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CANNIBALS ALL! OR, SLAVES WITHOUT MASTERS

1857

CH. I: THE UNIVERSAL TRADE

EXCERPTS

We are all, North and South, engaged in the White Slave Trade, and he who succeeds best is esteemed most respectable. It is far more cruel than the Black Slave Trade because it exacts more of its slaves, and neither protects nor governs them. We boast that it exacts more when we say “that the *profits* made from employing free labor are greater than those from slave labor.” The profits made from free labor are the amount of the products of such labor which the employer, by means of the command which capital or skill gives him, takes away, exacts or “exploitates” from the free laborer. The profits of slave labor are that portion of the products of such labor which the power of the master enables him to appropriate. These profits are less, because the master allows the slave to retain a larger share of the results of his own labor than do the employers of free labor. But we not only boast that the White Slave Trade is more exacting and fraudulent (in fact, though not in intention) than Black Slavery, but we also boast that it is more cruel, in leaving the laborer to take care of himself and family out of the pittance which skill or capital have allowed him to retain. When the day’s labor is ended, he is free, but is overburdened with the cares of family and household, which make his freedom an empty and delusive mockery. But his employer is really free, and may enjoy the profits made by others’ labor without a care or a trouble as to their well-being. The Negro slave is free, too, when the labors of the day are over, and free in mind as well as body, for the master provides food, raiment [clothing], house, fuel, and everything else necessary to the physical well-being of himself and family. The master’s labors commence just when the slave’s end. No wonder men should prefer white slavery to capital, to Negro slavery, since it is more profitable, and is free from all the cares and labors of black slave-holding.

Now, reader, if you wish to know yourself — to “descant on your own deformity”¹ — read on. But if you would cherish self-conceit, self-esteem, or self-appreciation, throw down our book, for we will dispel illusions which have promoted your happiness, and show you that what you have considered and practiced as virtue is little better than moral Cannibalism. But you will find yourself in numerous and respectable company, for all good and respectable people are “Cannibals all,” who do not labor, or who are successfully trying to live without labor, on the unrequited labor of other people — whilst low, bad, and disreputable people are those who labor to support themselves and to support said respectable people besides. Throwing the Negro slaves out of the account, and society is divided in Christendom into four classes: the rich, or independent respectable people, who live well and labor not at all; the professional and skillful respectable people, who do a little light work, for enormous wages; the poor hard-working people, who support everybody, and starve themselves; and the poor thieves, swindlers and sturdy beggars, who live like gentlemen, without labor, on the labor of other people. The gentlemen exploitate [exploit], which being done on a large scale and requiring a great many victims, is highly respectable — whilst the rogues and beggars take so little from others that they fare little better than those who labor.

But, reader, we do not wish to fire into the flock. “Thou art the man!” You are a Cannibal! and if a

successful one, pride yourself on the number of your victims, quite as much as any Feejee [Fiji] chieftain, who breakfasts, dines and sups on human flesh. — And your conscience smites you if you have failed to succeed, quite as much as his, when he returns from an unsuccessful foray.

Probably you are a lawyer, or a merchant, or a doctor, who has made by your business fifty thousand dollars, and retired to live on your capital. But, mark! not to spend your capital. That would be vulgar, disreputable, criminal. That would be to live by your own labor, for your capital is your amassed labor. That would be to do as common working men do, for they take the pittance which their employers leave them, to live on. They live by labor, for they exchange the results of their own labor for the products of other people's labor. It is, no doubt, an honest vulgar [common, ordinary] way of living, but not at all a respectable way. The respectable way of living is to make other people work for you, and to pay them nothing for so doing — and to have no concern about them after their work is done. Hence, white slaveholding is much more respectable than Negro slavery — for the master works nearly as hard for the Negro, as he for the master. But you, my virtuous, respectable reader, exact three thousand dollars per annum [year] from white labor (for your income is the product of white labor) and make not one cent of return in any form. You retain your capital, and never labor, and yet live in luxury on the labor of others. Capital commands labor, as the master does the slave. Neither pays for labor, but the master permits the slave to retain a larger allowance from the proceeds of his own labor, and hence “free labor is cheaper than slave labor.” You, with the command over labor which your capital gives you, are a slave owner — a master, without the obligations of a master. They who work for you, who create your income, are slaves, without the rights of slaves. Slaves without a master! Whilst you were engaged in amassing your capital, in seeking to become independent, you were in the White Slave Trade. To become independent is to be able to make other people support you, without being obliged to labor for *them*. Now, what man in society is not seeking to attain this situation? He who attains it is a slave owner, in the worst sense. He who is in pursuit of it, is engaged in the slave trade. You, reader, belong to the one or other class. The men without property, in free society, are theoretically in a worse condition than slaves. Practically, their condition corresponds with this theory, as history and statistics everywhere demonstrate. The capitalists, in free society, live in ten times the luxury and show that Southern masters do, because the slaves to capital [i.e., the northern factory workingmen] work harder and cost less than Negro slaves.

The Negro slaves of the South are the happiest, and, in some sense, the freest people in the world. The children and the aged and infirm work not at all, and yet have all the comforts and necessaries of life provided for them. They enjoy liberty, because they are oppressed neither by care nor labor. The women do little hard work, and are protected from the despotism of their husbands by their masters. The Negro men and stout boys work, on the average, in good weather, not more than nine hours a day. The balance of their time is spent in perfect abandon. Besides, they have their Sabbaths and holidays. White men, with so much of license and liberty, would die of ennui [boredom], but Negroes luxuriate in corporeal [bodily] and mental repose. With their faces upturned to the sun, they can sleep at any hour, and quiet sleep is the greatest of human enjoyments. “Blessed be the man who invented sleep.” 'Tis happiness in itself — and results from contentment with the present, and confident assurance of the future. We do not know whether free laborers ever sleep. They are fools to do so, for whilst they sleep, the wily and watchful capitalist is devising means to ensnare and exploit them. The free laborer must work or starve. He is more of a slave than the Negro because he works longer and harder for less allowance than the slave and has no holiday, because the cares of life with him begin when its labors end. He has no liberty, and not a single right. We

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