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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SLAVERY: WHAT IT WAS, WHAT IT HAS DONE, WHAT IT INTENDS TO DO ***

SLAVERY: WHAT IT WAS, WHAT IT HAS DONE, WHAT IT INTENDS TO DO.

[1]

S P E E C H

OF

HON. CYDNOR B. TOMPKINS, OF OHIO.

Delivered in the House of Representatives, April 24, 1860.

Mr. TOMPKINS said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The charge is frequently made, that nothing but slavery occupies the attention of the National Legislature. That this charge is true to a great extent, that this subject is constantly kept before the country, and that there is constant excitement about it, is not the fault of the Republican party. In the first hour of the present session of Congress, it was thrust upon the House by a member of the slavery party; for two months a discussion was continued upon that subject, and almost exclusively by that party—a discussion unparalleled in point of violence and virulence in the history of Parliamentary debate. Charges the most aggravated were unscrupulously and shamelessly made against the best and purest men of the country, and honorable members on this floor. Calumny and vituperation held high carnival in the legislative halls of this great nation. The columns of the *Daily Globe* teemed with fierce and fiery denunciations of all who would not bow to the behests of pro-slavery power. Depraved, corrupt, and polluted presses exerted themselves to the utmost in the work of slander and detraction; hireling scribblers for worse than hireling presses glutted themselves and *made their meals on good men's names*. These spacious galleries were filled with disloyal men, ready to applaud to the echo every threat uttered against the Government, and every disloyal sentiment heard from this floor.

If the Republicans here shall feel it to be their duty to discuss this subject now; to lay bare its weakness and its wickedness; to expose the madness and the folly of those who sustain, support, and cherish it; if the great interests of the country have to be neglected for a time; if ordinary legislation must be put aside, no complaint can be made against the Republican party. That party, its principles, its men, and its measures, have been misrepresented, and most unjustly assailed. It is our privilege, it is our duty, to repel those assaults, that the world may know that when the advanced guard of freedom is attacked, "our feet shall be always in the arena, and our shields shall hang always in the lists."

I intend to review this question for the time allowed me. I hope to do so with fairness and candor,

and not with the passion and excitement that have characterized many speeches made this session by pro-slavery members. I shall endeavor to show that the fathers of this Republic, both of the North and South, were more thoroughly anti-slavery than any political party now in the country; and that, for more than forty years after its organization, a large majority of our prominent men were strongly opposed to the extension of that "*patriarchal* institution."

The debates in the Federal Convention show that the Constitution was framed, adopted, and ratified, by anti-slavery men; that they regarded it as an evil, yet were ashamed to acknowledge its existence in words—thus virtually refusing to recognise property in many Resolutions, addresses, and speeches, now to be found, establish this very important fact, as I will show by quotations from them.

At a general meeting in Prince George county, Virginia, it was

"*Resolved*, That the African slave trade is injurious to this colony, obstructs the population of it by free men, and prevents manufacturers from Europe from settling among us."

At a meeting in Culpeper county, Virginia, it was

"*Resolved*, That the importation of slaves obstructs the population with free white men and useful manufacturers."

At a meeting in Nansemond county, Virginia, it was

"*Resolved*, That the African slave trade is injurious to this colony, obstructs the population by free men, and prevents manufacturers from settling amongst us."

Resolutions to the same effect were adopted in Surrey county, Caroline county; and at a meeting in Fairfax county, over which George Washington presided, resolutions of like import were adopted.

At a very full meeting of delegates from the different counties of the Colony and Dominion of Virginia, at Williamsburg, on the 1st day of August, 1774, it was

"*Resolved*, that the abolition of domestic slavery is the greatest object of desire in these colonies, where it was improperly introduced in their infant state."

This is the language of the good and wise men of the Old Dominion in 1774; "the *abolition* of domestic slavery was the greatest object of their desire." Not merely to limit it, to prevent its extension, but wholly to overthrow it. What would be said if a body of men, equally wise, good, and patriotic, should *now* meet in the Old Dominion, and attempt to pass such resolutions? They would be scourged, driven by violence from the State, and might be considered fortunate should they escape with their lives. At a meeting in New Bern, North Carolina, August, 1774, numerously attended by the most distinguished men of that region, it was resolved that they would not import any slave or slaves, or purchase any slave or slaves imported or brought into that province by others from any part of the world. Such was the sentiment of North Carolina in 1774, as to the evil and great wrong of slavery.

