

MR. PRESIDENT:

I have often asked myself, what posterity would think of the strange contest in which the abolitionists are engaged. Here we meet, time after time, newspapers are printed and speeches delivered, to prove – what? Why, that a man is a man, and that he is the only human possessor of himself. But these propositions are self-evident; and self-evident propositions, we all know, though the most difficult to be proved, are the most easily understood, because they need no proof. The mind sees their truth intuitively, without the aid of reasoning. The attempt to prove them, therefore, would be ridiculous, were it not for the consideration of the amazing state of delusion and vassalage to which prejudice reduces the mind when unenlightened by reason.

The history of every age shows the truth of this assertion. At one time, we see Galileo thrown into prison by the Inquisition, because he had made some discoveries tending to confirm the Copernican system, and forced to purchase his liberty by retracting his opinions. Again, before the sacred page was punctuated, some of the Alexandrian fathers placed a punctuation mark in one of the chapters of St. John's Gospel. Chrysostom, alarmed at this terrible innovation, denounced it as a heresy; and Epiphanius declared it blasphemous, and the sin against the Holy Ghost. When, therefore, we see the control which prejudice, aided by circumstances and encouraged by self-interest, has in *times past* exercised over the human mind, and the tenacity with which it has held its deluded victims, stopping up the av-

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enues of improvement, clipping the wings of genius, and retarding the progress of truth – when we see the minds whose energies have been crippled, and whose spheres of action have been curtailed by its influence – when we see the tremendous power which reformers have brought to bear against the prevailing sins of the ages in which they lived, the firm opposition they encountered, and the long and arduous struggles which preceded a better state of things – we are led, by analogical reasoning, to believe, that the contest in which we are engaged is not an unnatural one – that it is not so dissimilar in its character and measures to others which have been carried triumphantly through – that the modern champions of freedom do not savor so much of quixotism as their traducers have represented – and that the unfortunate men, whose cause they have espoused, have as just a claim to humanity as their oppressors, and like them have been created a little lower than the angels.

In all moral reforms, too, there is a striking similarity in the various passions, qualities and traits of character called forth. The same zeal and boldness of the reformer – the same caution, distrust and timidity of the conservative, wincing at this phrase, trembling at that expression, and whining about ultraism – the same headlong fury of the rabble, who, for want of something better, would fain

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the same rapid speed of truth when once elicited by reason and argument – and the same general results.

How was it five years ago in regard to the question of slavery? A gloom hung over the moral atmosphere, which nothing seemingly could dissipate, save a miracle from God himself. All saw it, but no one durst expose his own breast to the pitiless peltings of the gathering storm. The pulpit and the press, instead of being faithful to their trust, were the panders to the general lust. But mind, like matter, must have its legitimate scope. How absurd was the attempt of the ancient king to chain the Hellespont! And yet not more so than the attempt of modern republicans to bridle the human mind. There are always some spirits who will resist such unnatural domination. And such a spirit was found in the father of American anti-slavery. In that dark hour, he arose to cheer us on our gloomy pathway. The shafts of criticism, and sarcasm, and denunciation, which rang against his buckler, told only where he stood up unscathed, in his moral and intellectual might, and bearing down all opposition. The result is well known, nor does Mr. GARRISON need any eulogy from me.

The task of the reformer is far from being an agreeable one. The hidden springs which are to be touched by him, and set into motion, are not discernible to common eyes; and, if they were, few would know how to approach or dare to meddle with them. He scatters his truths among the body politic, and the effect is electrical. He is greeted at once with smiles and frowns, with blessing and cursing, with

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eulogy and abuse. Now he is almost stifled with the caresses of devoted friends, and anon he is exposed to the fury of a blood-thirsty mob. But, if it is melancholy to see some run mad, we have the gratification to behold others restored to their reason. Much may depend upon accidental circumstances for the success of the reformer, but more depends upon himself. In him are found the great qualities of the head and heart. For the burden of proof is upon him, and he is to answer cavils, refute sophistry, and prove his propositions, while slanderers are crucifying his reputation, and assassins are aiming deadly daggers at his heart. All moral reformations have been attended with more or less persecution; but the American abolitionists stand pre-eminently distinguished in this respect. Not that those of their ranks, who have been imprisoned and murdered, can bear comparison numerically with other reformers. But the light of religious toleration had not dawned upon the Inquisition; and the dogma, that ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, is a newly discovered truth. But the Americans, with the moral and intellectual light of the nineteenth century, should have known better than to shoot down a man for his faithful advocacy of those burning truths enunciated by their own great apostle of democracy. They present the rare spectacle of a nation boasting of equal rights, while a large part of the population are the most oppressed and degraded beings that crawl on the face of the earth. If they have fled from the fire of tyranny in the old world, it is to light up a still more horrid one in the new, whose lurid glare serves only to show more distinct-

