

Who is Responsible for the present Slavery Agitation?

THAT our country is now under the most tremendous excitement on the subject of slavery, no one can doubt. At the South this excitement has reached a *furor* unparalleled in the past, developing itself in all the fanaticism and extravagance, usually attendant on popular convulsions. Innocent travellers are waylaid and arrested; quiet schoolmasters from the North are catechised and threatened; honest peddlars and outspoken artisans are tabooed and banished; medical students at the North are courted and bribed to return to their southern homes; free negroes are banished under pain of perpetual slavery, if they remain in the land of their birth; warlike stores are provided; non-intercourse with the North is threatened, to the great fright of some northern merchants; and dissolution of the Union prophesied, if the next President of the United States should fail to be acceptable to southern politicians. This southern excitement is transferred North by a press, eager to embalm and circulate all facts or fancies tending to throw discredit on opponents at the North, whether these op-

ponents be political, commercial or theological. The North is startled by the cry, that "the Union is in danger;" and northern men are asked to surrender the principles of their fathers, and the right of expressing their honest and conscientious convictions, lest the "South" should "go off;" or what some would regard as a greater evil, lest southern trade should "fall off."

The impression in view of these facts has become very common, that our times are wonderfully chaotic and disturbed, and all are looking with interest to the future, and asking: "What shall the end of these things be?" We do not desire the reputation of prophets, and therefore shall not undertake to predict results. We prefer to look at the causes which have induced this peculiar state of the public mind. On whom rests the responsibility of producing this phrensied excitement? Partisans would settle this question by pointing to their opponents, and saying, "These are the troublers of Israel." But we are not to take counsel from such partial, blinded, interested classes. On whom will truth, candor and right reason fasten the blame of disturbing the Church and the land?

We find the first occasion of our unhappy disturbance *in the existence among us of such an institution as human slavery*. In this nineteenth century; in the most enlightened and freest nation of earth; in an age of warm, comprehensive, outgoing philanthropy, when Christian charity feels the universal pulse of suffering humanity, and sends out sympathy, prayers, men and money, to bless and educate the degraded of all lands; it could not occur, that such an institution as slavery should produce no excitement. Its prohibition of schools and Bible reading; its failure to recognise by law the marriage relation, parental control and filial obedience;

its denuding the laborer of all rights of property and appeal to the justice of courts against oppression; its separation of families, by the sale of husband or wife on the block, at the impulse of caprice or avarice—we say that such an institution itself, in this age and land, is so great an anomaly, so offensive at the first blush to Christianity, to human sympathy, to the spirit of our free institutions, that it *must* excite attention, not alone in States that endorse it, but among all Christian men of every land. It will not do to say that every body should look at their own affairs, mind their own business, and not trouble themselves about the condition of four millions of men in other States. This is an age of reading and reflection, and among a people so intelligent as those who inhabit the northern States, the fact of slavery, its laws, its incidents, its faults, cannot be ignored. And what Christian men think, they will say, with more or less charity, intelligence and interest; with more or less consideration and sympathy for the master as well as the slave. Now so far as the institution of slavery tends to do violence to the spirit of the age and the sympathies of Christianity, it is, and will continue to be, an occasion of religious and political excitement. To remove the excitement, the occasion must itself be modified or removed. This excitement may be palsied by hopelessness; it may be softened by a large charity towards our southern brethren; it may be schooled, restrained and guided, as it ought to be, by a sober judgment; but it cannot be annihilated by any cautions of interest or policy, or cowed by threats and demonstrations. If this view be correct, all men ought to know it. Pro-slavery men, North and South, in Church and State, in our cities and elsewhere, ought to bear in mind that the only way to prevent slavery from creating an unpleasant excite-

ment, is to divest it, or, at least, *begin* to divest it of the laws and incidents which are regarded by the civilized world, as offences against Christianity itself. This would at once take the wind out of the sails of agitators and fanatics, and breathe the spirit of peace over our land.

