
Slavery Papers, Speeches & Manuscripts
MS/146-018

1836

Speech of Mr. Hubbard, of New Hampshire, In Senate, March 7, 1836

For this and additional works see: URL

UUID: 9480bfed-7be4-4221-9d67-0f91f09f95b8

Recommended Citation:

Hubbard, Henry. 1836. Speech of Mr. Hubbard, of New Hampshire, Senate, March 7, 1836 : The Memorial of the Society of Friends Upon the Subject of the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia, and the Question As to the Proper Mode of Disposing of It, Being Before the Senate. Place of publication not identified: publisher not identified.
<http://hdl.handle.net/10428/468>.

This item is free and open source. It is part of the COLLECTION TITLE at Odum Library Valdosta State University Archives and Special Collections. If you have any questions or concerns contact archives@valdosta.edu

(3)

S P E E C H

MR. HUBBARD, OF NEW HAMPSHIRE,

IN SENATE, MARCH 7, 1836.

The memorial of the Society of Friends upon the subject of the abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia, and the question as to the proper mode of disposing of it, being before the Senate—

Mr. HUBBARD submitted the following remarks:

Mr. President: The Senator from Vermont (Mr. Swift) who has just resumed his seat, has informed the Senate that anti-slavery societies within his own State—particularly within his own immediate district—have greatly multiplied since he left his home in November last. It may be so. I presume the fact to be as stated by the Senator; but whether these societies be few or many, does not disturb my convictions; *it is matter of little concern to me. I cannot for one believe that they can contain such a portion of the good, the wise, the prudent men of any non-slaveholding State, as to endanger the order and repose of the community.* There will be no occasion, Mr. President, for the gentleman from North Carolina, (Mr. Brown,) as he stated, to leave this capitol with any apprehensions that the moral and intellectual power of New England is not sufficient to correct and to maintain correct public sentiment there upon this all absorbing subject. †

It is, sir, upon the moral principle, upon the general intelligence of the North, that I place my confiding reliance. It will prove abundantly sufficient, unless I greatly mistake the signs of the times, to put down excitement, to restore tranquillity.

Yet, sir, I cannot, I will not say, that these things are not calculated to give alarm to southern men—the owners of slave property—those who live in the midst of a slave community. The very statement of the Senator from Vermont does not tend to calm their fears—to bring peace to their troubled winds. The daily occurrences—the information coming to them from various sections—the events which have transpired since we have assembled in this city—the very agitation of this subject here, growing out of the proceedings of our constituents, one and all, are calculated more or less to disturb the confidence of the South in the security of their rights. This very morning, Mr. President, I have received information that the

Presbyterian synod of Ohio has, by a majority of the presbytery, determined to shut their pulpits and to close their churches against preachers and professors who are not the avowed friends of abolition. These passing events cannot fail to produce a most unfavorable effect upon the owners of slave property in slaveholding States.

In those sections, every thing is involved in the issue and final determination of this question. Their peace, their prosperity, their safety is put in jeopardy by the movements of the abolitionists. I am not then, Mr. President, at all surprised at the feeling, the alarm which some of our southern friends have manifested upon this subject. Yet, sir, I can assure them that all will end well—that their rights cannot in reality be endangered through *all the influence* which can be exerted *by all the force* which the abolitionists can command in *all the free States*. There is an abiding virtue among the People, which will come to the rescue. The sentiment of the North is sound upon this subject; and whenever occasion shall demand—whenever duty shall call for action, our southern friends may rely upon the force of that sentiment to put down all opposition.

Mr. President, the remarks of my honorable colleague in relation to this matter, and which met with my entire approbation, seemed to render it unnecessary for me to add any thing more; and it was my intention to have given a silent vote; but since this subject has been under the consideration of the Senate, since the question as to the fit mode of disposing of this memorial has been under discussion, I have received a petition purporting to be signed by sundry persons residing in one of the interior towns in New Hampshire, asking for the abolition of slavery in this District. And, from this circumstance, I have been induced, with all the attention, *with all the consideration which it was in my power to bestow,* to examine this whole subject. I have endeavor-

