

# BIBLE VIEW OF SLAVERY.

NEW YORK, Dec. 20th, 1860.

To the Right Rev. JOHN H. HOPKINS, D.D., LL.D.,  
Bishop of Vermont:

DEAR SIR—The dangerous crisis to which our National Union has arrived is universally known to have arisen from the persevering agitation of the question of Slavery, and we hold it to be the duty of every patriotic man to aid as far as possible in giving a right direction to the public mind, before the evils which threaten our government are consummated. We therefore respectfully ask you to favor us with your opinions upon the Scriptural authority for Slavery and the constitutional position of the contending parties, in the belief that from your official position as a bishop, your age and your experience, the expression of your judgment would be useful and acceptable to very many in the community. We remain, Right Rev. Sir,

With great respect,  
Your obedient servants,

—THE CITIZENS OF  
DOWNHILL WEST

BURLINGTON, Vt., Jan. 30, 1861.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have received your friendly request that I would give you my opinion on the Scriptural authority for negro slavery in the Southern States, and also on the constitutional position of the contending parties, in the present crisis of the Union. For the confidence implied in this kind application I owe you my cordial acknowledgements, and I shall respond to it with the frankness which becomes my office in the defence of truth.

The word "slave" occurs but twice in our English Bible, but the term "servant," commonly employed by our translators, has the meaning of slave in the Hebrew and the Greek originals, as a general rule, where it stands alone. We read, however, in many places, of "hired servants," and of "bondmen and bondmaids." The first were not slaves, but the others were: the distinction being precisely the same which exists in our own day. Slavery, therefore, may be defined as *servitude for life, descending to the offspring*. And this kind of bondage appears to have existed as an established institution in all the ages of our world, by the universal evidence of history, whether sacred or profane.

This understood, I shall not oppose the prevalent idea that slavery is an evil in itself. A *physical* evil it may be, but this does not satisfy the judgment of its more zealous adversaries, since they contend that it is a *moral* evil—a positive *sin*, to hold a human being in bondage, under any circumstances whatever, unless as a punishment inflicted on crimes, for the safety of the community.

Here, therefore, lies the true aspect of the controversy. And it is evident that it can only be settled by the Bible. For every Christian is bound to assent to the rule of the inspired Apostle, that "sin

is the transgression of the law," namely, the law laid down in the Scriptures by the authority of God—the supreme "Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy." From his Word there can be no appeal. No rebellion can be so atrocious in his sight as that which dares to rise against his government. No blasphemy can be more unpardonable than that which imputes sin or moral evil to the decrees of the eternal Judge, who is alone perfect in wisdom in knowledge, and in love.

With entire correctness, therefore, your letter refers the question to the only infallible criterion—the Word of God. If it were a matter to be determined by my personal sympathies, tastes, or feelings, I should be as ready as any man to condemn the institution of slavery, for all my prejudice of education, habit and social position stand entirely opposed to it. But as a Christian, I am solemnly warned not to be "wise in my own conceit," and not to "lean to my own understanding." As a Christian I am compelled to submit my weak and erring intellect to the authority of the Almighty. For then only can I be safe in my conclusions, when I know that they are in accordance with the will of Him, before whose tribunal I must render a strict account in the last great day.

I proceed, accordingly, to the evidence of the sacred Scriptures, which, long ago, produced complete conviction in my own mind, and must, as I regard it, be equally conclusive to every candid and sincere inquirer. When the array of positive proof is exhibited, I shall consider the objections, and examine their validity with all the fairness in my power.

The first appearance of slavery in the Bible is the wonderful prediction of the patriarch Noah. "Cursed be Canaan, a *servant of servants* shall he be to his brethren. Blessed be the Lord God of Shem, and Canaan shall be his *servant*. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be his *servant*." (Gen. ix, 25)

The heartless irreverence which Ham, the father of Canaan, displayed towards his eminent parent, whose piety had just saved him from the deluge, presented the immediate occasion for this remarkable prophecy; but the actual fulfillment was reserved for his posterity, after they had lost the knowledge of God, and become utterly polluted by the abominations of heathen idolatry. The Almighty, foreseeing this total degradation of the race, ordained them to servitude or slavery under the descendants of Shem and Japheth, doubtless because He judged it to be their fittest condition. And all history proves how accurately the prediction has been accomplished, even to the present day.

