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Political.

The Perils and Exigencies of the Present Crisis.

An Address Delivered by the Hon. Robert Dale Owen, on Wednesday, February 13, 1861, in the Hall of Representatives, Indianapolis.

If there be any one among us who has so far strayed from the truth as to believe that public affairs may be safely neglected for private, and that politics constitute a trade fit only for the demagogue, let him now confess the magnitude of his error, and its fatal consequences. Let him confess that the powers of the wisest and best may well be taxed to find, amid the gloom that is daily settling more and more darkly around us, a path of safety and of peace.

Under such circumstances, even those who are no longer actively engaged in public life may be excused, if they step forward; each, in the way of counsel or warning, contributing his mite.

It will be eighty five years in the month of July next, since, to a crowd assembled in an open square and its adjoining street—Chestnut street, in Philadelphia,—a man of grave aspect read a certain document, every syllable of which thrilled through the hearts of his audience. For it announced one of those great resolves such as occur only in the lapse of many centuries, destined thenceforth to influence, for good or for evil, the destinies of half the civilized world.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the importance of that declaration. Yet it is doubtful to-day, when more than three-quarters of a century has tested the Republican experiment of Union and Independence,—to-day, in a time of profound peace with all foreign nations, and when we have no other enemies but our own degenerate selves,—whether we of the present generation are not called upon to act under circumstances more grave, at a crisis more solemn, to decide a question more momentous than the Revolutionary question itself.

For while the crowd before that old State House witnessed the birth of a republic, composed of States united as to foreign relations, their descendants and successors, are to be witnesses either of the rescue and the restored health and vigor of that confederated Union, or of its downfall and dissolution.

Long have we been accustomed to assume that apprehensions of danger to the government of our country were but the panic dreams of imagination, baseless and vain; that while generation after generation of its citizens passed to another phase of existence, the Union would yet remain and endure. The Supreme Judge of the world, to whom the patriots of '76 appealed for the rectitude of their intentions, seemed to be now, that, as there are physical laws which no man, even the strongest, may habitually disregard, and yet continue to live, so are there also great social laws which no nation, how powerful soever, how prosperous soever, may persistently violate and yet hope to escape their inevitable punishment; the fate in the past, of a hundred empires, of whose greatness, except in the warning page of history, the only records left are piles of moldering ruin.

There are few men among us who do not, in words, profess a reverence for Christianity, yet there are perhaps as few who truly, earnestly believe, or who in their deeds practically evince belief, that a nation may survive or may fall, according as its people or its rulers exhibit, in their public action, a regard or a disregard, not for any special form of worship, not for any peculiar phase of creed, not for the letter that killeth, but for the substance, the essence of that system of ethics which Jesus taught; for the spirit which giveth life.

It is time we should learn, that, if our religion contains, as each week we assume that it does, the great practical rules of life, it is both weak and criminal to use it, as many, like some holiday garment, reserved only for the season of rest and prayer. It should be our every day wear. It should go with us into life, public as well as private. Its spirit should influence our actions, not as individuals only; as Representatives, as statesmen.

But if we look closely at the Christian system, not in its ecclesiastical aspect, but as an element of civilization and in its connection with human progress and public affairs, what do we find? Aside from all theological subtleties; aside, too, from those minor peculiarities which touch only the essential, but which often enkindle polemical zeal in the inverse ratio of their practical importance; aside from all this, what is the master-principle pervading the entire code of Christian morality, giving it life and peculiar character, distinguishing it broadly, conspicuously, from the Jewish and all other stern old systems of an ancient world?

It is the substitution, in all the affairs of mankind, whether international, legislative, litigant, executive or social, of the spirit of mildness for the spirit of force. It is the replacement of war by peace, of severity by humanity; and by forgiving mercy of vindictive justice; for contention the enjoining of meekness, and for hatred, of love.

We stand, at this hour, on the verge of disunion. What has brought us there? More than any other one thing the manner in which we have set at nought the noblest injunctions of Him whom we idly profess to honor and love.

It avails nothing to inquire whether in this the North or the South be more deeply in the fault. It is a fact patent to the world that both are guilty. In the South, under the promptings of alarm for an institution which the public opinion of a majority of the civilized world disapproves, there have been threats and acts of violence destructive alike of security to person and of freedom to individual opinion. Among us of the North there has shown itself a temper as pernicious as lawless deeds; a temper unneighborly, abusive, intermeddling, pharisaical: "God, we thank thee that we are not as other men, or even as these slaveholders." Between both, there has been a spirit the very reverse of the Christian; haughty, vindictive, unforgiving. There has been crimination and recrimination. Mutual offenses and short comings have been distorted and magnified. There have been passing, throughout long years until they stung and rankled, those grievous words that stir up anger. That anger, becoming the madness of the hour, at length so inflamed the brains of fanatics in either section, that they set to calculating the value of the Union, and finally fell into the delusion that it was not worth the sacrifice of evil passions which was necessary to maintain it. In the South many acted upon this delusion; in the North, not a few rejoiced in that action.

