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# LETTER FROM ROBERT DALE OWEN.

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*Editorial from the EVENING POST of November 22, 1862.*

## THE POLITICAL PROBLEM.

We publish elsewhere a discussion of the aspects and duties of the times, by one of our most distinguished statesmen and politicians, Robert Dale Owen. Unlike some other democrats, Mr. Owen does not deceive himself as to the nature of the civil war in which we are engaged. He takes no narrow or partisan view of the motives under which it should be conducted. He desires no end of it which shall not be enduring in its results.

Mr. Owen discerns, what many had long since discerned before, and many more are just beginning to discern, that the continued existence of two orders of society, so different as those of the free and slave states, is incompatible with the peace of the continent. Whether in the Union or out of it, slavery can only prove a cause of perpetual irritation and conflict, and a suspension of hostilities or truce of any kind a mere postponement of a more dreadful outbreak. Emancipation is at once the surest means of suppressing the rebellion as an armed resistance, and of harmonizing the sections as bodies politic.

His statements are clear, his arguments cogent, his motives patriotic, and we ask for his presentation of the case the calm, unprejudiced consideration of men of all parties, and particularly of that democratic party to which the writer has all his life adhered.

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## THE COST OF PEACE.

*To the Hon. Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury:*

Sir: In briefest terms I state the propositions which, as the subject of our recent conversation, I promised to reduce to writing.

What are the reasonable hopes of peace?

Not, that within the next fifty days the South, availing herself of the term of grace offered in the President's proclamation, may, to save her favorite institution, return to her allegiance. Let us not deceive ourselves. There are no conditions, no guaranties—no, not if we proffer her a blank sheet on which to set them down, with

unrestricted pen, in her own hand—under which she will consent to reunion, except in one contingency—conquest, more or less complete, by force of arms.

Are we likely to obtain peace by conquest?

In search of an answer, let us look closely at a few statistical facts.

By the census of 1860 the number of white males between the ages of 18 and 45 is, in the loyal states, about four millions; and, in the disloyal states, about one million three hundred thousand; a little upwards of three to one. The disproportion seems overwhelmingly great.

But this calculation, as a basis of military strength, is wholly fallacious; for it includes persons of one color only.

Out of the above four millions the North has to provide soldiers and (with inconsiderable exceptions, not usually extending to field-labor) laborers also.

But of the three millions and a half of slaves owned in the rebel states about two millions may be estimated as laborers. Allow three hundred thousand of these as employed in domestic services and other occupations followed by women among us, and we have seventeen hundred thousand plantation hands, male and female, each one of which counts against a northern laborer on farm or in work-shop.

Then, of that portion of population whence soldiers and outdoor laborers and mechanics must chiefly be taken, the northern states have four millions and the southern states three millions.

Supposing the negroes all loyal to their masters, it follows that the true proportion of strength available in this war—that is, of soldiers to fight and laborers to support the nation while fighting—may fairly enough be taken at three in the South to four in the North.

Under this supposition of a South united, without regard to color, in an effort for recognition, shall we obtain peace by subduing her? If history teach truth, we shall not. Never, since the world began, did nine millions of people band together, resolutely inspired by the one idea of achieving their independence, yet fail to obtain it. It is not a century since one-third of the number successfully defied Great Britain.

But let us suppose the negroes of the South loyal to the Union instead of to their masters, how stands the matter then?

In that case, it is not to a united people, but to a Confederacy divided against itself, that we are opposed; the masters on one side; the laborers, exceeding them in number, on the other.

Suppose the services of these laborers transferred to us, what will then be the proportion, on either side of forces available, directly and indirectly, for military purposes?

As about five and three-fourths to one and a third: in other words, nearly *as nine to two*.

Such a wholesale transfer is, of course, impossible in practice. But in so far as the transfer is possible, and shall occur, we approach the above results.

