WASHINGTON, D. C.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN RELIGIOUS TRUTHS AND AMERICAN INFIDELITY.

SPEECH OF MR. GIDDINGS, OF OHIO,

UPON

The Issues pending before the American People, in regard to Freedom and Slavery.

Delivered in Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union, February 20, 1858.

Mr. Chairman, questions of mere economy, those which relate to banks, to internal improvements, or protective tariffs, no longer occupy the public mind. These subjects have given place to questions of more transcendent importance, to those which relate to the rights of mankind, to the religious, moral, and political elevation of our race. The discussion of these subjects has, in all past time, been attended with agitation and excitement. It brings the rights of the people into conflict with despotism, whatever may be the form of government under which the discussion takes place. Such is now the condition of this mighty nation; our Union is shaken to its very centre by the agitation of great and undying truths. Our Government is vibrating between Freedom and tyranny, and it becomes us thoroughly to examine the religious basis on which we found our political action.

The late message of the President in relation to Kansas is without precedent in the history of executive communications to this body. Its tone of contempt for the people of that Territory finds no precedent in our Government, while the language of the people of Kansas, expressed by her Legislature, is most extraordinary for sovereigns to use towards a servant already arraigned before the tribunal of the popular mind, for high crimes and misdemeanors.

Under these circumstances, I have thought that the best service I can render the people on the present occasion would be to analyze the subject which now absorbs the popular mind, and, so far as able, to define the issue now pending before the nation.

That issue is founded upon fundamental religious truths, which are maintained by one political party, and denied by the other.

Immediately after the last Congress adjourned, the men who wield the judicial and executive powers of Government publicly denied the great primal doctrine of our Government, "*that all men are endowed by their Creator with inherent, equal, and inalienable rights.*" They essayed to obliterate the line of demarkation drawn by our patriot fathers between the despotisms of a darker age, and the rights of mankind as understood in this nineteenth century.

The annual message of the President, in its leading positions and in its details, wholly disregards those rights of human nature, and speaks of men, created in the image of God, with undying spirits, with eternal destinies, as transformed into *property*, in direct contradiction of those truths which the American people have long regarded as "self-evident."

It will be my object to render this issue more distinctly obvious. Its importance is transcendent; and however fully other gentlemen may have appreciated it, I feel constrained to admit that I have failed to comprehend its vastness, or set bounds to the consequences naturally resulting from its decision; yet every member of society is bound to examine and to act upon his own responsibility.

Our fathers, recognising God as the author of human life, proclaimed it a "self-evident" truth, that every human being holds from the Creator an inalienable right to live, to sustain and protect life, attain knowledge, elevate his moral nature, and enjoy happiness.

These prerogatives were recognised as "*gifts of God,*" lying behind and above human legislation; and the founders of our institutions proceeded to declare that Governments are instituted among men to secure their enjoyment. Thus our Republic was founded on religious truth, and it was thus far emphatically a religious Government. It has ever been sustained by the religious sentiment of the nation; and it will only fail when this element shall be discarded by the people. The attempt now made to overthrow these religious truths demands the severest condemnation.

There are but few men who openly deny the existence of a Supreme Being, or that he is clothed with the attributes of infinite wisdom, truth, and justice; or that men are religious in degree as they bring themselves into harmony with those divine qualities, make them their own, and assimilate their characters to that of Deity. This is the sense in which I use the term "religion." I do not speak as a sectarian. Indeed, sectarians do not regard membership as religion, but merely as the evidence of religious feeling on the part of the individual. All admit that those who are wise, truthful, just, and pure, of all denominations, and men who, possessing these attributes, belong to no particular sect, are the truly religious men of earth.

I am conscious this examination of the religious character of our Government will subject me to criticisms; but I assert, if there be a place on earth where religion, where wisdom and truth and justice and purity of purpose, should be observed and practiced, this Hall constitutes that place. If there be a class of men on earth who ought to be religious, who ought to be wise and truthful and just and pure of purpose, the members of this body ought to sustain that character.

I repeat, we all acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being; that he is the Creator; that we are brought into life by His will. At this point, the American people separate into two great parties—one holding that sovereignty dwells alone with the Creator, and not with men; that kings, potentates, and all human Governments, are subjected to the "higher law" of the Creator, and authorized to legislate only for the protection of the rights which God has conferred on mankind. Another portion deny the existence of this "higher law," and insist upon the perfect and unlimited sovereignty of human Governments over the lives and liberties of the people. To be more explicit, the religious portion hold that, as God gave life to the human race, He conferred on each a right to that liberty which is necessary to become wise, truthful, just, and pure; to bring himself into harmony with the law of God, and enjoy happiness; that these rights are equally self-evident as the existence of our race; that they are *inherent, inalienable,* and common to all men; that they constitute the great moral ligament which binds man to his Creator, connects earth with heaven, and unites the human race in one common brotherhood, bound by the most sacred obligations to love, revere, and obey our Universal Father. Of the possession of these rights, every sentient being is conscious. When God created man, and breathed into him the breath of life, when man became a living soul, this consciousness formed a part of his moral nature; and never, in any age or in any clime, has man, even in his rudest, his most barbarous state, been unconscious of his right to live, to nourish and protect life, and seek his own happiness.

