

SPEECH OF ROBERT PURVIS.

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: It is bad taste, I know, in a speaker, to begin with an apology and to talk about himself; but I must ask to be excused if I offend in both these particulars. I cannot speak to order, as some people, more happily constituted, can. I cannot, in cold blood, arrange a speech before hand, and yet I dare not trust the impulse of the moment. It is the misfortune of natures born near the sun that their blood will not obey the helm of their judgment. I don't know why it is, therefore, that my friends on the Committee of Arrangements so persistently urge me to speak. No, sir—I will correct myself—I *do* know why; it is because I am identified with the confessedly oppressed race in this country, and you will allow me to say, sir, that by reason of that identification, waiving all objection, I consent to speak.

Mr. Chairman, this is a proud day for the “colored” man. For the first time since this Society was organized, I stand before you a recognized citizen of the United States (applause). And let me add, for the first time since your government was a government is it an honor to be a citizen of the United States! Sir, old things are passing away, all things are becoming new. Now a black man has rights, under this government, which every white man, here and everywhere, is bound to respect (applause). The damnable doctrine of the detestable Taney is no longer the doctrine of the country. The Slave Power no longer rules at Washington. The slaveholders and their miserable allies are biting the dust, and Copperhead Democracy has come to grief. The black man is a citizen, all honor to Secretary Bates, who has so pronounced him. The black man can take out a passport and travel to the

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uttermost parts of the earth, protected by the broad aegis of the government; all honor to Secretary Seward, who was the first to recognize this right. The black man is a citizen soldier, standing on an equality in the rank and file with the white soldier; all honor to Secretary Stanton and the rest of the Administration. Sir, I know very well that this government is not yet all that it ought to be. I know that Mr. Bates is not considered a progressive man, and that Mr. Seward has incurred the severe displeasure of loyal anti-slavery people. But, sire, these gentlemen have in a signal manner recognized my rights, and the rights of my oppressed countrymen. They have officially invested us with the prerogatives of which we had been basely robbed, and I would be false to my nature, false to my convictions, false to my best feelings, did I not thus publicly testify my sense of respect and heartfelt gratitude. Say what you please of Mr. Seward, condemn as you may his shortcomings and his failures—I make no apology for either; but it must always be owned, to his immortal honor, that he has from the beginning been the last friend of the “man of color.” From the time when, as Governor of this Empire State, he refused to deliver up to the Governor of Virginia certain black refugees, to the day when, as a lawyer, he defended the idiotic black culprit Freeman, and from that day till the present time, Mr. Seward has been the unprejudiced respecter of the black man’s equal rights, and as such, I feel bound here and everywhere to honor him. I have said that I consider it an honor to be a citizen of this republic, and I repeat it. I am proud to be an American citizen. You know, Mr. Chairman, how bitterly I used to denounce the United States as

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the basest despotism the sun ever shone upon; and I take nothing back that ever I said. When this government was, as it used to be, a slaveholding oligarchy; when such imbecile and heartless cravens as our Buchanan and your Pierce were its nominal rulers; when its powers were used and abused by slaveholding, slave-breeding traitors, such as Jefferson Davis, and Howell Cobb, and Thief Floyd and Isaac Toucey, and when the old Jesuit Taney was unshorn of his power as Chief President in its Temple of Justice; then, sir, I hated it with a wrath which words could not express, and I denounced it with all the bitterness of my indignant soul (applause.) My friends would urge me to moderate my tone, but it was impossible; out of the bitterness of the heart the mouth would speak. I was a victim, stricken, degraded, injured, insulted in my person, in my family, in my friends, in my estate; I returned bitterness for bitterness and scorn for scorn. I am the same man still, and I must be allowed, as some would say, though I do not, to err on the other extreme. I forget the past; joy fills my soul at the prospect of the future. I leave to others the needful duty of censure. But, I hear some of my hearers saying, "It is too soon to being to rejoice; don't halloo till you are out of the woods; don't be too sure of the future—wait and see." No, sir, I will not wait—I cannot be mistaken. My instincts, in this matter at least, are unerring. The good time which has so long been coming is at hand. I feel it, I see it in the air, I read it in the signs of the times; I see it in the acts of Congress, in the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, in its exclusion from the Territories, in solemn treaties for the effectual suppression of the infer-

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nal foreign slave trade, in the acknowledgment of the black republics of Hayti and Liberia. I see it in the new spirit that is in the army; I see it in the black regiment of South Carolina (applause); I see it in the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Massachusetts; I see it in the order of Adjut.-Gen. Thomas, forming a Black Brigade at Memphis; I see it, above all, and more than all, in the GLORIOUS AND IMMORTAL PROCLAMATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN, ON THE FIRST OF JANUARY, 1863 (cheers). By that imperishable instrument the three million of slaves in the rebel States are legally and irrevocably free! (the opinion of Mr. Greeley, of *The Tribune*, to the contrary notwithstanding). By that immortal document all the remaining slaves of the country are in effect promised their freedom. In *spirit* and in *purpose*, thanks to *Almighty God!* this is no longer a slaveholding republic. The fiat has gone forth which, when this rebellion is crushed—and it will be crushed as sure as there is a God in heaven—the fiat has gone forth which, in the simple but beautiful language of the President, “will take all burdens from off all backs, and make every man a freeman.”

