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Speech of Mr. Palfrey, of Massachusetts

John Gorham Palfrey

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Estate of S. E. Sewall
Apr. 29, 1891

SPEECH

OF MR. PALFREY, OF MASSACHUSETTS,

ON THE

POLITICAL ASPECT OF THE SLAVE QUESTION.

(In Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, January 26th, 1848.)

MR. CHAIRMAN:

On the 22d day of December—a day consecrated to all time by the first pressure of the footsteps of the martyrs of Liberty on the shore of this Western world, desecrated to all time by the consummation, at the other end of this Capitol, of the measures taken by the champions of Slavery for the admission of a foreign nation into this Union, for the purpose of strengthening and perpetuating that institution—the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. CLINGMAN) addressed this committee on what, in the pamphlet publication of his remarks, he has called the Political Aspect of the Slave Question. He treated the subject with great courtesy, fairness, moderation, and dignity. I am not sure that his speech will not permanently connect yet another class of associations with that famous date. I see in it evidence that the time has passed away when it was thought necessary to banish this great question from the deliberations of this Hall. I joyfully accept the omen. I see other indications of the same welcome improvement in the state of feeling around us. It is but a little while since I read two articles in the "Southern Review" on this subject, of which the temper and tone were as commendable as the argument seemed to me fallacious. I understand that there has been a plan for a newspaper in this District, to be devoted to the interests of Southern slavery. And, on the other hand, a plan has not only been projected, but executed, for the establishment of a paper with the opposite design, (The National Era.) It is conducted with distinguished ability, and, I am told, enjoys a wide circulation. There were some threats of violence, I believe, at first, but they came to nothing. The friends of liberty, it seems, have at last a fair field. Give them that, and they ask no favor.

I was not so fortunate, Mr. Chairman, as to hear the whole of the argument of the gentleman from North Carolina, some engagements having called me out of the Hall while he was addressing the committee. I read the report of it the next morning in the Intelligencer, and came to my seat expecting to make some comments upon it, if an opportunity should occur. But immediately on the reading of the journal the death of one of our associates was announced, and the House adjourned over to the next week. For the few days, within the last two weeks, that the House has again been in committee on the message, other subjects—Internal Improvements, the Treasury Report, the Mexican War—obtained its attention, and the interest created by the gentleman from North Carolina, in the subject which he treated, had passed away. On the last day but two of the session of the committee it was revived by the remarks of my friend from New Hampshire, (Mr. TUCK,) and the gentleman from Maryland, (Mr. McLANE.) I attempted yesterday to get the floor, but unsuccessfully, till just before the committee rose.

The gentleman from Maryland, if I understood him, expressed an opinion that the subject of slavery was unsuitable to be introduced into the discussions of this House. [Mr. McLANE assented.] I am of a different mind. I think the gentleman from North Carolina is right upon that point. But, if be there any question about it, I beg it may be remembered that it is not the enemies of slavery who have introduced the discussion into the proceedings of this Thirtieth Congress of the United States. At the beginning of this Congress, in the

very first set speech, if I mistake not, it was introduced by a member from a slaveholding State, representing, as I suppose, a slaveholding constituency. In this Congress it is the South that has thrown down the gauntlet.

I said that, in my opinion, the gentleman from North Carolina was right in introducing the subject; and I am struck with the propriety of the title which he gives to his published remarks—The Political Aspect of the Slave Question. Sir, it is the great political question of the country, and has been from the beginning of this century, though not hitherto so prominent as now. It is the question which underlies all other great questions, and determines their solution.

Sir, the gentleman tells me nothing when he says (page 8) that the free interest of this country is secure, because “the free States are in the ascendancy in all the branches of the Government; and their majority of more than fifty votes on this floor, and in the electoral colleges, is greater than they ever had in former times.” It is true, notwithstanding some singular facts, themselves growing out of the fact of the extension of slavery and of the slave power, under the forms of the Constitution, in a way never contemplated by the framers of that instrument. It is true, notwithstanding that Ohio and New York together have only 4 representatives in the other branch of the Legislature, 55 in this, and 59 in the electoral colleges, while fifteen slave States, (all except Virginia,) with an aggregate free population only about as large as the population of New York and Ohio together, have 30 votes in the other House, 78 in this, and 108 in the election of President and Vice President. What the gentleman says is true, notwithstanding this singular distribution of political power which the introduction of new slave States has brought about. But it is not all the truth. The gentleman did not intend to disguise anything; but some further facts, bearing on this point, did not suit the purpose of his argument. The free population of the United States, according to the census of 1840, amounted to not far from fifteen millions; the slaveholders, at a liberal estimate, were not more than three hundred thousand; fourteen millions and a half against three hundred thousand, a numerical preponderance among the free population, in the proportion of nearly fifty to one, in favor of the free interest.* In the Presidential election of 1844 there were about three millions of voters; between one hundred and one hundred and fifty thousand of these voters were holders of slaves; that is, the majority of non-slaveholding voters over slaveholding, was somewhere between two millions seven hundred thousand and three millions—a disproportion of twenty or thirty to one.

