

SPEECH

OF

HON. J. R. GIDDINGS, OF OHIO,

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, DEC. 18, 1855.

The election of Speaker being the business before the House—

Mr. GIDDINGS said:

FELLOW-MEMBERS: I address you in this manner for the reason that we have no officer to whom I can direct my remarks. As yet we are unorganized; without rules, without officers. While in this condition the people are looking to us with intense interest, expecting us to proceed, as soon as possible, to the discharge of the important trusts confided to our discretion and patriotism. Still I am not opposed to those explanations to which we have listened for some days past. Indeed, it is right and proper that gentlemen should place their views before the country in order that the people, who are our constituents, our masters, may understand our positions. I am gratified at hearing gentlemen speak out so plainly. It is an important era with our nation. The eyes of the country are upon each of us, and the popular approval or condemnation awaits every member.

Gentlemen will pardon me when I say there is one practice which, in my opinion, leads to unnecessary misunderstanding of each other, and the consequent delay of business. With all delicacy I suggest, that instead of using *terms and phrases* which are so indefinite, on which different individuals place different constructions, which serve rather to confuse than to enlighten our understandings, we should speak of *principles*. In justice to ourselves and to each other, ought we not to refer to the doctrines which gentlemen hold, rather than call them "Whigs," "Democrats," "Know Nothings," and "Free-Soilers?" When a gentleman speaks of a member as a Free-Soiler, what does he mean by it? No man can answer for another; or if different men answer the question, each will give a different definition of the term. So of all the parties. If you speak of a "Democrat," one member will understand you as referring to a gentleman who voted for Mr. Pierce; another will believe you refer to a gentleman holding the opinions of Jefferson; and another will understand you as speak-

ing of a supporter of the Nebraska bill; and another will understand you to mean a supporter of slavery generally. I therefore submit whether we ought not to define these terms before we use them, so that we may each understand the speaker when he refers to the different parties, or to different members. If we but adopt this rule, we shall find ourselves agreeing upon many points on which we now appear to differ. Gentlemen, when I speak of the "Democratic party," I refer to those who stand by the Nebraska bill, and denounce the "American organization" without a hearing: when I speak of Republicans, I speak of those who take distinct and unmistakable issue with the Democrats on these points, holding that all men and all parties shall be respectfully heard; and when I refer to "Know Nothings," I refer to those who seek to enlarge the time required for naturalizing foreigners under our laws, and who are now associated by secret obligations.

There is one other point to which I would respectfully ask the attention of gentlemen. Yesterday we listened to various remarks from members having distinctive reference to *sectional lines*, speaking of *North and South*, of *northern parties and southern parties*, *northern men and southern men*. This language ought not to be used here. There are no such parties. I never use such phrases. I base my whole moral, political, and religious hopes and expectations upon distinct, unyielding, enduring *principles*. I apprehend that others do the same. It is well known that the southern States adhere to slavery, while those of the North are generally in favor of liberty. There is, however, nothing sectional in these *principles or sentiments*. Liberty is the same wherever it is enjoyed. Its elements pervade the human race: they are broad as creation; comprehensive as mankind. Slavery is also the same, whether found in Africa, Brazil, or the United States. In this Union it has found an actual, permanent existence only in one section of the country. At the commencement of our Government, its founders repudiated the doctrines of slavery; proclaimed

liberty to our territories, leaving slavery but a limited existence in the States which constituted the Union. Since that period it has become more limited, and now actually exists in but one portion of the Confederacy. It is most emphatically a "sectional" institution, embracing sectional interests, and forcing sectional issues upon the country.

These sectional interests are now pressed upon the consideration of this body, insisting that we shall elect a Speaker of sectional feelings to preside over our deliberations, whose duties are general, extending over the whole country. Those who hold to the constitutional rights of the several States insist that this sectional interest shall be excluded from our national legislation, and left with the States in which it exists; that we shall elect a Speaker whose views are national—who loves his whole country. And I appeal to members, whether it were not more just and more statesmanlike for the supporters of that institution to call themselves, and be called, "pro-slavery men," or the pro-slavery party, while the advocates of freedom shall call themselves, and be called, the "FRIENDS OF LIBERTY," rather than speak of "sectional parties" and "sectional issues?" Yet, if this sectional language must be used, why, then, let justice be done, and let it be understood that about sixty southern members, representing sectional interests, aided by some fifteen northern members holding to the doctrines of slavery, now constitute a *sectional party*, insisting that this Government shall legislate for that institution, and protect sectional oppression; that a minority of seventy-four gentlemen, in a body consisting of two hundred and thirty-four members, stand here and denounce the one hundred and sixty other members as "*sectional*," that this minority, condemned by the popular sentiment of the country, stand here preventing an organization of this body; and while we, a large plurality, are endeavoring to organize and maintain the Government and continue its functions, these gentlemen have the effrontery to make proposition after proposition that we, the one hundred and sixty, shall resign our places, disappoint those who sent us here, refuse to perform the duties for which we were elected, and go home to the people. To induce us to do this they say they will also resign, if we will. The proposition is about as fair as would be that of a criminal standing on the gallows, the drop supported by a single cord, the rope around his neck, and fastened to the beam above him, the sheriff standing ready to execute the law, with his hatchet raised to sever the cord that sustains the drop on which the culprit stands, when he coolly turns to the officer, and proposes: "*Now, Mr. Sheriff, if you will stop at this point, lay down that hatchet, resign your place, and return to the people, I will do the same.*" [Great laughter.]

