

SPEECH

OF

MR. JOSHUA R. GIDDINGS, OF OHIO,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, DECEMBER 27, 1849,

On the motion of Mr. SACKETT, to amend the rules so as to elect certain Committees by vote of the House.

Mr. GIDDINGS said, he had noticed that through a portion of the Administration press of the North the Free Soilers of this body were charged with electing the present Speaker. He desired to say to the House and to the country, that the present occupant of the chair held his office as a necessary result of the plurality rule. That rule had been forced upon us by the Whig party, aided by some small portion of the members from the other side of the House. He thought every reflecting mind must have foreseen this result. If the Free Soilers had separated, and each united with the party to which he had been formerly attached, it was clear that the Democrats would have a majority of four votes. There were in the House one hundred and sixteen members who had been elected by aid of Democratic votes; while only one hundred and fourteen had been elected by aid of Whig votes. Two of these were absent, leaving but one hundred and twelve members now present who had come here by aid of the Whigs. With these facts before us, (said he,) I could not suppose that any one could mistake the effect of electing a Speaker by a plurality of votes.

Mr. WHITE inquired if there was any other way to organize the House?

Mr. GIDDINGS. The Whig party had it in their power at any time to elect the gentleman from Pennsylvania on the other side of the House, [Mr. STRONG.] This matter was so plain that no man could doubt it. If the question of freedom in the Territories had been regarded as an object by the Whigs, they could, at any hour after the first ballot, have secured it by voting for any proviso Democrat. In doing so, they might have selected the gentleman to whom I have alluded, (Mr. STRONG,) who is believed to be in favor of modifying the tariff and of harbor and river improvements; or they might have elected my Free-Soil friend from New York, [Mr. PRESTON KING;] or my friend from Pennsylvania, [Mr. WILMOT;] or my colleague from the Huron district, [Mr. ROOT.] Had the Whigs voted for any one of those gentlemen they would have elected him at any ballot. Free Soilers had intended to be liberal and just. They had voted for my Whig friend from Pennsylvania, [Mr. THADDEUS STEVENS,] a man recognized as a Whig, but one who had no hesitation in avowing his attachment to freedom. Had the Whig party voted for him, he might have been elected at any time. In short, sir, had the Whigs united on any man who was unconditionally committed to the cause of free soil and of humanity, even if a Whig, he would have been elected. They were informed of these facts by Free Soilers, at different times during the ballotings; but they adhered pertinaciously to their caucus nominee. They appeared

determined to stand or fall with him. They would go for no other candidate. Indeed, it appeared to me that they intended to elect him or a slaveholding Democrat. All were conscious that the Free-Soil vote would be given for any candidate of either party who stood publicly pledged to the Wilmot proviso, so soon as his vote would effect his election. I could, therefore, see no other object in a proposition to unite Whigs and Democrats on some new plan for electing a Speaker, than to avoid the election of a man committed to freedom in the Territories. This conviction was so strongly impressed on my own mind, that I called the attention of the House to it on the morning of the 20th instant, as plainly as I could under the gag resolution then in force, by the interrogatories propounded to the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. ASHmun.]

But the vote of a plurality of this body would, under the Constitution, confer no right whatever to the office of Speaker. This was well understood by the House. The vote merely operated as a nomination, while the election was made by adopting the resolution of the gentleman from North Carolina, [Mr. STANLY.] That resolution reads as follows:

"Resolved, That the Hon. Howell Cobb, a Representative from the State of Georgia, be, and he is hereby declared duly elected Speaker of this House for the thirty-first Congress."

This resolution gave him the office, constituted him Speaker. Without it, he would have had no claim to the Speakership. This was adopted and the Speaker elected by the united vote of nearly the entire Whig and Democratic parties, and was clearly a part of the original agreement by which the plurality rule was adopted. The Whig press now turn round and charge Free-Soilers with electing the present Speaker.

Mr. SCHENCK inquired if Mr. GIDDINGS had not an opportunity of choosing between the present Speaker and a Whig committed to the proviso? Mr. GIDDINGS. Certainly; I did so when I voted for the gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. STEVENS.]

Mr. SCHENCK inquired if his colleague did not have the opportunity of choosing between the Whig nominee and the gentleman elected?

Mr. GIDDINGS. I regret that my colleague has pressed that question upon me. I had not intended to make any personal allusions to the honorable gentleman who filled the Speaker's chair during the last Congress, [Mr. WINTHROP.] It is known to the House and to the country, that on the assembling of the last Congress two honorable gentlemen, who had acted with the Whig party, together with myself, refused to vote for the gentleman at that time nominated by the Whigs. A

learned and honorable gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. PALFREY,] with my entire approbation, propounded to the candidate interrogatories as to the manner in which he would, if elected, constitute certain committees to whom petitions in regard to the slave trade and slavery are, by the rules of the House, committed. The gentleman refused to inform us; but referred to his past acts and votes, from which we were to judge of his future course. These were not satisfactory, however, and we refused to vote for him. My colleague now inquires if I did not know that that same gentleman was in favor of the proviso? I answer, I do not know any such thing—how could I know it? He refused to declare his sentiments. Why did he withhold them from the public? Every man is aware that he did so in order to obtain votes from members who would not sustain him if his opinions were known. While I felt no disposition to defraud others, I had no desire to be made a dupe myself. I therefore could not vote for him. His public acts do not show him in favor of the proviso. The Committee on Territories selected by him, refused to report a bill excluding slavery from California until peremptorily ordered by the House.

