

AN ADDRESS

OF

FRIENDS

OF THE

YEARLY MEETING OF NEW-YORK,

TO THE

CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES,

ESPECIALLY TO THOSE OF THE SOUTHERN STATES,

UPON THE

SUBJECT OF SLAVERY.

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AN ADDRESS ON SLAVERY.

FELLOW CITIZENS:

ACCEPTING it as an undoubted truth, that it is "Righteousness which exalteth a nation," and firmly believing that the tranquillity and prosperity of Governments depend in a great degree upon a scrupulous adherence to the dictates of this ennobling principle, we are concerned to call the attention of the public, and more especially the citizens of the South, to a serious consideration of the condition of that numerous portion of American population held in a state of unconditional and interminable servitude. We regard the subject as being of a very grave character, not only affecting the civil and social condition of millions of persons, who by the strong arm of power are deprived of the enjoyment of those rights and privileges, without which, man, noble as he is by creation, loses his native character, and sinks to the condition of a chattel, but also affecting in a pecuniary view the interest of a large portion of the citizens of the United States, and as we believe, intimately connected with the peace and prosperity of our whole country—the stability of its government, and the harmony of its public councils:

We are sensible that it is a subject, not only of great magnitude, but that it is also one of great delicacy, and we approach it with a feeling which prompts us to desire the advancement of the best interests of the master, while we plead for the release of the slave. We can readily believe there are many owners of slaves who are dissatisfied with the system of slavery, and desire its extinction. They feel

themselves burdened, and yet as individuals, may think they have not strength to throw it from them. We sympathise with such wherever their lots may be. We know that slavery did not originate with those whom we now address, but that it is the offspring of a darker age—that it has descended from preceding generations as an established condition, and may, to a certain extent, be said to have forced itself upon those who are their successors. And thus it is probable many find themselves in a position with respect to slaves, which they would not of choice have assumed. We willingly allow all the extenuation which considerations such as these can furnish. It is not our purpose to reproach the master, but to plead for the slave. We ask then, a patient hearing, and that we may calmly reason together.

If there be truth in the language so solemnly put forth in the Declaration of the Independence of the United States of America, that "All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," it must be admitted that slavery is a grievous infringement of those rights. And if we estimate the extent of injury it inflicts by supposing ourselves, our friends, or our children the subjects of its operation, surely the strongest language would be quite inadequate to describe the amount of evil connected with the system, and the act would be regarded as calling loudly for retributive justice upon the aggressors. And why, let us earnestly ask, is not this a correct conclusion in relation to those upon whom the system is at present operating? It is a rule for judging which the gospel suggests, and as Christians we ought to respect it. It is also a view of the subject which has been entertained by many who were eminent as statesmen, some of whom have left their sentiments upon record for the benefit of posterity. And would it be wise in us,

their successors, to forget or neglect them? They regarded the system as evil in itself, and as fraught with danger to the rising republic. So deeply impressed were those eminent men who framed the Constitution of the Union, with the incompatibility of slavery with republican principles, that they could not consent that the obnoxious word should have a place in that instrument. And he who is styled the Father of his country, though he held slaves while he lived, left them free in his will, thereby bearing his dying testimony in favor of emancipation.

The language of that eminent statesman, Thomas Jefferson, in his Notes on Virginia, is remarkable both for its justness and its force. He asks, "Can the liberties of a nation be secure, when we have removed their only firm basis, a *conviction* in the minds of the people that these *liberties* are the *gift* of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever; that, considering numbers, nature, and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation is among possible events; that it may become *probable by supernatural interference*. The Almighty has no attribute which can take sides with us in such a contest."

There is something peculiarly solemn in this language. It seems like a warning voice designed to call us back to a sense of duty. It is known that he had long been impressed with a conviction of the injustice, impolicy and dangerous tendency of this Institution of the South. As early as 1784, he was advocating the cause of freedom in Congress. And in a draft of a Constitution for the State of Virginia, drawn by him, provision was made for the emancipation of slaves in that State, in the year 1800, by declaring that all born after that time should be free. In these generous efforts, however, it was his lot to meet with defeat.

But so earnest was the engagement of Thomas Jefferson for the promotion of this cause, that he addressed a letter to Doctor Price of London, who had written a treatise upon slavery, asking him to address an exhortation on the subject of the abolition of slavery to the young men of William and Mary's College in Virginia, who were preparing for public life, hoping it might be decisive of the question in that State, which he declared would be the "*State* where the interesting spectacle would be presented of *Justice* in conflict with *Avarice* and *Oppression*." And so late in his life as the year 1814, in reply to a letter from a friend who it seems had urged him to renew his efforts in the cause of emancipation, he declares his continued conviction that "the hour of emancipation is advancing in the march of time," and adds, "This enterprize is for the young, for those who can bear it through to its consummation. It shall have all my prayers, and those are the only weapons of an old man. It is an encouraging observation, that no good measure was ever proposed, which, if duly pursued, failed to prevail in the end. And you will be supported by the religious precept, 'be not weary in well doing.'"

