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WILLIAM ABBATT

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LOOKING BACK ACROSS THE WAR-GULF

BY

ROBERT DALE OWEN.

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LOOKING BACK ACROSS THE WAR-GULF

AFTER an early life of storm and struggle and rescue, and of years passed in that valley of the shadow of death where souls are tried, some to sink and be lost in the darkness, some to emerge into light and freedom, it behooves the survivor, glad in the returning sunshine of peaceful days, to spend an occasional spare hour in retrospect. Out of the gloom of the past come the best lights of the future.

So now, at the beginning of a new decade, though we may feel a certain reluctance in reverting to what we have suffered and escaped,—a feeling that tempts us to exclaim, "Let the dead bury their dead," yet, if we would not altogether neglect the Old for the New,—if we would not wholly forget the great lessons of adversity, —a glimpse, now and then, at some of the more striking phases of the nation's antediluvian life may serve at once to quicken a sense of gratitude to the All-giver, while we trace his guidance of us through evil to good, and to suggest that while we may properly rejoice in what has been effected, there are grave tasks before us, involving broader duties which we should promptly address ourselves to perform.

Such considerations gave rise to the following paper: to be followed, perhaps, as occasion offers, by one or two more from the same source.

THE HOUR AND THE MAN

They who inhabited the United States during the last ten years, were fortunate. It was a time and a century worth living in.

There are certain epochs when the great problems on the solution of which hangs the destiny of mankind, make unwonted progress toward solution.

Such a revolution was that from which our country has lately emerged.

We had been endeavoring to settle, by practical experience on a large scale, one of the great questions that have ever divided the opinions of mankind—the question whether the masses are capable of self-government. Under what our forefathers deemed the pressure of necessity, this question had been complicated with another. Within our system of self-rule, we had been trying an experiment that had never, in all human experience, been tried before. We had been trying to maintain a united democratic government over thirty millions of people, of whom twenty millions lived under one system, industrial and social, ten millions under another. The twenty millions, chiefly of one race, carried out among themselves, substantially, a Declaration made ninety years ago, recognizing the equality in creation, and the inalienable rights, of man. The ten millions consisted, in nearly equal portions, of two races,—one the descendants of voluntary emigrants who came hither seeking freedom and happiness in a foreign land; the other, deriving their blood from ancestors against whom was perpetrated a terrible wrong; who came in chains and were sold as chattels. From these forced emigrants and their descendants had been taken away almost all human rights, the right of life and of perpetuating a race of bondsmen excepted.

The experiment we had been trying for more than three-quarters of a century was, whether, over social and industrial elements thus discordant, a republican government, asserting equality of rights, and freedom in thought, in speech, in action, could, in perpetuity, be successfully maintained.

The statesmen of the Revolution did not believe that it could. Men of progress, they understood the law of progress. They regarded African slavery as an abuse, and they knew that although, for the time and in a certain stage of human progress, some abuses may have their temporary use, and for this, under God's economy, may be suffered to continue, yet all abuses have but a limited life, the Right only being eternal.

Great truths like these are forgotten by nations in the course of long seasons of material prosperity. So it happened in the slave States of the South. Their bondsmen, originally forced upon reluctant colonists, were submissive under their wrongs. The condition of involuntary servitude gradually came to be regarded as a domestic necessity and a legitimate element of wealth. Riches poured in on the slaveholders, at a fabulous rate of increase. Conscience slept, fanned by the enervating breeze of success.

With vast wealth and a drowsy conscience, came pride, the harbinger of destruction. When annual reports of the great Southern staple swelled from thousands to millions of bales, hearts waxed haughty and said: "We are the commercial arbiters of the world. We can do as we list. Who shall gainsay us?" And because men justify what they love, they said, further: "Slavery is the normal condition of the negro; let us base government upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth."

Then took practical form a vagrant idea that had been wandering, for more than a quarter of a century, amid Southern political circles, hospitably received by Calhoun and his disciples, and countenanced by men more sagacious than they.[1] The Southern States raised the standard of Secession.

Thus the South hoped, first, to protect from danger and to perpetuate, her favorite institution; and secondly, to found an independent slave empire, magnificent and powerful, the envy of the world.