Mr. ROCKWELL asked if the gentleman intended to say that the Committee on Territories refused to report such a bill?

Mr. GIDDINGS. I will say they neglected to report such a bill. Probably that term is more appropriate than to say they refused to report it.

The Committee on the District of Columbia, during the late Congress, appeared to have been arranged in such manner as studiously to protect that infamous commerce in human flesh now carried on in this city. That committee had before them thousands of petitions from the North, praying the abolition of the slave trade. They had witnessed the heartrending scenes which transpired on our principal avenue in May, 1848, when that slave dealer, Hope H. Slatter, with his mournful procession of fifty-two fathers and mothers and children marched through that court street of our city, on their way to graves in the far South. I cannot say that the then Speaker and the committees which he had arranged, were personally present and witnessed that worse than barbarian spectacle. But if they were not eye-witnesses of that revolting scene, they knew all the facts, and understood its true character. Yet not all these considerations, aided by the voice of northern philanthropy, enforced by thousands of petitions, could extort from these committees a report against the slave trade, or even a reproof of that traffic.

But it may be urged that the Speaker was ignorant of the views of the gentlemen whom he had placed on these committees. Did he mistake the character of those whom he placed on committees which exerted a political influence? Not at all. The character of every anti-slavery man in this body was as well known as was that of Whigs or of Democrats. No excuse of this kind could possibly apply to him at the second session, when he again arranged those committees. He then knew the character of every member. Their sentiments were on record, and he could not have mistaken the views of anyone. Nearly all of the same members were a second time placed on these committees; and the slave trade was again upheld and protected by them. The petitions of the whole North were again suppressed; and there those committees stood between us and those who deal in human flesh—who commit crimes at

which humanity shudders. Those crimes were protected; and those who perpetrated them were encouraged by committees placed there by a Speaker elected by a party with whom I had once felt proud to act.

Now, sir, the same gentleman was at this session again presented as a candidate, and Free Soilers were asked to vote for him—to sanction the arrangement of those committees, and to approve the slave trade, with its Heaven-daring iniquities. We were called on to choose between him and the gentleman who now occupies the chair. God forbid that I should choose between them. I speak with proper respect for both those gentlemen: they look upon these things in a different light. I speak of the character in which the slave trade presents itself to my view. I do not believe that a member on this floor, or a person in the whole country, has for a moment believed that I could be made to vote for either of those gentlemen—that I could be constrained by any circumstance to lend the sanction of my vote to any one who exerts his official influence to maintain this execrable commerce in human flesh. Yet one thing is certain, the present Speaker can do no worse than the last; he may do better.

I regret, sir, that my colleague felt it his duty to press me into this explanation, which I was desirous of avoiding. I now speak to the country. The people of my district understand this matter. These things were all pressed against me pending my last election. An appeal was then made to my constituents. I was charged with refusing my support to the gentleman from Massachusetts. I left the district early in the canvass, and did not return until after the election. The Hunker-Whigs and Hunker-Democrats united for the purpose of defeating me. But my constituents approved my course; they sent me back by a majority of some thousands, with the expectation that I would maintain my position. To them and to the country I stood pledged to vote for no man to the office of Speaker who lends his influence to support the slave trade.

[Mr. WINTHROP, Mr. ROCKWELL, and Mr. SCHENCK followed Mr. GIDDINGS, in opposition to the views he had expressed.]

Mr. GIDDINGS, having again obtained the floor, said that no gentleman regretted the present discussion more than himself; and the House would bear him witness that he had been forced into it. I came here, said he, intending to discharge my duties in a quiet, unpretending manner; but when I saw myself assailed through the leading Taylor papers of the North, I felt it a duty to say a few words in vindication of my own course. On this floor I have been assailed because I dared to vote for such man to the office of Speaker as my judgment and my conscience dictated. In short, it has come to this, that gentlemen in this Hall undertake to say who I shall vote for, and who I shall vote against. Now, I was sent here to act according to the dictates of my own judgment. I came here with no expectation or intention to look to any man, or to any number of men, for instruction as to the candidate for whom I should cast my vote. While I was previously on the floor, I stated some of the reasons why I refused to vote for the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. WINTHROP.] This was done in the most general terms possible, in order to avoid a conflict with that gentleman. But he, in reply, has seen fit to refer back to the commencement of the last Congress, and to allude to further objections which

I made to him as a candidate for Speaker at that time. The gentleman having referred to my published vindication, with some warmth of feeling pronounced a statement which I then made to be *false*. The language is rather unusual for this Hall. It was used under very evident excitement. But it is my duty to reply to it dispassionately. Sir, during the Presidential campaign of 1844, the whole Whig party denounced and execrated the Mexican war. None did this with more zeal or more sincerity than myself. The gentleman from Massachusetts also denounced it. I supposed him and other Whigs to be sincere and honest in their denunciations; but when the question came before us in 1846, that gentleman changed his position and voted for the war.

