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LOYAL PUBLICATION SOCIETY,
863 BROADWAY.

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**No. 28.**  
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THE DEATH OF SLAVERY.

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LETTER FROM  
PETER COOPER, TO GOVERNOR SEYMOUR.

1791-1853.

*His Excellency Horatio Seymour, Governor of the State of  
New York :*

My Dear Sir : I thank you for your prompt answer to my letter of 8th ult., and for the assurance I received that "we agree in the end to be realized, the restoration of the Union and the preservation of the Constitution."

So deeply am I impressed with the absolute necessity of maintaining the integrity of the Union and the Constitution, that I desire to see all the powers that God in nature has given us brought into requisition to save our country from being dis-severed, and from becoming the sport of foreign and domestic Saracens. I fear we are in danger of being drawn into error by men who have no faith in a real democratic form of government—I mean a government that aims to secure the greatest good to all the people.

Being a democrat, nearly seventy-three years of age, and having served my country in person and by substitute from the commencement of the war with England to its close, I feel that I have a right to plead with my countrymen of all the shades of political opinions, and to beseech them by every consideration that can move our manhood, to look with me at the dangers which threaten us as a nation.

One of the principal arguments made use of during the last

canvass to induce people to vote the democratic ticket, was the declaration in their platform and speeches, of the assurance that by such a vote they would obtain "a more vigorous prosecution of the war."

Since that time it has become common for those who sympathize with the South to profess great concern about the sovereignty of the individual states. Such persons fail to realize how entirely impossible it would have been for any one individual state to have gained an independence for itself. It required the united power and efforts of all the states to win and maintain an independence of the mother country.

It does now, it always has, and will forever, require the united powers of all the states, to hold securely the dear-bought treasure of freedom and independence—a treasure that should be the pride and glory of every American citizen. For men to talk about the sovereignty of an individual state that never had and never can have the power to win or maintain its sovereignty, is to talk of a living body without any animating spirit.

James Madison declared in the convention that formed the Constitution that "the states never possessed the essential right of sovereignty. These were always vested in Congress." He called the states great corporations. The folly of such an assumption of sovereignty was rendered apparent by the first attempt to form a government out of a league of states. Chancellor Kent assures us that "as soon as the league was ratified the states began to fail in a prompt and faithful obedience to its laws, and as danger receded instances of neglect became more frequent, and by the time of the peace of 1783 the disease of the government had displayed itself with alarming rapidity. The delinquencies of one state became the apology for those of another." He then declares that "the idea of supplying the pecuniary exigencies of the nation from requisitions on the states was soon found to be a delusion."

After a great deal had been said in the convention as to the rights of individual states, President Madison remarks: "I hope these arguments may convince all of the necessity of a strong energetic government, which will equally tend to give energy and protection to the state governments." He adds: "the object of the federation is twofold; first, to maintain the Union—

secondly, good government." "It is evident if we do not radically depart from the federal plan we shall share the fate of ancient and modern confederacies." Mr. Madison says, "Our greatest danger is from the encroachments of the states on the General Government." This apprehension is justly founded upon the experience of ancient confederacies, and ours is proof of it. He further says: "Our National Government must operate for the whole, and the people must have an interest in its support. But if you make the legislators subject and at the mercy of state governments, you ruin the fabric." "The weaker you make your confederacy the greater the danger." He cites evidences of this truth from the acts of the state governments too numerous to mention. It was his opinion, expressed at various times in the convention that framed the Constitution under which we live, that any thing less than such a yielding up of the powers of all the individual states, as would make a national government, would prove a phantom.

We are too apt to forget that the Constitution makes the duly elected President the commander-in-chief of the army and navy of the United States, and holds him responsible for an energetic use of all the powers of the nation, to preserve its interests, its honor, and its life.

Nothing can be more certain than the fact that every effect, physical, moral, political, flows from a cause sufficient for its production. If the causes that now operate to spread misery, death, and desolation through the land are within our reach, there is nothing that can be more important for us than to understand and remove the causes that endanger all we hold dear.

Some may reply that we must stop the abolitionists from talking and writing, in order to prevent and remove dangers from our country; for these abolitionists are constantly declaring that "*these truths are self-evident, that all men are born equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*" These abolitionists even go so far as to say, "That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men."

If it has been found impossible to restrain the few active abolitionists who were in the country when the war of rebellion was

commenced, what can we expect to accomplish when, by the course of events, they have been multiplied one hundred or a thousand fold?

Under these circumstances would it not be wise for us to take a lesson from Mahomet, who, when he found the mountain would not come to him, thought it best that he should go to the mountain?

Others will say that the President's proclamation of freedom and the Congressional act of confiscation must be withdrawn in order to remove the cause that continues the war. Such an opinion is without a shadow of authority from any act or from any member of the Confederate government.