These rights constitute an element of the human soul; they cannot be alienated by the individual; nor can any association of men, or any earthly power, separate the humblest of the human race from them. Men may rob their fellow man of the food which he gathers for his own support; they may deprive him of the power of self-defence; they may bind his limbs and scourge his body; they may prevent him from attaining knowledge; but his *right* to the food which he gathers, to defend his person, to attain knowledge, will remain unchanged. Their *crimes* will in no degree affect *his right.*

This relation of man to the Creator is repudiated by a portion of the American people. They deny that we hold any inalienable rights from God. They deny that the right to live, to protect life, and to attain moral elevation and happiness, is derived from Heaven, or is superior to human enactments. The denial of these fundamental religious truths I can characterize by no other term than "*American infidelity.*" This first and primal issue literally separates the religious from the infidel portion of our people. In using this language, I do not seek to cast opprobrium upon those who honestly disbelieve the religious truths which Jefferson and Adams and Franklin and their associates termed "self-evident."

The outworking of this great primal issue is witnessed in almost every important question that comes before Congress. One portion of its members adhere to the central proposition, that man holds natural and inalienable rights from the Creator, which are not to be invaded by human enactments; that they cannot be violated except by incurring the penalties of that law which was ordained by Him who bestowed them upon our race; that every individual who invades these rights of his fellow man is guilty of crime, and should be punished accordingly; that all human enactments professing to authorize the invasion of these rights are outside the just powers of human Governments, are impious invasions of God's prerogatives, are despotic in their character, impose no moral obligation upon any individual, but involve those who enact and those who support them in the same degree of guilt with those who perpetrate the crimes; that such statutes can in no degree modify the moral guilt of those who trample upon the rights which God has bestowed upon their fellow men. The other portion of the American people, maintaining a corresponding infidelity, deny the existence of these rights, deny that God has bestowed them upon mankind; they claim unlimited sovereignty for human Governments over human rights.

But I desire to call attention to some of those spec fic rights which are included in the general proposition regarded as inalienable and common to all men. Christians and patriots hold life to be the *gift of God.* They regard it sacred; they look upon its invasion as a crime; that, as the Creator bestows existence upon those who bear His image, it becomes the duty of individuals, of associations, and of Governments, to protect each and every human being in the enjoyment of life; that at this point human legislation commences, limited in its appropriate powers to the protection of life, and not to its destruction; that human Governments hold no other rightful powers in regard to life than to protect its enjoyment; that the execution of pirates and murderers, and those who invade our country, is allowed only for the purpose of protecting society; that these powers are ordained of God, sanctioned by religion, by philosophy, by the common sense of mankind. They believe that that command which was proclaimed from Sinai, in tones of thunder, saying to every human being, "Thou shalt not kill," was truly the voice of God; that it is repeated in all His works, and in every revelation of Himself, and is binding on all our race. This commandment of God, this entire doctrine, is denied by the President and by all American infidels; and this constitutes the first collateral issue.

In our slaveholding communities, enactments have been passed, and are now supported, professing to authorize masters to murder their slaves. For instance, in those States the slave is denied the right of self-defence—the right to protect his life or his person. If he attempt to defend himself against the master, the master is authorized to slay him in any manner he may be able; if he run from the master, after being ordered to stop, the master is authorized to shoot him; if he die under the scourge, the master is not held responsible. American infidels believe that no moral turpitude attaches to these statutory murders; while Christians hold that God's moral law remains unchanged by such enactments; that the guilt of the murderer is in no degree modified by such statutes; that the perpetrator stands unveiled before God and all good men, guilty as he would be if no such laws existed; that all who enact and all who support such enactments, make themselves accessary to the crimes committed under them, are guilty as such, and ought to be subjected to the same punishment with those who murder their slaves.

But this power of the master over the life of the slave constitutes the vital element of the institution, without which Slavery could not exist. It is exercised wherever Slavery is maintained. Every master exercises the privilege of driving his slave, in sickness or in health, just so severely as will best subserve his own interests. It is on this principle that slaveholders openly declare it to be profitable to work their slaves so hard as to produce the death of the whole gang on an average of five years upon sugar plantations, and of seven upon cotton plantations; and to supply their places by other victims imported from the slave-breeding States. From official documents, it is estimated that thirty thousand human victims are thus sacrificed annually within the United States and Territories.

In the slave States, it is not uncommon to see advertisements in the public papers, offering a bounty for the head of a particular slave, who has absconded from his master. Even in Ohio, during the past year, a Government official deliberately murdered an absconding slave, and is yet protected from the gallows by those who administer the State laws in the country where the murder was perpetrated. Our Federal troops are often employed in the work of murdering those who are supposed to be fugitive slaves. A signal instance of this character occurred many years since. In a time of profound peace, General Jackson directed our army to invade Florida, at that time a province of Spain, for the purpose of murdering a people who were born free, but whose ancestors had been slaves; and in one day nearly three hundred men, women, and children, were barbarously and wantonly murdered by American troops.