[2]

The Continental Congress, in October, 1774, resolved that they would neither import, nor purchase any slave imported, after December of the same year; they agreed and resolved that they would have no trade, commerce, dealings, or intercourse whatsoever, with any colony or province in North America which should not accede to, or should violate, this resolve, but would hold them as unworthy the rights of freemen and inimical to the liberties of this country.

But what is now the attitude of slaveholders? They will hold no intercourse, they will have no dealings, with any person or State that does not approve of slavery, and yield to its intolerant and despotic demands; if any man, not thus approving and yielding, chances to travel through the slave States, and there to express his sentiments, he is subjected to the degradation and cruelty of the lash, and is driven from the State.

October 21, 1774, the Continental Congress, in an address to the people of Great Britain, said:

"When a nation, led to greatness by the hand of liberty, and possessed of all the glory that heroism, munificence, and humanity, can bestow, descends to the ungrateful task of forging chains for her friends and children, and, instead of giving support to freedom, turns advocate for slavery and oppression, there is reason to suspect that she has either ceased to be virtuous, or is extremely negligent in the appointment of her rulers."

Is not this the situation and condition of this country now? Is not a great party now engaged in the ungrateful task of forging chains for a large portion of the people of this country? Instead of supporting freedom, does it not advocate slavery and oppression? Have we not reason to suspect that too many of our countrymen have ceased to be virtuous?

By the Darien committee, Georgia, January, 1775, it was declared:

"To show the world that we are not influenced by any contracted and interested motives, but a general philanthropy for all mankind, of whatever language or complexion, we hereby declare our disapprobation and abhorrence of the unnatural practice of slavery in America—a practice founded in injustice and cruelty, and highly dangerous to our liberties."

I cannot quote at greater length from the proceedings of this committee. Their philanthropy was without regard to complexion; they abhorred slavery, as based on injustice and cruelty; and

more, as dangerous to our liberties. If it were founded in injustice and cruelty in 1775, it is the same in 1860. It was dangerous to liberty *then*; no man *now* apprehends any danger to liberty, unless from the same source. It is daily threatened by men who are interested in slavery. Liberty cannot be very secure where four million human beings are held in hopeless bondage—where human blood, bone, muscle, and, I might almost say, immortal souls, are articles of merchandise.

The historical quotations I have made bring me to the Revolution. I will cite the opinions of some of the great actors in that great drama. George Washington said, in his will:

"Upon the decease of my wife, it is my desire that the slaves whom I hold *in my own right* should receive their freedom."

Again, he said:

"I never mean, unless some particular circumstance should compel me, to possess another slave by purchase, it being my first wish to see some plan adopted by which slavery in this country may be abolished by law."

La Fayette, while in the prison of Magdeburg, said:

"I know not what disposition has been made of my plantation at Cayenne; but I hope Madame de La Fayette will take care that the negroes who cultivate it shall preserve their liberties."

Washington wrote to Robert Morris:

"It will not be conceived, from these observations, that it is my wish to hold these unhappy people (negroes) in slavery. I can only say that there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it."

Again, he writes to La Fayette:

"The benevolence of your heart, my dear Marquis, is so conspicuous on all occasions, that I never wonder at any fresh proof of it; but your late purchase of an estate in the colony of Cayenne, with a view of emancipating the slaves on it, is a generous and noble proof of your humanity. Would to God a like spirit might diffuse itself generally into the people of this country!"

Washington hoped for some plan by which slavery might be legally abolished. Washington lauded the humanity of La Fayette in purchasing an estate for the purpose of emancipating the negroes. I will leave it to gentlemen on the other side to draw the comparison between the chivalry of the South *then* and *now*; between the licentious assumption of thought and utterance permitted *then*, and the course of conviction and conversion esteemed necessary and equitable *now*, towards hapless offenders in the footsteps of predecessors so illustrious.

Patrick Henry said:

"Slavery is detested; we feel its fatal effects; we deplore it with all the pity of humanity. I repeat again, that it would rejoice my very soul that every one of my fellow beings were emancipated. We ought to lament and deplore the necessity of holding our fellow men in bondage."

[3]

Charles Pinckney, Governor of South Carolina, said:

"I must say that I lament the decision of your Legislature upon the question of the importation of slaves after March, 1793. I was in hopes that motives of policy, as well as other good reasons, supported by the direful effects of slavery which at this moment are presented, would have operated to produce a total prohibition of the importation of slaves, whenever the question came to be agitated in any State that might be interested in the measure."

