

ADDRESS

TO THE

CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ON THE

SUBJECT OF SLAVERY,

FROM THE

YEARLY MEETING

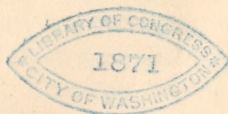
OF THE

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

(CALLED QUAKERS)

HELD IN NEW-YORK.

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AMERICAN SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

SUBJECT OF SLAVERY

FROM THE

YEARLY MEETING

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

(CALLED TOGETHER)

HELD IN NEW YORK

1841

NEW YORK: PUBLISHED BY THE NEW YORK STATE OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

U. S. 14/2/11

ADDRESS

TO THE

CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

IMPRESSED with the belief that it is the solemn duty of Christians, to do all in their power to meliorate the condition of mankind, the Yearly Meeting of the religious Society of Friends, held in the city of New-York, ventures to address you on one of the most deeply interesting subjects, that can engage the attention of philanthropic minds. Abstaining, as we are known to do, from any participation in the political movements of the day, we trust that we shall stand acquitted of sinister motives, in making a few remarks on the topic of American Slavery. Considering the excitement which has been produced in the North as well as in the South, by the discussion of this very important subject ; and considering, also, the feeling with which an address of this nature may be received by at least one portion of our fellow-citizens, we would gladly withhold our fee-

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ble efforts, did not our sympathy for the suffering slaves, and our deep sense of what is required of us as professing Christians, imperatively demand that we should raise our voice against injustice and oppression.—We should prove faithless to the cause of our holy religion, and to that gracious Being who has bestowed his favors upon us so bountifully, were we to remain silent, while within the borders of our territory, more than two millions of human beings are held in servile bondage. As a society we have for many years been convinced, that freedom cannot be withheld from the slave, without militating against Christian principles; and in accordance with this belief, we deemed it to be our duty to require, that all our members should be guiltless of holding property in their fellow men. Having broken the shackles of our own slaves, we felt and still feel it to be a part of the work allotted to us by the Supreme Judge of the world, that we should continue our efforts in behalf of the oppressed African race. We solicit, therefore, fellow-citizens, your patient attention to what we have to say on a subject which, we trust, is destined to be discussed in this republic, till the reproach of slavery shall no longer be cast upon us.

You cannot but be aware, that of the thirteen millions of human beings who tread our soil, more than two millions are slaves; claimed as the property of their fellow men, for whose exclusive benefit they are compelled to labor. You cannot but be

aware, that they are so far held as goods and chattels, that they are liable to be transferred from one dealer to another, to be removed from state to state, regardless of those natural feelings of affection, which bind men to their families, friends, and country ; that many thousands of those unfortunate beings, are annually sold and taken from their homes and kindred to distant states, there to serve without compensation, new and perhaps cruel masters ; that in the District of Columbia, which is under the exclusive control of Congress, Slavery and the traffic in human beings are tolerated, even in the very vicinity of the Capitol, where sit the representatives of a people who profess to hold freedom as the inalienable right of man. And being aware of these facts, will you not sanction our efforts in behalf of the slave, and cheerfully contribute your aid, to effect in a peaceful and lawful manner, the liberation of the oppressed African ?

The condition of our fellow men now in the galling bonds of servitude, all must admit to be truly deplorable. Considered as the property of their masters, they are estimated in proportion to the value of the labor they are capable of performing ; too little attention is given to their happiness, and, in general, only so much is paid to their bodily comfort, as is necessary to keep them in a proper condition to perform their daily tasks. As a proof that the mind of the negro receives but a small share of his master's regard, we need only refer to the existing laws pro-

hibiting the education of slaves, and attaching a penalty to the humane effort of teaching them to read. Thus they are reared in profound ignorance, the spiritual benefit derivable from the perusal of the holy scriptures, is withheld from them, and it is to be feared that great numbers die annually, who have never been taught by human agency that there is a future state of existence, or that they possess immortal souls to be saved or lost.

Among the evils of slavery, may be reckoned the deleterious influence it exercises over the morals both of the master and the slave. We entreat you, fellow citizens, to consider whether the Christian religion in its purity, can flourish among a people, who, without compunction, claim and exercise exclusive control over the persons of their fellow men, require the performance of arduous daily tasks, and appropriate the fruits of labor thus extorted, to their own benefit, regardless of the scripture declaration, that the laborer is worthy of his hire, and of the injunction of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Can those who are content to keep their slaves in ignorance of the sacred writings, fully estimate their value, or appreciate the importance of the doctrines contained in the New Testament? It is contrary to the very nature of things, that they should entertain a high regard for the Gospel of Christ, while in the maintenance of slavery, they violate its spirit. If the religion of a

slave-holding community is thus seriously affected by this enormous evil, how can it be expected that the morality of that community should be preserved unimpaired? How can it be supposed that the domestic relations of the slaves will be respected by the masters, or by the slaves themselves, who, from their want of mental improvement, cannot properly estimate the sanctity of the marriage covenant, or be aware of the restraint it is designed to impose. By destroying the moral principle of the bondman, slavery urges him to intemperance, theft, and other vices; and to such a state of debasement does it reduce him, that he can hardly be reclaimed by the force of example, or by persuasion. He becomes addicted to licentiousness in all its forms, and being destined by his hard lot, to live and toil for the ease and luxury of others, and accustomed to be governed and controlled with much severity, he regards it as his highest enjoyment, to escape the allotted task, and to surrender himself a prey to the leading of his unbridled passions.