It might be rash to condemn in wholesale fashion, her motives in this matter. Ambition and prejudice, each tending to obscure the mental vision, doubtless had their influence; ambition in the leaders, who saw, in a separate government, fairer field for office

1 De Tocqueville, in his chapter, "On the Chances of Duration of the American Union, and the Dangers which threaten it," says:—

"If one of the States chose to withdraw its name from the contract, it would be difficult to disprove its right of doing so."—*Democracy in America*, by Alexis De Tocqueville, Cambridge ed., 1862, vol. i. p. 499.

and distinction; prejudice in the masses, taking the form of deep-rooted hatred of the North and Northern opinions and Northern criticism,—a hereditary tendency widely spread among all classes of Southern whites. Few men are capable of steeling their reason against the specious pleadings of self-interest and of passion; least of all those who have been accustomed from infancy to the irresponsible exercise of arbitrary power.

It might be rash, then, to question the sincerity of her belief in her right to secede and carry out her ambitious scheme. It was easy and natural enough for Southerners, not having been disciplined to wholesome restraint, to think that they, not their slaves, were the wronged ones. When visions of servile insurrection floated before their eyes, it was easy to ascribe to what they called Northern aggression, that which had origin deep in their own vicious system. They may sometimes have honestly persuaded themselves that acts, blameless on the part of the North, were plenary justification for the revolt they meditated. The wolf may have been in earnest when he complained that the lamb, lower down the stream, muddied the water which he was drinking.

Thus, a candid interpretation of motives suggests that under these deluding influences, the ruling majority in the insurrectionary States may, in the end, have conscientiously adopted a political heresy, the fallacy of which even the luminous mind of De Tocqueville had failed to perceive.

Nevertheless the Southern insurgents of 1861 were not, independently of their failure, entitled, except in the turbulent sense of the term, to be called revolutionists. They sought, indeed, like the French revolutionists of 1789, to overthrow the existing order of things; but not, like them, in the interest of progression. They were the Vendeans—the Chouans—of the time fighting for antiquated ideas, levying war in support of ancient abuse.

Neither could the term revolutionist be applied with propriety to the people of the North. It is true that, in the course of

the conflict, they undertook a vast and radical reform; yet they became reformers not from spontaneous impulse, but because of the palpable unfolding of an inevitable principle. They were converted to radicalism by incidents which arose during the effort to maintain, in integrity, the structure of their government and the territory composing the Union. Except patriotism, there was, at the first, little in common either in spirit or in purpose, between them and the men who, in the first honest and ardent days of the French Revolution, uprose to fight the battle of civic liberty and human rights.[1]

The morning of our great struggle was dark and threatening. There were no brilliant lights luring to a political Utopia. The American Loyalists of 1861 engaged in the contest that was forced upon them, sadly, reluctantly. Not to achieve new liberties was their endeavor; it reached no farther than to maintain the old. They had no Girondist dream of regeneration; a rescue from anarchy was their humbler hope.

They advanced slowly, cautiously, feeling their way, more after the sober method of their English ancestors than after the enthusiastic fashion of their old allies of France. At the commencement of the conflict to which the abuse, grown to overshadowing dimensions, had given birth, the popular sentiment rose no further than a firm resolve to save the life of the nation, not yet attaining the height of a purpose to extirpate the abuse which had threatened that life.

Unimpassioned deliberation mingled with the enthusiasm under the influence of which, in April, 1861, at a day's warning farm and workshop were deserted, and the North became a nation of warriors.

1 Speaking of the French Revolution of 1789, De Tocqueville says:—

"I have studied history extensively, and I venture to affirm that I know of no other revolution at whose outset so many men were imbued with a patriotism as sincere, as disinterested, as truly great."—*Old Régime and the Revolution*, chap. xiv.