And thus it has become a necessity, melancholy though it be, to estimate the privileges and advantages enjoyed under this Confederacy of States; and enjoyed, until now, as we enjoy the fresh air or the sunlight, scarce heeding the blessings they are, and little dreaming that we may, one day, be deprived of them.

What is our Federal Union worth? Ask rather (for one question is a paraphrase of the other) what is life worth?—life and all that makes life worth having? What is it worth to maintain inviolate security to person and property? to enjoy uninterrupted peace and prosperity at home, acknowledged power and consideration abroad? There is not a constitutional safe-guard to human liberty, wrung six centuries since by the English Barons from King John, and since developed and matured and consolidated, from age to age, first by slow and sturdy effort in Great Britain, then more boldly and rapidly in this New World—there is not a right or a privilege, private or political, which has been won from arbitrary rule, back from the date of Magna Charta and down to the present hour, that is not placed in imminent jeopardy from that day forth, if come it must, when these Confederated States shall finally dissolve their political connection, never more to be re united.

Is this imagination? Is it exaggeration? Is no such retrograde movement possible in the course of civilization? Is it a thing unexampled, that a brave and powerful people, reared in the love of freedom, should prove recreant to their principles and relapse into anarchy or absolutism? Such is not the lesson of history. All past experience teaches, indeed, that this is a world of constant progress; that, in the aggregate, the human race is advancing from ignorance and strife and misrule to intelligence and peace and social order, and that for mankind, as a whole, there is no retrogression. But he must have read history to little profit, who knows not, or fails to bear in mind, that though the march of civilization be constant, the order of precedence in that march is ever varying. America can not, it is true, by any folly, by any madness, arrest that perpetual progression from the worse to the better which God has made a rule as universal as the law of gravitation. But she may forfeit, as mightier nations than she have forfeited, her rank among the great leaders, and may take ignominious place, as they have been doomed to take it, in the straggling rear.

What once was republican Rome? Whence but from the records of the courage and the patriotism and the self devotion and all the stern virtues of her earlier days, have modern nations, struggling for liberty, derived their best inspiration? Yet how low since then, in their disunion and isolated existence, have sunk the petty States that occupy distracted Italy, once the foremost leader in the progress of the world!

It was during a residence in one of these States that I first realized what a nation is, deprived of those guards to freedom which we inherit from the mother country; denied trial by jury, with no right of habeas corpus, its people taxed without their consent, ruled without their concurrence; no property exempt for an hour from lawless seizure; no man safe, for a night, from arbitrary arrest and indefinite imprisonment; obedience enforced at the bayonet's point; order coerced by a hundred thousand well drilled soldiers.

We shrink, perhaps, indignantly from the thought, that we may brought, even to this. And so did one of old shrink, when the prophet with tears predicted the evils he should bring upon his country. "What! is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" Little he knows who takes the first devious step from the pleasant paths of wisdom and peace, whither the devious windings are to conduct him at last. It is as true in politics as in morals, that the road is broad and of easy descent that leads to the lowest depths of national degradation.

But you think I adduce sufficient warrant, perhaps, in the facts which surround us, to justify these forebodings of evil. God send that they be overestimated! It would be cowardly faintheartedness, if the severance of this Confederacy were, even now, irrevocably settled, to relax a single exertion. But he is best prepared to meet an emergency who has the most carefully scanned its possible results. The observer who employs a telescope to obtain an enlarged view of a distant danger, thereby neither lessens its distance nor increases its magnitude.

What, then, is the prospect around us? Six States have already passed ordinances of secession. If conciliation does not arrest the action of the border States, they may do likewise, and the breach may become permanent. The North and the South may, in the future, constitute two nations.

Is that all? The door once set open, the precedent once established, who shall say where disintegration shall stop? The free States sundered from the slave will still, it is sometimes argued, form a powerful and respected confederacy. But what assurance have we, if mere sectional interests are to be held as valid excuse for secession, that the North west and the North-east will hold together; the one manufacturing and in favor of protective duties, the other agricultural and holding to a revenue tariff? To say nothing of the distant States of the Pacific, what certainty is there that New York and New England will remain in the same confederacy? In the commercial metropolis of our country men already canvass the advantages of a free port. Symptoms begin to exhibit themselves, and may go further than empty words, of a desire to imitate the free towns of Northern Europe, and to seek in a sovereign municipality advantages from which they have been debarred by the restraining sovereignty of the Union.