Mr. WINTHROP. Does the gentleman say that I voted for the war?

Mr. GIDDINGS. I intend to say that the gentleman did vote for the war—for the bill declaring war. It was this change of position on that momentous question which constituted one of my objections to him as Speaker in 1847.

Mr. WINTHROP. I deny that I ever changed my position.

Mr. GIDDINGS. This constituted but *one* of my objections. At that time, as at the recent election, I felt bound to obey the dictates of my own judgment, and voted for another gentleman. For thus daring to think for myself—for not permitting a Whig caucus to think for me, to dictate my course of action, I was denounced by the Taylor papers of that day as an apostate from the Whig party. The papers most warmly in support of the gentleman from Massachusetts were loudest in their attacks on me. I thought proper to publish a vindication of my vote. In it I stated distinctly the change of that gentleman's position in regard to the war, as one of the objections which I had to his election. It was this tergiversation to which I stood opposed. In writing out my vindication, I stated the fact that he had voted for the war, and in a Whig caucus had proposed that the party should vote for it. The fact that he thus voted is placed upon the Journal of the House. No effort can change, no time can erase it. There it stands, and there it will remain forever, conclusive and indubitable proof of the gentleman's change of position. It was the most solemn evidence that he approved the war. In his subsequent administration, he arranged the committees so as to continue the war; so as to recommend appropriations to carry forward the work of devastation and bloodshed, instead of withdrawing the army and doing justice to Mexico. Neither he nor his friends ever have or ever will deny these solemn truths which appear on record. But admitting all these, he attempts to evade their force by saying that, although he voted for the war, he did not recommend in caucus that others should vote for it. He thus attempts to leave the substance, for the purpose of contending about the shadow. If it were right for him to vote for the war, it could not have been wrong for him to advise others to do so: yet this collateral fact is not a matter of record. I stated it from positive knowledge, from what I knew. He denies it, and says it is *false*. He may, and undoubtedly has, forgotten it. The Hon. E. D. CULVER, in a letter published at the time, relates all the facts to which I alluded in my vindication. Yet he does not hesitate at this time to pronounce the statements of myself and of Mr. CULVER both *false*. But this point on which he attempts to make up an issue, is merely collateral to the important fact

that he changed his position in relation to the war. I repeat, that fact is indisputable; it is on record. To that record the country will hold the gentleman. He cannot escape through an immaterial issue. No chicanery of special pleading can relieve him from the charge of voting for the war, and of sustaining it after he and his party had denounced and execrated it. But, sir, I had no intention of referring to this matter. The gentleman has dragged me into this part of the debate, and I am constrained to meet him. It gives me no pleasure thus to refer to his past political course. My objections rested in my own breast, and would never have appeared before the public but for the attacks made upon me by him and his friends.

The gentleman says that the member from Tennessee [Mr. JOHNSON] has assailed him because he was opposed to the interests of slavery, and that he will leave that gentleman's speech and mine to answer each other. Unfortunately for the gentleman from Massachusetts, the gentleman from Tennessee said nothing opposed to what I have advanced; nor have I said anything opposed to what he has asserted. His charges stand independent of mine, and mine have no relation to his. How, then, they are to answer each other appears not very obvious to my comprehension.

The gentleman from Massachusetts says that the Committee on the District of Columbia reported a bill to abolish the slave trade in this District. The assertion is not sustained by the record. No such bill was reported. The bill to which I presume the gentleman refers is entitled "A bill to prohibit the introducing of slaves within the District of Columbia as merchandise, or for sale, or hire." It does not even allude to the slave trade carried on within this District. It has no reference to your slave auctions; to your slave prisons; to your slave dealers; to the transportation of the slaves of this District to southern graves. Sir, the history of that bill was this: After the resolution of the gentleman from New York [Mr. GORT] was defeated, there was some excitement here and in the country as to the manner in which the slave trade had been upheld. The friends of the Administration appeared to feel the pressure of public sentiment. The Common Council of this city adopted resolutions desiring Congress to pass a law prohibiting the bringing of slaves to this District for sale. This was presented to the House, and referred to the Committee on the District of Columbia. They reported such a bill on the 31st January. It merely prohibited the bringing of slaves from the surrounding country to this city for sale or hire. Those slaves could be sold at any other place. It simply refused to their owners the benefit of this market. All within the District were left as they had been—subject to be sold and carried south. Had the bill passed, it would not have prevented the sale of a single slave, either here or elsewhere. It was a "*device*," a "*get off*," an apology for doing nothing. Nor did the fraud end there. The committee who reported did not attempt to pass it. They reported it to the House. That was the last that was heard from it. It went to the tomb of the Capulets. To me, (and I think to all reflecting men,) the transaction bears upon its face conclusive evidence of an intention to deceive the public. I felt some degree of surprise and astonishment at hearing it referred to as a bill to abolish the slave trade now carried on here. It contains no allusion to it. The assertion that the committee reported such bill is entirely unfounded.

