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[For the Critic.]

A LETTER TO THE HON. CHARLES SUMNER, A SENATOR IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS: OCCASIONED BY HIS ANTI-SLAVERY DISCOURSE, IN NIBLO'S THEATRE.

SIR: I have read with great attention a discourse of yours published in the New York Tribune of the 18th of May, which, according to the statements of that paper, was pronounced at Niblo's Theatre, in the City of New York, a few days before, to an immense and delighted assembly of the people. I will add that it is my habit to read carefully, whatever I find in the newspapers of the day, proceeding from you. For I observe in what falls from you, a more serious conviction, a deeper tincture of scholarship, a larger intelligence, and a more earnest manliness, than I have been able to discover in the utterances of those who seem to enjoy your confidence, and share your labors. It is no disparagement to you, personally, to add, that representing the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, sitting in the seat of Daniel Webster, discoursing of the duty of the Northern States on the most dangerous topic of our day, and pleading eloquently for the Necessity, Practicability and Dignity, of an enterprise whose success involves the ruin of the country—your words have, for all considerate men, an interest and an importance which all your high qualities would fail to impart to them. if you spoke as a private citizen. It may be possible, also, that the words of a private person like myself, and a total stranger to you, by connecting themselves with the stirring and dangerous words spoken by you from the great position you have won, may obtain an audience, which, but for that, it were idle to expect for them. And you will yourself, perhaps, admit, that I have somewhat to say, worthy of serious consideration, and that my life long connection, in many forms, with most of the topics you discuss, entitles me, without undue presumption, to give utterance to some of the thoughts excited by your discourse.

Allow me, sir, to utter in one sentence, the substance of my whole thought touching the madness of the times, about this whole question of negro slavery. Here we are—a great people, with a glorious mission set before us. More than twenty millions of us—with whose destiny the des-

tiny of three or four millions of blacks is fearfully combined. One way or other, we must solve their destiny, when we solve our own. This is wholly unavoidable. But, the madness is, that every seven white Americans must needs cut each other's throats concerning the fate of one black African! Is there no solution of the problem of their destiny and ours, but that solution which destroys us, without benefitting them? And can statesmen such as I do not see sufficient reason to doubt you are,—and patriots such as I have not the heart to deny you to be,—find no better solution of this terrible problem—no nobler issue of our sublime hopes,—than mutual destruction by the men of the North and the men of the South,—for the sake of the African slaves, scattered thinly over the continent? Are we not able to bear through, by our invincible strength, even such a parasite as this black race, carrying them forward far beyond any thing they could have reached without us, and yet mounting up ourselves, far beyond any thing they may ever reach? Shame upon every American statesman and every American patriot, who is insensible to the glory of such a result! Infamy to every one, who conspires to defeat it!

And yet, sir, you, an American Senator, speaking in the name of that great Commonwealth in whose bosom stands Bunker Hill,—and sitting in the seat of that great Statesman and Patriot who saw no hope for public liberty, higher than that which rests upon the Union of these States; you, an American Senator, who have studied the past and who fear God, allow yourself to bring the whole force of your character, your position, and your great gifts, to bear directly upon the point at which alone it is possible to wreck the country, and to destroy us all together! The very madness of the times assumes in you, its most frantic aspect: and you openly avow, that slavery in America, is a wrong so grievous and unquestionable, that it should not be allowed to continue,—nay, that it should cease to exist at once,—nay, that a wrong so transcendent, so loathsome, so direful, must be encountered wherever it can be reached, and the battle must be continued without truce or compromise, until the field is entirely won. Such are your words: profoundly eloquent—unspeakably frantic!

