

SUNDAY MORNING SESSION.

SPEECH OF H. FORD DOUGLASS.

[The Chairman, on introducing Mr. Douglass, said that the speaker he was about to introduce to the meeting, though from Chicago, and of the name of Douglass, was not the Stephen A. Douglas of whom the Audience had heard so much.

Mr. Douglass addressed the meeting:]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The difference between my distinguished namesake, to whom you have referred, and myself, is this, He is seeking his mother; I am not. I feel but little, just now, like making a speech. We have just been listening to the very able report of your Executive Committee, and I fear I can add nothing to the interest of the occasion, by any poor words that I may utter.

We have listened to a recital of the imminent dangers which threaten the liberties of the people; and I am sure none of us can go away from this meeting without feeling that we all have much to do;—that our mission is not fulfilled, till slavery shall cease to exist in every portion of our widely extended country.

Thirty-five years ago, when the abolitionists began their labor, they supposed all that was necessary, was to let the people know the true character of slavery—to hold the hateful system up to the scorn and indignation of the world, and the work would be done. But we have lived to learn that slavery is no weak and impotent thing, but a giant power, so fortified by potent influences, social, political and religious, that it can be rooted out only by uncompromising and untiring effort. We have proved it true, as was said by Benjamin

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Franklin, that “a nation may lose its liberty in a day and be a century in finding it out.” When the people of this country consented to a union with slaveholders—when they consented to strike out, at the bidding of South Carolina, from the original draft of the declaration of Independence, the clause condemning the King of Great Britain for bringing Africans into this land, and dooming them to slavery—at that moment they sold their own liberties. If there was ever any doubt of this, we can doubt it no longer, now that the rights of the white man, as well as the black, are so ruthlessly stricken down.

I do not mean to assert, at present, that the constitution of the United States is now susceptible of an anti slavery interpretation. I believe if I was a Supreme judge, and there was in the country a public sentiment that would sustain me in it, I would find no difficulty in construing that instrument in favor of the freedom of all men. But that is not now the question. You have decided upon the character of the constitution, and I must accept your own interpretation; and with that rendering, I repudiate the instrument, and the government and the institutions, which it is made to sustain. I will not stand connected with a government that steals away the black man’s liberties,—that has corrupted our best political leaders, by leading them to the support of the greatest crimes, the vilest of all institutions. Even William H. Seward has lately declared, that this is to be the white man’s government. Ten years ago he would have been thought incapable of such a

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declaration; but such is the influence of slavery. Hence the necessity of attacking the system now, in a deadly warfare; otherwise, our people will be,—if they are not now,—wholly and hopelessly lost.

Yes! we must do as John Brown did,—not necessarily in the *way* he did it, but we must labor with the sure determination to effect, in some way, the complete overthrow of slavery. I am not an advocate of insurrection; I believe the world must be educated into something better and higher than this, before we can have perfect freedom, either for the black man or the white. In the present moral condition of the people, no true liberty can be established, either by fighting slavery down, or by voting it down. Hence our object is not to put anybody into office, as a means of abolishing slavery, or to keep anybody out. I care not for the success or defeat of any party, so far as the interests of freedom are concerned. The failure or success of any of the present political parties can neither injure nor aid us. Our business must be to educate the people to the high sentiment that shall make them recognize the white man, the black man, the red man,—*all* men, to all the rights of manhood. There is not to be, as your noblest statesman seems to imagine,—a government for the *white* man alone. What merit is there in your boasted liberty or the christianity you profess to adopt, unless they recognize the brotherhood of all men, in all time? Till we have protected the rights of all, we have secured the liberties of none,—that government is no govern-

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ment which fails to protect the freedom of its meanest subject. I will put the rights of the meanest slave against the greatest government of the world,—for liberty is more than any institution, or any government.