The gentleman from Massachusetts, on my left, [Mr. ROCKWELL,] thinks I was not authorized to impute neglect to the Committee on Territories, in reporting a bill for organizing a territorial government in California. Our treaty with Mexico, by which that Territory was obtained, bears date on the 2d February, 1848. It stipulated, on the part of this Government, for the protection of the people of the territory ceded, and their admission to all the rights of citizens of the United States. It was officially proclaimed on the 4th July, 1848. From that moment, delay could not be justified. I can find no excuse for the committee's neglecting to report a bill another week. The gentleman, in his speech, referred only to the last session. He attempted no excuse for the delay from the 4th of July up to the 14th of August, when Congress adjourned. Here, sir, was ample time to have reported and passed a bill organizing governments in California and in New Mexico. But no movement on the subject took place in that committee; nor am I aware that any other reason for such inaction has ever been assigned, except that a southern candidate for President had been nominated, and that the party had adopted the policy of inaction and delay on all matters touching slavery. I therefore appeal to the good sense of the House and of the country, whether I was not fully justified in imputing neglect to that committee.

When we reassembled in December, the public mind had become dissatisfied with the silence of this body in regard to those Territories. It is quite certain that the public regarded the delay as unreasonable. Notwithstanding the delay at the former session, the same committee were reappointed on the 7th December, instead of the 10th, as the gentleman represented.

Mr. ROCKWELL, (in his seat.) That is correct.

Mr. G. After this reappointment, six days more elapsed, when my colleague introduced his resolution, peremptorily ordering the committee to report such bill. It was reported on the 20th; but was suffered to take its place on the calendar of business. No attempt was put forth to make it the special order for a day certain. There, sir, it lay, until the 15th January, when the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. ROCKWELL,] not the chairman of the committee, moved to make it the special order for the 22d of that month. When this latter day arrived it was again postponed, on motion of a southern member, until the 30th, and finally it passed the House on the 27th February, and was thus sent to the Senate four days before the close of Congress. The question of neglect I submit to the consideration of all candid men. It may not attach to the gentleman on my right, [Mr. ROCKWELL,] but it must attach to the majority of the committee. Now, sir, after the long delay of this committee to move on the question during the first session of the late Congress, at a time when the public mind had become excited by this extraordinary delay, it would appear that the Speaker might have found members here, who, if placed on the committee, would have acted promptly and efficiently. If he had been anxious for the success of the measure, would he not have placed the power to act in the hands of men who were ready to exert themselves in favor of the measure?

I will now reply to some of the remarks of my colleague from the Dayton district, [Mr. SCHENCK.] That gentleman, in his defence of the Whig candidate for Speaker, was pleased to say, that the

gentleman who filled the Speaker's chair in the last Congress, [Mr. WINTHROP,] placed on the Committee upon the District of Columbia five members from the free and four from the slave States. Now, my colleague should understand that I have objected to the location of no man. A slaveholder in Ohio is just as exceptionable as he would be if he were from a slave State. Six members of that committee were supposed to be slaveholders, although two of them [Mr. EDWARDS of Ohio, and Mr. FICKLIN of Illinois,] resided in free States. Our objections are to the sentiments, to the principles, the doctrines of those who composed that committee.

My colleague says the gentleman from Massachusetts had, some years since, offered the proviso excluding slavery as an amendment to the Oregon bill. That is quite true. But men change their opinions. I ask my colleague and the country, why did the gentleman hesitate to avow his adherence to that proviso? If he really held to it and intended to carry it out, why has he refused to say so at this session?—why refuse to say so now? The very fact that he remains silent on the subject—that he refuses to avow his sentiments, satisfies me that I ought not to have voted for him.

My colleague has misrepresented me in saying that I demanded that the House of Representatives should come to me, or not be organized. I, in common with all Free Soilers, have asked them to support certain great and important principles. We demanded that they should recognize the "self-evident truths" on which this Government was founded. We desired the House to acknowledge the fundamental axiom "that governments are constituted for the purpose of securing all men in the enjoyment of their inalienable rights." The Free-Soil party stand on this doctrine. From it I trust in God they will never depart. I hope and believe they will never vote for any man who refuses to acknowledge these fundamental, these essential elements of our Government. I take this opportunity of saying to my colleague, that while the Whig party denies these doctrines, or refuses to recognize them, I cannot and will not support it.

