

ADDRESS
TO THE
WHIGS OF THE STATE OF NEW-YORK,
ON THE SUBJECT OF
ABOLITION AND AGITATION.

BY
PUBLIUS.

NEW-YORK:
PRINTED BY J. P. WRIGHT, 74 FULTON STREET.

1850.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from

The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant

TO THE WHIGS
OF THE
STATE OF NEW-YORK.

I am convinced that the time has arrived when, not merely for the sake of the party, but for that of our common country, you are called upon to choose whom you will follow; and that, accordingly, you must decide whether you will join with the leaders of Abolition and Agitation, or unite with the friends of Order and of the Union. As one of your number, therefore, I now respectfully ask, for the words of this Address, a careful and candid consideration.

You will, I think, upon reflection, coincide with me in opinion, that the course pursued by your delegates, in retiring from the Syracuse Convention, was justified by the conduct of those who controlled the action of that body; but if, notwithstanding the provocation that was given, you should consider that a simple but energetic protest would have been more in accordance with the usages of our party, you will, at least, heartily respond to the spirit of their Address, by “regarding *with sentiments the reverse of approbation the course of one of our Senators in Congress upon questions more important than any that divide the political parties of our day,*” and that you will agree with them in considering that the 5th and 7th resolutions, passed by the

majority on that occasion, besides being radically objectionable in themselves, could only have had the effect of producing discontent, exciting discord, and dividing the party.

The 5th resolution tenders the thanks of the Whig party to our Senator in Congress, for the course he pursued and the doctrines he expounded in the Senate of the United States; while the 7th resolution expresses a determination to renew the agitation of the Slavery question, notwithstanding the patriotic and successful efforts that were made to reconcile conflicting opinions, and thus, as was hoped, put that exciting subject at rest, at least for a season,—possibly forever. Nor must it be forgotten that these resolutions of the majority, so certain to produce disunion among the delegates, were introduced as substitutes for those which, having been agreed to, in the true spirit of compromise, by a joint committee, had already received the hearty approbation of the Convention. It was not a question of withholding or awarding individual praise and approbation, for all would willingly accord to the recipient of the Convention's thanks the possession of talents and acquirements of no ordinary character; but personal considerations must be kept out of view. The counter-resolutions involved a matter of principle of vital importance, in its future effect and bearing, not only to the Whigs of this State, but to the friends of the Union.

There was no room to doubt what were the "*principles*" alluded to by the resolution of the majority, for the advocacy of which the *especial* thanks of the Convention were offered: they were none other than the extreme and ultra views of the Senator on the subject of Slavery, and these resolutions therefore were intended to serve as a declaration of political faith, and a test of party fidelity. In the words of the Ad-

dress of the Utica Convention, “we cannot resist the conclusion that the course of the majority in the Syracuse Convention was unwise and intolerant ; that it tended directly “to the conversion of the Whig party of New-York into a “*political Anti-Slavery party*, to its distraction and disunion “at home, and to its severance from the Whig party of the “*Union.*”

The Whigs of New-York have been ready at all times, and desirous also, when occasion required, to avow their party principles. They have always been in favor of protection to domestic industry, wherever general interests required national aid and support ; they have ever been the consistent advocates of internal improvements in all cases where national assistance was required in aid of objects connected with the public good ; and they also have ever been, and desire now, above all else, to remain the steadfast friends of the Union, and of the supremacy of the law. Without pretending to be exclusive advocates of these principles and doctrines, the Whigs only claim, as a party, that their efforts have been *especially* directed to uphold and maintain them. But they now feel that all other party considerations are subordinate to that higher and paramount law which inculcates allegiance to the Constitution and to the Union,—for I think the Whigs of New-York are prepared, if necessary, “to reject party affinities, if, by maintaining them, they supposed they put in jeopardy that “Constitution which makes the people of these United States “one people.”

Do the Whigs of New-York believe that there is a higher law for a representative than the Constitution which he has sworn to defend ? or that the dictates of conscience should be allowed to interfere with the performance of his duty to

his country? Will they justify and applaud a course of persevering opposition to the settlement of the difficult questions connected with the subject of Slavery, and thereby condemn the conduct of Henry Clay, who introduced and advocated, and of Daniel Webster, who approved and defended, the Compromise bill? And are they desirous now to revive the agitation of these exciting questions, and thereby array one section of the Union against the other, and thus hazard the peace and happiness of our Republic, that Abolitionism may accomplish its objects, and triumph, in the end, over the destruction of that Union? Are these the "beloved principles of public policy so long cherished by the Whigs of this State," and do they believe such principles to be "eminently national and republican?"