ed to examine it with candor and with fairness, certainly with a mind free from any prejudice against the petitioners. Although I have no acquaintance with a single individual whose name is affixed to this petition, yet I know they are a portion of my constituents, and as such are entitled to my respectful consideration. Certainly as such they have a right to demand at my hands a deliberate examination of, and attention to, their requests when communicated. And, Mr. President, with a knowledge of the relation which subsists between the representative and the constituent, and of all the obligations of duty growing out of that relation, I have fully examined this subject, and have satisfied my own mind what course I ought to pursue; how I ought to treat this petition, and how I shall feel myself bound to act with reference to the petition which I hold in my hand, and which has been forwarded to me from a portion of my constituents, and to all others of a similar character. I cannot agree to lend my aid in any way, *directly or indirectly*, in furtherance of the object contemplated by the petitioners. To abolish slavery in this District, in my opinion, would be unjust, impolitic, inexpedient, even if the measure itself were practicable. But in my opinion, the object contemplated would be found altogether impracticable. What I mean to say is this, that if you should be able to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia by a positive enactment, you would not thereby emancipate those who are now held in bondage in this District. My position is, that we never can by our *legislation* make the slave a free man, without the consent of the owner, within the limits of this ten miles square. I shall endeavor to illustrate this position, before I conclude my remarks. As I have brought my mind to the conclusion that I ought not upon any principle to grant the prayer of the petition of my constituents, I must state at length the considerations which have induced that conclusion. It is due to them, it is due to myself, that the grounds of my objection should be fully and explicitly stated.

What is the prayer of the petition now before us? What do these memorialists ask at our hands? The following extract from the paper itself clearly shows:

“That, having long felt deep sympathy with that portion of the inhabitants of these United States, which is held in bondage, and having no doubt that the happiness and interests, moral and pecuniary, of both master and slave, and our whole community would be greatly promoted, if the inestimable right to liberty was extended equally to all:”

“We therefore earnestly desire, that you will enact such laws as will secure the right of freedom to every human being residing within the constitutional jurisdiction of Congress, and prohibit every species of traffic in the persons of men, which is inconsistent in principle, and inhuman in practice, as the foreign slave trade.”

In the petition committed to my charge, the same leading ideas are advanced.

“They consider the toleration of slavery in the

District of Columbia as inconsistent with justice, humanity, and christianity.”

And the petitioners ask, “That Congress will, without delay, pass a statute to abolish immediately, slavery in the District of Columbia: to declare every person coming into the District free.”

The manifest object, the direct purpose of all these petitioners is, to emancipate the slaves—to liberate those who are held in bondage within this District. The first inquiry is, can this purpose be accomplished? can this object be effected by the legislative power of Congress? In other words, will the abolition of slavery in this District—will the destruction of the slave trade by an act of Congress, make one less slave in the country? My answer is no; you cannot, by destroying that traffic in this District, destroy the relation of master and slave: you will not, by abolishing slavery in this District, thereby diminish the number of slaves, although you may possibly lessen the number of masters. Admitting for argument, that the toleration of slavery in this District is inconsistent with justice; admitting that it is the bounden duty of Congress to pass, without delay, a statute to abolish slavery within its limits: admitting that the slave trade is opposed to every feeling of humanity; yet, by doing all that the petitioners ask, they will not thereby “secure the right of freedom to every human being residing within the constitutional jurisdiction of Congress. They will still have occasion to feel deep sympathy for that portion of the inhabitant of the United States, which is held in bondage.” The petitioners have not asked for any interference of Congress with slavery, as it exists in the States. They disclaim every intention of any such interference. They do not hesitate to deny to Congress, the constitutional power over this subject within the States.

If then the grounds which are assumed by the petitioners for the abolition of slavery and of the slave trade within the District of Columbia be true—if every consideration which they have urged be matter of fact—yet the object which they have in view cannot be obtained, if all is done which they require.

It would seem, from the zeal which characterizes the proceedings of the abolitionists, that slavery in our country is confined to the District of Columbia; that it exists in no other parts of this confederacy; that if slavery can be abolished here, the slaves of our country become at once free men; that their involuntary servitude is at once changed for the blessings of constitutional liberty.

According to the official enumeration, the slaves of our whole country amounted in the year 1790, to 697,697; in 1800 to 896,849; in 1810 to 1,191,364; in 1820 to 1,538,064; in 1830 to 2,010,436. Between 1790 and 1830, this description of our population has more than trebled.