We come next to the proof that slavery was sanctioned by the Deity in the case of Abraham, whose 318 bond servants, born in his own house, (Gen. xiv, 14.) are mentioned along with those who were *bought with his money*, as proper subjects for circumcision. (Gen. xvii, 12.) His wife Sarah had also an Egyptian slave, named Hagar, who fled from her severity. And "the angel of the Lord" commanded the fugitive to *return to her mistress and submit herself*. (Gen. xvi, 9.) If the philanthropists of our

prudence remain. And hence I cannot doubt that the examples of barbarity must be exceedingly few, and ought to be regarded, not as the general rule, but as the rare exceptions. On the whole, indeed, I see no reason to deny the statement of our Southern friends, that their slaves are the happiest laborers in the world. Their wants are all provided for by their master. Their families are sure of a home and maintenance for life. In sickness they are kindly nursed. In old age they are affectionately supported. They are relieved from all anxiety for the future. Their religious privileges are generously accorded to them. Their work is light. Their holidays are numerous. And hence the strong affection which they usually manifest towards their master, and the earnest longing which many, who were persuaded to become fugitives, have been known to express, that they might be able to return.

The third objection is, that slavery must be a *sin*, because it leads to *immorality*. But where is the evidence of this? I dispute not against the probability and even the certainty that there are instances of licentiousness enough among slaveholders, just as there are amongst those who vilify them. It would be a difficult, if not an impossible task, however, to prove that there is more immorality amongst the slaves themselves, than exists amongst the lower class of freemen. In Sabbath-breaking, profane cursing and swearing, gambling, drunkenness and quarrelling—in brutal abuse of wives and children, in rowdiness and obscenity, in the vilest excesses of shameless prostitution—to say nothing of organized bands of counterfeiters, thieves and burglars—I doubt whether there are not more offences against Christian morality committed in the single city of New York, than can be found amongst the slave population of all the fifteen states together. The fact would rather seem to be that the wholesome restraints of slavery, as a general rule, must be, to a great extent, an effectual check upon the worst kinds of immorality. And therefore this charge, so often brought against it, stands entirely unsupported either by positive proof or by rational probability.

The fourth objection is advanced by a multitude of excellent people, who are shocked at the institution of slavery, because it involves the principle of *property in man*. Yet I have never been able to understand what it is that so disgusts them. No slaveholder pretends that this property extends any farther than the *right to the labor of the slave*. It is obvious to the slightest reflection that slavery cannot bind the intellect or the soul. These, which properly constitute the *MAN*, are free, in their own nature, from all human restraint. But to have a *property in human labor*, under some form, is an essential element in all the work of civilized society. The toil of one is pledged for the service of another in every rank of life; and to the extent thus pledged, both parties have a *property* in each other. The parent especially has an established *property* in the labor of his child to the age of twenty-one, and has the further power of transferring this property to another, by articles of apprenticeship. But this, it may be said, ends when the child is of age. True; because the law presumes him to be then fitted for freedom. Suppose, however, that he belonged to an inferior race which the law did not presume to be fitted for freedom at any age, what good reason could be assigned against the continuance of the property? Such, under the rule of the Scriptures and the Constitution of the United States, is the case of the negro. God, in His wisdom and providence, caused the patriarch Noah to predict that he should be the *servant of serv-*

*ants* to the posterity of Japhet. And the same Almighty Ruler, who alone possesses the power, has wonderfully adapted the race to their condition. For every candid observer agrees that the negro is happier and better as a slave than as a free man, and no individual belonging to the Anglo-Saxon stock would acknowledge that the intellect of the negro is equal to his own.

