First Letter to the Corinth.* c. 55.) The redemption of captives was so carefully provided for by the Church that it was regulated by the ancient canons, and to fulfil it, she sold, if necessary, her ornaments, and even the sacred vessels. When unhappy captives were in question, her charity and zeal knew no bounds,

and she went so far as to ordain that, however bad might be the state of her affairs, their ransom should be provided for in the first instance. (*Caus.* 12, 5, 2.) In the midst of revolutions produced by the irruption of barbarians, we see that the Church, always constant in her designs, forgot not the noble enterprise in which she was engaged. The beneficent regulations of the ancient canons fell not into forgetfulness or desuetude, and the generous words of the holy Bishop of Milan, in favor of slaves, found an echo which ceased not to be heard amid the chaos of those unhappy times. We see by the fifth canon of the Council of Mâcon, held in 585, that priests undertook the ransom of captives by devoting to it the Church property. The Council of Rheims, held in 625, inflicts the punishment of suspension from his functions on the bishop who shall have destroyed the sacred vessels; but with generous foresight, it adds, "for any other motive than the redemption of captives;" and long afterwards, in the twelfth canon of the Council of Verneuil, held in 844, we find that the property of the Church was used for that merciful purpose. When the captive was restored to liberty, the Church did not deprive him of her protection; she was careful to continue it, by giving him letters of recommendation, for the double purpose of protecting him from new trouble during his journey, and with furnishing him with the means of repairing his losses during his captivity. We find a proof of this new kind of protection in the second canon of the Council of Lyons, held in 583, which ordains that bishops shall state in the letters of recommendation which they give to captives, the date and price of their ransom. The zeal for this work was displayed by many in the Church with so much ardor, that they went so far as to commit acts of imprudence which the ecclesiastical authority was compelled to check. These excesses, and this mistaken zeal, prove how great was the spirit of charity. We know by a Council, called that of St. Patrick, held in the year 451 or 456, that some of the

clergy ventured to procure the freedom of captives by inducing them to run away. The Council by its thirty-second canon very prudently checks this excess by ordaining that the ecclesiastic who desire to ransom captives must do so with his own money ; for to steal them, by inducing them to run away, was to expose the clergy to be considered as robbers, which was a dishonor to the Church. A remarkable document, which, while showing us the spirit of order and equity which guides the Church, at the same time enables us to judge how deeply was engraved on men's minds the maxim, that it is holy, meritorious, and generous to give liberty to captives ; for we see that some persons had persuaded themselves that the excellence of the work justified seizing them forcibly. The disinterestedness of the Church on this point is not less laudable. When she had employed her funds in the ransom of a captive, she did not desire from him any recompense, even when he had it in his power to discharge the debt. We have a certain proof of this in the letters of St. Gregory, where we see that the Pope reassures some persons who had been freed with the money of the Church, and who feared that after a time they would be called upon to pay the sum expended for their advantage. The Pope orders that no one, at any time shall venture to disturb either them or their heirs, seeing that the sacred canons allow the employment of the goods of the Church for the ransom of captives. (L. 7, ep. 14.)

The zeal of the Church for so holy a work must have contributed in an extraordinary way to diminish the number of slaves ; the influence of it was so much the more salutary, as it was developed precisely at the time when it was most needed, that is, in the ages when the dissolution of the Roman empire, the irruption of the barbarians, the fluctuation of so many people, and the ferocity of the invading nations, rendered wars so frequent, revolutions so constant, and the empire of force so habitual and prevailing. Without the beneficent and liberating

