August 1, 1856
Pennington, J. W. C.
The reasonableness of the Abolition of Slavery in the South, a legitimate inference from the success of British Emancipation – An Address Delivered at Hartford, Conn.…
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ADDRESS.

IN 1638, two hundred and eighteen years ago, twenty African slaves were landed upon the shores of New England. From this beginning, slavery spread over this fair continent, until the roots of the upas tree penetrated every part of its soil. But free soil will resist the noxious weed, if *well cultivated*. It is a pleasing reflection that the first act of emancipation took effect in New England.

In Massachusetts, in 1780.

In Rhode Island, in 1782.

In Connecticut and Pennsylvania, in 1784.

In Chili, in 1811.

In Buenos Ayres, in 1812.

In Columbia, in 1821.

In Mexico, in 1821.

In New York, in 1827.

In British Isles, in 1838.

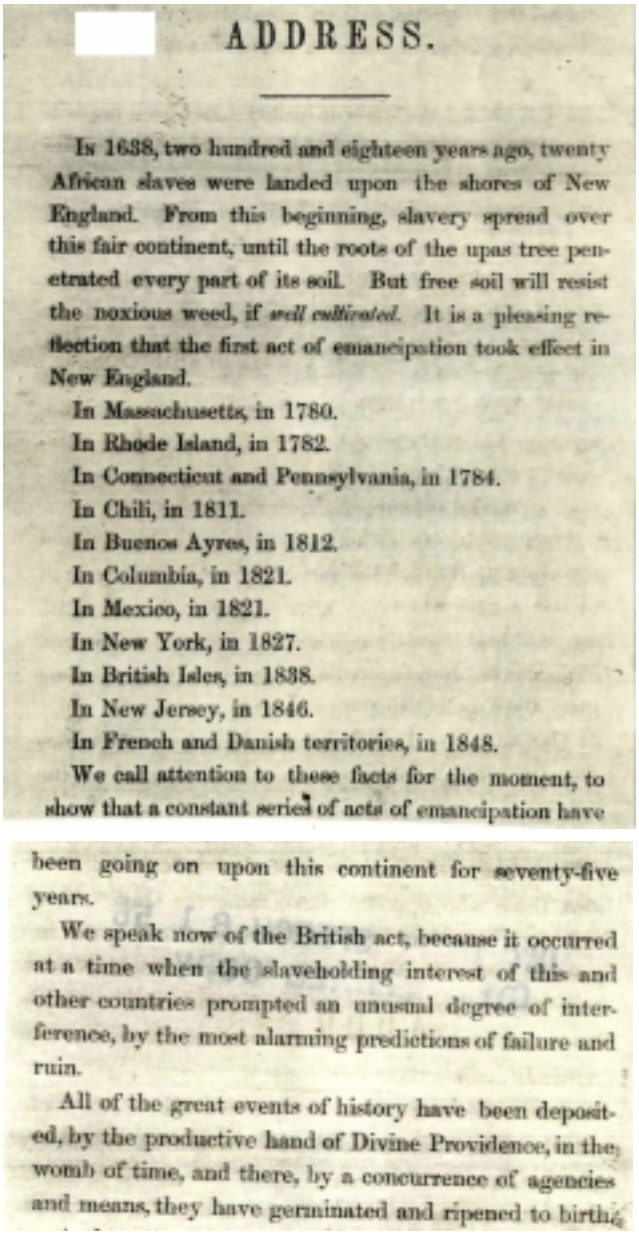
In New Jersey, in 1846.

In French and Danish territories, in 1848.

We call attention to these facts for the moment, to show that a constant series of acts of emancipation have been going on upon this continent for seventy-five years.

We speak now of the British act, because it occurred at a time when the slaveholding interest of this and other countries prompted an unusual degree of interference, by the most alarming predictions of failure and ruin.

All of the great events of history have been deposited, by the productive hand of Divine Providence, in the womb of time, and there, by a concurrence of agencies and means, they have germinated and ripened to birth.



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And under the husbandry of God all-wise, time never fails to bring her germs to life and vitality. She never dwarfs or miscarries her offspring.

Events are classed into families, and the one with which we are concerned to-day, is the youngest member of the family to which it belongs; born in a momentous age of the world, and under the auspices of so great a nation, it is heir of glories and honors yet untold by mortal tongue.

Placing our feet in the broad pathway of history, and traveling up through the vast expanse of time, in search of the period when the germ of this event was sown, we shall find that it was when the great Clarkson, and Wilberforce, and Granville Sharp were young among men, and younger in the cause of humanity.

The annals of British history furnish some curious facts in connection with these worthy names, on the subject of emancipation.

From the commencement of the slave-trade, there were those who opposed the commerce; Queen Elizabeth, in whose time Sir John Hawkins began the importation into the West Indies, in 1562, is said to have had serious doubts of its lawfulness; she sent for Hawkins, and cautioned him against importing the Africans against their free consent.

But it was long before any positive effort was made either to check or abolish the slave-trade or slavery itself.

And it is a remarkable fact, that when the first efforts were put forth by British abolitionists, they found their first work to do in the metropolis.