But the idea that man is superior to institutions finds no favor in this country. The principles of justice are forgotten. The question is not what is right; but, rather, “how shall we accomplish our selfish ends?” And all parties make success a foregone conclusion. Under no circumstances must the government be endangered, to give the black man his rights; yet, let me tell you, my liberty is more to me, and more in fact, than all the glory of your government. I have it from God, and you have no more right to compromise my freedom for the sake of the success of your party, than you have to take my life. For what is my life with to me, when you take away all that makes it worth the living?

As I said I am no advocate for revolution. I would only resort to it, after all other means have failed. I believe in the right of self defence; it was given us at the creation. I believe it a duty as well as a right, and no man has a *right* to become a slave for a single hour, if by defending himself he can prevent it. If you can take away the freedom of one man, you strike at the liberty of all. The same means required to prepare the white man for enslaving the black, prepare the black man to enslave the white; and the master and the slave are alike in chains. ‘Man never fastens a chain upon the limbs of a slave, but God, in his

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divine justice, fastens the other end around his own neck.'

So in this country we have four political parties, all talking of liberty, yet all in chains! Stephen A. Douglas said, yesterday, at Cleveland, that he would stop this slavery agitation; he would put the slave question outside of Congress. They had nothing to do with it, and he did not care whether slavery was voted up or voted down. He did not know, when he thus sneered at liberty that he was himself a slave! So of W. H. Seward; when he talks of a government of white men, he may think he is free, but he is not, and cannot be. And when Abraham Lincoln opposes the rights of the free colored people, even in his own state—when he shuts them out from the courts of justice, he does not know that he makes himself a slave. When you have made me a slave, no white man is free. Strike down my liberty, if you will, but when you do it, you can no longer enjoy your own.

Hence this struggle interests not one class alone, but all classes of the people. While the colored people are bowed down by slavery, they can accomplish nothing great or noble; nor can you, while you oppose them. They are men as you are, demoralized by slavery. Often they oppose anti-slavery lecturers, just as you do. I find many of them in New York and New England opposing anti slavery. All classes are alike degraded, and if any thing is done for freedom, we must make this question of slavery, not a colored question, but a white question as well. Thus you see

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where the Republican party stands, when it calls itself the white man's party—it stands arrayed against the freedom of all, white or black. I have said sometimes, in view of the fact that the Republican party fell so far short of its professions, and was deceiving so many honest anti-slavery men, that I would rather hear of its defeat than of its success. I have said I would rather Douglass would be elected President of the United States than Lincoln. But I have changed my feeling on that matter; and now my choice would be to see Douglass and his party, with all their arrogance and impudence overthrown, and Lincoln elected, rather than any other of the candidates. Not that I suppose there is any essential difference between the two men, or would be any in their action. But there is in the Republican party a strong anti-slavery element. And though the party will do nothing for freedom now, that element will increase; and before long—I trust—springing up from the ruins of the Republican party, will come a great anti-slavery party, that will be true to freedom, and recognize the rights of all men. But while I thus declare my desire to see the Republican party succeed, I must say that as a party, I regard it false to freedom and in no higher position than the Democratic party. And in its position it can do nothing for the salvation of the nation, notwithstanding the noble anti-slavery men who are in it. For God has made it certain, that the truth cannot be advanced by the telling of lies. I believe that in giving the enemy the one half, you cannot save the other; for as somebody

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has said, every compromise with the devil weakens the man that makes it.

The Republicans say they are bringing the Government back to the policy of the fathers. I do not desire to do this; the policy of the fathers was not uncompromising opposition to oppression; and nothing less than a position far higher than they occupied, will ever make us worthy of the name of freemen. If we cannot succeed by the force of ideas, then I go for a policy far different from that of the fathers, if you refer to their policy in the management of the government; for in that case this blood stained despotism must be overthrown. But all peaceful means must first be exhausted. And for one, though I cannot accomplish what many others can, I am disposed to do everything I can by moral and pacific means, to educate the people into true ideas of their duty—to eradicate the mean spirit of selfishness that makes almost every one in the country look upon himself, his color, his race, as alone worthy of consideration.

