

MR. PRESIDENT AND LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

For the last thirty years, the colored people have taken the greatest interest in the agitation of the abolition question, as carried on by this Society. We have watched with hope and fear as impediment after impediment has been thrown in the way of its progress. Among the many obstacles which have been brought to bear against emancipation, one of the most formidable has been the series of objections urged against it upon what has been supposed to be the slave's want of appreciation of liberty, and his ability to provide for himself in a state of freedom; and now that slavery seems to be near its end, these objections are multiplying, and the cry is heard all over the land, "What shall be done with the slave, if freed?" I propose to use the short time allowed me this morning in examining these phases of the question.

It has been clearly demonstrated, I think, that the enslaved of the South are as capable of self-support as any other class of people in the country. It is well known, that throughout the entire South, a large class of slaves have been for years accustomed to hire their time from their owners. Many of these have paid very high prices for the privilege. Some able mechanics have been known to pay as high as \$600 per annum, besides providing themselves with food and clothing; and this class of slaves, by their industry, have taken care of themselves so well, and their appearance has been so respectable, that many of the States have passed laws, prohibiting master's from letting their slaves out to themselves, because, as it was said, it made the slaves dissatisfied to see so many of

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their fellows well-provided, and accumulating something for themselves in the way of pocket-money.

The Rev. Dr. Nehemiah Adams, whose antecedents have not been such as to lead to the suspicion that he favors the free colored men, or the idea of giving to the slaves their liberty, in his "Southside View," unconsciously and unintentionally gives a very valuable statement upon this particular point. Dr. Adams says:—

"A slave woman having had \$300 stolen from her by a white man, her master was questioned in court as to the probability of her having had so much money. The master said that he not unfrequently had borrowed fifty and a hundred dollars from her himself, and added that she was always very strict as to his promised time of payment."

There was a slave woman who had not only kept every agreement with her master—paying him every cent she had promised—but had accumulated \$300 toward purchasing her liberty, and it was stolen from her, not by a black man, but, as Dr. Adams says, by a white man.

But one of the clearest demonstrations of the ability of the slave to provide for himself in a state of freedom is to be found in the prosperous condition of the large free colored population of the Southern States. Maryland has 80,000, Virginia 70,000, and the other slave States have a large number. These free people have all been slaves, or they are the descendants of those who were once slaves; what they have gained has been acquired in spite of the public opinion and laws of the South, in spite of prejudice, and everything. They have acquired a large amount of prop-

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ty; and it is this industry, this sobriety, this intelligence, and this wealth of the free colored people of the South, that has created so much prejudice on the part of slaveholders against them. They have felt that the very presence of a colored man, looking so genteelly and in such a prosperous condition, made the slaves happy and discontented. In the Southern Rights Convention which assembled at Baltimore, June 8th, 1860, a resolution was adopted, calling on the Legislature to pass a law driving the free colored people out of the State. Nearly every speaker, Mr. President, took the ground that the free colored people must be driven out to make the slave's obedience more secure. Judge Mason, in his speech, said, "It is the thrifty and well-to-do free negroes, that are seen by our slaves, that make them dissatisfied." A similar appeal was made to the Legislature of Tennessee. Judge Catron, of the Supreme Court of the United States, in a long and able letter to the *Nashville Union*, opposed the driving out of the colored people. He said they were among the best mechanics, the best artisans, and the most industrious laborers in the State and that to drive them out would be an injury to the State itself. This is certainly good evidence in their behalf.

The State of Arkansas passed a law driving the free colored people out of the State, and they were driven out, three years ago. The Democratic press howled upon the heels of the free blacks until they had all been expatriated; but after they had been driven out, the *Little Rock Gazette*—a Democratic paper—made a candid acknowledgement with regard to the character

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of the free colored people. It said:—

“Most of the exiled free negroes are industrious and respectable. One of them, Henry King, we have known from our boyhood, and take the greatest pleasure in testifying to his good character. The community in which he casts his lot will be blessed with that noblest work of God, an honest man.”

Yet these free colored people were driven out of the State, and those who were unable to go, as many of the women and children were, were reduced to slavery, and there they are toiling in chains and slavery to-day.

The New Orleans *True Delta* opposed the passage of a similar law by the State of Louisiana. Among other things, it said:—

“There are a large free colored population here, correct in their general deportment, honorable in their intercourse with society, and free from reproach so far as the laws are concerned, not surpassed in the inoffensiveness of their lives by any equal number of persons, in any place North or South.”