Such were the sentiments of the most enlightened, the most virtuous men of our country in its heroic age. George Mason, of Virginia, stigmatized the slave trade as an "infernal traffic!" He said that "slavery discouraged manufactures; that it produced the most pernicious effect on manners." Without intending to be personal or offensive, I think I can pause here and properly remark, that if the effects of slavery are changed in every other respect, the effect on manners is the same now that it was in the last century. The epithets used by men on this floor, their arrogant bearing towards their peers, is abundant proof that there is no change in that respect. We have frequently heard members, this session, speak of a great party in this country as the Black Republican party. Legislative bodies in the slave States have so far forgotten what should be due to the standing and dignity of a Legislature, as to call a certain party, in their official proceedings, the "Black Republican party." Why are men betrayed into such violations of the proprieties of life? There can be no other reason than the one given by George Mason eighty years ago: slavery produces a most pernicious effect upon manners. I know it is claimed, by men in the slave States, that slavery is necessary to the highest development of human society; but I think the experience of members of Congress is, that slavery does not always produce this beneficial result.

I revert to my Southern authorities upon the peculiar institution. Mr. Iredell, of North Carolina, thus expresses himself:

"When the entire abolition of slavery takes place, it will be an event which must be most pleasing to every generous mind, and to every friend of human nature."

Thomas Jefferson writes:

"The spirit of the master is abating: that of the slave rising from the dust; his condition mollifying; the way, I hope, preparing, under the auspices of Heaven, for a total emancipation."

He continues, in his plan for a Constitution for Virginia:

"Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate, than that these people are to be free."

In a letter to Dr. Gordon, on Lord Cornwallis's invasion of Virginia, Mr. Jefferson says:

"He carried off also about thirty slaves, (Jefferson's.) Had this been to give them freedom, he would have done right; but it was to consign them to inevitable death from small-pox and putrid fever then raging in his camp."

I conclude here my citations from the united voices of some of the best men of the country, before and after the Revolution, against slavery as an evil, and a great national sin, not that I have exhausted their utterances, but that my time admits of no more.

The Republican party proclaims no doctrine so *ultra* as theirs, uses no language so strong as that of those Southern statesmen from whom it gains so much information, and whose views, to a great extent, it conscientiously accepts. We desire only to confine it within its present limits; we ask that it shall not pollute territory now free; we know the utter folly of appealing to the morality or humanity of a pro-slavery party, where the rights of a black man are involved; but when you insist on taking slaves into a free Territory, and smiting the land with this blighting, withering curse, we plant ourselves on our constitutional rights, and say, *thus far shall you go, and no further.*

The learned gentleman from Alabama, [Mr. CURRY,] in alluding to the opinion of the fathers of the Republic, said:

"These, however, were but mere speculations."

Was it a mere speculation when Madison said, "we have seen a mere distinction of color made the ground of the most oppressive dominion of man over man?" Was it as a mere speculation that Jefferson wrote, that Cornwallis would have been right, had he carried away his (Jefferson's) slaves to free them? Was it a mere speculation, a wild fancy, that the framers of the Constitution would not admit that there could be such a thing as property in man? A mere speculation, was it, of Patrick Henry, when he said "that slavery is detested; we feel its fatal effects; we deplore it?" when he declared it would "rejoice his very soul, were all his fellow beings emancipated?" Was it a mere speculation when Jefferson wrote, and his colleagues signed, "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal?" No one then doubted the truth of this declaration. More than a generation passed away before any man dared raise his voice against it. No, sir; this was no mere speculation, but the acknowledgment of a great "humanitarian fact." True then, it is true now; and must remain indisputable and eternal—a pillar of fire by night, a cloud by day, to guide and guard nations yet unborn in the path of honor, of safety, of moral and political grandeur.

But the learned gentleman does not pause upon these "speculations." He proceeds to tell us that circumstances are changed; that there was then little more than half a million slaves, and scarce a pound of cotton exported. Does the gentleman believe, or does he but attempt to lead *us* to believe, that the ethics of those men "without fear and without reproach" had no sounder foundation than this: that while slaves were few and cotton scarce, slavery might be a wrong, but with four million slaves and four million two hundred thousand bales of cotton, it becomes just, humane, moral?—that while negroes and cotton fill one side of the scales, Christian truth must kick the beam on the other, and slavery thus becomes a great "humanitarian fact?"

[4]

The right and wrong of the thing, about which there has been so much discussion, is now easily solved. The gentleman has found an infallible rule; it is simply to make a chemical analysis of your soil; if it will produce cotton, you can purchase slaves and work them without violating the laws of God or man.

We may also infer, or be induced to believe, from the honorable gentleman's speech, that if nothing is raised but indigo and rice, the propriety and morality of holding men in bondage is doubtful. Not such, sir, were the "*speculations*" of the fathers of the Republic.

