

Resolved, That the principles and object of the New York Committee of Vigilance, commend themselves to the efficient aid of all the friends of God and man.

The truth, Mr. Chairman, is the great mirror in which all principles and plans for the moral welfare of man are to be surveyed: and any principles and measures that will not endure unblanched the concentrated rays the of truth, cannot be pressed home upon us with the binding force of righteous obligation; but if, on other hand, any principles and objects which will endure the burning rays of truth, though heated seven times hotter than they are wont to be heated to try other objects and measures, which claim and receive a very large share of the benefactions and sympathies of an enlightened Christian public, then may our appeal be urged with more confidence and pertinacity.

By this test, sir, let the claims of this committee be tried; if found wanting, let them retire from public gaze and sink away from the defeat into the silent abode of forgetfulness; for crushed indeed are those whom the truth slays!

What then, sir, are the principles of this committee?

They are the same as those found in the Declarations of American Independence: "That all men are born free and equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are *life, LIBERTY and the PURSUIT of happiness.*" They are the same as those found in the

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writings of the ablest civilians and divines in England and America. The Blackstones—the Broughams—the Clarksons—the Wilberforces—the Westleys of England, and the Kents—the Channings—the Edwardes—not to mention the host of mighty minds which have, within a few years, poured a flood of light upon the principles of personal and civil liberty. They are those which no man can construct an argument to deny to a fellow man, unstained with crime, without showing one equally conclusive against his own enjoyment of rational freedom; they are those which reason and all just laws sanction, denying the right of man to hold property in man. They are contained in the book of Revelation—Jehovah's Magna Charta to the moral, intelligent universe; in which the rights of all are defined and guarded by tremendous penalties, and the various duties which man owes to his brother man, are pointed out; and around these great rights and duties, God has thrown the adamantine wall of his own protection; and whoever invades them, does it at his peril, for they are defended by Omnipotence; and before they can be stricken down with impunity, his throne must be destroyed. It was the contemplation of this terrible fact to all transgressors, that made Jefferson fear, surrounded and upholding by his influence and practice, slavery's dark empire, and amid his deep agitation, he declared that he trembled for his country when he reflected that God was just, and that his *justice* could sleep *forever*; and that in the event of a servile war, he had no attribute that could take part with the oppressor.

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But, sir, do not this committee *interfere* with the rights of the slave States, violate the compact, and endanger the glorious Union? No sir. Those whom they assist they find in the "possession of life, liberty and" only assist them in "the pursuit of happiness," which they have not found at the South, amid its galling chains, bloody stripes, and starvations and unpaid toil, and its cruel separations; and this committee aid to continue their flight, for let it be remembered that the Genius of Liberty has consecrated no holy ground, erected no sacred temple upon American soil, where millions of her children can enjoy "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

But, sir, do not the Nashes and Boudinots exhibit the roving commissions of Governors, backed by legislative enactments, and will not the Rikers declare that it is plain that certain persons are "goods and chattels to all intents and purposes whatsoever;" and, therefore, they must "owe service" for life, and their posterity forever? They do! And we ask them to pause and hear the language of Lord Brougham, he says: "Tell me not of rights—talk not of the property of the planter in his slaves. I deny the right—I acknowledge not the property. The principles, the feelings of our common nature rise in rebellion against it.—Be the appeal made to the understanding or to the heart, the sentence is against it. In vain you tell of laws that sanction such a claim! There is a law above all the enactments of human codes,

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the same throughout the world, the same in all times, such as it was before the daring genius of Columbus pierced the night ages, and opened to one world the source of power, wealth and knowledge to another, all unutterable woes, such as it is this day; it is the law written by the finger of God on the heart of man; and by that law, unchangeable and eternal, while men despise fraud and loathe rapine, and abhor blood, they shall reject with *indignation* the *wild* and *guilty* fantasy that *man can hold property in man!* In vain you appeal to treaties, to covenants between nations. The covenants of the Almighty, whether old or new denounce such unholy pretensions."