Now, sir, this means, neither more nor less, than the edge of the sword. Lay aside the rhetoric, and the simple sense is, grape and canister, cold steel and stricken battle. Believe me, Mr. Sumner, when I state two facts, one of which I know better than you do, and the other of which you ought to know, better perhaps than I do. The fact, which I know better than you do is, that whenever the very faintest indication of the settled purpose of the men of the North to follow your advice becomes apparent to the men of the fifteen slave States of this Union,—a million of armed men, will be ready to receive you and your followers: and if you come not speedily thereafter to execute your threats, your coming will not be waited for;—but they will seek you on the soil where you now vainly suppose no danger will ever come. The fact which you ought to know better than I do is, that after two or three hundred thousand men are arrayed in battle, on each side, it makes no sort of difference, as to the probable result, whether one or the other party has the greater reserve of physical force, left out of battle: because, after two or three hundred thousand fighting men, in the present state of the art of war—every thing depends merely on brains. The sum of these two facts is very clear; namely, if the North wants to settle the slavery question by the edge of the sword, the North is in a very fair way to be perfectly gratified; and when she gets what she wants, there

is at least an exceeding great probability that the North will see reason to change her mind very materially, as to the wisdom of that method of settling that question.

Moreover, let it not escape your attention, that many circumstances aggravate the conduct of the men of the North, and exasperate the hearts of the men of the South, in this whole business: all of them tending to strengthen us, and to weaken you, at every stage of the bloody struggle to which you are driving the country. For, in the *first place*, let slavery be all that you assert it to be,—the time is long past when it was either honest, wise, or patriotic, for you to take that ground, even in an argument having merely ordinary political bearings, much less in one looking to bloodshed and conquest. All *that* was settled between us before the old confederation was formed: it was settled again in the common danger and common glory of our great Revolution: it was settled again in the Federal Constitution. I say nothing about the unspeakable folly of arguing as a Statesman, that a slave State and a free State cannot tolerate each other in one confederacy, supposing the question to be now for the first time considered. What I say is, that it is no longer possible for the men of the North to open that question, without revolution, and without disloyalty to every national act and movement of our past history: and what I mean is, that they cannot do this, without so weakening and disgracing themselves, and so strengthening and ennobling us,—that God, posterity, fortune, and the hearts of the combatants, must feel the effects of the opposite conduct and position of the parties. To which add, in the *second place*, that this conduct of the men of the North, besides being a base political afterthought,—is a deliberate breach of faith, cemented by the blood of our fathers; an ignoble retraction of plighted honor and truth and justice; a calculated sacrifice of those of their own race, and lineage, and house, and blood, for those of a strange kindred and clime,—without any new circumstance or additional reason, for so atrocious a perfidy against nature and against plighted troth. Add again, in the *third place*, the atrocity of that state of heart in which the North presses this bloody arbitrament, under the settled belief that she risks nothing thereby, and that we risk every thing: and the fervor of that state of soul, in which the South, roused by so much insult, injustice, and danger, really does risk all, with a sublime purpose, to the last man, to win all. And then, in the *fourth place*, add the sort of conviction, with which the two parties thus mutually range themselves, in that deadly strife; and if you be as wise as you are eloquent,—you may comprehend, what as yet you seem to have wholly overlooked—namely, the settled confidence of the entire slave States, that they are fully able to make the men of the North repent that ever they broke constitutions, and forgot ancestral ties, and outraged national obligations, in order to ruin ten millions of the most elevated race on the face of the earth, upon the hazard—if not the pretext—of benefiting the third part of that number, of one of the most degraded races in the world. You will have battle,—and that without truce or compromise,—and that whenever you can reach us,—and that until the field is entirely won? For my part, sir, I would gladly shun that battle; gladly give my blood to arrest it, if it were begun. But there mingles with this profound dread of shedding my brother's blood, not one apprehension of the result of the conflict. For whoever lives to see that battle fought, will see one more example added to the multitudes which already crowd the annals of mankind, that they who boast themselves when they gird their harness on, are apt enough to wail when they come to put it off.

So far then you may perceive, that according to the fixed and unanimous conviction of the fifteen Commonwealths you propose to conquer, your whole North, if it were united as one man, could no more do that deed, than it could make a world: and that, unless it were utterly lost to every glorious inspiration of the past, and every sacred impulse struggling for birth in all true hearts, the North would no more think of making such an attempt, upon such pretexts as you array,—even if those pretexts were all true and real,—than it would think of parricide followed by self murder. But, sir, I beg you to consider what I shall add to show that those pretexts are neither true nor real.