intervention of Christianity, the immense number of slaves bequeathed by the old society to the new, far from diminishing, would have been augmented more and more ; for wherever the law of brute force prevails, if it be not checked and softened by a powerful element, the human race becomes rapidly debased, the necessary result of which is the increase of slavery. This lamentable state of agitation and violence was in itself very likely to render the efforts which the Church made to abolish slavery useless ; and it was not without infinite trouble that she prevented what she succeeded in preserving on one side, from being destroyed on the other. The absence of a central power, the complication of social relations, almost always badly determined, often affected by violence, and always deprived of the guarantee of stability and consistency, was the reason why there was no security either for things or persons, and that while properties were unceasingly invaded, persons were deprived of their liberty. So that it was at that time necessary to fight against the violence of individuals, as had been formerly done against manners and legislation. We see that the third canon of the Council of Lyons, held about 566, excommunicates those who unjustly retain free persons in slavery ; in the seventeenth canon of the Council of Rheims, held in 625, it was forbidden, under the same penalty, to pursue free persons in order to reduce them to slavery ; in the twenty-seventh canon of the Council of London, held in 1102, the barbarous custom of dealing in men, like animals, is proscribed : and in the seventh canon of the Council of Coblentz, held in 922, he who takes away a Christian to sell him is declared guilty of homicide ; a remarkable declaration, when we see liberty valued at as high a price as life itself. Another means of which the Church availed herself to abolish slavery was, to preserve for the unfortunate who had been reduced to that state by misery, a sure means of quitting it.

We have already remarked that indigence was one of the

causes of slavery, and we have seen that this was frequently the cause among the Gauls, as is evidenced by a passage of Cæsar. We also know that by virtue of an ancient law, he who had fallen into slavery could not recover his liberty without the consent of his master ; as the slave was really property, no one could dispose of him without the consent of his master, and least of all himself. This law was in accordance with Pagan doctrines, but Christianity regarded the thing differently ; and if the slave was still in her eyes a property, he did not cease to be a man. Thus on this point the Church refused to follow the strict rules of other properties ; and when there was the least doubt, at the first favorable opportunity she took the side of the slave. These observations make us understand all the value of the new law introduced by the Church, which ordained that persons who had been sold by necessity should be able to return to their former condition by restoring the price which they had received. This law, which is expressly laid down in a French Council, held about 616 at Boneuil, according to the common opinion, opened a wide field for the conquest of liberty ; it supported in the heart of the slave a hope which urged him to seek and put into operation the means of obtaining his ransom, and it placed his liberty within the power of any one who, touched with his unhappy lot, was willing to pay or lend the necessary sum. Let us remember what we have said of the ardent zeal which was awakened in so many hearts, for the works of this kind ; let us call to mind that the property of the Church was always considered as well employed when it was used for the succor of the unfortunate, and we shall understand the incalculable influence of the regulation which we have just mentioned. We shall see that it was to close one of the most abundant sources of slavery, and prepare a wide path to universal emancipation.

The conduct of the Church with respect to the Jews also contributed to the abolition of slavery. This singular people

are found dispersed among all nations, like fragments of insoluble matter floating in a liquid, seek to console themselves in their misfortune by accumulating treasures, and appear to wish to avenge themselves for the contemptuous neglect in which they are left by other nations, by gaining possession of their wealth by means of insatiable interest, if not usury. In times when revolutions and so many calamities must necessarily have produced distress, the odious vice of unfeeling avarice must have had a fatal influence. The harshness and cruelty of ancient laws and manners concerning debtors were not effaced, liberty was far from being estimated at its just value, and examples of persons who sold it to relieve their necessities were not wanting; it was therefore important to prevent the power of the wealthy Jews from reaching an exorbitant extent, to the detriment of the liberty of Christians.

The third Council of Orleans, held in 538, by its thirteenth canon, forbids Jews to compel Christian slaves to do things contrary to the religion of Jesus Christ. This regulation, which guaranteed the liberty of the slave in the sanctuary of conscience, rendered him respectable even in the eyes of his master: it was besides a solemn proclamation of the dignity of man, it was a declaration that slavery could not extend its dominion over the sacred region of the mind. Yet this was not enough; it was proper also that the recovery of their liberty should be facilitated to the slaves of the Jews. Three years only pass away; a fourth Council is held at Orleans; let us observe the progress which the question had made in so short a time. This Council, by its thirtieth canon, allows the Christian slaves who shall take refuge in the Church to be ransomed, on paying to the Jewish master the proper price. If we pay attention we shall see that such a regulation must have produced abundant results in favor of liberty, as it gave Christian slaves an opportunity of flying to the churches, and there imploring with more effect, the charity of their brethren, to gain the price of their ransom.