A second occasion of the unhappy bitterness attending this subject, is the *entirely new ground* on which the system is now defended by its advocates in Church and State. The fathers of Virginia and the Carolinas; the patriots of the Revolution, like Henry, Washington, and Jefferson; the fathers of the Presbyterian Church, like Edwards, Davies, Witherspoon, J. P. Wilson, Ashbel Green, Moses Hoge, J. H. Rice, Gideon Blackburn, James Blythe, and David Rice, never pretended to defend the system of human slavery as right in the abstract; as a system congenial to the Gospel, and founded in equity. No such thing. They considered it an evil, moral, social, and political, and only to be tolerated temporarily to avoid the worse evil of immediate abolition. So universal was this feeling in the South, thirty years ago, that it was common for southern members of Congress alluding to slavery, always carefully to say: "I will not defend slavery in the abstract." This is known to all intelligent readers, whose memories reach back thirty years. A minister of the Gospel in those days, who had undertaken to defend slavery by the Bible, would have been regarded as insane or imbecile. The first clergyman in our land who undertook this task, we believe, was a Rev. Mr. Smylie, of Natchez, Mississippi; who, twenty-five years ago, issued a pamphlet defending slavery, as a system, by the Bible. He was regarded as partially insane on account of this effort. The first politician who inaugurated slavery as a blessing to be per-

petuated through all time, was John C. Calhoun. It amazed the world. But now the novel and strange views of Messrs. Smylie and Calhoun have become a part of the religious and political creed of the South, and do not lack some willing advocates even in our free North. The friends of human freedom and progress, constituting the great mass at the North, are now asked, under pain of the imputation of fanaticism and constructive treason, to sanction doctrines, which, for a thousand years, will leave millions in our land to be kept ignorant, that the South may be safe; to be bereft of schools, Bibles, marriage and civil rights, and legal protection, and all this under sanction of our holy and beneficent religion. Now, it is not wonderful that opposition to such principles drives some wise men mad. To be asked in the same breath to go against our natural sense of justice; against what, for a thousand years, has been regarded as the spirit of Christianity; against all the declarations and moral foundations on which our revolutionary fathers based their appeals to God, and the sentiments of universal humanity; against the ancient, and the oft-repeated and earnestly enforced "testimonies" of the Church; against the common opinion of Christians at large—to ask all this of northern ministers and from northern men, is asking a great deal too much. Northern clergymen and honest Christian men in our churches, do not hold their principles on swivels of interest and popularity, to be conveniently turned to meet the clamors of commerce and political partisanship. So long as these new-fangled, most repulsive and dangerous heresies on the doctrine of human rights, are urged upon us as tests of orthodoxy and love of the *Union*, so long there will be resistance and unpleasant excitement. "I speak as unto wise men; judge ye what I say."

A third source of irritation from the slavery discus-

sion, we find in the *selfish and mercenary motives of many of those who keep up the agitation*. We are willing to believe that there is an honest northern party, and an honest southern party; and none can blame these honest parties for being true to their principles. But outside of these parties, yet claiming to represent them, are divers guerilla bands, caring little for any moral principle, but carrying on the war for the glory they can achieve, or the plunder they can secure. Thus some find it very convenient to be ultra and rabid abolitionists. It leaves them absolved from all obligation to conserve the Christian graces of faith, humility, penitence, gentleness, forbearance, prudence, and moderation; and allows them to sanctify, in their own estimate of themselves and before the world, by a profession of love to the slave, all their desire for notoriety; all their personal ambition for place and manifestation of their genius and eloquence; all their latent self-righteousness, combativeness, and social discontent. Free from the restraints of the Bible and religious profession and principle, by becoming champions of a benevolent enterprise, they, like the Pharisees, gain a self-complacency, without virtue; and by loud claims to one equivocal charity, and loud laudations of themselves and slander of all others, they boast that they are too pure to hold fellowship with the Church of God. With some of these, *abolition* not only seems all their religion and morality, it is their livelihood, their trade. Abolition gives them their excitement, their complacency, their license to slander, their notoriety, and their bread. It gives them audiences, at so much a head, circulates their newspapers, sells their books, pays their travelling expenses, and, in their own estimate, saves their souls. Like a gossip, reforming the erring in a New England village, by reporting scandal among her neighbors, these reformers devote themselves to unsparing, reckless and

bitter denunciation of men five hundred miles off, to *persuade* those men, with almost superhuman virtue, to sacrifice their property and position to a moral principle. Abolition has opened to skeptics, religious errorists, poets, lecturers and novelists, a mine of notoriety and money, and they are working it. Now it is hard enough for the common sense and Christianity of the North to bear these modern Pharisees—these men of not only *one* idea, but of *one* moral principle. When their discord reaches the South, unsoftened by one note of forbearance or charity; and when this discordant note is taken as the key of northern piety, patriotism, and fraternity, no wonder our brethren there think it is time to *dissolve the Union*. We owe it to our southern brethren to protest that these fanatics represent neither the judgment nor the spirit of the North; that in spite of all the clamor and bitterness of these professional and mercenary reformers, the great heart of the North still beats warmly and kindly towards their countrymen of Virginia and the Carolinas.