Lucid as is the gentleman's speech in general, there is a want of clearness in the last point I have cited; but this is owing entirely to the materials used in the demonstration—rice and indigo will not do; nothing will serve but cotton; cotton ever, cotton only.

If slave labor, then, is profitable, slaveholding is equitable. Thus it is decided, that whatever is profitable is also equitable: justice and injustice are mere matters of profit and loss; the morality or immorality of slavery a mere question of soil and climate.

The great authorities cited as to the evil effects of slavery on the white race, should satisfy the most incredulous. But, says the learned gentleman from Alabama, there were few slaves at that time, and scarce a pound of cotton for exportation. Let us, then, pass from that period, to one when the few slaves had become millions, and the bales of cotton exported were estimated in like manner. In 1832, Thomas Marshall, of Virginia, said of slavery:

"It is ruinous to the whites; retards improvement; roots out an industrious population; banishes the yeomanry of the country; deprives the spinner, the weaver, the smith, the shoemaker, the

carpenter, of employment and support. Labor of every species is disreputable, because performed mostly by slaves; the general aspect of the country marks the curse of a wasteful, idle, reckless population, who have no interest in the soil, and care not how much it is impoverished."

Mr. Berry, of Virginia, spoke thus:

"I believe that no cancer on the physical body was ever more certain, steady, and fatal, in its progress, than is the cancer of slavery on the political body of the State of Virginia. It is eating into her very vitals."

The records of Southern statesmanship, sir, abound in such and stronger expressions. Slavery had then existed in this country more than two hundred years, yet scarce a man could be then found so bold and so reckless as to proclaim it just and righteous, a humane, a Christian institution. Nearly the whole civilized world united in its condemnation; the ministers of our holy religion in the slave States declaimed against it; their solemn petitions ascended to the throne of God, that the country might be rid of these "bonds." But, slave labor has become profitable in some parts of the South; the *mania* for wealth has seized the slaveholder's avarice, has dried up the fountain of humanity. The lust of power and dominion deadens their consciences; a million bales of cotton can blind their eyes alike to the flames of perdition and the glories of Paradise. They make to themselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness; they become full, and deny their Maker, and say, who is the Lord! Concerning oppression, they speak loftily. But they are set in slippery places; they will be cast down unto destruction.

The gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. LAMAR] said, a few days since:

"I tell you, Mr. Chairman, that God's sun does not shine upon a nobler, prouder, more prosperous, and elevated class of people, than the non-slaveholders of the South."

This, I think, will be news to many non-slaveholders in the gentleman's district. Thomas Jefferson tells us that man is an imitative animal; therefore, if the assertion of the gentleman from Mississippi be correct, we must wonder why slaveholders do not relieve themselves of their negroes, that they may become equally noble, proud, prosperous, and elevated, with the non-slaveholder. Who can compare with them on this side of Paradise? With them, the millennium can be no object of desire, since

"Not a wave of trouble
rolls
Across their peaceful
breasts."

Still there must be some malice in their hearts, for the honorable gentleman states that they (the non-slaveholders) hold slavery in the hollow of their hands; surely, were they benevolent, they would close their hands and crush out the "institution," that their slaveholding fellow-citizens might become as prosperous and as happy as themselves.

The assertion is frequently made, that white men cannot work in the hot latitudes of the South, and this is offered as a reason why there should be black slaves there. The gentleman knocks one of the strongest props from under the institution. He tells us white men work, and raise not only cotton, but corn and potatoes. He also informs us that after the cotton, corn, and potatoes, are raised, the strong, brave man drives the plow through the fallow ground. It will be seen that work during the summer has not produced the lassitude and enervation that it has been claimed is produced in white men by labor. We are still further informed, that the fallow ground turned up by the strong, brave man, discloses something more valuable than the gold of California—"Tis the sparkles of liberty!" We have heard of the sparkles of liberty that are made manifest to the non-slaveholders of the South. The poor laboring man at Columbia, South Carolina, when streams of blood issued from the furrows plowed in his naked back by a cow-hide in the hands of a negro, saw some of the sparkles of liberty, when, bleeding, exhausted, besmeared with tar, and covered with feathers, he was thrust into the cars, and left to perish in the cold. He had, no doubt, a vivid idea of the liberty that is enjoyed by non-slaveholders in the South, when he remembered that these cruelties and barbarities were inflicted on him for expressing a rational and honest opinion relative to this "peculiar institution."