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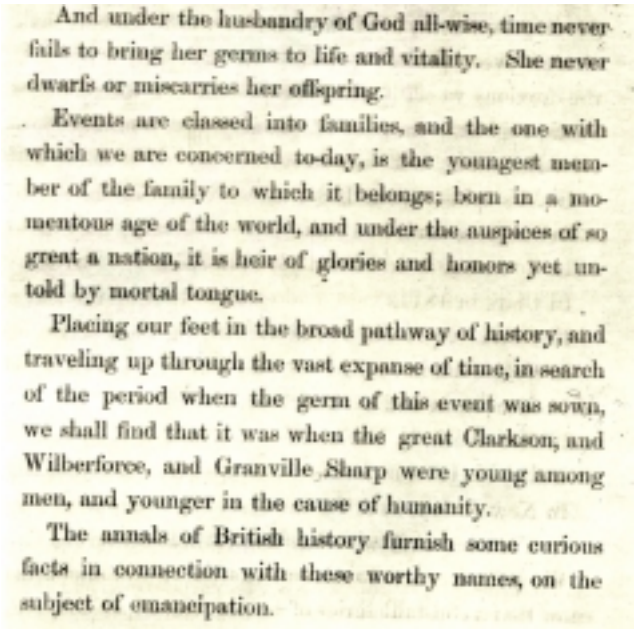
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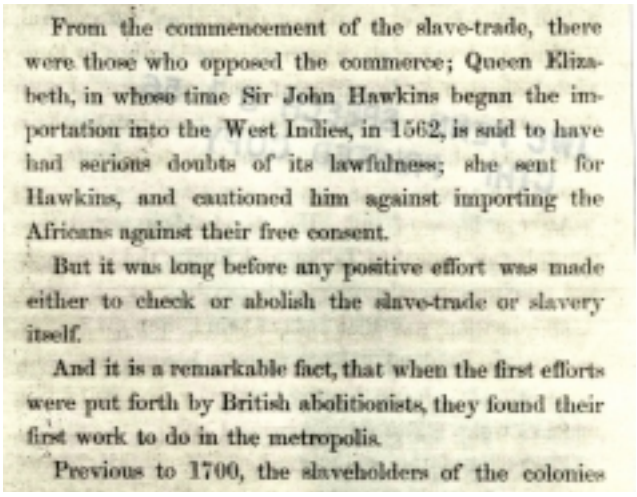
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were in the constant habit of carrying their slaves into Great Britain, and especially the city of London, and there by substituting the term "servant" for slave, and omitting the harsher treatment of slavery, they held them, to all practical intents and purposes, as slaves.

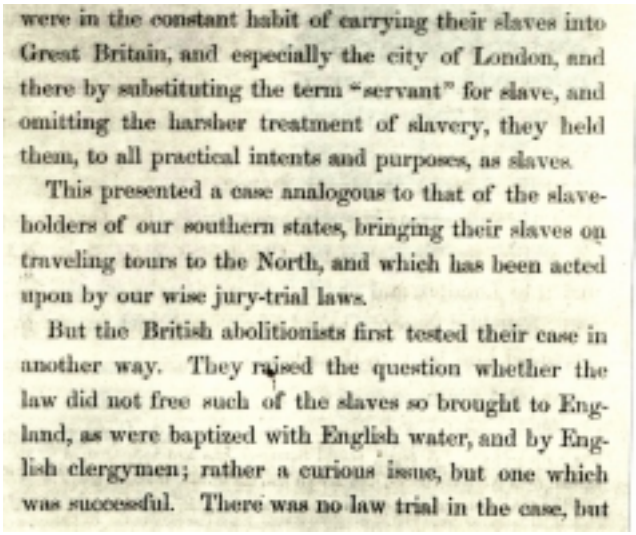
This presented a case analogous to that of the slave-holders of our southern states, bringing their slaves on traveling tours to the North, and which has been acted upon by our wise jury-trial laws.

But the British abolitionists first tested their case in another way. They raised the question whether the law did not free such of the slaves so brought to England, as were baptized with English water, and by English clergymen; rather a curious issue, but one which was successful. There was no trial law in the case, but public opinion seems to have determined by general consent, that every slave on receiving baptism in England, became free by virtue of that ordinance. Upon this, many of the slaves got persons to stand as their godfathers, who, when they were molested, protected them from arrest.

After a lapse of time, the slaveholders tested this point by an appeal to Talbot and Yorke, the attorney, and solicitor-generals.

The decision was that a slave being brought by his master into England, did not thereby become free, and that such slave being baptized, did not invalidate the master's right. *This decision was in* 1729.

The effect of this was to awaken the abolitionists to greater efforts; it brought out Granville Sharp's celebrated work on the "*injustice and dangerous tendency of tolerating slavery in England*," and other writings and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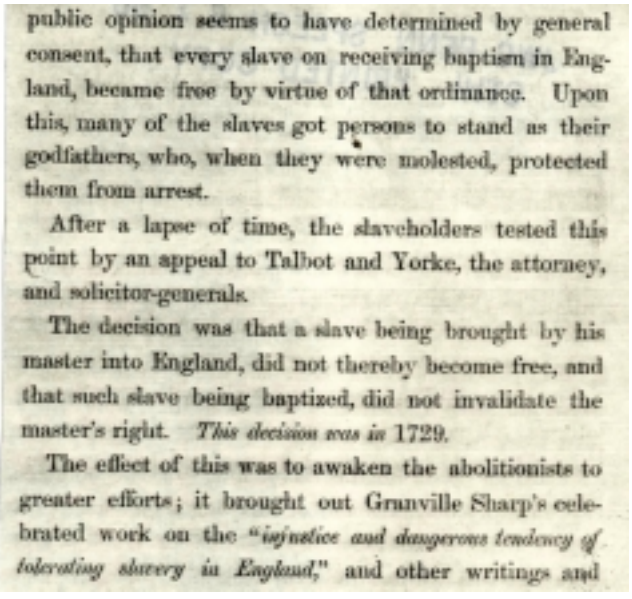
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measures of kindred character.

REIGN OF TERROR

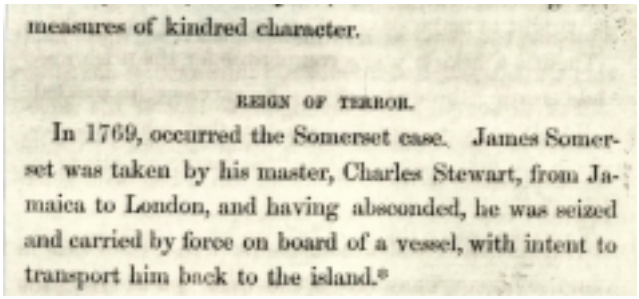
In 1769, occurred the Somerset case. James Somerset was taken by his master, Charles Stewart, from Jamaica to London, and having absconded, he was seized and carried by force on board of a vessel, with intent to transport him back to the island.*

This case was tested on this question, *whether a slave by coming into England became free*. It was argued three times by Glynn, Davy, Hargrave, and Mansfield, and twice decided against them. The third time the decision was that "*as soon as any slave touched English soil he became free whether baptized or not!*"

This decision was in 1772, and was gained after a struggle of forty-three years.

Having now driven slavery from the metropolis, the spirit of abolitionism began to look out upon slavery and the slave-trade with indomitable energy.

