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OUR COUNTRY

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PARTY SPIRIT:

BEING

A REJOINDER

TO THE

REPLY OF PROF. MORSE.

BY

EDWARD N. CROSBY.

Poughkeepsie:

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POUGHKEEPSIE. April 9th, 1863.

PROF. S. F. B. MORSE :

My Dear Sir : In your printed "Reply," dated March 2d, and which, with your accompanying note of March 20th I did not receive, owing to absence from home, till March 30th, you speak of my letter as written "wholly under misconception of my [your] opinions," &c. This is shown to be but too true, by the statement of those opinions, both in this Reply and in your inaugural speech as President of your Society.

You err, however, in supposing that my impressions of the character of that Society were formed from the report in the Evening Post. It was not the source of my information, nor have I yet seen it. The existence and general design of the Society were subjects of current notoriety: and a wide-spread patriotic condemnation of that meeting and its objects may well exist, without being grounded on "the egregiously false and impudent representations of an unprincipled reporter in the Evening Post."

I certainly did misconceive your opinions, for, in the exercise of a charity where "the wish was father to the thought," I supposed your unfriendly political action to be governed by the least objectionable reason—an abhorrence of war and a yearning desire for peace. But I find that you justify your actions from positions so extreme that I was unwilling to believe that you could occupy them. I am not sure now that I should do you injustice, to deem you an admirer and advocate of slavery. Allow me to review, seriatim, some of the salient points of your reply.

MR. FIELD'S LETTER.

Mr. Field's letter needs no vindication at my hands. It carries its own defence, and, I doubt not, has received the cordial approval of many whose life-long politics have been antipodal to his. The two "clippings" you sent me will fail to damage the effect of the letter with any fair mind that will read them in connection with the letter itself. One of the extracts, of which I do not recognize the source, is nothing short of scurrilous, the production of a trenchant pen held by a reckless character. It speaks of Mr. Field as "believing in the omnipotence of fanatical falsehood." Would it be right for me to draw the natural inference from your sending it, that you thereby endorse its language? The other, an extract from the National Intelligencer, though marked by less of discourtesy, is yet in

a spirit of captiousness below the dignity of that journal. The contradiction it spies out is only apparent, and would perplex no ingenuous person. The very part of Mr. Field's letter thus criticised admits "it may not always be easy to draw the exact line between just criticism and dangerous cavil," and for the evident reason that the appropriate courses and limits of action may overlap each other under varying circumstances. A wiser man than the editor of the *Intelligencer* has said in two consecutive sentences, "Answer not a fool according to his folly," and "Answer a fool according to his folly," thus by their juxtaposition braving this very spirit of cavil; and it is only a shallow or a malignant mind that has ever taken offence at that or similar seeming paradoxes.

CHRISTIAN STANDPOINT.

You say, "On Bible truth I am ready to plant every position I take," and "This standpoint will have to be established impreguably on the Bible ere the perverted Christian mind of the country can be disabused of the ruinous fallacies which have turned aside the incumbents of so many pulpits from their legitimate duty of allaying the fierce passions of men," &c. This language I would adopt in all its force, but with the privilege of giving it a direction exactly opposite to that you intended. It is the Dabneys, the Palmers, the Thornwells, and particularly the Dr. Lords (of Dartmouth), the Raphalls and the Van Dykes, who have left their "legitimate duty," and, forgetting the spirit of that Gospel which teaches "good will to men," the "loving our neighbor as ourselves," and the "doing to others as we would that they should do unto us," have proclaimed a Bible commendation of a system that has nurtured the "fierce passions" of the southern slaveholders. For every evil passion—and their name is legion—which is gratified and fostered by the system of slave-holding, is most fierce when crossed or even criticised. It is especially these gratuitous apologists for slavery, whose wrong-doing has not the extenuation of self-interest, which may be accorded to the slave-holder—these eager champions of a blighting system, which all civilized nations are repudiating as a sin and shaking off as an incubus—it is these "incumbents of the pulpit," whose talents have been used to "pervert the Christian mind of the country with ruinous fallacies," and to "add fuel to the already raging fires of a ferocious and desolating" system of slave-holding and slavery propagandism. The question naturally arises here: Did "the harangues" of these "political orators" excite in you and those with whom you politically fraternize, the same indignation against pulpit interference in politics? A frank answer to this question