But is the gentleman to be told by me of the power which can be exerted by the concentrated energies of an active oligarchy, spread over a country, intent on a single policy, and bound together by a common intelligence and a common interest—how, with its ever-watchful ambition, it will take the lead of the busy and inert masses—how it can intimidate and overawe the weak, beguile and conciliate the easy, and bribe the mercenary, among those who can influence the public voice? Fifteen years ago there was a great excitement in this country, and a powerful party was organized, against the institution of Free Masonry. The charge was, (I do not enter into the merits of the controversy,) that that institution had been the cause of the death of a citizen, and that it was an irresponsible power, spread like net-work over the land, and compacted by oaths and symbols which gave it an omnipotent unity and secrecy of action. But how many more lives of citizens have been sacrificed to the masonry of the slaveholders, and how much more perfect is their mutual understanding, and their combination of power and of activity, than any system of oaths and symbols could create! Slavery exists but in half of the States of this Union. But by the possession of the bulk of the property in those States, and by a virtual

*The probability is, that there are not so many as 300,000 slaveholders, and that the estimated proportion of 50 to 1 is quite within the truth.

monopoly of the means of education, it appropriates to itself the internal government of those States, and their influence beyond their borders. Small as are its comparative numbers, it takes its place in the national councils, as the representative of the aggregate weight of those States. With this weight, and with the skill derived from making politics its study and practice, it comes as a seller into the market of the national patronage—with the retaining fees of fortunes for the basely sordid, and promotion for the basely aspiring. What wonder that, with such advantages, it should find willing and capable tools beyond its own domain? What wonder that it should find means to perplex the simple, and beguile and soothe the good, as well as to enlist and use the selfish? What wonder that it should be able to play off parties against each other, and take to itself effectually the balance of power, and the lion's share of the prizes at stake?

But why reason about it? Look at the facts. I have a statement before me, which, if not punctiliously exact, is not far from the truth; and it runs as follows:

| | From non-slaveholding States. | From slaveholding States. |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Presidents* - - - - 4 terms | - | - 12 terms. |
| Judges of the Supreme Court | - 11 | - - 17 |
| Attorney Generals - - - - | - 5 | - - 14 |
| Speakers of the House - - - | - 11 | - - 21 |
| Presidents of the Senate, <i>pro tem.</i> | - 16 | - - 61 |
| Foreign Ministers - - - - | - 54 | - - 80 |

While the proportion of cabinet ministers and of high naval and military officers has been something like the same.

Such is the disproportion in the distribution of offices of emolument and honor, to correspond to a proportion of voters, on the favored side, of one to twenty or thirty of the whole vote. No matter for the emolument—I speak for the great mass of the people of the free States, the honest people, who are not struggling for the “spoils”—we have other avenues to gain—the ways of industry and of frugality, which we prefer. No matter for the honor. We can find that in the paths of science and letters, in the labors of philanthropy and of public enterprise, and in the offices of a blameless and useful private life. But this accumulation of public offices in one class of hands represents the accumulation of POLITICAL POWER, and affords the means of perpetuating and extending it.

See how it is exercised. Let me first mention the unutterably heinous law—I can characterize it by no milder epithet—of Feb. 12th, 1793, putting the liberty of every freeman in this nation at the mercy of every paltry town or county magistrate whom the kidnapper may delude or bribe to do his dirty work. If my neighbor sues me for twenty dollars, the Constitution of my country gives me the security of a jury of our peers to pass between us. Not so with my liberty, which I value at more than twenty dollars. Let a stranger come among us of the free States, and claim one of our number as his runaway slave, and let him satisfy, *any how*, some trading justice that his claim is good, and that justice's warrant is valid for him against all the world. The law makes no distinction between white and black men, though, if it did, it would make no difference in the atrocity of the principle. Let the man-stealer get that warrant, and with it he may bring me or any representative from a free State on this floor to the auction block close by this Capitol, to make our next remove in chains to Natchez or New Orleans. He may take my wife from my side, or my infant from its cradle, and, if I resist, he is armed with the whole power of the country to strike me down: The odious law, by its letter, threatens and insults the Governor of Massachusetts or New York as much as the darkest me-

* The Presidency of 1841-'5 is reckoned in both columns, once for President Harrison's election, and once for President Tyler's term of office.

nial they employ. Do gentlemen say the law would never be so executed? Be it so. What would prevent it? The law of force, or the fear of force. The standing outrage and indignity, standing on the defiled pages of the statute book, are still the same.

What next? Look at your Cherokee troubles, and your Seminole War. One of those misfortunes of the Cherokees, which led to your driving them off at the cost of the national honor in the violation of sixteen treaties, was, that they were charged with harboring fugitive slaves. The same was the great sin of the Seminoles in Florida, expiated in a stubborn conflict of seven years' duration, at the price of I know not how many lives, and of at least twenty millions of dollars, (and nobody knows how much more,) of which we of the North had to pay our share, sooner than Southern slaves should get away from their owners.

But time is wasting, and I must pass entirely over many things, and lightly over many others. As to this Political Aspect of the Slave Question, how has it dealt with our right of petition, and our freedom of speech and of the press—the two last belonging to the inheritance of our Anglo-Saxon manhood, the former commonly recognised in the poorest vassal that crouches before a despot's throne. For several years, the petitions of our constituents for the redress of what they felt to be offensive grievances were contemptuously thrown back by a standing regulation of this House; and now the most that we have gained is, that they may go into the hands of the Committee on the District, which committee, it is just as well understood as if it were formally set down and ordained in your rules and orders, is to do its office by simply burying them out of sight, and taking care that they be no more heard of forever.

