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The Irrepressible Conflict

William H. Seward

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The Irrepressible Conflict.

A SPEECH

BY

WILLIAM H. SEWARD,

DELIVERED AT ROCHESTER, MONDAY, OCT 25, 1858.

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FELLOW-CITIZENS: The unmistakable outbreaks of zeal which occur all around me, show that you are earnest men—and such a man am I. Let us therefore, at least for a time, pass by all secondary and collateral questions, whether of a personal or of a general nature, and consider the main subject of the present canvass. The Democratic party—or, to speak more accurately—the party which wears that attractive name, is in possession of the Federal Government. The Republicans propose to dislodge that party, and dismiss it from its high trust.

The main subject, then, is, whether the Democratic party deserves to retain the confidence of the American People. In attempting to prove it unworthy, I think that I am not actuated by prejudices against that party, or by prepossessions in favor of its adversary; for I have learned, by some experience, that virtue and patriotism, vice and selfishness, are found in all parties, and that they differ less in their motives than in the policies they pursue.

Our country is a theatre, which exhibits, in full operation, two radically different political systems; the one resting on the basis of servile or slave labor, the other on the basis of voluntary labor of freemen.

The laborers who are enslaved are all negroes, or persons more or less purely of African derivation. But this is only accidental. The principle of the system is, that labor in every society, by whomsoever performed, is necessarily unintellectual, grovelling and base; and that the laborer, equally for his own good and for the welfare of the State, ought to be enslaved. The white laboring man, whether native or foreigner, is not enslaved, only because he cannot, as yet, be reduced to bondage.

You need not be told now that the slave system is the older of the two, and that once it was universal.

The emancipation of our own ancestors, Caucasians and Europeans as they were, hardly

dates beyond a period of five hundred years. The great melioration of human society which modern times exhibit, is mainly due to the incomplete substitution of the system of voluntary labor for the old one of servile labor, which has already taken place. This African slave system is one which, in its origin and in its growth, has been altogether foreign from the habits of the races which colonized these States, and established civilization here. It was introduced on this new continent as an engine of conquest, and for the establishment of monarchical power, by the Portuguese and the Spaniards, and was rapidly extended by them all over South America, Central America, Louisiana, and Mexico. Its legitimate fruits are seen in the poverty, imbecility, and anarchy, which now pervade all Portuguese and Spanish America. The free-labor system is of German extraction, and it was established in our country by emigrants from Sweden, Holland, Germany, Great Britain, and Ireland.

We justly ascribe to its influences the strength, wealth, greatness, intelligence, and freedom, which the whole American people now enjoy. One of the chief elements of the value of human life is freedom in the pursuit of happiness. The slave system is not only intolerant, unjust, and inhuman, toward the laborer, whom, only because he is a laborer, it loads down with chains and converts into merchandise, but is scarcely less severe upon the freeman, to whom, only because he is a laborer from necessity, it denies facilities for employment, and whom it expels from the community because it cannot enslave and convert him into merchandise also. It is necessarily improvident and ruinous, because, as a general truth, communities prosper and flourish or droop and decline in just the degree that they practise or neglect to practise the primary duties of justice and humanity. The free-labor system conforms to the divine law of equality, which is written in the hearts and

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Alfred S. Gordon

consciences of men, and therefore is always and everywhere beneficent.

The slave system is one of constant danger, distrust, suspicion, and watchfulness. It debases those whose toil alone can produce wealth and resources for defence, to the lowest degree of which human nature is capable, to guard against mutiny and insurrection, and thus wastes energies which otherwise might be employed in national development and aggrandizement.

The free-labor system educates all alike, and by opening all the fields of industrial employment, and all the departments of authority, to the unchecked and equal rivalry of all classes of men, at once secures universal contentment, and brings into the highest possible activity all the physical, moral, and social energies of the whole State. In States where the slave-system prevails, the masters, directly or indirectly, secure all political power, and constitute a ruling aristocracy. In States where the free-labor system prevails, universal suffrage necessarily obtains, and the State inevitably becomes, sooner or later, a republic or democracy.

Russia yet maintains slavery, and is a despotism. Most of the other European states have abolished slavery, and adopted the system of free labor. It was the antagonistic political tendencies of the two systems which the first Napoleon was contemplating when he predicted that Europe would ultimately be either all Cossack or all Republican. Never did human sagacity utter a more pregnant truth. The two systems are at once perceived to be incongruous. But they are more than incongruous—they are incompatible. They never have permanently existed together in one country, and they never can. It would be easy to demonstrate this impossibility, from the irreconcilable contrast between their great principles and characteristics. But the experience of mankind has conclusively established it. Slavery, as I have already intimated, existed in every state in Europe. Free labor has supplanted it everywhere except in Russia and Turkey. State necessities developed in modern times, are now obliging even those two nations to encourage and employ free labor; and already, despotic as they are, we find them engaged in abolishing slavery. In the United States, slavery came into collision with free labor at the close of the last century, and fell before it in New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, but triumphed over it effectually, and excluded it for a period yet undetermined, from Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. Indeed, so incompatible are the two systems, that every new State which is organized within our ever-extending domain makes its first political act a choice of the one and an exclusion of the other, even at

the cost of civil war, if necessary. The slave States, without law, at the last national election, successfully forbade, within their own limits, even the casting of votes for a candidate for President of the United States supposed to be favorable to the establishment of the free-labor system in new States.

Hitherto, the two systems have existed in different States, but side by side within the American Union. This has happened because the Union is a confederation of States. But in another aspect the United States constitute only one nation. Increase of population, which is filling the States out to their very borders, together with a new and extended network of railroads and other avenues, and an internal commerce which daily becomes more intimate, is rapidly bringing the States into a higher and more perfect social unity or consolidation. Thus, these antagonistic systems are continually coming into closer contact, and collision results.

Shall I tell you what this collision means? They who think that it is accidental, unnecessary, the work of interested or fanatical agitators, and therefore ephemeral, mistake the case altogether. It is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slaveholding nation, or entirely a free-labor nation. Either the cotton and rice fields of South Carolina and the sugar plantations of Louisiana will ultimately be tilled by free labor, and Charleston and New Orleans become marts for legitimate merchandise alone, or else the rye-fields and wheat-fields of Massachusetts and New York must again be surrendered by their farmers to slave culture and to the production of slaves, and Boston and New York become once more markets for trade in the bodies and souls of men. It is the failure to apprehend this great truth that induces so many unsuccessful attempts at final compromise between the slave and free States, and it is the existence of this great fact that renders all such pretended compromises, when made, vain and ephemeral. Startling as this saying may appear to you, fellow-citizens, it is by no means an original or even a modern one. Our forefathers knew it to be true, and unanimously acted upon it when they framed the Constitution of the United States. They regarded the existence of the servile system in so many of the States with sorrow and shame, which they openly confessed, and they looked upon the collision between them, which was then just revealing itself, and which we are now accustomed to deplore, with favor and hope. They knew that either the one or the other system must exclusively prevail.

Unlike too many of those who in modern time invoke their authority, they had a choice

between the two. They preferred the system of free labor, and they determined to organize the Government, and so to direct its activity, that that system should surely and certainly prevail. For this purpose, and no other, they based the whole structure of Government broadly on the principle that all men are created equal, and therefore free—little dreaming that, within the short period of one hundred years, their descendants would bear to be told by any orator, however popular, that the utterance of that principle was merely a rhetorical rhapsody; or by any judge, however venerated, that it was attended by mental reservations, which rendered it hypocritical and false. By the Ordinance of 1787, they dedicated all of the national domain not yet polluted by Slavery to free labor immediately, thenceforth and forever; while by the new Constitution and laws they invited foreign free labor from all lands under the sun, and interdicted the importation of African slave labor, at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances whatsoever. It is true that they necessarily and wisely modified this policy of Freedom, by leaving it to the several States, affected as they were by differing circumstances, to abolish Slavery in their own way and at their own pleasure, instead of confiding that duty to Congress, and that they secured to the Slave States, while yet retaining the system of Slavery, a three-fifths representation of slaves in the Federal Government, until they should find themselves able to relinquish it with safety. But the very nature of these modifications fortifies my position that the fathers knew that the two systems could not endure within the Union, and expected that within a short period Slavery would disappear forever. Moreover, in order that these modifications might not altogether defeat their grand design of a Republic maintaining universal equality, they provided that two-thirds of the States might amend the Constitution.