would fitly illustrate the pithy old satire: "You may preach orthodoxy, but orthodoxy must be my doxy." The Bible has ever been made a standpoint for the defence of errors of opposite extremes, for which not the Bible but its differing interpreters are alone responsible. "The unstable" may "wrest" it in the cause of a supposed conservatism to imprison a Galileo, or in the cause of a pretentious progress, by supplementing the Decalogue with an absolute prohibition of the use of wine. Truth is not always literally or immediately conservative. Its strength is often shown in "the *pulling down* of strongholds." Where its power has been felt, it has pulled down heathen sutteeism and infanticide. It has pulled down the Inquisition and trial by torture. It has pulled down the slave trade, and is now pulling hard, and with wide success, at slave-holding throughout the world. Truth has shown little conservatism towards oppression. It is only remarkable that slave-holding should have maintained its ground so long after the prohibition of the slave trade,—that when the theft of human beings has been so long under the ban of civilization, the holding of *such* stolen property should still retain a quasi respectability. This fact will appear still stranger in the dispassionate retrospect which a few rolling years will enable us to take. The experience of the past on this subject might well suggest a caution to those who assume to hold a Bible standpoint in favor of slave-holding. Such persons may, with a moderate lease of life, find occasion for recantation and self-reproach, as did those numerous Christians, both lay and clerical, who in the last century advocated the slave trade and denounced Wilberforce and Clarkson, and their worthy associates, as fanatics.

GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION.

I find two faults with your treatment of this subject. But, first, let me disclaim having had any intention to fix upon you the same purpose of "undermining or paralyzing the government," which I believe attaches to your Society, though my words may admit of that construction. If I had assumed this to be your motive, I should hardly have asked, "What appears to you the sufficient reason," &c.? My language also intimated the belief that you had required some persuasion to induce you to become the President of such a Society. My meaning would have been less liable to misunderstanding if I had said "allying yourself with others *who have* the extreme and radical purpose," &c.

The first exception I take to your comparison of government and administration, is, that the latter term is so commonly restricted in meaning to the Executive that it does not present a

fair antithesis. You thus virtually exclude Congress, who are supposed to represent the wishes and opinions of the people. In this fuller meaning of "the administration," the term "government" is constantly used. In the next place, though you quote from Webster's Dictionary an excellent definition of "government," as meaning a constitution, &c., you are not warranted in calling this "*the* ordinary meaning," as implying that the use is less ordinary in reference to those who at the time conduct the government. We speak constantly of government action, government diplomacy, applications to government, and a thousand other expressions, all pointing to persons administering, not to fundamental rules underlying the government. In an editorial in your nephew's journal, the New York Observer of March 26th, I find the following sentiment, which probably none of its many readers considered heresy, religious or political: "Our government is embodied in the officers appointed by the people to execute the laws, and resistance against them is resisting the ordinances of God." But there need have been no ambiguity in this matter, for a little further on, the same question is repeated in this varied form: "Should not a Christian conviction of duty to the powers that are ordained of God prevent any disposition to resist or thwart the government?" Permit me to say that in neither form do I consider the question satisfactorily answered. You limit your obedience to the *constitutional* measures of the government. You then pronounce four of the government measures—the Emancipation proclamation, the suspension of habeas corpus, the confiscation acts, and the summary imprisonment of citizens—to be in direct and palpable contravention of the Constitution." If the United States Supreme Court so pronounce them, they will of course be void, and have no claim to our obedience. In the meantime, if Congress and a majority of the people sustain them, are you and others of apparently "slack allegiance" absolved from all obedience to them? If these acts of the administration are in any way, as you say, "undermining or paralyzing the government," permit me to suggest that it is mainly by furnishing a hollow pretext for complaint and opposition with those who have ever been disaffected to the war and bitterly hostile to the party in power. "I yield to no man in hearty loyalty to the" Constitution, but it would be simplicity or affectation to claim for it the perfection or universality of inspiration. Many of the malcontents who now parade such an admiration and jealous solicitude for the letter of the Constitution, with characteristic inconsistency claim that its text has been much improved by the wisdom of "our misguided brethren." The Constitution never conten-

