

Thomas Clarkson

TO THE CHRISTIAN AND WELL-DISPOSED CITIZENS OF THE
NORTHERN STATES OF AMERICA.

“This paper, which I wrote at your request,” says the venerable and indefatigable Clarkson, “is in the form of a letter, addressed to the Christian and well-disposed citizens of the Northern States of America, on the subject of Slavery. If it be worthy of insertion in the Liberty Bell, I think Mr. Garrison, if he approve of it, might reprint it in his paper. I beg that you would present my affectionate regards to Mr. Garrison. Our great cause is deeply indebted to him, for there was a time when it slept and could not have been recovered, unless he had kept the flame alive.”

MY FRIENDS:

THOUGH I live across the Atlantic, far from you, I believe my name is not unknown to you. I have heard, with almost indescribable delight, of the great progress which the Anti-Slavery cause has made in your part of the world. Permit, then, an old man, almost worn out by sixty years' hard labor in that

sacred cause, to express his joy to you on this occasion, and to take advantage of this new and favorable turn of things to give his opinion as to what ought to be your present aim, or as to what you ought always to keep in view, in your attempts to promote the extinction of Slavery.

Slavery is the greatest evil which has ever afflicted your country. It has heaped incalculable sufferings upon the heads of a people who have never given you any cause of offence; and you have done this without any right to do it but your own will and the law of force. It has corrupted the morals of your population to a frightful extent, by familiarizing them with cruelty and injustice, by hardening their hearts, and by giving birth to erroneous opinions which lead to infidelity; and, moreover, it has injured your national character in the eyes of the civilized nations of the world. These, then, are some of the

evils of Slavery. But we can apply no remedy to them till we find out their source. It has been a great misfortune to America, that the people of the South should have ever attempted to obtain a political preponderance over the people of the North; and still more strange that they should have succeeded in their attempt. I repeat, still more strange; for it is strange indeed that a people like those of the South, a people of no reputation but for their tyranny and vices, and a people despicable in the eyes of all good men, should have obtained lordship over the virtuous people of the North;—a people known to have been of religious character from the time of their first settlement in America, and to have kept up the same character (till Slavery made inroad upon their morals) to the present day. And why did the people of the South make this daring attempt? It was that they might rule over the whole land, both North and South;

that they might become, in fact, the legislators or makers of the laws, and thus protect and establish Slavery forever as an institution of the United States. This preponderance, then, there can be no doubt, is the source of the evils mentioned.

I will now ask you, my friends of the North, what you have profited by this preponderance, or ascendancy? I will tell you. You have got a slave-holding President, a slave-holding Senate, a slave-holding Congress, and a slave-holding Cabinet. You have got the very sort of men in these high offices the most detrimental to your best interests.

But perhaps the men, filling these offices, may have been more serviceable to you than you are aware of, as Legislators. I will ask you, then, what good they have done. In the common routine of business, in Congress, they have done, perhaps, as well as any other men could have done; but, whenever Slavery has

been brought before them as a matter of business, the most malignant of what we call demons could not have done worse. Their laws against their Slaves stand on record as the most bloody of the most savage nations upon earth; so shocking, as to produce horror and indignation in all who read them; and so shocking that one of your own judges, Stroud, who first brought them together in print, is now, or was lately, buying up the unsold copies; because, as was reported, wherever the book is seen, it makes converts to the Anti-Slavery cause. Again, the men filling these offices brought forward and passed the famous gagging bills, and gave the power to Postmasters to open letters and parcels, thus stopping the free liberty of speech, and of writing a man's own thoughts. And why was this tyrannical law passed? That not a murmur against Slavery might be allowed to transpire, and that Slavery might go on unin-

terruptedly in all its miseries and horrors as before, without censure or reproach. What an outrage was this upon a free Constitution, so often boasted of as the most free in the world; an outrage, worthy only of the Sultan, or the Emperor of Morocco, the lives of whose subjects are entirely at their command. Again, the men filling these offices caused the butchery of the Indians, and the extermination of some of their tribes, on the mere surmise that these tribes might disturb the plantations of their brother Slave-holders, and afford a refuge or retreat for their fugitive Slaves. Was this a proper motive for shedding torrents of blood? And will not a day of just retribution come? The same description of men made a law, that whoever aided the escape of a fugitive Slave from the oppression of a cruel task-master, should be punished with death; though it was commanded, of old, that no fugitive Slave should be restored to his master. Was

not this setting up a legislation in direct opposition to the law of God? Again, the same description of men had the audacity to propose the annexation of Texas to the United States, so that both might be one territory, and under one sway. But for what purpose was this union proposed? To have a contiguous Slave Territory, where the poor fugitive could find no shelter, but must be sent back to an enraged owner, to undergo whatever torture the monster's ingenuity might think fit; and, secondly, not only to perpetuate Slavery in the United States, but to extend it to another country, from which it might be spread we know not where. Was there ever a more wicked proposition than this, to transfer the whip, the chain, the iron collar, and the other hideous instruments of torture, to innocent millions yet unborn, and to an indefinite extent of country? Could the mind of a Nero have invented a more wholesale complication of

cruelty? And yet your President, in his correspondence with Texas, says, that this necessity was forced upon him by the views of the British Ministry; when this Ministry, to my knowledge, up to the present time, has not taken one step to interfere with the Government of Texas on this subject.