Gentlemen should understand that this question of the Nebraska bill has been tried before the people of the United States. They have passed upon it, condemned it, repudiated its authors, and put their servants here to restore freedom to that Territory; to give security to the people in that far distant region; bid this Administration stay its hand, and hereafter to wield its powers for freedom and not for slavery. The Democratic members of this body have been reduced, in twelve months, from one hundred and fifty to

seventy-four; from a triumphant and dominant majority to a minority that is feeble, inefficient, except to retard our organization. Yet, in all kindness, gentlemen, you will permit me to say that your modesty and delicacy in your new condition are not so apparent as would be desirable to some of us. You are rather too assuming. Your propositions for us to resign may have been quite acceptable under other circumstances; it had even been generous if made while you had the majority. You do not, however, appear conscious that the scepter of power has passed from you: you do not seem to understand your helpless condition. Your insensibility on that subject reminds me of a very solemn fact recorded by a theological writer—perhaps it was Swedenborg—who states that he was entranced, and in that condition his spirit visited the other world, where he met with many old acquaintances, among whom were a class of "*Fogies*," who, although they had been in that world "twenty, thirty, and even forty years, had not yet learned that they were dead." [Shouts of laughter.] I mention this for the instruction, the edification of the minority. I really think it were more modest for them to withhold these propositions to resign, and these assaults charging the majority with sectionalism. The dictatorial bearing which they manifest is not altogether agreeable. They all understand that I have myself heretofore acted with a minority in this body, and speak from experience on this subject.

Gentlemen, we are in the midst of great confusion. We came here unacquainted with each other, bringing with us different views and prejudices: it is absolutely necessary that we should understand each other in order to act together. We must know wherein we agree, and where we disagree. This discussion would have arisen very appropriately after our organization, but, as it is conducted courteously and in good feeling, we shall actually lose no time by entering upon it now. In 1849 the discussion prior to the election of Speaker was more constant and more unlimited than it has been at our present session. It then resulted in good, and I think it will now. The real and indeed the only question of difficulty now before us is that of slavery. For twenty years it has occupied the attention and disturbed the action of this body, exciting discussions and calling forth the warmer emotions of our nature. I well recollect that, fourteen years since, this body was thrown into the wildest confusion by the agitation of this question; the passions of members were lashed into fury at the presentation of a petition by the Hon. John Quincy Adams. The shafts of calumny, detraction, and slander, were hurled at him: there he sat quietly in the seat now occupied by my friend from Connecticut [Mr. Woodruff], while the waves of denunciation and detraction were rolling and dashing around him in wild disorder: venerable for his age, with a countenance mild and placid as a summer morning, he rose from his seat, and having obtained the floor, called on the Clerk to read the first paragraph of the Declaration of Independence.

In imitation of that example, I now ask the attention of the House while I repeat that emanation from the intellect of the great apostle of American Republicanism, sanctioned and approved by Hancock, Franklin, the Adamases, and, indeed, by the

unanimous voice of the Continental Congress. They declared that:

"When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have bound them to another, and to assume among the Powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind require that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."

And what were the causes which led them to separate from Great Britain? They placed those reasons on record, proclaiming to the world, that

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among them are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

"That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to 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."