If such should prove to be the course of things, what destiny awaits our dissevered country? What destiny? The hand of God alone, lifting the dark veil, can disclose the brood of evils that may be in store for us, remarkably concealed as yet behind its impenetrable folds!

But in dim and faint outline, lighted by the torch of History, we may see shadowed forth our possible fate. The strength which is derived from union alone, lost forever! The power gone to command for our citizens either security at home or protection abroad. Rank, influence, consideration in the eyes of the world, all madly forfeited! The glory of our Israel departed! The flag that, even yet, we cherish as a talisman of hope in every civilized land, become but a warning beacon of the past, the symbol of greatness dishonored and empire overthrown. The United States of America, for whom, but yesterday, half a continent seemed an insufficient theater of action, degraded to the level of petty, half-civilized principalities, whose obscure and chronic quarrels History scarce deigns to record;—become the peer of Costa Rica or Nicaragua, of Venezuela or Ecuador.

The worst yet remains untold. Power and station forfeited, will even peaceful obscurity remain to us?

There is an evil, besides which, if we are to judge of causes by effects, all other human evils sink into insignificance; a giant evil that has stalked abroad over the earth ever since man was its inhabitant; an evil, the terrible details of which fill up more than one half of every human history. Its victims are numbered, not by thousands, not by millions, by hundreds or thousands of millions. No man can reckon them. No human imagination can reach the aggregate of the calamities it has inflicted on mankind; cities, from those minor pestilences, given up to the flames; fields of the dead and the dying, whole countries so utterly desolated, that the authors of their ruin might have adopted the Hun's fearful boast, that "the grass never grew where his horse once trod." Honest industry, instructive science, liberal arts, languish before it. All direful passions follow in its wake. If there be one evil, one crime above all others, that has closed man's ears to reason and man's heart to the love of his kind; one that has been the foe of freedom, one that has been the deadly enemy of human rights,—that evil, that crime is war. And this—*the* evil of evils—may be standing, even now while I speak, thundering at the gate.

North as well as South, we see already the nucleus of standing armies. If these be maintained and kept busy, how will it end? What follows, surely as the setting sun follows the rising, in the train of standing armies, numerous and actively employed. The ascendancy of force over reason, or arbitrary sway over liberty, fame and popularity and power to successful war-leaders; and at last, it may be, what Bourbon-governed Naples was cursed with—a Military Despotism.

And all these hideous evils, crowned by this appalling catastrophe, we are about to risk,—why?—for what?

The party which succeeded at the last Presidential election rested their chief claims to public favor on their disapproval, in principle, of a form of labor, involving African servitude, which prevails, by law, in fifteen of these United States. Yet that party does not propose to get rid of this form of labor. It does not even propose to diminish the number of slaves. Its ablest leaders declare that they would not, if it were in their power, so alter the Constitution as to abolish involuntary servitude in the States where it now prevails. Nor, last May, at Chicago, was there any declaration, in terms, of their intention to confine that servitude within its present limits, by refusing admission to any new States, the inhabitants of which might constitutionally adopt this form of labor, or otherwise; though it is, probably, a fair inference that such is the desire of a considerable portion of that party.

On the other hand, no Southern State has proposed, though a party in some of them may wish, by reopening the slave trade, to increase the number of African slaves by immigration.

Whatever, therefore, may be the private desires on either side, the practical question of difference, as avowed, is narrowed down to a very small matter. Let us observe that it involves no proposition whatever for the increase of slavery. It involves no proposal to reduce to servitude, here or elsewhere, one human being who is now a freeman. The question at issue amounts to this, and no more; whether the four million Africans now held to labor within a certain area of territory shall with their descendants and their owners, be restricted to their region, or shall be permitted also to occupy, if their owners see fit to occupy, other more Western portions of this continent.

Is this a question of humanity to the negro, or of advantage to the white? I know of no good reason for supposing that slaves, in a Federal Territory, will be worse treated or more unhappy than slaves in a Federal State. I know of no sufficient reason for the belief that the number of Africans will augment, by natural increase, more rapidly, if diffused through sixteen or eighteen States than if confined to fifteen; it is certain, that within the limits of the present slave States the serviile population might increase to five times its present number.

