

SPEECH OF H. FORD DOUGLASS,

*At the Celebration of the First of August at Abington.*

One month ago, Mr. President, we were assembled in the beautiful grove at Framingham, to celebrate the emancipation of thirteen American colonies from the despotism of that old Saxon mother of States, England. To-day, we have come to join our friends here in Abington, in honor of an event somewhat different in its character, one that will be the glory of England, and the admiration of the world, when her brightest military achievements shall have faded from the memory of mankind.

A proud and haughty race of oppressors, accustomed to sneer at every effort that seeks to have justice done the negro, will not care to remember this day, and the glorious results which it commemorates. It is fit and proper, therefore, that all who love justice and liberty should meet, as we do to-day, to keep fresh and green in our memories an act so sublimely disinterested as that which gave freedom to a million souls in the Carribbean Isles; for, the same earnestness of purpose that won for British Abolitionists this noblest triumph in the annals of the Saxon race, makes possible the total abolition of the accursed system in our own country.

I have found in the West, where I live, and among those of my own race, objections urged against the propriety of celebrating this day, because this act of justice was performed by the people of another government. But, to me, this can never be a reason for withholding from the noble men and women of England our eternal gratitude for that generous act of mercy. Justice is of universal application, and whatever concerns the rights and liberties of one nation,

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or variety of men, involves all others in the common interest. The bridge that spans Niagara's mighty torrent is supported on either side by a single chain; break it in any of its parts, and that magnificent structure, the grandest monument which the science and mechanism of the centuries can boast, will disappear forever in the howling hell of waters beneath. So with this chain of humanity which God has stretched across the ages; no matter which of its strongly-connected links is broken, either will destroy that continuity of progress by which man alone hopes at last to reach the home of the eternal Father. (Applause.)

The Negro and the Indian, the Malay and the Caucasian, types of an intense diversification, are nevertheless children of the same Creator, influenced alike by the same elements of decay and growth. Indeed, no government can be complete in its social and political symmetry without this variety of race. As the blending of the productions of the four grand divisions of the globe is essential to the highest artistic and commercial growth, so is the blending into one political system an harmonious recognition of the rights of all these various races essential to the highest governmental development.

There is no merit in our civilized, Christian growth over the barbarous forms of other times, unless we can forget our own clan, tribe, race, countrymen and family in application of justice to all people, through the complicated forms of civil government, from the pew to the pulpit, and from the ballot-box to the presidential chair. God save any decent man from ever being compelled to occupy the latter, since James

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Buchanan has been its incumbent! (Laughter and applause.) But, then, this is a republican government—this is Christianity—all else is an imposition, to be hated and resisted.

I heard Mr. Garrison say, twelve years ago, that he never looked upon a slave, peeled and bruised, robbed of his manhood and herded with cattle, that he was not willing, in the duty which he owed to a brother man, to do all for him that he would for a member of his own family. (Applause.) It was the religious and political self-abandonment of such a spirit that lifted the British slave out of his fetters, and made this day worthy of the consecration which we now make by our earnest words of commemoration.

Mr. President, civil and religious liberty, the right to serve God as one's conscience shall dictate, the right to be secure in one's individuality, complete and perfect exemption from the selfish abuses of an organized and supercilious majority, are some of the rights which this government was established to secure; in all of which it has proved a magnificent failure.

God knows I am no friend of slavery any where on earth. Every pulsation of my heart beats in sympathy with the brave words and braver deeds of the patriots of the old world, who are struggling for political rights, whether it be Victor Hugo hurling back into the teeth of the bloody usurper those memorable words, '*When liberty returns to France, then will I return,*' or the sturdy blows of Garibaldi on the plains of Palermo, to throw off the Papal power in classic Italy. In me, the crowned and mitred des-

