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ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE A MEETING

OF THE

MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

OF THE

PENNSYLVANIA ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY

DURING THE ANNUAL FAIR

DECEMBER 19, 1849.

BY W. H. FURNESS.



PHILADELPHIA:
MERRIHEW & THOMPSON, PRINTERS,
No. 7 Carter's Alley.
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A D D R E S S .

The history of Abolitionism is full of encouragement. From the time when—about a short quarter of a century ago—all that could be discovered of it was a white man and a black boy laboring in the office of the Liberator, up to this present moment, the course of this great doctrine of Humanity has been a most animating illustration of progress and of victory. As we look back upon it, man, individual men, the men and women who have been its ministers and instruments, disappear; and we seem to be observing a great process of Nature—the goings of the Almighty.

So manifest is it that in this movement an eternal law of Nature has been at work, entering into the hearts of men, subduing their reluctance to receive it, awakening and enlisting all their energies, and coming forth to demand recognition and obedience, that nothing could well seem more childish than the fault which is found with those who have undertaken the maintenance of this law. It is very common for grave statesmen and dignified persons to express, in terms more or less strong, their regret, and their disapproval of the ignorance and folly and fanaticism and violence, and I know not what, of those who have been known as Abolitionists; all which regret and disapproval are becoming as ridiculous as the mop with which Mrs. Partington undertook to sweep back the Atlantic ocean. I am not disposed to admit that the friends of Freedom have been particularly ignorant or foolish or fanatical or violent. I have never heard of their shedding

any blood, or even of their threatening to shed any, and this is more than can be said of some of their opponents, who stand, too, among the highest in the land. But even if they were foolish and violent, I doubt whether any folly of theirs has exceeded the folly of those who object to the imperfections of men and overlook the mighty work of God. I find it hard to understand how any thoughtful, intelligent man can fail to see that this cause of the Abolition of American slavery involves as its central life the first great principle of our social order, the radical truth of the Religion of Christendom, the eternal law of Justice and Humanity. If the solid earth on which we stand, if the great heaven over our heads, be a fact, then is human freedom a fact also, which *must* be realized; and whatever may be the defects of the individuals who study and labor for the liberation of man, I see in the thing itself, a natural growth, which must come, a product of nature, a work of God, like the light and the air. It is no creation of man's fancy, no caprice of man's self will, no device or hobby of man. It has its existence in the nature of things. And it must needs assert its existence; and we might as well resent the sun's rising as the growth and dissemination of those principles for the sake of which you, my friends, are associated. I say, therefore, that Abolitionism, with whatever imperfections and infirmities it may be connected, is the embodiment and expression of a higher will than man's. It lies not in your will that you are Abolitionists. You must needs be so; you cannot help it. You have not chosen this truth, but this truth has chosen you, and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth such fruits as ye have produced and are producing.

But all this is apparent, not only from the essential nature of Abolitionism, being identical with the law of Justice and Love, the acknowledged principles of our Religion, but also, as I began with remarking, from its history, which has been

one steady course of triumph. This manifests the presence of a more than human power. This shows us the working of Nature and of Providence.

I shall not attempt to go into the particulars of this history. Even if I were able to tell it, it would be scarcely necessary here and now; for the members of this Society have been among the earliest witnesses of the progress of the Anti-Slavery cause. They have been sharers in its fortunes. Its history is theirs, and that of their associates and friends. And I might as well bring coals to Pennsylvania, or carry granite to New Hampshire, as undertake to tell you how the cause for which many of you are living and laboring has sped. From the moment William Lloyd Garrison publicly declared that the holding a man as a slave, is not only an evil and curse, but a moral wrong, a violation of God's law, and as such to be abstained from instantly, from that moment you have seen how this word has vindicated its truth and vitality by the agitation it has occasioned. You know how it has stirred the whole land; how it has travelled through all highways and byways; how it has commanded and fixed public attention, shaking in pieces old and time-honored ecclesiastical organizations, attracting the regards of eminent men like Channing, and making them its servants, inspiring distinguished statesmen like Adams, whom it crowned with his highest glory, bursting like some magic gas into our national councils and throwing men into convulsions of rage and fear. At every meeting that you have held, you have had some new triumph to celebrate. Every event that has befallen you has proved an occasion of rejoicing, a new spring of animation. And now, at home and abroad, so much is occurring to inspire every heart that beats for Freedom, that though you were to hold such meetings as this every day, every day you would have to note a new step taken towards the consummation you so devoutly wish for.