It remains to say on this point only one word, to guard against misapprehension. If these States are to again become universally slave-holding, I do not pretend to say with what violations of the Constitution that end shall be accomplished. On the other hand, while I do confidently believe and hope that my country will yet become a land of universal Freedom, I do not expect that it will be made so otherwise than through the action of the several States cooperating with the Federal Government, and all acting in strict conformity with their respective Constitutions.

The strife and contentions concerning Slavery, which gently-disposed persons so habitually deprecate, are nothing more than the ripening of the conflict which the fathers

themselves not only thus regarded with favor, but which they may be said to have instituted.

It is not to be denied, however, that thus far the course of that contest has not been according to their humane anticipations and wishes. In the field of federal politics, Slavery, deriving unlooked-for advantages from commercial changes, and energies unforeseen from the facilities of combination between members of the slaveholding class and between that class and other property classes, early rallied, and has at length made a stand, not merely to retain its original defensive position, but to extend its sway throughout the whole Union. It is certain that the slaveholding class of American citizens indulge this high ambition, and that they derive encouragement for it from the rapid and effective political successes which they have already obtained. The plan of operation is this: By continued appliances of patronage and threats of disunion, they will keep a majority favorable to these designs in the Senate, where each State has an equal representation. Through that majority they will defeat, as they best can, the admission of free States and secure the admission of slave States. Under the protection of the Judiciary, they will, on the principle of the Dred Scott case, carry Slavery into all the Territories of the United States now existing and hereafter to be organized. By the action of the President and the Senate, using the treaty-making power, they will annex foreign slaveholding States. In a favorable conjuncture they will induce Congress to repeal the act of 1808, which prohibits the foreign slave-trade, and so they will import from Africa, at the cost of only \$20 a head, slaves enough to fill up the interior of the continent. Thus relatively increasing the number of slave States, they will allow no amendment to the Constitution prejudicial to their interest; and so, having permanently established their power, they expect the Federal Judiciary to nullify all State laws which shall interfere with internal or foreign commerce in slaves. When the free States shall be sufficiently demoralized to tolerate these designs, they reasonably conclude that Slavery will be accepted by those States themselves. I shall not stop to show how speedy or how complete would be the ruin which the accomplishment of these slaveholding schemes would bring upon the country. For one, I should not remain in the country to test the sad experiment. Having spent my manhood, though not my whole life, in a free State, no aristocracy of any kind, much less an aristocracy of slaveholders, shall ever make the laws of the land in which I shall be content to live. Having seen the society around me universally engaged in agriculture, manu-

factures and trade, which were innocent and beneficent, I shall never be a denizen of a State where men and women are reared as cattle, and bought and sold as merchandise. When that evil day shall come, and all further effort at resistance shall be impossible, then, if there shall be no better hope for redemption than I can now foresee, I shall say with Franklin, while looking abroad over the whole earth for a new and more congenial home, "Where liberty dwells, there is my country."

You will tell me that these fears are extravagant and chimerical. I answer, they are so; but they are so only because the designs of the slaveholders must and can be defeated. But it is only the possibility of defeat that renders them so. They cannot be defeated by inactivity. There is no escape from them, compatible with non-resistance. How, then, and in what way, shall the necessary resistance be made? There is only one way. The Democratic party must be permanently dislodged from the Government. The reason is, that the Democratic party is inextricably committed to the designs of the slaveholders, which I have described. Let me be well understood. I do not charge that the Democratic candidates for public office now before the people are pledged to, much less that the Democratic masses who support them really adopt, those atrocious and dangerous designs. Candidates may, and generally do, mean to act justly, wisely, and patriotically, when they shall be elected; but they become the ministers and servants, not the dictators, of the power which elects them. The policy which a party shall pursue at a future period is only gradually developed, depending on the occurrence of events never fully foreknown. The motives of men, whether acting as electors or in any other capacity, are generally pure. Nevertheless, it is not more true that "Hell is paved with good intentions," than it is that earth is covered with wrecks resulting from innocent and amiable motives.

The very constitution of the Democratic party commits it to execute all the designs of the slaveholders, whatever they may be. It is not a party of the whole Union, of all the free States and of all the slave States; nor yet is it a party of the free States in the North and in the Northwest; but it is a sectional and local party, having practically its seat within the slave States, and counting its constituency chiefly and almost exclusively there. Of all its representatives in Congress and in the Electoral Colleges, two-thirds uniformly come from these States. Its great element of strength lies in the vote of the slaveholders, augmented by the representation of three-fifths of the slaves. Deprive the Democratic party of this strength, and it would be a helpless and hopeless minority, incapable of con-

tinued organization. The Democratic party, being thus local and sectional, acquires new strength from the admission of every new slave State, and loses relatively by the admission of every new free State into the Union.

A party is in one sense a joint-stock association, in which those who contribute most direct the action and management of the concern. The slaveholders contributing in an overwhelming proportion to the capital strength of the Democratic party, they necessarily dictate and prescribe its policy. The inevitable caucus system enables them to do so with a show of fairness and justice. If it were possible to conceive for a moment that the Democratic party should disobey the behests of the slaveholders, we should then see a withdrawal of the slaveholders, which would leave the party to perish. The portion of the party which is found in the free States is a mere appendage, convenient to modify its sectional character, without impairing its sectional constitution, and is less effective in regulating its movement than the nebulous tail of the comet is in determining the appointed though apparently eccentric course of the fiery sphere from which it emanates.

To expect the Democratic party to resist Slavery and favor Freedom, is as unreasonable as to look for Protestant missionaries to the Catholic Propaganda of Rome. The history of the Democratic party commits it to the policy of Slavery. It has been the Democratic party, and no other agency, which has carried that policy up to its present alarming culmination. Without stopping to ascertain, critically, the origin of the present Democratic party, we may concede its claim to date from the era of good feeling which occurred under the Administration of President Monroe. At that time, in this State, and about that time in many others of the free States, the Democratic party deliberately disfranchised the free colored or African citizen, and it has pertinaciously continued this disfranchisement ever since. This was an effective aid to Slavery; for while the slaveholder votes for his slaves against Freedom, the freed slave in the free States is prohibited from voting against Slavery.

In 1824, the Democracy resisted the election of John Quincy Adams—himself before that time an acceptable Democrat—and in 1828, it expelled him from the Presidency and put a slaveholder in his place, although the office had been filled by slaveholders thirty-two out of forty years.

In 1836, Martin Van Buren—the first non-slaveholding citizen of a free State to whose election the Democratic party ever consented—signalized his inauguration into the Presidency by a gratuitous announcement, that

under no circumstances would he ever approve a bill for the abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia. From 1838 to 1844, the subject of abolishing Slavery in the District of Columbia and in the national dock-yards and arsenals was brought before Congress by repeated popular appeals. The Democratic party thereupon promptly denied the right of petition, and effectually suppressed the freedom of speech in Congress, so far as the institution of Slavery was concerned.

From 1840 to 1843, good and wise men counselled that Texas should remain outside of the Union until she should consent to relinquish her self-instituted Slavery; but the Democratic party precipitated her admission into the Union, not only without that condition, but even with a covenant that the State might be divided and reorganized so as to constitute four slave States instead of one.