There have been philosophers and physiologists who contended that the African race were not strictly entitled to be called *men* at all, but were a sort of intermediate link between the baboon and the human being. And this notion is still maintained by some, at the present day. For myself, however, I can only say that I repudiate the doctrine with my whole heart. The Scriptures show me that the negro, like all other races, descends from Noah, and I hold him to be a *MAN* AND A *BROTHER*. But though he be my *brother*, it does not follow that he is my *equal*. Equality cannot be found on earth between the brothers even in one little family. In the same house, one brother usually obtains a mastery over the rest, and sometimes rules them with a perfect despotism. In England, the elder brother inherits the estate, and the younger brothers take a lower rank; by the *slavery of circumstances*. The eldest son of the royal family is in due time the king, and his brothers forthwith become his subjects. Why should not the same principle obtain in the races of mankind, if the Almighty has so willed it? The Anglo-Saxon race is king, why should not the African race be subject, and subject in that way for which it is best adapted, and in which it may be more safe, more useful and more happy than in any other which has yet been opened to it, in the annals of the world?

I know that there may be exceptions, now and then, to this intellectual inferiority of the negro race, though I believe it would be very difficult to find one, unless the intermixture of superior blood has operated to change the mental constitution of the individual. For all such cases the master may provide by voluntary emancipation, and it is notorious that this emancipation has been cheerfully given in thousands upon thousands of instances, in the majority of which the gift of liberty has failed to benefit the negro and has, on the contrary, sunk him far lower, in his social position. But no reflecting man can believe that the great mass of the slaves, amounting to nearly four millions, are qualified for freedom. And therefore it is incomparably better for them to remain under the government of their masters, who are likely to provide for them so much more beneficially than they could provide for themselves.

The difference then, between the power of the Northern parent and the Southern slave holder, is reduced to this, viz., that the master has a *property in the labor of his slave for life*, instead of having it only to the age of twenty-one, because the law regards the negro as being always a child in understanding, requiring a superior mind to govern and direct him. But on the other hand, the slave has, just as really, a *property for life in his master's support and protection*, and this property is secured to him by the same law, in sickness and in health, in the helplessness of old age as well as in the days of youthful vigor, including, besides, a comfortable maintenance for his wife and family. Can any rational judgment devise a fairer equivalent?

The fifth objection, which often meets the Northern ear, proceeds from the over-weening value attached, in our age and country, to the name of liberty, since it is common to call it the dearest right of man, and to esteem its loss as the greatest possible calamity. Hence we frequently find persons

who imagine that the whole argument is triumphantly settled by the question, "How would you like to be a slave?"

In answer to this very puerile interrogatory, I should say that whether any condition in life is to be regarded as a loss or an advantage, depends entirely on circumstances. Suppose, for example, that the Mayor of New York should ask one of its merchant princes, "How would you like to be a policeman?" I doubt whether the question might not be taken for an insult, and some words of indignation would probably be uttered in reply. But suppose that the same question were addressed to an Irish laborer, with what feelings would he receive it? Assuredly with those of gratitude and pleasure. The reason of the difference is obvious, because the employment which would be a degradation to the one, offers promotion and dignity to the other. In like manner, Slavery, to an individual of the Anglo-Saxon race, which occupies so high a rank in human estimation, would be a debasement not to be thought of with patience for a moment. And yet, to the Guinea negro, sunk in heathen barbarism, it would be a happy change to place him in the hands of a Southern master. Even now, although the Slaves have no idea of the pagan abominations from which their forefathers were taken, it is notorious that they usually value their privileges as being far superior to the condition of the free negroes around them, and prefer the certainty of protection and support for life, to the hazards of the liberty on which the abolitionist advises them to venture. How much more would they prize their present lot, if they understood that, were it not for this very institution of slavery, they would be existing in the darkest idolatry and licentiousness among the savages of Africa, under the despotic King of Dahomey, destitute of every security for earthly comfort, and deprived of all religious hope for the world to come!

