

DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS

OF THE

AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

Adopted at the Formation of said Society, in Philadelphia,
on the 4th day of December, 1833.

DECLARATION.

The Convention assembled in the City of Philadelphia, to organize a National Anti-Slavery Society, promptly seize the opportunity to promulgate the following DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS, as cherished by them in relation to the enslavement of one-sixth portion of the American people.

More than fifty-seven years have elapsed since a band of patriots convened in this place, to devise measures for the deliverance of this country from a foreign yoke. The cornerstone upon which they founded the TEMPLE OF FREEDOM was broadly this—"that all men are created equal; and they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, LIBERTY, and the pursuit of happiness." At the sound of their trumpet-call, three millions of people rose up as from the sleep of death, and rushed to the strife of blood; deeming it more glorious to die instantly as freemen, than desirable to live one hour as slaves. They were few in number—poor in resources; but the honest conviction that TRUTH, JUSTICE, and RIGHT were on their side, made them invincible.

We have met together for the achievement of an enterprise, without which that of our fathers is incomplete; and which, for its magnitude, solemnity, and probable results upon the destiny of the world, as far transcends theirs as moral truth does physical force.

In purity of motive, in earnestness of zeal, in decision of purpose, in intrepidity of action, in steadfastness of faith, in sincerity of spirit, we would not be inferior to them.

Their principles led them to wage war against their oppressors, and to spill human blood like water in order to be free. *Ours* forbid the doing of evil that good may come, and lead us to reject, and to entreat the oppressed to reject, the use of all carnal weapons for deliverance from bondage; relying solely upon those which are spiritual, and mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

Their measures were physical resistance—the marshalling in arms—the hostile array—the mortal encounter. *Ours* shall be such only as the opposition of moral purity to moral corruption—the destruction of error by the potency of truth—the overthrow of prejudice by the power of love—and the abolition of slavery by the spirit of repentance.

Their grievances, great as they were, were trifling in comparison with the wrongs and sufferings of those for whom we plead. Our fathers were never slaves—never bought and sold like cattle—never shut out from the light of knowledge and religion—never subjected to the lash of brutal task-masters.

But those for whose emancipation we are striving—constituting, at the present time, at least one-sixth part of our countrymen—are recognized by the law, and treated by their fellow-beings, as marketable commodities, as goods and chattels, as brute beasts; are plundered daily of the fruits of their toil without redress; really enjoying no constitutional nor legal protection from licentious and murderous outrages upon their persons, are ruthlessly torn asunder—the tender babe from the arms of its frantic mother—the heart-broken wife from her weeping husband—at the caprice or pleasure of irresponsible tyrants. For the crime of having a dark complexion, they suffer the pangs of hunger, the infliction of stripes, and the ignominy of brutal servitude. They are kept in heathenish darkness by laws expressly enacted to make their instruction a criminal offence.

These are the prominent circumstances in the condition of more than two millions of our people, the proof of which may be found in thousands of indisputable facts, and in the laws of the slaveholding States.

Hence we maintain,—that in view of the civil and religious privileges of this nation, the guilt of its oppression is unequalled by any other on the face of the earth; and, therefore,

That it is bound to repent instantly, to undo the heavy burden, to break every yoke, and to let the oppressed go free.

We further maintain,—that no man has a right to enslave or imbrute his brother—to hold or acknowledge him, for one moment, as a piece of merchandize—to keep back his hire by fraud—or to brutalize his mind by denying him the means of intellectual, social, and moral improvement.

The right to enjoy liberty is inalienable. To invade it is to usurp the prerogative of Jehovah. Every man has a right to his own body—the products of his own labor—to the protection of law, and to the common advantages of society. It is piracy to buy or steal a native African, and subject him to servitude. Surely the sin is as great to enslave an AMERICAN as an AFRICAN.

Therefore we believe and affirm—That there is no difference *in principle*, between the African slave-trade and American Slavery.

