

## FREDERICK DOUGLASS ON THE NEGRO EXODUS.

A PAPER by Fred. Douglass was read before the Social Science Association, at Saratoga, on the Negro exodus from the South. The real cause of the exodus, he thinks, is bad treatment.

"The Negroes say that they are badly treated at the South; that the landowners, planters, and the old master class generally deal unfailingly with them; that, having had their labor for nothing when they were slaves, these men, now they are free, endeavor by various devices to get it for next to nothing; that, work as hard, faithfully, and constantly as they may, live as plainly and as sparingly as they may; they are no better off at the end of the year than at the beginning. They say that they are the dupes and victims of cunning and fraud, in signing contracts which they cannot read and cannot fully understand; that they are compelled to trade at stores owned wholly or in part by their employers, and that they are paid with orders, and not with money. They say they have to pay double the value of nearly everything they buy; that they are compelled to pay a rental of \$10 a year for an acre of ground that will not bring \$30 under the hammer; that landowners are in league to prevent land-holding by Negroes; that when they work the land on shares they barely make a living; that outside the towns and cities no provision is made for education, and, ground down as they are, they cannot themselves employ teachers to instruct their children; and that they are not only the victims of fraud and cunning, but of violence and intimidation.

"They believe that when the governments, state and national, shall both be in the control of the old masters of the South they will find means for reducing the Freedmen to a condition analogous to slavery. They despair of any change for the better, declaring that everything is waxing worse for the Negro, and that his only means of safety is to leave the South. It must be admitted, if this brief statement of complaints be only half true, the explanation of the exodus and the justification of the persons composing it are full and ample."

Mr. Douglas thinks the exodus impolitic, because of the enormous sums it would require to make it successful, and that it is ill-timed and in some respects hurtful. He says:

"At a time like this, so full of hope and courage, it is unfortunate that a cry of despair should be raised in behalf of the colored people of the South; unfortunate that men are going over the country begging in the name of the poor colored men of the South, and telling the people that the Government has no power to enforce the Constitution and the laws in that section, and that there is no hope for the poor Negro but to plant him in the new soil of Kansas and Nebraska. These men do the colored people of the South a real damage. They give their enemies an advantage in the argument for their manhood and freedom. They assume the inability of the colored people of the South to take care of themselves. The country will be told of the hundreds who go to Kansas; but not of the thousands who stay in Mississippi and Louisiana. They will be told of the destitute who require material aid; but not of the multitude who are bravely sustaining themselves where they are. In Georgia the Negroes are paying taxes on six millions of dollars, and in Louisiana forty or fifty millions, and upon ascertained sums elsewhere in the Southern States. Why should a people who have made such progress in the course of a few years now be humiliated and scandalized by exodus agents, begging money to remove them from their home, especially at a time when every indication favors a position that the wrongs and hardships which they suffered are soon to be redressed? Besides, it is manifest that the public and noisy advocacy of a general stampede of the colored people from the South to the North is unnecessary—an abandonment of a great and paramount principle of protection to person and property in every state in the Union. It is an evasion of a solemn obligation and duty. The business of this nation is to protect its citizens where they are; not to transport them where they will need no protection. The best that can be said of this exodus in this respect is that it is an attempt to climb up some other way than the right way. It is an expedient—a half-way measure—and tends to weaken in the public mind a sense of the absolute right, power, and duty of the Government, inasmuch as it concedes, by implication, at least, that on the soil of the South the law of the land cannot command obedience, the ballot-box cannot be kept pure, peaceable elections cannot be held, the Constitution cannot be enforced, and the lives and liberties of loyal and peaceable citizens cannot be protected. It is a surrender, a premature, disheartening surrender, since it would make freedom and free institutions depend upon emigration, rather than protection; upon flight, rather than right; upon going into a strange land, rather than by staying in one's own."

The South is the best place for the Negro, because he can find there the best market for his labor. He is a necessity there; as nowhere else, and has a monopoly of the labor market:

"As there are no competitors or substitutes, he can demand living prices, with the certainty that the demand will be complied with. Exodus would deprive him of this advantage. It would take him from a country where the landowners and planters must have his labor or allow their fields to go untilled and their purses unsupplied with cash, to a country where the landowners are able and proud to do their own work, and do not need to hire hands, except for limited periods at certain seasons of the year. The effect of this will be to send the Negro to the towns and cities, to compete with white labor, with what result let the past tell. They will be crowded into lanes and alleys, cellars and garrets, poorly provided with the necessities of life, and will gradually die out.

"In anything like a normal condition of things, the South is the best place for the Negro. Nowhere else is there for him a promise

of a happy ~~and~~ ~~future~~ ~~life~~ ~~there~~, if he can, and save both the South and himself to civilization. While, however, it may be the highest wisdom, in the circumstances, for the Freedmen to stay where they are, no encouragement should be given to any measure of coercion to keep them there. The American people are bound, if they are or can be bound to anything, to keep the North gate of the South open to black and white and to all the people. The time to assert a right, Webster says, is when it is called in question. If it is attempted by force or fraud to compel the colored people to stay there, they should by all means go, go quickly, and die, if need be, in the attempt. Thus far and to this extent any man may be an emigrationist. In no case must the Negro be 'bottled up' or 'caged up.' He must be left free, like every other American citizen, to choose his own local habitation and to go where he shall like. Though it may not be for his interest to leave the South, his right and power to leave it may be his best means of making it possible for him to stay there in peace."