Liberty of speech and liberty of the press, what are they worth in nearly half of the States of this Union, if one would exercise them in relation to the great moral, social, and political question of the time? On that subject, within those borders, who does not know that a man is not to speak or print his mind, except at peril of life and limb? Nor does personal liberty, in certain circumstances, fare better. By the Constitution of Massachusetts, established in 1780, people of color are *citizens* of that commonwealth, as much as whites. And by the Federal Constitution, which went into operation in 1789, all "*citizens* of each State are entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States." By the *constitution* of Massachusetts, I say, freedom is universal within her limits, and citizenship has nothing to do with color. There was never an act of Emancipation in that commonwealth. Emancipation took place by force of the organic law. Three years after its adoption, a colored man prosecuted a white for assault and battery. The fact was admitted, but justified on the ground that the black was a slave, and that the assault was the lawful chastisement of the master. The court held, that under the clause of the bill of rights declaring that "all men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and inalienable rights, among which may be reckoned the right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties," (language almost copied from that written by a Virginia pen in the Declaration of Independence,) no such relations as those of master and slave could subsist in Massachusetts. The master was convicted and fined, and slavery took its last leave of her jurisdiction.

The colored citizen of Massachusetts goes on his lawful occasions to a Southern State, with just as good a constitutional right to tread its soil in security and at will, as the heir of its own longest and proudest lineage. But not only is he forbidden by a pseudo-legislation of the place to land there in freedom, he is not permitted even to remain in freedom on board the ship that has conveyed him. He is forced on shore to a prison; and when he is discharged and departs, it is on the payment of a ransom, called the expense of his detention. If he comes a second time, he is scourged. If a third, he is sold into perpetual slavery. So decrees the so-called law. Massachusetts was uneasy to have her

unoffending citizens treated thus. She remonstrated, but to no purpose, except to draw down fresh insult. She could not, nor did she desire, to escape the responsibility of adopting all means in her power for their protection. She sent one of her most respected citizens, a man of admirable wisdom, discretion, dignity, and purity of character, simply to try the question of the validity of those provisions which South Carolina persisted in affirming to be law, though that one of her own eminent sons, who had had cognizance of it on the supreme tribunal of the nation, had said, "on the unconstitutionality of the law, it is not too much to say, that it will not bear argument."*

A new Political Aspect of the Slave Question was now disclosed. The slave question had closed the doors of the Federal courts, to which it belonged to extend the security the Federal Constitution had assured. The Massachusetts lawyer could not reach the bench before which he would have pleaded for the liberty and rights of Massachusetts freemen. Nor only so. The slave question had yet further aspects for himself. He was expelled, and sent home with indignity, if it were possible for indignity to reach such a man. And laws, so called, were forthwith enacted, making it highly penal henceforward to seek legal redress in that region, under such circumstances, for the extremest outrages offered to a New England freeman.

Mr. Chairman, we have no present remedy. We cannot raise a regiment, nor fit out a ship, for the maintenance of the rights of those to whom the State owes protection, as much as they owe allegiance to the State. We are disarmed by those compromises of the Constitution, which Massachusetts respects. I shudder while I refer to such expedients; but in other times they would have been resorted to. It may be we shall see hereafter that these dismal transactions are not merely to be deplored. It is such extravagances that attract attention, arouse indolence, and excite to action. It is a method of Providence, to provide for the ultimate overthrow of great evils, by the practical development of their enormity. The excess of an abuse conducts it to its fate. I said to Mr. Hoar, when I welcomed him back, that I could not wholly regret the annoyances he had endured, for they seemed to belong to that blackest darkness that just precedes the day. I believe it was so; and that while the pen of History was recording that shameful chapter, the pen of Destiny was writing the certain and not distant downfall of the oppressive and insolent institution.

Then came, for the strengthening and perpetuation of slavery, the disastrous measure of the annexation of Texas, with its long train of *political aspects of the slave question*, long enough already, and still stretching far away into the unknown and threatening future. The first fruit of that proceeding was the repeal of the tariff act of 1842; a measure which took the bread from the mouths of thousands of the working men of the free States, and a measure carried by two votes cast at the other end of this building, by men who had no more constitutional right to come in and act upon our affairs, than any two who might have been brought over from England, or France, or Algiers. The next blossoming of the tree was in the pending war with Mexico. Gentlemen please themselves with making distinctions between the *occasion* and the *cause* of that war. But nobody, I take it, doubts that, if Texas had not been annexed, war would not have taken place. Mr. CALHOUN, whose sagacity all the newspapers extol, thought he could set fire to a barrel of gunpowder, and extinguish it when half consumed. He has lived to rue the failure of the hopeful experiment. We have spent an hundred millions of dollars, and are going on spending. No matter for the money, if it had only been buried in the deep blue sea, "deeper than did ever plummet sound," instead of being used to purchase so much disgrace and mischief. But it has been made to carry widowhood and

* Opinion of Judge Johnson, August 7, 1823, in the case of Henry Elkison vs. Francis Delicesseline, sheriff of Charleston district.

orphanage into thousands of the homes of a sister Republic, the homes of men and women who never injured us. It has been made to carry widowhood and orphanage into thousands of our own American homes—to write a chapter in our history for the execration and loathing of the civilized and Christian world, and the bitter shame of our own wiser posterity.