That every American citizen who retains a human being in involuntary bondage as his property, is, according to Scripture (Ex. xxi. 16), a MAN STEALER :

That the slaves ought instantly to be set free, and brought under the protection of law :

That if they lived from the time of Pharaoh down to the present period, and had been entailed through successive generations, their right to be free could never have been alienated, but their claims would have constantly risen in solemnity.

That all those laws which are now in force, admitting the right of slavery, are therefore before God utterly null and void; being an audacious usurpation of the Divine prerogative, a daring infringement on the law of nature, a base overthrow of the very foundations of the social compact, a complete extinction of all the relations, endearments, and obligations of mankind, and a presumptuous transgression of all the holy commandments—and that therefore they ought instantly to be abrogated.

We further believe and affirm—That all persons of color who possess the qualifications which are demanded of others, ought to be admitted forthwith to the enjoyment of the same privileges, and the exercise of the same prerogatives, as others; and that the paths of preferment, of wealth, and of intelligence, should be opened as widely to them as to persons of a white complexion.

We maintain that no compensation should be given to the planters emancipating the slaves;

Because it would be a surrender of the great fundamental principle that man cannot hold property in man;

Because SLAVERY IS A CRIME, AND THEREFORE IS NOT AN ARTICLE TO BE SOLD :

Because the holders of slaves are not the just proprietors of what they claim; freeing the slaves is not depriving them of property, but restoring it to its rightful owners; it is not wronging the master, but righting the slave—restoring him to himself;

Because immediate and general emancipation would only destroy nominal, not real property; it would not amputate a limb or break a bone of the slaves, but by infusing motives into their breasts, would make them doubly valuable to the masters as free labourers; and

Because, if compensation is to be given at all, it should be given to the outraged and guiltless slaves, and not to those who have plundered and abused them.

We regard as delusive, cruel, and dangerous, any scheme of expatriation, which pretends to aid, either directly or indirectly, in the emancipation of the slaves, or to be a substitute for the immediate and total abolition of Slavery.

We fully and unanimously recognize the sovereignty of each State, to legislate exclusively on the subject of the Slavery which is tolerated within its limits; we concede that Congress, *under the present national compact*, has no right to interfere with any of the slave States, in relation to this momentous subject :

But we maintain that Congress has a right, and is solemnly bound, to suppress the domestic slave-trade between the several States, and to abolish Slavery in those portions of our territory which the Constitution has placed under its exclusive jurisdiction.

We also maintain that there are, at the present time, the highest obligations resting upon the people of the free States, to remove Slavery by moral and political action, as prescribed in the Constitution of the United States. They are now living under a pledge of their tremendous physical force, to fasten the galling fetters of tyranny upon the limbs of millions in the Southern States; they are liable to be called at any moment to suppress a general insurrection of the slaves; they authorize the slave owner to vote on three-fifths of his slaves as property, and thus enable him to perpetuate his oppression; they support a standing army at the South for its protection; and they seize the slave who has escaped into their territories, and send him back to be tortured by an enraged master or a brutal driver. This relation to Slavery is criminal and full of danger: IT MUST BE BROKEN UP.

These are our views and principles—these our designs and measures. With entire confidence in the overruling justice of God, we plant ourselves upon the Declaration of our Independence and the truths of divine revelation as upon the Everlasting Rock.

We shall organize Anti-Slavery Societies, if possible, in every city, town, and village, in our land.

We shall send forth agents to lift up the voice of remonstrance, of warning, of entreaty and rebuke.

We shall circulate, unsparingly and extensively, anti-slavery tracts and periodicals.

We shall enlist the pulpit and the press in the cause of the suffering and the dumb.

We shall aim at a purification of the churches from all participation in the guilt of Slavery.

We shall encourage the labor of freemen rather than that of slaves, by giving a preference to their productions: and

We shall spare no exertions nor means to bring the whole nation to speedy repentance.

Our trust for victory is solely in God. We may be personally defeated, but our principles never. TRUTH, JUSTICE, REASON, HUMANITY, must and will gloriously triumph. Already a host is coming up to the help of the Lord against the mighty, and the prospect before us is full of encouragement.