plated, in reference to our navy, the use of its most valuable ship for laying an Atlantic telegraph cable between two British ports. Yet, how would you and the whole country characterize such a cavil against the proceeding? You will hardly suppose that its framers had in view and provided for just such a rebellion as this. If an unprecedented danger threatens the existence of our nationality, the people might well mistrust the fidelity of those in power, if, in the failure of ordinary means, they did not, as the emergency required, resort to some unprecedented and extra constitutional measures. *The Constitution was formed for the Nation, not the Nation for the Constitution.* It has become very evident to the public mind that this fear of federal encroachment and government tyranny is in all cases either grossly exaggerated or wholly insincere and hypocritical. It is the straw which a drowning, desperate partisanship clutches as its last hope.

CHARACTER OF ABOLITION.

Under this head you draw a picture which, to say the least, is highly colored. The description seems entirely too imaginative and impassioned to be diffused as sound "political knowledge." One example will illustrate this: "Breathing forth threatenings and slaughter against all those who venture a difference of opinion from them, murderous," &c. Now, there is little doubt that any member of your Society, with all his "difference of opinion," would, without any body-guard, not only be perfectly safe in one of their "dark conclaves" against both slaughter and murder; but also escape with perhaps less invective than they have received at your hands. But extravagant as is this description of extreme abolitionists, it is less surprising than your next step, when you pronounce

"DISTINCTION BETWEEN ABOLITIONISTS AND REPUBLICANS IMPOSSIBLE."

It is a familiar fact, if several persons combine to shout very earnestly that a dog is mad, his life would be as hopeless as if he had communicated hydrophobia to a whole neighborhood. This has been with party leaders considered their shrewdest and most successful method for traducing the principles and party now in power. I did sincerely hope to find you less closely affiliated with such. Without taking the space to repeat and answer them separately, to each question you ask under this head, commencing with, "Did not the Republican party," &c. ? I return a respectful but emphatic "NO!" Did space allow, I would substantiate that negative in each instance. As the best general reply to your unwarranted confusion of the

whole Republican party with the extremest radicals that may mix among them. I quote your own language further on: "Every one of any experience in political movements, is aware that on both sides, in party excitements, there is every possible variety of character associated together. * * * It is not safe, therefore, to characterize a cause by the character of some few who may be loud and forward in advocating it. Bad men may promote a good cause for bad ends." As confirmatory of your general views you ask me "to look at the state of the country." I do look at it most intently, as I have for years past, and I will tell you what I have seen: I have seen in the slave-holding states a race of men—"among whom I recognize many excellent, intelligent, conscientious men"—the exceptions)—who live chiefly in the atmosphere of politics, who, from the habit of dominating all their life-time an oppressed people, have become imperious and arrogant, and manifest these feelings towards us in many ways, speaking in contempt of all our industrious classes as the "greasy mechanics," "filthy operatives," and "mudsills of the north"—a race of men who, from the prevalent excessive use of stimulants and the common practice of gambling, duelling and street brawls, have become impatient and revengeful,—I have seen these men following out the false ideas of manhood thus fostered, and envious at the superior prosperity and progress of their neighbors in the free states, at one time resort to filibustering raids upon the neighboring territories of friendly nations, at another time making an armed incursion into a part of our national territory to preoccupy and control a new state. Failing in these and many other efforts to retain a political power beyond their due, they finally settled upon the principle of "Rule or ruin." The wicked strife begun at Fort Sumter was its natural fruit.