How much wisdom, under these circumstances, is there in the advice that we should put down the rebellion first and settle the negro question afterwards? What shall we say of their statesmanship who, in a war like this, would leave out of view the practical effects of emancipation?

On the other hand, however, it is to be admitted that African loyalty in this war will little avail us, if we have not good sense and good feeling enough properly to govern the negroes who may enter our lines.

To render their aid available, in the first place we must treat them humanely; a duty we have yet to learn: and secondly, both for their sakes and for our own, we must not support them in idleness. Doubtless, they are most efficient as laborers, as domestics in camp, as teamsters, or employed on entrenchments and fortifications, or in ambulance corps, or as sappers and miners; or, as fast as southern plantations shall fall into our possession, as field-hands. But if all these posts become over filled, better do away with the necessity for further draft in the North by putting muskets in the hands of able-bodied men, colored differently from ourselves, than to delude their ignorance into the opinion that among the privileges of freedom is food without work.

Have we philanthropy and discretion enough wisely to administer such a change of system? Possibly not. Administrative capacity in public affairs is not our strong point. We would do well to bear in mind, however, that without such capacity not this war only, but our entire governmental experiment, will prove a failure at last.

Do other objections hold against the plan? Does humanity forbid us to accept the aid of an enslaved race? In so far as humanity can ever enjoin war at all, she enjoins the employment, by us, of the African in this; first, because his employment may shorten, by years, the fratricidal struggle; and then, because, if he is not permitted to assist

in civilized warfare under us, and if, without his aid, we fail to effect his liberation and thus disappoint his hopes, he may be overtaken by the temptation to seek freedom and revenge in his own wild way. In accepting the liberated slave as a soldier we may prevent his rising as an assassin. By the creation of negro brigades we may avert the indiscriminate massacres of servile insurrection.

Or is there an insuperable difficulty of caste in the way? In a contest likely to eventuate in securing to another race than ours the greatest of temporal blessings, are we determined to shut out that race from all share in its own liberation? Are we so enamored of the Moloch, War, that we will suffer none but *our* sons to pass through the fire? Terrible penalty to pay, with life and death at stake, for a national prejudice against the southern Pariah!

As to the duty of our rulers in the premises, I cannot see according to what principle of ethics a government, charged with the lives of millions, the putting down of a gigantic rebellion and the restoring of tranquillity to the land, has the right, in the hour of its utmost need, to scorn a vast element of strength placed within its reach and at its disposal; nor why, if it refuses to avail itself of such an element, it should not be held responsible for the lives it sacrifices and the hopes it blights.

But we need emancipation far less for the material aid it affords—great, even indispensable, though it be—than because of other paramount considerations.

We have tried the experiment of a federal Union, with a free-labor system in one portion of it and a slave-system in another, for eighty years; and no one familiar with our affairs for a quarter of a century past is ignorant that the result has been an increase—embittered year by year in ever-accelerated ratio—of dissensions, of sectional jealousies, of national heart-burnings. When, eighteen months since, these culminated in war, it was but the issue which our ablest statesmen, looking sorrowfully into the future, had long since foretold. But if, while yet at peace and with all the influence of revolutionary reminiscences pleading the cause of Union, this diversity of labor systems, producing variance of character and alienation of feeling, proved stronger to divide than all past memories and present interests to unite, what chance is there that its baneful power for evil should cease, now, when to thoughts of fancied injuries in other years are added the recollections of the terrible realities enacted on a hundred bloody battlefields, from which the smoke has scarcely passed away?

None—the remotest!

A suspension of hostilities we can purchase; a few years' respite, probably, in which to return to our money-getting, before the storm bursts forth anew with gathered force; but if we look beyond selfishness and the present; if our children are in our thoughts; if we are suffering and expending now, that they, in a land of prosperity, may live and die in peace, then must we act so that the result shall endure. We must not be content to put off the evil day. The root of the evil—the pregnant cause of the war—that must be eradicated.