My colleague has represented my objections to the gentleman from Massachusetts as based solely on his opposition to the Wilmot proviso. I surely had given him no cause for such an assertion. My objections were based upon the whole political character of that gentleman. I refer to his celebrated toast at Faneuil Hall, on the 4th July, 1845, in favor of Texas; I refer to his motion at a Whig convention in Massachusetts, in 1847, to lay on the table the resolution of his late colleague, [Mr. PALFREY,] pledging the Whigs of that State to oppose any candidate for the Presidency who was in favor of extending slavery; to the various demonstrations of his party; to the remarks of his colleague—(who, I presume, spoke his sentiments)—at the Whig caucus in this city, on the Saturday evening previous to the present session, "that the Wilmot proviso constituted no part of the Whig policy."

Mr. ASHMUN. To whom does the gentleman allude?

Mr. GIDDINGS. To the gentleman now addressing me.

Mr. ASHMUN. I did not use such language.

Mr. GIDDINGS. Gentlemen have all seen the remarks to which I refer. I believe he said that the Whigs of Massachusetts, or the people of Massachusetts, made no such test.

I have already mentioned the change of that gentleman's position in relation to the Mexican war, and to the arrangement of the Committees on the Judiciary, the District of Columbia, and the Territories. I go further: I object to that gentleman on account of his having sustained for President a man whose education, interest, associations, and prejudices are opposed to freedom. The effect of the election of General Taylor upon the Whig party, has been most marked. My colleague has referred to the candidate of that party for Speaker, and says he would support any Whig who had been regularly nominated by them. I could not go so far. While that party adhered to the fundamental principles of human liberty, it was my pride and my pleasure to act with it. It gives me no satisfaction to expose their abandonment of former doctrines. But my colleague has referred to the party in a manner which leaves me no choice. I will refer to one instance as illustrating the change of position by the Whig party of the North:

On the 21st December, 1847, I myself introduced to this body a petition from the people of this District, praying the abolition of the slave trade; and moved its reference to the Committee on the District of Columbia, with instructions to report a bill in accordance with the prayer of the petition. A motion was made to lay my proposition on the table. The object of the motion appeared to be to silence all agitation on the subject. The Whig party of the North voted against the motion, without a single exception. The vote was such as did them credit. It was such as I expected from them. New mark the change! Precisely one year subsequently—that is, on the 21st December, 1848—my friend from New York, on my right, [Mr. GOTT.] introduced his resolution instructing the same committee to report a bill for the same purpose. Gentlemen then voted agreeably to the righteous impulses of their hearts. There was no party drill, or to bring the power of party discipline to bear upon members. The resolution was carried by a majority of eleven votes. A motion was made, however, to reconsider the vote adopting the resolution. This motion came up six days subsequently. A motion was then made to lay the proposition to reconsider on the table. On this vote the friends of humanity rallied, as they thought it the most favorable point on which to concentrate their whole power. If that motion had been carried, it would have left the resolution in full force, and a bill for abolishing that "execrable commerce" would have come fairly before us. We therefore believed that every member whose heart beat for freedom, who really abhorred the traffic in men, would vote with us on that occasion. But, sir, to our disappointment and dismay, twenty-six northern Whigs voted against laying the proposition to reconsider on the table: thereby lending their influence in favor of that disgraceful traffic in mankind. Thus, sir, in the short space of one year and six days, a majority of the northern Whigs then voting, faced to the right about, changed their position, and lent their influence to sustain the slave trade. Why this change of front? this undignified tergiversation? Because General Taylor had been elected President. He was a slaveholder, and depended on the slave trade to supply his plantations with laborers. To condemn that traffic would be to condemn him; to uphold that commerce would be to propitiate his favor.

And now, Mr. Speaker, a word in your ear. My colleague, who has just addressed us with so much eloquence, who has referred to my humble self with so much severity, [Mr. SCHENCK.] was one who thus suddenly turned a political somerset in favor of the slave trade.

Mr. SCHENCK (interposing) said he was absent when the resolution was adopted. That when the vote was taken upon laying the proposition to reconsider on the table, he opposed it, as he was desirous of striking out the preamble which was offensive to the South.

Mr. GIDDINGS resumed. My colleague says he was opposed to the preamble; that it was offensive to the South. Was there anything in it that was not strictly true? I hope he does not regard truth offensive! That preamble is before me. Its language is as follows:

"Whereas the traffic now prosecuted in this metropolis of the republic in human beings, as chattels, is contrary to natural justice and to the fundamental principles of our political system, and is notoriously a reproach to our country throughout Christendom, and a serious hindrance to the progress of republican liberty among the nations of the earth."