The whole population of the country in 1790, was 3,927,827; in 1830 it was 12,856,407; having a little more than trebled within those periods. And it appears that the increase of the slave population of our country has been nearly equal to the increase of the free population within the same periods.

In 1830 the slave population of the District of Columbia was 6,050. The whole population of the District was at that time 39,858, leaving a free population of 33,808.

In 1810 the slave population of this District was 5,395. The whole population of the District was at that time 19,785, leaving a free population of 14,388 at that time. It follows from this statement, that while the free population of this District has more than doubled, the slave population has been only increased a few hundreds.

How has this been produced? The general increase through the country of the slave population has been equal to the increase of the free population within the same periods of time.

This effect has been in some degree produced by the frequent agitation of this subject in other sections of the Union—in the free States of this confederacy. The reiterated applications to Congress for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, has given to slave property here a character of insecurity; a degree of uncertainty, both as it respects its tenure, continuance and durability, which must prevent its increase to any great extent. Is it not most apparent that by abolishing slavery you will not emancipate the slaves of this District? Is it not also clear that by the destruction of the slave trade you can produce no such effect? We may compel, by our legislation, masters to sell their slaves; we may drive from this District those who are held in bondage to less desirable sections of this republic; we may change the place of traffic from Alexandria to Richmond; but we shall not set free one solitary individual now bound to servitude; we shall not better the condition of the slave. No; we shall make his condition worse; we shall rivet still stronger his chains; we shall, as it respects the present slave population of this District, do an essential injury to them. By the abolition of slavery here we shall unavoidably, but inevitably, coerce the slaves from their friends—from all those early associations which are near and dear to them. Can any one suppose that if we should abolish slavery in this District, without the consent and against the will of the owners of slaves, that they will acquiesce and submit to such a proceeding? No, Mr. President, the action of Congress upon this subject would induce every slaveholder to sell that description of his property to the planters of Mississippi or of Louisiana. I am no advocate of slavery; for nearly forty years it has entirely ceased to exist in New Hampshire; but it does exist, and constitutionally exists, in other States of this confederacy; it also exists within the limits of this District; and it is here that the memorialists seek to effect the abolition of slavery. Under the clause of the constitution giving power to Congress "to exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever over this District," it is contended that we ought, against the consent and without the will of the owner, to deprive him of his property. Slaves are held here as individual, personal property.

It is far from my purpose to go into any consideration of the extent of the legislative power of Congress over this District. It is upon the ground of expediency that I oppose this proceeding. It

is because the people of this District, whose interests are to be affected by this movement, ask no legislation of us upon this subject, that I oppose it. It is because I regard it as an officious interference on the part of the abolitionists with the rights of others, with which they have no concern, that I oppose it. It would be regarded as the worst species of tyranny for Congress to annihilate, in any one of the States, any one description of property, without the consent of the owner. And is it not equally so for Congress to interfere with *slave property* in this District, against the will of its proprietor? It was this principle which produced the American revolution. It was the enactment of laws—the imposition of parliamentary edicts, without the consent of the colonies—it was taxation without representation, that first put the ball of the revolution in motion.

I cannot entertain any doubt that the measure proposed by the petitioners are fraught not only with the most imminent danger to public peace and to public order, tending, in my judgment, not only to undermine the foundations of this confederacy to rend asunder the bonds of this Union, but *as tending* to destroy the rights of individual property—to jeopardize the safety, the security, the happiness of the slave population within this District.

I would say to the petitioners—to the people of the north—to my own constituents who seek the abolition of slavery in this District, that every consideration of public policy, every sentiment of common justice, every feeling of just humanity, call upon them to consider well their ways; to stay their dangerous course; to abandon that which cannot be obtained, but the agitation of which, at a time like this, is productive of the most deadly and destructive consequences.

"The evil that men do, lives after them: Their good is oft interred with their bones."

By abolishing slavery in this District, which all the petitioners ask; by providing that slave shall no longer exist within its limits; we shall not, we cannot effect the emancipation of the slaves within the District; but the effect which would be produced upon slave property, in the States of Virginia and Maryland, could not fall be of the most injurious character.

The States of Virginia and Maryland grant to the United States the territory now constituting the District of Columbia. They are both slave holding States. At the time of the cession, the slave population of Maryland exceeded one hundred thousand, while that of Virginia was nearly three hundred and fifty thousand. And can it be supposed that those States would set apart a portion of their domain for the seat of Government if they had supposed that under the clause of the constitution to which I have referred, Congress would ever undertake to abolish slavery in this District, so long as slavery should continue to exist within their limits? Never, sir; no, never.