This system of murder is encouraged and maintained by the present Executive, and by all who support his Administration. They insist that the people of a State or Territory may rightfully enact laws giving to one man power over the life of his fellow men who have committed no offence; that popular sovereignty is not limited by God's higher law; that it extends with propriety over the life, the liberty, and the happiness, of a portion of the human family; that the whites may, with moral impunity, subject the colored people of a State or Territory to degrading servitude, close up the windows of their souls, shut out knowledge from their understandings, hold them in ignorance, and murder them if they assert the rights which God has given them.

This infidelity, within the last half century, has consigned more than a million of innocent and unoffending victims to untimely graves. The number is far greater than has perished under the infidelity of France in all past time. But this comparison of American with French infidelity does great injustice to the latter. In France, the victims were sent to the guillotine under pretence that it was necessary for the *public safety.* They suffered but little; there was no flogging, no torture. But American infidelity consigns its victims to years of torture and suffering, and finally to death, for no higher purpose than to gratify the sordid passions of their individual oppressors.

These wholesale murders are but the outworkings of that infidelity which denies that God has endowed all men with the inalienable right to live. The enactments referred to, and their results, clearly demonstrate the views of those who sustain them, and are laboring, in this Hall and elsewhere, to extend them over our Territories, and wherever Congress holds exclusive jurisdiction. It is most obvious, that while the present Administration openly lends its influence to such crimes, every intelligent man who sustains and upholds its policy, or fails to oppose it so far as able, becomes involved in the guilt of the murders which it sanctions.

But I shall be told that these enactments are confined to the slave States, and that Congress holds no power to repeal or modify them. I reply, that the people and statesmen of our Southern States insist that slaveholders may carry their slaves, and all privileges which they hold of flogging and murdering them under State laws, into our Territories; and the President, and those who sustain him, declare that the Constitution extends and protects these crimes wherever Federal authority exists. They declare that this system of murder is established by the Federal Constitution; that neither Congress nor the people of the Territories have the right to punish those who perpetrate such crimes. Not content with this avowal of doctrine, however, we are at this time sustaining a code of laws for the government of this District, which holds to the blasphemy that men may become the property of their fellow men—may be bought and sold like swine. In these and in other modes is the transcendent question of Christianity, or slaveholding heathenism, made the absorbing political issue in the nation.

But I shall be told that the Supreme Court of the United States have decided that our fathers did not intend to avow those self-evident truths which they solemnly proclaimed; that they really held to the doctrines of Slavery which they did not avow. Our fathers could no more change the law of eternal right and wrong, than we can. The ordained will of Heaven has existed through the eternity of the past, and will continue through all the future. Men may *conform* to this law, but they can never modify it, or make it conform to the human will. Our fathers sought to make no such modification of the Creator's law.

Had such infidelity characterized their action, it would have imposed no obligation upon the present generation to sustain this system of murder. They have passed to that tribunal which will do them justice. They must answer for their conduct; we must account to God and posterity for our own stewardship, and not for theirs. God, through all his works, in all his laws, by every revelation to man has prohibited us from murdering our fellow beings; and we, as to the nation, to the statesman, the legislator, the despot, the oligarch, the murderer, who disregards this law of the Most High! I feel humbled and mortified, when I see statesmen, ministers, teachers of religion, in this land of Bibles, and Sabbaths, and churches, maintain the doctrine that human authority can repeal this law of Heaven. To me, it is downright blasphemy; derogatory to the character of the Creator, and offensive to the religious sense of mankind. Yet this absurdity is the legitimate outworking of that infidelity which denies "that God has endowed all men with inalienable rights." If He has endowed our race with any right whatever, it surely is the right to live. If this right be denied, no other can be acknowledged. If there be exceptions to this central, this universal proposition, that all men, without respect to complexion or condition, hold from the Creator the right to live, who shall determine what portion of the community shall be slain? And who may perpetrate the murders? The Executive and his supporters say that white men may murder black men. The blacks deny this; God and Christianity and nature and all religious, all just, all moral men deny it.

Yet this denial of the right of men to live constitutes the mildest and least offensive phase of American infidelity. No intelligent person would desire to have the life of his body prolonged for the purpose of being subjected to physical torture, while his intellect shall be paralyzed, his soul enshrouded in ignorance, and his moral nature brutalized. Therefore, the right to enjoy liberty—physical, moral, civil, and religious—is regarded even more important than life. Indeed, it is obvious to every mind, that life itself cannot be protected, unless the individual be permitted to support and defend the physical existence with which God has endowed him.