[5]

The statements, and doubtless convictions, of the honorable member from Mississippi, differ singularly from those of Senator CLAY, of Alabama, who tells us that, in his State, "we may behold numerous fine houses, once the abode of intelligent freemen, now occupied by slaves, or else tenantless and dilapidated; that we may see fields, once fertile, covered with foxtail and broom-sedge—moss growing on the walls of once thrifty villages, and may find that 'one only master grasps the whole domain' which once furnished homes for a dozen white families."

Hear, also, Senator HAMMOND, of South Carolina, who says of the non-slaveholders of his State:

"They obtain a precarious subsistence by occasional jobs, by hunting, by fishing, by plundering fields or folds, or, too often, by what is far worse in its effects, trading with slaves, and leading them to plunder for their benefit."

The opinions already quoted from many of the wise men of the South go far to demonstrate that the gentleman from Mississippi is entirely mistaken. There is, however, another test by which we can try the accuracy of what the gentleman has said about the non-slaveholders of the South. The census report of 1850 shows this important fact: that of the white men in the slave States over

twenty-one years of age, there is about one in every twelve that cannot read and write; while in the free States there is only one out of every forty-five. It must also be remembered, that a very large number of those in the free States who cannot read, came originally from the slave States. Take, for instance, Massachusetts, where there are but very few persons from the slave States, if any, and there is only one in seven hundred and seventy-eight that cannot read and write. Take Indiana and Illinois—States that have large populations from the slave States—Indiana, one in every fourteen cannot read; in Illinois, one in every twenty-one and a half; and if any one will take the trouble to examine, it will no doubt be found that this ignorance exists almost entirely where the population from the slave States largely predominates. I will venture the assertion, that there can scarcely be a man found in the State of Ohio, that was born there, who possesses intellect capable of cultivation, that cannot read; while a very large portion of those ignorant men in the slave States were "to the manor born."

It must also be borne in mind that, in making the estimate of the free States, the men that perform all the labor are included. In the slave States, the men who do nearly all the work are not included. I do not know that any great good can come of making these comparisons. But when the gentleman tells us that the non-slaveholders in his State are the most prosperous and the most elevated of mankind, the inquiry is at once presented to the mind, how elevated in the scale of existence can a man be who can neither read nor write?

I have shown that slavery was regarded as a political, moral, and social evil, by the founders of this Republic, and by able Southern statesmen within thirty years; that their anxious query has been, "what is to be done with it?" We are now asked to discredit those men, and give ear to a modern creed, that slavery is not only necessary, but beneficent—a divine ordinance—and that Southern non-slaveholders, even, are prosperous and elevated just in proportion to the number of slaves owned by their neighbors.

Not such, sir, were the "speculations" of the fathers of the Republic; nor is the world to be deceived by such assumptions. Decree and carry out what non-intercourse you will; surround yourselves with barriers as impassable as the Chinese wall, or the great gulf between Dives and Lazarus, still the evidences of your condition will exist on the imperishable pages of history, in the records left by the mighty and venerated dead; and the attempt to establish the belief that slavery is a universal blessing will be received but as an aggression upon the credulity of mankind.

Forty years ago, a slave Territory applied for admission to the Union as a State. The friends of freedom objected that its reception would be contrary to the policy of our Government. "Admit it," it was urged, "with its present Constitution, and we will consent to a line of demarkation, north of which slavery shall never pass." This was solemnly agreed to before the whole world; and this compact, forced upon the country by the slave power, was claimed by it as a great triumph of slavery. Men at the North felt that this was a great aggression, a great outrage upon freedom; yet, to give quiet and restore harmony, they submitted, consoled by the national pledge that slavery should be extended no further, and believing that the nation might joyously look forward to long years of happiness and repose. But despotism is ever restless and grasping; but twenty-five years rolled by—a very short period in the life of a nation—ere Texas was admitted to the Union, that slavery propagandists could have a wider field for their operations. As everybody foresaw, war ensued; and the best blood of the nation fattened the soil of Mexico. More than two hundred millions of treasure were expended, and many thousand valuable lives sacrificed. All over this land, "the sky was hung with blackness;" "mourning was spread over the mountain tops." Territory enough was obtained to make four large States, well adapted to the productive labor of human chattels, and this territory was blackened over with slavery. Such a triumph ought to have satisfied the most grasping of the friends of this "peculiar institution;" but the world should have known that nothing short of universal dominion would satisfy the slave owner and slave breeder. Less than ten years after the annexation of Texas, it was discovered by Southern men that there was a Territory west of Missouri, wherein the peculiar institution of the South could be made profitable; but by a solemn league and covenant this land had been, for more than a third of a century, consecrated to freedom. This bond of national faith, this pledge of national honor, stood in the road of their ambition.