This Government was founded for the purpose, design, and end of securing "all men under its jurisdiction in the enjoyment of life, liberty, and happiness." It is now placed in our hands. We, the Representatives of the people, are bound to wield its power and influence in accordance with those intentions of its founders. On this rock the Republican Church was founded, and I speak reverently when I say, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

This House and the country are aware that the present Executive, in his inaugural address, denies these truths, declaring that "domestic servitude (slavery) is based upon the same principles as other recognized rights." That in the other end of this Capitol these "self-evident truths" have been boldly declared to be "self-evident lies." That in this Hall they have been treated with contempt; and this Government, instituted to secure freedom to all men, has been, and now is, wielded to destroy the liberty of a portion of the people, and to render them slaves. Against this prostitution of our national influence the people have spoken in the most emphatic and unmistakable language. Yet the advocates of those doctrines of our fathers in this Hall are denounced as "fanatics," "sectionalists," "Abolitionists," and nearly all the epithets furnished in the English language are heaped upon us. Gentlemen, in the paragraph quoted from that immortal instrument which, as it descends to coming generations, and its doctrines shall be better understood and appreciated, will reflect greater and still greater honor upon its author,—in that, I say, you have the creed, the "platform," the doctrines of the Republican party of 1855. They are the same now as they were held by the Republicans of 1775, and will continue the same while God shall govern the world. These doctrines were then sustained upon the battle-field; they are now upheld by the more peaceful operation of the ballot-box. Our fathers bled to sustain them, and we shall prove ourselves unworthy descendants of those noble sires if we shrink from the frown of slaveholders, or the miserable assaults of dough-

In the language of those patriots, we hold that "all men are endowed with this right to liberty

by their CREATOR;" not by the President, nor by Congress, nor by State Legislatures, nor by human constitutions, nor by human laws, but by the "OMNIPOTENT MIND;" and that it is the office of human laws, and constitutions, and legislation, "to secure these rights;" not to rob men of them—nor to suffer such robbery to be perpetrated under its jurisdiction or by its consent.

When we say "all men are thus endowed," we mean what we say. We do not refer particularly to the high or the low, the rich or the poor, the noble or the ignoble, the man of light or of dusky complexion; but we speak of all who bear the image of God, whose countenances beam with immortality. All such are endowed by their Creator with the inalienable right to freedom. Mr. Pierce and the Democratic party, by their words and acts, deny these truths. Jefferson and Pierce are at issue. The Congress of 1776 laid down doctrines which were denied and repudiated by the Congress of 1854.

Mr. SMITH, of Virginia. Why is it that your party has assumed the name of *Republicans*?

Mr. GIDDINGS. For the reason that we advocate the principles, stand upon the doctrines, and advocate the policy of the Republicans of 1776—the founders of our Government. They consecrated this Republic to the support of liberty; we do the same. They excluded slavery from their Territories; we do the same. They left the States to guide their own governments within their own jurisdictions; we do the same. Their doctrines are our doctrines; their name is our name; their God is our God.

Mr. SMITH. Why did you not take the name before?

Mr. GIDDINGS. Our party has just been formed. It yet stands at the baptismal font; christened "REPUBLICAN," and consecrated to the support of liberty by the most solemn obligations resting on men, on christians, or statesmen.

Mr. LETCHER. I want to know whether the gentleman drafted this resolution?

"Resolved, That we will support no man for Speaker who is not pledged to carry out the parliamentary law, by giving to each proposed measure ordered by the House to be committed, a majority of such special committee; and to organize the standing committees of the House by placing on each a majority of the friends of freedom who are favorable to making reports on all petitions committed to them."

If you are the author of that resolution, was it adopted by the caucus?

Mr. GIDDINGS. I will answer the gentleman.

Mr. LETCHER. Hear me through.

Mr. GIDDINGS. One question at a time.

Mr. LETCHER. Very well, then; go on.

Mr. GIDDINGS. I thank the gentleman for propounding the question. I drafted the resolution: it was adopted at a meeting for conference, but not at a caucus. There was no secrecy about it. It has long been in print, with all the circumstances attending its adoption. The constant perversion of the parliamentary law for the last twenty-five years, by the party to which the gentleman belongs, called loudly on all lovers of the Constitution to stand forth boldly for the correction of the abuses which that party introduced and have so long sustained. They have long deceived and insulted the people of the free States. The parliamentary law and the rules of this House require our committees to consider and

report on all petitions and other matters referred to them for consideration. The people of the free States have constantly sent their petitions here, praying Congress to repeal the laws of this national Legislature which sustains the slave trade in this District, and upon our southern coast. A still more revolting practice has attained in this District. Here boys and girls are reared for market, like sheep or swine, and sold at the proper age. This disgusting practice is sustained by congressional enactment; and the party to which the gentleman belongs has for twenty-five years lent its influence to sustain and protect this infamous pursuit, as well as to uphold this commerce in human flesh. This object has been effected by fraud, by violation of the parliamentary law, and of the rules of this House. To maintain these atrocious practices the Speaker arranges the committees by placing on them a majority of members favorable to maintaining this slave trade and the rearing of slaves. Thousands of petitions come from the people of the free States, praying the repeal of the acts of Congress by which these flagrant iniquities are upheld and protected. They are respectfully received and referred to committees selected for the purpose of holding them in perpetual silence. Being sent to those committees, they remain with them. They constitute that bourn from whence no petition for the abolition of the slave trade returns; nor will they report thereon. The committee, in flagrant violation of the parliamentary law, and the rules of the House, and their constitutional duties, hold such petitions in perpetual silence. All memorials on these subjects since A. D. 1828, now lie entombed in the office of the Clerk of this body.