Of a system which leads to such political results—for, following the gentleman from North Carolina, I have not spoken of it as a question of justice or humanity—that gentleman is the elaborate apologist, and the gentleman from Maryland thinks that it ought to be regarded with respect and deference. The gentleman from North Carolina said, (pages 5, 6,) that it is mis-called a “peculiar institution,” for that it is “natural among men,” and prevails widely throughout the earth. I think he has been reading Rousseau, and learned from his fantastic dreams that the savage state is the natural and blissful state of man. Rather he has been reading Hobbes, and has adopted from that vigorous champion of arbitrary power the doctrine that might makes right, and in his school has contracted a love for slavery and force, and all that condition of humanity which in his nervous but not dainty language the philosopher describes as “without arts, without letters, without manners, without society, and the life of man solitary, disturbed, nasty, brutish, and short.” I am not so forgetful of the state of things in the ancient republics, and in the cultivated communities of the southern section of this country, as to affirm that slavery cannot co-exist with a high civilization. But they have no natural or proper affinity. It is only by force of earlier events that they are brought into contact. Slavery is natural to man, just as it is natural to him to drape himself with fig leaves and bear-skins. As his rude nature is developed, he invents better arts, and tends to a better culture. I know not but it was natural to man, as the Scottish philosopher of the last century maintained, to go on all-fours, and climb trees to regale on acorns. But in the progress of ages he has learned to do better. Liberty, justice, humanity, are natural to man, just as it is natural to him to learn to calculate eclipses, and build marble palaces, and make books of science and poetry, and surround himself with the charms and graces of a refined society. And where is slavery the “practice of mankind?” Among the highly cultivated communities of the race? In England? In France? Or in Mozambique and Guinea? Sweden, Holland, and Denmark, have at length closed the procession of the civilized nations that have abandoned it. Out of these United States, I know not that it exists in any part of Christendom, except Brazil and the Spanish colonies. And in those colonies its form is much milder than with us. Of its condition in half-civilized Brazil I cannot speak.

Again: The gentleman urged, to this point, the natural inferiority of the negro race, (page 7.) He has no doubt examined, and knows how to expose, the seeming paradox of those ingenious men who have held that the balance of power was shifted, and the sceptre of the world passed from the colored to the white race, some twenty-four centuries ago, at the capture of Babylon by the Persians; and I presume he decides that question rightly.

[Mr. CLINGMAN interrupted, and was understood to say he had referred to the Egyptians, and relied on the formation of the Egyptian skull.]

The gentleman speaks of the Egyptians. Undoubtedly he has attended to the curious hint in Herodotus, bearing on that question. The gentleman quotes Appian, a writer not commonly in the hands of professed scholars. He is a reader of Polybius, and has weighed his merits, and those of the other great masters in that department of composition in such exact critical scales as to feel justified in placing him at the head of the list in respect to political sagacity, (page 6.) He cannot have overlooked that singular passage in so common an author as Herodotus, in which the old chronicler has been thought to say, that the ancient Egyptians, the remote source perhaps of Greek civilization, were woolly-headed negroes. I will not defend that interpretation of his words. But

it is no invention of any of your high-flying Abolitionists of the present day; it has been received by grave and plodding English and German doctors, who read, and pondered, and smoked, and annotated, long before such a *lusus nature* as an American abolitionist was ever heard of. The gentleman has, of course, determined the complexion of the great captain of antiquity, the Carthaginian Hannibal, and knows how far it resembled that of the Lybians and Nubians whom he led to twenty years' triumphs over the sharp-beaked eagles of Rome. He sees how to dispose of the phenomenon of the French mulatto, Alexandre Dumas, that miracle of prolific genius. He can show that no stress is to be laid on such a case as that of the American Frederick Douglas, now of Rochester, New York, ten years ago a wretched slave, picking up scraps of leaves of the Bible in the gutters of Baltimore to teach himself to read, then working three years on the wharves at New Bedford, without a day's schooling, I presume, in his life; yet now speaking and writing the English language with a force and an eloquence which, I hesitate not to say, would do no discredit to any gentleman on this floor. But I do not discuss the question whether the negro inferiority is to be traced to a congenital incapacity, or to the depression and low culture of many generations. It is a great problem. I have not time for it. It is too intricate and vast. Nor, determined either way, would it have any material connection with the main question I have in hand, or directly bear on any measures now in the contemplation of this committee. I have been but stepping aside a little way in the gentleman's track.

Again: He appealed to the "failure of the emancipation of the negroes in the West Indies," (page 8.) The gentleman gets his views of this from the English merchants, who try the question of success or failure by the amount of their importations of coffee and sugar from the islands. [Mr. CLINGMAN was understood to say that he had his information from those who had personally visited the islands.] The statements of visitors, Mr. Chairman, are conflicting. I have statements different from what have reached the gentleman, on which I am disposed to rely. I am very anxious to see the recent parliamentary reports, and have sent for them for the purpose of being aided to clear up the contradictions. I have before me a table showing the amount of sugar exported from the British West India islands in five successive years. It is as follows:

| | | | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|------------|---------|--------|----------|
| In 1841 | - - - - | 125,295 | hogsheads, | - - - - | 12,225 | tierces. |
| In 1842 | - - - - | 135,910 | do. | - - - - | 15,985 | do. |
| In 1843 | - - - - | 141,100 | do. | - - - - | 13,640 | do. |
| In 1844 | - - - - | 138,150 | do. | - - - - | 16,395 | do. |
| In 1845 | - - - - | 157,200 | do. | - - - - | 20,075 | do. |

Showing, on the whole, a constant and very gratifying increase of the exportation. But, supposing it were otherwise, the gentleman, like myself, I believe, is a friend to the *protective system*; and if so, he knows the worth of the *home market*. Mr. Jefferson pointed it out long ago, and showed how, on account of the saving of the cost of transportation, and for divers other good and weighty reasons, it was better than the foreign. And if part of the sugar and coffee which used to be sent abroad is now consumed within the islands, which is the case to a large extent, in consequence of the negroes being now in a condition to indulge in such luxuries, the decrease in the amount exported is little to the purpose. And, supposing even that less of these commodities were raised, the negroes being disposed to turn more of their industry to other productions—to raising yams, bananas, plantains, pine apples, any thing—for the market, or for their families, what then? The better the farmer can suit himself with his farming, the more rent will he be willing to pay; and with the rise of rents, of course comes the increase of the value of land, and of the wealth of the proprietors. Is it not so? And is that *failure*, even in an economical point of view?