The year of 1785 presents us with another matter of interest. A voice came forth from the university of Cambridge, which has sounded long and loud even to this day.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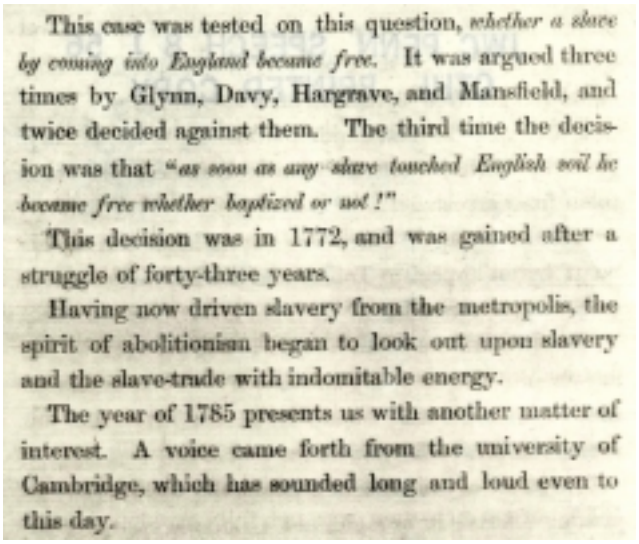
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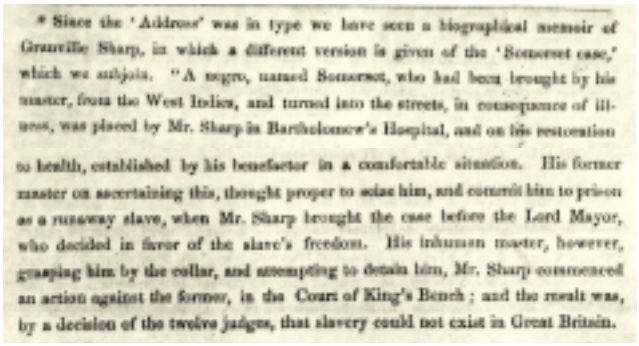
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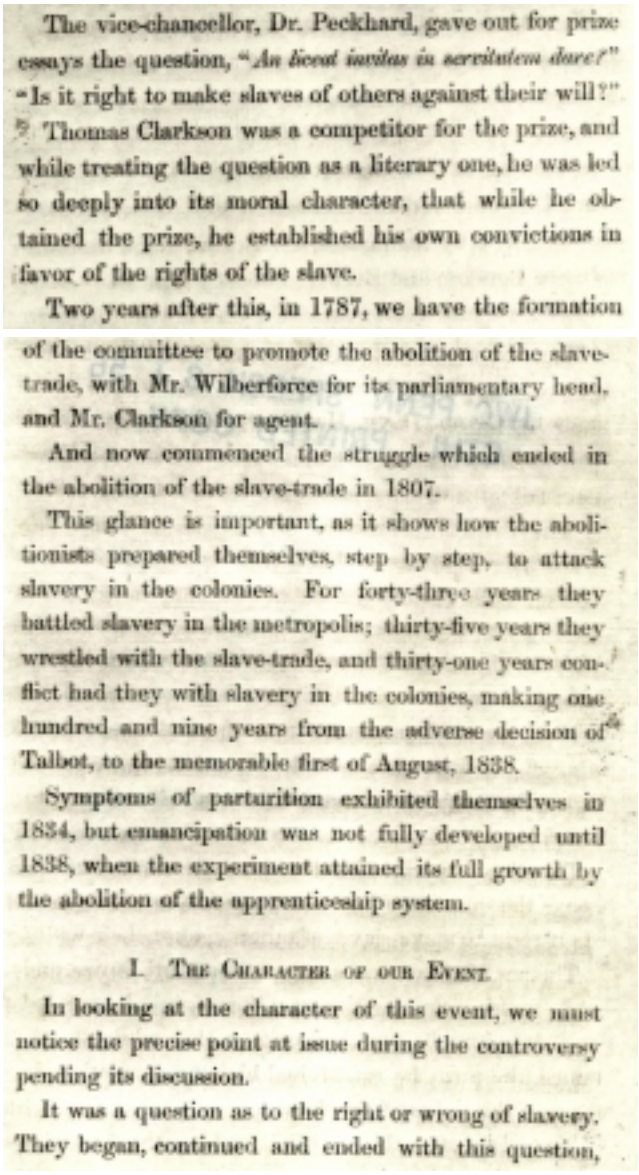
Two years after this, in 1787, we have the formation of the committee to promote the abolition of the slave-trade, with Mr. Wilberforce for its parliamentary head, and Mr. Clarkson for agent.

And now commenced the struggle which ended in the abolition of the slave-trade in 1807.

This glance is important, as it shows how the abolitionists prepared themselves, step by step, to attack slavery in the colonies. For forty-three years they battled slavery in the metropolis; thirty-five years they wrestled with the slave-trade, and thirty-one years conflict had they with slavery in the colonies, making one hundred and nine years from the adverse decision of Talbot, to the memorable first of August, 1838.

Symptoms of parturition exhibited themselves in 1834, but emancipation was not fully developed until 1838, when the experiment attained its full growth by the abolition of the apprenticeship system.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I. THE CHARACTER OF OUR EVENT.

In looking at the character of this event, we must notice the precise point at issue during the controversy pending its discussion.

It was a question as to the right or wrong of slavery. They began, continued and ended with this question,

Is slavery right, or is it wrong? The abolitionists, of course, took the ground that it was wrong, and they made progress just in proportion as they proved to the sober views of the community, that their position was correct.

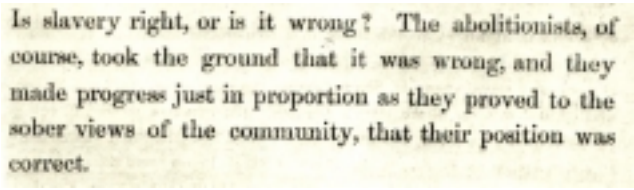
This was the identical question discussed by Mr. Clarkson in his essay. It has been found even in the most corrupt ages of the world, that when a question is placed fairly before the moral vision of men, it will seldom fail to be decided according to its true character.

The British abolitionists understood this, and they were ever vigilant to guide their question to its true issue. They displayed their talents and energy in collecting and arranging their antislavery facts so as to carry the question home to the moral feelings of the nation.

The West India emancipation was a response to the question which they had faithfully and skillfully pressed home; a response too in the negative.