But if no one African is added to the present catalogue of slaves, and if no measure is proposed that is calculated, in the slightest degree, to add to the burdens that may now be borne by the negro under the Southern form of labor, what becomes, I ask you, of the question of humanity? What becomes of the common assumption, that the present is a struggle for the rights of man, in which every concession is a surrender of sacred principle, a link added to the heavy fetters of the bondsman?—that it is a struggle in which all compromise is an act of recreancy to freedom, in which there should be but one battle-cry: "Let mercy and justice be done, if the heavens fall"

There is a question—in the abstract a vitally important one—apparently involved in the legal condition of our Territories. But the destiny, the rights, the welfare of the African are no whit concerned in that question; no, not more than the condition of the serfs of Russia. What matters it to the negro whether he be held to servitude in South Carolina, or in Texas, or in Nebraska? Do his hours of toil increase in number, or the provisions of the slave code augment in severity as he is carried West? No. Are his chances of good treatment or of emancipation less in a Territory than in a State? No. It is not he who would suffer by the change. It would be the emigrant, the white laborer. If slaves, in numbers, become resident where he is, he finds his voluntary labor brought into contact and competition with involuntary servitude. In such a case he has a right to complain. In such a case he has a right to require that there shall be portions of Federal territory, corresponding in extent to the relative number of free States, in which he may settle without being compelled to labor in competition with those who receive for the longest day's work but food and clothing, or to bring up his children among the adverse influences and temptations inseparable from a system of legalized slavery.

But in all this the white man is acting for himself and his descendants, not for the African race. He proposes not to loosen the fetters, not to alleviate the condition of one single slave. He proposes to keep them out of his way; that is all.

I commend his resolution to keep slaves out of his way. I confess that he is reasonable in demanding, if the demand be necessary, that from certain territory they should be excluded. What I object to is, that he should say he desires this exclusion for *their* sakes and *their* interest, when, in fact, he desires it for his own. What I object to is, that he should set up for a philanthropist when he is an economist only. What I object to is, that he should assume credit when he deserves none; that he should glory in his zeal and devotion to the sacred cause of humanity, when his motives,—very proper motives, commendable in their place,—rise no higher than to seek an adequate reward for his own labor, and advantageous surroundings for his children and for himself.

But this is a view of the abstract question only, as a question of principle, of conscience. Its practical aspect remains to be considered, and will have to result in conclusions even more decidedly important.

I said that the free laborer might reasonably demand, for his own and his children's use, the occupation; unshared by slaves, of certain portions of our Territories, *if the demand be necessary*. But recent events show, that this demand, proper in itself, has no practical application. It is fruitless to make it; for no object is obtained when it is granted.

The industry of a Senator from New York, soon, if report speaks truth, to occupy the chief seat in the Cabinet, has recently brought to light a fact, conclusive on this branch of the subject.

The entire Territories of the United States outside of the States already admitted, comprehend an area twenty-four times as large as that of the State of New York. For twelve years this Territory has been open to the occupation of slave owners with their slaves. Yet, as Senator Seward brought forward by Mr. Seward is, that into this vast extent of country, in which, under the action of Congress and the decision of the Supreme Court, slavery has been uninterruptedly maintained, protected, guaranteed, *there have been brought twenty-four slaves only*. If, throughout the last twelve years, slavery had been interdicted there, what would have been the practical result? Let faction listen! Let fanaticism give ear! The practical result would have been, that *twenty-four African slaves would have been excluded therefrom!*

I hope that I am as willing as others to respect the conscientious scruples of my fellow citizens. I trust that I am capable of appreciating, and disposed to honor, exertions and sacrifices in a great and good cause. Nor has it been the habit of my life to let principle wait upon expediency. But experience has taught me that, in the excitement of party strife, few men maintain due proportion between effort and result. The immediate object of pursuit looms up before us in a magnitude and importance due only to the distorting medium through which it is regarded.

Have any honestly persuaded themselves that, if, at this moment, the Union is endangered, it is for a cause in which life and liberty may rationally be staked?—that the contest is for the most precious of human rights?—that the issue is the same that has, in all times, and in a hundred shapes, divided the opinions of mankind—the issue between freedom and slavery? Let him be undeceived. Before us, to-day, there is no such issue. There might have been, but there is not. There might have been. For there are, among us, four millions of men, of African lineage, existing without personal liberty or political rights. The issue might have been, on the one side, whether that liberty and these rights should be accorded to them; and, on the other, whether additional numbers of the same race should be brought hither, to be subjected to the same servitude. The North might have demanded immediate manumission, or she might have proposed the purchase and colonization of every negro slave on this continent; or she might have sought, by force or argument, to mitigate the stringency of slave-codes. The South, on her side, in search of wealth and political influence, might have demanded, by a reopening of the slave trade, an increase of human servitude; an extension of the three-fifth basis of representation; an importation, from the African coast, at once, of Federal votes and domestic labor.

All this might have been. And then, indeed, might the friends of the African have called upon us to say whether we were willing to imperil our Union for his sake. But except by a comparatively small sect of Abolitionists in the North and a few inconsiderate extremists in the South, no such extravagant and impracticable measures have ever been broached, far less seriously proposed. What party, having any respectable influence, will avow them? Are they found, with the inconsiderable exceptions referred to, in any one of our present political creeds?