In those days, as a general rule, the volunteer was animated by one idea only. It was embodied in the sentiment once proposed by Andrew Jackson: "The Federal Union; it *must* be preserved!" Eminent statesmen had prophesied, as to that Union, that it would endure only so long as all the States which compose it chose to continue members of the Confederation.[2] At the outset, the popular masses throughout the loyal States had not deliberately and logically followed out, to its foundations in error, the specious fallacy of the secession doctrine, as at a later period they did. But their instinct revolted against the fulfilment of a prophecy which involved certain disruption of the nation, and humiliating abasement, not less certain, of her position among the great powers of the earth. Like men having a vow to save intact their entire country, they were resolved to show that, in their Federal Government, the element of strength mingled with the habit of mildness. The issue, then, during the first year of the war, though highly important, was virtually one of supremacy only, awaking little sympathy outside the limits of the Republic. It involved no specific question of Morals or Civilization, in which the great heart of Humanity might take part. It referred to boundaries and material interests; to the integrity or dismemberment of a powerful nation, therefore to its peace, prosperity, commercial advancement, national welfare; matters vital to us, but not directly connected with the cause of moral and spiritual progress.

This happened, not because the majority of those who sprung to arms in order to quell an insurrection were indifferent to the enormity of the social abuse then prevalent among the insurgents, but because they had become accustomed to regard themselves

2 "If the sovereignty of the Union were, at the present day, to engage in a struggle with that of the States, its defeat may be confidently predicted; and it is not probable that such a struggle would be seriously undertaken. As often as a steady resistance is offered to the Federal Government, it will be found to yield. Experience has hitherto shown that whenever a State has demanded anything with perseverance and resolution, it has invariably succeeded; and that, if it has distinctly refused to act, it was left to do as it thought fit."—De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Cambridge ed., 1862, vol. 1. pp. 497, 498.

as debarred from interference in the matter. It happened because a respect for law conflicted with a regard for liberty. To the American citizen, the Constitution stands in the place occupied, under the monarchical system, by the sovereign in person. It is the supreme object of his loyalty. In the instance referred to, veneration for that instrument went so far as to influence perceptions of justice. A large majority in the North have always deemed it a great wrong that human beings and their descendants forever should be held in bondage, or regarded, to use the legal phrase, as "*res positae in commercio*,"—as chattels in which it is lawful for States or individuals to traffic; but until after the time when civil war made the slaveholders in eleven States their enemies, the Northern masses tolerated that wrong, lest, in the endeavor to remedy it, greater evils might have birth.

A small, sturdy minority there was, who, chiefly on humanitarian grounds, had always denied the legality of the slaveholder's claim to service or labor; yet a construction of the Constitution adverse to such denial and acquiesced in by the nation throughout two generations,[1] was held by most men to be sufficient reason why the claim in question should be regarded as private property and respected as such. The majority in our Northern States held to the opinion that it could not be resisted without violation of the Constitution; in other words, by a revolutionary act. They felt that though revolutionary acts become a justifiable remedy upon great occasions, as in 1776, yet they are usually replete with peril; that it is easy to pass the limit of regulated authority, but impos-

1 The opinion of Congress on this subject was tested at a very early day. During the second session of the First Congress, namely, on the 12th of February, 1790, a memorial from the "Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Abolition of Slavery" was presented to the House of Representatives. It prayed for the abolition not only of the traffic in slaves, but of slavery itself. The action on this memorial was in Committee of the Whole only, not passing into actual legislation; but it sufficiently indicates the temper and opinion of the House on the subject. After discussion on the 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, and 22d of February, it was—

"*Resolved*, That Congress have no authority to interfere in the emancipation of slaves, or of the treatment of them within any of the States; it remaining with the several States alone to provide any regulations therein which humanity and true policy may require."

sible to estimate the dangers we may encounter, when that guardian limit is once transgressed. And thus the North refrained from taking the initiative in an anti-slavery revolution.

It may not be denied, as to many Northern men, that cupidity, excited sometimes by supposed commercial advantages, sometimes by selfish political calculations, came in aid of constitutional scruple. But cupidity, commercial or political, was not, in het minds of the masses, the ruling motive; nor, but for the restraint of the Constitution, would sordid considerations have prevented the nation from shaking off the incubus that oppressed it.