This is the most wicked and the meanest kind of infidelity; yet it is in all your churches,—even your professors of religion do not know the A B C of the Bible, or of christianity,—do not know that God is no respecter of persons, and has made of one blood all the nations of man,—do not know that colored men have the rights of humanity. They condemn John Brown as the vilest of criminals, yet laud the Revolutionary fathers for doing what John did. If Washington and his associates of the Revolution, were right, so was John Brown. I know that Henry Ward Beecher preach-

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ed a sermon in which he argued that John Brown was in the wrong, in doing as he did, because there was no prospect of success; thus making success the test of the matter. But if John Brown was wrong in defeat, would he have been right in success? If our Revolutionary fathers had failed, would they, therefore, have been the greatest of criminals?

What the age wants, is a confidence in justice and a determination to do it. We are in fellowship with slaveholders, and so long as we remain in this position we are no better than they. The receiver is as bad as the thief. When you consent to carry out the fugitive slave law, you do as badly as to hold slaves. What difference does it make to me whether you hold me in bondage yourself, or deliver me up to the man who will. Anthony Burns could feel as much respect—and far more—for his master, than for those Boston minions of slavery who gave him up to bondage. Yet Abraham Lincoln will carry out the fugitive slave law, and you will carry him into office! He will be the bloodhound to catch the slave, and send him back to his hard life of toil, and you by sustaining him, will make yourselves as guilty as he. I want to see the day when no slaveholder will dare to come here for his slave. But that day cannot come so long as you are willing to exalt to the presidency men who endorse the Dred Scott decision. And all your Presidential candidates do this. I know this has been denied of the Republican candidate. But does any one who hears me deny that Abraham Lincoln endorses, even the

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worst features of that infamous decision; 'that the black man has no rights which the white man is bound to respect?' If any one denies or doubts it, let him speak. In the state of Illinois, I cannot testify against a white man in any court of justice. Any villain may enter my house at Chicago and outrage my family, and unless a white man stands by to see it done, I have no redress. Now, I went to Abraham Lincoln, personally, with a petition for the repeal of the infamous law, and asked him to sign it, and he refused to do it. I went also to Lyman Trumbull, with the same petition, and he also refused; and he told me, if I did not like the laws of Illinois, I had better leave the State! This is the doctrine of the Dred Scott decision in its most odious form. It is declaring, not only in words, but in action, the infamous principle that colored people have no rights which you are bound to respect. And yet, you tell me, you are anti-slavery men, while you support such men as these, for the highest offices of the nation! Surely, you will not expect me to regard you as in favor of freedom, when you will not recognize me as a free man, or protect me on your own soil. Your anti-slavery should begin at home, or it is not to be trusted. There is too much of this hypocritical abolitionism. You profess to be in favor of freedom, and then allow the slaveholder to come among you and carry away your citizens. You allow it, and you agree to it, if you do not *ap-*
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a man should barter away his manhood. Let us act nobly and justly—do right, and leave the consequences to God.

But, you may inquire, who shall we vote for? I answer, vote for an anti-slavery man, or do not vote at all. God put you here to do your duty and be true to your own souls. He never commanded you to tell a lie, and violate principle even to break the fetters from the slaves. And you cannot [b]reak the slave's fetters by thus trampling on every righteous principle. You gain no power for good by sacrificing principle to gain numbers. God and one true man, are in a majority over all the hosts of error and falsehood; and we never can, as anti-slavery men, do the work we have to do, till we make our own hands clean.