That I consider testimony of real value. I produce this, Mr. Chairman, because there is nothing entitled to great weight on this point than the testimony of the people of the slave States themselves.

Dr. Nehemiah Adams, whom I have already quoted, also testifies to the good character of the free colored people; but he does it unintentionally; it was not a part of the programme; how it slipped in I cannot tell. Here it is, however, from page 41 of his “Southside Views”:—

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“A prosecuting officer, who had six or eight counties in his district, told me that, during eight years of

service, he had made out about two thousand bills of indictment, of which not more than twelve were against colored persons.” (Applause.)

Hatred of the free colored people, and abuse of them, have always been popular with the pro-slavery people of this country; yet, an American Senator, from one of the Western States—a man who never lost an opportunity to villify and traduce the colored man, and who, in his last canvass for a seat in the United States Senate, argued that the slaves were better off in slavery than they would be if set free, and declared that the blacks were unable to take care of themselves, while enjoying liberty—died, a short time since, \$12,000 in debt to a black man, who was the descendant of a slave. (Applause.) Thus, those who have fattened upon us, often turn round and traduce us. Reputation is, indeed, dear to every nation and race; but to us, the colored people of this country, who have so many obstacles to surmount, it is doubly dear.

“Who steals my purse, steals trash;
‘Twas mine, ‘tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he who filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.” (Applause.)

In the District of Columbia, since the abolition of slavery, it is found that, according to their numbers, the larger proportion of the property-holders are among the negroes. Figures, though we are told that they very often lie, are sometimes found to tell the truth. The Tammany Hall Young Men’s Democratic Committee of the city of New York, on the 13th of March, 1862, passed the following resolution:—

“Resolved, That we are opposed to emancipating negro slaves, unless on some plan of colonization,

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“Resolved, That we are opposed to emancipating negro slaves, unless on some plan of colonization,

in order that they may not come in contact with the white man's labor."

Now, Mr. President, this resolution is based upon the supposition that the slaves, if freed, will all flock to the North; and that is a very popular cry with the pro-slavery people of the free States, because they know that nothing would be so effective to the accomplishment of their ends as to make the laboring whites of the North believe that they will be overrun by the negroes, if slavery is abolished. Now, I hold to the right of the black man, whether liberated or not, to go where he pleases, to make himself a home in any part of the country he chooses; but I do not believe that, if slavery is abolished, the slaves will flock into the free States. I do not believe it, because I have a reason for not believing it. Look at the large free colored population in the slave States! See how cruelly they have been oppressed! Why, the State of Virginia long had a law on her statute-books, and has now, unless it has been very recently repealed, taxing the free colored people one dollar per head, over and above any other class in the community, by which the State of Virginia put into her treasury, in one year, \$50,000, taken from the colored people. Maryland had a similar law. The Gulf States have been still more severe on this class of their population; and yet the free colored people have remained in the Southern States. Why did they not come North? Because they were unwilling to leave the congenial climate of the sunny South for the snowy hills of the rugged North; and, where you have found ten colored persons coming from the South to the North, nine out of ten have been

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fugitive slaves, flying from the South because they could not enjoy liberty there; not the free colored people, who had the right to go off if they chose. Now, Mr. President, what has kept the free colored people in the Southern States will prevent the slaves coming here, if slavery is abolished.

But we are told that the contrabands are flocking, even now, into Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania Legislature has been petitioned, by the working people of Philadelphia and other cities, to pass a law prohibiting their settling in that State. Illinois has already passed such a law. Ohio either has, or is trying to do so. But you must expect that the slave, running away now, will seek to get beyond the Border Slave States. His liberty is in doubt; we have had Generals who have sent slaves back; and, after getting out of his master's hands, his first thought is to get further North, where his liberty is secure. If you were there, and in his position, you would take the same course the contraband takes now. He feels precisely as he did before the commencement of the rebellion; he wants to get out of the way. But if you want to stop the contraband from coming into the free States, if you want to stop the slave's running off from the South, give him his freedom upon the soil. (Loud applause.) The Tammany Hall Committee is opposed to abolition, unless expatriation shall follow it. The first Napoleon was waited upon by a Committee of the old planters of St. Domingo, urging him to send an army to Hayti to reduce the emancipated slaves again to chains. After the Committee had withdrawn, Napoleon turned to Gregoire, and asked him what he thought of the

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advice. The latter replied: "If those planters should change their color to-night, they would come back to-morrow, and give your Majesty different advice." So it would be, Mr. President, with the Young Men's Democratic Committee of New York. (Applause.)