But, Mr. Chairman, I am ashamed to argue the question on such a basis. The failure of West India emancipation! Do the gentleman and I speak the same language? Do I understand the gentleman, and does he understand himself? *Failure*, when 800,000 human chattels were quietly changed in a day to men and women, endowed with the possession and care of their own bodies and souls, introduced to the relations of humanity, entitled to call their children their own, empowered to have husband and wife, brother and sister, in some intelligible sense! This a *failure*! And mark the decisive practical contradiction given, and forever sealed, to all that had been said, and nowhere more loudly than in these islands, of the danger of such a proceeding. Four hundred thousand negroes in Jamaica to forty thousand whites, the whites would have been but a mouthful for their vindictive maw, if vindictive passions had had sway. But not one act of violence sullied that magnificent triumph of Christianity and right; and, from that day to this, a peace and good order have prevailed, which would do honor to any civilized community. If that is a failure, will some one tell me what would have been triumphant and glorious success? I should be glad to be informed. The idea has not yet dawned upon me.

Once more: The gentleman took ground against the pretty common opinion that, as he expresses it, "the continuance of slavery is injurious to us as a nation," (page 9.) He will excuse me for saying, that rarely has it been my chance to fall in with so palpable a *non sequitur* as that which lies in the chasm between his premises and his conclusion. "It may be remembered," he said, "that the view derived from the decennial census is well calculated to deceive. More than one hundred thousand foreigners annually arrive in the United States, who settle down almost entirely in the free States." Do they? And why? Because in the free States the occupation of the laborer does not place him in a degraded *caste*, and because in the free States there are common schools for him to send his children to, in which they can be trained under the same advantages as the richest, and from which they can start in an equal competition with the sons of the richest for all the prizes of society. Nor only is this the case with foreigners. "Those who emigrate from the old Northern States almost all go to the new free States; while, on the other hand, a very large proportion of the emigration of the old Southern States goes into the free States of the Northwest." Indeed! And what is it that sets the prodigious current of emigration so determinately in that direction, winning even the sons of the sunny South from the homes of their childhood and the graves of their fathers, and all the associations of kindred and of memory, to seek the hardships of an untried condition and a Northern sky? Just the intense desire for that equality and those social advantages which the presence of slavery absolutely excludes. "This, I have observed myself," the gentleman continued, "is eminently true of the North Carolina emigrants; and I may add, too, that, *but for this emigration*, population would increase in that State as fast as it would in any country, there being an abundant supply of the necessaries of life among the entire population." Ah! Mr. Chairman, "much virtue is in" *but*, as well as in "*if*." "*But for this emigration*," North Carolina would rapidly increase. *Because of this emigration*, it does not so increase. And what causes this emigration? The gentleman told us what does not cause it. It is no want of a "supply of the necessaries of life," vulgarly so called. Of them, he said truly, they have abundance—plenty to eat, drink, and wear. But of what are equally "necessaries of life" to right-minded people—equality of social position, and opportunities for personal improvement and advancement—the non-slaveholding North Carolinians have not enough, and therefore they go elsewhere in search of them, keeping down the population of the State, as well as its wealth and consequence, of which, in a well-organized community, the industrious classes are always the support and strength. This remark on the tendency of emigration to the free States, said the gentleman, is "*eminently true of the North*

Carolina emigrants." I should expect it, from the well-known sound sense and robustly independent character of the good old North State. The free, "tender, and open" spirit which George Fox found among the honest planters of Albemarle, has not died out there, and it is not satisfied with inferiority and stagnation. Let them get rid of slavery, and they can live at home without either.

And when we have got at the cause which keeps down the comparative population, prosperity, and consequence of North Carolina, we can answer the same question in other applications. We can tell why the growth of beautiful Kentucky keeps no better pace with her sister Ohio across the river, not so large and scarcely so fertile, yet the latter, though starting later, now nearly tripling the free population of the former. We can tell why Virginia, in the first half century of the Federal Government, increased her population from about three-quarters of a million to about a million and a quarter, while New York, on a much smaller territory, enlarged her numbers from about 340,000 to nearly two millions and a half, and her estimated property had become nearly three times as great as that of the State the most favored by nature of any in this Union. We can tell why Maryland, most eligibly situated, has 27 free inhabitants to the square mile, and bleak and barren Massachusetts 98. We can explain how it came about that Michigan, in ten years before 1840, increased her free population 574 *per cent.*; and Arkansas, erected into a State about the same time, only 200 *per cent.* Washington saw the difference between Pennsylvania and Virginia in his day, and his infallible discernment described the cause to be in the laws for abolishing slavery: "laws," said he, for once too hopefully, "which there is nothing more certain than that Maryland and Virginia must have, and that at a period not remote." And his august wisdom pointed out the proper method of relief, as well as the crying need. "There is one only proper and effectual mode," he wrote to Robert Morris, "by which it can be accomplished, and that is, by legislative authority; and this, as far as my suffrage will go, (mark it, GEORGE WASHINGTON'S suffrage for abolition,) shall never be wanting."

An institution so salutary and beneficial to the body politic, the gentleman from North Carolina would have extended into Territories and States as yet untouched by its influences, and he offered his own scheme for that purpose, (page 5.) Upon that I will not now detain the committee with any of my remarks. I may have an opportunity to do so hereafter, when the question of extending slavery into new territory may come up. But as to two or three things which he said about it, I must briefly throw in my *caveat* at the present time.