Slavery, therefore, moral wrong as it is, was tolerated by the majority, as one of the articles in a great national compromise which it was unlawful and perilous to violate. If, before the South had trampled under foot compromise and Constitution, those who administered the Federal Government, taking the initiative, had striven to eradicate the growing evil, the effort would have been in vain; for they could not have carried the people with them. If such an effort had resulted in war, the war would have been unsuccessful, because the free States were not ready to go to war for such a cause.

There had, indeed, been gathering in the public mind of the North, for years, a sense of Southern encroachment, a vague consciousness, too that slavery, always a national sin, was becoming a threatener of national destruction; and above all a resolution, which finally took efficient practical form in the autumn elections of 1860, that this national sin should not extend beyond its existing limits. The belief, also, which the framers of the Constitution held, that slavery was a short-lived abuse, was reviving, in the shape of a grave doubt whether two discordant systems of labor could be permanently maintained in the North American Republic.

Nevertheless, when the storm-cloud of Secession burst over

the Northern States, it found the mass of the people patriots, not philosophers; exhibiting stern courage in an imperative cause, not high-wrought enthusiasm in a generous crusade. In the eyes of foreign peoples, the attitude of the North, in 1861, challenged respect but did not enkindle admiration. The world looked calmly on, and saw her struggling for life and for maintenance of her rank among nations; that was all. She had not yet come to think seriously of redressing the grievances of an oppressed race, indwellers of the same land with herself.

That came with time. The seed, scattered under a cloud of obloquy, in days of discouragement and danger, on what had seemed stony ground, was springing up under the forcing heat of the war. The bread cast upon the waters, by the small band of despised abolitionists, was returning after many days. As the contest proceeded, the North went beyond the perception that the wrong perpetrated against others was a standing menace against herself. She awoke to the consciousness that a new duty had devolved upon her. In adversity men look into their hearts, there to read lessons which in prosperity they had never learned. Sufferings under an unjust war bred sympathy for sufferings under an iniquitous system.

Nevertheless it was at the hands of its own friends that the slave system received its death wound. They tore the seal from the national bond. What abolitionists had failed to effect, slaveholders unwittingly succeeded in effecting. Armed enemies of the Constitution, they forfeited its guaranties. War, which has its mission, released the hands and absolved the scruples of the North, leaving her free to act according to the dictates of her conscience.

She saw the time arrive when no constitutional bar any longer interposed to prevent the abatement of the great national Wrong. She felt that she was henceforth responsible if, in the race for human freedom, impartial and universal, she lagged, with Spain, behind the rest of the civilized world. Finally she settled down to

the conviction that she was answerable, before God and man, if, having at last become free to carry out in practice the noble declaration of our forefathers, that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are among the inalienable rights of man, she basely refused or neglected thus to do.

And so, on an auspicious first day of the year, about the middle of the great war, she set free from hereditary bondage three millions of people.

From that day her arms prospered, and her foes grew more and more dismayed. Two years and a few months later, the last insurgent army surrendered to the Federal power.

At the approach of the long, dark days that were to try the nation's courage and decide her fate, her own presaging instinct, or some guardian influence from a Higher Source, had guided her selection of a Leader. She chcse, out of the people, a man after the heart of the people. Distinguished names were laid before her; she passed them by. There was presented to her a Senator whom his State—the Empire State of the Union—had delighted to honor; a man favored by education, fortified by experience, gifted with eloquence; one among those, too, who had proclaimed the conflict that was about to rage. She turned from him, with his brilliant antecedents, and gave her voice for another, unlettered, inexperienced, of lesser renown, of humble rank. How much more than men dreamed of then, depended on the sagacity of that decision!

The nation selected, as Chief, to find the way for her in her Day of Trial, One who was a noble, if rudely fashioned, embodiment of herself; an American of the Americans;[1] a man whose heart-throbs beat in unison with the nation's pulse; who rejoiced when the nation rejoiced, who wept when she wept; a denizen not of any of the cities, which men make, but of the great country as it comes from the hand of God.

1 Philippians iii. 5.

This man, tinged with the prejudices of his nation, shared alike her scruples and her aspirations. Like her he venerated the Constitution and respected its compromises. Like her he was law-abiding, sober-minded, peace-loving, long-suffering. Like her, too, he felt his way anxiously, and discarded his untenable preconceptions slowly, as events, teeming with lessons, supervened. With cautious step he went in advance of the people, leading them on; but not far in advance; never so far but that they could distinctly hear his mild words of encouragement; never so far that, like a magnet too remote from its object, he lost his attractive force over the nation's heart; never so far that the people feared to follow him, lest they should be led away into wild and perilous paths.