Sir, this is a glorious contest. It is not simply and solely a fight about the black man. It is not merely a war between the North and the South. It is a war between freedom and despotism the world over. If this government had only the South to contend with, their work would be soon done. But it is with the South, backed up by pro-slavery Europe and pro-slavery England, that this government has to contend. It is pro-slavery England that furnishes to the rebels the arms, ammunition, ships, encouragement and money with which to carry out the base slaveholding,

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slave-breeding conspiracy. I say pro-slavery England, for, Mr. Chairman, I need not tell you that there are two Englands—anti-slavery England, that manumitted her 800,000 slaves, and the England that opposed, as long as there was any hope of success, that glorious act; the England which now speaks of our favor in the voice of John Bright and William R. Forster, and that noble man and unequalled orator, George Thompson, and the England which holds the reins of power in its hands and uses that power, as far as it *dares*, to break down this government. Sir, the former England I honor and adore; the latter, the England which now uses and abuses the great power of that great country, I abhor and repudiate. When I was in England, many years ago, it was my good fortune to be introduced to Ireland's great Liberator, the eminent Daniel O'Connell. Before extending his hand to me he said "that he would never take the hand of an American, unless he knew him to be an anti-slavery man." Thanking him for his noble resolution, and declaring myself at the same time to be an Abolitionist, he grasped me warmly by the hand and shook it heartily. It was a striking circumstance, and left a deep impression upon my mind. Mr. Chairman, I am prepared now to practice in the lesson I then learned. O'Connell has gone, and alas! his spirit has gone with him. The foulest and bitterest enemies of freedom and the black man are countrymen of the great Liberator. If hereafter any one coming from Great Britain, be he Saxon or Celt, should seek an introduction to one so humble as myself, I think, before extending my hand, I would feel bound to say, "What sort of an Englishman or Irishman are you? Are you of the herd that support

slave-breeding conspiracy. I say pro-slavery England, for, Mr. Chairman, I need not tell you that there are two Englands—anti-slavery England, that manumitted her 800,000 slaves, and the England that opposed, as long as there was any hope of success, that glorious act; the England which now speaks in our favor in the voice of John Bright and William R. Forster, and that noble man and unequalled orator, George Thompson, and the England which holds the reins of power in its hands and uses that power, as far as it dares, to

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the slaveholding rebels, and that build Alabama corsairs and Florida pirates to prey on the commerce of Freedom? If you are, I will have nothing to do with you; I regard you as an enemy of God and of the human race. But if your sympathies are with struggling freedom, and your hatred toward its enemies, then give me your hand.

Mr. Chairman, I intended to say something about the Copperhead Democracy, but these dastards don't trouble me now. They are as malignant, as venomous, as traitorous as ever, and perhaps more so, but their power is gone, and their days are numbered. They are

"Their country's curse, their children's shame,  
Outcasts of virtue, peace and fame."

They may, in their baseness and pusillanimity, denounce the black man as inferior, as do your Vallandighams—I trust he has got his deserts at last (applause)—Morses and Coxes, down to your ex-Congressman Biddle, or they may hound on an Irish mob, as do your Fernando Woods and Booby Brookses in your streets; but I repeat it, sir, their power is gone.

Mr. Chairman, I end as I began: This is a proud day for the "colored man," and a day of glorious promise for the country. Our work as Abolitionists is not finished. Much remains to be done. But we have thousands upon thousands of helpers. Anti-slavery societies and anti-slavery agents are now numerous and powerful. The United States Senate and House of Representatives, the State Legislatures, the "Union Leagues" are anti-slavery societies; the Cabinet at Washington is a great Executive Committee, and thousands of its civil and military officers are its agents.

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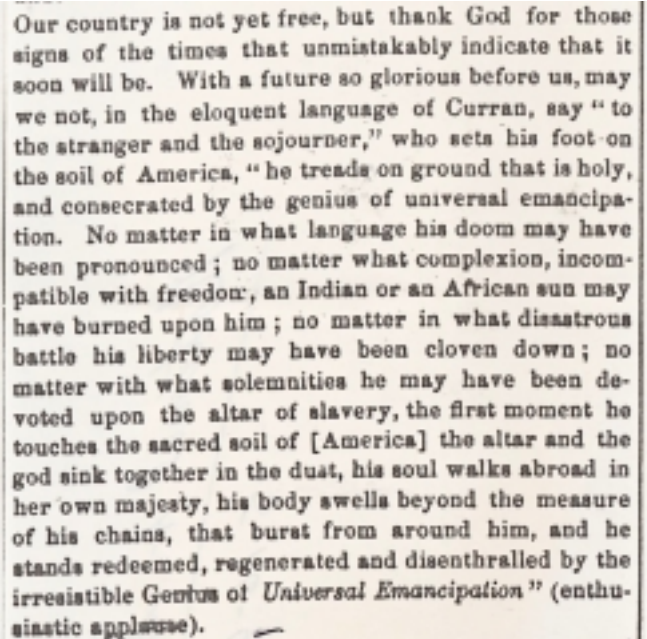
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Our country is not yet free, but thank God for those signs of the times that unmistakably indicate that it soon will be. With a future so glorious before us, may we not, in the eloquent language of Curran, say "to the stranger and the sojourner," who sets his foot on the soil of America, "he treads on ground that is holy, and consecrated by the genius of universal emancipation. No matter in what language his doom may have been pronounced; no matter what complexion, incompatible with freedom, an Indian or an African sun may have burned upon him; no matter in what disastrous battle his liberty may have been cloven down; no matter with what solemnities he may have been devoted upon the altar of slavery, the first moment he touches the sacred soil of [America] the altar and the god sink together in the dust, his soul walks abroad in her own majesty, his body swells beyond the measure of his chains, that burst from around him, and he stands redeemed, regenerated and disenthralled by the irresistible Genius of *Universal Emancipation*" (enthusiastic applause).



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