If men would reflect maturely on the subject, they would soon be convinced that liberty is a blessing to those, and only those, who are able to use it wisely. There are thousands in our land, free according to law, but so enslaved to vice and the misery consequent on vice, that it would be a mercy to place them, supposing it were possible, under the rule of some other will, stronger and better than their own. As it is, they are in bondage to Satan, notwithstanding their imaginary freedom; and they do his bidding, not merely in the work of the body, but in the far worse slavery of the soul. Strictly speaking, however, the freest man on earth has no *absolute liberty*, for this belongs alone to God, and is not given to any creature. And hence, it is the glory of the Christian to be the *bond servant* of the divine Redeemer who "bought us to Himself with his own precious blood." The *service of Christ*, as saith the Apostle, is "the only perfect freedom." All who refuse that service, are slaves of necessity to other masters; slaves to Mammon; slaves to ambition; slaves to lust; slaves to intemperance; slaves to a thousand forms of anxious care and perplexity; slaves at best, to pride and worldly decorum, and slaves to circumstances over which they have no control. And they are compelled to labor without ceasing under some or all of these despotic rulers, at the secret will of that spiritual task master, whose bondage does not end at death, but continues to eternity.

The sixth objection arises from the fact that slavery separates the husband from the wife and the parents from the children. Undoubtedly it sometimes does so, from necessity. Before we adopt this fact, however, as an argument against slavery, it is only fair to inquire whether the same separation do

not take place, perhaps quite as frequently, among those who call themselves free. The laboring man who has a large family is always obliged to separate from his children, because it is impossible to support them in his humble home. They are sent to service, therefore, one to this master and another to that, bound as apprentices, as the case may be, and thus the domestic relations are superseded by strangers for the most part, beyond recovery. So among the lower orders, the husbands are separated from their wives by the same necessity. How many, even of the better classes, have left their homes to seek their fortune in the gold regions! How many in Europe have abandoned their families for Australia, or the United States, or the Canadas! How many desert them from pure wickedness—a crime which can hardly happen under the Southern system! But above all, how constantly does this separation take place amongst our soldiers and sailors, so that neither war nor foreign commerce could be carried on at all without it! All these are borne by *freemen*, under the *slavery of circumstances*. Is it wise to declaim against this necessity in one form, when we are forced to submit to it in so many other kinds of the same infiction?

There is only one other argument which occurs to me, requiring notice, and that is based upon the erroneous notion, that the laws of God, under the Mosaic dispensation, allowed polygamy as well as slavery; and, therefore, it is inferred that the legislation of the Old Testament is of no authority upon the subject, but as the Gospel did away the first, so also it should do away the other.

The facts here are misunderstood, and the inference is without any real foundation. Let us look at the matter as it is explained by the Saviour himself. "The Pharisees came to him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them: Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female; and said, for this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together let no man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery, and whoso marieth her that is put away, doth commit adultery." (Mat. xix. 3-9.)

Now, here our Lord plainly lays down the original law of marriage, referring expressly to Adam and Eve, one man and one woman, declared to be *one flesh*, and adding the command, *What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder*. But it is evident that polygamy must, of necessity, interfere with this divine union. The *twain* can no longer be *one flesh*, when another wife is brought between them, because the new wife must deprive the former one of her exclusive rights and privileges, and the husband destroys the very unity which God designed in joining them together. The doctrine of our Saviour, therefore, restores the law of marriage to its original sanctity, and the apostles, accordingly, always speak of the wife in the singular number, in no instance appearing to contemplate the possibility of the Christian having more wives than one, while, in the case of a bishop, St. Paul specifies it as an essential con-

dition, that he shall be "the husband of one wife."  
(1 Tim. iii, 2.)