We all know, although it would seem to be forgotten, that Slavery was first introduced into our country by accident, and has been continued from necessity.

The petitions of the Colonists to the mother Country, to abate or abolish the evil, were presented in vain. It had been introduced, by the traffic in slaves, into all the Colonies; and when our Constitution was established, Slavery existed in nearly every State of the Union. The Middle and Eastern States, finding slave labor an incumbrance, and that neither climate nor productions required its continuance, gradually abolished Slavery. The act for that purpose, in this State, which passed in 1817, did not go into operation until 1827; but the importation of slaves was prohibited after 1808. We are also all aware that the Constitution recognises this description of property, provides for its security, allows it to form the basis of representation, and makes provision for the return of a fugitive slave to the owner; while to the States themselves, where Slavery may exist,

is left all other control and jurisdiction over the subject, within their respective limits. Is not Slavery, then, the result of accident, not of choice? Was it not established originally against the will of our ancestors, and is not its continuance the misfortune, not the fault, of the South? And in the sacred compact that made us one people, when Washington and the great host of revolutionary patriots of the South were all slave-holders, did we not mutually covenant and agree that the rights of the owners of this description of property should be protected and maintained?

Yet have we not seen the Abolitionists, for a long series of years, attacking the owners of slaves in every form that could produce discontent, or instigate revolt. Incendiary publications have been circulated among them. Men engaged in the abduction of slaves have either been employed by the Abolitionists for the purpose, or encouraged and rewarded for their efforts, until at last, throwing off the mask, they have boldly avowed their design of Abolition or Disunion.

And what has been the result of this species of *humanity* and *philanthropy*?

Has not the spirit of Abolition, in the whole course of its influence and progress, tended only to rivet still stronger the fetters of the slave?

But for its interference, would not those Slave States bordering on the free States have continued, as they had already begun, to take steps for the gradual abolition of Slavery, had not self-respect, as well as a regard for their own security, no less than for their interests, required them to exercise both caution and severity in guarding their rights from officious interference, and their property from depredation? What gave occasion for the severe penalties of the late Fu-

gitive Slave law—although conformable, even in its severity, to the provisions of the Constitution—but the acts of the pretended friends of the slave, whose “misguided zeal” created the necessity for that stern decree?

In a word, leaving out of view its ulterior objects and designs, as lately avowed, what has Abolition done, beyond the forcible abduction of the property of others, but excite a deep and dangerous feeling of discontent and indignation among brethren of the same political family, and members of the same glorious Union?

And will the Whigs of this State lend the sanction of their name to countenance the belief, that, through any act or volition of theirs, the slaves of our sister States should be invited to insurrection—that the two races should meet in conflict, and that, in the fulness of time, the blood of the African should mingle, in fraternal union, with that of the Anglo-Saxon?

But, perhaps, you believe that such results, if to be apprehended at all, can only arise from the effects of fanaticism; whereas those who approve the Syracuse resolutions, and are willing to support those principles, while they would bind you to the consequences, are opposed to the wild and visionary schemes of the Abolitionists: that they are the advocates of free soil, and that they only desire that Slavery shall not be introduced into the newly acquired territories of the Union. I entreat of you not to be misled or deceived by appearances or pretences, but to judge for yourselves. My object is not to assail motives, but to deal with principles; and accordingly, when the public course of a representative, in relation to a subject of such vital importance, is to be rewarded with especial thanks, it becomes essential for the Whig cause, to ascertain how far the declarations and opin-

ions and votes of one, thus specially applauded, are in accordance with the principles of our party, the compromises of the Constitution, and the safety of our Union.

You will recollect, that an ex-President of the United States, while a member of Congress, publicly declared at Pittsburgh, that abolition of Slavery must come,—whether by *blood* or otherwise, he knew not, but come it must: and he repeated the same sentiment in his place in Congress, when he offered a resolution declaring that the following amendment of the Constitution be submitted to the people for adoption:

“That hereditary Slavery should cease after the 4th July, 1842, after which every child born in the United States should be free.”