Meanwhile the Leader was himself a Follower also. He, too, had his path to find, and his progress to make. The pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, marked his way through alternate sunshine and storm. Tardily and wearily sometimes, but unflinchingly ever, he worked up to the guiding light. Others, outrunning his sober pace, chafed because it was not hastened; but he overtook them on the journey in due time, as "God gave him to see the Right."[1] Some men stand still, amazed, when the tempest darkens around them; others grow and rise to the height of the occasion; but few have ever grown and risen as did this man; his mind maturing and his views expanding under the stirring influences of the times. It was an old familiar name for which the majority voted as President in 1864; yet it was scarcely a reëlection. It was not the same man that the people had elected President four years before.

Nevertheless, even before his name was mentioned for any office higher than a seat in the Senate of the United States,[2] he did indicate the path of progress; in words, too, which we have learned to recognize as prophetic. Adverting to the agitation then prevalent on the subject of slavery, he declared that it would never

1 President's Message.

2 In June, 1858.

cease till a crisis had been reached and passed. He added an expression of his belief, that the Government could not permanently endure if two discordant systems of labor continued in the States. He predicted that the issue would be, not the fall of the Union but the cessation of this discordance. He predicted, farther, that the public mind would find no peace until it could rest in the belief that slavery was in progress of gradual extinction. As a step in that direction, he declared himself in favor of the exclusion of slavery from all the territories of the United States.

To that point he went, not beyond it. He expressed the opinion that there was no right, and ought to be no inclination, in the people of the States that were free, to interfere with slavery in the States that were slave. As to the admission of additional slave States into the Union, he declared that he should see, with exceeding sorrow, any such admission; that he hoped and believed not a single slave State ever would be added to the present list; but that, if any territory whence slavery had been excluded during its territorial existence, the people, when they came to adopt a State Constitution, should do a thing so extraordinary as to incorporate in it the principle of slavery, he saw no alternative but to admit them, notwithstanding.

These words indicate the limits to which he advanced. He preceded the people but a little way, yet it was in the right path; and he did not fear to tell them plainly whither that path would ultimately lead.

It was a single step. With our ideas enlarged and liberalized by the grand events which have been crowded into the last few years, we call it a small step. It was, however, the first in a radical series. And it had this great recommendation, that it was one which the people, noting the giant strides of the slave power, alarmed by the Kansas-Nebraska iniquity, outraged by the Dred Scott decision, were prepared to take. They needed time and thought to determine what the next step should be.

The mixture of boldness and of caution, pleased them. They selected its author, undistinguished and unpretending, as their standard-bearer in the great conflict that was approaching. And after so doing, they stopped where he had stopped; they endorsed his opinion that each State had a right to order and control its domestic institutions as it saw fit.

They did more. Sharing his errors, they followed him when he went astray. This happened mainly because his failings were of honest birth; not the growth of pride, nor of self-seeking, nor of guile in any shape; but the short-comings of over-caution, the hesitancies of a painstaking desire to seek out the right; the weaknesses that beset a genial nature. He was never betrayed into error by arrogance, often by sympathy. When his head and his heart were at variance, the latter sometimes unfairly won the day. Even when faults were apparent, the people forgave them, because, like a sinner in the olden time, he "loved much."

This man's first official missive to the nation breathed the very spirit of comity and conciliation. Some of its concessions for the sake of peace, reached a limit beyond which a single step would have been culpable. Posterity will decide that, on one point, he transgressed that limit; intimating his approval of a proposed amendment to the Federal Constitution which should irrevocably prohibit interference with slavery in the States. Yet the majority of the people, recoiling from the horrors of a fratricidal war, sanctioned and applauded this error. God, in whose hands the wrath of man becomes an element of good, willed not that so fatal a compromise of principle should be carried into effect; and that calamity by no human effort was averted.

