





"INITIATE EMANCIPATION."

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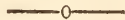
OF

HON. J. M. ASHLEY,

OF OHIO,

In the House of Representatives, April 11, 1862,

ON THE BILL FOR THE RELEASE OF CERTAIN PERSONS HELD TO SERVICE OR  
LABOR IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.



WASHINGTON, D. C.  
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Mr. ASHLEY said :

Mr. CHAIRMAN : I intend to vote for this bill as a national duty, and not as the Representative of a locality. I shall vote for it without apology, and without disclaimer. I have no excuses to offer here, or elsewhere, for doing an act which even-handed justice demands. From the first I have been earnest and persistent in pressing this question of emancipation. It became my pleasing duty, in obedience to the request of the District Committee, to meet and confer with the Senator who had charge of this subject in the other branch of the national Legislature, and I may say, I trust, without impropriety, that the Senate could not well have confided it to a truer and more earnest friend of the measure.

After several meetings and consultations with leading members of both Houses, and citizens of the District, we agreed upon a bill, which was approved by each committee, and ordered to be reported in both Houses. This was the bill which I reported to the House on the 12th day of March last. I deem it due to myself, in this connection, to say that the bill then reported by me was not in all respects what I could desire ; and I need hardly add that some of the Senate amendments are of a character to make it still more objectionable. But I am a practical man, and shall support this bill as the best we can get at this time. I have been shown a number of amendments which some of my friends on this side of the House desire to offer, and which I would prefer to the provisions

which are proposed to be amended ; but if offered I shall vote against them, as their adoption would greatly delay, if not endanger the passage of the bill at this session, because their adoption would necessarily return the bill to the Senate for their concurrence. I trust, therefore, that all friends of emancipation will decide to accept the Senate bill as it is, and vote against all amendments, so that the practical end aimed at by the earnest men of this House, the immediate liberation of all slaves in this District, shall at once be accomplished. The object to be attained, and not its particular mode of attainment, is what we ought all to have most at heart.

If I must tax the loyal people of the nation \$1,000,000 before the slaves at the national capital can be ransomed, I will do it. I would make a bridge of gold over which they might pass to freedom, on the anniversary of the fall of Sumter, if it could not be more justly accomplished. The people of the United States must be relieved from all responsibility for the existence or longer continuance of human slavery at the capital of the Republic. The only question which I conceive I am called upon as a Representative to decide is, has Congress the power and is it our duty to pass such a bill as the one before us ?

Part of the sixteenth clause of the eighth section of the first article of the Constitution reads thus :

“ Congress shall have power to exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever over such



district (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular States and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of Government of the United States."

I need not go into a labored argument to show that Congress has power to banish slavery from this District. It is not necessary to be a constitutional lawyer to comprehend the extent of the power here granted. The meaning is plain enough. This clause confers upon Congress all the legislative power that can be exercised by both national and State governments combined. If Congress cannot abolish slavery in this District, no power on earth can.

A few years ago, one of freedom's distinguished orators startled the country by declaring "*that Congress had no more power to make a slave than to make a king.*" If, then, there is, as I claim, no constitutional power in Congress to reduce any man or race to slavery, it certainly will not be claimed that Congress has the power to legalize such regulations as exist to-day, touching persons held as slaves in this District, by re-enacting the slave laws of Maryland, and thus doing by indirection what no sane man claims authority to do directly. I know it is claimed by some that if Congress has power to abolish, it must necessarily have power to establish slavery. I will not insult the intelligence of this House by discussing such a proposition. If Congress could not constitutionally re-enact the slave laws of Maryland for this District, then slavery could not exist even for a single hour after the cession of the territory became complete. But whether slavery constitutionally exists in this District or not, that it does exist is a fact, and because it exists and has existed by the sufferance and sanction of the national Government, for which the entire people of the United States are justly responsible, it is more than even the imperative duty of this Congress to abolish at once and forever so unnatural and unjustifiable a wrong. And, sir, if it be necessary to employ gold to do it, let gold be employed. Gold—which has corrupted statesmen, perverted justice, and enslaved men, can never be more righteously used than when it contributes to re-establish justice and ransom slaves.