To language thus true, thus appropriate, my colleague objects. Why so? On what are his objections founded? Is not the slave trade "*opposed to natural justice*?" Is it not unjust to sell a man?—to degrade and brutalize him?—to tear his children from him and sell them like brutes?—to dispose of his wife at auction? Was my colleague afraid to speak these solemn truths in the face of the South? Again: is not this commerce in our own species "*opposed to the fundamental principles of our political system*?"

Our Government is based upon the self-evident truth "*that all men are created equal, and are endowed with the inalienable right to life and liberty.*" Now, sir, to deny the equality of man's political rights—to rob a portion of the people of their liberty—to sell them like oxen in the market-place—to make merchandise of them—is most obviously opposed to the spirit of our institutions. Again, sir: Is not the slave trade a "*reproach to our country*?" Does my colleague doubt it? I am sure he does not. We as a nation have set the seal of our own condemnation upon it. We regard the slave dealer who pursues his vocation on the eastern shore of the Atlantic as a *pirate*. Our laws pronounce him such. When taken, he is regarded as an outlaw, unfit to associate longer with our race. We hang him without mercy, and doom his memory to execration. Yet he is far less guilty than he who follows the same vocation in this city. And was my colleague afraid to utter such palpable truths, lest southern slave dealers should be offended? He would hang one man for dealing in slaves, but would be cautious and delicate in the language he uses towards another. Why, sir, if there be a crime in the universe for which I would hang men, it is that of dealing in mankind—of making merchandise of human flesh. He who deals in slav here, is far more guilty than he who follows that business in Africa. His victims are more enlightened, and suffer far more than the victims of the African slave trade. But, sir, did southern gentlemen object to this language? From whence arose my colleague's paternal love of these slave dealers? Were southern members here incapable of taking care of the rights of the South? I have usually found them quite willing not only to take care of themselves, but they are generally disposed to take care of the North also. This, sir, is going a great way to find an excuse for upholding this

slave trade. My colleague out-Herods Herod. Yet such excuses have passed current for forty years.

Mr. VINTON interposed. He said when the resolution of the gentleman from New York [Mr. GORR] was offered, the previous question had been called. His colleague [Mr. GIDDINGS] had voted for the previous question, by which a motion to strike out the preamble was cut off. He had himself voted to reconsider, in order to strike out the preamble.

Mr. GIDDINGS resumed. I am aware, said he, that my colleague last up not only voted to reconsider the adoption of the resolution, but he had also voted against laying the proposition to reconsider on the table. The Journal also shows that my colleague moved to postpone the consideration of the subject for two weeks. He, too, it seems, was desirous of using language of delicacy in reference to crimes the most Heaven-daring that ever marked the depravity of mank'nd. Sir, I repeat, why did not my able and respected colleagues leave these objections to be made by slaveholders? Why were they so fastidious as to the delicacy of language towards those who deal in the bones and muscle, the blood and sinews, of their fellow men?

When I was interrupted by my colleague [Mr. SCHENCK] I was speaking of the change of the Whig party after the nomination and election of General Taylor. I had spoken of the manner in which the resolution of the gentleman from New York [Mr. GORR] was reconsidered. It was then placed on the list of resolutions, where it could never more be heard from. That was the last of it. Thus, sir, by sheer management the subject was given the "go-by." It was thus put at rest, and the slave trade was upheld and sustained. More men were purchased, more women were obtained, and more children collected for the southern market. It was the first instance on the records of the nation in which the Whigs of the North had showed themselves more servile defenders of the slave trade than the northern Democrats. But the truth should be spoken though the heavens fall. While twenty-six northern Whigs thus lent their influence in favor of the slave trade, only twenty-three northern Democrats united with them in that unenviable exercise of political power.

But, sir, I am constrained to look still further into the policy of the Whig party, as connected with this slave trade. I will not say that gentlemen voted to uphold that traffic under the promise or expectation of reward; I have not the record evidence on which to base the assertion. Yet one of those gentlemen who voted thus to protect the slave trade [Mr. SMITH of Connecticut] received the offer of a seat in the Cabinet, but for some reason did not accept it; another [Mr. PRESTON of Virginia] is now a Cabinet officer; another, [Mr. COLLAMER of Vermont,] who did not vote at that time either for or against the slave trade, also holds a seat in the Executive Cabinet; another [Mr. BAREINGER of North Carolina] represents this nation at the court of Madrid; another [Mr. MARSH of Vermont] is our minister to the Grand Sultan of Turkey; another [Mr. CALEB B. SMITH of Indiana] is Commissioner of Mexican Claims; another [Mr. ALEXANDER IRVIN] is marshal of the western district of Pennsylvania; another [Mr. EDWARDS of Ohio] is a general superintendent or examiner of hospitals in the United States; and the son-in-law of another [Mr. VINTON of Ohio] is chief clerk in the Department of the Inte-

rior. I repeat, that I cannot say that these offices were conferred as rewards for the votes given on the occasion referred to; but it is a remarkable coincidence that not one of those gentlemen who opposed the slave trade on that important vote has, so far as my information extends, received any favor whatever from the Executive. Had the same thing occurred under a Democratic administration, I should at once have characterized it as "a bargain and sale;" and I think every Whig would have sustained me in the charge. Yet now I am told that I ought to have voted for the gentleman from Massachusetts, for the reason that he belonged to the "Whig party."