The ineffable goodness of a God made man, who had shed His blood for the redemption of all men, was the powerful motive which urged the Church to interest herself with so much zeal in the enfranchisement of slaves; and, indeed, was it not enough to inspire horror for so degrading an inequality, to think that these same men, reduced to the level of brutes, had been, as well as their masters, as well as the most powerful monarchs upon earth, the objects of the merciful intentions of the Most High? "Since our Redeemer, the Creator of all things," said Pope St. Gregory. "has deigned, in His goodness, to assume the flesh of man, in order to restore to us our pristine liberty, by breaking, through the means of His divine grace, the bonds of servitude, which held us captives, it is a salutary deed to restore to men, by enfranchisement, their native liberty; for, in the beginning, nature made them all free, and they have only been subjected to the yoke of servitude by the law of nations." (L. 5. lett. 72.)

SENTIMENTS OF S. AUGUSTINE AND S. THOMAS AQUINAS
ON THE SUBJECT OF SLAVERY.

Thus did the Church, by a variety of means, break the chains of slavery, without ever exceeding the limits marked out by justice and prudence ; thus did she banish from among Christians that degrading condition, so contrary to their exalted ideas on the dignity of man and their generous feelings of fraternity and love. Wherever Christianity shall be introduced, chains of iron shall be twined into gentle ties, and humiliated men shall raise their ennobled heads. With what pleasure do we read the remarks of one of the greatest men of Christianity, S. Augustine, on this point (*De Civit Dei*, l. xix. C. 14, 15, 16.) He establishes in a few words the obligation incumbent upon all who rule — fathers, husbands, and masters — to watch over the good of those who are under them : he lays down the advantage of those who obey, as one of the foundations of obedience ; he says that the just do not rule from ambition and pride, but from duty and the desire of doing good to their subjects : “*Neque enim dominandi cupiditate imperant, sed officio consulendi, nec principandi superbia, sed providendi misericordia ;*” and by these noble maxims he proscribes all opinions which tend to tyranny, or found obedience on any degrading notions ; but on a sudden, as if this great mind apprehended some reply in violation of human dignity, he grows warm, he boldly faces the question ; he rises to his full height, and, giving free scope to the noble thoughts that ferment in his mind, he invokes the idea of nature and the will of God in favor of the dignity of man thus menaced. He says : “thus wills the order

of nature ; thus has man been created by God. He has given him to rule over the fishes of the sea, the birds of the air, and the reptiles that crawl on the face of the earth. *He has ordained that reasoning creatures, made according to His own image, shall rule over creatures devoid of reason. He has not established the dominion of man over man, but that of man over the brute.*" This passage of S. Augustine is one of the bold features which shine forth in writers of genius, when grieved by the sight of a painful object, they allow their generous ideas and feelings to have free scope, and cease to restrain their daring energies. Struck by the force of the expression, the reader, in suspense and breathless, hastens to read the succeeding lines ; he fears that the author may be mistaken, seduced by the nobleness of his heart, and carried away by the force of his genius. But, with inexpressible pleasure, he finds that the writer has in no degree departed from the path of true doctrine, when, like a brave champion, he has descended into the arena to defend the cause of justice and humanity. Thus does S. Augustine now appear to us ; the sight of so many unfortunate beings groaning in slavery, victims of the violence and caprice of their masters, afflicted his generous mind. By the light of reason and doctrines of Christianity, he saw no reason why so considerable a portion of the human race should be condemned to live in such debasement ; wherefore, when proclaiming the doctrines of submission and obedience, he labors to discover the cause of such ignominy ; and not being able to find it in the nature of man, he seeks for it in sin, in malediction. "The primitive just men," says he, "were rather established as pastors over their flocks, than as kings over other men ; whereby God gives us to understand what was called for by the order of creation, and what was required by the punishment of sin ; for the condition of slavery has, with reason, been imposed on the sinner. Thus we do not find the word slave in