The northern Democrats vote for a Speaker of this description. They know when they give their votes that such will be the action of the Speaker. They, therefore, as really vote to sustain the slave trade and the rearing of children for market, as though their votes were given on the direct question of supporting those abhorrent crimes; but their people do not see the connection between the vote of their representatives for Speaker, and the crimes which those votes sustain. The people are deceived, the rules of the body violated, the Constitution trampled upon, and humanity outraged. The people have the constitutional right to be heard. When they send respectful petitions to us, they are entitled to respectful answers. I do not say their petitions shall be granted. If the committee really think that the slave trade and the practice of raising human stock for market are of themselves just and proper in this civilized, this Christian nation, let them say so. If they agree with the petitioners, let them say that also. But they are now held in silent contempt. We insist they shall be respectfully answered.

An entirely different practice prevails with petitions in favor of slavery. Let a slaveholder send his memorial to this body, asking Congress to pay him from the funds collected from northern laborers for the loss of his slaves, and such petition is at once considered, and respectfully reported upon. This invidious distinction between northern and southern petitions ought not, and, so far as my influence extends, shall not continue. We should deserve the contempt of our people if

we longer submit to these insults. We demand the same respectful treatment for northern men and northern petitions that we grant to southern men and southern petitions. We are in earnest on the subject. We discard the offensive sectionalism which has so long been manifested. On this subject there is but one feeling among our people. Not a member of this body from the free States could be returned here again, if his constituents were conscious of his voting to continue this practice, so insulting to the self-respect of the people of the free States.

Now, gentlemen, I feel some degree of pride in having penned this resolution. I am perfectly willing the world should regard me as its author. It embraces two points. We vote for no man who by his character and conduct is not pledged to carry out the parliamentary law. This is the first point to which slaveholders object. They intend the Speaker shall violate that law, as they have done for the last twenty-five years. This constitutes the first issue. The next is, he shall place on the principal committees a majority of the friends of freedom favorable to making reports on all petitions referred to them; not merely petitions from the North, or from the South—not merely those which pray for the abolition of the slave trade, and to prohibit the practice of rearing children for market, but they shall report on all petitions referred to them, even those praying the continuance of the crimes referred to. To this, the Democratic party also take exception. They say the committees shall not report on petitions in favor of freedom, of civilization. This constitutes the second issue. We would deal out equal justice to all men, and to all sections of the country. Pro-slavery men and pro-slavery petitions shall be treated with the same kind attention which anti-slavery men and anti-slavery petitions receive. Equal rights, equal privileges, and equal justice to all men constitute the whole substance of this resolution. It embraces that perfect rule of human conduct, of doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. Under these circumstances, the resolution was drawn up and presented, and *unanimously* adopted. I rejoiced at this unanimity, and am thankful to God that I have lived to see Representatives from our free States thus candidly and firmly demand that the petitions of our people shall receive the respectful attention of this body.

And now, having given a distinct and categorical answer to the interrogatory of my friend from Virginia, [Mr. LETCHER,] I desire to propound a question to him: Would you, sir, vote for a Speaker that you believed would thus strangle petitions from the North?

Mr. LETCHER. I will vote for a Speaker who will do his duty fairly and justly.

Mr. GIDDINGS. I never knew my friend to be astride the fence before. [Laughter.]

Mr. LETCHER. I will never vote for any man whose character and conduct are so doubtful that I must demand pledges from him that he will be honest. [Cries of "Good, good!"]

Mr. GIDDINGS. I call on this House and the country to witness the fact that the gentleman evades my question. He dare not give a direct answer. He dare not say that he agrees with the resolution to which he referred; nor dare he say that he is opposed to it, or would vote for a