Surely the sentiments above quoted, emanating from such a source, and sustained by such weight of character, should receive the most serious consideration. How consistent are his views; and how solemn his conclusions. Regarding *liberty* as the gift of God to man, he infers that it may not be violated without incurring the wrath of the giver. And looking forward to the possible continuance of this violation of rights, and connecting the thought that God is just, and that his justice cannot always sleep—adverting also to the operation of natural causes, and the probability of supernatural interference in favor of the oppressed—he is affected with the most solemn concern—he trembles for his country. Would that any effort of ours

could tend to impress this concern upon the minds of those in whose hands are entrusted, at the present time, the destinies of our beloved country !

Equally strong is the language of William Pinkney, delivered in the House of Delegates of Maryland in 1789, in reply, it would seem, to arguments designed to ward off the weight of responsibility from the actors of that day, and place it upon their ancestors. And we would recommend his sentiments to the serious consideration of all who are disposed to shelter themselves under a course of reasoning of this kind. "Wherefore," says he, "should we confine the edge of censure to our ancestors, or those from whom they purchased? Are *we* not equally guilty? They strewed around the seeds of slavery. We cherish and sustain the growth. They introduced the system. We enlarge, invigorate and confirm it. Its continuance is as shameful as its origin. By the eternal principles of natural justice, no master in the State has a right to hold his slave in bondage for a single hour. Sir, the thing is *impolitic*; never will your country be productive; never will its agriculture, its commerce, or its manufactures flourish, so long as they depend upon reluctant bondmen for their progress."

The names of other eminent statesmen who entertained similar views might be inserted, but we know not that any thing could add force to the sentiments already presented. We think it cannot fail to be interesting, to observe the manner in which great men of an age that has passed away, regarded the subject of which we are treating. They concur in speaking of slavery as it then existed, in plain and strong terms, as being wrong in itself, *impolitic*, and of dangerous tendency. And we fear that its features are but slightly, if at all, ameliorated at this day. The foreign slave trade indeed, has since that time been abolished, and as far as our government is concerned, we

hope it may be considered as suppressed. But an internal traffic of a similar character, and to a considerable extent, is still carried on between different States of this Union—perhaps less marked than the foreign, with the extreme of human suffering, but still cruel and unrighteous. The most tender connections are liable to be severed, and families to be separated and scattered, never more to meet. Ah! and the helpless and pitiable objects are collected in droves, by unfeeling and relentless men. They are driven, manacled, along your highways. They pass your doors, and the distressing spectacle is forced upon you. How long, let it be asked, in the tenderest feeling of Christian philanthropy, how long shall this state of things continue? How long ere the state of public feeling shall melt in tenderness at scenes of woe like these, and rising in its strength, resolve, in wisdom and in mercy, that they shall cease? Will you not unite with us in anticipating this period with pleasure? And why should this happy period be long delayed? Why should not the time very soon arrive, when this traffic, so repugnant to all that is generous in our nature, shall cease—and still more than this—when every shackle shall be loosed from every limb, and every slave be made a *man*!

We entirely disclaim all intention of improper interference with the internal Institutions of the South, yet we feel that we are interested in this matter, because we believe the prosperity and happiness of our whole country, and the harmony of our legislative councils, are affected by it. We know that emancipation can only be effected by the legislative action of each State for itself. But we do believe it is a subject which calls loudly for such action. How can it be true “that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”—and yet the nation that proclaims this lofty senti-

ment to the world, not be called upon to legislate speedily for the emancipation of its slaves? If we take into consideration the serious truth, that this right of liberty, with which all men are endowed, "is the gift of God, and that it cannot be violated but with his wrath," there is an additional and solemn reason presented for urging legislation upon this subject. If we add the declaration of one who was familiar with the subject, and fully competent to judge, that "never will our country be productive; never will its agriculture, its commerce, or its manufactures flourish, so long as they depend upon reluctant bondmen for their progress," the necessity for prompt and effectual exertion in reference to this deeply interesting subject, is still further augmented. And we think a case is made out, which must be felt to be irresistible.