Such an interference on the part of Congress would be in bad faith—against the spirit of the compact—a violation of that understanding which must have subsisted in those States which ceded to us this territory. On that ground I will oppose this proceeding, so long as I shall have the ab-

to understand, and physical power to enable me to act. Abolish slavery in this District, and you make it the asylum for every runaway negro in the country. You change the character of the black population from better to worse—you make this also the resort of free blacks, the abiding place of that colored population, who readily could be excited to do every mischievous work to the safe enjoyment of slave property in the adjoining States. They would be employed as fit instruments by the designing and mad fanatic, to carry distress—dismay—desolation—among the people of Virginia and Maryland.—While the owners of slave property in the adjoining States would be greatly annoyed and essentially injured by the abolition of slavery in this District, yet, if it has ever entered into the calculations of the abolitionists that this would become a safe and secure retreat for the fugitive slave, such a calculation would prove vain and delusive. The framers of the constitution have been more just to the rights of individuals, than to leave this description of property at the mercy of such fanatics. This District can never become the den of fugitive slaves from any of the States. The constitution provides that, “persons held to service or labor, who shall flee into another State, shall be given up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due.” If the constitution has watched so cautiously to prevent the protection of runaway slaves, it could not have intended to vest Congress with power to establish an asylum for such persons in the District of Columbia.

Will any man assert, be he abolitionist or anti-abolitionist, that, in comparison between the free blacks and slaves in a slaveholding country, the advantage in condition is in favor of the former? Can any man say with truth, that the present state of the free negro population of the north is more desirable, unless it be in the enjoyment of personal liberty, than the slave population of the south? Mr. President, it will not be pretended by any man acquainted with the subject, that the character, the condition, the comfort of the free blacks are superior to that of the slave. It cannot be pretended that, in the adjoining States, they are as well fed and as well clothed as the slaves themselves. The race of free blacks in a slaveholding country is more debased, more degraded, less controlled by the sympathies of our nature, more desperate, and more abandoned than the slaves themselves. I well remember of once being told that you could not use language, in a slaveholding country, conveying in terms a more severe and humiliating reproach to a slave himself, than to call him “as bad as a free negroe.” And as far as my own observations have extended, I would not blame the slave for resenting the insult.

To excite our engagedness in this matter—to stimulate our zeal—to induce our speedy action, we have had sent to us the most gross and shameful pictorial representations of slavery, as it is said to exist in this District. Sir, I will not stop to inquire, whether individual cases exist, or have existed, meriting the character given to them by these prints. But if they are designed to give true representation of the relation which subsists

between the master and the slave; if they are intended to exhibit the general conduct of the one, and the sufferings of the other; if they are intended to paint the weal of the master and the woe of the slave, they are most deceptive and most libellous. It has been my fortune to have formed some acquaintances with slaveholders, both in Maryland and in Virginia. I have visited their plantations. I have seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears, sufficient to enable me to say, that these prints are most deceptive. Sir, it would be but an act of justice to add, that more warmth of feeling, more ardency of attachment I have seldom seen exhibited in my own section, than I have seen upon these plantations between the master and slave. It has been my privilege, since I have been in Congress, occasionally to have visited a plantation not ten miles from this District, upon which lived two bachelors, the only white persons I believe upon the plantation, surrounded by forty or fifty slaves of different ages and sexes; and from the oldest to the youngest, I never discovered the slightest discontent; all was confidence—all was peace. I asked how this general appearance of happiness and contentment could be accounted for? The reply was, all their wants are supplied: they are all well fed, well clothed, well taken care of in sickness and in health, that no instance of cruel and barbarous treatment would be tolerated; that public feeling, common sentiment would put down, render execrable and odious, that master who should attempt to exercise any undue severity over his slave. There is then a false philanthropy, an unwarrantable feeling governing this whole matter.

There is more poetry than truth, more fancy than fact, in the tales and pictorial representations of the abolitionists.

“Oh! judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason.”

Abolish slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia—we shall not thereby diminish the number of slaves in the country; we shall not in the slightest degree check the traffic in that description of property; but we shall not only bring evils upon the slave population, but we shall bring evils upon the free white population of the country.