At this present moment, the National Legislature, the central government of this great empire, is brought to a stand-still by the intrusion of your great principle. The two political parties which have hitherto divided the country between them, are rendered powerless. They cannot stir hand or foot. One or the other of them has always had its way, and now they are both baulked; and fruitful as politicians are in the most beautiful compromises, and in the most skilful management, the representatives of the nation, more than two hundred busy and ready-witted individuals, cannot get organized. They have been winding up the political machine, winding and winding, day after day, for weeks, but the clock will not strike, the wheels will not go. A great deal of vexation and indignation is expressed, but there the machine stands. It will not stir. Every thing would get into order, it is commonly said, and go on smoothly enough, if it were not for a little dust—a little free soil—which has got in among the works and is absorbing all the oil; if it were not, in plainer terms, for the outrageous obstinacy of a few wrong-headed and perverse individuals called Free Soilers. Now these individuals may be wrong-headed, and perverse, and obstinate, although the fact that the most prominent of them have shown a disposition to fall in with either of the two great parties, provided an object which they desire, which is perfectly constitutional to say the least, is secured, (a fair construction of certain committees,)—although this fact, I say, is no great evidence of perversity. But if they were altogether unreasonable and perverse, they could not possibly stand their ground as they do. They would have been put down long ago. The whole country would have risen against them. Not merely by the power of a majority, but in the great power of wisdom and reason, their fellow members would have brought them to terms in a few hours. But they have not yet forsaken their ground. The country has not yet risen against

them. The majority has not yet put them down. And the reason is, however wrong-headed they may be, they are conscious that they are standing upon a plain principle of Right and Humanity. Underneath the narrow doctrine of Free Soilism, a larger and stronger truth lies, from which its adherents derive power. Let them be never so self-willed, they know that they have right on their side, that there is an eternal law of God for them to be faithful to. And their opponents know this too, or, if they do not, strictly speaking, *know* it, they feel it. They feel that there is something in the way which they cannot demonstrate, even to their own satisfaction, to be unreasonable and wrong, and the country feels this too, and so the contest is left to go on. How it will terminate we can only guess. We all know that one of the great political parties is pretty strong in its party allegiance, and the other great party very accommodating, and they may settle it between them.* But be this as it may, I congratulate you, friends, on the power of your cause, on this new and animating evidence, that it is the cause of Truth and of God.

I suppose there are a great many persons who look upon the state of things which has existed now for some weeks, in our National Legislature, with real anxiety; but I do not imagine that any Abolitionist, that any one who has close

* Since the above was delivered a Speaker has been elected.

“For this most happy result,” says the North American of the 24th inst., “the country is indebted entirely to the patriotism of the Whig members of the House; and it is right that the country should know and remember it. It is they, and they alone, who have proved themselves capable of sacrificing the interests of party on the altar of their country; and it was entirely by such a sacrifice of party interest that they redeemed the country—saved it from the great danger in which it has been kept for three weeks by the insanity of a hateful faction, to which patriotism has ceased even to be a pretence. The Democratic members were willing—yet not all willing—to befriend the country; but they demanded a price, and the Whigs have paid it; it is the election of a Democratic Speaker by *Whig votes which has saved the republic.*”

at heart the cause of human rights, sympathises with such apprehensions. There would seem indeed to be an alarming symptom of social disorganization, when the government of the country will not work; when its machinery will not go. But the cause of the difficulty is the thing to be looked at. If the wheels of Government stop because a right principle has become strong enough in its councils to prevent its moving any longer in a wrong direction, because Freedom and Justice and Humanity, instead of being vague abstractions hovering over the heads of men, are coming down into their hearts and getting embodied in the active sentiments, in the will, and so becoming fixed into the condition of things as facts—if such is the source of the difficulty, there is no occasion of anxiety; but abundant reason for rejoicing and encouragement. It is order, not chaos, that is coming. The kingdom of heaven, the dominion of right is at hand.