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pots who pretend to rule by right divine in the nationalities of Europe will ever find an uncompromising foe. Yet I am ashamed to be compelled to say, that so far as human freedom is concerned, they put to utter shame the loftier pretensions of our own government. There is, indeed, a significant fact projected from the historical back-ground of two hundred years. It is this: that while all the monarchical governments of the old world have been constantly tending to liberty, affording us unmistakable signs of progression, republican America, theoretically an antipode, has been all the while merging itself into a despotism baser and blacker than anything history has yet recorded. Take, for example, that great empire of the North, extending from the frozen Don to the midland sea, that only four hundred years ago began to move from her icy anchorage, laden with a conflicting population from almost every zone—religious rites the most savage, and customs the most uncivil; and yet you will find, despite the barbarous character of her people, that Russia, from Ivan to Alexander II., has been in constant progression in the attainments of more humane and liberal institutions. The serfdom of Peter the Great, which was only a milder type of absolute bondage, has gradually melted away before the increasing heat of democratic ideas. And on the twenty-fifth day of next November, after we shall have elected to the Presidency of the Republic a man pledged not to lift a finger in the work of abolishing slavery in this country, but, on the contrary, pledged to slave-breeding, slave-trading and slave-catching; at such a time, we are to behold thirty-five million serfs, lifted by the beneficent policy of the

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Czar of all the Russias, from the slavery of four hundred years to the political equality of the proudest subject in his imperial dominions.

Emerson says— 'Every law indicates some fact in human nature.' Laws are the mile-stones along the pathways of history, that tell how far we have travelled from the rude barbarism of the past toward a higher and a nobler life. Laws are the test of a nation's civilization. The true man's real character consists in what he does, and not what he merely has the ability to do. So I measure the civilization of Russia, Austria, France, England and the United States, by what they do, each in their sphere, for civilization, progress, freedom, all that helps to produce the highest culture, and noblest spiritual development. England has done much for freedom, within the last sixty years, and promises to do much more. This Government has done nothing, and promises to do less. Whatever may be the poverty and destitution of the lower and middle classes in England, resulting from fast-anchored customs which she has inherited from feudal times, she has still a commanding sense of right and wrong. Conservative, land-loving, money-loving, she is still liberty-loving. Englishmen cling with undying tenacity to Runnymede, whose regal splendor pales its ineffectual fires before the sturdy old baron who wrung from the reluctant grasp of their monarch the great Charter of English rights. The safeguards of individual freedom which *Magna Charta* secured to the people reach all classes and conditions of English life, from the sovereign on the throne to the beggar in the streets. Half a century ago, after the ambitious Corsican had

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broken his empire against British steel at Waterloo, and, flying the disastrous stroke of fortune, was compelled to surrender himself to the captain of an English vessel, instructions were immediately sent by the government, warning the captain not to approach within three leagues of the shore, lest Napoleon, the disturber of the peace of nations, should avail himself of the writ of *Habeas Corpus*, and secure his freedom, which no power on earth could prevent. Here, then, was fidelity to constitutional liberty, on the part of this old government, whose corrupt and despotic institutions we are so much accustomed to deplore and denounce, worthy our imitation as well as admiration.

I realize no particular pleasure, Mr. President, in making comparisons that reflect to the discredit of this government and the enlightened Christian character of our people. The Supreme Court of the United States unwittingly honored the negro race, when it declared they were not citizens under the Constitution. If I shall, by my fidelity and faithfulness to this great cause, secure for my humble name some passing notice from the future historian who shall deign to do justice to the men and the women who in this hour of shameless hypocrisy are found faithful to freedom, I want no prouder mention than that in such an hour as this, I scorned to stand inside of these institutions of a barbarian people, or to become partner with the American Government, the bold and unblushing violator of the rights of man. (Applause.)