Mr. President, one of the great evils to be apprehended from the agitation of this subject, certainly from any action of Congress upon it, is, that the slaveholding States will find it necessary for their own security, to drive, by positive enactment, or by the force of public opinion, every free black from their own dominions. They will find that population dangerous to the peaceable and secure enjoyment of their slave property. Another effect to be produced by the wished for action of Congress in relation to this matter, is, to fill the rich valleys of New England with the free black population of the south, and there to compete with her free labor. This, sir, is an unavoidable consequence, if this course is pursued, if this project be not abandoned—a consequence, sir, which would be most deeply lamented—a consequence which every son and daughter of New England would regret.

Such a state of things would lead to great political evils; would put to hazard our dearest and our freest institutions. I hope never—never to see the time when the hardy yeomanry of New England will find themselves surrounded by a black population, in no respect congenial in *habit*, in *disposition*, in *principle*. Can it be possible that we can contemplate such an event with any other emotion, but that of deep sorrow?

"Breathes there a wretch, to shame so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own—my native land?"

Mr. President, I would conjure the abolitionists to let this subject alone—to be at peace—to give up their policy, fraught as it is with mischiefs, dangers, consequences, of the most alarming character. They can gain nothing; they may lose much that is dear and most precious to them, and to us all.

In the course of this debate, we have been often reminded of the importance of this subject. Important, I admit it to be, in every point of view; important in its character—important in its consequences—important to the tranquillity of the South—no less important to the honor of the North—important to the slaveholder—equally important to the holder of any and of every other description of property. In my opinion, it is a subject of the highest and deepest importance to the perpetuity of our free institutions—to the preservation of the Union itself.

It has been said that this question must and would mingle itself with the politics of the day. It has been said by a distinguished Senator that it would be mixed with the approaching public elections. Sir, I was sorry to hear that declaration. It too plainly asserted, that those who happened to live north of a given line would be regarded as unworthy of political trust, from the mere fact that they resided in a non-slaveholding country? Such a sentiment ill comports with the magnanimity, the love of justice which has uniformly characterized the South. What would have been said, Mr. President, by our southern friends, *if we of the north* had objected to those who have filled the highest office in the republic for *forty* out of *forty-eight years* of our constitutional existence, that they were not entitled to our support, to our confidence, because, forsooth, they were slaveholders, and lived in a slaveholding country? I leave it for them to give the answer.

The question then put to the American people, was, "was the candidate qualified for the high trust?" And notwithstanding the evil forebodings of some, the same question will be repeated to the American people so long as the confederacy shall exist: Is the candidate honest, capable, worthy of confidence? Upon the answer to be given, will depend his success, be his residence where it may—north or south of the Potomac.

Mr. President, the sentiments of my own State, the sentiments of all New England upon the subject of slavery in the abstract, are well known. I do not, on this occasion, deem it necessary to advert to them. I cannot regard it as matter of importance to make them the subject of discussion at this time. My purpose is to allay an excitement which has already become fearfully dan-

gerous. It is no object of mine to add fuel to the flame. *It is* the leading desire of my heart to bring back repose, to restore peace to the troubled mind of the public. I would not then, unnecessarily bring before the Senate, matters which are foreign from the subject immediately claiming its consideration.

Mr. President, I have said all that I have to say upon the character of these petitions; the object of the abolitionists; the entire inability on the part of Congress to accomplish that object, even if all is granted that they demand at our hands. I have offered all I have to offer upon the consequences which would result from the adoption of the measure demanded. I have stated the effects it would produce upon the slave population; upon the slaveholding States, and upon ourselves; the inhabitants of the free States of the Union. One question remains. How shall the Senate dispose of this and of all similar memorials? The honorable Senator from South Carolina has moved, in effect, "that this memorial be not received." This he regards as the best course; as the one more calculated than any other to check the course of the abolitionists; to do away—effectually to destroy, this spirit of fanaticism. His general object and my own are the same; and that is to silence this restless, meddlesome, interfering disposition; to induce the abolitionists to be content; to mind their own business, and let the business of others alone. But is the mode suggested by the Senator from South Carolina the best mode for accomplishing these objects? I think not. What are the grounds upon which the Senator rests his motion? First, that the Senate has no jurisdiction of the subject-matter.