Now, everything has shown that the slaves can be trusted in slavery, except when he can get a chance to use his heels; for the slaveholders themselves have testified to his good character. You know we were told by the slaveholders, just before the breaking out of the rebellion, that if we got into any difficulty with the South, their slaves would take up arms, and fight to a man for them. Mr. Toombs, I believe, threatened that he would arm his slaves, and other men in Congress from the slave States made the same threat. They were going to arm the slaves, and turn them against the North. They said they could be trusted; and many people here at the North really believed that the slave did not want his liberty, would not have it if he could, and that the slave population was a very dangerous element against the North; but at once, Mr. President, on the approach of our soldiers, the slaves are seen, with their bundles and baskets, and hats and coats, and without bundles or baskets, and without hats or coats, rushing to our lines; demonstrating what we have so often said, that all the slave was waiting for was the opportunity to get his liberty. Why should you not have believed this? Why should you have supposed for a moment, that, because a man's color differs a little from yours, he is better contented to remain a slave than you would be, or that he has no inclination, no wish, to escape from the thralldom that

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holds him so tight? What is it that does not wish to be free?

“Go, let a cage with grates of gold,
And pearly roof, the eagle hold,
Let dainty viands be its fare,
And give the captive tenderest care;
But say, in luxury’s limits pent,
Find you the king of birds content?
No, oft he’ll sound the startling shriek,
And dash the cage with angry beak:
Precarious freedom’s far more dear
Than all the prison’s pampering cheer.”

As with the eagle, so with man. He loves to look upon the bright day and the stormy night; to gaze upon the broad free ocean, its eternal surging tides, its mountain billows and its foam-crested waves; to tread the steep mountain side; to sail upon the placid river; to wander along the gurgling stream; to trace the sunny slope, the beautiful landscape, the majestic forest, the flowery meadow; to listen to the howling of the winds and the music of the birds. These are the aspirations of man, without regard to country, clime, or color. (Loud applause.)

What shall we do with the slave of the South?
“Expatriate him,” say the haters of the negro. Expatriate him for what? He has cleared up the swamps of the South, and has put the soil under cultivation; he has built up her towns and cities and villages; he has enriched the North and Europe with his cotton and sugar and rice; and for this, you would drive him out of the country? “What shall be done with the slaves, if they are freed?” You had better ask, “What shall we do with the slaveholders, if the slaves are freed?” (Applause.) The slave has shown himself better fitted to take care of himself than the

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slaveholder. (Renewed applause.) He is the bone and sinew of the South; he is the producer, while the master is nothing but a consumer, and a very poor consumer at that. (Laughter.) The slave is the producer, and he alone can be relied upon. He has the sinew, the determination, and the will; and if you will take the free colored people of the South as the criterion, take their past history as a sample of what the colored people are capable are doing, every one must be satisfied that the slaves can take care of themselves.

But it is said, "The two races cannot live together in a state of freedom." Why, that is the cry that rung all over England twenty years ago—"If you liberate the slaves of the West Indies, they can't live with the whites in a state of freedom." Twenty years have shown the contrary. The blacks and the whites live together in Jamaica; they are all prosperous, and the island in a better condition than it ever was before the act of emancipation was passed.

But they tell us, "If the slaves are emancipated, we won't receive them upon an equality." Why, every man must make equality for himself. No society, no government, can make this equality. I do not expect the slave of the South to jump into equality; all I claim for him is, that he may be allowed to jump into liberty, and let him make equality for himself. (Loud applause.) I have got some white neighbors around me; they are not very intellectual; they don't associate with my family (laughter and applause); but whenever they shall improve themselves, and bring themselves up by their own intellectual and moral worth, I shall not object to their coming into my so-

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ciety. (Renewed merriment.)

Now, Mr. Chairman, this talk about not letting a man come to this place or that, and that we won't do this for him, or won't do that for him, is all idle. The anti-slavery agitators have never demanded that you shall take the colored man, say more than that you shall take the uncultivated and uncouth white man, and place him in a certain position in society. All I demand for the black man is, that the white people shall take their heels off his neck, and let him have a chance to rise by his own efforts. (Applause.) One of the first things that I heard when I arrived in the free States—and it was the strangest thing to me that I heard—was, that the slaves cannot take care of themselves. I came off without any education. Society did not take me up; I took myself up. (Laughter.) I did not ask society to take me up. All I asked of the white people was, to get out of the way, and give me a chance to come from the South to the North. That was all I asked, and I went to work with my own hands. And that is all I demand for my brethren of the South to-day—that they shall have an opportunity to exercise their own physical and mental abilities. Give them that, and I will leave the slaves to take care of themselves, and be satisfied with the result.