You send your boys to college to study the classics; they read Roman and Grecian history, and learn to

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denounce the despotism of the old nations that have died long ago. But barbarous and infidel Rome, in the darkest ages of her crime, in the reign of her perfidious Tarquin or bloody Nero, never sunk, in her downward tendency to despotism and crime, so low as the civilized Republic of the United States. In acts of wanton cruelty, in open disregard of human life, in violation of every right, sacred and divine, this Government stands preëminent—preëminent in guilty co-partnership with piracy, robbery and wholesale murder.

Doubtless there are many who regard such denunciation as this very unjust. The author of *Marble Faun* went to a foreign land to write a romance, because, as he said, no shadow or gloomy wrong had crept over the mirror of our commonplace prosperity. Yet our whole history is filled with gloomy wrongs inflicted upon feeble races. We commenced here, with the cant of the Puritans, to steal the Indian's land by the small acre. Getting bolder with our success, we finally took all they had, and now we don't hesitate to steal whole States from a sister Republic, and then whip them if they manifest any dissatisfaction. (Laughter.) By treaty-stipulations, we have agreed with other nations to make the slave-trade piracy, punishable with death, and yet this very same traffic was never so prosperous as now. Cargoes, fresh from Africa, are constantly landed in Southern ports, in open violation of our laws, and there is not virtue enough left in our political institutions to punish the guilty parties. But then, upon what ethics does the domestic or coastwise slave-trade, carried on beneath the sheltering wings of the Republic, pro-

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ected by Congressional law and sanctioned by the whole people, become less a crime than the African or foreign slave-trade? If it is a crime to steal men in Africa, and transplant them in the Carolinas, upon what principle can you make it a virtue to steal them in Virginia, and transplant them in Louisiana? In the one case, you steal ignorant savages, whose intellectual and moral nature has been blunted and stultified by long centuries of barbarism, and in the other you steal civilized Christian men and women, often your own sons and daughters; for Thomas Jefferson Randolph said, long ago, that 'the best blood of Virginia now courses in the veins of her slaves.' The plea is perfectly absurd, that in the one case it is an attempt to reduce innocent freeman to slavery, and in the other that it is simply a transfer of those who are rightfully held in bondage. The Hon. Mr. Goulden of Georgia, who boasted in the Douglas Convention at Baltimore, a few weeks ago, that he had slaves on his plantation fresh from Africa, has just as good a title to them as property, as ever had George Washington or Thomas Jefferson, or any other slaveholder that ever lived, to stain his hands with human guilt. If it be piracy to enslave a man born in Africa, then, by the principles of eternal justice, every slaveholder in the South deserves to die to-day. Slavery is murder, for in its very essence is involved the surrender of all the means of protecting and preserving life. It was not poetic license for Homer to say—

'God fixed it certain, that whatever day  
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He not only loses the will to do and to act as a natural being, but he must also give up the animal instinct of self-defence, and become at once, to use the language of that greatest of ancient philosophers, a '*living instrument*.' The murderous character of the system finds daily illustrations in every Southern newspaper that reaches the North—the shooting and burning of slaves—by those infernal fiends in human shape, whose cowardly skulls, in their midnight slumbers, are made to see God's avenging angel of insurrection hovering about them.

Not long since, we had the report of a slave-mother near Florence, in Kentucky, who, after she had been sold on the auction-block with her little girl in her arms—for the purpose of being sent to one of the slave-consuming States of the South, for whose benefit this internal slave-trade is carried on by the General Government—bethinking herself of the many wrongs which she, as a wife and mother, had been compelled to suffer, in her unprotected condition, turned away from the scene—her soul filled with that sublime woe which has made the story of Virginia immortal, in the classics of ancient Rome—she knocked out the brains of this precious jewel which God had lent her, saying that she 'would never rear a child to labor for another without wages.' (Applause.) This is only one scene in the dismal history of this internal slave-trade, which Abraham Lincoln has never given himself the trouble, as a statesman, to think about. I pray God, on this anniversary day, if consistent with his almighty purposes, to comfort and bless this poor slave-mother wherever she is in her chains; but thrice-cursed, is my earnest prayer forevermore, be the man or the party that refuses to lend his or its

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influence to the overthrow of this abominable institution in the land! (Applause.)