Submitting this DECLARATION to the candid examination of the people of this country, and of the friends of liberty throughout the world, we hereby affix our signatures to it; pledging ourselves that, under the guidance and by the help of Almighty God, we will do all that in us lies, consistently with this Declaration of our principles, to overthrow the most execrable system of Slavery that has ever been witnessed upon earth—to deliver our land from its deadliest curse—to wipe out the foulest stain which rests upon our national escutcheon—and to secure to the colored population of the United States all the rights and privileges which belong to them as men, and as Americans—come what may to our persons, our interests, or our reputation—whether we live to witness the triumph of LIBERTY, JUSTICE, and HUMANITY, or perish untimely as martyrs in this great, benevolent, and holy cause.

Done at Philadelphia, the 6th day of December, A. D. 1833.

P R E A M B L E

TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

Whereas, the Most High God "hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth," and hath commanded them to love their neighbors as themselves; and whereas, our national existence is based upon this principle, as recognized in the Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;" and whereas, after the lapse of nearly sixty years, since the faith and honor of the American people were pledged to this avowal, before Almighty God, and the world, nearly one-sixth part of the nation are held in bondage by their fellow-citizens; and whereas, Slavery is contrary to the principles of natural justice, of our republican form of Government, and of the Christian Religion, and is destructive to the prosperity of the country, while it is endangering the peace, union, and liberty of the States; and whereas, we believe it the duty and interest of the masters, immediately to emancipate their slaves, and that no scheme of expatriation, either voluntary or by compulsion, can remove this great and increasing evil: and whereas, we believe that it is practicable, by appeals to the consciences, hearts, and interests of the people, to awaken a public sentiment throughout the nation, that will be opposed to the continuance of Slavery in any part of the Republic, and by effecting the speedy abolition of Slavery, prevent a general convulsion; and whereas, we believe we owe it to the oppressed, to our fellow-citizens who hold slaves, to our whole country, to posterity, and to God, to do all that is lawfully in our power to bring about the extinction of Slavery, we do hereby agree, with a prayerful reliance on the Divine aid, to form ourselves into a society, to be governed by the following Constitution.

The Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society we omit, to make room for a brief extract from the Address adopted by the Society in 1844. The position then assumed, the Members of the Society hold to be strictly in accordance with the Declaration of Sentiments and the Constitution of 1833. We can give only the commencement of the Address—which is long. From this brief statement of the principles of the American Anti-Slavery Society, the intelligent reader will understand our aims and our measures. . . .

A D D R E S S.

At the Tenth Anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, held in the city of New-York, May 7th, 1844,—after grave deliberation, and a long and earnest discussion,—it was decided, by a vote of nearly three to one of the members present, that fidelity to the cause of human freedom, hatred of oppression, sympathy for those who are held in chains and slavery in this republic, and allegiance to God, require that the existing national compact should be instantly dissolved; that secession from the government is a religious and political duty; that

the motto inscribed on the banner of Freedom should be, NO UNION WITH SLAVE-HOLDERS; that it is impracticable for tyrants and the enemies of tyranny to coalesce and legislate together for the preservation of human rights, or the promotion of the interests of Liberty; and that revolutionary ground should be occupied by all those who abhor the thought of doing evil that good may come, and who do not mean to compromise the principles of Justice and Humanity.

A decision involving such momentous consequences, so well calculated to startle the public mind, so hostile to the established order of things, demands of us, as the official representatives of the American Anti-Slavery Society, a statement of the reasons which led to it. This is due not only to the Society, but also to the country and the world.

It is declared by the American people to be a self-evident truth, "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed BY THEIR CREATOR with certain inalienable rights; that among these are *life*, LIBERTY, and the pursuit of happiness." It is further maintained by them, that "all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed;" that "whenever any form of government becomes destructive of human rights, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness." These doctrines the patriots of 1776 sealed with their blood. They would not brook even the menace of oppression. They held that there should be no delay in resisting, at whatever cost or peril, the first encroachments of power on their liberties. Appealing to the great Ruler of the universe for the rectitude of their course, they pledged to each other "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor," to conquer or perish in their struggle to be free.