It is claimed by the opponents of emancipation that the proper and natural condition of all colored races is that of slavery to the white race; that the people of color, not only in this District, but throughout the country, are unfit for free-

dom; that they cannot take care of themselves, and must, of necessity, if liberated, become a public charge. We are asked with apparent horror, and an air of sincerity, "if we intend to let this slave population loose among the whites;" and we are told if we do that, it will be destructive alike of the interests of both races; that the prejudices against persons of color are so implacable they cannot live in peace, and a war of races will be the inevitable result of freeing them among the whites—evils far more to be dreaded than any which can ensue from their continued enslavement. I have no such apprehension. Experience teaches me that all such fears are groundless. While I deny the doctrine that the normal condition of any race is that of slavery, or that there can be rightfully such a thing as property in man, under any Government or constitution, I will not and cannot believe that the restoration of any race to freedom will produce antagonisms that shall culminate in a war between those whose relationships are changed from that of gross injustice and oppression to that of self-dependence and freedom. God made of one blood all the nations that dwell together on the face of the earth, and gave man "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth;" but man over man, never.

The distinction here made between persons and animals is clear and marked. It is the distinction recognised in the jurisprudence of all civilized and Christian nations; and when a slave master stands up here and claims that his title to his fellow-man rests upon the same recognised rights that give him a title to his horse, I see and feel the blighting effects of slavery, and realize the justice of the remarks which I submitted on this floor two years ago, when I said that—

"I exempt, with pleasure, from any sweeping denunciations which I may make, thousands of good and true men who find themselves born to this inheritance, and whose whole lives give assurance to the world that their hearts are better than the system. I trust a class of men in any society or Government with absolute power over a servile race, and the bad men will not only use it and abuse it, as I shall show, but, by their clamorous cry of danger to the State, will perpetrate and give sanction to outrages that good and true men will be powerless to prevent. It is not that southern men and slaveholders are worse than other men, but because they are no better, that it is unsafe, if it were not in itself

an indefensible wrong, to intrust them with absolute power over any part of the human race."

Sir, the origin and authority for all the dominion man of right possesses in this world comes direct from the Father of all, and has been so recognised, not only by the great English commentator, but by the law-givers of every civilized nation on earth. There is no right outside of His authority, much less in violation of it.

The great epic poet of England writes—

"He gave us only over beast, fish, fowl,  
Dominion absolute; that right we hold  
By his donation; but man over man  
He made not lord; such title to himself  
Reserving, human left from human free."

I ask the indulgence of the House while I read a few extracts from the writings of the great men of the past, which will suffice to show how slavery was regarded by them.

"Slavery is a system of the most complete injustice."—*Plato*.

"Slavery is a system of outrage and robbery."—*Socrates*.

"By the grand laws of nature all men are born free, and this law is universally binding upon all men."

"Eternal justice is the basis of all human laws."

"Whatever is just is also the true law; nor can this true law be abrogated by any written enactment."

"If there be such a power in the decrees and commands of fools, that the nature of things is changed by their votes, why do they not decree that what is bad and pernicious shall be regarded as good and wholesome, or why, if the law can make wrong right, can it not make bad good?"

"Those who have made pernicious and unjust decrees, have made anything rather than laws."—*Cicero*.

"The law which supports slavery and opposes liberty must necessarily be condemned as cruel, for every feeling of human nature advocates liberty. Slavery is introduced by human wickedness; but God advocates liberty by the nature which he has implanted in the breast of every man."—*Fortescue*.

"If neither captivity nor contract can, by the plain law of nature and reason, reduce the parent to a state of slavery, much less can they reduce the offspring."

"The primary aim of society is to protect individuals in the enjoyment of those absolute rights which were vested in them by the immutable laws of nature. Hence it follows that the first and prime end of human laws is to maintain those absolute rights of individuals."

"If any human law shall require us to commit crime, we are bound to transgress that human law, or else we must offend both the natural and divine."—*Blackstone*.