Now, in his oration on the death of this ex-President, our present Senator in Congress said—

“The republic has been extended and consolidated, but human Slavery has been extended and consolidated also—Slavery therefore must be restrained, and, without violence or injustice, abolished. There were now resolute hearts and willing hands to undertake it, but who was strong enough or bold enough to lead. Who had patience enough to bear with enthusiasm that overleaped its mark, and intolerance that defeated *its own generous purposes.*” And again: “For the rest, the work of emancipation abides the action, whether it be slow or fast, of the moral sense of the American people. How long emancipation may be delayed, is among the things concealed from our knowledge, but not so the certain results.” And during the canvass in Ohio, in 1848, in a speech at Cleveland, the same Senator is reported to have said, “Can nothing be done for freedom because the public conscience is inert? Yes, everything can be done.

“Slavery can be anchored ; it can and must be abolished—and you and I can and must do it. It is written in the Constitution of the United States, that five slaves shall count equal to three white men as a basis of representation, and it is written also, in violation of divine law, that we shall surrender the fugitive slave.” And farther, “Extend a cordial welcome to the fugitive, and defend him as you would your paternal gods. Correct your own error, that Slavery has any constitutional guarantee which may not be released, and which ought not to be released.”

Now, sentiments such as these may be considered to arise from a spirit of the most enlightened philanthropy ; they are only adduced here to show how difficult it is to become convinced that nothing more is meant or intended than to confine Slavery within existing bounds. They seem, on the contrary, to indicate a plan of future agitation, and accordingly the States immediately interested will be likely to construe such declarations and recommendations into an intended attack upon their principles and rights, if such doctrines should be countenanced and sustained, even by inference or implication, *by Conventions of the people of our State.*

It is likewise well to bear in mind, that a few years since a sister State at the East addressed a memorial to Congress, which was presented by one of her Senators, advising a call for a Convention for the avowed object of depriving the South of the right to have their slave property represented ; and during the last session, the Legislature of another State at the East passed resolutions, addressed and presented to Congress, reflecting injuriously upon the feelings of those whom accident had made owners of slaves.

But we have farther and later proof that agitation must

be continued, if not perpetuated, at least, until its great objects shall be accomplished.

Towards the close of the last session of Congress, after the passage of the measures which had so long occupied the time of Congress, and so deeply agitated the feelings of the country, when the great majority of the people of the Union seemed to hail the final settlement with gratitude and joy, the Senator from our State moved the abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia, although in his letter of 1st February, 1849, he had said, "I hold that agitation worse than useless, which, prosecuted for unattainable purposes, puts in jeopardy great existing interests;" a Senator from the West made a motion in favor of the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso,—and a Senator from the East declared, in substance, that propositions of this kind were the first, not the *last*, of the series.

Does not all this plainly indicate a determination to keep alive the spirit of agitation; and were not the resolutions at Syracuse in keeping with the continuous movements that have preceded and produced the dangerous feelings of bitterness and wrath that have been engendered between the North and the South.

Can we, then, extend our faith and charity so far as to suppose, that after the efforts of the wise and the good, of both political parties, had succeeded, as was fondly hoped, in staying the plague, that agitation must now be renewed and continued merely to prevent the possible chance that Slavery might gain a foothold in New Mexico and Utah—whence it is now excluded by existing laws—where the feelings of the people are opposed to it—and where it is confidently believed neither climate nor productions require its introduction or can afford its employment?

Let us, therefore, take heed in time ; for it is to be feared, that, although harmony and conciliation are recommended in some quarters among us, they may prove but words intended to serve a temporary purpose, and endure only for a season ; for you may rest assured, if the crusade against Slavery is to be continued, pretexts will not be wanting to answer the purpose. Opposition to the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave bill, or a cry for its repeal—proposed action upon imaginary indications that Slavery is tending towards New Mexico and Utah, or another attempt to abolish Slavery in the District of Columbia,—each, or all of these movements, will be sufficient to serve as pretences for renewed agitation.