That such actually is the cause of this confusion in the councils of the nation, we have abundant evidence. The whole course of things recently, shows that a higher interest than that of banks and tariffs is beginning to animate political parties, and take possession of the public mind. It is becoming apparent to all that there is one question, which is the question of the day, and which will thrust all other things aside until it is settled; and that it is a question that implicates the dearest rights of man, the most vital considerations, the establishment of equal justice, the entire abolition of all wrong. Before its increasing influence, which is rising like the wind, all mere political arrangements are beginning to betray their weakness and inefficiency. There may be a lull in the breeze at times, and occasionally it may seem to die wholly away; but it only pauses to gain new strength—to blow with greater power. Political parties watch for it, and trim their sails accordingly. We have seen the Whigs claiming to be Free Soilers, though

they would not venture to assume the name, or accept as their own the triumphs of Free Soil; and the great Democratic Party, which has for the most part ruled the country, has been broken in two. The breach has been healed indeed, after a fashion, and with small honor; still, although once so compact and complete in its organization, it shows marks of being sorely weatherbeaten. In and through all the events which make up our political history for the last few years, we may see that there is a force, a law, a power at work which is above us all. It is not man merely, but Truth, Nature, God, who is stirring in our land. Let it be that there has been ignorance and folly and violence, of one kind or another, more or less all round, still, in and through all, the Eternal Law of Right has been coming into operation. It must come. No power on earth can stop it. To Abolitionists this is very plain. It is plain to every man who seeks to see things as they are. But it is not plain to those who take counsel only of their own prejudices and interests. It is not plain to those who hold the small taper of their own pride of opinion so close to their eyes, that their sight, dazzled and blinded, extends only a very few inches. Still, it is growing plainer and plainer every day; and the time will shortly come when it will be so plain, that it will be palpable to the blindest that it is the kingdom of God which is coming, and that it is as preposterous to resist it as to attempt to resist the law of gravitation.

I do not know, friends, whether you ever grow weary and desponding. I do not see why you should, amidst the numerous tokens of success which greet every step of your progress. But when the heart that has been touched with a sense of the wrongs inflicted upon the slave does grow weary and faint, let it be strengthened anew to its blessed work by the simple consideration which I have tried to make prominent, viz: that the cause of Abolition is not of man's devising. It is not the

invention of human wit, liable, like all human works, to decay and destruction. It is the cause of truth—of all that is just and humane. Freedom, Right, Love, are not human fictions. They are the prime interests of the Universe, the eternal will of God. All nature is constructed for their furtherance. This faith, steadily cherished, must dissipate all despondency, and animate us to persevering exertion.

The political history of our country, since the Anti-Slavery movement commenced, is full of lessons. It is very instructive. It reveals, as I have said, the simple working of nature, and so clearly, that all who are interested for freedom against slavery, cannot but be conscious that power is on their side; and that the opposition which is made to it must come to naught.

I proceed to mention another lesson which this same history teaches, the identity of Principle and Policy, of Right and Expediency, in the largest sense of these words. What is right? is one question. What is expedient? is another and different question. And yet, rightly considered, they bring us the same answer; and right is found to be expedient, and expediency found to be right. And this the history of Abolitionism shows most clearly. The Abolitionists have taken their stand upon the simple ground of right. They recognise the natural dictates of Justice and Humanity as their commanding principles of action. They believe that the law which requires us to undo the heavy burthens, and let the oppressed go free, is the command of nature and of God. And they strive in every way to obey and press home upon men the supreme authority of this law. What though it irritates and inflames bad passions, though it produces excitement and uproar, and makes the civil fabric shake to its foundations, yet they waver not in their course, simply because they have entire confidence that whatever God commands to be done, may be done with

the very best results ultimately to all interested. What though they are utterly unable to see how any good can come out of it—although, as far as their sight extends, nothing is visible but confusion and evil? That is not their concern. They are here, living and breathing, simply to do what is required of them, and nothing less, and all that they hold dear on earth is to be accounted as dust, if it come in conflict with this plain obligation. They say with Luther, “Here we stand. We cannot otherwise. God help us.” Like the great Reformer, they, too, “would gladly have good quiet days, and live unperplexed,” but a necessity is upon them. They have caught sight of the Everlasting Law in relation to the mighty wrong which this Christian nation fosters in its bosom, and they must be obedient to the heavenly vision. Speaking, working in this faith, they have pleaded and are pleading with their countrymen. They have borne obloquy, misrepresentation, violence. They have shrunk from no toil or danger.