"What the Parliament doth shall be holden for naught whenever it shall enact that which is contrary to the rights of nature."—*Lord Coke*.

"The essence of all law is justice. What is not justice is not law, and what is not law ought not to be obeyed."—*Hampden*.

"No man is by nature the property of another. The rights of nature must be some way forfeited before they can justly be taken away."—*Dr. Johnson*.

"If you have the right to make another man a slave, he has right to make you a slave."—*Dr. Price*.

"It is injustice to permit slavery to remain a single hour."—*Pitt*.

"American slavery is the vilest that ever saw the sun; it constitutes the sum of all villainies."—*John Wesley*.

"Man cannot have property in man. Slavery is a nuisance, to be put down, not compromised with, and to be assailed without cessation and without mercy, by every blow that can be leveled at the monster."

"Ireland and Irishmen should be foremost in seeking to effect the emancipation of mankind."

"The Americans alleged that they had not perpetrated the crime, (that of enslaving the blacks,) but inherited it from England. This, however, fact as it was, was still a paltry apology for America, who asserting liberty for herself, still used the brand and the lash against others."—*Daniel O'Connell*.

"In regard to a regulation of slavery, my detestation of its existence induces me to know no such thing as a regulation of robbery or a restriction of murder. Personal freedom is a right of which he who deprives a fellow-creature is criminal in so depriving him, and he who withholds is no less criminal in withholding."—*Charles James Fox*.

"I would never have drawn my sword in the cause of America, if I could have conceived that thereby I was founding a land of slavery."—*La Fayette*.

"I never mean, unless some particular circumstances should compel me to it, to possess another slave by purchase, it being among my first wishes to see some plan adopted by which slavery in this country may be abolished by law."

"But there is only one proper and effectual mode by which it can be accomplished, and that is by legislative authority, and this, as far as my suffrage will go, shall never be wanting."—*Washington*.

"The abolition of domestic slavery is the greatest object of desire in these colonies, where it was unhappily introduced in their infant state."—*Jefferson*.

"It is wrong to admit into the Constitution the idea that there can be property in man."—*Madison*.

"We have found that this evil has preyed upon the very vitals of the Union, and has been prejudicial to all the States in which it has existed."—*Monroe*.

"Is it not amazing that at a time when the



rights of humanity are defined and understood with precision, in a country above all others fond of liberty, that in such an age and in such a country, we find men professing a religion the most mild, humane, gentle, and generous, adopting such a principle, as repugnant to humanity as it is inconsistent with the Bible, and destructive to liberty?"—*Patrick Henry*.

"Sir, I envy neither the heart nor the head of that man from the North who rises here to defend slavery on principle."—*John Randolph*.

"The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written as with a sunbeam in the whole volume of human nature by the hand of Divinity itself, and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power."—*Alexander Hamilton*.

"Little can be added to what has been said and written on the subject of slavery. I concur in the opinion that it ought not to be introduced or permitted in any of the new States, and that it ought to be gradually diminished and finally abolished in all of them."—*John Jay*.

"It is among the evils of slavery, that it taints the very sources of moral principle. It establishes false estimates of virtue and vice; for what can be more false and more heartless than this doctrine, which makes the first and holiest rights of humanity depend upon the color of the skin?"—*John Quincy Adams*.

Thus, sir, spoke some few of the great men of the past, and the just principles by them proclaimed control and direct to-day all the civilized Governments of Europe. Shall the American Government be less just than monarchical Governments? Shall we alone cling to slavery and the dead past, while all Christian nations are keeping step to the march of human progress, and the demands of a higher civilization? Let us hope not, and so act and vote as to secure a realization of that hope.

I am for the liberation, not only of all slaves in this District, but wherever national jurisdiction extends and the national Constitution confers power. I am for it, because I believe it an act of justice to white as well as black, to master as well as slave; and, if no other reason could be given, I am for it because, in the language of the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts, "*they are men by the grace of God, and this is enough*." Free institutions will gain strength everywhere by a decree of emancipation at the national capital, while slave institutions will everywhere be weakened. Such a triumph for the cause of freedom, as the passage of this act to-day, will be welcomed with gratitude not only by the ransomed slave, but with joy by the people everywhere in the loyal por-

tions of our country. In Europe it will be hailed by the friends of liberty and progress as the dawning of a new era in the United States, and it will make the line of demarkation at home more distinct between the supporters and opponents of the Government.