These, my friends, are some, but only some, of the evils which had their origin solely in the political ascendancy of the Southern over the Northern States. I say solely, because if there had been no Slaves in the South, there would have been no occasion for the bloody laws in question. What occasion for gagging bills, if there had been no Slavery to talk about? and so with respect to the other evils mentioned. Nor can you be better off in future, so long as this preponderance exists. While it lasts, you will have the same sort of men in office, and, of course, the same sort of wicked measures, and the same sort of evils,

and perhaps worse; for, wherever arbitrary power has been once exerted successfully, it may go to precedents it has made for its continuance. What, indeed, can you hope for from a slave-holding Cabinet; a Cabinet of men who appear to have no fear of God before their eyes, whose motto seems to be expediency in preference of honor and honesty, and who have been accustomed to look upon the sin of Slavery as a common custom only, and without reproach? Will God smile upon the labors of such men? Or, will he not rather take vengeance? "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach (a detriment) to any people."

And now, my friends of the North, I will tell you what I promised to say to you in the beginning of the letter; that is, to give you my opinion as to what ought to be your present aim, or what you ought always to keep in view in your attempts to promote the extinct-

ion of Slavery. It should be your constant aim to try to break up the political preponderance of the Southern over the Northern States, that the former may no longer be the rulers of the land. Such has been my opinion for a long time ; but I have been lately more and more confirmed in it, as well as in its practicability, by circumstances. If the people of the North were to determine upon the Abolition of Slavery, and were to be in earnest, heart and hand, for this purpose, I have no doubt Slavery must fall. I am confirmed in this conclusion by the testimony of Americans themselves. But what practical steps will serve to forward and accomplish this object? I answer, first, through the medium of conversation, every one with his friends and acquaintance, and even with strangers, where a suitable opportunity offers. You must never allow the notions and arguments of the Slave-holders, as urged either by themselves or others, to pass without

a suitable opposition. You must not allow them, for instance, to treat God's declaration at creation as a lie, "that He made man in His own image," and that there was originally but one race of men. You must stand up for the poor Slaves, who are not allowed to stand up for themselves. There is one argument which you must always have ready on your lips to utter, and which can never be answered by any sophistry; you must say, "That Slaves are men, and not brutes; that they have the same form and shape as men, but brutes have not this form; that they have intellect, but brutes have only instinct; that they can talk, but brutes have no articulation; that they have the power of reasoning, but brutes have no such power; that they understand religious truths and are susceptible of religious feeling, but brutes have neither such understanding nor such sensations; that they have consequently an immortal soul, but the brutes

perish. But if they are men like ourselves, then Christianity commands us to perform towards them the same duties of humanity which it enjoins to all others who are acknowledged to be men;" and then, it may be argued, that there could be no such thing as Slavery. If you, then, my friends, and all the well-disposed persons of the North, were to stand up for the Slaves in this manner, do you think that you would not produce an infinity of good to the Anti-Slavery cause? I pray you not to think this my advice trifling, or of no consequence. You would probably, by following it, stop the progress of Slave opinions in many, and make converts of others who have adopted them.

But this is not all. You must act as well as talk. The political preponderance of the South over the North must be broken up before you can expect to effect your object. You may endeavor to direct the public mind

to this end by occasionally publishing little tracts of a few pages only, showing that, if we are to judge by what the people of the South have done, (by their unjust laws, and the violation of their charter of independence,) they are not fit to rule the land. The adoption of the principles and notions which Slave-holding induces, disqualifies them for a righteous administration of the government. These little tracts could not fail of having their effect in so plain a case.

But there is another way in conjunction with the two now mentioned, which would contribute greatly to our views. Every man's attention must be turned to the securing of votes, at your elections, in favor of such candidates, for seats in Congress, as will pledge themselves to vote for the total abolition of Slavery. By such means it was (by making Slavery the subject of almost daily conversation, and painting it everywhere in bright

colors, and by the Slave-holders making interest to get themselves and their friends into Congress,) that the people of the South gained this ascendancy, and by such means they have contrived to keep it up. Why, then, should you not do the same? There is a reasonable prospect of success, if the Anti-Slavery cause should go on advancing as rapidly as it has done in the last six months. Why should you despair? Your cause is a holy one, being the cause of mercy, justice, and religion. That of the people of the South is a supremely wicked one, and such as all independent and disinterested men of only common honesty would be ashamed to patronize. Besides, you are sufficiently numerous to secure the ascendancy. Look at the tens of thousands in the North who have lately joined the standard of liberty, and the tens of thousands there, of independent, rational men, who have hitherto taken no

part in the question, and who are yet left for conviction, and you will see no reason to despair. But you must be energetic and persevering, as much as if you considered the cause to be your own. For, what are you called upon to do? "To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free," (Isa. lviii. 6,) and to arrest the progress of principles which are contrary to the law of God. Pleasing task! Could you have a more noble subject to call forth your exertions than this? No! Choose, then, your way. Consider well whether you will be any longer trodden down by the people of the South, any longer submit to gagging bills, any longer submit to be the jailors for their fugitive slaves, or whether you will be your own masters, aiming at the restoration of morals, and making laws agreeable to your declaration of independence, the object of

which originally was the liberty and happiness
of the people.

(Signed,)

THOMAS CLARKSON.

Playford Hall, near Ipswich, Eng., Aug. 30, 1844.