Statesmen, orators, philanthropists and poets, the best and greatest world has ever seen, might be brought to almost any number to substantiate this opinion, if it were necessary, but it is not, for it rests upon the foundation of immutable truth. We ask them, farther to look at God's Magna Charta of human rights, and examine their claim in the light that JUSTICE shines upon it, and like the Vermont judge, we demand a sight of their bill of sale from the court of heaven, signed by the Almighty; for we believe with Weld that the Bible, so far from being "the asylum of slavery, as is its sepulchre; its city of refuge, the city of destruction; that flees from light into the sun; from heat into devouring fire; and from the voice of God into the thickest of His thunders." The great LAW OF LOVE consumes their claim, withers, and blasts, and annihilates the avaricious lust in which it is conceived.

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Sir, do we not mistake, and talk about abstract rights? What do they mean? "One thing is clear," says Dr. Abercromie, "that our abstractions must be corrected by reason. We deny, emphatically deny that human beings have no rights, only as they "wander in dens and caves of the earth," without the pale of civil society; and ask them to look at the manifestations and endowments with which they are clothed, and who has a right to interfere with the legitimate exercise of their sympathies and constitutional propensities? Can men speculate away the relations that exist between husband and wife, parent and child? and can any think even of the poor slave, without thinking of his dear little ones that play upon his knee a few years, before they are torn away and sold, and of his companion, who by her smile, made even his cabin seem like "sweet home?" I know that it is said, that the poor slaves have no mind for elevation, and are scarcely reached in their debasement by the heavenly light." No mind's for elevation in this country, but in *Africa they have!* and have they not in Canada? May this committee, and the noble, self-denying Hiram Wilson be allowed to testify! If they are not reached by the heavenly rays, it is because the opacity of those bodies upon which the rays is so great, such non-conductors before it can "reach" them. — With intellectual powers, not susceptible of mental improvement. Behold, then, the assembled wisdom of all the slaveholding States speaking out in Legislative enactments, "by authority," making a penal offence to instruct those who are with-

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out mental capacity!

They are wise! and may such wisdom die with them!

The principles of the Vigilance Committee, then, are sanctioned by reason and revelation, and they are but the Executive of these [dving] principles, founded by the Almighty in all the relations which he ahs established and defined to be of binding force and perpetual obligation among sentient men, and will not, cannot destroy any union but that founded in violence, fraud and outrage.

Any object looking to those principles for protection and authority, must find a response in the bosom of reflecting minds, and show them the necessity of assisting those who pass this way in "the pursuit of happiness."

Those who come with fear and trembling and apply for aid, are flying from the cruel prison house – the dark land of their unpaid toil – the ground stained with their blood, and wet with their bitter tears – they have journeyed with scant food, guided by the palelight of the North star – the sombre night has been their day – the cold damp earth their cheerless bed – the dreary day has been full of danger and alarm – every stirring leaf spoke to them of the slavehunter – every sound told them of the bloodhound, in their fitful slumbers, their fancy drawing its images from the sad realities which have surrounded them, they seem to see their raging master, dog and gun – they feel his merciless grasp – the galling fetters bound anew –

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the heavy blows falling thick and fast – their warm blood gushing forth to the ground – their bodies writhing under new tortures, until, in their alarm and fright, they awake and find their dream but just not realized, and thus while fear and hope alternately reign in their hearts, they pursue again their flight, not knowing into whose hands they shall fall. At this point, this committee find them tormented with overwhelming anxiety – pursued by unrelenting foes – surrounded by detestable spies, who wish to live upon the heart's blood of their fellow men, and for a few dollars would consign them again to hopeless bondage, and if possible, to severer punishment, for attempting the "pursuit of happiness," and assists them by the authority of their great charter, which says: – "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant, that which escaped from his master unto thee." To stay here would be to be in a state of continual jeopardy—for this is the slavecatcher's hunting ground; and it is for such persons, thus situated, that this committee ask efficient aid, and in view of their principles and the situation of those whom they appeal; is it not true that their operations commend themselves to all the friends of God and man? They do commend themselves to every mind, and plead in earnest and affectionate authority in every soul that has a father's, a mother's or a child's interest and happiness throbbing there. What an untold amount of mental, moral, and social happiness have this committee secured, and do they propose to secure for those whom they assist! How wide and un-

