

Men enter into conversation with me in railway-carriages, and they say, "We are as much opposed to slavery as you are; but then, after all slavery ought to have been gradually abolished, and not immediately." Well now, suppose it ought, it was not. (Laughter.) It would cost just as much blood and treasure to get the negroes back into slavery as it has cost to get them out, and if these people really meant to criticise where they can remedy, and not to find fault merely in a querulous spirit, they would accept the state of facts as they present themselves and make the best of it. (Hear, hear.) I will tell you what is the fact. The people that find fault with abolition generally do not want it, gradual or immediate. They say that the negroes were very well contented when they were in slavery. "I have seen them," some will say, "and heard them say they were contented." They have told me that frequently, and there was never a greater mistake in the world. Here a white man says that the negroes were contented. (Loud applause.) The white man was not in slavery; I was, and I know where the shoe pinched; and I say I was not contented. But then, Mr. Chairman, suppose it were the fact that the black man was contented in bondage, suppose he was contented to see his wife sold on the auction-block, or his daughter violated, or his children separated from him, or having his own manhood crushed out of him,—I say that is the heaviest condemnation of the institution, that slavery should blot out a man's manhood so as to make him contented to accept his degradation, and such an institution ought to be swept from the face of the earth. (Loud applause.) While there is an irresponsible power committed to the hands of the slaveholder, and while human nature remains as it is, it is impossible to

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talk about treating slaves kindly. You cannot do it. I was once on a plantation—I went there accidentally—and I saw a lot of negroes gathered by the side of the water. In the middle of the stream there stood a stalwart negro with an axe on his shoulder. The overseer was trying to urge the negroes on the bank to go in and make him come out, but the boys all knew him, and he said, “Do not approach me, for I will brain the first one that does, and die in this water.” The boys knew that he would do it, and they would not approach him. Finally, the overseer had to send for the young master, who came down and said to the negro, “Jim, you must come out of the water.” Jim said, “I will come out if you promise that I shall not be flogged. I have done nothing to be flogged for. I do my work faithfully. You sold away my wife. I have made up my mind never to be flogged, and I will not come out of the water.” The young master appealed to him by all the feelings connected with their boyhood, all the reminiscences and associations of their early life, but the negro still refused; and at last the young master said to the negro-driver, who was standing by, “You must shoot him down; there is no help for it.” The negro-driver raised his rifle, and in a moment the sharp crack of the rifle sent the poor corpse floating down the stream, his blood staining all the water. Now, that I saw. It was not because the man who did it was bloodthirsty, or tyrannical, or ferocious, or more cruel than many of us might be here, but if the negro had been successful in resisting his authority that day, another negro would have attempted it the next, and so on until all discipline would have been at an end in the plantation. When I have talked about

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the inherent cruelty of the institution, men have said, "Why do you talk so? Don't you know that I would not kill my horse?" Ah, but people do not remember that there is this great difference between a man and a horse: if you beat a horse, the other horses go on; if a horse is punished for rebellion, another horse will eat his oats just as well. But if one negro becomes successful, another negro becomes successful, and if one is shot down, the others are deterred. Therefore I say the institution of slavery is so bitter in itself that it sours everything it comes in contact with. It is no use talking about the majority of slaves having been kindly treated or anything like contented. Not one in ten thousand was contented, and the fact is, that where they were well treated the more discontented they were. I was a slave until I was twenty-two years of age, and I know I suffered more acute anguish than most of the slaves around me, just because aspirations had been roused in me that were not aroused in them; because I was associated with gentlemen who were so near to liberty and brought me so near to it that I wanted it all the more.

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