The Fugitive Slave bill, framed in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, has become a law of the land, being required by absolute necessity, inasmuch as the previous law, for this purpose, had become a complete dead letter. It might probably have answered, if the law had been made prospective in its operation, although its present terms are, in strict justice, demanded, if we desire to fulfil our engagements and keep our faith with the South : the present law, however, plainly proves, by the alarm and *emigration* that have followed its passage, to what extent the owners of this property had suffered, and how completely inefficient the former law had become for the object of its enactment.

But there are some who still believe that slaves *may* be sent to New Mexico and Utah. In the language of the Senator from Kentucky, no power on earth could induce the Whigs of New-York to give their vote to plant Slavery where Slavery does not now exist. When, however, all must feel convinced that Slavery cannot abide in these newly acquired territories, will you, without real object or necessi-

ty, in the towering pride of strength and numbers, declare that it must and shall be excluded, and apply accordingly "the saving grace of the Wilmot proviso"? The Whigs generally, indeed almost universally, were opposed to the annexation of Texas, at the time, in the mode, and under the circumstances, which added her to the number of our States, because they were apprehensive of the consequences to the harmony of our Union. Yet, strange and inconsistent as it may appear, Texas was indebted for her admission, under the resolution of Congress, with all its latitude of construction, to the votes of Northern Senators: of those who, when the consequences of their votes can no longer be remedied, and when the territories acquired by the war that followed the annexation, require to be provided for, seem now to side with those who appeared willing to cling to what had become a mere abstraction; although at the expense of the peace, and at the hazard of the safety of the Union.

I am well convinced that the vast mass of the people of all the States are unalterably fixed in their principles of attachment to the Union; and as they are well aware that Slavery was originally established against our consent, and now exists beyond our rightful control, the conservative feeling, the common sense and intelligence of our countrymen, naturally induce them to ask, if, in a vain attempt to remedy this one evil, we shall peril all the blessings which the present confers, with the promise that the future has in store. I am sure that the great portion of the people of this State, who are firm in their opposition to Slavery in the territories, are also firm friends to the rights of the South, as protected by the compromises of the Constitution. Then why, by word, or deed, or vote, shall we give color to the

supposition, that we favor the senseless, mischievous, dangerous clamor against Slavery as it is, and where it is? Is it not perceived, that by thus keeping up the excitement we throw the game of Disunion into the hands of the Ultraists of the South, who may, in such case, prove too strong for the friends of the Union in that quarter. But, it is contended, that the South indulges too freely in threats against the North, and against the Union: that many, under excited feelings, deal in terms of boasting—lauding their strength, and praising their exclusive chivalry—of which, of course, they possess neither more, nor probably less, than others; and it is certain, that this too free mode of speech, and these occasional taunts and threats, have made for the South many enemies, in feeling at least, among the men of the North. But a pleasant, well-timed rebuke, like that contained in the speech of the Hon. member from Illinois, the last session, may well serve all the purpose of reply.

There might, however, be placed in the opposite scale, the exclusive claims of many at the North, to humanity and all the kindred virtues. But, let me ask, in a cause involving the momentous issue of the integrity of our Republic, are such matters worthy of serious consideration?

Let us rather cherish, with honest pride, the recollection of those illustrious statesmen of the South—Crawford, Lowndes, Telfair, and a host of others—who for so long a period led the Republican party, so called—men distinguished for enlarged views of public policy, alike liberal, conservative and national, and who advocated *then* the Whig doctrines of *to-day*; and let us still rejoice in those whom we now might name, who have ever been foremost in defending and maintaining the principles of our party as well as in supporting the Union. Are not the North, and East,

and West, secure in their institutions, their advantages, their acquisitions, and strong in all the essential elements of individual happiness and national prosperity? and shall we, by our conduct, alienate ourselves, even in feeling, from these members of our confederacy to whose co-operation we owe all that we possess? Without the South, our strength, prosperity and tranquillity, would vanish, because, with the loss of union, there would be the loss of every thing of pride, and power, and happiness we enjoy.