I rejoice that I am about to be permitted to record my vote in favor of this humane and beneficent measure. It is a day which, in common with millions of my countrymen, I have long hoped to see; and if I never give another vote in this House or elsewhere, I shall not have lived in vain, especially if I have hastened, even a single hour, the adoption by Congress of this act of national justice and national liberation. I shall have the satisfaction of leaving the enduring record of an action of which my children cannot but be proud, and of which no true man in any Christian nation could be ashamed.

It is said, if the slaves in this District are at once emancipated, that society and domestic regulations will be greatly deranged; that peace, order, security, industry, and contentment will be banished, and violence, disorder, robbery, idleness and crime will increase; that such an act can do no possible good, while it would be unjust and a great hardship to both master and slave. Such is not my view of this act, nor such, sir, as I read it, the history of emancipation in the British or Danish West Indies. Such, I am sure, will not be the result in this District. Why, sir, with all the disabilities imposed upon the colored population of this District by congressional enactments, corporation regulations, and blind prejudices—and they are sufficient to weigh down and destroy the worthy and energetic, and encourage the vicious and indolent—with all these disabilities, without a parallel in any nation on earth, that colored population will compare, advantageously to themselves, with the colored population of any city in the free States. They have amassed property beyond belief. Their church property alone, as I am informed, is valued to exceed *one hundred thousand dollars*. They are taxed for the support of schools from which their children are excluded, and maintain separate schools of their own. They have societies for the support of their sick and disabled, and never permit one of their number to be buried at public expense. In thirty years not one of their number has been convicted of



a capital offence. As a body, they are industrious, frugal, orderly, trustworthy, and religious. Instead of an increase, I venture to predict, as the earliest result of this great measure, a decrease in disorder, theft, idleness, and crime; and as an earnest that this prediction is not made without some foundation, let me read to you the preamble and resolution adopted the other day at a meeting of the colored ministers and leading members of the several colored churches in this city:

"Whereas we have learned by the published proceedings of Congress that there is a probability of the peaceful and final abolishment of slavery in the District of Columbia: Therefore,

*"Be it resolved,* That we recommend to the churches and congregations we represent that they set apart Sunday, the 13th day of April, 1862, in connection with the usual religious services, as a day of special prayer to Almighty God, that if this great boon of freedom is vouchsafed to our people, we may receive it in a becoming manner, and by our orderly behavior, our devotion to our Christian duties, our obedience to the laws, we may show how worthy we are to enjoy it; and that He would be pleased, in His own way and in His own time, to proclaim liberty throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof."

Need I say to this House and the country that the men who could draft and adopt such a preamble and resolution will receive their freedom with heartfelt joy, and not with riotous and offensive demonstrations? Before the President can sign this bill, they will have assembled in all their churches to receive with prayer and thanksgiving to the Almighty this ransom at your hands, and tears of gratitude will obliterate from their hearts the memory of the many and grievous wrongs they have suffered from this Government and their masters, and mingling with the echoing shouts on the sea and on the land, their voices will unite in gladness, with the generous hearts who everywhere will join the grand anthem, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will to men."

Mr. Chairman, the bill which we are about to pass could not have passed but for this proslavery rebellion. The sagacity and wisdom of many of our statesmen, who in vain warned the nation that slavery and freedom could not forever live together peaceably, is being practically demonstrated. Jefferson and Jay, Franklin and the Adamses, Garrison and Calhoun, have all warned the people of the impossibility of long-continued peace with slavery. Speaking

of the probable occurrence of a rupture between the North and the South, some ten or twelve years ago, in the United States Senate, John C. Calhoun said:

"The war will last between the two sections while there is a slave in the South. The conflict will never terminate. The South, I fear, will not see it until it is too late. They will become more feeble every year, while the North will grow stronger and stronger."