Throughout several weeks after the inauguration, people and President still hoped for domestic tranquillity. In vain! A thirty-years' plot against the government had matured. The fiery spirits who controlled the South had resolved that they would not accept a President duly elected, who, like the fathers of the

Revolution, had spoken of slavery as an evanescent thing. Opinions were set up as cause why they should reject this man: opinions, not acts; his acts were those of a mediator and a peace-maker. A practical Christian, he was ready to forgive his brother, even to seventy times seven. States had already formally withdrawn from the Union; and thousands in those States stood, armed for a contest, ready to obey the first trumpet-call of secession. Yet even to these avowed armed enemies, the President of the people, speaking in their name, had said: "You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors." He forebore the shedding of kindred blood, until on a day that will long remain a terrible remembrance to the South,—the first day of aggression,—the boom of cannon from the south shore of Charleston harbor, announced that civil war had begun. He forebore until further forbearance would have imperilled the national life. Then, at last, he called to the People who had been anxiously waiting the decision, long delayed. And never was uprising like that which answered his call!

But even as the great majority of those who then flocked to the national standard, acted on principles of patriotism, not of philanthropy, so, for the time being, did the representative man who led them on. A kinder heart than his has seldom tenanted human bosom; but, at the outset, he turned his thought to this, that it was his duty first to consult the rights and the interests of the country, not those of a race unrighteously held in bondage among us.

Had his views been more expanded, the response to them, at that juncture, would have been less impassioned and overwhelming. The very limit of his horizon, assimilating him in position more closely to the masses of his countrymen, caused his influence over them, just then, to be the more efficient, and the more widely spread.

Throughout the first year of the war, the mind of the nation's

selected chief, like that of the majority of those who selected him, had worked but a little way toward the great problem, on the solution of which hung ultimate success or failure. At the close of that year the President still thought it proper to keep the integrity of the Union prominent as the primary object of the contest; still deprecated haste in deciding that "radical and extreme measures" were indispensable; still adhered to the favorite fallacy of the Henry Clay school of politicians,—the policy of colonization; recommending the transportation to a congenial climate, not only of such slaves as might become free by operation of the recent confiscation act, or by action of any State, but of such other free colored people as might be willing to go.[1] He had previously so modified an order, by the general commanding the Western Department, which declared free all slaves of persons in that department who should take up arms against the United States, as to cause that declaration to conform to, and not to transcend the provisions of the act above referred to.[2]

The next year, the great educating year of the war, witnessed a vast advance in the ideas of President and people.

Like the noting of signs which herald the coming of spring—the swelling of the bud, the first unfolding of the blossom,—is the grateful task of following up, one by one, the tokens, ever clearer and more encouraging, which gave gradual assurance that the long winter of bondage was passing away, and the genial days were nigh when the sun of freedom, piercing the war-clouds of battle, was to warm and to gladden with its impartial rays the lives of the despised and the lowly.

To the impatient, or to the careless observer, the moral season seemed backward, and the incidents in its progress scarcely perceptible. Yet they were replete with promise.

1 President's *Message*, December 3, 1861.

2 "An Act to Confiscate Property used for Insurrectionary Purposes," approved, August 6, 1861.

The first indication came in the form of an Executive Message.[1] It took but feeble ground on the great question. Ignorant or forgetful, it would seem, of the English experience in Jamaica, the President declared that, in his judgment, gradual not sudden emancipation was best for all. And he proposed, as to any State, which might adopt such emancipation, pecuniary aid and coöperation on the part of the Federal Government,—a proposal that was never accepted. While he reminded Congress that such a proposition sets up no claim of a right, by Federal authority, to interfere with slavery within State limits, he added the significant hint, that, if resistance continued, such incidents as promised to be efficient in bringing the struggle to a close, must and would come.

Two months later a General commanding the Southern Department issued an order declaring free the slaves in three States. But in disavowing and avoiding this order, as incompetent to be issued by a department commander, the President took occasion to add that he reserved the question, whether it was competent for him, as Commander-in-Chief, to declare free the slaves of any State.