In 1846, when the United States became involved in a war with Mexico, and it was apparent that the struggle would end in the dismemberment of that republic, which was a non-slaveholding power, the Democratic party rejected a declaration that Slavery should not be established within the territory to be acquired. When, in 1850, governments were to be instituted in the Territories of California and New Mexico, the fruits of that war, the Democratic party refused to admit New Mexico as a free State, and only consented to admit California as a free State on the condition, as it has since explained the transaction, of leaving all of New Mexico and Utah open to Slavery, to which was also added the concession of perpetual Slavery in the District of Columbia, and the passage of an unconstitutional, cruel, and humiliating law, for the recapture of fugitive slaves, with a further stipulation that the subject of Slavery should never again be agitated in either chamber of Congress. When, in 1854, the slaveholders were contentedly reposing on these great advantages, then so recently won, the Democratic party unnecessarily, officiously, and with superserviceable liberality, awakened them from their slumber, to offer and force on their acceptance the abrogation of the law which declared that neither Slavery nor involuntary servitude should ever exist within that part of the ancient territory of Louisiana which lay outside of the State of Missouri, and north of the parallel of 36° 30' of north latitude—a law which, with the exception of one other, was the only statute of Freedom then remaining in the Federal code.

In 1856, when the people of Kansas had organized a new State within the region thus abandoned to Slavery, and applied to be admitted as a free State into the Union, the Democratic party contemptuously rejected their petition, and drove them, with menaces

and intimidations, from the Halls of Congress, and armed the President with military power to enforce their submission to a slave code, established over them by fraud and usurpation. At every subsequent stage of the long contest which has since raged in Kansas, the Democratic party has lent its sympathies, its aid, and all the powers of the Government which it controlled, to enforce Slavery upon that unwilling and injured people. And now, even at this day, while it mocks us with the assurance that Kansas is free, the Democratic party keeps the State excluded from her just and proper place in the Union, under the hope that she may be dragooned into the acceptance of Slavery.

The Democratic party, finally, has procured from a Supreme Judiciary, fixed in its interest, a decree that Slavery exists by force of the Constitution in every Territory of the United States, paramount to all legislative authority, either within the Territory, or residing in Congress.

Such is the Democratic party. It has no policy, State or Federal, for finance, or trade, or manufacture, or commerce, or education, or internal improvements, or for the protection or even the security of civil or religious liberty. It is positive and uncompromising in the interest of Slavery—negative, compromising, and vacillating, in regard to everything else. It boasts its love of equality, and wastes its strength, and even its life, in fortifying the only aristocracy known in the land. It professes fraternity, and, so often as Slavery requires, allies itself with proscription. It magnifies itself for conquests in foreign lands, but it sends the national eagle forth always with chains, and not the olive branch, in his fangs.

This dark record shows you, fellow-citizens, what I was unwilling to announce at an earlier stage of this argument, that of the whole nefarious schedule of slaveholding designs which I have submitted to you, the Democratic party has left only one yet to be consummated—the abrogation of the law which forbids the African slave trade.

Now, I know very well that the Democratic party has, at every stage of these proceedings, disavowed the motive and the policy of fortifying and extending Slavery, and has excused them on entirely different and more plausible grounds. But the inconsistency and frivolity of these pleas prove still more conclusively the guilt I charge upon that party. It must, indeed, try to excuse such guilt before mankind, and even to the consciences of its own adherents. There is an instinctive abhorrence of Slavery, and an inborn and inhering love of Freedom in the human heart, which render palliation of such gross misconduct indispensable. It disfranchised the free African

on the ground of a fear that, if left to enjoy the right of suffrage, he might seduce the free white citizen into amalgamation with his wronged and despised race. The Democratic party condemned and deposed John Quincy Adams, because he expended \$12,000,000 a year, while it justifies his favored successor in spending \$70,000,000, \$80,000,000, and even \$100,000,000, a year. It denies emancipation in the District of Columbia, even with compensation to masters and the consent of the people, on the ground of an implied constitutional inhibition, although the Constitution expressly confers upon Congress sovereign legislative power in that District, and although the Democratic party is tenacious of the principle of strict construction. It violated the express provisions of the Constitution in suppressing petition and debate on the subject of Slavery, through fear of disturbance of the public harmony, although it claims that the electors have a right to instruct their representatives, and even demand their resignation in cases of contumacy. It extended Slavery over Texas, and connived at the attempt to spread it across the Mexican territories, even to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, under a plea of enlarging the area of Freedom. It abrogated the Mexican slave law and the Missouri Compromise prohibition of Slavery in Kansas, not to open the new Territories to Slavery, but to try therein the new and fascinating theories of Non-intervention and Popular Sovereignty; and, finally, it overthrew both these new and elegant systems by the English Lecompton bill and the Dred Scott decision, on the ground that the free States ought not to enter the Union without a population equal to the representative basis of one member of Congress, although slave States might come in without inspection as to their numbers.

Will any member of the Democratic party now here claim that the authorities chosen by the suffrages of the party transcended their partisan platforms, and so misrepresented the party in the various transactions I have recited? Then I ask him to name one Democratic statesman or legislator, from Van Buren to Walker, who either timidly or cautiously, like them, or boldly and defiantly like Douglas, ever refused to execute a behest of the slaveholders, and was not therefor, and for no other cause, immediately denounced, and deposed from his trust, and repudiated by the Democratic party for that contumacy.

I think, fellow-citizens, that I have shown you that it is high time for the friends of Freedom to rush to the rescue of the Constitution, and that their very first duty is to dismiss the Democratic party from the administration of the Government.

Why shall it not be done? All agree that it ought to be done. What, then, shall prevent its being done? Nothing but timidity or division of the opponents of the Democratic party.

Some of these opponents start one objection, and some another. Let us notice these objections briefly. One class say that they cannot trust the Republican party; that it has not avowed its hostility to Slavery boldly enough, or its affection for Freedom earnestly enough.

I ask, in reply, is there any other party which can be more safely trusted? Every one knows that it is the Republican party, or none, that shall displace the Democratic party. But I answer, further, that the character and fidelity of any party are determined, necessarily, not by its pledges, programmes, and platforms, but by the public exigencies, and the temper of the people where they call it into activity. Subserviency to Slavery is a law written not only on the forehead of the Democratic party, but also in its very soul—so resistance to Slavery, and devotion to Freedom, the popular elements now actively working for the Republican party among the people, must and will be the resources for its ever-renewing strength and constant invigoration.

Others cannot support the Republican party, because it has not sufficiently exposed its platform, and determined what it will do, and what it will not do, when triumphant. It may prove too progressive for some, and too conservative for others. As if any party ever foresaw so clearly the course of future events as to plan a universal scheme for future action, adapted to all possible emergencies. Who would ever have joined even the Whig party of the Revolution, if it had been obliged to answer, in 1775, whether it would declare for Independence in 1776, and for this noble Federal Constitution of ours in 1787, and not a year earlier or later?

The people of the United States will be as wise next year, and the year afterward, and even ten years hence, as we are now. They will oblige the Republican party to act as the public welfare and the interests of justice and humanity shall require, through all the stages of its career, whether of trial or triumph.

Others will not venture an effort, because they fear that the Union would not endure the change. Will such objectors tell me how long a Constitution can bear a strain directly along the fibres of which it is composed? This is a Constitution of Freedom. It is being converted into a Constitution of Slavery. It is a republican Constitution. It is being made an aristocratic one. Others wish to wait until some collateral questions concern-

ing temperance, or the exercise of the elective franchise are properly settled. Let me ask all such persons, whether time enough has not been wasted on these points already, without gaining any other than this single advantage, namely, the discovery that only one thing can be effectually done at one time, and that the one thing which must and will be done at any one time is just that thing which is most urgent, and will no longer admit of postponement or delay. Finally, we are told by faint-hearted men that they despond; the Democratic party, they say, is unconquerable, and the dominion of Slavery is consequently inevitable. I reply to them, that the complete and universal dominion of Slavery would be intolerable enough when it should have come after the last possible effort to escape should have been made. There would, in that case, be left to us the consoling reflection of fidelity to duty.

