

The President then stated that, in consequence of the omission of the annual meeting of the Society last May, he would read the following Statement in behalf of the Executive Committee, instead of the series of resolutions usually submitted on the occasion:—

Statement of the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

For the first time since the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, its annual meeting was omitted one year ago, by the unanimous judgment of its Executive Committee, in order that, at so critical a period in the life of the nation, no opportunity should be given the domestic enemies of freedom to make a mobocratic outbreak, whereby the traitors of the South might be stimulated to a more vigorous prosecution of their nefarious designs, instead of being perplexed and confounded by beholding an undivided North in the maintenance of popular institutions. Now that the lines are distinctly drawn, and vast armies are in the field for the suppression of the rebellion, and all sympathy with the rebels is disavowed, this Society deems it advantageous to resume the observance of its anniversary meetings in the usual manner.

However opposed it may have been either to the Constitution or the Union, in time past, the Society has countenanced no resort to violence, acted no factious part, adopted no illegal or unjustifiable measures, and presented no other than a moral issue in vindication of the sovereignty of God and the sacred rights of human nature, against provisions or agreements regarded by it as cruel, wicked, and utterly indefensible. It is the prerogative of all citizens, whether in an individual or organized capacity, to criticise all those laws and institutions for which they are responsible, or by which they are required to be governed, and especially that Constitution which is "the supreme law of the land." And it is equally their right and duty to testify against whatever they conscientiously believe to be at variance with the principles of justice and the claims of humanity, as embodied in the Constitution or enforced in any of the laws under it. Loyalty to God forbids their being dumb in such an exigency. Beyond this, the Society has never gone a hair's breadth. Hence, those who accuse it of having pursued an incendiary, unlawful, treasonable course, are guilty of calumny.

The Society was organized for the abolition of slavery by peaceful and moral instrumentalities: it has used no others. It professes to regard the act of making man the property of man as a flagrant sin against God, and the denial of all human rights; and the slave system as "the sum of all villainies." In this conviction, it is sustained by the verdict of the civilized world and the common instincts of mankind: it is, therefore, neither fanatical nor mad. The charge of fanaticism and madness applies to those who advocate or sanction slavery, not to those who plead for its immediate abolition. To be morally consistent, the Society could not but deplore and reprobate those compromises of the Constitution, admitted and carried out to the letter by the nation ever since its formation, by which fugitive slaves are permitted to be hunted and captured as freely in the Free States as in the Slave States—a slave representation is allowed in Congress thereby greatly increasing the political power of a desperate and domineering slave oligarchy—and the national government is bound, in an emergency, to interfere with its military and naval power for the suppression of a slave insurrection. It was specially with reference to these universally recognized compromises,—no matter in what phraseology they are expressed or concealed,—that the Society has felt constrained to pronounce that instrument "a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell," and, consequently, to predict in due time that very overthrow which has now befallen it, through the treachery of those whom it was designed to conciliate and bind, and as the righteous retribution of Heaven.

It was neither a sacrifice of principle nor an abatement of its testimony, in this direction, on the part of this Society, to declare, as to the rebellion itself, that it was marked throughout by high-handed villainy and the blackest perfidy; that the theory on which it was attempted to be justified was wild and preposterous; finding no countenance whatever in the Declaration of Independence, or in any rational theory of popular sovereignty; that its object was as diabolical as its measures were base and dastardly; and, therefore, that the national government, having done no wrong to the South, nor sought to exercise any unlawful power over it, was clearly in the right, and imperatively bound, by its constitutional obligations, to crush the rebellion, at whatever cost to slavery, the sole producing cause of the rebellion.

Of the fifteen Slave States that were in the Union eighteen months ago, eleven are now in warlike rebellion, and confederated together for the overthrow of the government, and the establishment of an independent slavetending empire. The other four are held in allegiance only by the presence of vast armies upon their soil, drawn from the North, and whose withdrawal, even now, would be the signal for those States instantly to revolt, and to join the Southern Confederacy. The rebellion, therefore, virtually covers the whole slavetending dominion, includes nearly every slaveholder, and has no other object than the preservation and indefinite extension of slavery, and the repudiation of all connection with free institutions. In one word, rebellion and slavery are synonymous and convertible terms. Whoever would see the rebellion effectually and speedily crushed out, must demand the immediate and total abolition of slavery by the Government, as a measure equally necessary and lawful under the war power; and whoever is for guarding or prolonging the existence of slavery, on any pretext whatever, is directly aiding and protracting the rebellion. Traitors have no other claim upon the Constitution than to be hanged or shot. The traitors most deserving of this fate at the South are the slaveholders as a class, and with hardly an exception. They are the instigators, the leaders, the gigantic criminals, and upon their heads should fall an avalanche of retributive justice. Without them, and the bloody and oppressive system to which they madly cling, there had been no rebellion, but in all the South, as in all the North, there would have been the spirit of loyalty and the prevalence of peace. Bad as is the Constitution, in its admitted pro-slavery compromises, it no longer answers the purposes or needs of this nefarious oligarchy; and, therefore, they trample it under their feet, and cease to claim any advantage or protection from it, for themselves or their "peculiar institution." By so doing, they not only vacate all their old constitutional rights, and utterly preclude all appeal in that direction, but place their whole slave system at the mercy of the Government, which should have no mercy upon it, but should instantly avail itself of this magnificent opportunity to smite it to the dust, and so in righteousness bring the rebellion to an end, and give peace and repose to our distracted and bleeding country.