But how had the chosen people been allowed for so many centuries to practice polygamy, and divorce their wives for the slightest cause? Our Lord explains it by saying that *Moses* suffered them to put away their wives "because of the hardness of their hearts." The special questions addressed to Him by the Pharisees, did not, indeed, refer to polygamy, but only to the liberty of divorce, for at that time it should seem that the practice of polygamy had well nigh ceased in *Judea*, and it is certainly not countenanced by the Jewish laws at this day. The principle, however, is precisely the same in the two cases. Dissatisfaction with the present wife and desire for another, were the cause of action in both; and when the husband did not wish to be burdened by the murmurs or the support of his old companion, he would naturally prefer to send her away, in order to make room for her successor. We see, then, how readily this facility of divorce became the mode in which the Jews of that day sought for the gratification of their capricious attachments, instead of the more expensive and troublesome system of polygamy. And hence our Lord applied the remedy, where it was specially required, by forbidding divorces unless for the weightiest cause, such as adultery. Yet this was no change in the divine arrangement, which had been the same from the beginning. He expressly declares, on the contrary, that the latitude assumed by the Israelites was an *indulgence granted by Moses*, on account of "the hardness of their hearts." And this is a very different thing from an authoritative decree of the Almighty.

It is surely therefore manifest, from His language of the Saviour, that God had never given any direct sanction to polygamy. Doubtless, as we must infer from many parts of the Old Testament, it had become common among the Israelites, who, supposing themselves justified by the case of Jacob, had probably adopted it in so many instances that *Moses* did not think it safe or prudent to put it down, lest worse evils might follow, unless he was constrained to do so by the positive command of the Almighty. All that can be truly stated, therefore, is, that no such positive command was given, and the Deity left the human lawgiver to use his own discretion in the matter.

Such is the aspect of this question, according to the statement of our Lord, which must be conclusive to every Christian. And hence we may perceive, at once, that the case is in no respect parallel to that of slavery. For here the Almighty caused His favored servant Noah to predict that the posterity of Ham should be the servants of servants, under the descendants of Shem and Japhet. He recognized the bondman and the bondmaid in the Ten Commandments. He laid down the positive law to Israel that they should buy the children of the heathen that were round about them, and of the strangers who dwell in their land, to serve them and their families forever. The Saviour, when He appeared, made no allusion to the subject, but plainly declared that He had not come to destroy the law. The first church of believers in Jerusalem were all "zealous" for the law. And St. Paul preached obedience to the slaves among the Gentile churches, and sent a converted slave back to his Christian master.

Where, then, is the resemblance between these cases? In the matter of divorce and polygamy, the Deity is silent, leaving them to the discretion of *Moses*, until the Messiah should come. But in regard to the slavery of Ham's posterity, He issues

His commands distinctly. And the Saviour disclaims the intention to repeal the laws of His heavenly Father, while He asserts the original design of marriage, and His inspired apostle gives express sanction to slavery, and speaks of the one husband and the one wife, in direct accordance with the word of His divine Master. Here, therefore, it is plain that the cases are altogether unlike, and present a contrast, rather than a comparison.

We know that the doctrine of the primitive church was in harmony with this, for polygamy was never permitted, nor divorces for trifling causes, while slavery was allowed, as being perfectly lawful, so long as the slave was treated with justice and kindness. The ancient canons sometimes advert to the mode in which slaves might be corrected. Bishops and clergy held slaves. In later times, bondmen and bondmaids were in the service of convents and monasteries. And no scruple was entertained upon the subject until the close of the last century, when the new light burst forth which now dazzles the eyes of so many worthy people, and blinds them not only to the plain statements of Scriptures, but to the interests of national unity and peace.

Thus, then, I have examined the various topics embraced in your first inquiry, and the conclusion which I have been compelled to adopt must be sufficiently manifest. The slavery of the negro race, as maintained in the Southern States, appears to me fully authorized both in the Old and the New Testament, which, as the written Word of God afford the only infallible standard of moral rights and obligations. That very slavery, in my humble judgment, has raised the negro incomparably higher in the scale of humanity, and seems in fact, to be the only instrumentality through which the heathen posterity of Canaan have been raised at all. Out of that slavery has arisen the interesting colony of Liberia, planted by slaveholders, to be a place of refuge for their emancipated bondmen, and destined, as I hope, to be a rich benefit, in its future growth and influence, to Africa and to the world. I do not forget, and I trust that I do not undervalue, the missionary work of England and our own land, in that benighted continent. But I believe that the number of negroes Christianized and civilized at the South, through the system of slavery, exceeds the product of those missionary labors, in a proportion of thousands to one. And thus the wisdom and goodness of God are vindicated in the sanction which His word has given, and the sentence originally pronounced on Canaan as a curse, has been converted into a blessing.