Religious and patriotic men regard the body as merely the temporary habitation of the spirit, the soul which constitutes the *man;* to be occupied during its infant state of existence, and used for the purpose of developing the mental faculties extending the sphere of thought and elevating his moral nature, thereby preparing him for a higher and holier state of existence. And when the body shall have performed this service, it is laid aside, to moulder and return to its mother earth, while the spirit shall live on and on while God himself exists. No injury to the body can, therefore, bear any comparison to the enslavement of the intellect, the degradation of the moral nature of man.

By the established laws of our existence, the body requires food, raiment, and habitation. To each individual are given limbs to bear him forth from place to place; hands to cultivate and gather the fruits of the earth, to feed the body, provide raiment and habitation for its protection; eyes to guide him, and ears to detect danger. These are all held in subjection to the mind, and are put in operation by the will of the individual. The mind itself is constrained to action by an inflexible law which God had ordained for its early unfoldment. Its first care is to nourish, and feed, and clothe the body, to render it a comfortable and pleasant habitation during occupancy. The spirit is constrained, in seeking food, to put the limbs and hands and all the physical faculties into operation, to satisfy the hunger and thirst of the body, to provide raiment and habitation for its protection. That God has endowed each member of the human family with the inherent and inalienable right to use his own limbs and hands and bodily faculties for these purposes is, literally, a "*self-evident truth.*" It is a truth that cannot be rendered more clear by argument; it cannot be enforced by logic, or made more beautiful by eloquence. But this care of the body constitutes the first lesson, the lowest exercise of the intellect, and is introductory to that eternal unfoldment which was designed by the Creator as the means of elevating man to higher and still higher happiness; for I lay it down as a religious axiom, that in degree as man becomes wise, just, pure, and truthful, he approximates that happiness which constitutes the final design of his existence.

That God has endowed every human being with the right thus to enlarge this sphere of thought, and elevate his moral nature, is so obviously self-evidently true, that he must indeed be a most arrant infidel who denies it. It constitutes a part of the fundamental proposition, that "all men are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights." Its existence is, however, denied by "American infidels;" and this constitutes the second collateral issue between the religious and irreligious portions of our people. This enslavement of the soul presents infidelity in its most revolting features. It paralyzes the moral nature of man; renders the soul sterile and unprepared for heaven. We must wait the day of final retribution to disclose the extent of its enormities.

Yet the body can only be held in bondage by enslaving the spirit, by surrounding it with mental darkness. Permit a man to understand the duties which he owes to himself, to mankind, and to God, and he cannot be a slave. Hence, the whole policy of slaveholding Governments is arranged and adapted to the purpose of first enslaving the minds of their bondmen. In most slaveholding communities, it is a statutory offence, punishable by fine and imprisonment, to teach slaves to read the gospel. They are not permitted to read the words of "Him who spake as never man spake," who declared His mission on earth "*to proclaim liberty to the captive;*" to raise up the bowed down; enlighten the ignorant; who taught his disciples and followers "to do unto others as they would have others to do unto them." A distinguished jurist of North Carolina, while discharging official duties, declared, "a slave is one doomed in his own person and posterity *to live without knowledge.*" He is not permitted to understand the object of human existence. He can have no conception of *justice, or wisdom, or purity,* or *truth.* Slaves can have no correct idea of the duties which children owe to their parents, nor of those which are due from parents to children. The parent is not permitted to teach or govern his child, nor is the child permitted to honor or obey his parent.

The right of legal marriage is unknown among the slaves. They are not permitted to understand the relation nor the duties of husband and wife. The master sells him who is called *husband*, or her who is called herself *wife*, while he retains the other. He sells the parent, and retains the child; or he sells the child, and retains the parent. These separations are but the practical workings of that infidelity which denies to parents and children those inalienable rights which God and nature have bestowed upon them.

The legitimate heir of a plantation, coming into possession of his estate, often sells the children of his father—his brothers and sisters of the half blood—denying that they "have any rights which white men are bound to respect." This infidelity denies to six hundred thousand females of our land to protect their own virtue, and consigns them to practical prostitution. This state of society is but the outworking of that infidelity which denies the existence of man's inalienable right to liberty and to moral elevation.

It would be in vain for us to say to the Christians of Europe, or even to the Mohammedans of Turkey, that *religious* men of our country support such a system of pollution. Yet thousands of church members, in the slave States, impiously charge Deity with authorizing these crimes, and sacrilegiously endeavor to pervert the Holy Scriptures to the support of this infidelity. Newspapers professedly religious lend a silent, and some even in our free States, openly oppose and denounce all who resist the extension or exist of Slavery.

The number of heart-broken mothers and the torture which they suffer on being separated from their children, the physical suffering from floggings, thumbscrews, and all the various means of torture practiced in slaveholding communities, are matters of which we can speak, but of which we cannot form no estimate. This degradation and suffering constitute the legitimate sequence of American infidelity. If these God-given prerogatives of our race be abandoned, the mother can have no right to the food which she gathers by her toil; no right to the intellect which God has given her; no right to be virtuous, pure, wise, and good; no right to live. I repeat, that the religious men of our nation insist that these rights of human nature shall be held sacred, and their enjoyment secured to every individual; while the supporters of American infidelity deny their existence, and, as a government, claim the duty of human governments to disregard them; and each party will, of course, carry their views into their moral, social, and political conduct. Mr. Jefferson well exclaimed: "*Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure, when we have destroyed their only firm basis, a conviction* in the minds of the people that they *are the gifts of God?*—THAT THEY ARE NOT TO BE VIOLATED BUT WITH HIS WRATH?"