But you may ask, has not the north been in any way responsible for this state of things? I confess with shame they have. There has been for long years a party here, who have, for selfish political ends, sympathized with their discontent and co-operated in their schemes. Together they elected Polk, pledged to consummate the Texas iniquity for southern aggrandizement, at the expense of our weak neighbor Mexico. Together they elected the pliant Pierce, who eagerly recognized the pseudo-government of Filibuster Walker in Central America. Together they elected the more abject Buchanan, who had recently proved his quality and established his claim to their united favor, by fathering the infamous Ostend Manifesto—the blackest blot, by far, on our whole diplomatic history. It is superfluous to speak of the consequences of this course of unmanly, unpatriotic subservi-

ency. They are now upon us, and it is Heaven's mercy if they do not crush us. This is a hurried glance, and leaves out of view many important facts belonging to the true history of this epoch. As your remarks have, by seeking to criminate the whole Republican party, given to this discussion the direction of old party politics, which I could wish were hushed to silence through this sad crisis, I could not say less than I have with any proper regard to sound political knowledge. It is a high satisfaction, that of those who thus, as a party, heedlessly—in many cases ignorantly—nourished the germ of this very rebellion; thousands upon thousands, probably an immense majority, have nobly “come out from among them,” and cleared their skirts of all complicity with it as a developed fact, though still cherishing their old name of Democrats. The remainder still cringe to the slave power and obsequiously crave a hearing in favor of further concessions to it. Spurned away in that quarter, they confer clandestinely and traitorously with a foreign Minister as to the way in which British interests and their own, can be best advanced at the expense of their ruined country and degraded citizenship.

But you may ask, “Have the extremists of the Garrison stamp had nothing to do with all this?” I admit they have said and done many intemperate, and some very wicked, things. But putting it altogether, it has been as “the dust of the balance” in the great results we see before us. Moreover, every censurable word and act of theirs has been far outdone by their antagonists, the ultra exponents of slavery. And yet these two classes of extremists have not been treated with an equal share of obloquy by those who assume to “disabuse a perverted public sentiment of ruinous fallacies.” The pet phrase applied (and justly too) to one class is “fanatics.” Webster defines fanaticism to be an “excessive enthusiasm.” Now, if the alternative were unavoidable that we must choose the side of one of these extremes, far better would it be for our whole nation, and for humanity at large, that we should feel the fanaticism of anti-slavery, than that our souls should be darkened and our country doomed by the dreadful fanaticism of pro-slavery. Happily, no such choice of extremes is necessary. There is, on the contrary, a temperate, intelligent, yet deep-seated and earnest feeling of opposition to slavery—and that as much in behalf of the dominant as of the servile race—the nature and extent of which, I have sanguine hopes you will live long enough to find you have greatly underrated. *This* opposition to slavery does not merit the odium of an officious and meddling fanaticism. For as long as the institution existed in the District of Columbia and the government dockyards—prevented

the recognition of Hayti and Liberia, our own foster-child—elaimed the sanctity of a state right, and yet the patronage of the Federal government and the privilege of the public domain—and imposed the abhorrent duty of slave-catching on twenty million of freemen,—it was certainly a matter of national concern. Clay, and even Calhoun, testified to this opinion of it, and they are not commonly accused of “abolitionism.” The former said, “With my consent, slavery shall never occupy another foot of the national territory now free.” And Calhoun, long years ago, *took the lead* in measures, instituted but never completed, for removing slavery from the District of Columbia. Although the cry of “abolition” has been long, and, in a party sense, successfully used as a bugbear, the agitation of the times has thrown a searching light upon the phantom, that has stripped it of its terrors. Any further use of it for party purposes north of Mason & Dixon’s line, however effectively Beauregard may employ it further south, will prove a vain effort to keep alive a public sentiment that is fast becoming obsolete and fossilized. I hesitate not to characterize the hatred of *abolition per se* as unreflecting and prejudiced where it is sincere, and in all other cases perverse and unscrupulous. I would, with all respect, ask, Have you felt none of its warping influence, when you are led in your inaugural to speak of the Declaration of Independence as “a mixture of truths, qualified truths, and *“fallacious maxims?”* This calls to mind that Rufus Choate damaged not a little his great reputation by the use of a much more moderate expression, in calling it “a collection of glittering generalities.” This unreasoning and unreasonable hostility (with perhaps an admixture of “the cohesive attraction of spoils” in prospect) has, at a time when patriotism is fearfully tasked for the salvation of the country, made friends of such men as Fernando Wood and James Brooks, recalling, though reverently, a time when Pilate and Herod were made friends.