[6]

But men whose lives are but a series violations of the dearest rights that God has bestowed on man cannot be expected to be bound by pledges of national faith and national honor. This time-honored compact was annulled, the barrier between freedom and slavery broken down. The whole country was astounded at the perfidy of the act.

But the climax was not reached. The Territory was overrun with desperadoes; ruffians from adjoining States usurped the rights of actual settlers, stuffed ballot-boxes with illegal votes, and elected members of their own lawless bands to the Legislature, to enact laws by which every friend of freedom might be driven from the country.

Innocent and unoffending men were murdered in cold blood, houses were consumed with fire, hamlets laid in smoking ruins, homeless and houseless innocents, women and tender children, were driven forth, exposed to the winds and storms of heaven.

All these wrongs, all these outrages, all these crimes of blood and deeds of horror, were committed to plant the accursed institution on the soil that had been, by a great national act, dedicated to freedom. But violence and arson, bloodshed and murder, failed. The black banner of slavery is trailing in the dust. The stars and stripes wave triumphantly over a free and joyous people. The heretofore invincible is conquered. I have borrowed the word "aggression" to express

the conduct of the South toward the North. I do not intend to make the charge without the specifications.

1. I charge upon slavery, that the enforcement of the Missouri compromise was an aggression upon the North.

2. I charge the annexation of Texas, whereby the Mexican war was brought upon the country, more than two hundred millions of money were spent, and many thousand lives sacrificed, as an aggression.

3. I charge that the adoption of the fugitive slave law, with many of its odious and obnoxious provisions, was an aggression upon the people of the North.

4. I charge that the decision of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case was an aggression upon the North. It was a decision made for the benefit of slavery, and to deprive the people of the free States of their equal rights in the Territories.

5. I charge that the repeal of the Missouri compromise line was an outrageous aggression upon the rights of the North; disreputable to the nation, and dishonorable to the party engaged in it; one that has brought in its train innumerable woes, and created an excitement that will not be allayed during the present generation.

6. I charge that the murders, robberies, and arsons, in Kansas, were aggressions of slavery.

All these things I have charged as aggressions of slavery are national aggressions, for which the slavery party, having control of the administration of this Government, are responsible. I charge them as direct, positive aggressions, on the rights of the free people of the North. In addition to these great national aggressions, there are numerous similar infringements upon the rights of individuals of the North—of tarring and feathering, of whipping—acts of such barbarity and cruelty, that it would chill a man's blood to hear them recited.

Recently, a whole community of moral, peaceable citizens were driven from their homes, compelled to abandon their property, and seek refuge in a free State, from the violence of slaveholders. There are, no doubt, many good and humane men in slave States, who deprecate these wrongs; but they dare not utter a word—every mouth must be stopped, every lip must be sealed, every voice must be hushed, all must be silent as the grave—the most inexorable despotism reigns supreme.

Having endeavored to show what slavery was, and what it has done, I now propose to show what it intends to do. Its advocates claim that the territory now belonging to the Government is the common property of all the States, having been acquired by the common blood and treasure of all; that, therefore, the inhabitants of the slave States have a right to emigrate to the Territories, and take with them their slaves. I am willing to admit that the inhabitants of one section of the country have just the same rights in the Territories that the inhabitants of another section have. I say it would be an act of injustice to deny one man any right in the Territory that another man has, and would be just cause of complaint. But I am not willing to give to a man from a slave State any greater rights than to a man from a free State. And when I have admitted that all have the same constitutional rights in the Territories, I have by no means admitted that men from the South have a right to hold slaves in the Territories. You may go, and take your slaves with you, if you have a mind to run the risk; I say you shall not take your slave laws with you.

I say that slavery is but the creation of some local enactment, and that no property can exist in a human being, unless it is made so by some law. This opinion was entertained by the founders of this Republic, and by nearly every statesman in this country, until very recently. We hear much said about the constitutional rights of the South; it is thundered in our ears from the beginning to the end of the session of Congress. What is meant by this stereotyped expression, I do not exactly comprehend; and, I presume, many who make use of the phrase do not understand it. If you mean by this that the Constitution of the United States gives you the right to go into the Territories belonging to the people of this country, and take with you not only your human chattels, but also your bloody slave laws, I say, you have no such constitutional rights. The Constitution of the United States nowhere recognises slaves as property. The Supreme Court of the United States has decided that slaves are not property under the Constitution. The Constitution gives you the right to reclaim your slaves, if they escape into any other State; this is all the right it gives you, and all there is in the Constitution that can by any possibility be construed to apply to slaves. To contend that there is any power given in the Constitution which enables the slaveholder to take his slaves with him into a Territory, and not only his slaves, but his slave laws, and the slave laws of all the slave States, is an assumption of power that I am not willing to concede to him. It is claimed that if persons from the slave States are not permitted to go into the Territories, and take with them their slaves and slave laws, the rights of the slave States are violated. This cannot be. If you claim to take into the Territories the laws of the slave States, and not only the laws, but the Constitution of a slave State, I claim, also, that I will take the Constitution of my State, which says there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude; and if you do not permit this, the rights of my State are violated, if your doctrine be true.