And how now have the Abolitionists been regarded? Why, they are spoken of everywhere as the blindest of the blind, as people who have thrown away reason, mad enthusiasts, fanatics, who fling firebrands about and have no care for consequences. No care for consequences! What *are* the consequences which they were aiming at? What is the result which they have sought to bring about? Why, they have sought to awaken the country to the worth of Freedom, to the wrongfulness of Slavery. And lo! the country is awaking. They would have us wide awake to this matter. And behold! the country is getting wide awake, slowly, indeed, but steadily. The very thing which it was their purpose to accomplish is being accomplished. Does not the result show then that they have taken the very best way, the wisest, the most politic way, to effect the object they have had in view? Is not their fearless and uncompro-

misgiving fidelity to principle proved by its consequences to be the very soundest policy, the most admirable statesmanship? Is it not seen to be the very expedient best adapted to their end? They have labored, and are laboring, to elevate the temperature of Anti-Slavery feeling, until it shall rise to that fervent heat which shall consume every chain in the land, converting it from solid iron into impalpable air. And this purpose is in steady course of fulfilment. Is there any policy, commonly so called,—any political management or party, that could accomplish, or ever has accomplished, a like thing in so short a time? Truly, the Abolitionists, though many of them are women, have, almost without intending it, at all events without taking to themselves any credit for it, practised most excellent statesmanship.

And now let us see what is the amount of that policy which the world thinks so much of. I think if we look at it earnestly, we shall confess that it is so narrow, so very short-sighted, that it does not deserve the name even of policy, in any large and manly sense of the word. The thorough politician, commonly so styled, distrusts those simple dictates of right which are the unquestionable laws of God, and to which the Abolitionist clings without making any stipulation for his own safety, or for the safety of any interests whatever. The politician is not willing to yield himself wholly to the guidance of those simple principles. He follows them only so far as he can see with his own limited vision that they will not interfere with his own personal success, or the interests of his party. He cannot renounce them altogether. He cannot be so absurd as to maintain, for instance, that equal justice is an evil, and freedom a curse, and mercy a wrong. It is true, we hear occasionally of one and another who say that Slavery is a blessed, a divine institution, but we have never heard of any one so sincere in

this opinion, that he wished that he and his wife and children were slaves. We all, in this part of the world at least, admit the wrongfulness of oppression, the inalienable right of man to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Still, clear as this is to us, yet when we act politically, we are afraid of these truths. We cannot venture to surrender ourselves to them as guiding principles. We prefer, and this we call a wise expediency, to put our confidence in some political arrangement, in a Constitution confessedly the device of human wisdom, the work of men who never claimed to be inspired, or in some party, or some coalition of parties. These are the things in which men are counselled to put their main trust. These are the expedients by which the great hopes of mankind are to be accomplished. And so passionate, so blind is the confidence of men in things of this kind, that to preserve a constitution inviolate, or to secure the ascendancy of a party, they consent to repress the strongest instincts of humanity. They would silence those who assert the eternal laws of God. They are willing that millions should languish in brutal ignorance and hopeless bondage, and are ready themselves to be slaves. And in doing so, they fancy all the while that they are the wise men and the prudent, that they understand the thing; while such as contend for instant submission to an eternal law are unreasoning enthusiasts, the wretched victims of one idea.