Their opponents had sought at various times, and by various means, to throw a shade of contempt upon them. It was said that they were men of one idea, and of one song, and that that one idea and one song had grown threadbare upon their lips; a stereotyped saying that has been taken from the vile vocabulary of those transatlantic abusers of good men, to fix on abolitionists of our own day and country.

But though it is difficult to conceive how a man with any tolerable share of intellect can have less than *two* IDEAS, at least, yet if we were driven to the alternative, we would much rather have *one* good idea of humanity, and live an die vindicating that, than to have ten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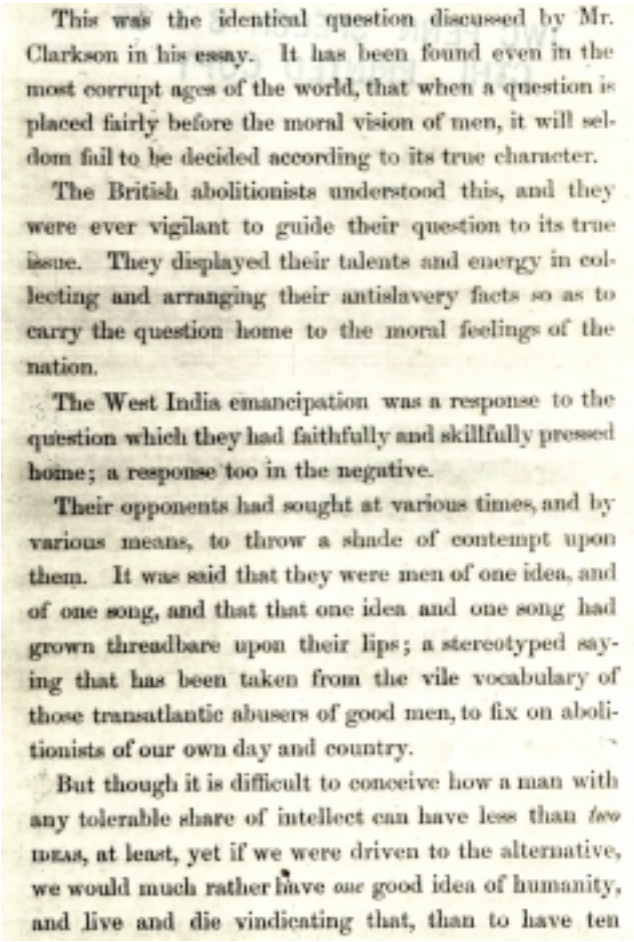
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thousand of cruelty and blood, such as fill a slaveholder's mind.

Yes, let it be one IDEA; and let it, like the mustard in our Saviour's parable, be the smallest of all seed; only let it be carefully sown, though in tears, as well as scorn and ignominy; and let it be carefully cultivated, and in due time the birds of the air may have a jubilee in its branches, while the care-worn prisoner may shade himself beneath it.

One idea! Would you not know, Mr. caviler, that no idea of human liberty can be fruitless or prove abortive? Not an argument used by the British abolitionists for the half century next preceding the event we are this day commemorating, had failed of its object, but had established itself immovably in the moral convictions of the nation. As evidence of this, when just previous to 1834, they made a bold push for the issue, the question was so well understood by the men, woman and children of the nation, and its character was so well appreciated, that their opponents could not slide in a false issue, nor could they divert the minds of the people from the true and proper point, "Is it right to make slaves of others against their will? Is it right to continue men in slavery who have lost their liberty by no crime of their own?"

As the question came up for adjudication, the ground was disputed inch by inch, and the abolitionists did not stop to ask who had a vested property in the slave, whether king, royal dukes, lords or commoners. Nor did they stay to ask who had been silly enough to set his death-palsied hand to an instrument leaving the estate

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of his widow and children vested in the bones and blood of God's poor. They did not regard the argument predicated upon the fact that slavery bore "the date of days of older times," nor yet the objection that it was sanctified by legislation.

They condemned slavery in all its length and its breadth—in its total character. They pushed their arguments to the throne, and they spoke in thunder-tones to the parliament, DECLARING, that the enslavement of men is a monstrous crime, which endangers the very existence of a nation, by exposing it to the wrath of heaven; that freedom is the slave's birth right; that the only way to do him justice is to set him free immediately and unconditionally; that the slave's ignorance which has been entailed upon him by slavery, is no argument for delaying his emancipation; that whatever preparation he may need for freedom, can not be made while in a state of slavery. And moreover, that as the best way to fit a man for slavery is to place him in a state of slavery, so the best way to fit a man for freedom is to lay upon him the responsibility of acting the part of a free man.

THE APPRENTICESHP SYSTEM, with the twenty millions of pounds sterling, was no part of the plan of British abolitionists. They were political expedients of the government to appease the planters.

The abolitionists accepted the apprenticeship system rather than delay their success, and the twenty millions, to show that they had no ill-will toward the planters.

When they came out with a long and mournful face, pleading ruin and bankruptcy, the abolitionists were willing to let them succeed in begging the twenty millions as a boon of pecuniary salvation. But when the

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abolitionists found that the apprenticeship system did not work well, they treated it as David treated Saul's armor, they put it off.