The very foundation of your discourse, as you distinctly state, is the grand principle, universal, as you assert, in the law of slavery, that man, created in the image of God, is divested of his human character, and declared to be a mere chattel. Now, Mr. Sumner, you cannot fail to be aware, that both parts of this statement are absolutely untrue: and by consequence, your whole plea for our conquest, is based on a double, perfidious quibble. There is not a single slave State in this Union, whose laws divest the slave of his human character. There is not a single one, whose laws declare a slave to be a *mere* chattel. No doubt, many of the rights which I believe with you, to be inherent in human nature, are wholly incompatible with any state of slavery. No doubt, if slavery exists at all, the right of property thus recognised by the local law, may be made analogous to the right one has to a chattel, just as it may be to the right one has to realty. But you have far too much sense and knowledge not to know, that these are widely different truths, from the abominable untruths upon which your whole discourse proceeds. Do you not perfectly understand, that every slave State in this Union shapes its entire slave code, upon the grand truths that a slave is *not* a *mere* chattel, and that his human character is *not* divested? Do you not know, that by the universal law of slavery, the slave is held to innumerable accountabilities, overriding all claim of his master; and that he is protected, not as a chattel but as a man, at the peril and profit even of his master's life? And yet, upon precisely opposite allegations, you construct an argument whose logical issue is the subversion of our National Union; and upon that argument you construct a code of morals, whose highest obligation is civil war! Sir, whatever may be my opinion of the fairness of such reasoning, I easily perceive its dialectic skill. But for your sweeping allegations, your argument had nothing on which to rest; for if the relation of master and slave be once admitted to be generically a relation of power and subjection analogous to those of ruler and subject, guardian and ward, parent and child,—then it demands far higher powers than yours, to show that as a mere relation it has any moral quality at all; and then your duty of murder on account of it, comes straightway to an end. Slavery, Mr. Sumner, is not a thing, which, even in its fundamental nature, much less in its more revolting aspects, I have any purpose to defend. But it is not, either in its nature or its manifestations, the thing you pronounce it to be; and this you could hardly fail to know. How then can I avoid saying, that the pretexts on which you counsel such insane proceedings, are neither true nor real?

What you say on the two vital objections, as you call them, to what you style the Anti-Slavery Enterprise, is not equal to the level of your ordinary thoughts. The *distinction of race*, as an obstacle to indiscriminate abolition, and the *sanction of christians* to the institution of slavery, as a plea

for its toleration, do unquestionably require to be put aside more thoroughly than you have succeeded in doing, before the terrible necessity of adopting your principles and following your counsel can be said to be obligatory on the conscience of the North. I will venture to suggest somewhat on both topics, which seems to have escaped your notice.

For my part, sir, I wish well to every country in the world, and to every race on the face of the earth. But I frankly admit, that I love my own country out of all comparison with every other; that I cherish my own race, with a fervor far beyond that with which I regard all others. Some people call this bigotry,—some call it fanaticism,—some call it narrow-mindedness,—and the like. I call it, an exalted duty, both of natural morality and of revealed religion,—whose neglect is incompatible with a pure heart or a right spirit in man. It has pleased God to create and to establish great diversities of race amongst men; diversities, which, if we could obliterate them completely, would, there can be no doubt, be re-established under the course of Divine Providence, whose grand designs in that, as in all things else, we neither fully comprehend, nor are able to defeat. This diversity of race, extending apparently to the utmost limit compatible with its generic unity, has been one of the most conspicuous elements in the destiny of mankind—and is so still. I beg you to consider that in all recorded time, but two methods have been found, whereby it was possible to solve that great problem of the general mixture of races in one community, on equal terms. It can be done—where all have a common master; that is, under a form, which indiscriminately enslaves all. Or it can be done, by means of the toleration of Polygamy; that is, under a form where the civil equality is preceded and co-erced by one of blood and household. Except by one or other of these means, or by both of them combined, the fundamental demand of your abolition hypothesis, after innumerable attempts, and upon every race of men, under every form of civilization,—has encountered only universal shipwreck. Your Anti-slavery Enterprise, therefore, as soon as it encounters the question of mixed races dwelling together, must demand that equality which is produced by the indiscriminate servitude of all; or it must demand the toleration of Polygamy; or it must succumb before the irresistible course of Providence and the invincible laws of human nature, as both are attested by the universal experience of mankind. That is, we must renounce our freedom and our actual civilization, to reach one solution of this problem; or we must renounce our christianity, to reach the other solution of it; or we must resist your Anti-slavery Enterprise, with its fundamental clause of equality of races, as tantamount to the utter disorganization of society. Sir, I have not one word to say about Shem, or Ham, or Japhet, or Canaan. But whether as a Statesman, as a Philosopher, or as a Christian, and with a sovereign contempt for all infidel theories of man, of society, and of virtue,—I calmly and sorrowfully tell you, there lies one of the grand and insuperable obstacles to that universal freedom and equality of man, for which man has panted from the origin of the race, but could never attain; and never will, upon such theories as yours. The pretext that the thing is attainable by civil war,—or is attainable at all except on the terms stated, or is either possible or desirable for us, is neither true nor real.