I now pass to the third *collateral* issue—*the right of all men to enjoy happiness.* I need not repeat that the ultimate beatitude of the race constituted the evident design of Deity in creating mankind. Such I understand to be the instinctive conviction of all men. This purpose, this hope, this intuition, is found in every human heart. Men in all ages, in all countries, of all languages, have regarded this as the ultimate object of their toils and labors, the great design of their existence. This beatitude can only be attained by moral culture; by extending the sphere of thought; by understanding the laws of nature and of nature's God; by attaining a knowledge of His attributes, and conforming to them. To be wise, truthful, pure and just, is to insure happiness in this life, and in the life to come; and it is a most beautiful feature in the law of our being, that to attain this happiness ourselves, we must respect the right of others to enjoy it; that, as we elevate our own moral natures, we necessarily influence others; and as we labor for the welfare and the happiness of others, we most rapidly promote our own. The religious man delights in doing good; he seeks to instruct the ignorant, to elevate the degraded, to relieve the oppressed, to enlighten those who sit in moral darkness, to give to all that elevation of soul which alone can qualify them for happiness. For this purpose, schools and academies are established, colleges are founded, tract and Bible and missionary societies are organized, teachers and ministers are employed. Indeed, this work of elevating our race constitutes the highest and holiest employment of mankind. For success in this work, prayer is daily made at every family altar; and on the Sabbath, our pulpits resound with the solemn, fervent supplication, that God will aid this work; that He will, by the irresistible power of His grace, convert the irreligious, enlighten those whose minds are enshrouded in the darkness of infidelity; that he will *relieve* the oppressed, comfort the afflicted, and hasten the day when all shall know His will, obey His law, and enjoy His favor.

The infidelity which denies the right of men to attain happiness, that dooms a portion of our race to degradation and torture, to vice and crime and misery, which shuts out hope from the human soul, shocks the conscience and awakens the sensibilities of all religious men.

While Government legislates for the protection of these natural, these God-given rights, they will receive the approval, the support, of all good men, and their laws will be respected and obeyed; but when they legislate for the invasion of these rights, they call up the hostility, the resistance, of those whom they seek to oppress. The just and wise and pure, of all parties, sects, and denominations, feel the outrage, and sympathize with the down-trodden. The great heart of Christendom now beats in sympathy with the enslaved of our land. We feel that sympathy in this Hall; and when we speak for justice and for freedom, we utter the voice of nature. We proclaim the law of Heaven, written in letters of living light upon the tablet of the moral universe.

The difficulties respecting Kansas, which now shake our Union to its very centre, constitute the legitimate outworkings of this infidelity. The right of all men in Kansas to live, to nourish and protect life, attain moral elevation and happiness, had been asserted by Congressional law; and under this enactment, peace blessed our nation. Infidels, however, said this was wrong; that such rights did not pertain to man; that one portion of the people there hold the power, and may, if they choose, rightfully enslave another, rob them of their toil, their intelligence, their hopes, their manhood, and murder them if they refuse to obey their masters. And this law of liberty was repealed, and men were enslaved, brutalized, sold like swine. The public conscience was outraged, and all good men sympathized with the oppressed. Usurpation and brute force were resorted to for the purpose of extending and supporting Slavery; civil war, devastation, and bloodshed, followed, and will continue until justice be done, and the rights of human nature enjoyed, in that unfortunate Territory.

This line of demarkation, which separates the natural rights of all men from human legislation, was clearly drawn by the founders of our Republic. They established the point at which the appropriate, the just powers of all human Governments commence, whatever may be their form. They defined the boundaries of human authority; they acknowledged God as the author of life, the donor of liberty, the fountain from which human happiness is derived. On the denial of these religious, these self-evident truths, American Slavery is founded. The slaveholder denies the right of his slave to cherish and protect his own life, to gain intelligence, to unfold his moral nature, to understand God's attributes, and enjoy that happiness for which he was created. To those primal truths he is infidel. To the rights of his fellow mortal he is infidel. To God's higher law he is infidel. Against these he wages unceasing war. He seeks to rob Deity of His attributes, and man of his God-given prerogatives. He claims for human legislation that supreme sovereignty over the life, the liberty, and the happiness, of mankind, which belongs only to the Creator. He thus places himself in hostility to Christianity, to civilization.