Under these altered circumstances, slavery is no longer a Southern institution, but a national responsibility, for the further continuance of which, the Government and people are to be held amenable before God and the world. On no consideration must they be permitted to evade the duty of the hour. Theirs is the right, theirs is the power, theirs is the sacred obligation to proclaim a jubilee to all who are pining in bondage in our land; and no device can be substituted for this, without involving them in blood-guiltiness. If, before the revolt and secession, they were not answerable for the existence of slavery at the South, (though their complicity has been constant from the beginning,) still, they can no longer avail themselves of such a plea. They stand as Pharaoh stood to the children of Israel, and can let the bondmen go free if they choose; and if they shall turn a deaf ear as he did, then other plagues shall assuredly scourge the land, and heavier judgments fall upon it. "Now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation."

To encourage and strengthen the Government in the performance of this legitimate and beneficent work,

multitudes of petitions, signed by tens of thousands of the most intelligent and moral portion of the people of the North, have been forwarded to the present Congress, asking for a decree of universal emancipation. It cannot reasonably be doubted that such a decree would sweep through the rebellious South with irresistible power, and electrify with indescribable joy the entire North. Why should there be any doubt or delay? If there are no constitutional scruples against sacking the towns, ravaging the fields, and destroying the lives of the rebels of the South, why should there be any against transferring four millions of slaves from the side of rebellion to that of the Union, the Constitution, the Government, and breaking all their fetters? It will be an act not only of the highest political wisdom, but of transcendent glory and immortal renown to the Administration under which it is consummated. Then may the shout go up from the Atlantic to the Pacific, without cant or hypocrisy, "Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!"

This Society rejoices in those cheering signs of the times which indicate an increasing readiness on the part of the Government and people to make slavery and the war terminate together. Among these are the act of Congress, prohibiting the return of fugitive slaves by any officers in the army; the proposition for the recognition of the independence of Hayti and Liberia; the motion of Senator Wilson for a material change in the Fugitive Slave Law, which will undoubtedly prevail; the proposition of Senator Sumner for the abolition of the inter-State slave trade; the treaty concluded between Great Britain and the United States for the suppression of the foreign slave trade; the recognition by the President of the incompatibility of slavery with the safety and permanence of the Government, in his message, recommending the abolition of the slave system in all the States, and proffering a generous cooperation on the part of the nation; the rising discussion of the question in the Border States; the restoration of Gen. Fremont to his command, in spite of the calumnies of his enemies, and notwithstanding his freedom-giving proclamation in Missouri; the growing disposition of the Government to give succor and protection to all fugitive slaves coming under our flag, as evinced especially at Port Royal, and to employ them for their own and the general welfare; the orders of the Secretaries of the Army and Navy to arm at discretion the slaves coming within our lines; and, finally, the cleansing of the National District from all the pollutions of slavery, by the emancipation of every slave within its limits.

But, cheering as are all these signs, they do not lay the axe at the root of the poisonous tree, which ought to be cut down at once, and destroyed forever; nor do they seal up or exhaust the fountain whence these bloody waters of rebellion naturally flow forth, which are now deluging the land. The subjugation of the South by the armies of the North is not reconciliation, is not the re-formation of a broken Union, is not peace, while a single trafficker in human flesh finds legal protection, or a single slave is left to wear the yoke and clank the chain; and, therefore, in order that there may be an abiding peace, and a perfect Union, and a homogeneous people, and all-abounding prosperity from the Atlantic to the Pacific, this Society will earnestly continue to enforce the duty of IMMEDIATE AND UNIVERSAL EMANCIPATION.