Report has it that a western politician recently proposed, as the best solution of our difficulties, the recognition of slavery in all the states. Such an idea has a basis of truth; namely, that a state of war is, among us, the necessary result of conflicting labor systems. Such an idea might even be carried out and lead to peace but for that progressive spirit of Christian civilization which we dare not openly outrage, how imperfectly soever we obey its humane behests.

There are a thousand reasons—geographical, commercial, political, international—why we should not consent to a separation into two confederacies; it is a contingency not to be thought of or entertained; but *if we look merely to the conditions of lasting peace*, the chance of maintaining it would be far better if the independence of the South were to be recognised with her negroes emancipated, than if she were to return to her allegiance, retaining her slave system.

For in the former case, the cause of dissension being uprooted, the tendency would be to reunite, and a few years might see us a single nation again; while, in the latter, a constantly active source of irritation still existing, three years of breathing time would not elapse without bringing endless quarrels and a second rebellion.

Conceive re union with slavery still in existence. Imagine southern sympathizers in power among us, offering compromises. Suppose the South, exhausted with military reverses and desiring a few years' armistice to recruit, decides to accept it under the guise of peace and re-construction? What next? Thousands of slaves, their excited hopes of emancipation crushed, fleeing across the border. A Fugitive Slave law, revived by peace, demanding their rendition. Popular opinion in the North opposed to the law, and refusing the demand. Renewed war the certain consequence.

Or take, even, the alternative of recognition—recognition of an independent confederacy, still slave-holding. Are we, then—becoming the sole exception among the nations of the earth—to make ourselves aiders and abettors of the slave-system of a foreign nation, by agreeing to return to her negro refugees seeking liberty and an asy-

lum among us? National self-respect imperatively forbids this. Public sentiment would compel the rejection, as a base humiliation, of any proposed treaty stipulation, providing for rendition of runaway slaves. Yet the South would regard such rejection in no other light than as a standing menace—a threat to deprive her of what she regards as her most valuable property. Co-terminous as for hundreds—possibly thousands—of miles our boundaries would be, must not the South, in common prudence, maintain all along that endless border-line an armed slave-police? Are we to consent to this? And if we do, shall we escape border raids after fleeing fugitives? No sane man will expect it. Are we to suffer these? We are disgraced. Are we to resent them? It is a renewal of hostilities.

State elections may go as they will. Their results can never change the fact that any party obtaining the control of the government and adopting the policy that the settlement of the emancipation question is to be postponed till the war shall be closed, will never, while it pursues that policy, see this war permanently closed—not even by accepting a shameful disruption of our country.

But if emancipation is to avail us as a peace-measure, we must adopt it boldly, resolutely, effectually. It must be general, not partial; extending not to the slaves of rebels only, but to every slave on this continent. Even if it were practicable, which it is not, with slavery non-existent in the northern states and abolished in those which persist in rebellion, to maintain it in the narrow border-strip, it is precisely there, where negro fugitives can the most readily escape, that its maintenance would the most certainly lead to war.

Can this great peace measure be constitutionally enacted?

A proclamation or (the more appropriate form) an act of General Emancipation, should, in its preamble, set forth, in substance, that the claims to service or labor of which it deprives certain persons having been proved, by recent events, to be of a character endangering the supremacy of the law, jeopardizing the integrity of the Union, and incompatible with the permanent peace of the country, are taken by the government, with just compensation made. Under circumstances far less urgent than these, the law or custom of civilized nations, based on considerations of public utility, authorizes such taking of private property for public use. We ourselves are familiar with its operation. When a conflagration in a city threatens to spread far, houses in the line of its progress may legally be seized and destroyed by the authorities in order to arrest it; and the owners are not held to have been wronged if they

are paid for such losses under an equitable appraisal. But it is not the existence of part of a city that is now endangered; it is the integrity of one among the first Powers of the world that is menaced with destruction.

The truth of the preamble suggested has become, in my judgment, incontrovertible. It will receive the assent of an overwhelming majority of the people of the loyal states. The public sentiment of Europe will admit its truth.