The great issues to which I have here referred were made up and were determined seventy-three years ago. Thirty-nine deputies from thirteen States, men more dispassionate if not wiser than their descendants, debated and decided them. If we would make these issues again, we must first reverse that solemn decision. If we protest against any constitutional recognition of voluntary servitude, we say that better is disunion without slavery than Union with it; if we declare that we can not so outrage principle as to make *any* compromise with slavery; then are we practically denouncing the statesmanship of Washington and Jefferson, and Franklin and Madison, and all that host of worthies who by their signatures to the Constitution or by their subsequent adhesion to it, sanctioned the delicately balanced provisions of that instrument. Then are we virtually declaring, not only that the Union ought not now to continue, but that it ought never to have been established. Then are we assuming that those who framed what for three-quarters of a century has been held to be the charter of our republican freedom, were betraying the very cause of liberty which that charter assumes to confirm.

Are we prepared to take such ground as that? In the name of nineteen out of every twenty among us, I venture to answer No! Like the patriots of the Revolution, nay, like every reasonable being who inhabits this imperfect world, we are content to tolerate some evil for the sake of much good.

But if no essential question now divides public opinion, what is the character of the present perilous strife?

A Presidential canvass, as usually conducted among us, must have its platforms, its watchwords, its war-cries. It must have on either side, its enthusiasm, its excitements, its fanaticism. These periodical tempests have their advantages, but they have their grave dangers also. If they stir the stagnant pools and clear the air, they often grievously disturb the equilibrium of the mental and moral atmosphere. Time must elapse, after each storm, before calm and order, and sober reason are, even in a measure, restored.

Only in such considerations as these, will a temperate spectator, here or in foreign lands, find any intelligible explanation of the amazing scenes that are now daily enacted among us.

I doubt whether, in all the past history of the world, a great empire, strong in power and prosperity, was ever threatened with dissolution for cause so light, through variance of opinion so trivial as the cause, and the variance that constitute our danger to-day.

The fears that were produced in the South by the election of the President soon to be inaugurated were the idlest of all visionary terrors. The concession by the North necessary to allay these fears are but as dust in the balance compared to the inestimable interests at stake.

How clearly we of the Free States distinguish the mote in a brother's eye.—the mad folly of the South! If we could but realize, half as distinctly, the beam is our own! Never, since America first took her separate and equal station among the nations of the earth, was the task of self-scrutiny so imperatively demanded of us as now!

Our shortcomings are chiefly two. First, an error to which humanity is prone, and which, the most easily, perhaps, besets the vigorous race to which we belong. Many of us mistake the promptings of inclination for the dictates of conscience. Many of us assume to be governed and restrained by love of principle, when the ruling motive of our action is pride of opinion alone.

Akin to this sin of presumption, but of darker stain and wider range, is the second offense we commit.

It is an offense against civilization and religion. We profess one thing and practice another, in our churches, nominally the followers of Him who was meek and lowly of heart; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not. We hear, with a moment's reverence, perhaps, the teachings of his faith: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called the children of God." "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them." Or clarity, it may be, is the theme, that charity greater than faith or hope, which "suffereth long and is kind; which is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." We listen. We have brought to the temple the homage of our presence, the offering of our attention. Are we Christians because of that? "Leave there thy gift before before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift."

Is all this impracticable abstraction, or sacred teaching? Are these visionary theories, or rules of life?

I have not forgotten, that there is no doctrine so pure but that it may be urged to an extreme. I need not be reminded, that when a weak and ignorant monarch, once sought to coerce his Transatlantic Colonies, and lost them by so doing, independence would not have been achieved had American subjects, meekly submitting to a long series of oppressions, refrained from an appeal to arms. But a rule is not to be set aside, and its excellence denied and its spirit violated, because, here and there, it may be necessary to make exceptions to it.

I admit, too, that, in practical life, each important case may be, in a measure, judged according to its own peculiar aspect. Let us, then, scrutinize the state of things before us, and see if therein can be found aught to justify a departure from that code of morals which it is weakness or hypocrisy first to acknowledge, and then to despise and disobey.

I regard South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, notwithstanding their declarations, as still, technically and legally speaking, within the Union. I cherish a hope, though it may be clouded with doubt, that they will not irrevocably leave it. But the anomalous condition in which they stand can not very long continue.

Whether the connection between us and them shall be finally severed or not, depends, of course, mainly upon this, whether the inhabitants of these States are united in their determination for a separate national existence or not.

I am not yet convinced that they are. We have had no satisfactory, not to say official, proof of it; no popular vote by ballot to indicate the true wishes of the masses.

If they are firmly united in such a determination, and persevere in it, not only can we not retain them, but we ought no longer to desire it.