Speaker who would arrange the committees so as to entomb northern philanthropy when it comes here in the shape of petitions. He thrust his interrogatory upon me. I gave him a direct categorical answer. I knew I was right. I know that the people, my own conscience, and God, will approve the course we have taken. And now, in turn, I propound to him a plain and simple interrogatory. He, a slaveholder, dodges, evades, and gives no answer. He dare not meet truth and justice at this forum. I desire him to say here, before the country, that he wishes to protect and continue the abhorrent crimes of slave-breeding and slave-dealing in this District, or that he would permit our petitions on those subjects to be heard and respectfully treated. He dodges, evades, and takes no position on either side. He speaks of pledges. Why, sir, he would vote for no man who is not pledged by his life and conduct to continue this insulting treatment of our petitions. But as I stand here to be questioned, I hold the reciprocal right of propounding interrogatories; and if gentlemen will bear with me, I should like to inquire of the Democratic candidate for Speaker, [Mr. RICHARDSON,] whether he will so arrange the committees as to give respectful answers to petitions which may be presented on the subject of the slave trade in this District, and in regard to the more detestable practice of rearing men and women for the market? or will he so arrange the Committee on the District of Columbia as to silence those petitions?

Mr. LETCHER. That is an evasion of the issue; you were to question me.

Mr. GIDDINGS. I have to deal with your candidate now.

Mr. RICHARDSON. You and I are not equal; you are not a candidate—I am. [Laughter.]

Mr. GIDDINGS. That gentleman stands before the country; the eyes of the nation are upon him. He is a candidate for Speaker. He wants my vote. I have a right to know his views before I vote for him, and so has every other member of this body; and now, when I propound to him a most respectful and important question, he stands mute. He dare not say to the friends of freedom, that he will, if elected, insult them by smothering their petitions; nor dare he say to the slaveholders he will not thus violate the parliamentary law, and the rights of the people and the spirit of the Constitution, in order to maintain the slave trade, and the practice alluded to; yet he is a gallant man; he quailed not on the battle-field; but he lacks the firmness to speak out here the sentiments of his heart. He says I am not a candidate. God forbid that I ever should be a candidate if thereby compelled to lay aside my independence, my manhood, and fear to speak the honest convictions of my heart. Sir, when I hesitate to avow my detestation of the crimes to which I have so repeatedly alluded; when I hesitate to declare that all my influence, official and personal, moral and political, shall be constitutionally exerted for the eradication of such iniquities from this District, from our Territories, and from the world, I shall regard myself unworthy to be a candidate for any office before the American people.

And now, if gentleman please, I will propound this same question to the gentleman from Vir-

ginia [Mr. SMITH] who preceded me, who spoke as one having authority.

Mr. SMITH, of Virginia. If the gentleman will take a word of advice from me—

Mr. GIDDINGS. No, no advice. I ask a question. [Laughter.]

Mr. SMITH. But allow me—

Mr. GIDDINGS. Sir, I ask no advice; God forbid that I should be driven to such a necessity.

Mr. SMITH. I will tell you what I say in reference to that. But first let me make a suggestion.

Mr. GIDDINGS. No suggestions. Answer my question—yes or no!

Mr. SMITH. If you wish to know how I would organize the committees, I can only say that I would organize them so as to advance the public business in strict conformity to the Constitution and all its compromises, and none other. Now, you may make the most of that.

Mr. GIDDINGS. Gentlemen will mark these facts.

The gentleman from Virginia [Mr. SMITH] can assail honorable Senators as he has done here to day, while they are at a distance, with no opportunity to answer him. He can denounce them and talk of the salvation of the Union; but when a simple interrogatory is propounded, calculated to draw out his honest feelings and show his principles and views to the country, he becomes mute. He evades my question and tells me to make the most of it. I can make nothing of it. I wish him to learn that here, at this forum, is ample room and verge for the display of his forensic talents. His lofty bearing, his dictatorial manner quails before a mere interrogatory calculated to unveil his motives and intentions.

I again call the attention of the country to this important fact. I am here interrogated, and those with whom I act are assailed, for adopting the determination expressed in the resolution which has been read; and now, when I turn and ask our assailants whether they will, or will not, sustain its doctrine, they and their candidate stand speechless. The picture thus presented to the American people is humiliating. Every gentleman is aware that the man of conscious integrity, who knows that he is right, that he seeks to do justice, to promote the public good, never did, and never will, fear to avow his doctrines; indeed, the more widely he is able to proclaim them, the more is he pleased and gratified, for the very promulgation of his doctrines tends to the attainment of his object; while, on the contrary, there can be but one motive to conceal the political sentiments which we entertain—that motive is to deceive the people. I speak frankly and plainly, when I declare that if slaveholding gentlemen and their northern allies really believed it just and right and proper to protect the rearing of children for market in this city, and to uphold the slave trade here and on our southern coast, they would say so frankly—they would not exhibit before the nation the humiliating spectacle presented here to-day: not daring to define their position; fearing to let the people know where they stand. Why, sir, a frank and open avowal of their intention to protect those crimes by the means adopted for the last twenty-five years, would consign to private life every such member from a free State, and many from our slave States.