It only remains that I should answer your other question, on the present crisis which agitates our country.

The political right of the South to the peaceful enjoyment of their domestic institutions, is fully recognized by the Constitution, the laws and the judicial decisions of the United States. And as every citizen is bound by his allegiance to submit to these, it results that no man can be justified in opposing them. But unhappily they have been opposed for a series of years throughout the Northern States, with systematic, zealous and increasing hostility, arising from the modern and popular doctrine that Slavery is a monstrous sin against the equality of man, and the Spirit of the Gospel. This hostility has been exhibited in every conceivable shape. By legislative action, designed to obstruct the execution of the laws of Congress for the recovery of the fugitive slave. By mobs, resolved to rescue him, and threatening the master and even the officers of justice with personal violence. By the irritating and insulting language

of the public journals; by the bitter oratory of legislative and Congressional declamation; by the inflammatory harangues of pulpit eloquence; by the successful and admired productions of popular novelists; by anti-slavery societies, tracts and traveling lectures; by organized plans to send the emissaries of abolitionism amongst the slaves, in order to excite them to insurrection; by the formation of a powerful party with the avowed determination that slavery shall not be permitted to expand into the territories, and that there shall be no new slave State in the Union; by the actual invasion of Virginia, when a brave but fanatical man, supported by the money and the sympathy of others, attempted to arm the slaves and take possession of the government; by the large and emphatic approbation of his motives and his courage on the part of the Northern people, who consider him a martyr in the sacred cause of freedom, and finally by the triumph in the late Presidential election of the new party, whose whole political principles resolved themselves into the single point of steadfast warfare, through all legal and Constitutional means, upon the domestic institutions, and by necessary consequence, upon the safety and prosperity of the Southern States.

Convinced, as well as they might be, that they could not long resist this advancing deluge of hostility, and knowing that its probable results would be a general insurrection of their slaves, a war of extermination to preserve their own lives, and the final ruin of their prospects, if they remained subject to it a few years longer, many of the Slave States have resolved to secede from the Union, in despair of obtaining any effectual remedy or guarantee from their uncompromising adversaries. They have desired to secede peaceably, if permitted. If not, they stand prepared to defend what they believe to be the sacred right of self-preservation. For this, they are branded as *traitors to the Constitution*. And thus we are brought to the verge of a civil war, the consequences of which, if God, in His mercy, do not avert it, must be a complication of miseries, on which no thoughtful mind can dwell, without horror and dismay.

Here, however, two questions are presented. First it may be asked whether the Southern States have a right to secede for any cause? Secondly, if they have the right, is the cause sufficient to justify its exercise?

In my humble judgment, they have a right to secede, although I grant that the point being entirely new, is not without considerable difficulty. I fear that the ingenious arguers against secession have hardly given sufficient attention to this fact, and have therefore very naturally fallen into the mistake of applying the principles of ordinary government to a Constitution which stands alone in the history of the world.

For no one denies that our system is an experiment, without precedent or parallel. Never before, in the annals of mankind, was the attempt made to unite thirteen Sovereign States under a Constitution which should consolidate them into one, while they still continued to be Sovereign States with respect to every right that was not yielded for the sake of union. Our system, therefore, being *sui generis*, and altogether peculiar, it results of necessity that the old theories of government and national law cannot be a safe guide in the determination of a question which never could have arisen in any other age or country. And I do not wonder that men of undoubted wisdom and integrity should differ, as they do, in their views of policy.