the Scripture before the day when the just man Noah, gave it as a punishment to his guilty son ; whence it follows that this word came from sin, and not from nature." This manner of considering slavery as the offspring of sin, as the fruit of the Divine malediction, was of the highest importance. By protecting the dignity of human nature, that doctrine completely destroys all the prejudices of natural superiority which the pride of freemen could entertain. Thereby, also, slavery was deprived of all its supposed value as a political principle or means of government : it could only be regarded as one of the numberless scourges inflicted on the human race by the anger of the Most High. Henceforth slaves had a motive for resignation, while the absolute power of masters was checked, and the compassion of all free men was powerfully excited. All were born in sin, all might have been in a state of slavery. To make a boast of liberty would have been like the conduct of a man who, during an epidemic, should boast of having preserved his health, and imagine that on that account he had a right to insult the unhappy sick. In a word, the state of slavery was a scourge, nothing more, like pestilence, war, famine, or any thing else of the kind. The duty of all men was to labor to remedy and abolish it. Such doctrines did not remain sterile. Proclaimed in the face of day, they were heard in all parts of the Catholic world ; and not only were they put in practice, as we have seen by numberless examples, but they were carefully preserved as a precious theory, throughout the confusion of the times. After the lapse of eight centuries, we see them repeated by one of the brightest lights of the Catholic Church. S. Thomas Aquinas (I. p. g. xcvi. art. 4). That great man does not see in slavery either difference of race or imaginary inferiority or means of government ; he only considers it as a scourge inflicted on humanity by the sins of the first man.

What more eloquent protest against the continuance of slavery can be introduced than the doctrine of these two illustrious doctors? They declare it, as we have just seen, to be the fruit of malediction, the chastisement of the prevarication of the human race; and they only acknowledge its existence by considering it as one of the greatest scourges that afflict humanity.

RESUME OF THE SUBJECT.

In the hasty sketch thus given, I believe that I have not advanced any proposition without supporting it by undeniable documents, and not allowed myself to be misled by enthusiasm in favor of Catholicity, so as to concede to it that to which it is not entitled. By passing, rapidly it is true, the course of ages, we have shown, by convincing proofs, which have been furnished by times and places the most various, that it was Catholicity that abolished slavery, in spite of ideas, manners, interests and laws, which opposed obstacles apparently invincible; and that it has done so without injustice, without violence, without revolutions, — with the most exquisite prudence and the most admirable moderation. We have seen the Catholic Church make so extensive, so varied, and so efficacious an attack on slavery, that that odious chain was broken without a single violent stroke. Exposed to the action of the most powerful agents, it gradually relaxed and fell to pieces. Her proceedings may be thus recapitulated:—

First, she loudly teaches the truth concerning the dignity of man; she defines the obligations of masters and slaves; she declares them equal before God, and thus completely destroys the degrading theories which stain the writings even of the greatest philosophers of antiquity. She then comes to the application of her doctrines: she labors to improve the treat-

ment of slaves ; she struggles against the atrocious right of life and death ; she opens her temples to them as asylums, and when they depart thence, prevents their being ill-treated ; she labors to substitute public tribunals for private vengeance. At the same time that the Church guarantees the liberty of the enfranchised, by connecting it with religious motives, she defends that of those born free ; she labors to close the sources of slavery, by displaying the most active zeal for the redemption of captives, by opposing the avarice of the Jews, by procuring for men who were sold, easy means of recovering their liberty. The Church gives us an example of mildness and disinterestedness ; she facilitates emancipation, by all the means that charity suggests ; and thus it is that, in spite of the deep roots of slavery in ancient society — in spite of the perturbation caused by the irruptions of the barbarians — in spite of so many wars and calamities of every kind, which in a great measure paralyzed the effect of all regulating and beneficent action — yet we see slavery, that dishonor and leprosy of ancient civilization, rapidly diminish among Christians, until where she has had her sway, it finally disappears. Surely in all this we do not discover a plan conceived and concerted by men. But we do observe therein, in the absence of that plan, such unity of tendencies, such a perfect identity of views, and such similarity in the means, that we have the clearest demonstration of the civilizing and liberating spirit contained in Catholicity. Accurate observers will no doubt be gratified in beholding, in the picture exhibited, the admirable concord with which the period of the empire, that of the irruption of the barbarians, and that of feudality, all tended towards the same end.

Such are the facts of history, I have pointed out the periods, and cited the Councils. The reader may thus fully convince himself that I have not deceived him. Had such been my

intention, surely I should have avoided descending to the level ground of facts; I should have preferred the vague regions of theory; I should have called to my aid high sounding and seductive language, and all the means most likely to enchant the imagination and excite the feelings; in fine I should have placed myself in one of those positions where a writer can suppose at his pleasure things which have never existed, and made the best use of the resources of imagination and invention. The task which I have undertaken is rather more difficult, perhaps less brilliant, but certainly more useful.