Names, sir, have little weight with me. Why, sir, is it less wicked, less criminal for the Whig party to sustain the slave trade than it is for the Democratic party? One thing stands recorded upon the history of the past two years: the slave trade has been sustained, protected, and upheld in this District, during that period, while the Whigs held a majority in this Hall. Sir, all our movements to put it down have been baffled and defeated. All attempts to relieve our fellow-men here from crimes at which humanity revolts have been thwarted. These facts stand written, as it were, in characters of "lurid light" upon our country's history. They are known and read of all men. Yet, sir, I am told that Free Soilers—men who hate oppression and detest crime—are bound to come up to the aid of those who sustain these transcendent iniquities.

Most of the old members will recollect a colored man who for some years waited in the refectory below us. On the week previous to our assembling here, as report says, he became alarmed at the idea of being sold south, and attempted to make his escape. The bloodhounds were soon upon his track. He was captured, and as he looked with certainty upon the fate that awaited him, he drew a knife from his pocket and cut his own throat, in the presence of his captors. He, sir, appealed directly to the God of Justice against this traffic, which for the last two years has been upheld by the Whig party of this House. These suicides are common. Even mothers have been known to murder their own children to save them from the tortures of this traffic. The blood of these people stains our garments. It is dripping from our hands. Yet we fear to speak forth the language of truth. We vote against resolutions for preventing these crimes, unless they are couched in delicate language. Yea, we are told that we must choose between men who carefully arrange the committees of this body so as to protect these crimes. I deny that such obligation rests on us. I mean no injustice to any gentleman, when I assure you, that I would be as willing to go down to the corner of Seventh street and Delaware avenue, and select the slave-dealer who presides over that piratical establishment for a Speaker of this body, as I would vote for any man who sustains him in his hated vocation. I care not whether he be called a Whig or Democrat. Others, no doubt, view the subject differently. My reverend friend in front [Mr. FOWLER] doubtless regards the matter in a different light. His deep-read casuistry guides his conscience, and leads his judgment to a different conclusion. I cannot, and will not, call him to an account for his vote; nor can I permit others to stifle the voice of my own conscience, bind me in the traces of party, and whip me into an indirect maintenance of crimes abhorrent to my nature.

By reading the remarks of Mr. Wendall Phillips, of Boston, my colleague has attempted to show that Free Soilers are in favor of a dissolution of the Union. He seems to have brought the paper containing those remarks to the House, ready folded and marked for the occasion; from which I judge that these attacks were preconcerted, conned beforehand, and manufactured to order. My colleague could not have been ignorant that Mr. Phillips, as well as himself, is opposed entirely to the Free Soil party: I thought it un candid, therefore, in him to represent that gentleman as a Free Soiler. Such insincerity detracts from the force of my colleague's argument. He would never have had recourse to misrepresentation while he could find truth to sustain his purposes. But he intimates that there is danger of dissolution of the Union, from the steady firmness with which Free Soilers press their principles. This has been the stereotyped argument for thirty years. It is a species of mock-thunder, too well understood to effect any harm. It has ceased to frighten the nervous misses at our boarding schools. It has become the jest of our schoolboys. Why, sir, does my colleague meet us on our principles and say that we are wrong? Not at all. He even professes to outdo us in the support of our doctrines: to go beyond us in the maintenance of our principles: then he turns suddenly round in the same speech and tells us that we shall produce a dissolution of the Union. Would he urge us to surrender our rights and the rights of humanity—permit the Constitution to be trampled upon, its essential elements subverted, in order to prevent southern slaveholders from seceding from the Union? He will not do that. His patriotism, his independence will revolt at such a proposition. Does he not know that a dissolution of the Union would be the death of slavery? Why, sir, every intelligent man must be aware that when northern freemen cease to uphold that institution, its death will be inevitable. Southern men understand this subject: they will be the last to seek a dissolution of our Federal Union. When I see the condemned culprit standing upon the gallows, with the rope about his neck and fastened over his head, coolly kick from under him the platform on which he stands, and thus sever his union with the world in which he has lived, with the atmosphere which he has breathed, I may then be made to believe that southern men will dissolve their connection with the northern States.