On the other point, your plea for the dissolution of society and the ruin of our country is still less satisfactory. As for me, Mr. Sumner, it has been the great business of my life to preach the Gospel of God: the great plea-

sure of my life, to do what I could to ameliorate the condition of my fellow men. And I need not hesitate to add, that while I have won neither Senatorial rank nor national notoriety thereby, I have endured more and risked more for the sake of the black race, by far, than either you or I have done for the sake of the white. Your fierce sarcasm, therefore, has no terror for me; nor can your pathos mislead a heart which has felt too deeply all the real evils of this pitiable case, to be susceptible to the influence of the most eloquent exaggerations; nor have I any sympathy with that state of mind, in which one can imagine that he is pleading the cause of Christ, while he is counselling the deliberate violation of the most sacred obligations. The life and the doctrine of the Lord Jesus, afford the only perfect illustration of every truth and every duty; and amongst the rest, of that glorious truth of the universal brotherhood of man, and that immortal duty of quenchless, mutual love, founded on it. But how utterly do we misconceive the life and the doctrine of the Son of God, when we advocate universal treason in order to redress partial oppression; or teach doctrines which lead only to universal rapine in order to rectify partial injustice! I wish, from the bottom of my heart, that every people were fit to enjoy, and did actually possess, public liberty and free institutions: but should I, therefore, urge an indiscriminate assault upon all nations which desire, but are denied these inestimable blessings? All duty is founded upon truths and laws, both of which are immutable; but every duty, is modified by circumstances which vary ceaselessly: and it is only as we comprehend both of these great principles, that we can ever attain any rational assurance that we perform a single duty aright. As a member of the human race, enlightened by the Gospel, I may have a particular view, of the general question of human servitude. Considered as a citizen of the United States, with the institution of slavery occupying the precise posture it does in this nation, my view of my own duty must necessarily be modified. Considered as a citizen of Kentucky, where much might be done towards the amelioration of slavery, my duty is modified again. And considered as a citizen of South Carolina, where probably it is hardly possible to conjecture how slavery could terminate peacefully and safely, my duty necessarily undergoes another and very serious modification. The religion of Jesus Christ is compatible with every condition in which God's providence constrains our fallen race to exist: and it is as absurd in reason, and as unfounded in fact, to assert that Christ and his Apostles required the indiscriminate abolition of human servitude, as to assert that they required the indiscriminate overthrow of any other form of despotic authority amongst men. For myself, my natural heart would doubtless have loved the teachings of the Lord all the more, if he had preached a crusade for liberty, instead of a sacrifice for sin. But with his Gospel in our hands, we can no more keep an honest and enlightened conscience, and deny that his teachings tolerated human servitude as a condition compatible with salvation—than we can make ourselves acquainted with the history of human affairs, and deny that his providence has tolerated human servitude as a condition compatible with the existence of society. What are we, that we cannot have a little patience with that, with which God has had patience since sin entered into the World? And how striking is it to behold the certainty with which men repudiate the power of the Gospel, as soon as they have fastened on it a power of their own; how surely they become heretics, apostates or infidels, when they begin to teach Christ, instead of setting down at his feet to learn

of him! What else can we say, but that all such pretexts, whether for public wrong or for private iniquity, are neither true nor real?