I now declare, that not a member from a free State ever will admit that he voted for a Speaker expecting him to arrange the committees in the manner stated, and so clearly admitted to be their present intentions.

But, gentlemen, the leading organ of the Democratic party takes exception to the resolution, for the reason that it insists that a majority of those committees shall be "*friends of liberty.*" The editor thus puts the matter upon the proper issue. He would have the majority on our committees *friends of slavery: friends of slave breeding and of slave dealing.* That is the *real* issue. The man who votes with them, votes for the protection, for the continuance of these crimes. He may deny it to his constituents, but he can only acquit himself of this intention by stultifying his judgment.

Again: gentlemen should understand, that we also adopted another resolution, declaring "that it should be no objection to a candidate that he belongs to the 'American organization,' provided he carries out the resolution before adopted." This was due, not only to the members of the "American organization," but to the country. They had been discarded and denounced by the Democratic party in their resolutions. For the purpose of electing a Speaker, we associated with the "Americans" and "anti-Americans," and all others, on terms of equal privileges and equal justice. We object to no man for the reason that he is a "Know-Nothing;" nor do they object to a candidate who is opposed to the order. From our Speaker, when elected, they are to receive the same measure of justice which we demand for ourselves. We, who are not of the order, will receive the same measure which is dealt out to them; they demand no more; we can accept of nothing less. Thus, standing on equal grounds, we can act together without surrender of our self-respect, or the just rights of any individual.

Nearly all those belonging to the "American order" agree with the Republicans in putting forth our united efforts to restore freedom to Kansas; that this is the great overshadowing issue now before the American people. They therefore cannot act in opposition to Republicans on the present occasion.

There are others who hold to the 12th section of the Philadelphia platform, who differ from us. They prefer to let slavery exist in Kansas, yet are hostile to the principle of extending it further, while the Democrats would permit it to extend into Minnesota, Oregon, Washington, and Nebraska. The course which those gentlemen will pursue is unknown to me. They will doubtless act under the guidance of their own best judgment, and to their own masters they must stand or fall.

And now I will come to the more immediate object I had in view when I rose, unless my friend from Virginia has further questions.

Mr. LETCHER. I have got all I want to go to my section of the country.

Mr. GIDDINGS. Oh, my friend, with what emotions do I hear that word "*section!*" Instead of looking to the general good of our whole country, we speak of "*sections,*" and pander to the prejudices of some particular "*locality.*" Would that we could all feel we are acting for a

nation, for a great and increasing empire!—that we are acting for coming generations! When will statesmen understand that the laws of retributive justice are fixed, determined, and infallible? Gentlemen of the Democratic party should realize this great truth. Two years since they held a large and controlling majority in this Hall. They then took upon themselves the guilt—they perpetrated the crime of extending slavery into Kansas. I then assured them that the retributive justice meted out by that "higher law" which they derided would visit them. They held my warnings in contempt, and now, lo! where are they? Nearly every man of that party from the free States rests in that political sleep which knows no waking. Instead of a triumphant majority in this Hall, they now number in all *seventy-four.* The vengeance of the American people is working their destruction. They have been "weighed in the balances and found wanting." The sentence of "depart, ye cursed!" has been pronounced against them. Their story is told, and their history may now be written. Pardon this digression in reply to my friend's reference to his "sectionalism." I was just coming to the subject of our present condition before the country.

The present Democratic minority have boldly and unmistakably placed themselves before the country on two issues. First, they proclaim to the world their intention to permit slavery to exist in all our Territories; that the power of Congress shall not be wielded for freedom in any Territory over which the Federal Government possesses exclusive jurisdiction. Second, they denounce the "American order," or the "Know Nothings" as they are called, repudiating them and their doctrines; pronouncing judgment against them without a hearing.

Opposed to the Democratic party on these issues stand the entire Republican phalanx, with all that portion of the "American order," or "Know Nothings," who hold the Republican doctrine, that the power of the Federal Government should be exerted for freedom in the Territories; and that their order shall be respectfully heard on any measure they may bring forward, and treated in the same manner that all other men and associations of men are treated. "Republicans" and this portion of the "Know Nothings" agree on the restoration of freedom to Kansas, while each man entertains his own views on all other matters. These constitute the two principal parties. They are distinctly arrayed against each other. The issue is one of slavery or freedom to our Territories. Each party has raised its banner—"LIBERTY" being the motto of one, and "Slavery" of the other. Each is now active in arranging their forces, consolidating their ranks, and preparing for the great presidential conflict of the coming year.