Let us confess that such a preamble, as preface to act or proclamation, could not have commanded the assent of more than a small fraction of our people, only two short years ago—two years, as we reckon time; a generation, if we calculate by the stirring events and far-reaching upheavals that have been crowded into the eventful months. In such days as these abuses ripen rapidly. Their consequences mature. Their ultimate tendencies become apparent. We are reminded of their transitory character. We are reminded 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 have been suffered to continue; yet all abuses have but a limited life. The Right only is eternal.

The rebellion, teacher and creator as well as scourge and destroyer, by sternly laying bare the imminent dangers of slavery, has created the constitutionality of emancipation. It has done more. It has made emancipation a bounden political duty, as well as a strictly constitutional right.

Can we, in declaring emancipation, legally avoid the payment, say of two hundred millions, in the shape of compensation to loyal slaveholders?

Not if a slaveholder's right to service and labor from his slaves, when not forfeited by treason, is legal. On humanitarian grounds the legality of that right has been denied. But a construction of the constitution adverse to such denial, and acquiesced in by the nation throughout more than two generations, is held by most men to be reasonable. Why the right in question should be regarded as private property. If it be private property, then, except by violating the fifth article of the amendments to the constitution, it cannot be taken for public use without just compensation. To violate any article of the constitution is a revolutionary act; but such acts cost a nation more than a few hundred millions of dollars.

The risk that a future decision of the Supreme Court might declare emancipation without compensation to be unconstitutional is, of itself, sufficient justification of the President's policy, corresponding to the above suggestions, in this matter.

Such compensation will be unpopular with many. Wise and just acts, when they involve sacrifices, frequently are. A wrong long tolerated commonly entails a penalty, which is seldom cheerfully paid. Yet, even on other grounds, we ought not, in this case, to begrudge the money. Who deserve better of their country than those brave men who, in the border and other slave states, have clung to their loyalty through all the dark hours of peril even to life?

Precautions naturally suggest themselves against false pretences of loyalty. It seems expedient that he who shall have proved that he is the legal owner of certain slaves, and also that he has ever been loyal to the Union, should receive a certificate of indebtedness by the government, not transferable, to be paid at some fixed time subsequent to the termination of the war: payment being made contingent on the fact that the claimant shall not, meanwhile, have lapsed from his loyalty.

Every such claimant, once recognised, would feel himself to be, by his own act, the citizen of a free state; one of us, detached forever from the southern league. A government stockholder, he would become pecuniarily interested in the support of the government and the restoration of peace.

Even if the legislatures of the border states should not initiate such a policy, the loyal men of these states will accept it.

Such a measure does not involve expense in conveying the liberated negro to other countries. It has hitherto, indeed, been the usual policy in slave states to discourage, as dangerous, the residence there of free blacks; and hence an idea that colonization should be the concomitant of emancipation. Of *general* emancipation, there is no need whatever that it should be. Those who take up such an idea forget that the jealousy with which slaveholders regard the presence of free negroes springs out of the dread that these may infect with a desire for freedom the slaves around them, thus rendering them insubordinate. But when all are free there will be no slaves to incite, nor any chains to be broken by resort to insurrection.

It is no business of ours either to decide, for the liberated negro, where he shall dwell, or to furnish his travelling expenses. Freemen, black or white, should select their own dwelling place and pay their own way.

As to the fears of competition in labor sought to be excited in the minds of the northern working man, they have foundation only in case emancipation be refused; for such refusal would flood the North with fugitives. If, on the contrary,

emancipation be carried out, the strong local attachments of the negro will induce him, with rarest exceptions, to remain as a hired laborer where he worked as a slave. Thus humane masters will not lack sufficient working hands, of which colonization would deprive them. And if, notwithstanding the probable rise of southern staples, profits, at first, should be less, the security of the planter will be greater. He will no longer lie down at night uncertain whether the morning's news may not be that his slaves have risen against them.