Is it not now worth while to consider which is the part of wisdom, which, in the long run, is most expedient for us, for the whole country, for the whole world: to rely upon those plain dictates of Right and Love, which are written by the finger of God upon the universal heart of man, or to place all our confidence in the success of some political contrivance or party, the work, not of nature, or the God of nature, but of men; of

men, too, who, for the most part, as everybody is saying, have some motive of personal ambition; of men who are caring anxiously for money and for office? Which, it certainly becomes us to ask, which is the wisest, the most expedient, to trust in those primal principles, which have again and again shown themselves so mighty, and which have just been shaking the old world to its centre, or to embark all our hopes in some frail political device, which may be defeated utterly, as political parties are defeated almost every hour? Which faith has most reason in it, shows the most comprehensive outlook, nay, which is the soundest expediency? Which is most worthy an intelligent man to rest in, principles inwrought into the very nature of all men, and with which all Nature conspires, and God himself, the Fountain of all Power and Wisdom, or in those superficial plans which are always dependent on contingencies over which we can have no control, and which, by their failure, may at any moment dash the fairest purposes? Let him who would be prudent, let him who would be politic—in the name of reason, let him once for all, and for ever, put his whole trust in the eternal law.

There is not a man of any intelligence and observation who does not see what poor things our political parties are, by what self-seeking management they are ruled, and how their zeal is inflamed by the forgetfulness of truth, and by most ruthless mutual denunciations. It needs no study to find this out. In the newspapers, which constitute almost the sole reading of the multitude, he who runs may read and see what small means those are, by which so many are vaguely expecting that the world is to be carried forward to universal freedom.

If any one wants to be satisfied of the inexpediency of mere political arrangements, the impolicy of politicians, let him just cast a glance back upon our recent political history.

Some years ago the Whigs nominated for President a Northern General. They relied upon the magic of a military title. They attributed General Jackson's triumph in great part to that; so they concluded that General Harrison was the available man for the Presidency; and then they took up for Vice President a Southern man, whose party attachments were doubtful, and this was considered as confirming his availability. This was believed to be an admirable political move. And, as politics go, it certainly did bid pretty fair for the party. But in a short month after his election General Harrison died, of the Presidency, as it has been said; and the administration passed into the hands of one in whom the party that elected him could have no confidence. Here the whole plan went to wreck. Ah! but, you say, Providence, by the death of General Harrison, interfered. Providence is very apt to interfere in such a way; and wise men ought to have kept Providence in view. Put your trust in everlasting principles, and you need never fear that any possible event of Providence will work in any way except to help them.

So, again, the Democratic Party thought the Mexican war a capital move, and the gold of California, which, however, unknown at the time, did not enter into the original consideration, would seem to show that it was a capital move. But if it had been foreseen that the war would produce a President for the opposite party, and that the territory that might be acquired, rich as it might be, might be free also, as well as rich, would not the Southern portion of the Democracy at least, have thought twice before they plunged the country into that abyss of blood and wrong?

Or once more, to go no farther back than the last Presidential election. We were promised all imaginable good if General Taylor were only made President. And thousands

seemed honestly to believe that something very like a Millenium was at hand. Now I do not undertake to know, but the ardor of the party that elected the present incumbent seems to be somehow cooled. They see that they have not carried the country as they anticipated. There appears to be among them a dim misgiving that a mistake has been made.

And so it is with all mere political plans and parties. Mr. Carlyle tells us, in his History of the French Revolution, that during that period of anarchy and blood, the people were fondly hoping every day to wake up the next morning and witness the Millenium, but every day they were vexed and maddened at finding their pockets picked of their Millenium. Their case was by no means singular. It is apt to be so in political matters. The politicians, like the monkey in the fable, take the oyster and give the shells to the country.

In conclusion, whether the great principles of our social order are carried out soon or late, the work of carrying them out must needs be salutary to all concerned. The heroic ages of history, are those in which great principles have contended for the supremacy. Whether you do good to others or not, by advocating the Right, you do an unutterable good to yourselves. There is nothing better for any human soul than to become interested in great vital truths, in truths which are truths. Let one give himself to the service of Freedom, nay, let him only so much as touch, in faith, the hem of her garment, and it will send an invigorating virtue through his whole frame, and he will begin to experience the new birth, the saving, sanctifying process of regeneration.