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ly the hollow mockery of their hypocritical professions. If they have driven the poor Indian, who 'sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind,' from the home of his fathers, it is only to make room for the still more imbruted slave, and to introduce a civilization which has been a curse to half of mankind. And thus they have become guilty of the double atrocity of immolating two races of men upon the bloody altars of their avarice and ambition. The red men are fast disappearing from our midst, and soon the halloo of their hunters, long since heard upon every margin of our lakes and rivers, will be succeeded only by the mournful winds as they sigh through their forests, and sing their requiem. But the place of the Indian is being fast supplied by that of the slave, upon whose devoted head all that can torture the body or enfeeble the intellect is pouring out. The wretched alternative even of removing to the far west is denied him. The wide world, with its joys and sorrows, its pleasures and pains, its paths to wealth and poverty, to distinction and disgrace, is limited to the plantation on which he toils the livelong day.

But why attempt to portray the atrocities of American slavery? The isolated facts of murder and violence that, ever and anon, come to our ears, are but whispers in that whirlwind that rages at the south. We read of deeds of barbarity, but they come mostly from the perpetrators of them, or from persons entrusted in stripping them of their terrors. If the victims *themselves*, who have been whipped and burnt to death, could break the silence of the grave, they 'could a tale unfold whose lightest

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word would harrow up the soul.' If the abominations of that system could be exposed to the eye, well might we thank Heaven that we are removed from scenes so petrifying to the moral feelings, and that we do not behold a picture too appalling for human sight, and too shocking to the sensibilities of our nature. If the monster herself could become visible to our natural as well as to our mental sight, and stalk into the midst of this assembly reeking with the tears and blood of her victims, well might she exclaim, as she lifted the veil from her horrid features, well might she exclaim in the language of the veiled prophet of Khorassan —

'Here, judge if hell, with all its power to damn,
Can add one curse to the foul thing I am.'

But, sir, the great characteristic of American slavery, and that which distinguishes it from all other species of oppression, is that hatred of the free colored man which makes his condition little superior to that of servitude itself. The slave escapes from the southern to the northern States, and just begins to congratulate himself upon his good fortune as he beholds the same dreaded form, though dressed in different habiliments, baffling all his schemes and enterprises. Though his flesh is not bared to receive the lash, and his limbs are unfettered, yet he feels his immortal mind dragged to the dust by a weight far more galling than chains, and more torturing than fetters. The gates that lead to intemperance, licentiousness and death are unbound, and he is permitted to enter them and die; but the road to the hill of science is guarded by a fiend, who sits at the entrance, hissing and gnashing his teeth

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upon him. The distant view is all that blesses his longing sight. The fragrance of the enamelled fields comes floating to him on every breeze, and he has the mortification to behold others plucking the flowers, and revelling in the sunny pastures. All the motives that excite in the citizen enterprise, virtue and patriotism, lie dormant in his breast. These inestimable qualities are to him mere words 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing' – the theoretical emanations of minds with whose emotions he knows not how to sympathise. As if he was a mere beast, his animal powers alone are strengthened and indulged; but when he has once tasted the proffered cup of intemperance, licentiousness and crime, like other rational and accountable beings, he becomes responsible for his acts, and dearly pays the penalty of violated law. Is it strange, then, that he does not stand out in the dignity of his nature, when so many of the attributes of humanity and the springs of human action are enfeebled by disease, and palsied by neglect? Is it strange that he does the State so little service, when the doors to honorable and profitable occupation are bolted and barred against him? Is it strange that, goaded to madness by his accumulated wrongs, he sometimes lays aside his pacific character, and turns upon his tormentors and rends them? Surely not. His patient endurance, under such provocations, ought to be passport to public favor; and though he seldom indulges in retaliation, it argues not that he is insensible to his degradation, but that he is actuated by a manly and christian forbearance.