It was my purpose, sir, to have said something on the remaining topics of your discourse—the Practicability and Dignity of the Anti-Slavery Enterprise, together with your view of the special duty of the North with regard to it. In your first topic, however, the Necessity of that Enterprise, the foundation of all lies; and having discussed, in some degree, your fundamental principles, I pass by what, when I was a younger man, I should have been more prompt to utter, touching some other portions of your discourse. For the rest, I will venture to add a few words, which, if you cared to do so, it would be your right to demand of me, in explanation of my own views, after having spoken so freely of yours.

Slavery, Mr. Sumner, is not a modern institution; it is as ancient as human society. And yet it is not a permanent institution, in the sense of being perpetuated in one particular race or country. We have the sad advantage of being able to contemplate it, in every age of the world, in every condition of severity, and in contact with every form of civilization. We ought, by this time, to be able to comprehend it. From this point of view I have two statements to make, both of which I fear may appear to you inaccurate. The first is, that nothing concerning the structure of human society is more clearly established by the entire career of man on this earth, than that, in some form or other, the social subjugation of one part of every highly developed community to another part of it,—that is, servitude in some form or other,—is absolutely inevitable; just as much so, as the existence of crime, or want, or sorrow. Let us bewail this as a badge of our fallen condition; let us seek its constant amelioration, as one of our clearest duties: but let us respect truth, and justice, and honor, and good faith, in all our attempts. The second statement I have to make is, that the general condition of negro slavery in America, so far from being particularly direful and loathsome, as you represent it to be, is really, and indeed, of necessity, in all respects mitigated and regulated after the pervading spirit of our protestant civilization, and is gradually acquiring a more endurable position, as the power of the Gospel gradually extends its influence, and as the slave states gradually settle into the conviction, that their duty obliges them to accept this institution as a permanent part of their social system. I do not myself believe that servitude in this particular form, is, as an original question, either necessary or desirable; and I am well convinced, that in many of our slave States, it might be gradually abolished, with great advantage; while in all of them it might be still further ameliorated without regard to the question of its ultimate solution. Nor is it my opinion, that the permanent continuance of this servitude, in its present form, is possible,—though its endurance may be protracted, and the methods of its termination extremely diversified, over the immense area covered by it. Your duty and mine, sir, as American philanthropists, each in his own sphere, is to accept this great problem as we find it, and by all the means in our power, assist its final outworking, in a manner most compatible with the interests of humanity, with the true progress and glory of our country, and with those internal principles of nature and of providence which our puny efforts may in some degree assist, but are wholly impotent to control.

There is an aspect of this whole question of negro slavery in America, extremely broad, and which you do not seem to have examined. It is not merely a question of slavery and the negro population on this continent;

nor yet, merely a question of bloodshed and conquest of your North against our South. It is a question affecting all of the Black Race throughout the earth—and all those vast interests of the whole earth, which the final destiny of that immense race involves. As yet, the Black Race has never had a nationality. As yet, there has never been a civilized state within the tropics. A hundred millions of the human race, and nearly a fourth part of the earth's habitable surface, around its very centre, await the issue of this question of negro slavery in America, and must be influenced greatly, if not controllingly by it. Rest assured, Mr. Sumner, whatever dignity you may persuade yourself to ascribe to your Anti-slavery Enterprise, and to your stirring speech at Niblo's Theatre,—nay, even to your Faneuil Hall eloquence, and your Massachusetts agitations over some poor fugitive slave,—there is an eternal logic in events, and there is an awful majesty in the sublime course of Providence, in the face of which, posterity will say, that men endowed like you, ought to have been ashamed to participate in such insane, fantastic, and ignoble revels!