The gentleman said: "The supposition that the States would exclude from all the Territories of the United States an institution which prevailed so generally among them, seems improbable in itself, and those who maintain it may well be required to furnish the evidence. There is not, sir, in the whole Constitution any one clause, which, either directly or indirectly, favors the idea that slavery was to be limited to the States where it then existed, or to be excluded from any part of the territory of the United States," (page 5.) I think, Mr. Chairman, that the Constitution, had it been faithfully executed, agreeably to the sense of the convention which framed and of the people who adopted it, contains enough safeguards against such a wrong, and that, construed in its true meaning and spirit, it could never have been used to extend the benefits (if they were such) of the original compromises—compromises bad enough, any way, for the free States—to new parties, not embraced in the original partnership. The gentleman, it seems, thinks otherwise, and, unfortunately, he has recent constructions in his favor. The past has come and gone. We may have opportunity to look at the question further, when further usurpations, as I esteem them, shall be attempted upon the liberties which that instrument was expected to secure to the freemen who ratified it. Enlightened by the dismal experience we have

had, I own I could now wish that the Constitution had uttered more positive and explicit prohibitions, though I have little belief that even they would have at all availed against such unscrupulous influences as have been in action to nullify it in all cases in which slavery was concerned. But that no further precautions were taken, is no matter of surprise. The gentleman must read the debates of the convention which framed that instrument, and of the State Conventions that ratified it, with very different eyes from mine, if he does not see that the statesmen of that day expected that the discontinuance of the slave trade, after twenty years, for which they made provision, and the discontinuance of slavery itself, would be pretty nearly simultaneous events. Such, I think, was the general expectation that prevailed every where, except in South Carolina and Georgia, which, it must be owned, clung to the evil with a tenacious fondness. No, sir; the tree of the Constitution which our fathers planted bore a natural fruit, salutary and palatable. A noxious branch was grafted upon it, which grew rankly, and overshadowed and poisoned the rest—"a mildewed ear, blasting its wholesome brother." Prune that off, and again in beneficent abundance it will yield fruit "for the healing of the nations."

The gentleman said, further, "one half of the States have slaves, the other half have none," (page 5;) and from that statement he argued that, in settling the institutions of new territory, an equitable arrangement would be to give half of it up to slavery, and let liberty live in the rest. Sir, I do not agree to that fractional statement. If facts which I have presented to the attention of the committee are sustained, then it follows that not one-half, but one fiftieth part of the people of this confederacy are interested, as proprietors, in an institution which is essentially and irreconcilably hostile to the highest interests of the other forty-nine fiftieths, and which demands to wield all the power of the Government, and extend the borders of its own domain, for the purpose of sustaining and perpetuating that instrument for oppressing the great majority.

The gentleman said again, in connection with this topic, "it is obvious that, by transferring part of the slaves from the old States to the new, you would not increase their numbers," (page 8.) Sir, if my little reading in political economy has not misled me, this is by no means "obvious;" but, on the contrary, it is obvious that by removing a population from comparatively narrow bounds, you provide for an increase of its numbers; and particular considerations might be added in the present instance, to show further that that result would follow. I anticipate the reply that may be made to this. It may be said, Very well; increase the amount of human life, and you add to the sum of human happiness. But, in the first place, this is a direct abandonment of the other position. And, in the second, I will not allow that the sum of happiness, under all circumstances of social condition, is enlarged with that of life. Virginians, at least, are not apt to forget the saying of their great compatriot, "Give me liberty, or give me death." If that sentiment be just, then it should equally be said, Give me liberty, or curse me not with existence.

Much of the interest lately manifested for the emancipation of the colored race, the gentleman referred to "the action of anti-slavery or abolition societies," (page 9.) He is aware that they are no institutions of recent origin, but coeval with the existence of our Government. I hold in my hand a copy of a memorial addressed to the Congress of the United States, in February, 1790, by the "Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Abolition of Slavery." The name of no less considerable a person than the sage Benjamin Franklin is subscribed to that memorial as President. I think Dr. Franklin knew some things as well as the men of this more confident generation. I think particularly that he had some comprehension of that Constitution which he helped to frame, and I set his authority against that of a Boston writer, who considered it "questionable, whether the abolition movement is reconcilable with duty under the

Constitution." Among the illustrious names on the roll of that society is found that of La Fayette, whom the gentleman from North Carolina quoted as complimenting "the good sense of the American people, which enabled them wisely to settle all domestic differences"—the same La Fayette who said to Clarkson, as that philanthropist reports in a letter written not long before his death, "I would never have drawn my sword in the cause of America, if I could have conceived that thereby I was founding a land of slavery."

The gentleman from North Carolina presented a classification of abolitionists of the present day. I am not satisfied with it, either for precision or completeness, and will bespeak his patience while I propose a different.

There are, in the first place, the *abolitionists*, strictly and commonly so called. Their specific distinction, as a body, is, that they urge a dissolution of the Federal Constitution and of the Union. With the gentleman on the other side who expressed his sentiments not long ago, they hold to the "sacred right of revolution." He called it "the most sacred of all rights." They attach to it a similar sanctity, though they would not prosecute the object in the way which I suppose he would think legitimate. They are, generally at least, non-resistants, and most of them even refrain from voting, from scruples against giving even that support to a Government which they regard as implicated in so much wrong. With a late president of the college of South Carolina, they have "calculated the value of the Union," and, as they do the sum, the Union turns out to cost too much. Among them are persons of the greatest purity of life, and the most unselfish philanthropy. There are individuals of eminent abilities, of the highest culture, and of social connections the most esteemed. There are those who bear the great historical names of the North—names which one cannot read the story of the heroic periods of New England without continually meeting.