This is the paper view of the question. But all edicts, all proclamations, how wise and righteous soever, are but idle announcements now, if we lack courage and conduct to enforce them.

Courage we have. Raw levies have behaved like veterans. The skeletons of regiments reduced to one-tenth their original number, attest the desperate valor with which they confronted death. Not with the rank and file is the blame! The leading! There has been the secret of failure.

With all the advantages of a just cause over our enemies, we have suffered them to outdo us in earnestness. We lack the enthusiasm which made irresistible the charge of Cromwell's Ironsides. We need the invincible impulse of a sentiment. We want, above all, leaders who know and feel what they are fighting for. This is a war in which mercenaries avail not. There must be a higher motive than the pay of a Swiss—a holier duty urging on, than the professional pride or the blind obedience of a soldier. By parliamentary usage a proposed measure is entrusted, for fostering care, to its friends. So should this war be. Its conduct should be confided to men whose hearts and souls are in it.

Again. It has long been one of our national sins that we pass by, with scarcely a rebuke, the gravest public offences. We utterly fail in holding to a strict accountability our public men. The result of such failure, in peace, had almost escaped our notice. In war we have now beheld its effects, flagrant and terrible.

It was not to be expected that among so many thousands of officers suddenly appointed there should not be some hundreds of incompetents. Such things must be. No one is to blame if, in field or garden, weeds spring up. The blame rests with him who leaves them there to choke the crop and cumber the ground.

Accountability—that should be the watchword—ACCOUNTABILITY, stern, unrelenting! Office has its emoluments; let it have its responsibilities also. Let us demand, as Napoleon demanded, success from our leaders. The rule may work harshly. War needs harsh rules. Actions are

not to be measured in war by the standard of peace. The sentinel, worn by extreme fatigue, who sleeps at his post, incurs the penalty of death. There is mercy in courts-martial—drum-head courts-martial. A dozen officers shot, whenever the gravity of the offence demands it, may be the saving of life to tens of thousands of brave men.

Eighteen months have passed. Eight hundred millions have been spent. We have a million of armed men in the field. More than a hundred thousand rest in soldiers' graves. And for all this, what result? Is it strange if sometimes the heart sinks and resolution fails at the thought that, from sheer administrative infirmity, the vast sacrifice may have been all in vain?

But let the Past go! Its fatal faults, (difficult perhaps, to avoid, under an effort so sudden and so vast) can never be recalled. Doubtless they had their use. It needed the grievous incapacity we have witnessed, the stinging reverses we have suffered, the invasion even of free states we have lived to see commenced; it needed the hecatombs of dead piled up unavailingly on battle-field after battle-field—the desolate hearths, the broken-hearted survivors—it needed all this to pave the way for that emancipation which is the only harbringer of peace.

The Future! that is still ours to improve. Nor, if some clouds yet rest upon it, is it without bright promise. Signs of nascent activity, energy, and a resolution to hold accountable for the issue the leaders of our armies, are daily apparent. Better than all, the initiative in a true line of policy has been taken. The twenty-third of September has had its effect. The path of safety is before us; steep and rugged, indeed, but no longer doubtful nor obscure. A lamp has been lit to guide our steps; a lamp that may burn more brightly before a new year dawns upon us. The noble prayer of Ajax has been vouchsafed in our case. At last we have light to fight by.

We shall reach a quiet haven if we but follow faithfully and perseveringly that guiding light.

There is, at this moment, in the hearts of all good men throughout the length and breadth of the land, no deeper feeling, no more earnest longing, than for peace; peace not for the day, not to last for a few years; but peace, on a foundation of rock, for ourselves and for our children after us. May the hearts of our rulers be opened to the conviction that they can purchase only a shambling counterfeit except at one cost! God give them to see, ere it be too late, that THE PRICE OF ENDURING PEACE IS GENERAL EMANCIPATION!

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

ROBERT DALE OWEN.

New York, November 10, 1862.



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