No longer ago than in 1858, in a speech at Springfield, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, now President of the United States, made this prophetic declaration, which is passing into history:

"'A house divided against itself cannot stand.' I believe the Government cannot endure half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect that it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind will rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward until it shall alike become lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South."

How truly prophetic! To a man who comprehends that slavery, and slavery alone, is the cause of this rebellion, the duty of the Government is plain. Such a man understands that there can be no permanent or lasting peace until the people of the free States are no longer responsible for the existence and continuance of slavery, either at the national capital, or in any territory or place where Congress has constitutional power to abolish it. Hence I rejoice at the introduction and certain passage of this timely measure. Others, I doubt not, will soon follow, and the people, North and South, will gradually array themselves on the side of freedom or on the side of slavery. There is, and there can be, but this one all-absorbing question in our national politics until it is disposed of, and that will continue to be agitated until the people "rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction." Until that time there can be but two great parties in this nation. The great mass of a free people, in a Government such as ours, must of necessity be divided into two, and into but two leading political parties; and in the present, as in all coming contests on the question of slavery, we can have but two formidable parties struggling for the ascendancy and control of the Government. The one, no matter what its name or designa-

tion, will be the representative of nationality and freedom; the other, that of privilege and slavery. As to other parties, representing, or professing to represent, the various shades of political opinions existing in the country, they cannot long continue, but must, as the Whig, American, and other parties have, in all the States, fade away before the advancing parties representing the cherished sentiments of a proslavery privileged class on the one hand, and the aspirations of the people for liberty on the other.

Individuals, however distinguished and worthy in all their relations in private life, who fail to co-operate earnestly with either the one or the other of the leading parties representing justice and freedom, or privilege and slavery, will continue to disappear, as they have done, from public life, and new and bolder leaders will be chosen by the people; for no generous and noble people will ever knowingly trust timid and time-serving leaders, knowing full well, as they do, that in such a contest as the party of privilege and slavery have forced upon this nation by their treason and rebellion there can be but two armies and two battle-fields and two banners, that of the stars and stripes, representing liberty and union, or that of the serpent and pelican, representing slavery and disunion. There can be no question as to the position which the people occupy. Let us, then, procrastinate no longer the hour which they have so long in vain looked for. Let the news go forth on the wings of the wind that the national capital is ransomed from slavery, and it shall nerve the arms of your soldiers, and strengthen the hold of the Government in the hearts of the people.

Mr. Chairman, the struggles and hopes of many long and weary years are centred in this eventful hour. The cry of the oppressed, "how long, O Lord; how long?" is to be answered to-day by the American Congress. A sublime

act of justice is now to be recorded where it will never be obliterated, and, so far as the action of the Representatives of the people can decree it, the fitting words of the President, spoken in his recent special message, "INITIATE AND EMANCIPATE," shall have a life coequal with the Republic. God has set his seal upon these priceless words, and they, with the memory of him who uttered them, shall live in the hearts of the people forever. The golden morn, so anxiously looked for by the friends of freedom in the United States, has dawned. A second national jubilee will henceforth be added to the calendar. The brave words heretofore uttered in behalf of humanity in this Hall, like "bread cast upon the waters," are now "to return after many days" and find vindication of their purposes in a decree of freedom. The command of God to let the oppressed go free, is declared to be our duty, not only by our patriotic President, but by both branches of our national Congress; and let us hope that from this time henceforth and forever, this nation is never again to be humiliated and disgraced by being responsible for the existence and continuance of human slavery. No longer within our national jurisdiction, where Congress has constitutional power to prohibit it, shall slavery be tolerated. The nation is to-day entering upon a policy which cannot be reversed; and justice is vindicated, humanity recognised, and God obeyed. In the beautiful words of Mrs. Howe:

"He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat:  
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant  
my feet!

Our God is marching on.  
In the beauty of the lillies, Christ was born  
across the sea,  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you  
and me;  
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make  
men free,

While God is marching on."