Outside of these disorganizers, there are other parties at the North, who are, in some degree, under the same condemnation. Those politicians in the Church, who have found it convenient to agitate slavery, in order to break in on the integrity and order of sister denominations, from which they desired to make proselytes, belong to this class. Our own Church has suffered abundantly from one quarter in this respect. A certain denomination, geographically free from contact with slave territory; certain ministers and associations; certain presses and agencies found that they could tamper with our churches and church members, by calling our General Assembly pro-slavery. Year after year they kept up the cry, not because they had more of the spirit of liberty than ourselves, but because abolition was a mine which they could work to ecclesiastical advantage. Their

shouts for freedom, under the impulse of sheer bigotry and ecclesiastical ambition, did not deceive us, nor much harm us; but it developed a spirit of Yankee cunning and hypocrisy, which has aided in mingling with the holy cause of human freedom, a distrust of the sincerity and true charity of its advocates, and made the whole influence of northern principles less efficient for good at the South. And we feel bound here to add, that so far as a great Home Missionary organization of our land yielded to the spirit which we have just described, so far has its power to do good in our whole country been curtailed and its good name tarnished.

In our summary of the causes of slavery excitement, we must not of course omit *the political parties*, North and South, organized with reference to the *peculiar* institution. Others may judge differently, but it strikes us that the chief blame here rests with southern politicians. John C. Calhoun, twenty-five years ago, had his own purposes to serve as to his favorite doctrines of the tariff, and the right of secession. The South could not be united as one man on any of the ordinary party issues. He saw clearly that on one subject there was extreme sensibility at the South; that as English politicians often rallied the nation by crying: "The Church is in danger!" he could rally the South by crying: "The institution of slavery is in danger!" The rising feeling of the world against Slavery, following the West India emancipation, gave intensity to the alarm. It would reach all classes. Planters, slave-owners, dealers and drivers, from interest; and women and children from fear, could all be roused. He assumed that the North would be divided in politics on ordinary issues. If the South could be combined to utter one cry, then by allying itself to one of the parties of the North, it could rule the country. Here was developed that new phase of the

slavery discussion, the results of which are all around us to-day. Here originated that reign of terror at the South, by which a great political party not only crushed out its opponents, but hushed down the southern conscience, and compelled its clergy and churches to say *aye* to every proposition deemed orthodox, for the security, the perpetuity and the expansion of human bondage. To the existence of this pro-slavery southern party, we owe the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the anarchy of Kansas, and the raid of John Brown.

What was passing meantime in the North? The abolitionists, with Birney or Gerritt Smith at their head, had been hardly able to raise a corporal's guard on the principle of emancipation. But when the great North saw that the South, by combining on the pro-slavery issue at home, and with a small minority in the free States, was set on the propagandism of slavery, and likely to succeed; then it was that the political leaders in the North, thinking that freedom had its charm *here*, as really as slavery *there*, raised the masses by the cry that human liberty, North and South, and the wide world over, was in peril from the new principles announced. The result we all know. The parties are divided North and South, to contend for the control of the government. We are not disposed to despond at this. Considering what human nature is, and what is to be expected when millions are roused by party strife, we bless God that so little has occurred of excess and riot, to rouse fear for the safety of the Union. We wish we could persuade the South to go back to the better principles of their fathers. We should like to see in the North a better temper and more conciliation. But as such wishes are vain, with confidence in God, and the triumph of truth and justice, we are willing with our children to wait in hope the developments of coming years.

We are compelled here to allude to one more occasion of the alienation between the North and South. It is by no means the least, especially in its bearing on the union of northern and southern Christians. We refer to those *northern presses, secular and religious*, which keep up the slavery agitation for their own advantage. Some of these papers take the South under their peculiar care. The South is always right and always abused. They see nothing in slavery but its holidays, its prayer meetings, and its "Uncle Toms." While the advocates of emancipation are mobbed all over the South, these professedly conservative presses do not hesitate to outrage the free North by the wholesale and the unblushing advocacy of the Bible righteousness of human slavery. They think that abolitionists at the South ought to be driven out; but they forget that they themselves are equally radical and impertinent by importing pro-slavery principles into free States. While they thus do violence to the whole spirit of northern sentiment, by advocating an institution which every Northern commonwealth has repudiated, they act as scavengers and tale-bearers general, to collect the ravings of fanatics, and the imprudent words of true lovers of liberty, or the resolutions of excited anti-slavery bodies, and straightway send it all South, as specimens of northern wisdom, sentiment and temper. They do more. They impute fanaticism to all presses which they regard as rivals, and to all men whose influence they desire to weaken, and thus make the South believe that all charity and truth have left their northern brethren. By constantly advertising southern Christians how much they are abused; by constantly averring that the sentiments of the North, in relation to liberty, lead to licentiousness, disunion, and bloodshed; it is not the fault of these presses if the pulse of the South ever falls below

