

READING: "The Barbarism of Slavery"

Senator Charles Sumner, "The Barbarism of Slavery". *The Works of Charles Sumner*, (Boston: 1874-83).

In presenting the character of Slavery, there is little for me, except to make Slavery paint itself. When this is done, the picture will need no explanatory words.

I begin with the Law of Slavery and its Origin; and here this Barbarism sketches itself in its own chosen definition. It is simply this: Man, created in the image of God, is divested of the human character, and declared to be a "chattel,"--that is, a beast, a thing, or article of property. . . .

Sir, look at its plain import, and see the relation which it establishes. The slave is held simply for the use of his master, to whose behests his life, liberty, and happiness are devoted, and by whom he may be bartered, leased, mortgaged, bequeathed, invoiced, shipped as cargo, stored as goods, sold on execution, knocked off at public auction, and even staked at the gaming-table on the hazard of a card or a die,--all according to law. Nor is there anything, within the limit of life, inflicted on a beast, which may not be inflicted on the slave: He may be marked like a hog, branded like a mule, yoked like an ox, hobbled like a horse, driven like an ass, sheared like a sheep, maimed like a cur, and constantly beaten like a brute,--all according to law. And should life itself be taken, what is the remedy? The Law of Slavery . . . openly pronounces the incompetency of the whole African race, whether bond or free, to testify against a white man in any case, and thus, after surrendering the slave to all possible outrage, crowns its tyranny by excluding the very testimony through which the bloody cruelty of the Slave-Master might be exposed.

Thus in its Law does Slavery paint itself; but it is only when we look at details, and detect its essential elements, five in number, all inspired by a single motive, that its character becomes completely manifest.

Foremost, of course, in these elements, is the impossible pretension, where Barbarism is lost in impiety, by which man claims property in man. Against such blasphemy the argument is brief. According to the Law of Nature, . . . every human being has complete title to himself direct from the Almighty. . . . Slavery tyrannically assumes power which Heaven denied,--while, under its barbarious necromancy, . . . a man is changed into a chattel, a person is withered into a thing, a soul is shrunk into merchandise. . . .

Secondly. Slavery paints itself again in its complete abrogation of marriage, recognized as a sacrament by the Church, and as a contract by the civil power, wherever civilization prevails. Under the Law of