I do not adopt their views in respect to disunion. I believe that there resides in the Constitution a sufficient recuperative power, which, though smothered now, only requires proper effort to be brought into action. I reject utterly the doctrine which makes the distinguishing badge of that body. It was from them that those expressions proceeded which the gentleman quoted to the committee as having been "collated by Mr. Nathan Appleton," (page 14.) I regret that the gentleman should have thus brought forward his friend here. I cannot anticipate any occasion that will lead me to introduce in this place, for animadversion, the name of a private citizen. But the remarks of the gentleman make some notice from me proper, perhaps necessary. I will not proceed to it without premising, that he shall not say anything of his friend's worth in private life that I will not cordially echo and confirm, perhaps with not less knowledge than his own. I cannot mistake the gentleman's allusion, when he said that, "because he [Mr. Appleton] expressed sentiments of regard for the Constitution and the Union, and a determination to abide by the laws as made, a torrent of obloquy was directed against him, so as to oblige him to publish a pamphlet in his defence." The gentleman read some of "the extracts which he [Mr. Appleton] thought proper to make, to show the opinions of his assailants;" and then, in allusion to part of what he had quoted, he went on to say, "this last sentiment he shows has been adopted as a motto by many who do not profess to belong to the sect of abolitionists." The gentleman must pardon me. I think his friend has not shown this. I think that he has not asserted it. If the gentleman understands that his friend has insinuated it, in relation to the writer of the pamphlet that drew out his own, on the gentleman be the responsibility of that interpretation. I entertain no such question here. But if the gentleman can further show that that insinuation is in fact made, then be the responsibility of such an insinuation upon its author. Certainly it would be a groundless one. The writer of the pamphlet which occasioned the publication by the gentleman's friend, recorded distinctly his dissent from the doctrine of

disunion. It was no *obiter dictum*, but explicitly set down, and somewhat fully reasoned out. In answer to the inquiry, what course of action the usurpations of slavery demanded from the free States, that writer said, "they should not meditate a severance of the union of the States. Disunion would be as evil a thing as it is painted by any of those who, by dwelling exclusively on its evils, put their consciences to sleep in respect to that *slavery*, which, as long as it exists, will threaten, more than all other causes together, to bring it about." He then proceeded to some considerations in confirmation of this sentiment, and concluded his remark upon the topic by saying, "constitutional proceedings, then, alone are to be thought of for the abatement of this monstrous nuisance. A disunion of the States, on all other accounts a calamity, does not change its character, when viewed in relation to this end."*

Another portion of those interested in the movement against slavery is embraced in the *Liberty party*, so called. It has a regular party organization, contemplating action under the Constitution, holding its conventions, and supporting its own candidates for office, as much as either of the two parties that mainly divide the country. In some States its numbers are large. In my own State its vote has nearly reached ten thousand. In New York, in 1844, it came up, I believe, to fifteen thousand. †

Among the opponents of slavery are next to be reckoned great numbers in the two principal parties in the free States. A very large number—I suppose the dominant portion—of the Democracy of New York has lately taken strong ground upon the subject; and the same, though to a less extent, has been the current of Democratic opinion in New Hampshire; while the Whigs of New Hampshire have made themselves very distinctly heard, and a combination, on the ground of hostility to slavery, has plucked the government of that State out of the hands of a dynasty which had seemed destined to be perpetual. In Massachusetts we have fourteen counties. Two of them are small, their population not equalling that of several of our single towns. The Whigs of a majority, I believe, of the rest, at the county conventions last autumn, declared the opposition of Massachusetts to any candidate for the Presidency or Vice Presidency who was not known to be opposed to the further extension of slavery; while no county, as far as I know, assumed the opposite ground. But the people of that sober Commonwealth have widely taken the alarm, and they do not limit their views to the mere confinement of slavery within its present limits. Let me read, Mr. Chairman, a Resolve of the Legislature of the pattern Whig State of Massachusetts, passed, as appears by the certified copy which I hold in my hand, on the 27th day of February last, five days before the dissolution of the last Congress. It reads thus:

"*Resolved, unanimously*, That the legislature of Massachusetts views the existence of human slavery within the limits of the United States as a great calamity, an immense moral and political evil, which ought to be abolished as soon as that end can be properly and constitutionally attained, and that its extension should be uniformly and earnestly opposed by all good and patriotic men throughout the Union."

Sir, that is plain language. That is off-hand, downright, point-blank utterance, if I know what such utterance is. Without being any friend to the doctrine of instructions, I take that for the sentiment and counsel of my venerated mother, and may God prosper me as I will act accordingly! I stand on just that platform. I consult that solemn record of the sense of my native State, and I find that my sentiments come exactly up to it. With that record of the will of whig Massachusetts in my hand, I shall not go to Mr. A, B, or C, in State street, or Wall street, to learn whether I am a Whig, when measured by some second-rate standard in their minds. As little shall I wait to have my

* Papers on the Slave Power, pp. 77-79.

Whig character passed upon by some inspecting editor here in Washington. I had not been many days in this place before one of that profession animadverted on me and two of my friends, as "putrid excrescences" upon the Whig party. In perhaps not quite so direct language, he passed the same sentence on three other Whig members, and recommended, I think, that we should be "lopped off." The calculation at the time was, that the party in this House had five majority, all told. It was a brilliant idea, that "lopping off," which would have left a minus quantity behind. Sir, it would not have been good partisan economy—it would not have secured a good working majority. It would have been financiering too much like that of the honest soldier in the English song—

"How happy's the soldier that lives on his pay,
And spends half a crown upon sixpence a day!"