Aside from these parties, standing in a separate organization, is that portion of the "American order" who wish to let slavery remain undisturbed in Kansas, and wherever it now exists under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government. They number some thirty members, most of them from slave States. Besides these three parties, there are some eight individuals who, as yet, have not taken their final position with either, but cast their votes on men who are not voted for by either organization.

This, then, is our position before the country. I am of opinion that, if we were organized, we should have a working majority in favor of restoring freedom to Kansas; yet that is at present doubtful. Without such a majority we do not desire the Speaker. It were useless to us to elect that officer unless we can sustain him after elected. The time has, therefore, arrived when, in my opinion, every man should stand forth boldly; let him take his position distinctly before the country, and let the nation know where he stands—what are his principles—where will he place himself on the record now being made for coming time. Does he wish to stand before the nation, and before coming generations, as an advocate and defender of liberty? or will he inscribe his name on the roll of slavery's advocates? I know that many friends think we should say little or nothing about these great fundamental principles which now divide us from the Democratic party. I entertain a different opinion. I know of no time more proper for the avowal of our individual views than the present. As soon as we fully understand each other we shall be better prepared to take our positions.

For my own part, I would not deceive any man, and I would have no man deceive me. We are strangers to each other; for the first time most of us have now met. We are constrained to act together, and, in order to prepare for that duty, we must know each other, and the principles which each entertains.

For myself, and I think I may speak for some others—indeed, for the Republicans generally—I may say that the government which we constitute in Kansas should secure all men of that Territory in the enjoyment of life, liberty, and happiness. We hold, with the fathers, that this is the object, the ulterior design of all Christian Governments. This design the Republicans intend carrying out by constituting a government in Kansas that shall effect that purpose. My friend from Pennsylvania [Mr. JONES] denies that we have the right to prohibit slavery in Kansas. I wish to meet him on this point. [Laughter.]

Mr. JONES. I do say that.
 Mr. GIDDINGS. I desire this issue to be understood by the American people. I ask his attention to what constitutes slavery. It is the subjection of the mind and body of one man to the will of another. In the words of a southern jurist: "*A slave is one doomed in his person and posterity to live without knowledge, to toil that another may reap the benefit of his labor. The object is the master's gain: the instrument the perfect subjection of the slave.*" The right of self-defense against the chastisement of the master is taken from the slave. That first great law of nature, and of nature's God, is repealed, so far as the slave is concerned, and human enactments can do it. He is placed in the power of the master, who may scourge and torture him; and if the slave defends his person, the law declares it an act of rebellion, and the master is at liberty to take the life of the slave if necessary to reduce him to subjection.

Mr. LETCHER. The criminal law which protects me protects my slave.

Mr. GIDDINGS. Then I would say to the slaves of Virginia, "Defend yourselves!" I would

that I could truthfully proclaim that fact to every slave in the Old Dominion; that I could say to them truthfully, "You have the same right to defend yourselves that your masters possess; that as your masters may protect their persons even to the slaying of him who assails them, so you have the right to defend your persons, and, if necessary to such defense, you may slay your masters when they assail you in the same manner that your masters may defend themselves against your attacks on them." If such were the laws of Virginia, slavery could not be maintained there one week. I admit that this right of self-defense, being a natural right, derived from nature's God, cannot be modified or repealed by human enactments, that the slave has ever had, and still possesses this right; yet the laws of all slaveholding communities inflict upon the slave punishment and render him liable to be slain by the master for exercising this right which God has bestowed upon him.*

This right of self-defense constitutes the very gist, the essential feature of slavery; without it slavery could not exist. Restore to the slave the right of self-defense, and he at once becomes a free man. This power of one man over another constitutes the vilest despotism, the most perfect tyranny that ever cursed the footstool of God. The master, at the instance of his own mind, without trial, without judicial investigation, punishes and even takes the life of his fellow-man. He thus holds the power of life and death over his slave. You may look to Austria or to Russia in vain for a parallel to such despotism; and we, the Republicans, insist that it shall not exist in Kansas. The Democrats say it shall be protected and permitted there; that this Government shall not prohibit it in that Territory.

Let no man charge me with discussing slavery in the States where we have not the power to interfere with it, nor the right to legislate in regard to it. The Democratic party have forced it into Kansas, and now insist that it shall remain there. They thus compel us to examine its moral, its political character; and now, as we are forming the great parties of the nation on this issue, and as gentlemen who have preceded me have undertaken to denounce us as "*agitators*," as "*sectionalists*," as "*fanatics*," I deem the present a fitting occasion to vindicate ourselves before the country.