For the example which they set to all people subjected to a despotic sway, and the sacrifices which they made, their descendants cherish their memories with gratitude, reverence their virtues, honor their deeds, and glory in their triumphs.

It is not necessary, therefore, for us to prove that a state of Slavery is incompatible with the dictates of reason and humanity: or that it is lawful to throw off a government which is at war with the sacred rights of mankind.

We regard this as indeed a solemn crisis, which requires of every man sobriety of thought prophetic forecast, independent judgment, invincible determination, and a sound heart. A revolutionary step is one that should not be taken hastily, nor followed under the influence of impulsive imitation. To know what spirit they are of—whether they have counted the cost of the warfare—what are the principles they advocate—and how they are to achieve their object—is the first duty of revolutionists.

But, while circumspection and prudence are excellent qualities in every great emergency, they become the allies of tyranny whenever they restrain prompt, bold and decisive action against it.

We charge upon the present national compact, that it was formed at the expense of human liberty, by a profligate surrender of principle, and to this hour is cemented with human blood.

We charge upon the American Constitution, that it contains provisions, and enjoins duties, which make it unlawful for freemen to take the oath of allegiance to it, because they are expressly designed to favor a slaveholding oligarchy, and, consequently, to make one portion of the people a prey to another.

We charge upon the existing national government, that it is an insupportable despotism, wielded by a power which is superior to all legal and constitutional restraints—equally indisposed and unable to protect the lives or liberties of the people—the prop and safeguard of American Slavery.

ANTI-SLAVERY NEWSPAPERS.

THE ANTI-SLAVERY BUGLE is published weekly, at Salem, O., at \$1 50 per annum.

THE PENNSYLVANIA FREEMAN is published weekly, at the office of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, No. 31 North Fifth street, Philadelphia, at \$1 per annum.

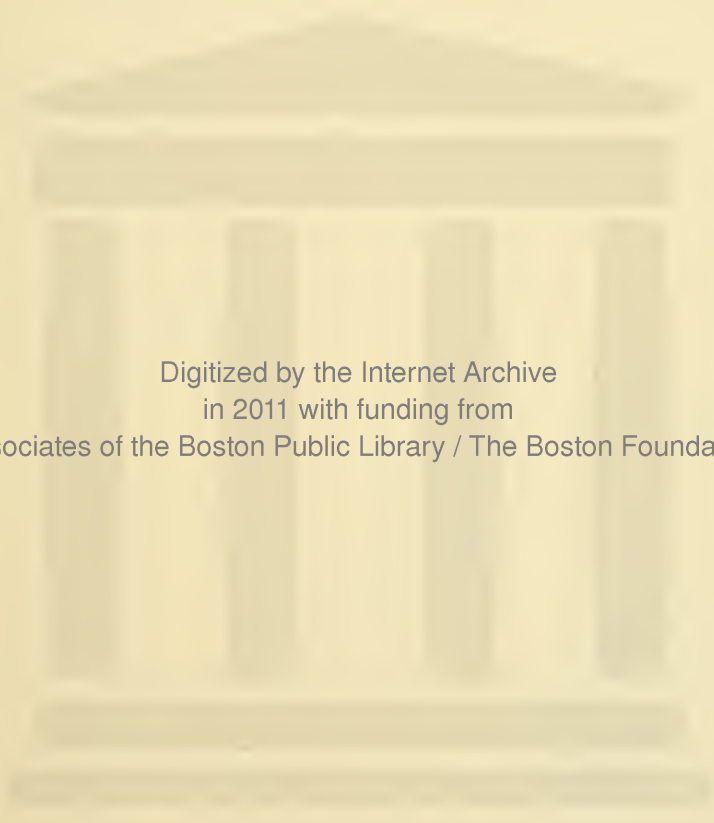
THE LIBERATOR is published weekly, at the office of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, No. 21 Cornhill, Boston, at \$2 per annum.

THE NATIONAL ANTI-SLAVERY STANDARD is published weekly, at the office of the American Anti-Slavery Society, No. 142 Nassau street, New York, at \$1 per annum.

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