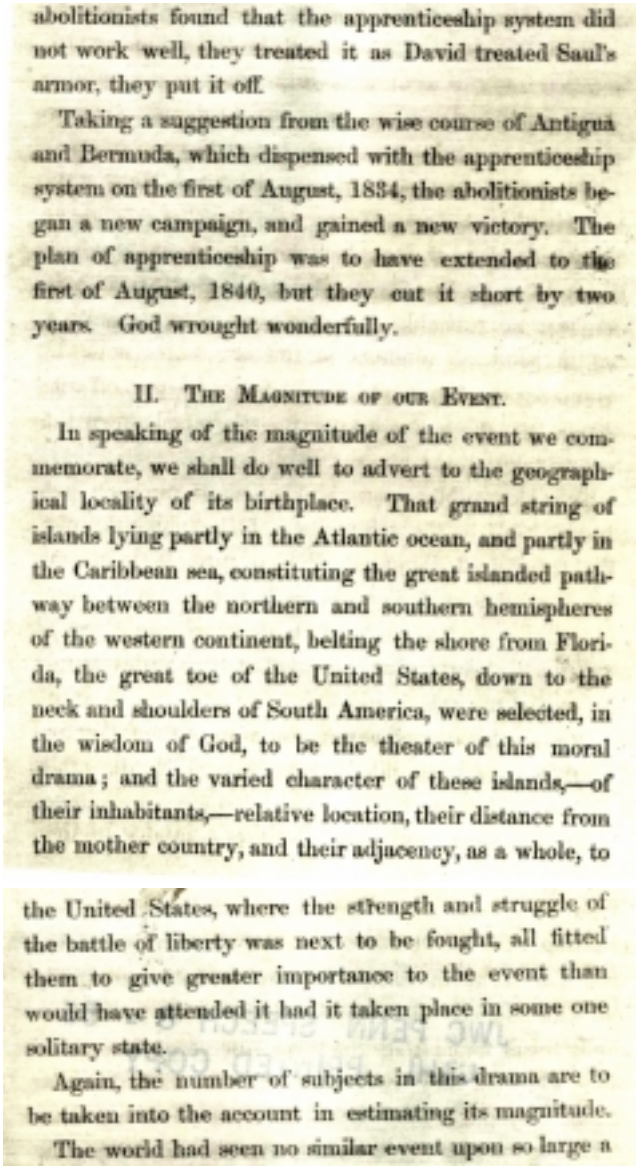
Taking a suggestion from the wise course of Antigua and Bermuda, which dispensed with the apprenticeship system on the first of August, 1834, the abolitionists began a new campaign, and gained a new victory. The plan of apprenticeship was to have extended to the first of August, 1840, but they cut it short by two years. God wrought wonderfully.

II. THE MAGNITUDE OF OUR EVENT.

In speaking of the magnitude of the event we commemorate, we shall do well to advert to the geographical locality of its birthplace. That grand string of islands lying partly in the Atlantic ocean, and partly in the Caribbean sea, constituting the great islanded pathway between the northern and southern hemispheres of the western continent, belting the shore from Florida, the great toe of the United States, down to the neck and shoulders of South America, were selected, in the wisdom of God, to be the theater of this moral drama; and the varied character of these islands,—of their inhabitants,—relative location, their distance from the mother country, and their adjacency, as a whole, to the United States, where the strength and struggle of the battle of liberty was next to be fought, all fitted them to give greater importance to the event than would have attended it had it taken place in some one solitary state.

Again, the number of subjects in this drama are to be taken into the account in estimating its magnitude.

The world had seen no similar event upon so large a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Taking a suggestion from the wise course of Antigua and Bermuda, which dispensed with the apprenticeship system on the first of August, 1834, the abolitionists began a new campaign, and gained a new victory. The plan of apprenticeship was to have extended to the first of August, 1840, but they cut it short by two years. God wrought wonderfully.

II. THE MAGNITUDE OF OUR EVENT.

In speaking of the magnitude of the event we commemorate, we shall do well to advert to the geographical locality of its birthplace. That grand string of islands lying partly in the Atlantic ocean, and partly in the Caribbean sea, constituting the great islanded pathway between the northern and southern hemispheres of the western continent, belting the shore from Florida, the great toe of the United States, down to the neck and shoulders of South America, were selected, in the wisdom of God, to be the theater of this moral drama; and the varied character of these islands,—of their inhabitants,—relative location, their distance from the mother country, and their adjacency, as a whole, to

the United States, where the strength and struggle of the battle of liberty was next to be fought, all fitted them to give greater importance to the event than would have attended it had it taken place in some one solitary state.

Again, the number of subjects in this drama are to be taken into the account in estimating its magnitude.

The world had seen no similar event upon so large a

scale, since the exit of the Jews out of Egypt.

The world had seen thirty thousand Hottentots emancipated at Cape Colony; we have seen eighty-five thousand set free at Guadaloupe, and six hundred thousand at St. Domingo. But as the first two instances bear no resemblance to the one we are descanting on, in point of numbers, so the last bears none in some important respects, for those men put off the chains, to put on the knapsack:—they laid down the hoe, to take up the musket.

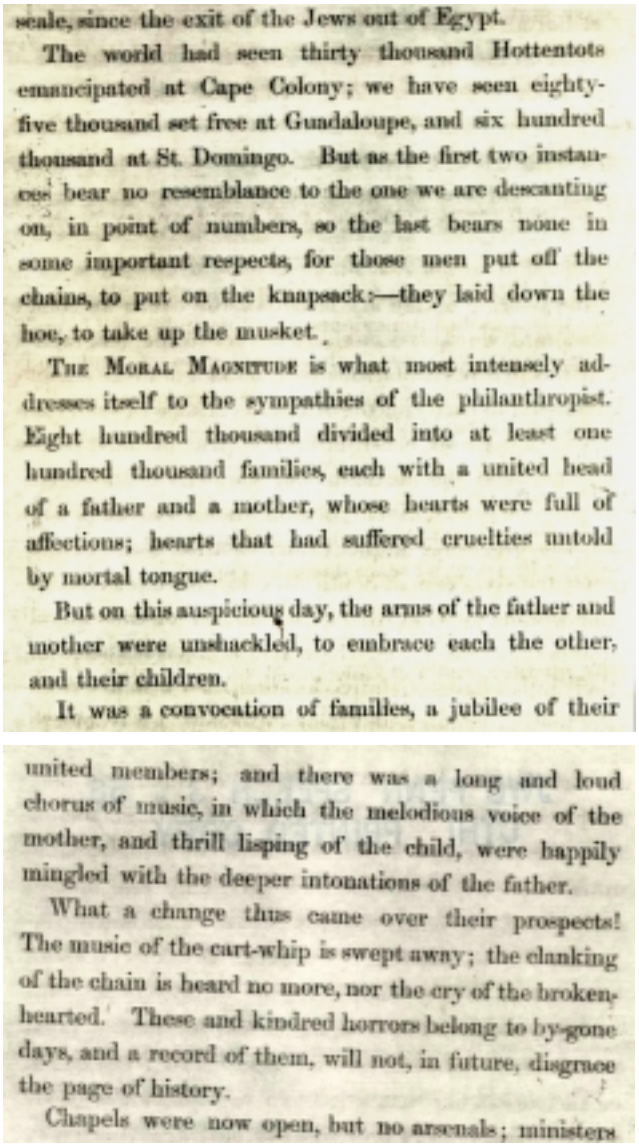
THE MORAL MAGNITUDE is what most intensely addresses itself to the sympathies of the philanthropist. Eight hundred thousand divided into at least one hundred thousand families, each with a united head of a father and a mother, whose hearts were full of affections; hearts that had suffered cruelties untold by mortal tongue.