However difficult the question of human servitude may be to solve, after slavery has been once fully established in the bosom of a commonwealth; or however men may differ as to the moral aspect of the actual questions now agitating the minds of our countrymen so deeply; it seems to me, that as a mere topic of National politics and National legislation, the whole question of American Slavery is one environed by no other difficulties, but such as have been created by our own evil passions. So far as the powers of the National Government are concerned—has not Massachusetts the unquestionable right to create slavery in her bosom—if she sees fit to do so,—and Louisiana to abolish it in hers, if she thinks proper? And is not this true of every State? What need then is there, in all soberness, for frantic contentions about Territorial settlements, which, in their own nature, can be only temporary? Suppose Missouri should abolish slavery? Suppose Illinois should create it? Suppose Kansas should decide the question, first one way, and then the other? Moreover, what essential difference does it make, whether it is upon a basis of fifteen slave States, or sixteen slave States, that the great problem of our National destiny is to be worked out? And as to its true bearing on the infinite mission of our country, what consequence can a rational mind attach to the temporary result of a fierce conflict for supremacy between madmen in one of our territories West of the Missouri River? What odds does it make, any way, as a National question, whether there are three millions of slaves, or three millions and a fraction over; whether six, or ten, or a hundred slaves, more or less, escape or are reclaimed? The power of the General Government over the whole subject is so extremely limited, and transient, and incidental, as compared with the absolute power of the States themselves; the good that can be done by the exercise of the powers actually possessed by Congress, is comparatively so slight and uncertain, and the danger which is obviously incurred is so real and deplorable; the condition in which the Nation stands with reference to the whole subject is so distinct and so peculiar; that, I must confess, it has always appeared to me unspeakably surprising, that any National party,—and especially any one at the North,—should be found capable of permanent organization in connection with such topics. Any honest, moderate, patriotic, consistent exercise of the powers of the General Government over the question of slavery, could hardly have failed to satisfy the nation to the end,—as it satisfied it during its early and most

glorious period. Whatever may have been the sins or follies of Southern Statesmen, or the Southern people, it would be hard to produce an example at once more flagrant, insulting, and unjust, than the discourse which suggested these remarks.

After all, I cannot persuade myself that God will allow us to degrade ourselves so utterly, as to break up this glorious confederacy on such a question as this. I do not allow myself to believe that the mass of the American people, are so utterly destitute of the sublime instinct of their country's mission among the Nations. Civil war is not a remedy; it is the most direful of all diseases. National strength, in a day like ours, and to freemen, is not so much a glory, as it is a necessity—the grand necessity of their liberty and independence. As to slavery, it is a question about which men may differ, according to the necessities of their condition and the point of view from which they consider it. But the cordial, and indissoluble Union of these States, is a matter concerning which no American who has a true heart in his bosom, can possibly have but one opinion—one purpose. If their be one political duty common to us all, and transcendently clear and binding, it is that we should visit with immediate and condign punishment, every party and every public man, who is not loyal to the Union and the Constitution.

Your fellow citizen and obedient servant,

R. J. BRECKINRIDGE.

*Brodalbane, Ky., June 11th, 1855.*

#### CHURCH ELECTIONS.—WHO MAY VOTE FOR PASTOR ?

HOWEVER unsatisfactory may have been the discussion in the late Assembly as to the right of suffrage in our congregations, we are gratified, and grateful to the Head of the Church, that the venality which prevails in elections in some parts of the Church, is beginning to excite attention and alarm. We are duly deliberate in using the term venality; for, as shall be shown, it is the very term which describes the thing. The debate in the Assembly was interesting, but by no means exhaustive of the subject. In our opinion the wisest speech made on the occasion was by Dr. Plumer. The report of it, we give in full :

“ It is clear we are not agreed. First, because the Book is a little ambiguous : secondly, our practice is widely different : thirdly, few have studied the subject much. I therefore move that the overture and other papers now before the body on this subject, be referred to a committee of three, to report to the Assembly of 1856.”

It is greatly to be regretted that Dr. Plumer's motion did not prevail. The subject was laid on the table; but it will not be allowed to slumber there forever. It is enough for the Church to know that there are persons who advocate the extension of the elective franchise to all men, of every creed and character, who are willing to purchase it with money. We pause to notice particularly but one argument urged in the Assembly, against confining the priv-