Do we forget that at the North we are free from the evils and safe from the dangers of Slavery; neither our rights, our interests, nor our possessions can be put in jeopardy; the torch of the incendiary, incited to insurrection, cannot reach our abodes, or disturb our repose. At the South, in this respect, their all is at stake, for, under the influence of our interference, these perils surround, if they do not affright them; but, what is of more importance, there is involved in the issue we make, that political, social, and national equality which formed the basis upon which our Constitution was established. He has not been a close observer of passing events who has not perceived, for some time past, that a breach has been opening and widening in the sentiments of attachment and good will between the members of our federal compact, while Ultraism, at each extremity, has been doing its work. The idea of disunion, which would once have been rejected with horror, is now spoken of in a way to familiarize the mind to the belief that such a thing was possible—while attachment to the Union has become less strong with those who have shared the ultra doctrines of the day.

Under the operation of such influences, and in a spirit of distrust and apprehension, the last Congress assembled.

We all recollect that it was with difficulty a Speaker could be elected.

The South feared that the Wilmot Proviso might be forced on them by a majority in one House that seemed to be relied on for the purpose, and by a close, possibly a tie vote in the other. A new census was soon to be taken, which would give the North and West increased numbers in the lower House, while the admission of California would destroy the equilibrium in the Senate; and the subsequent plan, as promulgated and recommended "by authority" was, that *such* a territory as New Mexico, with her limited and motley population, was to be admitted at once as a State, and all other questions relating to the exciting subject of Slavery, including the settlement of the Texan boundary, were to be left to take care of themselves.

The triumph of strength, wielded and displayed in this way, and for such objects, even more than the mere admission of California, would have maddened the South—the fear of the Wilmot Proviso would have been ever before them, while Texas would have become the rallying point for discontent and disaffection. With all these incentives to an alienation of former ties of brotherhood, in force and activity—with such elements of strife and discord in existence, added to the deep feelings of indignation prevailing but too generally at the South—one resolve of Legislature or Convention that should have recommended even conditional resistance—or one overt act of opposition to the laws, which accident or design might have originated—or one collision of arms in the Texas dispute—would have been seized on as the signal for alarm, when a flame would have been kindled, which, in unison with the sympathies of a

common cause, would have spread through the Southern region like the wild fire of the prairie.

But the sagacity of the Statesman foresaw the crisis, and the patriotism and the talents of the Senate, and the prudence and forecast and reflection of the House, induced a majority to come to the rescue and avert the danger. Look for a moment at the subsequent proceedings in some of the Southern States, and see the sullen, discontented spirit that still prevails, and let me ask what you think would have been the consequences if the "plan," before alluded to, had been carried out, and no compromise had been adopted. With the healing measures of that bill among the laws of the land, the real causes of complaint, the strong grounds for excitement, under the belief that the North would persevere in its course of wrong and aggression, are removed from the reach and influence of those who might have forgotten their duty to the Union. If, therefore, we are now only true to ourselves, to the South, and to our country, the cries of discontent, and the threatenings of ill-subdued resentment, which still grate harshly on the ear, may be regarded as the echoes of the muttering thunder when the cloud is past—"the moan of wearied ocean when the storm is gone."

Let us, therefore, in this great State—the key-stone of our mighty arch—be found conservative in our views, tolerant in our opinions, and national in our principles, that our State may become the rallying point where extremes of error may meet and mingle in reconciliation.

But will the Whigs of New-York consent that, in their name, and in their cause, Abolition shall again rear its head, and Agitation re-ignite its fires?

Do you think it possible that the union of these States can

be maintained, in the harmony of its relations, in its integrity and perpetuity, under the continued pressure of Abolition and Agitation on the one hand, and of the consequent wide-spread excitement and discontent on the other: while one side endeavors to persuade you that imperious obligations of duty, in the cause of liberty and humanity, require them to "agitate" until Slavery shall be abolished,—and while the other, asking in vain for the warrant or the justice of this officious intermeddling, appeals to the Constitution in defence of the rights that are invaded, and of the interests that must be sacrificed?

The members of our extended Confederacy must be linked together by the bonds of sympathy and fraternity; and then, under the shield of our sacred Union, every State becomes an equal sharer in a common heritage of surpassing greatness and enduring fame.

Whigs of the State of New-York, choose you, then, this day, whom you will follow as political guides—and decide, at once, whether you will join with the leaders of Abolition and Agitation, or unite with the friends of the law and of the Union.

PUBLIUS.

New-York, 30th October, 1850.

71.2009.084.07822