But I reply, further, that I know—few, I think, know better than I—the resources and energies of the Democratic party, which is identical with the Slave Power. I do ample prestige to its traditional popularity. I know, further—few, I think, know better than I—the difficulties and disadvantages of organizing a new political force like the Republican party, and the obstacles it must encounter in laboring without prestige and without patronage. But, notwithstanding all this, I know that the Democratic party must go down, and that the Republican party must rise into its place. The Democratic party derived its strength, originally, from its adoption of the principles of equal and exact justice to all men. So long as it practised this principle faithfully, it was invulnerable. It became vulnerable when it renounced the principle, and since that time it has maintained itself, not by virtue of its own strength, or even of its traditional merits, but because there as yet had appeared in the political field no other

party that had the conscience and the courage to take up, and avow, and practise the life-inspiring principle which the Democratic party had surrendered. At last, the Republican party has appeared. It avows now, as the Republican party of 1800 did, in one word, its faith and its works, "Equal and exact justice to all men." Even when it first entered the field, only half organized, it struck a blow which only just failed to secure complete and triumphant victory. In this, its second campaign, it has already won advantages which render that triumph now both easy and certain.

The secret of its assured success lies in that very characteristic which, in the mouth of scoffers, constitutes its great and lasting imbecility and reproach. It lies in the fact that it is a party of one idea; but that idea is a noble one—an idea that fills and expands all generous souls; the idea of equality—the equality of all men before human tribunals and human laws, as they all are equal before the Divine tribunal and Divine laws.

I know, and you know, that a revolution has begun. I know, and all the world knows, that revolutions never go backward. Twenty Senators and a hundred Representatives proclaim boldly in Congress to-day sentiments and opinions and principles of Freedom which hardly so many men, even in this free State, dared to utter in their own homes twenty years ago. While the Government of the United States, under the conduct of the Democratic party, has been all that time surrendering one plain and castle after another to Slavery, the people of the United States have been no less steadily and perseveringly gathering together the forces with which to recover back again all the fields and all the castles which have been lost, and to confound and overthrow, by one decisive blow, the betrayers of the Constitution and Freedom forever.

"Negro Slavery not Unjust."

A SPEECH BY CHARLES O'CONOR

AT THE UNION MEETING

AT THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC, NEW YORK CITY, DEC. 19, 1859.

MR. MAYOR AND GENTLEMEN:—I cannot express to you the delight which I experience in beholding in this great city so vast an assembly of my fellow citizens, convened for the purpose stated in your resolutions. I am delighted beyond measure to behold at this time so vast an assembly responding to the call of a body so respectable as the twenty thousand New Yorkers who have convened this meeting. If anything can give assurance to those who doubt, and confidence to those who may have had misgivings as to the permanency of our institutions, and the solidity of the support which the people of the North are prepared to give them, it is that in the queen city of the New World, in the capital of North America, there is assembled a meeting so large, so respectable, and so unanimous as this meeting has shown itself to be in receiving sentiments which, if observed, must protect our Union from destruction, and even from danger. (Applause.) Gentlemen, is it not a subject of astonishment that the idea of danger, and the still more dreadful idea of dissolution, should be heard from the lips of an American citizen, at this day, in reference to, or in connection with, the sacred name of this most sacred Union? (Applause.) Why gentlemen, what is our Union? What are its antecedents? What is its present condition? If we ward off the evils which threaten it, what its future hope for us and for the great family of mankind? Why, gentlemen, it may well be said of this Union as a government, that as it is the last offspring, so is it Time's most glorious and beneficent production. Gentlemen, we are created by an Omniscent Being. We are created by a Being not only All-Seeing, but All-Powerful and All-Wise. And in the benignity and the farseeing wisdom of His power, He permitted the great family of mankind to live on, to advance, to improve, step by step, and yet permitted five thousand years and upward to elapse ere He laid the foundation of a truly free, a truly happy, and a truly independent empire. It was not, gentlemen, until that great length of time had elapsed, that the earth was deemed mature for laying the foundations of this mighty and prosperous State. It was then that He inspired the noble-minded and chivalrous Genoese to set forth upon the trackless

ocean and discover the empire that we now enjoy. But a few years, comparatively, had elapsed when there was raised up in this blessed land a set of men whose like had never before existed upon the face of this earth. Men unequalled in their perceptions of the true principles of justice, in their comprehensive benevolence, in their capacity to lay safely, justly, soundly, and with all the qualities which should insure permanency, the foundations of an empire. It was in 1776, and in this country, that there assembled the first, the very first, assembly of rational men who ever proclaimed, in clear and undeniable form, the immutable principles of liberty, and consecrated, to all time I trust, in the face of tyrants, and in opposition to their power, the rights of nations and the rights of men. (Applause.) These patriots, as soon as the storm of war had passed away, sat down and framed that instrument upon which our Union rests, the Constitution of the United States of America. (Applause.) And the question now before us is neither more nor less than this: whether that Constitution, consecrated by the blood shed in that glorious Revolution, consecrated by the signature of the most illustrious man who ever lived, George Washington (applause)—whether that instrument, accepted by the wisest and by the best of that day, and accepted in convention, one by one, in each and every State of this Union—that instrument from which so many blessings have flown—whether that instrument was conceived in crime, is a chapter of abominations (cries of "No, no"), is a violation of justice, is a league between strong-handed but wicked-hearted white men to oppress, and impoverish, and plunder their fellow-creatures, contrary to rectitude, honor and justice. (Applause.) This is the question, neither more nor less. We are told from pulpits, we are told from the political rostrum, we are told in the legislative assemblies of our Northern States, not merely by speakers, but by distinct resolutions of the whole body—we are told by gentlemen occupying seats in the Congress of the Union through the votes of Northern people—that the Constitution seeks to enshrine, to protect, to defend a monstrous crime against justice and humanity, and that it is our duty to defeat its provisions, to outwit

them, if we cannot otherwise get rid of their effect, and to trample upon the rights which it has declared shall be protected and insured to our brethren of the South. (Applause.) That is the doctrine now advocated. And I ask whether that doctrine, necessarily involving the destruction of our Union, shall be permitted to prevail as it has hitherto prevailed? Gentlemen, I trust you will excuse me for deliberately coming up to and meeting this question—not seeking to captivate your fancies by a trick of words—not seeking to exalt your imaginations by declamation or by any effort at eloquence—but meeting this question gravely, sedately, and soberly, and asking you what is to be our course in relation to it? Gentlemen, the Constitution guarantees to the people of the Southern States the protection of their slave property. In that respect it is a solemn compact between the North and the South. As a solemn compact, are we at liberty to violate it? (Cries of “No, no!”) Are we at liberty to seek or take any mean, petty advantage of it? (Cries of “No! no!”) Are we at liberty to con over its particular words, and to restrict and to limit its operation, so as to acquire under such narrow construction, a pretence of right by hostile and adverse legislation? (“No! no!”)—to interfere with the interests, wound the feelings, and trample on the political rights of our Southern fellow-citizens? (“No! no! no!”) No, gentlemen. If it be a compact, and has anything sacred in it, we are bound to observe it in good faith, honestly and honorably, not merely to the letter, but fully to the spirit, and not in any mincing, half-way, unfair, or illiberal construction, seeking to satisfy the letter, to give as little as we can, and thereby to defeat the spirit. (Applause.) That may be the way that some men keep a contract about the sale of a house or of a chattel, but it is not the way honest men observe contracts, even in relation to the most trivial things. (“True,” and applause.) What has been done, having a tendency to disturb harmony under this Constitution, and to break down and destroy the union now existing between these States? Why, gentlemen, at an early period the subject of slavery, as a mere philosophical question, was discussed by many, and its justice or injustice made the subject of argument leading to various opinions. It mattered little how long this discussion should last, while it was confined within such limits. If it had only led to the formation of societies like the Shakers, who do not believe in matrimony; societies like the people of Utah, destined to a short career, who believe in too much of it (laughter); or societies of people like the strong-minded women of our country, who believe that women are much better qualified than men to perform the functions and offices usually performed by men (laughter)—and who