fever heat. "If where there is no tale-bearer the strife ceases," we may hope that when these disturbers of the public peace have had their say and day, that a better spirit will be found in Church and State. If instead of repeating words of bitterness and alienation, the press would only send North and South what it hears of the language of fraternity and appreciation; the North and South might differ in sentiment, and still be united in kind wishes and prayers for each other's welfare.

The bearing of *the interests of trade* on the slavery agitation is not to be overlooked. We allude not now to the increased love of slavery generated at the South by the late enormous rise of slave value in the market; we allude not to the madness of slave-dealers at aught which rebukes their practices, or touches the value of their human merchandise; but we refer to those northern merchants, who, trembling with fear lest their southern custom should be impaired, are unwilling to tolerate any opinions or moral teaching which may be unacceptable at the South. Willing, themselves, for the sake of gain, to imbibe and echo the highest type of a progressive pro-slavery creed; willing to bend the pliant knee to principles which their fathers abhorred,

"That thrift may follow fawning;"

they desire that the religious press and northern pulpit should imitate their example and adapt the Gospel of Christ and the laws of justice and charity to the novel and final teaching of slave-dealers and southern politicians. Some of this class, anxious to reap a large harvest from southern fanaticism, have not scrupled to stimulate the fears of the South; to charge all around them with hostility to our southern brethren, that these traffickers in principles and broadcloth might enjoy a monopoly of southern trade. Now, if anything could throw the northern religious press and northern pulpits into ul-

traism and bitterness, dictation from such a source and such motives would effect it. We are not sure but this has been sometimes the result. To be asked to hold his principles, as to human rights under the Golden Rule, at the beck of worldly interest, and adapt the law of God to the necessities of trade, is such an insult to the understanding, the conscience, the courage, and the honor of a religious teacher, that he has special need of the grace of God to bear it without the loss of equanimity and moderation. We trust that the class to which we have alluded is not large, and we are sure they will become

“Small by degrees, and beautifully less.”

They are likely to be appreciated at the South, as really as in the North.

There may be added to the occasions of bitterness, in the slavery discussion, *a practical violation of reciprocal obligations* on the part of many, both North and South. Here we speak for ourselves, holding no others responsible for any sentiments we may utter. It has always seemed to us that any organized efforts to tamper with southern slaves and run them off from their masters, was a species of lynch law; a violation of all principles of social order and comity; a gross outrage on the spirit of the Constitution of the United States. John Brown bid defiance to all laws and compacts. He did the matter openly and bravely, and periled the consequences. He occupies a position, in our estimate, far above those who profess a respect for law and order, and ask the protection of law as good citizens, and yet furtively engage in dispossessing southern men of what they regard, and what their laws regard as property. To assume that southern slave-holders, as a class, are banditti, from whom it is proper to reclaim their plunder by stealth, and release their captors by subterfuge, is regarded, at

the South, as the grossest insult; and the most enormous social and pecuniary wrong. Now, to keep the whole South in a fever of indignation, to unsettle their whole confidence in northern sentiments and northern men, to shut the ear of the South against all appeals for the slave, and to darken the hopes of millions left in bondage, for the sake of transferring, by stealth and illegally, a few individual slaves from the rice fields of the Carolinas to the forests of Upper Canada, is a philanthropy so equivocal, and a morality so peculiar, that we cannot commend it. It is an element of bitterness, strife, hate, and mutual recrimination, which should not be allowed to mar the peace of the country and the hopes of the true friends of human freedom.

While we thus condemn a practice which some good men of the North have sanctioned, we feel bound to say that we see all over the South, a practical wrong, of which not only all the North, but humanity, religion and law have a right to complain. In the Constitution of the United States, the southern slave-holder is allowed to come North and reclaim his fugitive slave. The exercise of this right has done extreme violence to northern sympathies, and not unfrequently been attended with breaches of the peace. Still the right is allowed, claimed, exercised, protected and enforced by the power of the general government.