Thus it is said, that none of these United States can secede *under the Constitution*, not only because the

Constitution acknowledges no such right, but because the very act of secession is a withdrawal from the Union which the Constitution was designed to form. But on the other hand, the *Constitution does not deny the right, nor forbid the act of secession*. The subject is not expressly adverted to at all. And we see that by the 10th Article of the amendment "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." If then every Sovereign State has an *inherent right* to separate itself from all others by virtue of its Sovereignty, and if that right was carefully reserved by the very terms of this article, is it an act of *treason* to exercise it?

It is said again, however, that the act of secession must be treasonable, because it destroys the perpetual union which the Constitution contemplated, and thus strikes at the very foundation of the Government.

This is plausible, but not quite satisfactory. The preamble to the Constitution does not speak of *perpetual Union*, but of a "*more perfect Union*," to establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." And the very ground which the Southern States assumes is that the whole of this design has been frustrated with respect to them—that *not the South*, but the *North*, has violated justice, destroyed domestic tranquillity, opposed the general welfare, and thus effectually broken the bonds of the Constitution, by their determined and unceasing assaults upon the domestic institutions those who were intended to be their equals and their brethren, making it virtually impracticable to live in peace together. The power of the free States which have thus carried on their assaults upon Slavery has at length obtained the mastery in the administration of the government, and therefore the Southern States have resorted to their *reserved right* by seceding, as the only peaceable remedy remaining, since warnings, expostulations and arguments have been employed for many years, and all in vain.

This act of peaceable secession, they utterly deny to be treasonable, because the Constitution, in Article iii, § 3, lays down the rule that "Treason against the United States shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort." But peaceable secession is not "levying war," nor are the seceding States "enemies." They claim rather to be aggrieved and alienated *friends*, seeking independence, only because Union had become impossible, and ready to adjust all matters of controversy with respect to property by fair and amicable negotiation, if they are not forced into a war by the effort to coerce them.

The easiest mode in my opinion, to attain a correct notion of this matter, is to go back to the time when the Constitution was formed, and imagine how its framers would have acted, provided they could have foreseen the present dangers of our noble Union.

Twelve States out of thirteen were *slave States* at that day, and no man had dreamed that slavery was a *sin*, or that a systematic warfare against slavery could ever be maintained, as a political duty. Let us suppose then that some prophet had told the Convention of the strife to come—that in less than eighty years, the abolition sentiment should prevail, until the Southern States were in the minority—that slavery should be regarded by the rest as the monstrous iniquity against which every true patriot must stand in uncompromising opposition—

that the territories should be compelled to exclude it, as a polluting and immoral abomination—that the slave States should be made the constant butt for general reproach, dislike and abuse, by preachers, politicians and editors, with the popular voice of the free States to support them—that a majority of those States should pass laws to prevent the surrender of their fugitive slaves, and that every man, woman, and child, should be taught to consider it a Christian duty, to encourage them to escape, and resist the rights of the master—and finally, that when the Southern States found it impossible to endure these insults and injuries any longer, and desired peaceably to depart from the Union and manage their institutions in their own way, the majority should deny them the right, brand them as traitors, and threaten them with fire and sword, if they would not consent to lie, bound and fettered, at the feet of those, whose affections had been turned into gall, and their friendship into enmity.

Now if the members of that great Convention could have had the future thus presented to them, and if they could have believed that their posterity should actually witness the accomplishment of the whole dark prediction, *would the Union have been formed at all?* Or, if formed, would not the Constitution have contained the most express guaranty of every right which the Southern States now demand, for the protection of their domestic institutions, their share in the common territory, their claims upon the comity of all the other States, and their sovereign prerogative of secession, in the event of any invasion of their privileges? It seems to me that every mind of common sense and candor can determine the question.