The Boston *Atlas and Bee* never gets tired with telling the people of Massachusetts about their constitutional obligations and the rights of the South,—as though a piece of paper, which our dishonest fathers put their names to, when they gave their souls to the devil, was to be regarded by us as more sacred than human freedom! If my life and liberty are made to depend upon a majority of votes expressed on a piece of paper, then there is no safety for man on earth, and our Government is nothing but the catchword of rogues, and the sooner it is dissolved, the better. Upon such ethics, the Legislature of Massachusetts may license a man to go through the State, and brain every baby born with blue eyes. I am not certain, however, that humanity may not yet demand such a condition of things, unless this blue-eyed Saxon race can be taught better manners. Better that the whole race had been brained ere they left the German forest, than that, through their instrumentality, these millions of innocent persons should be doomed to slavery! It were better far that this Government should perish to-morrow, and be blotted from the map of nations forever, than that the poorest man in the world should be robbed of his liberty to save it. (Applause.)

I wouldn't sacrifice a sick dog to save a State that would set up the brazen image of Daniel Webster in her capitol, and tolerate upon the platform on commencement-day, in one of her most honorable literary institutions for the advancement of her sons, that most profligate wretch and abandoned political scoun-

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drel that ever lived in any age or country, Stephen A. Douglas. (Applause.)

A pagan king, eighteen centuries ago, commanded the death of all the male children in Judea as a governmental necessity, just as these political parties are now demanding the sacrifice of the negro, in order to perpetuate this Government. We ought to make it a national matter, as an act of gratitude to our patron political saint, to dig up the rotten bones of this monster of India, and carry them to the Capitol of these American States, and with splendid eulogy and pompous panegyric lift his memory from the gibbet which the accumulated diary of the ages has erected, to the loftiest niche in the pantheon of American Heroes. Nay, more than this; we should, instead of sending expeditions to the Arctic Circle to search for the remains of Sir John Franklin, direct them to search ocean's shore and earth's secret places for the bones of the pirate Kidd, and take them to Bunker Hill, and there erect a monument to successful villainy that will rival in solid grandeur that old grey shaft, with its cap-stone kissing the clouds. Since we have dethroned God and enthroned the devil, let us be consistent, and have a devilish good time (Laughter and loud applause.)

I have no respect, Mr. President, for these slaveholding institutions that men are trying to save by telling a bigger lie than their fathers. I repudiate the whole Government as one of the necessities of freedom, and would spit upon it as a mean and worthless thing—a league with Satan as black as that which bound together, for the purposes of organized plunder, the pirates of the Gulf, or the Murrells of

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Thirty millions of white men have agreed and pledged themselves, by the conditions of this slaveholding Union, to steal and appropriate to their own use the intellectual and physical faculties of four millions black men. *The bargain is complete between them.* The proudest trophies of American statesmanship are the efforts of the Clays and Bentons of the South, and the Websters and Choates of the North, to keep inviolate this agreement to steal our liberty. All that either party can offer us in return for our votes, is future devotion to the continuation of this covenant to enslave the negro. And I pledge myself here, to-day, in the sight of Heaven, that if ever I shall falter in any effort, either by word or deed, to overthrow this bloody despotism that rests with the stillness of death upon four millions of my countrymen, may my right hand forget its cunning, and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth! (Applause.)

A robber is defined to be one who takes by force or privacy that which rightfully belongs to another. By this definition, we are a combination of robber-States, instead of capital-States, as that political sphinx of New York would have it, whose soul and heart all went to head and brain when he made his great bid in the U.S. Senate for a Presidential nomination.