The emigrants from every State in the Union, under the power claimed by the slavery propagandists, would have a right to take with them all the constitutions and all the laws of all the States. The confusion which would follow would be worse than at the Tower of Babel. If a citizen of any slave State leaves it, and goes into a free State or Territory to reside, he takes with him none of the rights or powers with which his State clothed him while he remained therein. He

can take with him such articles as, by the universal consent of mankind, are considered property, and exercise ownership over them. When at home, I am a legal voter; I can vote for any State or county officer, or President of the United States. But if I cross the river, a distance of eighty rods, or go out of my election district, or in any other direction, I have no such privilege. The right of suffrage, which is the highest right that ever can be exercised by a citizen, is controlled by the laws and Constitution of each particular State. In the State of Ohio, a man need not be a property holder to entitle him to the right of suffrage; if he remove into a State where he must have a property qualification before he can vote, are the rights of the State he left violated? I presume no one will contend that they are. A man may have some power in the State of Virginia, given by its Legislature—the right to issue paper money, for instance; but if he remove to Ohio, he has not this right. No man would pretend to claim that any of the rights of Virginia are infringed.

Yet the man who would make this claim, would be just as reasonable as he who should claim that the rights of Virginia are invaded because her slaveholders are not permitted to take slaves into Kansas or Nebraska.

I understand those Southern men, who talk so much about Southern rights, claim not only the right to take slaves into the Territories, but they claim the right to take slave laws and the habits and customs which are practiced in the slave States. They claim to take laws by which four million negroes are reduced to the condition of brutes. Six million white men, women, and children, who have to obtain their living by labor, are condemned to perpetual degradation and ignorance, by which three hundred and fifty thousand slaveholders can govern and control the destinies of the millions of people in the slave States; and not only of those people, but of this great country of ours. They not only claim the right to take their negroes into the Territories, but they claim to take laws there that will deny to every man the freedom of speech and the liberty of the press. They claim the right to seal every man's lips, and stop every man's mouth, on questions of great national interest. They claim to take with them the right to condemn as a felon the man who may utter and maintain the Declaration of Independence, or the opinions of the conscript fathers of the Republic. They claim to take with them the right to condemn as a felon the man who dares proclaim the precepts of our holy religion. They claim to take with them the right to strip naked and cut into gashes the back of the man who utters opinions that do not exactly "square and corner" with the interests of the aristocratic slaveholders.

A negro population is one by no means desirable, but a free white man could live where there are negroes, and maintain his freedom; but no white non-slaveholder can live where slave laws, customs, and habits, pertain, and retain the rights that belong to free men in free States.

A man may live in the swamps of the torrid zone, and escape the crocodiles, alligators, and other slimy and creeping things, but he cannot escape the miasma and poison of the atmosphere.

If the slaveholder is permitted to go into the Territories, and take his slave laws, habits, and customs, the people of the free States are to a great extent excluded therefrom, and deprived of all rights therein.

But slaveholders say they will go; they will take their slaves, and their slave code; they will establish there such a despotism as reigns in some of the slave States; they will poison the air that surrounds the fertile plains of the West, until freedom shall sicken and die; and we are constantly told, that if we do not yield to their unreasonable demands, this Union shall be dissolved.

But these threats do not move or alarm me, and for the best of all possible reasons; I do not believe that the gentlemen who make these threats intend to leave their places on this floor—nor, if they should, would the country suffer any loss. The section they represent would still remain under the Constitution and laws of the United States, and our glorious flag would still wave over its fertile plains and lofty mountains, its woody dells and shelving rocks, its gurgling fountains and rippling rills. Good, loyal, and patriotic men would come here to fill the vacant places, ready and able to discharge their duty to the country, and to the whole country.