If my humble voice could be heard, therefore, I would say, without hesitation, Let us act in the spirit which animated the patriots and the heroes of that day. Let us give to the South all that would then have been given, if our present difficulties could have been anticipated. Let us deal with those seceding brethren in the temper of kindness and just conciliation, and utterly repudiate the wild and cruel resort to a civil war, which, in no possible event, could bring victory or advantage to either party, but on the contrary, must produce a perfect uprooting of hatred and passion, an utter destruction of business and property, and an awful deluge of blood. Let the dispute about the right to secede, and the question of treason be submitted to the Supreme Court, whose office it is to construe the Constitution. Let the controversy about the forts be settled by the arbitrament of some foreign friendly power, if it should prove impracticable to heal all divisions by a fair and honest compromise. And for the future, let the abolitionists of the North be content with the example of Christ, and the precepts of His inspired apostle, convinced that the Providence of God will take care of the African race much better than they can, and that, when the proper time shall have arrived, the South will suggest of her own accord, the most practicable and judicious plans for their social elevation.

Such are my sentiments, and I state them frankly and fully, as a sincere though unworthy servant of the Prince of Peace, and a faithful friend and advocate of the Union. It is that Union which has, under the Divine favor, raised us to a position of commanding influence and honor amongst the nations of the earth. It is the flag of the Union which has led our army and navy to victory. The heroes and the patriots of the Revolution owe their lofty pre-eminence to the grand result which formed the Union, and no confederation of independent States could

have inscribed their names on the page of history with half the fame which that glorious Union has conferred upon their memory. All this is felt and acknowledged throughout the land. It enters into the training of all our schools. Every child, East and West, North and South, is inoculated from his birth with the same love and admiration for the Union. And even if our Southern brethren should be allowed to secede in peace, and should succeed in forming another Republic with prosperity and honor, it seems to my mind impossible that they should resign that older and nobler Union without a deep yearning of the heart, which would fill them with regret and sorrow.

I have now gone over the whole ground covered by your kind application, and would only here repeat that on the question of Slavery, which lies at the root of all our present difficulties, I have obeyed the rule of conscience and of duty, in opposition to my habits, my prejudices and my sympathies all of which would tend strongly to the other side. I need hardly say that I am no politician. More than forty years have elapsed since I ceased even to attend the polls. But as a Christian, I am bound to accept the doctrine of the Apostles for my guide. And as a citizen, I am bound to sustain the Constitution of the United States, and defend those principles of law and order, and friendly comity, which every State should faithfully regard in its relations to the rest. Nor is this the first time that I have expressed my opinions. In a lecture at Buffalo, published in 1850, and again in a volume entitled "The American Citizen," printed by Pudney & Russell, in 1857, I set forth the same views on the subject of Slavery; adding, however, a plan for its gradual Abolition, whenever the South should consent, and the whole strength of the government could aid in its accomplishment. Sooner or later, I believe that some measure of that character must be adopted. But it belongs to the Slave States themselves to take the lead in such a movement. And meanwhile, their legal rights and their natural feelings must be respected, if we would hope for unity and peace.

In conclusion, I would only say, that I am perfectly aware how distasteful my sentiments must be, on this very serious question, to the great majority of my respected fellow-citizens, in the region where divine Providence has cast my lot. It would assuredly be far more agreeable if I could conscientiously conform to the opinions of my friends, to whose ability, sincerity, and zeal I am ready to give all just commendation. But it would be mere moral cowardice in me to suppress what I believe to be the truth, for the sake of popularity. It cannot be long before I shall stand at the tribunal of that Almighty and unerring Judge, who has given us the inspired Scriptures to be our supreme directory in every moral and religious duty. My grey hairs admonish me that I may soon be called to give an account of my stewardship. And I have no fear of the sentence which He will pronounce upon an honest though humble effort to sustain the authority of His Word, in just alliance with the Constitution, the peace, and the public welfare of my country.

With the fervent prayer that the Spirit of Wisdom, unity, and fraternal kindness may guide our National Congress, the Legislatures of the several States and the sovereign will of our whole people, to a happy accommodation of existing difficulty,

I remain, with great regard,

Your faithful servant in Christ,

JOHN H. HOPKINS,

Bishop of the Diocese of Vermont.