But it is not the colored man alone, who is to be

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benefitted by the abolition of slavery. Its effects will be most salutary upon the white population, and particularly upon the slaveholder. I speak not of the deleterious influence of slavery upon the morals of the south – that is too well known – but the dispositions of the slaveholders are spoiled by it. Accustomed to the implicit obedience of their slaves, they cannot bear contradiction from freemen; and the signal vengeance which they take upon the abolitionists caught within the precincts of their States shows how little restraint they exercise over their passions. See how they burnt a free man of color by a slow fire in St. Louis, merely because, in a paroxysm of rage, he stabbed a white man to facilitate the escape of a runaway slave! In their fiendish exultation, they mocked the dying man's agonies while the hot blood was boiling out of his mouth! And because Lovejoy called this a cruel act, they destroyed his press; and when he sought protection from the laws of a non-slaveholding State, they pursued him, and deliberately shot him down, to show in what contempt they hold the laws and liberties of the free States. And they may tell us of their happiness and security, and that the slaves do not want their freedom; but we know nothing of the hours when they are visited by the most horrible spectres that the imagination of a guilty man can conjure up. They dare not tell us how, in the silent hour of midnight, their fitful slumbers are broken by the forms of their murdered victims, as they glide by their aching vision, and every murmur of the wind is the cry of the wronged slave cheering

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on his fellows to revenge and slaughter!

It is, then, to stay this torrent of vice that is rushing over us, and threatening to sweep away every vestige of that edifice the revolutionary fathers constructed with so much care and art, that we have formed the anti-slavery society. It is to lift up our perishing country men from the horrible state into which they are plunged by a despotism unparalleled in the history of nations. It is to give opportunity for the development of the moral and intellectual powers of man, to save woman from the bloody lash that is raised above her shrinking form, and to restore the babe to its bereaved mother. It is to save our churches and ministers from the awful charge of fostering and maintaining a sin, against which the great Author of our religion has denounced the most fearful penalties. It is to wipe a foul blot from our country, that her guilty, cowering form may stand erect, no longer the butt of merited ridicule and sarcasm, to save her from the horrors of a servile war, and render her more secure against the foreign harpies who are ready to pounce upon her. And call you this treason? And do the friends of the slave deserve hanging for such motives and purposes?

Nor need we be despondent. A voice comes on every wind of heaven encouraging to us, but full of terrible warning to the oppressor. The genius of British liberty, with a consciousness of being ever foremost in the cause of the slave, shows us the broken chains which fell from eight hundred thousand human beings, and tells us to go and do likewise.

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The voices of our revolutionary fathers, who fought long and hard for the freedom of their country, are heard repeating the same words that startled their armies of yore, 'Give us liberty, or give us death.' The free Haytien's voice is heard above the roar of the Atlantic, telling us, if we would avoid the horrors of a servile war, we must let the oppressed go free. The ancient as well as modern nations tell us of the impossibility of always holding men in bondage. Greece, though dead, yet speaketh. Though the vile herd have long since mangled her carcass, and 'strewed her ashes on the wind,' yet still her 'spirit walks abroad,' and points to Thermopylae, and Marathon, and Salamis, as beacon-fires to light the oppressed to freedom.

But, *abolition is dying away*, cry the assassins of Lovejoy, and the incendiaries of Pennsylvania Hall. Dying away? As is the torrent, when swollen by rains and increased by tributary streams, it sweeps on with greater strength against the barriers that are opposed to its impetuous course. Dying away? As is the sun, when new risen it 'looks through the horizontal misty air, shorn of its beams,' but soon to dissipate the gloom, and smile unclouded upon the glad earth. Dying away? Impossible! *Truth* never dies. Her course is always onward. Though obstacles may present themselves before her, she rides triumphantly over them; and the more formidable the enemy, the more terrible the encounter, and the more glorious the victory. No — though abolition is covered with scars, and bleeds at every pore, and has been often thrown to the ground, yet, like the fabled giant, she always wakes with renew-

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ed strength and vigor to the attack; and while her infatuated enemies are singing her funeral dirge, she will rise before their scared visages, and make them cry out with MacBeth —

‘The times *have been*
That when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end: but *now* they rise again
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools.’