This contest is not confined to the United States. These truths are operating upon the hearts of the Russian people. Their Government is in advance of ours. Measures have already been taken for the emancipation of the serfs of that vast Empire, although their condition is far better than that of American slaves. Holland is also moved by these doctrines, and is giving freedom to her oppressed people in her West India islands. England and France have abolished Slavery, regarding it as an institution unsuited to the age in which we live. We assert the rights of man wherever he exists. Ours is the cause of Christian civilization throughout the world. Our doctrines apply with equal force to other Governments, to other nations and people. The most illustrious monarch who sways the sceptre of human power is really as much bound to respect the inalienable rights of every individual as is the President of the United States. Kings, potentates, and emperors, become despots whenever they invade the rights of the most humble, to life, liberty, property, or happiness.

The mere name of "republicanism" gives us no claim to respect, so long as one-sixth part of our population is held in degrading bondage. I assert, without fear of contradiction, that if the Liberty enjoyed by one portion of our people, and the Slavery suffered by the other, could be brought into common stock, and each individual constrained to take his aliquot proportion of each, ours would be regarded as the most perfect despotism among civilized nations. The only advantage which we possess over other nations consists in that feature of our Government which vests all political power in the people. They may, by use of the ballot-box, so modify and shape the administration of Government as best to secure the inalienable rights of each and of every individual.

It is with emotions of gratitude to God, and profound respect for the memory of those who established our Republic, that we refer to the period when, at the very font of our national baptism, our fathers vindicated their claims to national independence, solely upon the religious truths which constitute the central proposition referred to at the commencement of my remarks. They claimed for themselves no special privileges. They spoke, they fought, they bled, to establish this universal, this eternal principle of man's right to live, to nourish his body, protect his life, to elevate his moral nature, and attain happiness. This they proclaimed the basis, the corner stone, not merely of our Republic, but of human Governments generally. The Constitution was framed and adopted upon this then universally-admitted principle; but such was the anxious solicitude of our early patriots, that, in two years after its adoption, it was amended, by declaring, in explicit language, "*That no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property, except by due process of law;*" that is, except on trial and conviction before some judicial tribunal. In accordance with these truths, one-half of the States of our Union proceeded to give liberty to all their people, to protect the inalienable rights of all; but the other States embraced and cherished this infidelity, which has at length infused itself into our Federal Government. Our teachers, our politicians, our statesmen, became unwilling to offend those who had embraced this infidelity. They were received into churches, elected to civil office, and finally obtained control of the Government. All classes of men became affected by this disbelief in God's law and in human rights. It was regarded as disreputable to examine the crimes which this system of oppression upheld; social and political ostracism awaited the man who dared speak disrespectfully of its iniquities.

Eventually, individuals appeared who were willing to encounter odium, in order to arouse the religious and moral sensibilities of the nation; and in 1856, a National Convention met at Philadelphia to devise means for overcoming this moral and political scourge. The members pledged themselves to each other and to the world, to maintain the truths to which I have alluded, and they now constitute the platform of a large and increasing political party.

That day witnessed the dawning of a reformation more deep, more radical, more important in its religious, its moral, its social, and political effects upon mankind, than has occurred since the sixteenth century. It is more deep and radical than that commenced by Calvin and his colaborers. It asserts the right of man to religious and moral elevation, as superior to the power of kings or of human Governments. The great reformers of that age dared put forth no such doctrine. Their lives would have constituted the price of such an avowal. They were constrained to admit the divine right of kings over the liberties of their people, and many of the usurped powers of the church.

The Philadelphia Convention will be remembered in coming time as first in the history of the political parties of our nation to make religious truths the basis of its political action, and first to proclaim these rights of mankind as universal, to be enjoyed equally, by princes and people, by rulers and the most humble. It was the first to proclaim the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The result of the Presidential election of 1856 showed the advocates of oppression that there was but one alternative for them to pursue. They were constrained to take distinct issue with the advocates of Liberty, by denying these religious truths, or disband their party in every free State.

The Supreme Court was selected as the instrument for officially avowing this undisguised infidelity. That tribunal was favorably constituted for such a purpose; a majority of its members were slaveholders. Other members had been appointed to office apparently on account of their uniform servility to the slave power; and every circumstance combined to render it the appropriate instrument for performing this work. The time, too, was a matter of importance. No sooner had the Thirty-fourth Congress adjourned, than a majority of that tribunal, in violation of its own declared rules, digressed from the question before them, to utter its denial of those doctrines of the republican fathers.

But this decision, opposed as it is to the self-evident truths of our Declaration of Independence, to the letter and spirit of the Constitution, to the intelligence and conscience of the American people, is emphatically repudiated by them. The vanity and arrogance exhibited by a majority the Court, in charging Hancock and Adams and Jefferson and Franklin, and their illustrious compeers, with proclaiming doctrines which they did *not intend* to express, and of failing to utter principles which they *intended* to avow, has called forth from the popular mind indignant pity for the Court, rather than doubts as to the intelligence and Christianity of those savans who founded our institutions.