In opposition to such an opinion I learn direct from Mr. Dean, the Provost-Marshal of St. Louis, that the proclamation of freedom has done more to weaken the rebellion than any other measure that could have been adopted. On his late visit to my house he informed me, that he had brought on a large number of rebel officers and men to be exchanged at Fortress Monroe. During their passage he took the opportunity to ask the officers in a body what effect the President's proclamation of freedom had produced in the South. Their reply was (to use their own vulgar mode of expression) that "it had played hell with them." Mr. Dean then asked them how that could be possible since the negroes cannot read. To which one of them replied that one of his negroes had told him of the proclamation five days before he heard it in any other way. Others said their negroes gave them their first information of the proclamation. One of these officers then said with a defiant air that if we would only leave them their corn, their bacon and their homespun, which their negroes produced, they would fight us twenty years. We cannot as a people too sincerely consider that old and worthy saying, that "a house divided against itself cannot stand."

It is undoubted that the proclamation did more to prevent foreign interference than all other measures.

Unfortunately for us, the seeds of a conflicting system were soon broadcast through our land by the unyielding policy of the mother country, acting in concert with mercenary men of our own, entirely regardless of human rights. Such a system has and

must continue to spread death and desolation through the land, until we are filled with our own ways, and become sick of our sins, and are made willing to do unto others as we would that others should do unto us. Just so long as we employ the power of the government to maintain, extend and perpetuate an institution that enables thousands to sell their own children to be enslaved, with all their posterity, just so long we must be a house divided against itself, with ruin staring us in the face. For slavery must forever be a war in its natural struggles for freedom, so long as God lights up the love of liberty in the human heart. The great question for the country is now to be settled by us—whether we will accept a providential interposition that has compelled the government, in the most reluctant self-defence, to declare freedom to all slaves claimed by rebels in arms, as the only effectual means of saving the nation's life, and thus performing the highest duty enjoined by the Constitution.

From all that can be gathered from the newspapers of the South that profess to speak in behalf of the states now in rebellion, we are compelled to believe that their Vice-President was in earnest when he declared that their intention was to make slavery the corner-stone of their confederacy. After the frightful loss of life and treasure already brought upon the nation, these men seem determined to wade through seas of blood in order to obtain stronger guarantees and additional protection for an institution which is at war with natural justice and all the noble instincts of a common humanity. When we are called upon to listen to the advocates of such a system, we would do well to bear in mind that men, in the opinion of Dr. Franklin, are proud, spirited little animals, not fit to be trusted with power. We should also profit by the warning of Jefferson, who said, (when speaking of the enslavement of human beings,) “when I remember that God is just, I tremble for my country.” We, as a people, may well tremble for our country, when we fail to cooperate with events which have made the slave-owners of the South the grandest abolitionists of the nation. The people of the South, by making war for the destruction of the Union and Constitution, have made it necessary, right and proper, for the government to abolish slavery upon the same principle that it would be right to destroy a city in order to save a nation.

It is painful to find so many persons, whom we are compelled to respect for honesty of purpose, who, we are also compelled to believe, are as much in error as St. Paul was when he was hauling men, women and children to prison and death. I sincerely believe that ten years will not pass after the South obtains relief from the paralyzing and corrupting power of holding Africans in slavery with so large a portion of their own children in the same bondage, before they will erect monuments in honor of their deliverance from so great an evil. This opinion is confirmed by the actual experience of a gentleman now in this city, who, after having lived twenty-five years in the South, and having constantly employed hundreds of negroes, gives it as his unqualified opinion that the South would be enriched by the liberation of its slaves. He says the South has untold wealth within its reach which it never can obtain while it works men as slaves. This opinion is further confirmed by one of the largest sugar planters in the South. This gentleman, since the war was commenced, found one morning all his negroes surrounding his house, when one of them informed him that they had " 'cluded to have wages after dis." Their master, after some parley, agreed to give them seven dollars per month, which they accepted and went to their work. This same master informed Judge Woodruff, of New Orleans, after getting in his crop, that he had never got it in so well and so cheaply before.

I believe it will be found that so soon as the South is secured to freedom, the colored people of the North will rapidly emigrate to the South and furnish an abundance of cheap labor of all kinds.

I have written this long letter because I fear that errors, however honestly entertained, have been and will continue to be the means of stimulating the rebels to persevere in their efforts for our destruction. The sympathy manifested for the rebellion by men throughout the North, and the constant opposition to the course adopted by our Administration, may enable the rebels to draw foreign governments to their aid, and in that way bring unheard-of suffering upon our country.

I do not know a single man in the whole nation who has the power to do so much to strengthen the hands of the government as yourself. Your efforts may prevent foreign interference in



our affairs, and enable our government the sooner to bring the rebellion to an end. The influence you can exert would do an immense amount of good by persuading our democratic friends to give their whole strength to a "more vigorous prosecution of the war."

I believe it would be the proudest day of your life, if I could induce you to call on all, without distinction of party, to unite to conquer the rebellion, relying that all reasonable sympathy and kindness will be manifested to the people of the South by the people of the North, when they see that the rebels have laid down their arms and have shown a determination to become peaceable citizens of a united country.

I have written these long letters with an inexpressible desire to do what I can to restore peace and prosperity to our suffering country—a country that, in the course of nature, I shall soon leave; but with an ardent hope that it may forever remain a glorious Union of states, where goodness and greatness shall be the motto and inspiration of the people.

Yours, most respectfully,

PETER COOPER.

New York, September 22, 1863.

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