probably would, if they had their way, simply change the order of proceedings, and transfer the husband to the kitchen, and themselves to the field or the cabinet. (Laughter and applause.) So long, I say, as this sentimentality touching slavery confined itself to the formation of parties and societies of this description, it certainly could do no great harm, and we might satisfy ourselves with the maxim that “Error can do little harm as long as truth is left free to combat it.” But unfortunately, gentlemen, this sentimentality has found its way out of the meeting-houses—from among pious people, assemblies of speculative philosophers, and societies formed to benefit the inhabitants of Barioboola-gha—it has found its way into the heart of the selfish politician; it has been made the war-cry of party; it has been made the instrument whereby to elevate not merely to personal distinction and social rank, but to political power. Throughout the non-slaveholding States of this Union, men have been thus elevated who advocate a course of conduct necessarily exasperating the South, and the natural effect of whose teachings renders the Southern people insecure in their property and their lives, making it a matter of doubt each night whether they can safely retire to their slumbers without sentries and guards to protect them against incursions from the North. I say the effect has been to elevate, on the strength of this sentiment, such men to power. And what is the result—the condition of things at this day? Why, gentlemen, the occasion that calls us together is the occurrence of a raid upon the State of Virginia by a few misguided fanatics—followers of these doctrines, with arms in their hands, and bent upon rapine and murder. I called them followers, but they should be deemed leaders. They were the best, the bravest, and the most virtuous of all the abolition party. (Applause.) On the Lord’s day, at the hour of still repose, they armed the bondman with pikes brought from the North, that he might slay his master, his master’s wife, and his master’s little children. And immediately succeeding to it—at this very instant—what is the political question pending before Congress?

A book substantially encouraging the same course of provocation toward the South which has been long pursued, is openly recommended to circulation by sixty-eight members of your Congress. (Cries of “Shame on them,” applause, and hisses.) Recommended to circulation by sixty-eight members of your Congress, all elected in Northern States (hisses and applause)—every one, I say, elected from non-slaveholding States. And with the assistance of their associates, some of whom hold their offices by your votes, there is great danger that they will elect to the highest office

in that body, where he will sit as a representative of the whole North, a man who united in causing that book to be distributed through the South, carrying poison and death in its polluted leaves. ("Hang him," and applause.) Is it not fair to say that this great and glorious Union is menaced when such a state of things is found to exist? when such an act is attempted? Is it reasonable to expect that our brethren of the South will calmly sit down ("No") and submit quietly to such an outrage? (Cries of "No, no.") Why, gentlemen, we greatly exceed them in numbers. The non-slaveholding States are by far the more populous; they are increasing daily in numbers and in population and we may soon overwhelm the Southern vote. If we continue to fill the halls of legislation with abolitionists, and permit to occupy the executive chair men who declare themselves to be enlisted in a crusade against slavery, and against the provisions of the Constitution which secure that species of property, what can we reasonably expect from the people of the South but that they will pronounce the Constitution—with all its glorious associations, with all its sacred memories—this Union, with its manifold present and promised blessings—an unendurable evil, threatening to crush and to destroy their most vital interests—to make their country a wilderness. Why should we expect them to submit to such a line of conduct on our part, and recognize us as brethren, or unite with us in perpetuating the Union?

For my part I do not see anything unjust or unreasonable in the declaration often made by Southern members on this subject. They tell us: "If you will thus assail us with incendiary pamphlets, if you will thus create a spirit in your country which leads to violence and bloodshed among us, if you will assail the institution upon which the prosperity of our country depends, and will elevate to office over us men who are pledged to aid in such transactions, and to oppress us by hostile legislation, we cannot—much as we revere the Constitution, greatly as we estimate the blessings which would flow from its faithful enforcement—we cannot longer depend on your compliance with its injunctions, or adhere to the Union." For my part, gentlemen, if the North continues to conduct itself in the selection of representatives to the Congress of the United States as, from, perhaps, a certain degree of negligence and inattention, it has heretofore conducted itself, the South is not to be censured if it withdraws from the Union. (Hisses and applause. A voice—"that's so.") Three cheers for the Fugitive Slave Law! We are not, gentlemen, to hold a meeting to say that "We love this Union; we delight in it; we are proud of it; it blesses us, and we enjoy it; but we shall fill all its offices with men of our own choosing, and, our brethren of the

South, you shall enjoy its glorious past; you shall enjoy its mighty recollections; but it shall trample your institutions in the dust." We have no right to say it. We have no right to exact so much; and an opposite and entirely different course, fellow-citizens, must be ours—must be the course of the great North, if we would preserve this Union. (Applause, and cries of "Good.")

And, gentlemen, what is this glorious Union? What must we sacrifice if we exasperate our brethren of the South, and compel them, by injustice and breach of compact, to separate from us and to dissolve it? Why, gentlemen, the greatness and glory of the American name will then be a thing of yesterday. The glorious Revolution of the thirteen States will be a Revolution not achieved by us, but by a nation that has ceased to exist. The name of Washington will be, to us at least at the North (cheers), but as name of Julius Cæsar, or of some other great hero who has lived in times gone by, whose nation has perished and exists no more. The Declaration of Independence, what will that be? Why, the declaration of a State that no longer has place among the nations. All these bright and glorious recollections of the past must cease to be our property, and become mere memorials of a by-gone race and people. A line must divide the North from the South. What will be the consequences? Will this mighty city—growing as it now is, with wealth pouring into it from every portion of this mighty empire—will it continue to flourish as it has done? (Cries of "No, no!") Will your marble palaces that line Broadway, and raise their proud tops toward the sky, continue to increase, until, as is now promised under the Union, it shall present the most glorious picture of wealth, prosperity, and happiness, that the world has ever seen? (Applause.) No! gentlemen, no! such things cannot be. I do not say that we will starve, that we will perish, as a people, if we separate from the South. I admit, that if the line be drawn between us, they will have their measure of prosperity, and we will have ours; but meagre, small in the extreme, compared with what is existing, and promised under our Union, will be the prosperity of each.

Truly has it been said here to-night, that we were made for each other; separate us, and although you may not destroy us, you reduce each to so low a scale that well might humanity deplore the evil courses that brought about the result. True, gentlemen, we would have left, to boast of, our share of the glories of the Revolution. The Northern States sent forth to the conflict their bands of heroes, and shed their blood as freely as those of the South. But the dividing line would take away from us the grave of Washington. It is in his own beloved Virginia. (Applause)

and cheers.) It is in the State and near the spot where this treason that has been growing up in the North, so lately culminated in violence and bloodshed. We would lose the grave—we would lose all connection with the name of Washington. But our philanthropic and pious friends who fain would lead us to this result, would, of course, comfort us with the consoling reflection that we had the glorious memory of John Brown in its place. (Great laughter and cheers.) Are you, gentlemen, prepared to make the exchange? (Cries of "No, no.") Shall the tomb of Washington, that rises upon the bank of the Potomac, receiving its tribute from every nation of the earth—shall that become the property of a foreign State—a State hostile to us in its feelings, and we to it in ours? Shall we erect a monument among the arid hills at North Elba, and deem the privilege of making pilgrimages thither a recompense for the loss of every glorious recollection of the past, and for our severance from the name of Washington? He who is recognized as the Father of his Country? (Cries of "No, no," and cheers.) No, gentlemen, we are not prepared, I trust, for this sad exchange, this fatal severance. We are not prepared, I trust, either to part with our glorious past or to give up the advantages of our present happy condition. We are not prepared to relinquish our affection for the South, nor to involve our section in the losses, the deprivation of blessings and advantages necessarily resulting to each from disunion. Gentlemen, we never would have attained the wealth and prosperity as a nation which is now ours, but for our connection with these very much reviled and injured slaveholders of the Southern States. And, gentlemen, if dissolution is to take place, we must part with the trade of the South, and thereby surrender our participation in the wealth of the South. Nay, more—we are told from good authority that we must not only part with the slaveholding States, but that our younger sister with the golden crown—rich, teeming California, she who added the final requisite to our greatness as a nation—will not come with us. She will remain with the South.