When millions of men deliberately, by solemn declaration, combine for a common object, they are to be treated as political models. There can be a band of five or fifty or five hundred, but there is no such thing as a band of five million traitors. They become revolutionists. They are entitled to this character in virtue of their numbers and their unanimity, no matter whether the object for which they combine be wise or foolish, legal or illegal; for indeed revolution usually consists in opposition to existing laws. If, by concerted action, in bands of thousands called soldiers, they resist constituted authorities, kill, seize property, even commit depredations, whatever the moral turpitude of these acts, those who perpetrate them are not, in the eye of international law, guilty of murder or of robbery; they are carrying on war. If taken in the act, they cannot, according to that law, be considered as traitors, but only as enemies; they cannot be hanged or sent to the penitentiary; they must be treated as prisoners of war: that question was settled by George Washington in our own revolution. Their acts are hostile, they are not rebellious.

If, then, the millions inhabiting the seceding States be united in their present object, or become unanimous or nearly so in the favor, it is a flagrant abuse of language to call them traitors. The law of nations declares that they are not. The force at their disposal will prove that they are not. We may levy war against them as enemies. That we have a right to do. We outrage civilization, and forfeit all claim to the respect of mankind, if we seek to do more.

Say that we levy war. Let us bear well in mind that it will be, not against five millions, but against ten. The border and Middle States will not stand by and see us carry it on; they will join our enemies.

But if we levy war against ten millions, who are now our brethren, to what purpose? To subside, when that liberty and these rights should be accorded to them; and, on the other, whether additional numbers of the same race should be brought hither, to be subjected to the same servitude. The North might have demanded immediate manumission, or she might have proposed the purchase and colonization of every negro slave on this continent; or she might have sought, by force or argument, to mitigate the stringency of slave-codes. The South, on her side, in search of wealth and political influence, might have demanded, by a reopening of the slave trade, an increase of human servitude; an extension of the three-fifth basis of representation; an importation, from the African coast, at once, of Federal votes and domestic labor.

All this might have been. And then, indeed, might the friends of the African have called upon us to say whether we were willing to imperil our Union for his sake. But except by a comparatively small sect of Abolitionists in the North and a few inconsiderate extremists in the South, no such extravagant and impracticable measures have ever been broached, far less seriously proposed. What party, having any respectable influence, will avow them? Are they found, with the inconsiderable exceptions referred to, in any one of our present political creeds?

The great issues to which I have here referred were made up and were determined seventy-three years ago. Thirty-nine deputies from thirteen States, men more dispassionate if not wiser than their descendants, debated and decided them. If we would make these issues again, we must first reverse that solemn decision. If we protest against any constitutional recognition of voluntary servitude, we say that better is disunion without slavery than Union with it; if we declare that we can not so outrage principle as to make *any* compromise with slavery; then are we practically denouncing the statesmanship of Washington and Jefferson, and Franklin and Madison, and all that host of worthies who by their signatures to the Constitution or by their subsequent adhesion to it, sanctioned the delicately balanced provisions of that instrument. Then are we virtually declaring, not only that the Union ought not now to continue, but that it ought never to have been established. Then are we assuming that those who framed what for three-quarters of a century has been held to be the charter of our republican freedom, were betraying the very cause of liberty which that charter assumes to confirm.

Are we prepared to take such ground as that? In the name of nineteen out of every twenty among us, I venture to answer No! Like the patriots of the Revolution, nay, like every reasonable being who inhabits this imperfect world, we are content to tolerate some evil for the sake of much good.

But if no essential question now divides public opinion, what is the character of the present perilous strife?

A Presidential canvass, as usually conducted among us, must have its platforms, its watchwords, its war-cries. It must have on either side, its enthusiasm, its excitements, its fanaticism. These periodical tempests have their advantages, but they have their grave dangers also. If they stir the stagnant pools and clear the air, they often grievously disturb the equilibrium of the mental and moral atmosphere. Time must elapse, after each storm, before calm and order, and sober reason are, even in a measure, restored.

Only in such considerations as these, will a temperate spectator, here or in foreign lands, find any intelligible explanation of the amazing scenes that are now daily enacted among us.

I doubt whether, in all the past history of the world, a great empire, strong in power and prosperity, was ever threatened with dissolution for cause so light, through variance of opinion so trivial as the cause, and the variance that constitute our danger to-day.

The fears that were produced in the South by the election of the President soon to be inaugurated were the idlest of all visionary terrors. The concession by the North necessary to allay these fears are but as dust in the balance compared to the inestimable interests at stake.

How clearly we of the Free States distinguish the mote in a brother's eye.—the mad folly of the South! If we could but realize, half as distinctly, the beam is our own! Never, since America first took her separate and equal station among the nations of the earth, was the task of self-scrutiny so imperatively demanded of us as now!