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bounded is the prospect—how bright the joys which they open for them and their posterity in this world and through that which is to come! If we love social happiness and joy – if we love domestic peace and comfort – if we would see the father's heart leap with gladness and the mother smile with unalloyed happiness – if we would have their children surrounded by parental protection – if we would have them rise in the scale of moral elevation – if we would have them grasp immortal pleasures through a Redeemer – then the principles and object of this committee commend themselves to all the friends of God and man.

The fact that the glory of God and the right of his son Jesus Christ to reign, and the happiness of men are completely blended together, are identical in this world, is a thought of unspeakable beauty, power, and consolation, to every virtuous and intelligent mind toiling, as such minds will do, to promote any object based upon the principles of His truth, and in harmony with those relations which He has established. Such efforts, tending as they do, to promote the glory of God, and to hasten the time when Jesus Christ shall reign, and to secure the highest happiness of man; no one that professes to honor God, and regard the relations and principles which He has established in his moral government, can consistently refuse their sympathy and cooperation; they may not say that they love God, but do not sympathize with this committee; for no individual can regard the rights

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of God, and violate those of man – they are inseparably connected. God measures our love to him, our fidelity to his cause, our regard for his character, by our efforts to do good to the bodies and souls of our fellow men, by our “remembrance of those in bonds, as bound with them.”

Friends of God and man, then, give this committee your efficient [aid], they are the palladium of the rights and interest of the poor and distressed; let it not be said at the last great day, by him who will judge, that *ye did it not unto me!*

Think for whom the appeal is made, think of the anxious mother with her boy in her trembling arms, as she flies from the hateful bondage, sustaining his feeble existence by the current that wastes her own! O! A MOTHER’S LOVE! See her pressing him a little nearer to her aching heart, as the darkness of night gathers around her unsheltered head, and the portentous cloud, the flaming lightnings, and the rough-voiced thunder, warns her of the power if the fast approaching storm. She has no covert to flee to from its drenching fury, no comfortable apartments, no affectionate husband and kind friends to cheer her fainting soul; but alone, with her tender infant and her God, in the wild woods she braves the pitiless tempest – fit emblem of the slaveholders wrath; but no, I do the storm injustice, its fury will soon be past, and again will the sun pour his golden rays around her; but the avarice of the slave system knows no end, amid its clouds and storms, the sun of liberty, the hope of the human race, never rises to bid the darkness of oppression and sorrow flee away. When the pen

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of justice shall exhibit the truth concerning the hundred that have escaped from the rigors of the South, deeds of noble daring, of patient suffering, of heroic endurance and of calm fortitude, when hope almost forsook the heart, will be presented to the admiring gaze of the world, which earth's proudest warriors never exhibited.

Let the committee, then, receive your warm sympathy, your vigorous co-operation, your efficient aid; let them be able to render timely assistance to the worthy applicants who, after bursting their fetters — dashing down their chains — leaping from their dark prison house — scaling the lofty mountain — sweeping through the wide valley — plunging across the rapid stream — escaping a thousand dangers, let them ascend the free river and dash over the bosom of the lake with a swiftness that shall mock the pursuit of the American eagle—proud and cruel bird, once the glorious emblem of virtuous liberty—but now, alas! stooping from his Alpine height to fix his bloody talons in the poor and defenceless, and to spread his broad wings over the unsightly monster of slavery. By your timely and efficient aid, may the poor victim escape and stand on free soil, and breathe free air by the side of the British lion, who will never degrade his noble nature, where justice and freedom reign, and where the once slaveman can lift up his unfettered hands, and swell his free soul, and exclaim: "Praise to the God of heaven and earth, I am free, I am free, my wife is my own — my babes are my own — my house is my own! WE ARE FREE!"

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May 22, 1841
Beman, Amos G.
Colored American

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