

1854. Archbishop Hughes Defends the Slave Trade

(Source: *The New York Times*, May 2, 1854, p. 2)

Archbishop Hughes, in his first sermon since his return from Cuba, perched on Sunday last, took occasion to speak of Slavery, both in the abstract and as it exists in that Spanish Colony. He said that he had taken pains to inquire of some who had been bought to Cuba as slaves from the Coast of Africa, whether they wished to return and they invariably stated that they did not; and the reason is that their condition here, degraded as it is, is much better than it was at home, where they were exposed to constant wars, in which mercy to the conquered is unknown, so that it is really a mitigation of their lot to be sold into foreign bondage. He bore testimony to the conscientious efforts made by many slave-owners to perform the duties which the responsibility of their position devolved upon them and said that he could see no great difference between the obligations of those who own slaves and those who have control over hired servants or over children.

There is undoubtedly much truth in the Archbishop's views; the only danger is that they may be compelled to give sanction to inferences not properly deducible from them. It is probably true that the condition of a slave in Cuba, or at the South is better than that of a negro in the heart of Africa, especially if he were there the prisoner of a hostile tribe. This fact however would scarcely justify the kidnapper in seizing negroes in Africa and selling them into Cuban or American slavery. And, yet, it may very possibly be used at some future day as an argument for the restoration of the Slave trade, as it was once used against its abolition. It was very strongly pressed by the mercantile interest of England which with the King and nobility strenuously resisted the abolition of the African Slave trade against the efforts of Pitt Wilberforce and their collaborators in this great work and it was heard on the floors of our Congress in connection with the struggle which resulted in declaring the Slave trade privacy.

It is by no means impossible that this whole question may again become the theme of public discussion; and we should, in such a case regret to find the Archbishop's sentiments concerning Slavery quoted to sustain practices which we are quite certain he would not directly approve.