

Religious Defense of Slavery

By Edwin Eugene Ott

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Slavery in the American south was often supported by the Biblical arguments of their religious leaders. The following is a tragic story from Laurens County's history...

Mr. Ezekiel, Birdseye, a gentleman of known probity, in Cornwall, Litchfield County, Conn. gives the testimony which follows: "A BAPTIST CLERGYMAN in Laurens District, S.C. whipped His slave to DEATH, whom he suspected of having stolen about sixty dollars. The slave was in the prime of life and was purchased a few weeks before for \$800 of a slave trader from Virginia or Maryland. The coroner, Wm. Irby, at whose house I was then boarding, told me, that on reviewing the dead body, he found it beat to a jelly from head to foot. The master's wife discovered the money a day or two after the death of the slave. She had herself removed it from where it was placed, not knowing what it was, as it was tied up in a thick envelope. I happened to be present when the trial of this man took place, at Laurens Court House. His daughter testified that her father untied the slave, when he appeared to be failing, and gave him cold water to drink, of which he took freely. His counsel pleaded that his death might have been caused by drinking cold water in a state of excitement. The Judge charged the jury, that it would be their duty to find the defendant guilty, if they believed the death was caused by the whipping; but if they were of opinion that drinking cold water caused the death, they would find him not guilty! The jury found him—Not GUILTY.'" (*)

(*) T E S T I M O N Y OF A THOUSAND WITNESSES. The American Anti-Slavery Society, Office: No. 143 Nassau Street, New York, 1839, Page 23.