Notwithstanding these threats of disunion from the Democratic party, we hear much holy horror expressed in regard to a sectional party, and much laudation of a national, conservative party. The nationality of the Democratic party consists in devoting all the energies and power of the Federal Government to advancing the interests, aims, and ends, of about one hundred thousand men. Its conservatism consists in its avowed determination to dissolve the Union, should a majority of our people, in the exercise of their legal and constitutional rights, elect a President not acceptable to that party.

[8]

There are, I presume, not more than one hundred thousand men in this country who feel any desire to extend the boundaries of slavery, or who would, had they the power, add one other slave State to the Union. Yet the whole power of this Government is devoted to that one object; its entire strength concentrated in one spasmodic effort to extend slavery. The agricultural, the manufacturing, the great commercial interests of this country, are entirely ignored, neglected, and forgotten, that the interests of one hundred thousand slaveholders may be advanced. The great pursuits by which twenty-five million people live, are not considered worthy the attention of this Democratic party; while one hundred thousand aristocrats require its entire services. Yet this is the great national party! While so determined upon rule is it, that if a majority of the people should decide against it, and discharge its members from places of trust and honor, they threaten to destroy this Government. Such is the conservative party commended to our most favorable consideration.

The slavery party is constantly complaining that the free States enact personal-liberty laws, and that they do not fulfil their constitutional obligations. Whatever acts may be passed by our Legislatures, so that they do not interfere with the Constitution of the United States, you have no right to complain. But if you think that Constitution violated, you have your remedy. Send your attorneys into the free States; commence your suits in the Federal courts, and try the validity of our statutes. We pledge ourselves that your agents shall be kindly treated, and shall have a fair hearing. We will not follow your example; we will not pass laws in plain and palpable violation of your rights, and in palpable violation of the Constitution, and then drive out, by threats or violence, any man who may come into the State to test the validity of such enactments.

Before you complain of us, go home and seize and hang the pirates who are hovering around your shores, engaged in the slave trade. You may say a jury will not convict them. Why not? Because the community sustains them in their unholy traffic and in their violation of the laws. But if you really desired to punish those men, you could easily devise the ways and means—a whipping on the bare back with a raw-hide, a coat of tar and feathers, or some other corrective that you are in the habit of using. I would not advise these punishments; in a free State they would not be practicable; but in States where such things are in constant use, it is rather surprising that some person has not thought of thus applying them. Men who commit acts declared by the whole civilized world to be piracy, you permit to escape, while you say you will hang the man who circulates Helper's book. Before you complain of the free States, arrest and punish the scoundrels who so cruelly treated the Irishman at Columbia, South Carolina, for no offence but saying that slavery was detrimental to free labor.

Take from place and power the men whose hands and faces are reeking and smoking with the blood of our people in Kansas, and put them to death. Punish the thousands of others who have committed acts of violence against free-State men, and are yet unwhipped of justice. These things you must do, before you complain of us. I take no pleasure in these criminations and recriminations. I know that all the States are a part of my country; but when I hear of the wrongs and outrages perpetrated on men merely because they will not subscribe to the doctrines you hold, and hear you complain of us for not doing our duty as citizens, I will let you know that you, too, "are made of penetrable stuff." I have

"Learned to deride your fierce decree,
And break you on the wheel you meant
for me."

I do not mean to interfere with any man's legal or constitutional rights. The people of the slave States have the right to continue slavery there if they desire so to do. I have no right to interfere with it. But I intend to maintain my own rights.

To draw an impassable line around slavery, and confine it within its present limits; an absolute abolition of the African slave trade; the Territories to be kept free for homes for free men—these measures I regard as absolutely essential to the perpetuation of this Government, and to the highest development of the Anglo-Saxon race. I have endeavored to show what slavery is, what it has done, and what it intends to do. I have also endeavored to show what are the aims and objects of the Republican party; and if they cannot be tolerated—if such principles cannot be sustained by the people of any section of this country—it is the misfortune of that people. They are the principles that ought to be sustained by all people that are fitted for civil liberty; they are the principles on which this Government was founded; they were baptized in the best blood of this nation; they were cherished by the greatest names that adorn the brightest pages of the history of our country during its patriotic and virtuous and heroic age. They were emblazoned on every banner that waved over our army in every battle-field of the Revolution; during the storm and darkness, they were the bright "signet on the bosom of the cloud," the rainbow of promise and of hope.

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Transcriber's Note: Minor typographical errors have been corrected without note. Variant spellings have been retained. Significant amendments to the original text have been listed below:

p. 2, 'Newbern' amended to *New Bern*;
'... meeting in New Bern, North Carolina ...'

p. 6, 'Scot' amended to *Scott*;
'... in the Dred Scott case ...'

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