Wm. Wells Brown then took the platform, and delivered a very creditable and highly satisfactory speech on the question, "What shall be done with the slaves, if they are all set free?" Rev. Mr. Hatfield, of the Methodist Church, in Brooklyn, then made an impromptu speech of a stirring and eloquent character—followed by Wendell Phillips in one of his admirably instructive and telling efforts; the services terminating with the singing of the doxology by the whole assembly. It was throughout a highly interesting occasion.

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

The opening session of the twenty-ninth anniversary of this Society was held in the Church of the Puritans, (Rev. Dr. Cheever's) in New York, on Tuesday forenoon, May 6,—a most intelligent, sympathetic and crowded audience being present, and warmly responding to the sentiments uttered on the occasion. The President (Mr. Garrison) was in the chair, and opened the meeting by a few congratulatory remarks, and the reading of striking and highly appropriate selections from the Scriptures. A fervent and impressive prayer was then made by the Rev. Mr. Post, after which, the Treasurer's report was submitted, and the following letter read by Oliver Johnson from Hon. Gerrit Smith:—

LETTER FROM GERRIT SMITH.

PETERBORO', April 16, 1862.

WM. LLOYD GARRISON:  
MY DEAR FRIEND,—The cordial invitation in your letter of 13th inst., to attend and address the approaching Anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, I should for many reasons love to accept. But I have many labors at home; and, moreover, I am too old to leave home unnecessarily. You will have an abundance of speakers, and will not need my voice.

I trust that the smiles of Heaven will be upon your meeting, and that great wisdom will characterize all its proceedings.

I shall be all the more pleased with your meeting, if I find that none of its time was consumed in discussing the relations of the Federal Constitution to slavery. Whether those relations be or be not pro-slavery, so it is that the American people persisted in being pro-slavery, until they thereby destroyed the nation. Destroyed it is simply by being pro-slavery; and destroyed it is no less by the pro-slavery of the North than of the South. I do not say that it is destroyed beyond restoration. I hope it will soon be restored; and I am sure it will be ultimately.

The people were infatuated enough to be pro-slavery, whatever might be the character of the Constitution; they will now, I trust, be anti-slavery, whatever its character. They sacrificed the nation to save slavery; they will now, I trust, sacrifice slavery to save the nation. If they fell below the Constitution before, I trust that they are now willing, if need be, to rise above it.

There is one point at which the meeting should, in my judgment, put forth a clear defence of the "Garrisonian Abolitionist." His influence, especially in the case of such a man as yourself or Wendell Phillips, is too important to the cause of freedom that injustice should be allowed to impair it. The "Garrisonian Abolitionist" was formerly a Disunionist, and is now a Unionist; and hence he is charged with being inconsistent, or at least with being a convert. He is, however, the subject neither of inconsistency nor conversion. This nation, whatever it was in theory and in its laws, was practically a nation of kidnappers—of monsters. The "Garrisonian Abolitionist," despairing at last of its reformation, held that it ought to be broken up. But such a change has taken place in the nation within the last year, that its reformation is no longer to be despaired of. Moreover, the reformation can be carried on far more hopefully in the union than in the disunion of the States. Hence, with all consistency, the "Garrisonian Abolitionist" is now a Unionist. There is a conversion. It is, however, to him, and not of him. There is a change; but it is around him, and not in him.

Whether he was right in holding that the Constitution is pro-slavery is another and inferior question. It is very inferior, because, be the Constitution pro-slavery or anti-slavery, the people are equally bound to be anti-slavery. The Constitution can bind none to be guilty of crime—can excuse none for being guilty of crime. On the immeasurably greater question, whether the nation was pro-slavery, he was emphatically right. Whether it was so hopelessly pro-slavery as he finally believed it to be is still another question. I confess that I lacked but little of being as hopeless as he; or, in other words, but little of identifying myself with his policy, and of going with him for the breaking up of the nation. Surely, it is better for a nation to be broken up than to continue to wield its mighty national powers to uphold a great crime. Surely, the English or the French nation had better be broken up than held together by the policy of putting to death every feeble-born child. That, however, were a small crime compared with the crime of crimes which stains our nation.

You and I have ceased from our anxieties about the abolition of slavery. We must not, however, accept too much credit for having done so. We could well afford to cease from them; for we saw an earnest and a mighty effort to save the country, and we knew that slavery had got such a fast and deadly hold of the throat of the nation, that the nation could not be saved without slavery was killed. Forty years ago, and a no less widely-extended rebellion could have been put down without putting down slavery. A flock of sheep may be saved, and the sucking-wolf which has got in among them be also saved; but let the wolf have a year's more growth, and either it or the sheep must die.

Please add to the funds of the Society the enclosed draft for fifty dollars.

With great regard, your friend,

GERRIT SMITH.