This authority of the master to scourge the slave, and to slay him if he resist, is but the legalizing of murder; it is giving one man power and authority to commit the offense of assault and battery against his fellow-men, and if they resist he is authorized to slay them. The Democratic party insist that these crimes shall be permitted in Kansas; that no protection shall be extended to the weak, the friendless, the helpless

*While Mr. GIDDINGS was speaking, Mr. LETCHER denied this position, to which Mr. GIDDINGS replied, that if he should write out his remarks he would refer that gentleman to his authority. In accordance with this promise, Mr. GIDDINGS quotes from the revised statutes of Virginia the following enactment of 1668:

"Be it enacted and declared by this General Assembly, If any slave resist his master, (or other by his master's order correcting him,) and by the extremity of the correction should chance to die, that death shall not be accounted felony, but the master (or other person appointed by the master to punish him) be acquit from molestation."

poor of that Territory. I repeat that we, the Republicans, insist that protection to the weak and friendless should constitute the first and principal object, the great leading feature and end of all Governments, particularly of all Governments formed under our Constitution. With the founders of our Republic we hold "that whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right, it is the duty of the people to alter or abolish it, and erect new safeguards for their protection."

It is admitted that the people of Kansas derive their authority to legislate from Congress. The very title of the bill purports to give authority to the people there to erect a Government. We could not give them, or a portion of them, powers which we did not ourselves possess, which we may not now exercise. We have not delegated to them, nor to any portion of them, authority thus to scourge and slay another portion of their fellow-men; nor has nature, or nature's God, bestowed such right. But if, as contended, we have delegated such powers, we are ourselves responsible for their exercise, and every member of this body who now insists on permitting these crimes to continue in Kansas is involved in their moral guilt.

Now, for one, I will not bathe my hands in the blood, nor stain my soul with the moral guilt of these iniquities. I stand here before the nation, and, in the presence of God and my fellow-men, I declare I will not participate in such wickedness. As a man, a Christian, a statesman, my feelings revolt at the proposition. My judgment, my conscience, the example of the early Republicans, their declared objects, left upon the records of our Government, the Constitution of our country, the laws of God, unite in urging me to oppose the existence of slavery and its attendant crimes, not only in Kansas, but wherever we have power to prohibit it. The Democratic party insist that there the master may even kill his slave, if the slave resists him. Four thousand years since God himself, in a voice of thunder, proclaimed from Sinai, "THOU SHALT NOT KILL." The Democrats are endeavoring to repeal this law of the Most High, and to render that commandment void. In thus sustaining slavery they are fighting against God, and nature, and our common humanity.

I repeat, that I embrace this opportunity of speaking frankly my own views, and I trust the views of Republicans and Christians generally, in consequence of the unrestrained denunciations iterated and reiterated against us by the advocates of oppression. I could not ask a new member to

perform this duty. Indeed I have been led to its discharge principally for the benefit of our new members. I desire to hear them speak *boldly* when they speak; to give utterance to their honest emotions; to speak their sentiments, and avow their doctrines without disguise, and I would say to them, they need not fear a dissolution of the Union, of which we have heard so many intimations this morning.

I feel that this threat of dissolving the Union should be met promptly at the very threshold of our session. It has long been held up as the "scarecrow," the "bugbear" to frighten dough-faces. These threats come from the slave States. They are not heard among the public men of the free States. They never have been uttered by the friends of Liberty.

A VOICE. Did not SUMNER threaten to dissolve the Union?

MR. GIDDINGS. Never, sir, never. While from the slave States, from the slaveholding portion of the Union, they have been almost constantly proclaimed for the last quarter of a century. Even now, the leading Democratic paper of the slave States, the Richmond Enquirer, almost daily puts forth articles calling on the people of Virginia to prepare for a dissolution of the Union. While the public press and the politicians of that portion of the Union are thus proclaiming their intention to dissolve it, they turn round and charge us of the North with efforts to effect that object.

The free States have ever been loyal to the Union—they will remain so. They will not only refrain from dissolving it, but they will not permit it to be dissolved by the people of the slave States. It was founded by our fathers; it was cemented by their blood; and by all the hallowed recollections which cluster around their memories we are called on to maintain it. To those who threaten its dissolution we present an unbroken phalanx. With unwavering determination we say to those traitors, *you shall not dissolve it*. They should bear in mind that we have now the majority in this body; next year, with God's blessing, we will have the President; and in two years more we will have the Senate. And with the executive and legislative branches of Government in our hands, I think we shall be able to maintain the Union, and perpetuate the institutions of freedom in our land, until Christianity and Civilization, now so rapidly advancing, shall make not only our whole country free, but other nations shall be led to imitate our example, and man shall become elevated, and liberty shall triumph throughout the world.