Now, Mr. President, I think that the present contest has shown clearly that the fidelity of the black people of this country to the cause of freedom is enough to put to shame every white man in the land who would think of driving us out of the country, provided freedom should be proclaimed. I remember

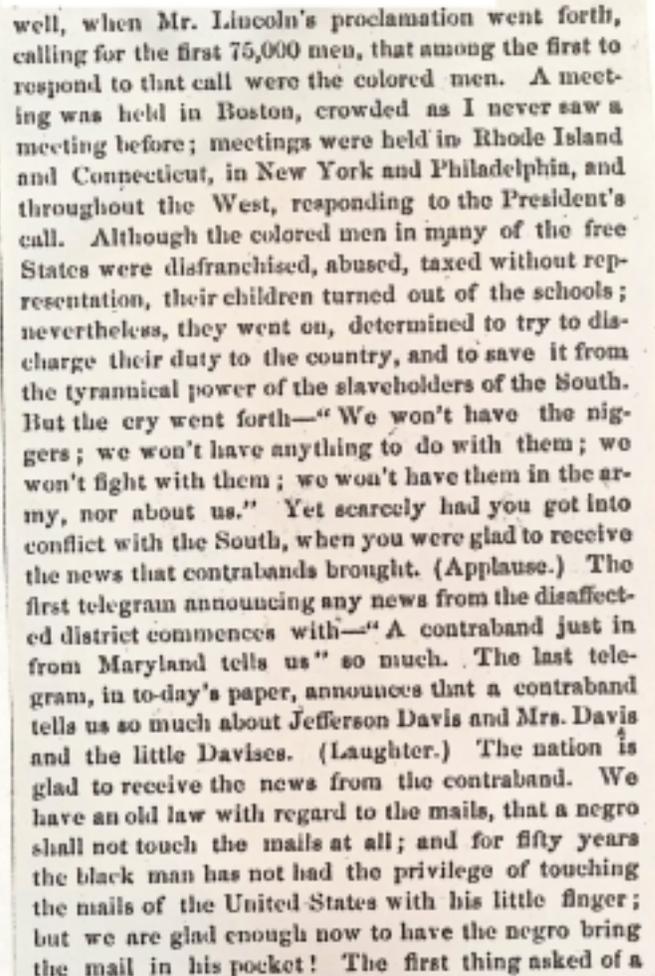
ciety. (Renewed merriment.)

Now, Mr. Chairman, this talk about not letting a man come to this place or that, and that we won't do this for him, or won't do that for him, is all idle. The anti-slavery agitators have never demanded that you shall take the colored man, any more than that you shall take the uncultivated and uncouth white man, and place him in a certain position in society. All I

demand for the black man is, that the white people shall take their heels off his neck, and let him have a chance to rise by his own efforts. (Applause.) One of the first things that I heard when I arrived in the free States—and it was the strangest thing to me that I heard—was, that the slaves cannot take care of themselves. I came off without any education. Society did not take me up; I took myself up. (Laughter.) I did not ask society to take me up. All I asked of the white people was, to get out of the way, and give me a chance to come from the South to the North. That was all I asked, and I went to work with my own hands. And that is all I demand for my brethren of the South to-day—that they shall have an opportunity to exercise their own physical and mental abilities. Give them that, and I will leave the slaves to take care of themselves, and be satisfied with the result.