It would seem to be unnecessary to adduce arguments in proof of the sinfulness of Slavery. The christian world proclaims it, and we cannot entertain so poor an opinion of our countrymen, as to suppose there are many among them who honestly believe that Slavery is not a positive evil of an aggravated character.

Whatever difference of sentiment there may be as to the practicability of emancipating the Slaves, all, it is hoped, concur in the wish, that Slavery had no existence within our borders.

If we thought it could be considered justifiable by any in the Northern States, we would point to that portion of the celebrated Declaration of Independence, wherein the noble sentiment is expressed, that “*all men are created equal*, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these, are life, *liberty*, and the pursuit of happiness.” As that document has received the unqualified approval of the American people, how can the slave-holding portion of our brethren, reconcile their confessed approbation of that passage, with their favorable opinion of Slavery? We might also point to the several laws of Congress, prohibiting the importation of Slaves, and imposing the penalty due to piracy, on every person detected in that nefarious traffic. If the introduction of Slaves is considered by Congress a crime of so deep a dye, as to merit death, how can it be maintained that it is not sinful, to hold in servitude those already in the country?—Or who can show an essential difference in principle, between carrying Slaves across the Atlantic, which is punishable with death, and driving them from their homes and friends in one state, to be sold to strangers in another? If the intervention of Congress was necessary in one case, it surely is in the other; and we ask you, fellow-citizens, seriously to reflect on the moral degradation, the mental as well as physical suffering produced by this internal trading in human flesh, which we consider no less disgraceful, and not less deserving the immediate attention of our national legislature, than the foreign Slave Trade.

We might proceed to enumerate many prominent evils resulting from Slavery, and refer, as one pernicious consequence, to the habits of indolence it engenders, among those who depend on the labor of Slaves, the baneful effects of which are so obvious to all who have the opportunity of contrasting the Northern and the Southern States ; but we base our abhorrence of Slavery, chiefly on its SINFULNESS, standing as it does, opposed to the divine principles of the christian religion. We have tried this system by the gospel of our holy Redeemer, and we have found that it harmonizes with none of its precepts ; but that it conflicts with the teachings of Him who came into the world, emphatically the friend of the poor and the oppressed.

A distinguished statesman of our country, one who was himself a slave-holder, and fully acquainted with the condition of the bondman under the most favorable circumstances, in speaking of Slavery, held the following memorable language : “ I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just—that his justice cannot sleep forever ; that, considering numbers, nature, and natural means only, an exchange of situations is among possible events ; that it may become probable by supernatural interference. The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest.”

Among the individual and national sins, for which the American people are now sustaining severe and almost unparalleled distress, may we not give to Slave-

ry a conspicuous place? Who can contemplate the increased traffic in our fellow-men during the last three years, without feeling the conviction that Heaven has at length interposed to assert the rights of the Slave, and to punish us for our crimes.

It is our wish, in thus addressing you, to awaken the minds of those who have reflected but little on the subject, to a just appreciation of its importance; not to suggest any mode by which the abolition of slavery should be effected. We are aware of the difficulties which start up in the way of emancipation; we are perfectly aware how closely the evil entwines itself with the relations of society at the South; but we do not despair that the all-wise Disposer of Events, will, in his own time, open a way for the accomplishment of this most desirable object. We trust that not many more years of suffering will be permitted to pass, before he shall impress the minds of all our countrymen with the turpitude of Slavery, and inspire their hearts with that wisdom which is requisite to devise a proper remedy for the greatest of our social maladies.

We hope, fellow-citizens, that such of you as have not already devoted a portion of your time and attention to this stain upon our national character, will henceforth exert yourselves in a cause which has the strongest claims upon your sympathies, as Americans, freemen, and Christians.—Let us not be behind the philanthropists of the old world in our efforts to raise the oppressed negro to the station that he should oc-

cupy as a member of the great human family, and to wipe from the Christian name, a blot that has too long been permitted to dim its lustre.

Signed by direction and on behalf of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, aforesaid, held in New-York by adjournments, from the 29th of the 5th Month, to the 2d of the 6th Month, inclusive, 1837.

SAMUEL PARSONS, *Clerk.*