But on this auspicious day, the arms of the father and mother were unshackled, to embrace each the other, and their children.

It was a convocation of families, a jubilee of their united members; and there was a long and loud chorus of music, in which the melodious voice of the mother, and thrill lisping of the child, were happily mingled with the deeper intonations of the father.

What a change thus came over their prospects! The music of the cart-whip is swept away; the clanking of the chain is heard no more, nor the cry of the broken-hearted. These and kindred horrors belong to by-gone days, and a record of them, will not, in future, disgrace the page of history.

Chapels were now open, but no arsenals; ministers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Chapels were now open, but no arsenals; ministers

of the gospel had enough to do, but it was a holiday for military officers and magistrates.

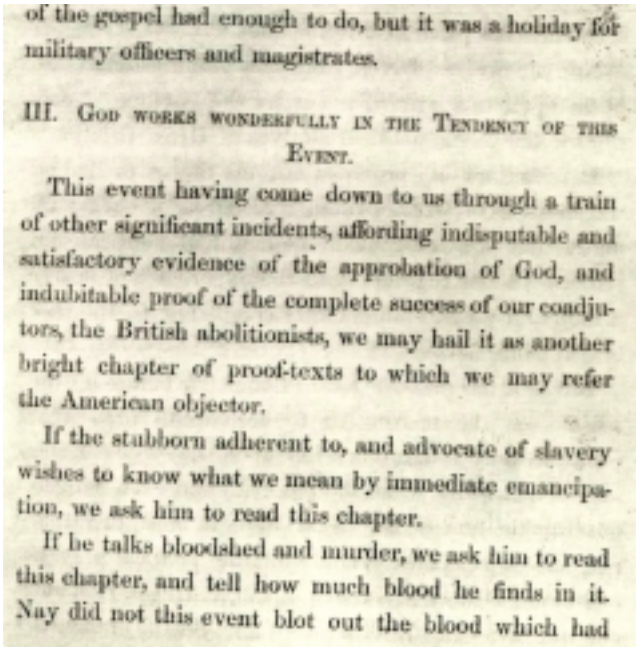
III. GOD WORKS WONDERFULLY IN THE TENDENCY OF THIS EVENT

This event having come down to us through a train of other significant incidents, affording indisputable and satisfactory evidence of the approbation of God, and indubitable proof of the complete success of our coadjutors, the British abolitionists, we may hail it as another bright chapter of proof-texts to which we may refer the American objector.

If the stubborn adherent to, and advocate of slavery wishes to know what we mean by immediate emancipation, we ask him to read this chapter.

If he talks bloodshed and murder, we ask him to read this chapter, and tell how much blood he finds in it. Nay did not this event blot out the blood which had stained the land before? Murder or homicide may have been the result of slavery, but never of emancipation. Does he talk about the slaves not being capable of taking care of themselves? We only ask him to review and study this chapter, and see how much pauperism it has inflicted upon Great Britain. We can but rejoice in the happy results of this benevolent achievement, as affording the most satisfactory proof that not only did not ill consequences follow West Indian emancipation, but that it led to a vast amount of good; and that it therefore presents the best argument why it should take place in this our land.

Nor can we be driven from the proud estimate we place upon this striking event by the caviling excep-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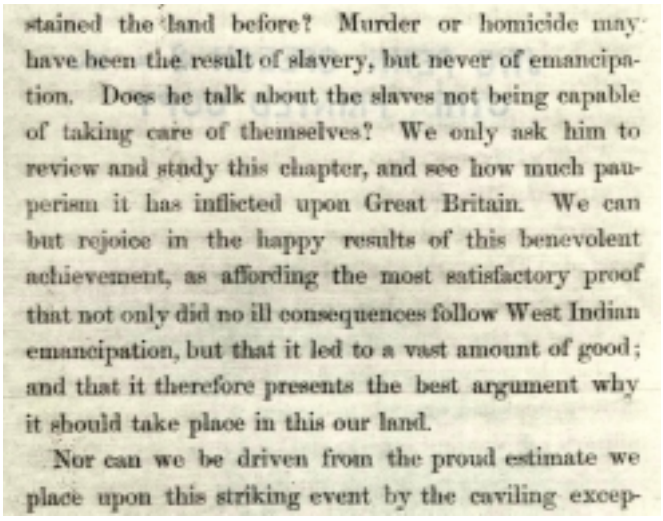
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tions taken to the political motives of Great Britain.

It is neither my province nor my object to defend the motives of Great Britain. A nation of such eminence, and possessing such an amount of political and judicial wisdom, together with the experience of nearly a thousand years, is abundantly competent to the task of defending itself.

But as it has pleased God to honor her before all the nations, as the instrument to accomplish this great event, we may congratulate her upon the success of her abolition measure, while the powerful and even dangerous combination of the West India interest, or rather prejudice against it, and while the political prayers of France, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Holland, and our own United States, were mingling in unhallowed unison to the god of slavery (if it has any) for its failure.

No, the truth is, all this shows that the event was a God-send; we care not what the motives of Great Britain were; and we may add that the more British duplicity our opponents can sift out of it, the more they establish God's agency in our behalf, and better would emancipation be for them too, if they had the good sense to see it; but the scales may some day fall from their eyes, and then they will perhaps give us credit for the truth of our prophecy.

This great experiment, as it is called, is now upon the wings of the universal winds that waft the merchant and the missionary-ship away to distant lands, and as the news is thus spread, it bespeaks the gradual but certain approach of ultimate success to the cause of human liberty in every land.