The happy thought was ground out by what was said—of course, erroneously—to be the organ of a certain interest in this House. To judge from the music it discoursed, it was an instrument of indifferent pretension, fitted with a sorry set of what Milton calls

"Scrannel pipes of wretched straw."

From the lumber garret, which was its too evident destiny, it has lately, if report says true, been ransomed, to be furnished with another stop, and attuned to a different symphony. I think it was time.

[Before the close of the last paragraph, the Chairman's hammer fell, on the expiration of the hour. Mr. P. would have gone on substantially as follows:]

There is another large number of persons, who are apt to be left wholly out of the account, in a consideration of this question—friends of freedom, who, disinclined to attach themselves to a third party, and merely block the wheels—utterly dissatisfied with the Democratic party, because of its alliance with slavery, and not sufficiently satisfied with the Whigs, because they think their practice is not up to their professions—stay at home, and do not vote at all, simply hoping and waiting for better times. When the Democratic party in Massachusetts suddenly abandoned, in 1845, the opposition to the annexation of Texas, in which, up to that time, it had gone hand in hand with its rival, the effect was immediately seen at the autumn election, in the loss of seventeen thousand of its votes—very nearly one-third of the whole number. It fell off still further the following year; and although it recovered a few thousands at the last election of governor, this gain has been thought to be owing, to some extent, to the accession of Whigs favorable to the war. There can scarcely be fewer than 160,000 voters in Massachusetts. The last year but one, the aggregate of votes scarcely exceeded 101,000, and the last year 105,000. In short, about one-third of the voters did not use their right. Of course, a variety of causes are to be supposed for this. A large number of voters always will be missing. But for so remarkable a result it is natural to presume that there was some prevailing reason, and I suppose there is no doubt that that to which I have adverted had a very material operation.

Once more: There is a large and all-important class of enemies of slavery beyond the borders of the free States. In the Lexington district of Kentucky, it is well known that there lives one of its foes, who bears "a name to conjure with;" and from the city of Louisville a newspaper is sent abroad, within and to the South and East of that State, devoted to the doctrines of freedom, conducted with singular talent and right feeling, and exerting a sensible and extensive influence. A governor of Virginia, not long ago, proposed to his legislature the enactment of a law giving to the respective counties the power to expel free colored people beyond their limits. The non-slaveholding farmers, west of the Blue Ridge, thanked him "for teaching them that word." They did not approve the particular application recommended of this new principle in legislation; but already there is much speculation about a State law, authoriz-

ing the counties severally to abolish slavery within their own borders. Delaware seems on the verge of emancipation, and panting for the untried prosperity it will bring. There are indications that Maryland will not be very far behind. The institution which her representative does not think ought to be spoken of here, is discussed very freely in her dwellings and by her roadsides. An uneasiness under the burden that so oppresses freemen is working in Western North Carolina and Eastern Tennessee. In Georgia, if report says true, the causes of the depression of the white laboring man are engaging a constantly increasing attention, and there are whispers even, that the thing is whispered even among the *sandhillers* of South Carolina. But whether more or less developed in one place or another, I take it to be unquestionable, that a desire for emancipation prevails, to an extent already not inconsiderable, among the non-slaveholding freemen of the Southern country. And it has a healthy root, and must grow. They are coming to see that for the welfare of the whole, and especially for their own, it is necessary that the nuisance be abated. Attention is getting fixed upon that great political truth. The baleful *political aspect of the slave question* stands out in the light. Discussion of it must take place, and must infallibly end in confirming, enlightening, and guiding to a practical issue, the sense of its reality, and of the obligation to seek a remedy.

So that, as I view the case, this is by no means a geographical and sectional question, as the gentleman from North Carolina understands it, (page 11,) and as it is made to appear in the resolutions of Mr. Calhoun, one great point of whose sagacity is, to present different issues from the true ones. The question is not at all between North and South, but between the many millions of non-slaveholding Americans, North, South, East, and West, and the very few hundreds of thousands of their fellow citizens who hold slaves. It is time that this idea of a geographical distinction of parties, with relation to this subject, was abandoned. It has no substantial foundation. Freedom, with its fair train of boundless blessings for white and black—slavery, with its untold miseries for both—these are the two parties in the field; and, as to their relative power, the slaveholders, if collected, would be outnumbered by the population of the single city of New York, while the name of the other host is Legion. I cannot, therefore, attach any importance to the hint which the gentleman threw out, towards the close of his remarks, of what “the South” might think it necessary to do, if the anti-slavery movement were too much pressed, (page 16.) On this point he spoke forbearingly, and in a strain which contrasts most agreeably with language to which these walls have listened in some other times. I have something to say upon the subject, but I do not feel called upon to bring it forward till some further occasion shall arise. I will now only express my deliberate and undoubting conviction, that the time has quite gone by when the friends of slavery might hope any thing from an attempt to move the South to disunion for its defence. When they raise that question seriously, their non-slaveholding neighbors—with their majority of more than six votes to one, even in that region—will settle it for them very quietly and effectually, through the ballot-boxes. And it is altogether likely they will then go further yet, and say, “An evil which has all along annoyed, disgraced, and kept us down, and which now asks for its support the overthrow of our wise form of government, is no more to be tolerated. Our interests, our peace, our safety, demand its extirpation.” I do not believe it is good policy for the slaveholders to let their neighbors hear them talk of disunion. Unless I read very stupidly the signs of the times, it will not be the Union they will thus endanger, but the interest to which they would sacrifice it. If they insist that the Union and Slavery cannot live together, they may be taken at their word, but **IT IS THE UNION THAT MUST STAND.**