It may be urged that there are dangers connected with the emancipation of slaves, which render it imprudent; and difficulties that make it impracticable. We regard such apprehensions as being of a very conjectural character. It is quite certain that no dangers of this kind attended the emancipation of the slaves in the West India Islands, nor yet difficulties. On the contrary, an additional feeling of security was the result. And this, we think, is the consequence to be expected from such a measure—a consequence which has uniformly resulted from emancipation wherever it has been tried, among every people, and in every clime. But if those dangers did exist, are there no dangers and no difficulties connected with the continuance of slavery? The enlightened statesman of Virginia, whose language we have freely quoted, saw dangers of an alarming character—and does not his sentiments find an echo in every southern bosom? Will it be attempted to guard against these dangers by a course of legislation intended to bind the intellect, and shut out from the understanding of beings, who, equally with ourselves, are the

objects of redeeming love, every ray of knowledge but that which is necessary to enable them to toil for their masters? Where is the man who would openly espouse such a measure? And what would be the nature of his safety, surrounded by hordes of human beings degraded to the lowest depth of ignorance, yet restless, and possessing strong vindictive passions? But supposing that quiet could be maintained for a season by such means,—should not the prudent statesman, and with him the private citizen also, who feels an interest in the welfare of his country, look in advance, and consider what may be the effect of measures now adopted in distant time to come, and what may be the condition of the State, “when from natural causes, numbers may be greatly increased,” and possibly the relative proportion of the two classes materially changed—and especially to bear in mind the possibility (should we go too far to say, the probability) of supernatural interference, at some period, in favor of the oppressed.

We are fully impressed with the belief that the emancipation of this people must take place at some time—and we as firmly believe that it is not likely ever to be effected with less difficulty than at the present. If we look back for fifty years, we think it will be seen that obstacles have gradually increased during that period—why may not the same result be expected in time to come? And what if the period should be so long postponed that the bonds, instead of being loosed, should burst?

If the assertion that the natural tendency of slavery is unfavorable to the prosperity of a country was one of doubtful credit, we might attempt to strengthen the position by arguments—but its correctness has been proved to a demonstration by actual experiment. We have only to call the attention of our readers to the appearance of contiguous sections of our country, one of which has been cultivated by free men, and the other by “reluctant bond-

men." The contrast is so marked, that a glance must be sufficient to satisfy the most superficial observer, that the balance of profit and comfort is largely on the side of freedom. Intelligent travelers from the South have not failed to be forcibly struck with the difference. They have looked with delight on the prosperity of the North, even in sections of country where both the soil and the climate are less favorable for agricultural pursuits than their own—and they have turned their eyes with a feeling of regret to the exhausted acres of their own once cultivated and productive fields, which under the blight of slave labor, have now fallen back into a wilderness. Not indeed the wilderness of olden times, which teemed with the luxuriance of nature, but one without fertility and without hope. Now these facts, we think, must be allowed to be stronger than argument in favor of emancipation. And with these facts before us, we are at a loss to conceive how an intelligent and reflecting community can hesitate at all upon this subject. It may be true, that the difference of circumstances has rendered it necessary that the citizens of the North should more generally apply themselves to labor than is the case at the South. But this very industry has contributed to their comfort, has given energy and success to enterprize, and is friendly to a state of pure morality. Permit us to ask what is the influence which slavery exerts upon the state of morals at the South? We feel that it may be a delicate inquiry to make, but the subject is a very important one; we put the question, and leave it to each to answer it to his own heart.

Lest it should be thought that the preceding contrast is more highly colored than facts would warrant, we avail ourselves of the concurrent testimony of a distinguished Senator of the South, one who cannot be suspected of being under the influence of improper bias in favor of the North.

“No Southern man can journey (as I have done) through the Northern States, and witness the prosperity, the industry, the public spirit which they exhibit, the sedulous cultivation of all those arts by which life is made comfortable and respectable, without feelings of deep sadness and shame as he remembers his own neglected and desolate home. There, no dwelling is to be seen abandoned, no farm uncultivated, no man idle, no waterfall, even, unemployed. Every person and every thing performs a part towards the grand result, and the whole land is covered with fertile fields, with manufactories, and canals, and rail roads, and public edifices, and towns and cities. How different the state of things in the South! Here the face of the country wears the aspect of premature old age and decay. No improvement is seen going on, nothing is done for posterity, no man thinks of any thing beyond the present moment. Our lands are yearly tasked to their utmost capacity of production, and when exhausted, are abandoned for the youthful West. Because nature has been prodigal to us, we seem to think it unnecessary to do any thing for ourselves. The industry and skill that have converted the inclement and barren hills of New England into a garden, in the genial climate and fertile soil of the South would create almost a paradise. Our natural advantages are among the greatest with which Providence has blessed mankind, but we lack the spirit to enjoy and improve them. The rich ore is beneath our feet, yet we dig not for it. The golden fruit hangs from the bough, and we lift not our hands to gather it.”

Seeing then that duty and interest unite in urging the measure of emancipation, what is there that ought to retard its progress? Does the sacrifice of property involved, present an obstacle? In the British West India Islands, where the experiment has been tried, the rise in the value of real estate, consequent upon emancipation, was nearly, and in

many instances, quite equal to the value of the slaves, which previously belonged to the estate.

Is the cost of wages to be paid for free labor regarded as an objection? There it has been found less expensive to pay wages to the free than to maintain the slave.