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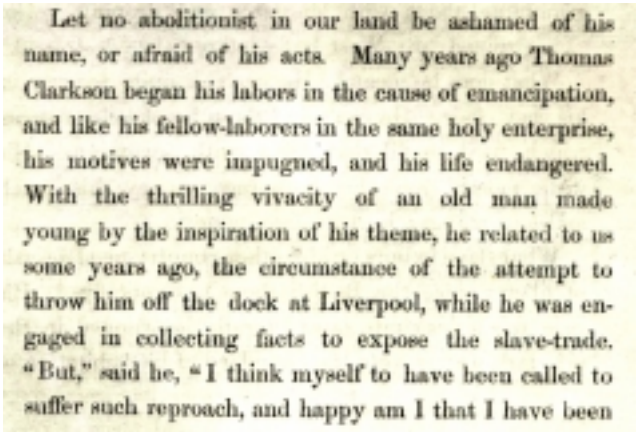
Let no abolitionist in our land be ashamed of his name, or afraid of his acts. Many years ago Thomas Clarkson began his labors in the cause of emancipation, and like his fellow-laborers in the same holy enterprise, his motives were impugned, and his life endangered. With the thrilling vivacity of an old man made young by the inspiration of his theme, he related to us some years ago, the circumstance of the attempt to throw him off the dock at Liverpool, while he was engaged in collecting facts to expose the slave-trade. "But," said he, "I think myself to have been called to suffer such reproach, and happy am I that I have been spared to see this cause crowned with such abundant success. The slave in my own country is free, and I am now watching the progress of the cause in your country and the world; I can do but little more; I am an old man. But the cause has so far advanced, and is in such good hands, that I feel perfectly willing to leave the stage. It must prevail."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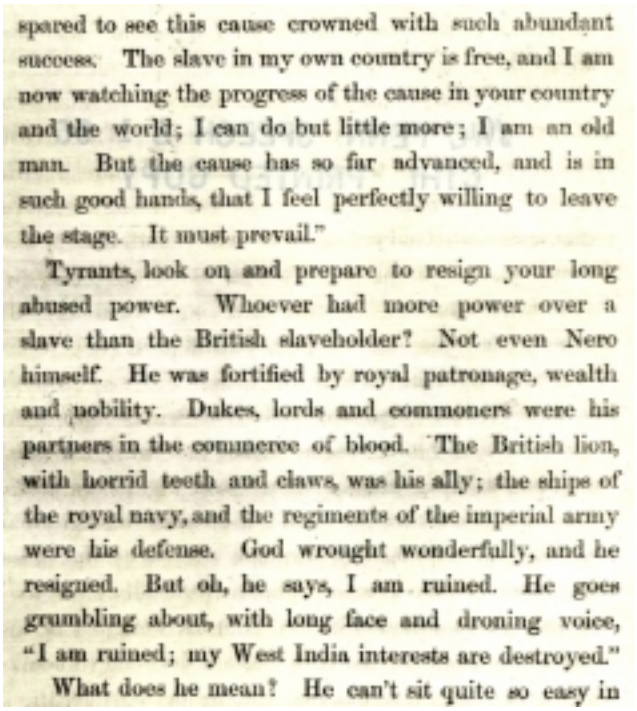
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Tyrants, look on and prepare to resign your long abused power. Whoever had more power over a slave than the British slaveholder? Not even Nero himself. He was fortified by royal patronage, wealth and nobility. Dukes, lords and commoners were his partners in the commerce of blood. The British lion, with horrid teeth and claws, was his ally; the ships of the royal navy, and the regiments of the imperial army were his defense. God wrought wonderfully, and he resigned. But oh, he says, I am ruined. He goes grumbling about, with long face and droning voice, "I am ruined; my West India interests are destroyed."

What does he mean? He can't sit quite so easy in

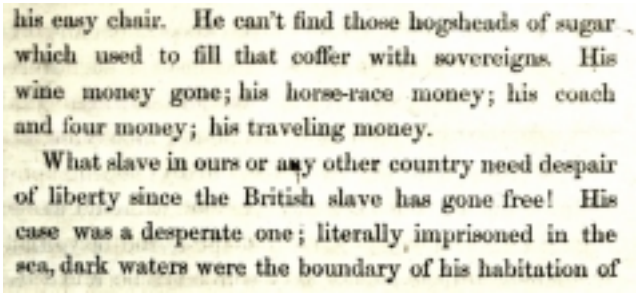
his easy chair. He can't find those hogsheads of sugar which used to fill that coffer with sovereigns. His wine money gone; his horse-race money; his coach and four money; his traveling money.

What slave in ours or any other country need despair of liberty since the British slave has gone free! His case was a desperate one; literally imprisoned in the sea, dark waters were the boundary of his habitation of sorrow. No free States or Canadas bounded him on either side, to which he could fly.

But God, who ordained that the isles should wait for his law, enforced that law in due season. That law came on the auspicious first of August, 1838; and then broke forth from the islands in the sea in the triumphal song,—"Sound the loud timbrel over India's dark sea; Jehovah hath triumphed, his people are free!"

The law came, and it restored the bondman his body; his body that was marked, bruised and lacerated; but it *was* his body, dear to him still, as was the body of his oppressor to *him*, whose skin had never been broken by the scratch of a pin. The law came, and the bondman received back his soul; his soul long benighted and vexed, but it was still his soul, possessed of its own immortality, an immortality of which the cart-whip and other instruments of torture, plied with deadly effect to the body that enshrined it, could not divest it.