But the same Constitution of the United States, which gives this right to the southern slave-holder, also ordains that "freedom of speech and of the press" shall not be abridged. This provision for "freedom of speech and of the press" was designed to protect men disposed to utter unpopular and uncomfortable opinions; for it would need no constitutional safeguard to allow men to echo sentiments popular and comfortable to all around. Now, southern slaveholders have found this provision

of the Constitution to be inconvenient and incompatible with their present system of slavery and its perpetuity, profit and expansion. So, instead of remodeling their institutions to meet the demands of an enlightened public sentiment, and the spirit of the age, they have practically and violently neutralized, and utterly disregarded this provision of the Constitution. Under the plea of "police regulations," and the apology of "northern abolition," they have made it a crime and nuisance to express an honest anti-slavery opinion, or to establish an anti-slavery paper, however conservative and Christian in spirit, any where between the Ohio river and the Capes of Florida! They ask of the North "the pound of flesh," because it is in the "bond;" but by mobs and lynch law, drive out of the South an honest and frank schoolmaster, who has ventured to express his opinions as to the morality and economy of human bondage. They come North, and are tolerated in any eulogies on slavery. They urge at home the most ultra charges against northern fraternity, patriotism and justice; but if you go South to give your opinions, or attempt to circulate South a refutation of partisan slanders, you are regarded as an incendiary, and will be happy, if not compelled to import home a southern robe of North Carolina tar and South Carolina cotton.

We have been amazed that southern statesmen, scholars and divines have been willing to submit to this "*index expurgatorius*;" this fetter on the tongue and the pen; this limitation of what men may speak, and hear, and write, and read, by the sublime judgment of village magistrates and street mobs. It seems to us that this prohibition of free thought tends to emasculate the whole southern intellect; to excite doubt as to the confidence of slaveholders in their own moral position; to violate the great Protestant principle of private

judgment, and to draw down on our southern brethren the indignation, if not the contempt, of the world.

Sure we are, that nothing more imperils the peace of the South, nothing tends more to exasperate the Christian world against slavery and slaveholding, than this denying to honest, conservative and true men, the fair expression of their moral judgments. If any institution of our land cannot bear this, its annihilation is only a question of time.

We will not prolong this Article. We have penned it in all sincerity and charity, as a contribution to truth and justice. We are certainly opposed to the whole system of human bondage, here and everywhere. But we have no personal prejudices against our Southern fellow citizens. As we need in the North their cotton, their rice, and their oranges; so we are of opinion that New England, New York, and Pennsylvania would be greatly benefited by the importation of the impulsive generosity, the high sense of personal honor, the gentlemanly courtesy, the frank bearing and chivalrous courage of the sunny South. The cold, angular, conscientious and economical Northerner, blended with the warm-hearted, indulgent, confiding and poetical South Carolinian, would develop a perfect American manhood. We desire to strengthen, not weaken, the bonds which link us to the South. We can sympathize with the one hundred millions in Africa, as really as with the four millions of Africans in the South; we can take our stand with the hundred millions of Africa, and look up joyfully to the semi-civilization and modified Christianity of four millions of Africans in our land. We give our southern brethren credit for a genuine interest in the well being and happiness of the inferior class entrusted to their control. We can estimate the real benevolence with which thou-

sands of southern gentlemen and ladies are planning and laboring for the moral improvement of their slaves. We are willing to accord to them a piety as sincere, and a philanthropy as genuine, as the world exhibits. We do not lay upon them the responsibility to lift four millions of Africans suddenly to the highest level of Anglo-Saxon progress. We are willing to trust to them the time, and mode, and measure, of amelioration and ultimate emancipation. We are willing to sympathize with them in the gross and indiscriminate vituperation to which they have been subjected, and to accord to them a perfect equality and fraternity with ourselves, in every claim to respect, courtesy and Christian charity.

And while we say, from the heart, all this; we claim from them, confidence in the purity of our intentions, and a respect for our conscientious convictions on the subject of slavery. We claim the liberty, respectfully and fraternally, to stand up against what we regard as their retrocession from sound principles, and their lethargy in opposing and abrogating laws, which deny Bible reading, and legal marriage, and family security, to a race in their power. We claim that by how much the African is weak in intellect, and submissive in temper; by so much does he lay a higher claim on Christian men, for more thorough education and full opportunities. If our southern neighbors will receive our protests of regard, and yield courtesy to our claims, we can mutually say: "*Let there be no strife between us, for we are brethren.*"