Gentlemen, if we allow this course of injustice toward the South to continue, these are to be the consequences—evil to us, evil also to them. Much of all that we are most proud of; much of all that contributes to our prosperity and greatness as a nation, must pass away from us.

The question is—Should we permit it to be continued, and submit to all these evils? Is there any reason to justify such a course? There is a reason preached to us for permitting it. We are told that slavery is unjust; we are told that it is a matter of conscience to put it down; and that whatever treaties or compacts, or laws, or constitutions, have been made to sanction and uphold it, it is still unholy, and that we are bound to trample upon treaties, compacts, laws, and constitutions, and to stand by what these men arro-

gantly tell us is the law of God and a fundamental principle of natural justice. Indeed, gentlemen, these two things are not distinguishable. The law of God and natural justice, as between man and man, are one and the same. The wisest philosophers of ancient times—heathen philosophers—said, The rule of conduct between man and man is, to live honestly, to injure no man, and to render to every man his due. In words far more direct and emphatic, in words of the most perfect comprehensiveness, the Saviour of the world gave us the same rule in one short sentence—"Love thy neighbor as thyself." (Applause.) Now, speaking between us, people of the North and our brethren of the South, I ask you to act upon this maxim—the maxim of the heathen—the command of the living God: "Render to every man his due," "Love thy neighbor as thyself." (Applause.) Thus we should act and feel toward the South. Upon that maxim which came from Him of Nazareth we should act toward the South, but without putting upon it any new-fangled, modern interpretation. We should neither say nor think that any Gospel minister of this day is wiser than God himself—than He who gave us the Gospel. These maxims should govern between us and our brethren of the South. But, gentlemen, the question is this: Do these maxims justify the assertion of those who seek to invade the rights of the South, by proclaiming negro slavery unjust? That is the point to which this great argument, involving the fate of our Union, must now come. Is negro slavery unjust? If it be unjust, it violates the first rule of human conduct, "Render to every man his due." If it be unjust, it violates the law of God which says, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" for that law requires that we should perpetrate no injustice. Gentlemen, if it could be maintained that negro slavery is unjust, is thus in conflict with the law of nature and the law of God, perhaps I might be prepared—perhaps we all ought to be prepared to go with that distinguished man to whom allusion is frequently made, and say, there is a "higher law" which compels us to trample beneath our feet, as a wicked and unholy compact, the Constitution established by our fathers, with all the blessings it secures to their children. But I insist—and that is the argument which we must meet, and on which we must come to a conclusion that shall govern our action in the future selection of representatives in the Congress of the United States—I insist that *negro slavery is not unjust*. (Long continued applause.) *It is not unjust; it is just, wise, and beneficent*. (Hisses, followed by applause, and cries of "Put him out.") Let him stay, gentlemen.

PRESIDENT—Let him stay there. Order.

MR. O'CONOR—Serpents may hiss, but good men will hear. (Cries again of "Put him out;" calls to order; confusion for a time.)

THE PRESIDENT—If anybody hisses here, remember that every one has his own peculiar way of expressing himself, and as some birds only understand hissing, they must hiss. (Applause.)

MR. O'CONOR—Gentlemen, there is an animal upon this earth that has no faculty of making its sentiments known in any other way than by a hiss. I am for equal rights. (Three cheers were—)

here given for Mr. O'Connor, three for Gov. Wise, and three groans for John Brown.) I beg of you, gentlemen, all of you who are of my mind at least, to preserve silence, and leave the hissing animal in the full enjoyment of his natural privileges. (Cries of "Good, good," laughter and applause.) The first of our race that offended was taught to do so by that hissing animal. (Laughter and applause.) The first human society that was ever broken up through sin and discord, had its happy union dissolved by the entrance of that animal. (Applause.) Therefore, I say it is his privilege to hiss. Let him hiss on. (Cries of "Good, good," laughter and applause.) Gentlemen, I will not detain you much longer. (Cries of "Go on, go on.") I maintain that negro slavery is not unjust—(a voice—"No, sir," applause,) that it is benign in its influences upon the white man and upon the black. (Voices—"That's so, that's so," applause.) I maintain that it is ordained by nature; that it is a necessity of both races; that, in climates where the black race can live and prosper, nature herself enjoins correlative duties on the black man and on the white, which cannot be performed except by the preservation, and, if the hissing gentleman please, the perpetuation of negro slavery.

I am fortified in this opinion by the highest tribunal in our country, that venerable exponent of our institutions, and of the principles of justice—the Supreme Court of the United States. That court has held, on this subject, what wise men will ever pronounce to be sound and just doctrine. There are some principles well known, well understood, universally recognized and universally acknowledged among men, that are not to be found written in constitutions or in laws. The people of the United States, at the formation of our Government, were, as they still are, in some sense, peculiar and radically distinguishable from other nations. We were white men, of—what is commonly called, by way of distinction—the Caucasian race. We were a monogamous people; that is to say, we were not Mohammedans, or followers of Joe Smith—with half a dozen wives apiece. (Laughter.) It was a fundamental principle of our civilization that no State could exist or be tolerated in this Union which should not, in that respect, resemble all the other States of the Union. Some other distinctive features might be stated which serve to mark us as a people distinct from others, and incapable of associating on terms of perfect political equality or social equality, as friends and fellow-citizens, with some kinds of people that are to be found upon the face of the earth. As a white nation, we made our Constitution and our laws, vesting all political rights in that race. They, and they alone, constituted, in every political sense, the American people. (Applause.) As to the negro, why, we allowed him to live under the shadow and protection of our laws. We gave him, as we were bound to give him, protection against wrong and outrage; but we denied to him political rights, or the power to govern. We left him, for so long a period as the community in which he dwelt should so order, in the condition of a bondman. (Applause.) Now, gentlemen, to that condition the negro is assigned

by nature. (Cries of "Bravo" and "That's so," and applause.) Experience shows that his race cannot prosper—that they become extinct in any cold, or in any very temperate clime; but in the warm, the extremely warm regions, his race can be perpetuated, and with proper guardianship, may prosper. He has ample strength, and is competent to labor, but nature denies to him either the intellect to govern or the willingness to work. (Applause.) Both were denied him. That same power which deprived him of the will to labor, gave him, in our country, as a recompense, a master to coerce that duty, and convert him into a useful and valuable servant. (Applause.) I maintain that it is not injustice to leave the negro in the condition in which nature placed him, and for which alone he is adapted. Fitted only for a state of pupilage, our slave system gives him a master to govern him and to supply his deficiencies: in this there is no injustice. Neither is it unjust in the master to compel him to labor, and thereby afford to that master a just compensation in return for the care and talent employed in governing him. In this way alone is the negro enabled to render himself useful to himself and to the society in which he is placed.