I shall not argue the absurdity of this decision. Its falsehood is as self-evident as the truths which it denies. Arriving at the conclusion that the sages who signed our Declaration of Independence meant precisely the opposite of that which they solemnly proclaimed, the Court proceeded to declare—in contradiction to its letter and spirit, to the history of the age, to the conscience and judgment of all Christian people—that black men were regarded as having no rights which white men were bound to respect; and on this basis founded their conclusion that Congress has no constitutional authority to protect the lives, liberties, and property, of the people in our Territories where it holds exclusive jurisdiction. This atrocious decision attempts to outlaw one-eighth part of the human race—to place them without the pale of legal protection. It affects to authorize any and every crime to be perpetrated against them. Under this decision, they may be robbed and murdered. In short, this decision would extend American infidelity, with all its attendant crimes, wherever Federal jurisdiction exists. Thus has the issue been made between the *religious* portion of the community and those who maintain this heathenism.

I greatly rejoice that Christians in Europe are sensible of the existence of this war upon human nature. American Christians, patriots, and philanthropists, feel the warmest gratitude towards the religious men of Scotland, of England, of France, and Germany, for the kind sympathy which they express in this cause, for the very catholic remonstrances which they have addressed to our American Christians against this infidelity. Every lover of truth, every religious heart in our land, must have glowed with gratitude to God and love to man, as he read the eloquent and truthful address of the Christians of Geneva, once the home of Europe's great reformer, to the Christians of the United States, on this subject. And whose heart was not moved, when noticing the action of the Protestants of France in relation to it? Nor is this Christian feeling confined to Protestants. The African Institute of Paris, formed for the purpose of maintaining the rights of the African race, embraces among its members distinguished laymen, ministers, bishops, and archbishops, belonging to the Papal Church. My own humble efforts in behalf of our common brotherhood caused my name to become known to its directors, who placed it on the roll of its honorary members. I take this occasion to thank them for this honor. A Protestant by education, by feeling, I greet those Catholic Christians most cordially, as good and worthy laborers in this holy work. Heartily do I thank them for all that they have done, and are doing, for the down-trodden of our race.

Could I hope that my remarks would meet the eye of British Ministers, I would in an especial manner invoke their official influence against this infidelity. I would beseech them no more to sanction, by their action, that blasphemy which seeks to transform the image of God into *property.*

I acknowledge that our Government was dishonored in the eyes of all Christians, when its Executive became the agent and solicitor of those pirates who claimed to own the fathers, the mothers, and children, on board certain slave ships wrecked on British islands, where, thanks to Christian civilization, no Slavery exists. The President, espousing the cause of men who deserved the halter and the gallows, demanded compensation from the British Government for their loss of human flesh. Our representative at the Court of St. James appears to have misled and deceived the British Ministry. In one of his official communications, he declared that "our Government had determined more than once, in the most solemn manner, that slaves killed in the public service of the United States, even in a state of war, were to be regarded as *property*, and not as persons, and the Government held responsible for their value."

When referring to this assertion of our Minister, fifteen years since, I pronounced it unfounded and *untrue.* I said this in the presence of the delegation from Virginia, the State of which our Minister, Mr. Stevenson, was a citizen, and I called on them, as his friends, to sustain his assertion by showing some one instance in which this Government had paid for slaves killed in the public service. I declared the whole history of Congress showed that we had in every instance refused such payment, and I defied them to show an exception to such practice. No man met the challenge. I now repeat the assertion. I pronounce the statement of Mr. Stevenson untrue, a libel upon our Government, and a slander upon the American people. I not only declare his assertion untrue, but I declare the opposite to be true. The British Ministry, by complying with this demand, tacitly admitted that phase of American infidelity which seeks to degrade the human soul to the level of swine. More recently they paid the slave-dealers the estimated value of the fathers, mothers, and children, on board the Creole, who obtained their own liberty by gallantly taking possession of the vessel, and landing on British soil.

The money—the dollars and cents—are of no importance; but concessions to this infidelity, at the present time, are important. It was an object with the slave power to obtain from the British Ministry the admission that *men are property.* I would entreat the British Government, and all other Governments, to maintain the dignity of our common nature. In the language of one of the most eloquent of England's orators, I would say, "He who gave us the *forms*, commands us to maintain the *rights*, of men." The Christians of the United States and of other nations would rejoice to learn that the British Ministry now, as in 1820, refuse even to correspond with our Executive on the subject of property in human flesh.

I would also warn the Spanish Crown and other continental Powers, that our present Executive is seeking, by all the various means and arts of diplomacy, to detach Cuba from its allegiance, to annex it to the United States in order to increase the influence of the slave power, and add strength to this American infidelity.

I hope and trust that this conspiracy may be defeated; that all Christian Governments may exert their power against the further extension of this scourge of our race. I would most earnestly invoke the Christians, philanthropists, and patriots, of this and of every nation and kindred and language, to exert their moral influence, their legitimate power, for the overthrow, the final eradication of this infidelity from the earth, for upholding the natural, Heaven-endowed rights of man, for the progress, the moral elevation of our race, until all shall understand the will and obey the laws of our common Father, and attain that happiness which constitutes the ultimate object of human existence.