Is it apprehended that the liberated slaves would indulge in idleness, and that it would be difficult to procure the amount of labor that would be needed? There it has been found that the laborers were willing to work for reasonable wages, and the net proceeds of the estates have proved larger than before.

Is it supposed that insubordination and a fearful increase of crime would follow? The demeanor of the laborers there is stated by eye witnesses to be more respectful than in slavery—and that crime has materially decreased.

Is it alleged that they would not be capable of providing a comfortable subsistence for themselves and their families, and that poverty and suffering would be the consequence of their emancipation? There they appear to speak of them generally to have done wonders in these respects—providing comfortable homes, cleanly and neat attire for themselves and their families, schools for the education of their children—erecting new houses for public worship, and enlarging others, at very considerable expense.

The testimony upon which the foregoing statements respecting the favorable working of freedom in the West India Islands is based, we believe is of the most unexceptionable character. It is evident that the prosperity of those Islands has been greatly promoted by the operation of the free system. And we cannot think of any good reason, why the same happy result from the same measures, might not be realized in our own country.

Slavery originated in a dark and barbarous age, and for a long period it prevailed to a great extent in the world.

But as civilization advanced—and above all—as the light of our holy religion extended its influence, the progress of this system, so destructive of the comforts of human life, was checked; and as light has increased and spread, slavery has continually receded from its presence. And so rapid for a few years past has been the progress of emancipation, as to induce the belief that the period for its final extinction had nearly arrived.

Shall it be said then, that the United States of America, a land of all others the loudest in its boast of liberty, and of its liberal institutions, is the last to relax its iron grasp—and that, when driven from other lands, slavery is still seen to linger on our own *free soil*. Surely our country, to have been consistent with its own high pretensions, should have taken the lead in this good work. And such, doubtless, had been the case, had the councils of the wisest and best of its statesmen been accepted.

If it be asked, Why does the Society of Friends thus busy itself with the affairs of others, and interfere with their domestic arrangements? We would respectfully reply, that, in time past the members of this Society participated in common with others in the practice of holding slaves. Their fields were tilled, and their harvests were reaped by them. Nor were they wholly free from that execrable foreign traffic in the persons of men which is now, by the laws of our country, declared to be piracy. In looking back upon past time, it seems wonderful to us that this could have been—and we regard it as a striking exemplification of the force of general custom, combined with the bias of education. By the faithful labors of a few pious and enlightened men, who were deeply impressed with the unrighteousness of the system, and its evil tendency, the society was induced to enter into a serious consideration of the subject, and to bring it to the test of those high principles of justice which are inculcated by the Gospel.

The result was, a full conviction that slavery was entirely incompatible with the benign nature of our holy religion. That it was, indeed, a very flagrant violation of those inalienable rights which a beneficent Creator had bestowed alike upon all. And so solemn did the conviction become, that the violation of those rights could not be continued, without indeed incurring the wrath of the Giver, that they dare no longer continue in the practice. In yielding to this conviction, they were not indifferent to the sacrifice of property which was apparently connected with it. And it cost them many a struggle before the love of property was brought to yield to the conviction of duty. But it did yield. The work of emancipation commenced under a solemn feeling that it was a religious requirement, and it progressed until it became general. And instead of the pecuniary embarrassments which had been expected, it proved that their temporal interests were promoted.

The Society having thus been strengthened to disengage itself from this system of oppression and fruitful source of domestic difficulty, we believe it to be our religious duty, as advocates in behalf of those who have long labored under a load of oppression, which if resting upon ourselves we should deem to be insupportable—thus to call the attention of the public to a serious examination of the merits, or rather the demerits of this oppressive system. We are prompted to do it, because we believe that as respected ourselves it was a system involving fearful responsibilities, and we cannot divest ourselves of this impression with respect to others—and because we regard it as a solemn truth, that the idea of retributive justice is consistent with the character of the Deity.

We therefore affectionately invite our fellow citizens, to take this great subject of human suffering and human wrong, into their very deliberate consideration. And especially do we entreat those who are most deeply inter-

ested in it to lay it seriously to heart. And as they prize the respectability of our national character abroad—as they value the prosperity and happiness of their own country—as they desire the enjoyment of uninterrupted peace and domestic security, and wish to transmit this blessed inheritance to posterity, to lose no time in devising such measures as may seem best adapted to the purpose of removing this opprobrious burden, and raising from their present degraded condition, that numerous class of our fellow creatures whose rights have been too long neglected. That thus the sighs of the poor and the cries of the oppressed may no longer ascend to Heaven from our land.

Signed on behalf and by direction of a meeting of the
Representatives of the Religious Society of Friends
of the Yearly Meeting of New York, held in that
city, the 1st of 4th month, 1844.

RICHARD CARPENTER, *Clerk.*