Our shortcomings are chiefly two. First, an error to which humanity is prone, and which, the most easily, perhaps, besets the vigorous race to which we belong. Many of us mistake the promptings of inclination for the dictates of conscience. Many of us assume to be governed and restrained by love of principle, when the ruling motive of our action is pride of opinion alone.

Akin to this sin of presumption, but of darker stain and wider range, is the second offense we commit.

It is an offense against civilization and religion. We profess one thing and practice another, in our churches, nominally the followers of Him who was meek and lowly of heart; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not. We hear, with a moment's reverence, perhaps, the teachings of his faith: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called the children of God." "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them." Or clarity, it may be, is the theme, that charity greater than faith or hope, which "suffereth long and is kind; which is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." We listen. We have brought to the temple the homage of our presence, the offering of our attention. Are we Christians because of that? "Leave there thy gift before before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift."

Is all this impracticable abstraction, or sacred teaching? Are these visionary theories, or rules of life?

I have not forgotten, that there is no doctrine so pure but that it may be urged to an extreme. I need not be reminded, that when a weak and ignorant monarch, once sought to coerce his Transatlantic Colonies, and lost them by so doing, independence would not have been achieved had American subjects, meekly submitting to a long series of oppressions, refrained from an appeal to arms. But a rule is not to be set aside, and its excellence denied and its spirit violated, because, here and there, it may be necessary to make exceptions to it.

I admit, too, that, in practical life, each important case may be, in a measure, judged according to its own peculiar aspect. Let us, then, scrutinize the state of things before us, and see if therein can be found aught to justify a departure from that code of morals which it is weakness or hypocrisy first to acknowledge, and then to despise and disobey.

We have here passed in review every point embraced in the various proposed compromises of the day. It is quite certain that some one of the compromises, or some combination of them (I assume not to determine its exact provisions,) will satisfy and retain in the Union the border slave States. It is equally certain that the news of a compromise accepted by them, when it reaches the seceding States, will be hailed by those who may be now, against hope, struggling there for the Union, as they would hail the glorious sun, breaking out after a weary tempest. Cheered by the glad conviction that a portion of the South has declared for that Union, that States with institutions like their own have decided still to cast their lot within it, may we not hope much from their exertions?

But even if these, for the time, should fail, how great will have been our gain! Nearly half the South, perhaps, still have remained within the Confederacy. The prospect that some reflection and actual experience of their true condition as dissevered States may, in the end, gradually bring in the remainder. Meanwhile the certainty that our seat of Government is preserved, that the tomb of Washington will never stand on a foreign, not to say an enemy's soil; and that, if a few stars have dropped out, our flag retains, none the less, its identity, and will still be known over the world as the ensign that represents the power and greatness of the United States of America.

But all these results and a thousand more—the blessed security of peace, of hearth and home inviolate—depend upon our forbearance. They are secured, or they may be lost forever, according as we now consent, or now refuse, to compromise.

If Faction stand out and refuse, will she succeed in her work of destruction? The answer shall be given by one, who, next to the President elect, will probably have the best opportunity to verify his own words. Hear what William H. Seward said, from his place in the Senate, on the last day of last month: He said, that, in lieu of that territorial question which had ceased to be a practical one, "comes up a great and vital and fearful question—the question of Union or of dissolution of the Union; the question of country or no country; the question of hope, and the question of greatness, or the question of sinking forever under the contempt of mankind." He said, (and I earnestly pray your attention to such a sentiment coming from such a man,)—he said, that, before the Union can be saved, partisan interests and platforms and all men who cling to them are to pass away and disappear. He said, that, when it shall be fully discovered that the Union is in danger, "through faction or even impracticability," and when there shall arise the whirlwind of popular indignation that will be excited at the discovery, then "you shall see men, whatever they may have been, who shall oppose, resist, stand in the way of the preservation of the Union will appear but as moths in a summer eve."

Is that plain speech? It is plain and faithful and truthful speech. It is speech such as the crisis demands. It honors the speaker. And no man save Abraham Lincoln himself could have uttered it with more authority than William H. Seward.

This plain speech declares, that there stand in the way of the preservation of the Union, not principles, not practical questions, but partisan interests, but platforms and their supporters, but factious and impracticable men. And this plain speech predicts, that whenever the people shall discover that that Union which, from their cradles they have loved, is in danger, their indignation will arise, like a mighty storm; and these interests, these platforms, all these factious and impracticable men will perish, like ephemeral insects, before it.

I do not understand Mr. Seward as declaring this of any one set of partisan interests, of any one platform, of factious and impracticable men belonging to any one single party. I understand him as declaring it of all interests and all platforms and all men, be they found where they will, that now are, or that may hereafter become, obstacles to the preservation of the Union.