Garrisonians have been denounced as disorganizers, and the enemies of all Government. But what is the object of Government? Is it to make money—the rich richer and the poor poorer? Is it merely to raise wheat and corn and rye? No; it is to make men; and if it fails in this—as your government has done—it fails in everything and is no government. Man, as I have said, is above and will survive all governments. Garrisonians desire to be true to humanity; and will respect no government that tramples upon it. But you are sacrificing *man*, to the government, humanity to success. An ancient king decreed that all the male children born in his kingdom should die to save his government; and you are following his example—sacrificing a whole race to sustain an iniquitous tyranny. And this nation should go away to

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Judea and dig up the rotten bones of Herod, and should seek for the bones of Captain Kidd the pirate, collect them together and build monuments over them, instead of seeking for the remains of Sir John Franklin in the frozen regions. Why should you not meet together to glorify the bloody Herod and the pirate Kidd? You have dethroned God, and enthroned the devil, and why not go to work and have a devilish good time.'

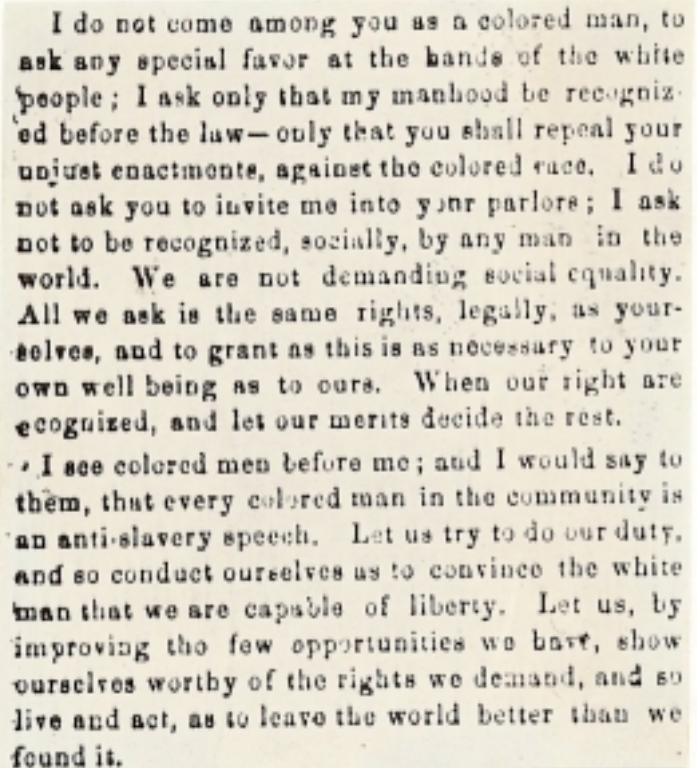
Three hundred years ago your English ancestors were opposed by the bloody Stuarts. You said the king had no right to violate your rights and trample on all law and justice. Charles the First replied that he would have his will, that the king could do no wrong. So you beheaded Charles the First and established the government of 1678. Afterward your fathers came to New England, and again made battle against the despotism of these same despotic kings of England. And you rose up against the power of George III and established the government of 1776. Then you thought you had done something worthy of the friends of freedom. But what has been the result? You have to-day Freedom only in name. You are no better than the worst governments of the Old World. I would rather live in the most tyrannical government in Europe, so far as freedom is concerned than in yours, which atheistically declares itself to be the white man's country, and has not risen above the lowest despotism. You have no true ideas of government or of law. No conception, with all your boasts, of the true ideas of liberty.

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I do not come among you as a colored man, to ask any special favor at the hands of the white people; I ask only that my manhood be recognized before the law—only that you shall repeal your unjust enactments, against the colored race. I do not ask you to invite me into your parlors; I ask not to be recognized, socially, by any man in the world. We are not demanding social equality. All we ask is the same rights, legally, as yourselves, and to grant as this is as necessary to your own well being as to ours. When our right are [r]ecognized, and let our merits decide the rest.

I see colored men before me; and I would say to them, that every colored man in the community is an anti-slavery speech. Let us try to do our duty, and so conduct ourselves as to convince the white man that we are capable of liberty. Let us, by improving the few opportunities we have, show ourselves worthy of the rights we demand, and so live and act, as to leave the world better than we found it.



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