THE PRESIDENT’S PROCLAMATION AND THE CORNER STONE.

The only quality of this Proclamation that my remarks defended, was its legality. I held that it was right and justifiable, as between our government and the rebels, and that this was made the more evident by an avowal of their own. I said nothing on the question of its expediency, although, as a military measure, I have always inclined in its favor; the more so since it was adopted in some sense—especially in view of our precarious foreign relations—as a last resort, after twenty months of unsuccessful use of other means, and even then with one hundred days of grace to the parties most directly aggrieved. Its final results will be a more satisfactory comment on

its influence than any speculation we may now indulge in. And now, as to your treatment of "the corner stone," I cannot avoid the conviction that you have somewhat damaged the cause you intended to serve. Whether or not our government will accomplish the removal of the corner stone, you certainly have succeeded in turning that stone around so as to expose its *hardest* side to the gaze of the public. For if your labor-ed analysis discovers any distinction, it is of this purport—that the corner stone of the so-called Confederacy is shown by one of its principal founders to rest, not on slavery incidentally, as a pre-existing, inherited and *de facto* institution, but on the desirability, the excellency, the very necessity of slavery, as the chief good. Now, if this is an escape for Mr. Stephens and his defenders from the shame and odium of making slavery the corner-stone, it is very like that other escape with which our minds have been familiarized from childhood—the escape "out of the frying-pan into the fire." It is not strange that "a great multitude both in Europe and America entertain" the opinion that the cause is so bad, when its most strenuous apologists make it out *EVEN WORSE*. A mind that not only fails to see any distinction between the most radical and infidel abolitionists and the great Republican party, but is so sure of the negative as to pronounce any such distinction impossible, and yet can discover such a redeeming difference between Mr. Stephens' real sentiments and those generally ascribed to him, such a mind must have reasoning and perceptive faculties with which few other men are favored. I wonder not that opinions so much at variance with the humane spirit of the Gospel, as those of Mr. Stephens, should be accompanied by such irreverence to its Divine Author as he betrays in course of the same speech, when he blasphemously applies to human slavery the language first used in regard to the Son of God—"This stone, which was rejected of the [first] builders, is become the head-stone of the corner." But you not only interpret Mr. Stephens' language; you also defend his arguments. You say "the error on one side which he combats, is *the assumed equality of the races*." This, too, is perhaps the principal of those "fallacious maxims" which you discover in the Declaration of Independence. Now, is this not a "man of straw," only set up for a valiant display of wasted argument? Does any one suppose that the Fathers of the Republic declared that men of all races were equal in physical and mental endowments? As well make them declare that all men are equal in stature, weight and color. Who does not well know that they are only declared to be equal in the rights then enunciated—such as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? Let us now look at Mr. Ste-