I will not undertake to discuss the question as to the right of Congress to legislate upon this subject within the District of Columbia. That is not my purpose. It is foreign from my object. No such discussion could have any profitable tendency; no such discussion would tend to produce, here or elsewhere—in the south or in the north—harmony, confidence, submission. A directly contrary effect would be the inevitable result of debate and of action upon this proposition. Is not the honorable Senator perfectly aware that this is debatable ground? The petitioners themselves think differently. They believe this subject is clearly within the jurisdiction of Congress; and among the members of this Senate a difference of opinion prevails upon this subject. It is perfectly manifest that there does not exist among the people of the country a union of sentiment on this point. But even if the memorial contemplated an object which, in the opinion of this body, infringed the constitution, it would be a want of policy to refuse to receive it. On this ground, then, the petition ought not to be kept out.

A second ground taken by the Senator why this memorial should not be received was, that its language is not respectful to a portion of this Union. I admit most freely that whenever petitioners undertake to attack the integrity of this body, whenever they presume to reproach the Senate, it becomes our duty, the common principle of self-preservation demands, that we should at once refuse to receive such a memorial,

whether its object be constitutional or unconstitutional, reasonable or unreasonable. But this is not that case. The memorial speaks not of persons or portions of the Union, only as connected with the subject matter; it uses no language reproachful to this body; and I would not on that ground refuse to receive it. A third ground taken by the Senator is, that the memorial speaks of a grievance with which the memorialists have no concern; that they are not residents within the District of Columbia, and are in no way injured by the existence of slavery in the District. The memorialists think otherwise; they believe that this District is peculiarly under the jurisdiction of Congress; that it is the seat of our national Government; that the citizens from every portion of the confederacy resort here for the transaction of their business; they know that slavery exists here; they believe it to be their duty to ask for its abolition within this ten miles square. I would not then, on this ground, refuse to receive the petition.

What reasons should induce the Senate to receive this memorial?

First, a refusal would impair and abridge the right of petition—an inherent, an inalienable right; a right existing before the confederation, guarded and protected by our constitution. It is not my purpose to discuss at length the right of the People to petition Congress for redress of what they regard as grievances. That right has been fully considered and most ably sustained, by those who have preceded me in this debate. It has been regarded, and justly regarded, as the foundation of popular governments—governments depending for their support on the virtue and intelligence of the People. This inherent, this independent right of the legitimate sovereigns of our country, has been viewed as essentially necessary to preserve in purity the true relation between the representative and the constituent. I can add nothing to what has been offered upon this subject. I fully concur in the views which have been expressed upon this point by the Senator from New York, (Mr. Tallmadge.) But, sir, it is contended that this right of petitioning would not be impaired—would not, in effect, be abridged by the adoption of the motion of the honorable Senator from South Carolina.

The Senator from Georgia (Mr. Cuthbert) says that it is not proposed or contemplated to pass any law inhibiting the right of the people to petition Congress; and hence he argues that a vote not to receive the petition cannot affect that right. Can this be so? Is it not an infringement of the right of the people to refuse to take their petition? The people may assemble peaceably—may discuss their grievances—may talk over the grounds of their complaints. They may come to the door of this hall, with their petition asking relief. They may have it placed upon the table of the Secretary. They may have it read in the hearing of this body: and although its language is unexceptionable, yet the Senate by the exercise of its power, will refuse to receive it, to place it on our files. It may direct its officer to carry back to the people their petition, and to say to them, *we cannot receive it.* But would it be possible to con-

vince the American people that such a course would be no abridgement of their right to petition? Would it be possible to satisfy the plain, common sense yeomanry of the country, that it would be no violation of their right, for us to refuse to receive from their hands their petition? We cannot do it.

Say not to the people, if we would have peace within our borders, that they shall not come up here with their complaints—that they shall not ask their public servants to receive the expression of their will—that we, their representatives, will turn a deaf ear to their addresses. No one thing could be done more fraught with danger. Such a step would be more fatal to public order, more destructive to public peace, than any other step which we could take. Such a decision would be most disastrous in its effects—would add fuel to the flame—would multiply these visionary fanatics—would enkindle a spirit which all the prudence and power of the Government could not control. I would not, Mr. President, refuse to receive this memorial. I would never say to petitioners, we will turn a deaf ear to your complaints—no matter whether well or ill founded—real or imaginary—feelingly or unfeelingly described. It will never do to drive from the doors of our legislative halls, the sovereigns of this land; it would be unjust, impolitic, and contrary to the spirit of our institutions.