Two months more brought clearer views to the mind of this anxious seeker after the right. In communicating with Congress regarding the provisions of the Second Confiscation Act, he asserted the right of the national legislature to emancipate. Rebels, he averred, forfeited their slaves at least as justly as they did any other property; and they forfeited both to the government against which they offended. The government, so far as there can be ownership, became the owner of the forfeited slaves. And he added, that he saw no objection to Congress deciding in advance that they should be free.[2]

The true key-note was struck at last. Such property of ene-

1 March 6, 1862.

2 Message transmitted to the House of Representatives, July 17, 1862.

mies as essentially aids to carry on war, and therefore tends to prolong it, may justly be seized and appropriated. The claims to service and labor were emphatically such property. We had a right by the laws of war, to appropriate and to annul them. As the only effectual means at once to secure domestic tranquillity, and to escape the merited reproach of the civilized world, so to act became a duty as well as a right.

As the weeks passed the military prospects of the North darkened. The largest and best appointed army this continent had ever seen was baffled at what had seemed the threshold of victory. Golden opportunities to capture the enemy's seat of government, were lost by unwarrantable delay. The tidings of an ultimate failure and a skilful retreat, veiled under the tender technicality of a change of base, fell upon the country, discouraging the timid and incensing the brave. Day by day emancipation became more and more the theme of debate. The President's antechamber was crowded with eager advisers. These were divided, as men always are, into the hopeful and the desponding. Many came to urge the measure as the appointed means of national redemption; more perhaps, to protest against it, as a direful source of discord even among the loyalists of the North, and the final opening of a breach, never again to be closed, between the contending sections of the country. All obtained patient audience. And it usually happened—such was the idiosyncrasy of the man they sought to advise,—that those who came to protest, departed convinced that a Proclamation of Emancipation was imminent; while those who urged the necessity of that measure went away despairing of any immediate action, and in doubt whether the Commander-in-Chief of the nation's forces would summon courage to issue such a proclamation at all.

If, as in etymological strictness we ought, we interpret prejudice to mean a judgment formed before examination, then must we regard as prejudices his opinions, however true, who has neg-

lected to weigh them against their opposites, however false. In this sense the chief who led the American people in their great conflict was a man, not indeed devoid of prejudice, yet habitually on his guard against it. He had long been revolving the justice and policy of a public manifesto declaring free all slaves held to service or labor in the insurgent States. Yet even when his mind had almost reached its final decision, it seemed more occupied with the objections and difficulties presented by this great measure than with the advantages he hoped thence to derive.

Incidental events determined the exact day. It was within a year and a half from the date of Fort Sumter's surrender that an older stronghold, vainly deemed sacred and impregnable by its Southern defenders,—a prison-house with sadder secrets than the Bastille's,—was first subjected to assault. A hundred days later the attack was renewed. More deadly than shot or shell were the missiles employed. The old walls crumbled under the fire from the battery of Freedom. Two years more, and of that vast structure, the pride of successive generations, nothing was left but the record of the crimes it had sheltered and the sufferings it had beheld.

A few months later, and the victor had become the victim. His spirit weary with the sorrows of a life and cares of a nation, the Leader who had proclaimed the liberty of millions, was himself released by a felon hand, from the turmoil and the bondage of earth. Not untimely was his fate. He survived to witness the extinction of slavery and all its woes. His eyes had seen the salvation of his country. His last days were days of triumph and of joy.

At some future day, in a coming generation, will doubtless be written, more frankly and more dispassionately than by any contemporary it can be, the history of the Hour and the biography of the Man. The whole truth cannot with propriety be told today. Whenever it is, the nation will learn that he who is yet

loved and mourned deep in the hearts of its millions as never chief of a great people was loved and mourned in the world before, was—aye, in very deed! like Him whose disciple he proved himself—"a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Some day will be laid before the world, shining proof, that there are no personal burdens so grievous and heavy to be borne, that a brave and a faithful spirit rising superior to them all, may not, despite the weary load, attain the summit of human distinction. And that great lesson will be embodied in the same volume, which shall relate the decline and fall, in the continent of North America, of that pestilent abuse of which the abolition, effected amid the clash of arms, will ever remain the crowning glory of the life and the times of Abraham Lincoln.

Robert Dale Owen