phens argument. His premise is: The two races are unequal. From this *premise* he and yourself come to the *conclusion* that this inequality determines the status of the inferior race to be slavery. It has seldom been my lot to find a more perfect *non sequitur*, or a more "fallacious maxim" than this. How is it falsified in every country, community and family, where similar inequality may be found, and still no slavery is "the necessary resultant fact." And yet it is this *conclusion*—not the fact but the groundless inference—that is to support the cornerstone of the would-be Confederacy. Not, however, fully confiding in the stability of your *conclusion* you go back to the premise, or fact, and say: "*The physical inequality of the races* then is this corner-stone." You then, a little further on, change again and directly imply that your *conclusion* (the "necessary resultant," *slavery*) is the corner-stone. For you say that slavery in America can be removed only by a separation of the races, and then inquire, "Is it worth while to attempt to remove a corner-stone which God has planted?" Now, this logic is a strange confusion of postulates and predicates; but it is surpassed by the stranger confusion of moral principles it evinces. It is a very thin and ineffectual disguise of that maxim, which is the essence of all tyranny and oppression, that "*Might makes right.*" It surely is, or ought to be, superfluous to argue against such a dogma at the present day. Your opposition even to the beneficent plan of colonization, as evidenced in your remarks last quoted above, shows how strongly your feelings must be wedded to the system of slave-holding. It might serve to abate, in your mind, some of this opposition to colonization, to reflect that it is cordially shared by the radicals of "the Garrison stamp." But here again extremes meet, as they do in the hatred of everything that favors the idea of abolition, while men of moderation from North and South, like President Lincoln and Henry Clay, can together take their "stand on this great acknowledged fact, that the African and the white races are physically different," and "follow out this truth to its logical result," that colonization of the negroes is the best plan for both races. Let me notice, in passing, another of your remarks, which, though true of the individual, is not altogether so of the race. You quote from Scripture, "the Ethiopian cannot change his skin," and then you add, "nor can any earthly power do it for him." If your additional remark were every way true, then would one crying curse of slavery be removed. But in the negro churches of Richmond, Savannah, and other centres of southern civilization, I have seen a gradation of color, from the pure African to the almost perfectly white Caucasian, which suggested most painful reflec-

tions upon the dangers and abuses of irresponsible power, as also upon the utter moral degradation which will allow men to rear their own offspring to be used as their menials and slaves—aye, and to sell them as such.

The experiment you have tried with the sentiments of the elder Adams, and those of Alex. H. Stephens, is certainly a bringing together of two opposite poles, and with considerable shock to the nerves of your readers. If an old superstition were truth, I should expect a loud rattling of the bones in Adams' grave.

Let me now advert, for a moment, to the shelter you have, at several points, sought for slavery and slave-holders, in the plea that the institution—or the necessity for it, if you so prefer—is providential. There is something positively fearful in thus virtually making God himself accountable for the misdoings of man's selfishness and depravity. I know *you* cannot hold any such opinion. And yet, such is the tenor of an important part of your argument, and the impression it is calculated to convey to your readers. Whereas, the truth is, that unmixed selfishness—often the most hard-hearted—is the corner-stone of slavery, as it was still more conspicuously of the slave trade. The exceptions are exceedingly rare, where a slave is held as such mainly for his own good, and with a view to emancipation as soon as he can be fitted for freedom. And state enactments have raised every barrier to this occasional generous impulse. We are to look at slavery as it is, and judge of it by its fruits. Speculation upon it, as some Utopian ideal of paternal rule, fostering only reciprocal virtues and benefits, will never bring a practical wisdom to bear upon the subject. Slavery, in America, can never plead the Providence of God as exculpatory of its guilt, nor can any man wisely venture such a plea in its behalf. (See James I. 13 to 16.) From His exalted throne, God certainly overrules all events by His good providence; what He does not ordain He permits for wise purposes and with wise limitations—causing even the wrath of man to praise Him, while the remainder of wrath he restrains. But does all or any of the wrong-doing which His long-suffering bears with and His wisdom makes subservient, enjoy on that account immunity from His displeasure, (Eccles. VIII. 11.) much more, the smiles of His approval? The signs of the times certainly do not seem to indicate any marked providential favor to slavery.

Passing over other points in your Reply, which merit attention, but which might give undue length to these remarks, let me, before closing, respectfully but earnestly plead with you to reconsider the political course you and your advocates are

taking. It is on other grounds, than anything I have been able to say, that I cling to the hope that you will yet withdraw the influence of a name, so honored hitherto, from men and measures, which, if they escape oblivion altogether, will receive no flattering verdict from future history. Excuse the freedom with which I have expressed myself, and to which I consider that your Reply invited me, and receive what I have said as coming from

Your sincere friend and neighbor,

EDWARD N. CROSBY.





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