"All factious are impracticable men." Who are the factious and the impracticable? Do any ask, "Is it I? Is it I?" If they are honest in the inquiry, their consciences may readily answer it. If any Republican there be, who thinks and acts with a view to maintain political power and his party creed first, and to preserve the Union afterwards; if any Democrat there be, who thinks and acts with a view to regain political power and reinstate his party creed first, and to preserve the Union afterwards, that Republican, that Democrat, is the man. Through him and through such as he, it is, that, in these days of gloom, offenses come. Wo to him! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast in the sea!

In conclusion, suffer me very briefly to group together the issues I have made, in their connection with the present state of things, its perils and its exigencies.

Thus we stand: Six Slave States, declaring themselves out of the Union, have elected a President and Vice President of a Southern Confederacy. Two more seem ready to join that Confederacy. Seven Border and Middle States comprise the remainder. Virginia, their leader, has declared, conditionally, for the Union. If a compromise, substantially embodying the provisions I have already passed in review, is adopted, she deems it certain that the Cotton States, if they should abstain from every word or deed that may tend to irritate. But this is not enough. We owe them not forbearance only, but active aid. The border slave States are bestirring themselves. Virginia, the mother of patriots, has made the earliest move; has already stemmed the tide of disunion within her own borders, and has been the first to invite her sisters, from the North as from the South, to a family council. "Come now and let us reason together," she has said.

Is there to be no response to a spirit frank and noble as that? Are we to stand sullenly, truculently, and say: "There is nothing to reason about; we have nothing to concede." Are the Commissioners from Virginia, and from our neighbor Kentucky and the rest, to return home and declare to their constituents: "It is vain; all our offers are rejected; all terms of accommodation are refused." Are the Border slave States, thus repulsed, to join their seceding sisters, making the South a unit, and quenching the last spark of hope for a united country?

If such be the lamentable consummation that is approaching, what will have brought it about? The behests of principle? the dictates of conscience? tenderness for the welfare of the African? regard for the advantage of the white laborer? any one sentiment of honor, of humanity? any one motive pure, upright, holy?

Not one! not one!

Cast your eye, for a moment, over the separate points at issue, and tell me if I speak not the exact, manifest truth.

The repeal of the so-called personal liberty bills; amendments to the fugitive slave law, so as to render its provisions at once more efficacious to secure its legitimate object and less obnoxious in the mode of securing it; determination of the legal *status* as to slavery, of the District of Columbia and other small portions of Federal Territory held within the limits of Southern States; the right of transit, with slaves, from one portion of the Union to another; the undisturbed right by the States where slavery exists, to regulate and control it within their own boundaries; what is there, with a single exception, in all this, except proposals more effectually to secure certain rights which are already conferred by the Constitution, or else matters too trival for rational men to make a moment's difficulty about? The exception to which I refer is the maintenance of slavery in the District of Columbia, so long as Virginia and Maryland object to its abolition there. But, in the first place, no actual change is here proposed; slavery has existed in the District ever since our existence as a nation. And, secondly, if, by refusing to continue it there we cause the secession of the two States between which it lies, will it become free? Of what use, even if it were free and were in our possession, would it be to us? Do we propose, we of the North, in case of disruption of the Union, to conduct our Government and assemble our Congress within the limits of a foreign country?

I shall be reminded, however, and properly reminded, that it is not in any of these minor points that the true difficulty lies. The question of slavery in the Territories, that is the demand, we are told, which can never be granted.

One among the thousand politicians of the day to whom, if we are to judge him from his recent efforts, may justly be accorded to the seldom earned title of statesman, the Senator from whom I have already quoted, a gentleman who will not be suspected of pro-slavery proclivities, has recently set this matter in its true light. He "has followed this thing," he says, "in good faith, with zeal and energy;" and, as a result of his inquiries, the conclusion of his sober thought, he declares that the question of slavery in the Territories "has ceased to be a practical question."

Mr. Seward speaks the simple truth; but he proclaims the inevitable conclusion which every sane man must deduce from the fact, that in all the twelve years during which slavery has been permitted and protected in the Territories of the United States, the owners of twenty-four slaves only saw fit to avail themselves of the privilege.

The question has become a mere abstraction. It exists not in the actual world, but only in those hot houses of the imagination called party creeds. A Power greater than ours has intervened. Soil, climate, circumstances—the influences of God—have already decided the matter. The efforts of man are impotent alike to confirm, as to reverse the decision.

We have here passed in review every point embraced in the various proposed compromises of the day. It is quite certain that some one of the compromises, or some combination of them (I assume not to determine its exact provisions,) will satisfy