These are the principles, gentlemen, which the extreme measures of abolitionism compel us to enforce. This is the ground that we must take, or abandon our cherished Union. We must no longer favor political leaders who talk about negro slavery being an evil; nor must we advance the indefensible doctrine that negro slavery is a thing which, although pernicious, is to be tolerated merely because we have made a bargain to tolerate it. We must turn away from the teachings of fanaticism. We must look at negro slavery as it is, remembering that the voice of inspiration, as found in the sacred volume, nowhere condemns the bondage of those who are fit only for bondage. Yielding to the clear decree of nature, and the dictates of sound philosophy, we must pronounce that institution just, benign, lawful and proper. The Constitution established by the fathers of our Republic, which recognized it, must be maintained. And that both may stand together, we must maintain that neither the institution itself, nor the Constitution which upholds it, is wicked or unjust; but that each is sound and wise, and entitled to our fullest support.

We must visit with our execration any man claiming our suffrages, who objects to enforcing, with entire good faith, the provisions of the Constitution in favor of negro slavery, or who seeks, by any indirection, to withhold its protection from the South, or to get away from its obligations upon the North. Let us henceforth support no man for public office whose speech or action tends to induce assaults upon the territory of our Southern neighbors, or to generate insurrection within their borders. (Loud applause.) These are the principles upon which we must act. This is what we must say to our brethren of the South. If we have sent men into Congress who are false to these views, and are seeking to violate the compact which binds us together, we must ask to be forgiven until we have another chance to mani-

fest our will at the ballot-boxes. We must tell them that these men shall be consigned to privacy (applause), and that true men, men faithful to the Constitution, men loving all portions of the country alike, shall be elected in their stead. And, gentlemen, we must do more than promise this—we must perform it. (Loud applause, followed by three cheers for Mr. O'Connor, and a tiger.) But a word more, gentlemen, and I have done. (Cries of "Go on.") I have no doubt at all that what I have said to you this evening will be greatly misrepresented. It is very certain that I have not had time enough properly to enlarge upon and fully to explain the interesting topics on which I have ventured to express myself thus boldly and distinctly, taking upon myself the consequences, be they what they may. (Applause.) But I will say a few words by way of explanation. I have maintained the justice of slavery; I have maintained it, because I hold that the negro is decreed by nature to a state of pupilage under the dominion of the wiser white man, in every clime where God and nature meant the negro should live at all. (Applause.) I say a state of pupilage; and, that I may be rightly understood, I say that it is the duty of the white man to treat him kindly; that it is the interest of the white man to treat him kindly. (Applause.) And further, it is my belief that if the white man, in the States where slavery exists, is not interfered with by the fanatics who are now creating these disturbances, whatever laws, whatever improvements, whatever variations in the conduct of society are necessary for the purpose of enforcing in every instance the dictates of interest and humanity, as between the white man and the black, will be faithfully and fairly carried out in the progress of that improvement in all these things in which we are engaged. It is not pretended that the master has a right to slay his slave; it is not pretended that he has a right to be guilty of harshness and inhumanity to his slave. The laws of all the Southern States forbid that: we have not the right here at the North to be guilty of cruelty toward a horse. It is an indictable offence to commit such cruelty. The same laws exist in the South, and if there is any failure in enforcing them to the fullest extent, it is due to this external force, which is pressing upon the Southern States, and compels them to abstain perhaps from many acts beneficent toward the negro which otherwise would be performed. (Applause.) In truth, in fact, in deed, the white man in the slaveholding States has no more authority by the law of the land over his slave than our laws allow to a father over his minor children. He can no more violate humanity with respect to them, than a father in any of the free States of this Union can exercise acts violative of humanity toward his own son under the age of twenty-one. So far as the law is concerned, you own your boys, and have a right to their services until they are twenty-one. You can make them work for you; you have the right to hire out their services and take their earnings; you have the right to chastise them with judgment and reason if they violate your commands; and they are entirely without political rights. Not one of them at the age of twenty years and eleven months

even, can go to the polls and give a vote. Therefore, gentlemen, before the law, there is but one difference between the free white man of twenty years of age in the Northern States, and the negro bondman in the Southern States. The white man is to be emancipated at twenty-one, because his God-given intellect entitles him to emancipation and fits him for the duties to devolve upon him. The negro, to be sure, is a bondman for life. He may be sold from one master to another, but where is the ill in that?—one may be as good as another. If there be laws with respect to the mode of sale, which by separating man and wife do occasionally lead to that which shocks humanity, and may be said to violate all propriety and all conscience—if such things are done, let the South alone and they will correct the evil. Let our brethren of the South take care of their own domestic institutions and they will do it. (Applause.) They will so govern themselves as to suppress acts of this description, if they are occasionally committed, as perhaps they are, and we must all admit that they are contrary to just conceptions of right and humanity. I have never yet heard of a nation conquered from evil practices, brought to the light of civilization, brought to the light of religion or the knowledge of the Gospel by the bayonet, by the penal laws, or by external persecutions of any kind. It is not by declamation and outcry against a people from those abroad and outside of their territory that you can improve their manners or their morals in any respect. No; if, standing outside of their territory, you attack the errors of a people, you make them cling to their faults. From a sentiment somewhat excusable—somewhat akin to self respect and patriotism—they will resist their nation's enemy. Let our brethren of the South alone, gentlemen, and if there be any errors of this kind, they will correct them.

There is but one way in which you can thus leave them to the guidance of their own judgment—by which you can retain them in this Union as our brethren, and perpetuate this glorious Union; and that is, by resolving—without reference to the political party or faction to which any one of you may belong, without reference to the name, political or otherwise, which you may please to bear—resolving that the man, be he who he may, who advocates the doctrine that negro slavery is unjust, and ought to be assailed or legislated against, or who agitates the subject of extinguishing negro slavery in any of its forms as a political hobby, that that man shall be denied your suffrages, and not only denied your suffrages, but that you will select from the ranks of the opposite party, or your own, if necessary, the man you like least, who entertains opposite sentiments, but through whose instrumentality you may be enabled to defeat his election, and to secure in the councils of the nation men who are true to the Constitution, who are lovers of the Union—men who cannot be induced by considerations of imaginary benevolence for a people who really do not desire their aid, to sacrifice or to jeopard in any degree the blessings we enjoy under this Union. May it be perpetual.

(Great and continued cheering.)

THE REAL QUESTION STATED.

LETTER FROM CHARLES O'CONOR TO A COMMITTEE OF MERCHANTS.

NEW YORK, Dec. 20, 1859.

CHAS. O'CONOR, Esq.: The undersigned, being desirous of circulating as widely as possible, both at the North and at the South, the proceedings of the Union Meeting held at the Academy of Music last evening, intend publishing in pamphlet form, for distribution, a correct copy of the same.

Will you be so kind as to inform us whether this step meets your approval; and if so, furnish us with a corrected report of your speech delivered by you on that occasion. Yours respectfully,

LEITCH, BURNET & CO.,
GEO. W. & JEHIAL READ,
BRUFF, BROTHOR & SEAVER,
C. B. HATCH & CO.,
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(Formerly FURMAN, DAVIS & CO.,
WESSON & COX,
CRONIN, HURXTHAL & SEARS,
ATWATER, MULFORD & CO.

GENTLEMEN: The measure you propose meets my entire approval.

I have long thought that our disputes concerning negro slavery would soon terminate, if the public mind could be drawn to the true issue, and steadily fixed upon it. To effect this object was the sole aim of my address.

Though its ministers can never permit the law of the land to be questioned by private judgment, there is, nevertheless, such a thing as natural justice. Natural justice has the Divine sanction; and it is impossible that any human law which conflicts with it should long endure.

Where mental enlightenment abounds, where morality is professed by all, where the mind is free, speech is free, and the press is free, is it impossible, in the nature of things, that a law which is *admitted* to conflict with natural justice, and with God's own mandate, should long endure?

You all will admit that, within certain limits, at least, our Constitution does contain positive guarantees for the preservation of negro slavery in the old States through all time, unless the local legislatures shall think fit to abolish it. And, consequently, if negro slavery, however humanely administered or judiciously regulated, be an institution which conflicts with natural justice and with God's law, surely the most vehement and extreme admirers of John Brown's sentiments are right; and their denunciations against the Constitution, and against the most hallowed names connected with it, are perfectly justifiable.

