

I regard the existence of slavery as an evil. I regret it, and wish that there was not one slave in the United States.

But it is an evil which, while it affects the States only, or principally, where it abounds, each State within which it is situated is the exclusive judge of what is best to be done with it, and no other State has a right to interfere in it.

Kentucky has no right to interfere with the slavery of Virginia, and Ohio has no right to interfere with it in either.

The jurisdiction of each State, where slavery exists, is among the reserved rights of the States. Congress possesses no power or authority to abolish it.

Congress is invested with no power relating to it, except that which assumes its legitimate and continued existence. As to slavery, with the exception of the conservative, representative, and taxing powers of Congress, the States are as much beyond the control of Congress as if they were independent nations, unconnected by any confederative constitution.

Although I believe slavery to be an evil, I regard it as a far less evil than would arise out of an immediate emancipation of the slaves of the United States, and their remaining here mixed up in our communities. In such a contingency, I believe that a bloody civil war would ensue, which would terminate only by the extinction of the black race.

It results, from these opinions which I entertain, that I consider the movements of the Abolitionists as altogether unauthorized and most unfortunate. I believe them productive of no good whatever, but attended with positive mischief to both the white and the black races. Of all the modes of separating the free blacks from the rest of the population of the United States, in my opinion, that of colonizing them in Africa is best. They are there in the abode of their ancestors, in a climate congenial to their constitutions, and with boundless territorial scope before them. For these and other reasons I think Africa far preferable to Oregon. An emigrant can be sent to Africa much cheaper than he can be to Oregon. He would then be not only in the home of his forefathers, but he might render great service to the natives of Africa, by introducing among them the arts of civilization and the religion of Christ. He would, moreover, be secure forever against the progress of the white man, which he would be far from being in Oregon.

I have regretted extremely the agitation of abolition in the free States. It has done no good, but harm. It will do no good. The great body of Abolitionists, like the great mass of every party, I have no doubt, is honest, sincere, and humane. Their leaders deceive them, and will endeavor to profit by them. They

will seek to ride into public office, and to snatch public honor, upon the delusions which they propagate.

Abolition is a delusion which cannot last. It is impossible it should endure. ⁷ What is it? In pursuit of a principle—a great principle, if you please, it undertakes to tread down and trample in the dust all opposing principles, however sacred. It sets up the right of the people of one State to dictate to the people of other States. It arrays State against State. To make the black man free, it would virtually enslave the white man. With a single idea some of its partisans rush on blindly, regardless of all consequences. They have dared even to threaten our glorious Union with dissolution. And suppose that unhallowed object achieved, would it emancipate the slaves? What is their next step? Is it to light up a war between the dissevered parts of the Union, and through blood, devastation, and conflagration, to march forward to emancipation? Are they at all sure that through such diabolical means they would be able finally to arrive at their object? No, my friend, let each State, and the people of each State, take care of their own interests, leaving other States, and the people of other States, to take care of theirs. We have enough to do in our respective and legitimate spheres of action—enough for the exercise of all the charities and sympathies of our nature.

But what is ultimately to become of slavery? asks the impatient Abolitionist. I ⁸ cannot tell him with any certainty. I have no doubt that the merciful Providence, which permitted its introduction into our country against the wishes of our ancestors, will, according to His own good pleasure and time, provide for its mitigation or termination.

In the mean time, we have had much to encourage us. Our Revolution led to ⁹ the cessation of the African slave trade with the United States. It altogether ceased in 1808. Many States emancipated their slaves, not by the perilous process of an immediate liberation, but by the gradual and cautious proceeding of a slow and regulated emancipation, liberating the offspring at mature age, and leaving the parents in slavery; thus making preparation for the proper use of the liberty which their children were to enjoy. Everywhere a spirit of humanity was, more and more, infusing itself into the laws for the regulation of the treatment of slaves, until it was checked, in some places, by the agitation of Abolition. Some States, where the proportion of slaves was not very great in comparison with the whites, were beginning seriously to think about the practicability of a gradual emancipation within their limits, but they, too, have been checked by the intemperate zeal of Abolitionists. The feasibility of African colonization has been demonstrated, and the Society, with its limited means, has been quietly prosecuting its noble object.

By some of the means indicated, and others hidden from our view, by an all-wise Providence, we may cherish the hope that, if violent Abolitionists will cease stirring up strife and agitating the passions, we may ultimately alleviate the evils, if not eradicate the existence of slavery in our land. ¹⁰

The generation that established our independence achieved a great and glorious work. Succeeding generations have accomplished much in advancing the growth, the power, and the greatness of this nation. We must leave some things to posterity, and among others the task of making adequate provision for the institution of slavery. ¹¹

In spite of slavery, our arms triumphed in the revolutionary struggle. And it is not too much to assert that, if Abolition had developed itself then, as it since has done, we should have failed. We should have been unable to form the Confederation, or subsequently to have adopted the present Constitution. In spite of slavery, we were successful in the second war with Great Britain. And in neither war, it is a gratifying historical fact, was the enemy able, by all his arts of seduction, to withdraw many slaves from their fidelity. In spite of slavery, we have moved onward in our march to power and greatness, augmenting our population, in a period only co-extensive with that of my own life, from two and a half to seventeen millions. ¹²

If our country is now writhing under the agony of extreme pecuniary distress and embarrassment, it has not been produced by slavery, at least not by black slavery. It has been brought about, I think, by the exercise of arbitrary power, but not that which the master exerts over his black slave. ¹³

Let us cease to agitate a topic which divides, distracts, and inflames the community; which tends to array man against man, State against State, and section against section, and which threatens the greatest of all possible calamities which could befall this people, the dissolution of the Union of these States. Let us, in place of discord and dissension, cultivate peace, harmony, and good-will among the people and the States of this Confederacy. And let us recollect that we have other duties—far higher duties—to perform toward our country, toward posterity, and toward the world, than even the extirpation of African slavery, however much its original introduction among us is to be deplored.