I am aware, sir, that many of the suggestions and arguments that have been used this evening, have been repeated again and again by others who are better able than myself to explain and defend the doctrines of the abolitionists. But I plead the necessity of the case. New truths, though as clear as the light of the sun, must be repeated often, and enforced and illustrated in a thousand different ways. But this only shows the difficulty of proving self-evident propositions when obscured by prejudice and preconceived opinions. Again, the nice discriminations and hair-splitting distinctions, in which this controversy is involved, serve to confuse the mind and obscure the truth. Some philosophers have attempted to prove the non-existence of the world and all within it. But, if we cannot prove by mathematical demonstration the absurdity of this theory, we can tell them we feel conscious of our own existence, and this is all the refutation such rhapsodies deserve. Some men have also endeavored to prove the inferiority of one race of men to another upon no better grounds than a dissimilarity in their outward conformation. But this, I apprehend, is as difficult a task as the other, and merits

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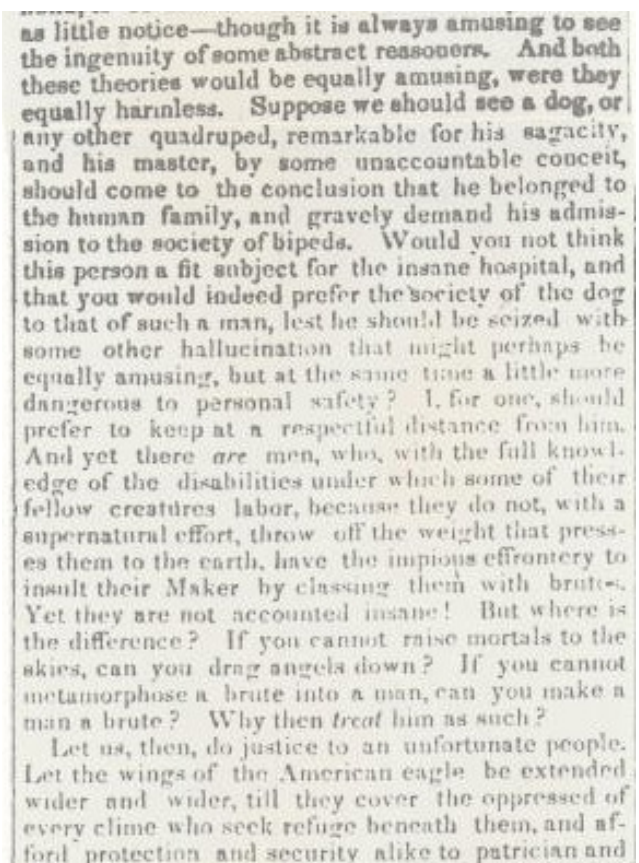
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as little notice – though it is always amusing to see the ingenuity of some abstract reasoners. And both these theories would be equally amusing, were they equally harmless. Suppose we should see a dog, or any other quadruped, remarkable for his sagacity, and his master, by some unaccountable conceit, should come to the conclusion that he belonged to the human family, and gravely demand his admission to the society of bipeds. Would you not think this person a fit subject for the insane hospital, and that you would indeed prefer the society of the dog to that of such a man, lest he should be seized with some other hallucination that might perhaps be equally amusing, but at the same time a little more dangerous to personal safety? I, for one, should prefer to keep at a respectful distance from him. And yet there *are* men, who, with the full knowledge of the disabilities under which some of their fellow creatures labor, because they do not, with a supernatural effort, throw off the weight that presses them to the earth, have the impious effrontery to insult their Maker by classing them with brutes. Yet they are not accounted insane! But where is the difference? If you cannot raise mortals to the skies, can you drag angels down? If you cannot metamorphose a brute into a man, can you make a man a brute? Why then *treat* him as such?

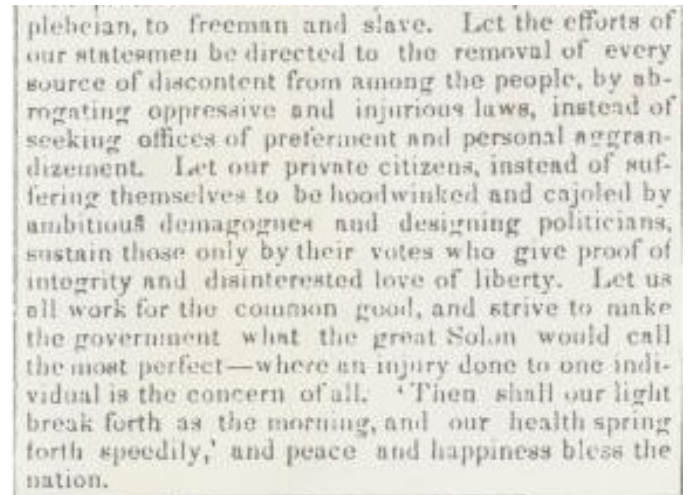
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