

REMONSTRANCE

OF THE

GRAND JURY OF WASHINGTON COUNTY,

IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,

*In respect to Petitions to Congress for the Abolition of Slavery in the
District of Columbia.*

JANUARY 17, 1837.

Read, and ordered to be printed.

*To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in
Congress assembled :*

The undersigned, Jurors of the United States for the county of Washington, in the District of Columbia, with feelings of deep mortification and unfeigned regret, are constrained to make the present remonstrance to Congress on a subject not only affecting the pecuniary interests of a considerable number of the people of this District, but, what is of much greater importance, the peace and tranquillity of the whole federal community. They allude to the formation of certain "self-created societies" in some of the States of the Union, and the consequent presentation to Congress of petitions for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.

The undersigned beg leave respectfully to call the particular attention of Congress to the injustice and other great and growing evils likely to be produced by these proceedings, and to ask such interposition on the part of your honorable body as may arrest, and finally put a stop to their further progress.

Coming, as the Jurors do, from different parts of the county, it may reasonably be supposed that they possess a correct knowledge of the views and sentiments of the people thereof in regard to this all-absorbing and momentous question; and, in what follows, they feel confident that they speak the opinion of every man of practical sense, who is the true and genuine friend of the peace of society, of the federal constitution, the union of the States, and of rational liberty.

It is not to be inferred, because the people of this District have hitherto abstained from the expression of their opinion publicly in respect to the meddlesome conduct of these petitioners, that, therefore, their proceed-

ings had, at any time, received countenance from, much less the support and approbation of the people of this community. Their silence on the subject has been caused, principally, by the hope (though as it now appears a delusive hope) that time and due reflection on the part of those by whom they have been assailed so long and so unjustly, would correct the evil and unneighborly spirit which has dictated their iniquitous proceedings—alike destructive, as they are, of private rights and the public tranquillity.

It is believed that a similar instance cannot be found in the annals of the civilized world, where individuals, belonging to a separate and distinct community, having no common tie of interest and feeling with another, and living under different laws, have vouchsafed thus to obtrude themselves in intermeddling with the domestic affairs of the latter in any shape or form whatsoever, much less to throw fire-brands among them, destroying their peace and harmony, and even, in some cases, endangering their lives; and all this, too, under the garb of that holy religion which teaches "Peace on earth, and good will towards men!" Against the right thus claimed and exercised by certain individuals and "self-created societies" of the non-slaveholding States, a solemn PROTEST is hereby entered.

Congress, when legislating on the affairs of this District, is supposed to act, exclusively, as a *local legislature*. It thence results that these petitioners have just the same right (and could exercise it with equal, indeed more propriety) to petition that body to abolish or repeal our laws regulating descent, our inspection laws, or any others that might not happen to suit the particular tastes and fancies of these intermeddlers, as to petition for the passage of a law depriving any portion of the people here of their property. "*Whatsoever the LAW makes property, is property.*"

It is scarce necessary to state to your honorable body that, when the present constitution was made and adopted by the States, slavery existed in each of them to a greater or less extent. Such of them as passed laws for its gradual abolition, did so, from time to time, without any officious interference whatever in the matter on the part of their sister States, or any of the inhabitants thereof. Such an interference would not, for one moment, have been tolerated or permitted. Have the people of this District become so abject and degraded, so sunk in the eyes of the whole civilized world, so completely stripped of every attribute of freemen, of every vestige of the common right of American citizens, that they must tamely submit to this monstrous encroachment upon their rights by strangers, having no common ties of interest or feeling with them? Is there, indeed, no remedy for this, to them, *real grievance*? Is that officious meddling spirit which invades the sanctuary of their peaceful firesides, excites their slaves to insubordination, insurrection, and even murder; destroys the happy and peaceful, and even friendly relation which hitherto subsisted between masters and servants—to receive no rebuke, no check, no discountenance whatsoever, from that body which the constitution has (for weal or for woe, time will determine) given the "exclusive" power to legislate for them "*in all cases whatsoever.*"

One of the avowed objects of the federal constitution, as expressed

in the instrument itself, was "TO ENSURE DOMESTIC TRANQUILLITY." Does the presentation of these petitions, year after year, will all the exciting circumstances attending them, tend "to ensure domestic tranquillity?" No one will answer this question in the affirmative. The Grand Jury feel themselves bound and called upon on this occasion to pronounce some of them, indeed, most of them, libellous in the extreme; because "they tend to bring the laws into contempt, excite to violence, and endanger the public peace." Much more have they a tendency to do this than the miserable anonymous pamphlets which, not long since, were circulated in the District, and for doing which, an individual was put in jail, indicted, and prosecuted for a libel.

To put a final stop to these unauthorized and disorganizing proceedings; to allay and check that spirit which seeks thus insidiously to intermeddle with our private and domestic concerns; sowing the seeds of discord and insurrection where formerly prevailed harmony, concord, and obedience to the laws; and, above all, to prevent the master-spirits who are covertly moving this great machine, from making this District the *fulcrum* on which to plant their *lever*, by which this Government (the world's last hope) may be uprooted and overthrown, the undersigned do most respectfully request and beseech that, hereafter, no petitions may be received or entertained by Congress from these "self-created societies," or other inhabitants of the non-slaveholding States, for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia: and they, as in duty bound, will pray, &c.

NATHAN LUFBOROUGH, *Foreman*.
 B. K. MORSELL,
 WM. O'NEALE,
 LEWIS CARBÉRY,
 HENRY McPHERSON,
 WILLIAM MURDOCK,
 FRANCIS DODGE,
 J. FLORENTIUS COX,
 JOSHUA PEIRCE,
 W. SMOOT,
 JOHN W. MAURY,
 C. SMITH,
 PETER FORCE,
 JOHN COX,
 WM. A. DAVIS,
 THOMAS FENWICK,
 GEORGE W. YOUNG.