The friends of truth—the patriotic Americans who would sustain their country's honor against foreign rivalry, and defend their coun-

try's interests against all assailants, err greatly when they contend with these men on any point but one. Their general principles cannot be refuted; their logic is irresistible; the error, if any there be, is in their premises. They assert that negro slavery is unjust. This, and this alone, of all they say, is capable of being fairly argued against.

If this proposition cannot be refuted, our Union cannot endure, and it ought not to endure.

Our negro bondmen can neither be exterminated nor transported to Africa. They are too numerous for either process, and either, if practicable, would involve a violation of humanity. If they were emancipated, they would relapse into barbarism, or a set of negro States would arise in our midst, possessing political equality, and entitled to social equality. The division of parties would soon make the negro members a powerful body in Congress—would place some of them in high political stations, and occasionally let one into the Executive chair.

It is in vain to say that this could be endured; it is simply impossible.

What then remains to be discussed?

The negro race is upon us. With a Constitution which held them in bondage, our Federal Union might be preserved; but if so holding them in bondage be a thing forbidden by God and Nature, we cannot lawfully so hold them, and the Union must perish.

This is the inevitable result of that conflict which has now reached its climax.

Among us at the North, the sole question for reflection, study, and friendly interchange of thought should be—Is negro slavery unjust? The rational and dispassionate inquirer will find no difficulty in arriving at my conclusion. It is fit and proper; it is, in its own nature, as an institution, beneficial to both races; and the effect of this assertion is not diminished by our admitting that many faults are practised under it. Is not such the fact in respect to all human laws and institutions?

I am, gentlemen, with great respect, yours truly,

CHARLES O'CONOR.

To Messrs. Leitch, Burnet & Co.; George W. & Jehial Read; Bruff, Brothor & Seaver; C. B. Hatch & Co.; Davis, Noble & Co.; Wesson & Cox; Cronin, Hurxthal & Sears; Atwater, Mulford & Co.

CONFLICTING AUTHORITIES.

At the late Union-saving meeting in this city, wherein sundry gentlemen distinguished themselves no less for their lofty patriotism in preventing the dissolution of the Union than for their generous abuse of the Republican party in general and Gov. Seward in particular, the speech of Mr. O'Connor was the gem of the occasion. The clerical patriotism and happy forgetfulness of the reverend theologian; the stately and heavy grandeur of the ex-Governor; the splendid hits and magnificent periods of the chameleon Thayer—all pale before the effort of this distinguished orator of the legal profession. It is, however, deserving of special notice, not on account of its novelty, its logic, or its moral tone, but for the simple fact that the leading Democratic journals have pronounced it a bold and manly effort, and assumed it as the key-note of Democratic conservatism. As a lawyer, Mr. O'Connor, in giving utterance to his extreme Pro-Slavery sentiments, so utterly abhorrent to the intelligence and moral sense of the North, should at least have attempted to fortify his doctrine by a show of authority or logical argument.

We do not, however, deny the right of this distinguished advocate, in presenting the case of his Southern clients and of the Northern Democracy, to take his own course; but we propose to call him and several other witnesses, whom he himself will recognize as men of some eminence as lawyers, jurists, statesmen, philosophers, and theologians, and present their testimony to the American people, in order that they may come to a right conclusion as to the success of Mr. Charles O'Connor's defence of Slavery, and its Democratic indorsement. And first, consider an extract from Mr. O'Connor's speech upon this subject of Slavery:

"It (Negro Slavery) is not only not unjust, it is just, wise and beneficent."—*Charles O'Connor.*

This *ipse dixit* closes the case on the part of the Democracy. Now, on the other hand:

"Slavery is inconsistent with the genius of Republicanism—it lessens the sense of the equal rights of mankind, and habituates us to tyranny and oppression."—*Luther Martin, of Md.*

"It (Slavery) is so odious that nothing can be sufficient to support it but positive law."—*Lord Mansfield.*

"It is injustice to permit Slavery to remain for a single hour."—*William Pitt.*

"Slavery is contrary to the fundamental law of all societies."—*Montesquieu.*

"Slavery, in all its forms, in all its degrees, is a violation of divine law, and a degradation of human nature."—*Brisson.*

"Those are men-stealers who abduct, keep, sell, or buy slaves or freemen."—*Grotius.*

"Slavery is detrimental to virtue and industry."—*Beattie.*

"Slavery is a system of outrage and robbery."—*Socrates.*

"Slavery is a system of the most complete injustice."—*Plato.*

"While men despise fraud, and loathe rapine, and abhor blood, they will reject with indignation the wild and guilty phantasies that man can hold property in man."—*Brougham.*

"Slavery is a state so improper, so degrading, so ruinous to the feelings and capacities of human nature, that it ought not to be suffered to exist."—*Burke.*

"No man is by nature the property of another."—*Dr. Johnson.*

"A system (Slavery) which is not only opposed to all the principles of morality, but as it appears to me, is pregnant with appalling and inevitable danger to the Republic."—*Baron Humboldt.*

"Every man has a property in his own person—this nobody has a right to but himself."—*Locke.*

"It perverts human reason, and induces men endowed with logical powers to maintain that Slavery is sanctioned by the Christian religion."—*John Q. Adams.*

"I never would consent and never have consented that there should be one foot of Slavery territory beyond what the old thirteen States had at the formation of the Union. Never, never."—*Daniel Webster.*

"It (Slavery) ought not to be introduced nor permitted in any of the new States."—*John Jay.*

"Natural liberty is the gift of the beneficent Creator of the whole human race."—*Alex. Hamilton.*

"Slavery is an atrocious debasement of human nature."—*Franklin.*

"It (Slavery) impairs our strength as a community, and poisons our morals at the fountain head."—*Judge Gaston, of N. C.*

"The evils of this system (Slavery) cannot be enumerated."—*George W. Summers, of Va.*

"So long as God allows the vital current to flow through my veins, I will never, never, never, by word or thought, by mind or will, aid in submitting one rood of free territory to the everlasting curse of Human Bondage."—*Henry Clay.*

"Sir, I envy neither the heart nor the head of that man from the North who rises here (in Congress) to defend Slavery from principle."—*John Randolph.*

"We have found that this evil (Slavery) has preyed upon the very vitals of the Union, and has been prejudicial to all the States in which it has existed."—*James Monroe.*

"The abolition of domestic Slavery is the greatest object of desire in these Colonies, where it was unhappily introduced in their infant state."—*Thomas Jefferson.*

"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" (Slavery).—*Geo. Washington.*

For Mr. O'Connor's special benefit, we introduce two other witnesses:

"Not only does the Christian religion, but nature herself cry, out against the state of Slavery."—*Pope Leo X.*

"We further reprobate, by our Apostolic authority, all the above offences (traffic in slaves and holding them in Slavery) as utterly unworthy of the Christian name."—*Pope Gregory XVI.*

We simply add that the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran, the Greek, the Nestorian, the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the Reformed Churches of France, Switzerland, and Holland; indeed, the whole Protestant Church—all, except a few churches in the Southern States—now, and at all times, have deplored and denounced human bondage, as a social, moral, and political evil—either by their creeds, laws, or constitutions, or by the authoritative opinions of their most eminent divines. And yet, Mr. Charles O'Connor, as the representative man of the vast multitude of the Union-saving Democracy—standing in the great commercial emporium of this great Republic—has the effrontery to proclaim (and is applauded for so proclaiming) that the system of Negro Slavery, which the united voices of the great and the good, in all ages, and which the advancing civilization of the whole of Christendom unite in denouncing as abhorrent to all law, human and divine, "is not only not unjust, but is just, wise, and beneficent." And the Pro-Slavery Democracy not only does not condemn the utterance of this abominable sentiment, but sustains and applauds it!

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