If there is one thing more than another that rightfully belongs to a man, it is his head, his hands, his heart, his body. These he received not from man, but from the God of the Universe, and by whom only he can lawfully be deprived of them. The man or government that steps between me and my God, for

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the purpose of robbing me of my freedom, assumes at once all the bloody habiliments of a robber, and I am morally bound to resist such an outrage at every hazard. (Applause.) I care nothing about the circumstances that influenced the actions of the men who consented to this shameful contract, nor do I care, so far as the purposes of the discussion are concerned, whether the Constitution is pro-slavery or anti-slavery; it is enough for me to know, that so long as we, individually as men or collectively as States, remain in a state of loyalty to a Government which we are bound to assist in the slavery of every sixth person in the Government, we are simply a band of robbers; and to the overthrow and utter annihilation of such a combination is to me, and must be to every honest man, the highest test of duty. This is the only course left those who wish to be relieved from all support of slavery. We can never do an anti-slavery work, if we consent to compromise principle in the least, in order to secure temporary success. Looking at the struggle which resulted in the abolition of slavery in the British Islands, we are taught one very impressive lesson—that God's work is not to be advanced by surrendering to the devil half of the kingdom of Heaven, if he will only let you have the other half. This will do for a successful political juggler like Lincoln, but will never serve a high anti-slavery purpose, such as ours.

When, some seventy years ago, the first organization was effected in England for the purpose of making war upon slavery, Granville Sharpe proposed to them that, instead of directing their efforts against the slave-trade, it would be the most politic to at-

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tack the system of Colonial slavery at once. But timid men could think of no such thing; they thought it bad policy to attempt to accomplish the whole thing at once; they wanted to attack the territories, the outposts, the slave-trade. But Granville Sharpe, with a keener perception of the moral necessities of the hour, turned away from such counsel, and uttered this prophetic declaration:—‘You are temporising with Justice. God, when He founded the universe, made it certain that every bargain with the devil should weaken the man who makes it.’

The conduct of British abolitionists, at the commencement of that memorable struggle, was strikingly similar to that strange madness which has taken possession of the political abolitionists of our day, who shut their eyes upon the earnest admonition of all past history, and blindly pursue the very same policy of moderation towards the American slave system that covered with defeat and disappointment those British leaders after thirty years of effort. They thought then, as the Republican party now thinks, if we can only destroy the slave-trade, the system must die out. ‘If we can only prevent its extension into new territories,’ says Henry Wilson, ‘the moral influence of an advancing civilization will wear it away.’ I have, it is true, great faith in the sweet and gentle influence of Christianity as an efficient instrument in reforming the manners of men; but history has demonstrated that a race of slaveholders are seldom, if ever, reached in that way. They form a distinct class of sinners, requiring often other than Christian remedies to teach them to respect the rights of men. The moral or political forces, therefore, that can hope to accomplish its extinction, must not leave

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it alone to its own hateful meditations, but must grapple with it—without compromise, without concession—with the consistency of truth and the logic of an almighty purpose, determined that, in the Union or out of the Union, live or die, survive or perish, to unseat the bloody monster and trample him in the dust. (Applause.)

To be generous with slavery, is either to underrate its power or welcome defeat; for it is not the weak and impotent thing that the discussions of the hour would have the masses believe, but a real power in the land, fortified by social, political and religious combinations, linked and interlinked with the selfish instincts of thirty millions of people, who need the most radical truth to be convinced that God pays, in the end, a better dividend than the devil.

To the great work of revolutionizing public sentiment are we now summoned, that this proud and guilty nation may be saved from God's avenging bolt of retributive justice; for, not till tyrants and slaveholders can scale the battlements of heaven and drive God from his eternal throne can they crush out in the black man's bosom his determination to be free. (Loud applause.)

Mr. President, it is written on every page of the mournful and melancholy past, that the slave is either to walk to liberty by a generous restoration of his rights by those who have robbed him, or else through a sea of blood over the broken body of the slaveholder. If this is to be the end of slavery, and there is no escape from the dreadful necessity of revolution, then, I say, the sooner the better; and may God speed the right! (Loud applause.)

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