And here is an eternal truth that is destined to beat away every refuge of lies that can be brought by the ingenuity of critics, tyrants and cavilers, to support slavery. When you have made of man a slave by a seven-fold process of selling, bartering and chaining, and garnishing him with that rough and bloody brush,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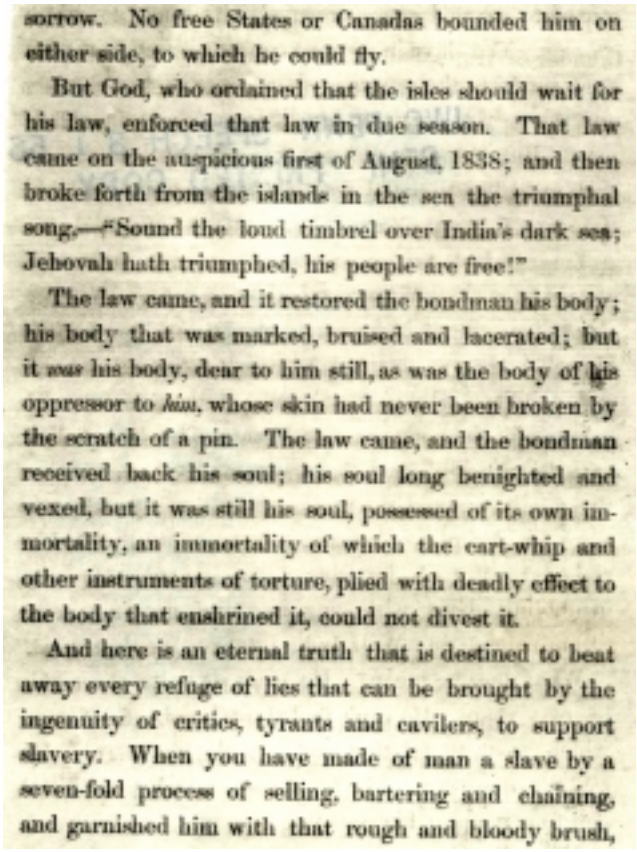
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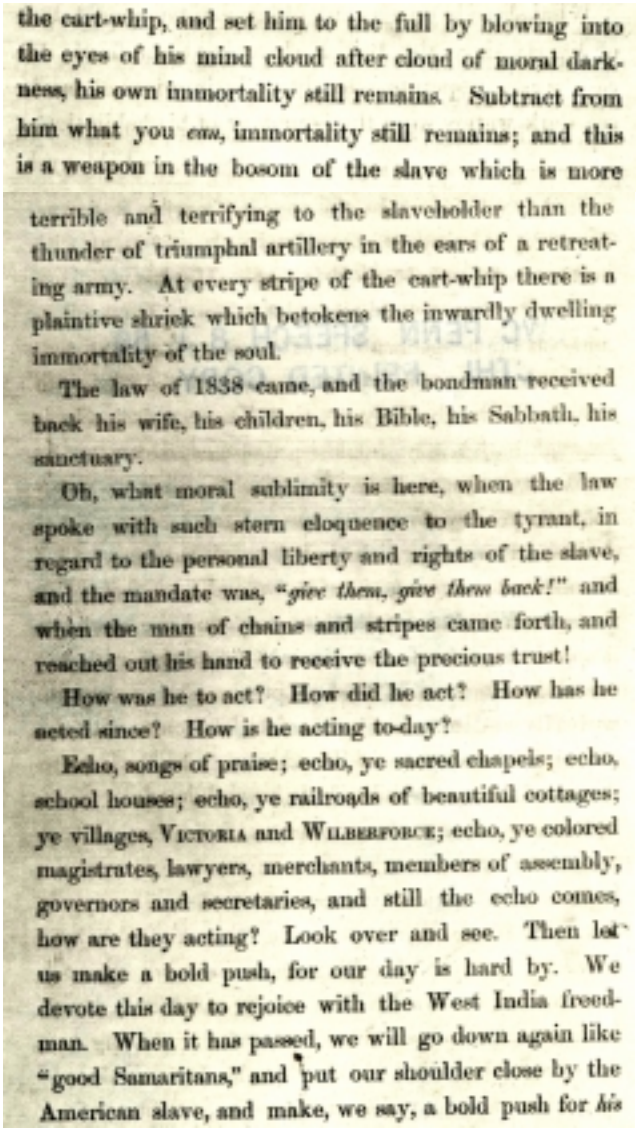
The law of 1838 came, and the bondman received back his wife, his children, his Bible, his Sabbath, his sanctuary.

Oh, what moral sublimity is here, when the law spoke with such stern eloquence to the tyrant, in regard to the personal liberty and rights of the slave, and the mandate was, "*give them, give them back!*" and when the man of chains and stripes came forth, and reached out his hand to receive the precious trust!

How was he to act? How did he act? How has he acted since? How is he acting to-day?

Echo, songs of praise; echo, ye sacred chapels; echo, school houses, echo, ye railroads of beautiful cottages; ye villages, VICTORIA and WILBERFORCE; echo, ye colored magistrates, lawyers, merchants, members of assembly, governors and secretaries, and still the echo comes, how are they acting? Look over and see. Then let us make a bold push, for our day is hard by. We devote this day to rejoice with the West India freedman. When it has passed, we will go down again like "good Samaritans," and put our shoulder close by the American slave, and make, we say, a bold push for *his*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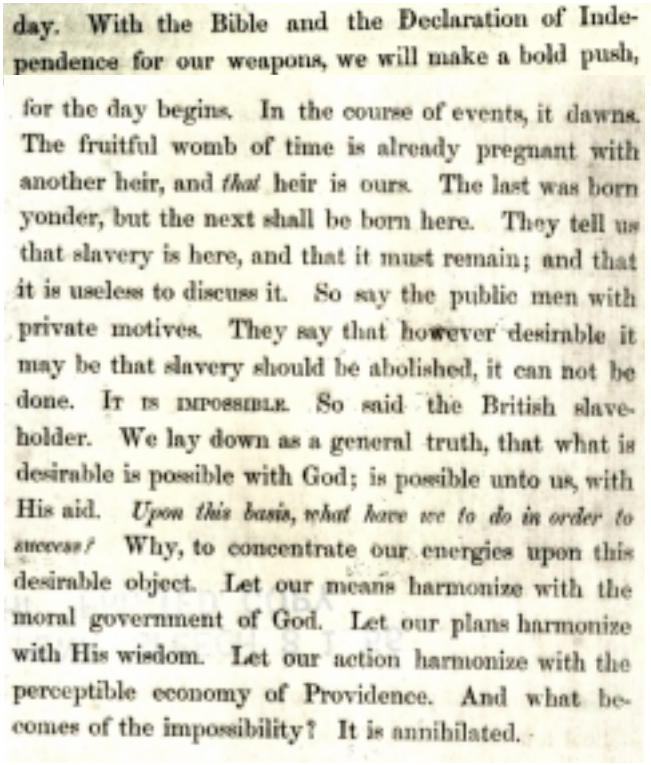
day. With the Bible and the Declaration of Independence for our weapons, we will make a bold push, for the day begins. In the course of events, it dawns. The fruitful womb of time is already pregnant with another heir, and *that* heir is ours. The last was born yonder, but the next shall be born here. They tell us that slavery is here, and that it must remain; and that it is useless to discuss it. So say the public men with private motives. They say that however desirable it may be that slavery should be abolished, it can not be done. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE. So said the British slaveholder. We lay down as a general truth, that what is desirable is possible with God; is possible unto us, with His aid. *Upon this basis, what have we to do in order to success?* Why, to concentrate our energies upon this desirable object. Let our means harmonize with the moral government of God. Let our plans harmonize with His wisdom. Let our action harmonize with the perceptible economy of Providence. And what becomes of the impossibility? It is annihilated.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