The Senator from Louisiana says that there is no essential difference between the motion of the Senator from Carolina and the motion of the Senator from Pennsylvania. Sir, there is a very great difference, in principle and in practice. The one notion seeks to keep out of the Senate this memorial, while the other puts it into the possession and under the control of this body. Both of the Senators from Mississippi will vote, as they say, for the motion of the Senator from South Carolina, because it is the strongest measure. The strongest measure! Sir, what is the strongest measure? Is it not that measure which produces the strongest effect? Is it not that measure which makes the greatest possible impression upon the public mind? Is it not that measure which tends more than any other to influence the human conduct?

Mr. President, I wish to vote for the strongest measure. I wish to give such a direction to this subject as will produce an abiding effect upon the public mind—as will check this spirit of fanaticism; and willingly would I vote with the honorable Senator from South Carolina, did not his motion, in my judgment, infringe that inherent, that independent right of the people to petition Congress for redress of grievances—could I regard it as the strongest measure. But, sir, it is not so. The vote of the Senate last year declaring that, in the then posture of our affairs with France, “no legislation was necessary,” the vote of the House of Representatives, declaring “that the terms of the treaty ought to be insisted on,” were strong measures. They produced a strong effect from the unanimity which prevailed in both branches; and the influence, the effect, the impression upon the public mind in relation to the matter now before

us would be greatly increased by the united, combined and undivided vote of the Senate.

The motion of the Senator from Pennsylvania is, "that the prayer of the petition ought to be rejected." And is not this the strongest possible measure? What do we say by agreeing to this vote? Your petitions we have received; we have well considered your requests; we have weighed the reasons for and the reasons against your object; and we have come to the conclusion that we cannot grant the prayer of your memorial; that you ask what we cannot give; that considerations of public policy, of justice, and of right, have convinced us that we ought not to lend our aid in the accomplishment of your purpose. Would not this be a strong measure? and if it could be sustained by the unanimous vote of this body, would it not be the strongest possible measure? Clearly so, sir.

Mr. President, the time has arrived when there must be something done, and done *by us*, the representatives of the States and of the people, upon this all-absorbing and difficult subject of slavery. We are called upon by every consideration of public policy and of public duty; we are called upon as the constitutional guardians of the *rights of the people*, to act—to act promptly—to act efficiently. It will no longer do to remain passive. Memorials, addresses, petitions, come from too many sources for us any longer to refuse action upon them. I am free to admit that there is imminent danger involved in the principles and in the practice of the abolitionists; I am free to admit that their course and their conduct merit the severest reprehension; yet, sir, if we receive their petitions; if we consider their subject matter; if we vote to reject their prayer, I cannot doubt that they will be deterred from prosecuting further their purpose. There are moments when delusion itself will lose its control over the mind;

when morbid philanthropy will fail to stifle the voice of judgment; when argument will produce effect; when right reason will govern human conduct.

A portion of the abolitionists are governed by religious fanaticism, or pushed on by a love for distinction. A much larger portion of them are honest in their views, but ignorant of the tendency and effect of their movements. The latter class are desirous of doing their duty, but by an undue influence, and from a want of information, are prevented. By adopting the motion of the Senator from Pennsylvania, we cannot fail to satisfy this class that they are engaged, if not in an unholy, in a most unjust crusade against the rights of others.

Mr. President, I will close my remarks by giving to the Senate an extract from the proceedings of a respectable meeting of my fellow-citizens in my own immediate neighborhood. I offer it as the best evidence of public sentiment and of public feeling in my native State.

"Much excitement has prevailed in this State in relation to the existence of slavery in the southern portion of the Union. And, in the opinion of this convention, the constitution of the United States reserves to the slaveholding States the original right to the exclusive control of the servile portion of their population. And the present excitement in the northern States, got up by fanaticism and morbid philanthropy, and based upon an ignorance of the true condition of the slave, the character of the master, and of the relative rights and duties of the original members of the confederacy, has been seized upon by wicked and corrupt men with a view to divide the democracy of the north and south, and sever the union of the States: and, in our belief, the course of the abolitionists, if persisted in, will lead to a dissolution of the confederacy."