From the Philadelphia North American.

JUDGE WILMOT AND THE THIRTEENTH DISTRICT.

An attempt is being made, as many of our readers must already know, to abolish the thirteenth judicial district of Pennsylvania, and annex the counties of Bradford and Susquehanna, of which it is composed, to the twenty-sixth and eleventh judicial districts, respectively. The motive for this action is neither more nor less than to get rid of Judge Wilmot, the presiding judge of the thirteenth district. As the law now stands, a presiding judge is to be elected by the people of Bradford and Susquehanna in October next, and the probability amounts almost to a certainty that Judge Wilmot will be the choice of those counties. Hence the attempt made by a portion of Wilmot's political, if not personal, opponents, to remove him from the bench by destroying his district, and defeating the will of the people of two counties.

Of course, it becomes necessary for those engaged in this attempt to assign some reason for their conduct, and they are not slow to charge Judge Wilmot with incompetency, with entertaining political prejudices, which warp and bias his mind, and with personal habits unbecoming to an occupant of a judicial seat. For those who know anything of Judge Wilmot, the first and last of these charges need no refutation; and the second is wholly unsustained, so far as we are aware, by specifications. The accusation is brought in general terms, and might as well be levelled against any other occupant of the bench who is known to entertain political opinions of a decided character. Bills have lately been introduced into the Legislature with the object of effecting the changes in the courts for Bradford and Susquehanna counties, to which we allude. In both branches these were referred to the Judiciary Committees, and the gentlemen who appeared before these committees failed to specify, much less sustain, an instance of official misconduct, or of an exhibition of undue political bias on the part of Judge Wilmot.

With us, it is a matter of indifference to what party the Judge thus assailed belongs. We should speak in his behalf, were he a Democrat, as quickly as we do, he being a Republican. It is not the man, or the party alone, that is involved in the present case. It is a principle. It is manifest that an act of injustice is being attempted against one who has long been honored with the confidence of his fellow citizens, has held responsible trusts from them, and has played no unconspicuous part in public affairs. This act originates in personal and partisan antipathies; and it seeks its consummation by an appeal to partisan feeling. And besides this, if the attempt of the opponents of Judge Wilmot was successful, it is manifest that the wishes of the people of the thirteenth district would be disregarded. They would be rudely overridden by a party majority in the Legislature. We cannot bring ourselves to believe that the bills introduced will be acted on, or, at all events, passed. The precedent would be dangerous in the extreme; and the measure would be insulting to the people of Bradford and Susquehanna. The members of the Legislature, who would lend themselves to its passage, would not be forgotten, and would ultimately have to pay the penalty of their deed.

CONNECTICUT.—Mr. N. D. Sperry, of New Haven, one of the leading Fremont Americans of Connecticut, explains why he endorsed Mr. Scranton at the late American State Convention at Hartford, as its nominee for Governor, and makes out a defence for his conduct, but places Mr. Scranton in a disagreeable plight before the public. Mr. Scranton appears to have indulged in Americanism to Mr. Sperry, and in Democracy to the Democrats. Mr. Sperry now goes for Mr. Buckingham, the Republican candidate for Governor, and there will probably be no American nomination against him. Mr. Scranton, of course, is just a fit man to go with the Lecomptonites, but cannot carry many with him, so the field is now clear for a grand Republican victory in old Connecticut the first Monday in April.

As a further indication of the signs of the times, the New Haven *Register* (Administration) reads Mr. Strong of Hartford out of the Democratic party, for his bold anti-Lecompton speech in the Democratic State Convention on Wednesday. Even his acquiescence in the milk-and-water compromise resolutions does not save him, and he is denounced as no better than a Black Republican, which is true. He will feel better to take out his freedom papers entirely. He can't stay with the Democracy if he wants to, and he ought not to desire to. Mr. Strong was chairman of the Committee on Resolutions at the State Convention.

Barbarous punishments are still retained in the British army, and a private underwent at Northumberland on the 6th ultimo, the sentence of a court-martial, dooming him to receive 450 "gashes" cut at the rate of nine at a time on his back. The victim resisted, but was stripped and tied to the triangle by six stout men, when the operation proceeded as follows:

"Forth stepped one of the largest drummers, armed with a 'cat,' the length of the handle of which being eight inches, the nine tails the same length, armed with pentagonal pieces of case-hardened steel, eighty one in number. At the first blow of the 'cat' a piercing and unearthly shriek rang from the strong man in his agony. His lacerated flesh gaped under the blow, and lumps of flesh at each fresh blow were detached from his bleeding back, and hung high about the walls of the racket-court, and on the clothes of those standing by. The officers and soldiers standing by could not endure the spectacle, and several were carried away fainting. At the forty-fifth stroke of the instrument, that is, after receiving 405 gashes, the unhappy wretch, whom fortune saved from the hands of an Indian, to fall into the hands of an English Nena Sahib, positively burst his bonds in the contortions of agony, and fell in a bloody he