Now, Mr. President, I think that the present contest has shown clearly that the fidelity of the black people of this country to the cause of freedom is enough to put to shame every white man in the land who would think of driving us out of the country, provided freedom should be proclaimed. I remember

well, when Mr. Lincoln's proclamation went forth, calling for the first 75,000 men, that among the first to respond to that call were the colored men. A meeting was held in Boston, crowded as I never saw a meeting before; meetings were held in Rhode Island and Connecticut, in New York and Philadelphia, and throughout the West, responding to the President's call. Although the colored men in many of the free States were disenfranchised, abused, taxed without representation, their children turned out to the schools; nevertheless, they went on, determined to try to discharge their duty to the country, and to save it from the tyrannical power of the slaveholders of the South. But the cry went forth—"We won't have the niggers; we won't have anything to do with them; we won't fight with them; we won't have them in the army, nor about us." Yet scarcely had you got into conflict with the South, when you were glad to receive the news that contrabands brought. (Applause.) The first telegram announcing any news from the disaffected district commences with—"A contraband just in from Maryland tells us" so much. The last telegram, in to-day's paper, announces that a contraband tells us so much about Jefferson Davis and Mrs. Davis and the little Davises. (Laughter.) The nation is glad to receive the news from the contraband. We have an old law with regard to the mails, that a negro shall not touch the mails at all; and for fifty years the black man has not had the privilege of touching the mails of the United States with his little finger; but we are glad enough now to have the negro bring the mail in his pocket! The first thing asked of a



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contraband is—"Have you got a newspaper?—what's the news?" And the news is greedily taken in, from the lowest officer or soldier in the army, up to the Secretary of War. They have tried to keep the negro out of the war, but they could not keep him out, and now they drag him in, with his news, and are glad to do so. Gen. Wool says the contrabands have brought the most reliable news. Other Generals say their information can be relied upon. The negro is taken as a pilot to guide the fleet of Gen. Burnside through the inlets of the South. (Applause.) The black man welcomes your armies and your fleets, takes care of your sick, is ready to do anything, from cooking up to shouldering a musket; and yet these would-be patriots and professed lovers of the land talk about driving the negro out!

Now, what shall you do with the slaveholders? That is the other question, The only recommendation I have to make in regard to that is, that you shall take the slave from the slaveholder, and let the slaveholder go to work and labor for himself, and let him keep out of mischief. (Applause.) If the slaveholders had had the opportunity of laboring for themselves, for the last forty years, we should never have had this rebellion. It is because they have had nothing to do but to drink and walk about and concoct mischief, while the black man was toiling for their support, that this rebellion has taken place.

Mr. President, I must bring my remarks to a close. This nation owes the colored people a great debt. You, the people of New York, owe us a great debt. You have kept us down, helped to degrade us by your

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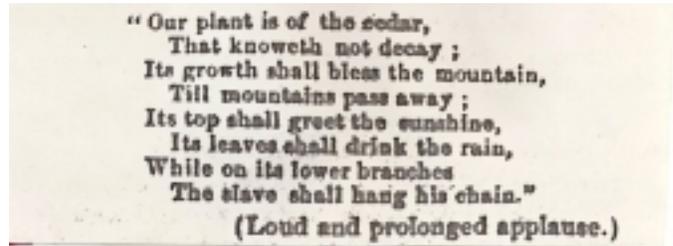
Mr. President, I must bring my remarks to a close. This nation owes the colored people a great debt. You, the people of New York, owe us a great debt. You have kept us down, helped to degrade us by your

odious laws—the fugitive slave enactments and others—you have loved to keep us in chains, while the slaveholders have deprived us of our liberty and everything; and now the time has come for you to do your duty in this matter. You see that this has affected you, as well as it has affected the black man, North and South; and now the world is looking on, expecting that your duty to the negro, to the cause of freedom, will be performed; and the moral sentiment of the world will hold the American people accountable, if this rebellion shall close, and the negro be still left weltering in his blood and chains. There is no mistake about it: the time has come for the nation to discharge its duty to the black man. Now is the time, and I hope the nation will have the moral courage to perform its duty. That the slave will have his liberty, I have not the slightest doubt. These black men in the slave States, whom Jefferson Davis and Beauregard have been teaching the science of arms on the one hand, and the contrabands at Port Royal and Fortress Monroe, to whom your men and woman have been teaching the science of letters, on the other hand, have implanted in the black man's bosom in the Southern States that which will ultimately give him his liberty, if you do not give it to him. (Applause.) I am confident that the tree of Liberty has been planted. If it was not planted by this Society, Mr. President, it has been planted by the rebellion of the South, and it is growing—it is growing, and its branches are overshadowing the land; and, in the language of the poet, we may say:

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“Our plant is of the cedar,
That knoweth not decay;
Its growth shall bless the mountain,
Till mountains pass away;
Its top shall greet the sunshine,
Its leaves shall drink the rain,
While on its lower branches
The slave shall hang his chain.”

(Loud and prolonged applause.)



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(Loud and prolonged applause.)