My colleague has commented with some freedom on the vote which I and some of my friends gave for the gentleman from Indiana [Mr. Brown.] I heard this lecture, I trust, with becoming meekness. "To his own master" each of us "must stand or fall." Yet I am quite willing that my colleague should show to me this kind of paternal supervision. Free Soilers, sir, were determined to vote for no man who would so arrange the committees of this House as to sustain the slave trade. When the gentleman from Indiana became a prominent candidate, my friend from Pennsylvania [Mr. WILMOT] propounded to him interrogatories on this subject. The gentleman from Indiana answered promptly and distinctly. He did not hesitate to place his solemn pledge to freedom on record, so that the whole world might see and read it. On the faith of that pledge I voted for him cheerfully. I had no fears that he would violate it; I had no suspicion that he would prove recreant to his faith, thus solemnly pledged. How was it with my colleague? Did he vote for a candidate thus pledged? No, sir. He had no such

assurance on which to rely. But intimations are banded through the public press, that the gentleman from Indiana would not have redeemed his pledge. Gentlemen have no right to assume that such violation would have followed his election. We were told that he served a long time as Secretary of the State which he in part represents. He served here in the twenty-eighth Congress. He was an Assistant Postmaster General during the Administration of Mr. Polk, and has been again returned to Congress by a constituency and from a State devoted to the Wilmot proviso. And were we to distrust the solemn word of such a man? Sir, when those southern gentlemen abandoned him, they did so because they feared that he would prove true to freedom. They who had the slave interest in their keeping, believed that he would not answer their purpose, and they changed their votes to defeat his election. Will my colleague say that their fears were unfounded? that they, as well as the Free Soilers, were mistaken?

But my colleague says, the gentleman from Indiana voted against the proviso in the twenty-eighth Congress. This is true; and so did others who now vote for it. Men change in these days. I have already shown how twenty-six northern Whigs changed entirely round in the short space of one year and six days. They changed from the support of human rights to the opposite side of that question; whereas the gentleman from Indiana, in the space of four years, changed the other way. He once opposed the proviso: he is now pledged to sustain it.

But my colleague says a man must be judged by his past life. I have shown that the candidate for whom he voted lent his official influence to sustain the slave trade. If my colleague judges that gentleman by his past life, he must himself be in favor of that measure. Sir, you may search the Journals of this body, but you can never find a vote of the gentleman from Indiana so exceptionable, so hostile to freedom, so opposed to humanity, as that given by those twenty-six Whigs to whom I have referred. Sir, let me know that a man is right now, and I will forgive and overlook his past life. Had the gentleman from Massachusetts at this session publicly avowed his adherence to the proviso, I should have voted for him with great pleasure. I could at once have forgiven and forgotten the past. That cannot be recalled; its errors only can be avoided in future. All history and all experience show the absolute necessity of taking men as they *now are*, instead of what they have been. Paul was converted suddenly. Nor was he afraid or ashamed to avow his change from evil to that which was right and just. And, sir, on this subject of slavery we have all been silent and supine, while slavery was subverting our interests and our constitutional rights. If, therefore, the lovers of freedom were to adopt my colleague's rule of judging men by their past conduct on these questions, we should condemn all; for all have sinned in this respect. My colleague, and his associates, and their candidate, as well as myself, would all be found wanting if weighed in such a balance.

But my colleague objects to any man who gives evidence of a change of mind in regard to slavery. I object to any one who refuses such evidence. It is said that the gentleman from Indiana pledged himself also to southern gentlemen. If such were the fact, it was entirely unknown to Free Soilers. It is certain that he *refused* any written pledge to them. They wrote him, requesting a pledge in writing. He refused to give it.

So did the candidate of my colleague, when addressed in that way. If the objection applies to one, it is equally applicable to the other. Sir, it was wrong in both. They should have spoken freely when called on. But Free Soilers knew nothing of such refusal by the gentleman from Indiana.

Again: It is said by southern members that the gentleman from Indiana [Mr. Brown] pointed them to his past votes and acts for evidence as to his future course. This was precisely what I objected to on the part of the Whig candidate. He pointed northern men to his past acts for proof of his future course, refusing to express his present views. In that way were both wrong. The one deceived the North, the other deceived the South. The very object of a candidate's withholding his views, is to deceive some of those whom he expects to vote for him. There sits the gentleman from Alabama, [Mr. ALSTON:] he is sincerely of the opinion that it is unconstitutional for Congress to exclude slavery from our newly acquired territory. He would not dare vote for a man who is known to be in favor of such a measure. Here is my colleague who has just addressed us: he holds that it is unconstitutional to permit slavery to exist in those territories; nor would he support a man who entertains the opposite opinion. Yet, sir, we saw these gentlemen sit here day after day, voting for the same candidate. Each of them, doubtless, thought he was overreaching the other. Each believed the other to be the dupe. Each had been referred to the past acts and votes of their candidates. Those acts and votes satisfied both; they read to suit each; and each entered upon the balloting with the positive knowledge that either himself or the other must eventually be deceived, if they elected their candidate. It was a mutual attempt at fraud—a political lottery—a gambling transaction. Free Soilers enter into no such game of chance. They will not unite in that political play of "blind man's buff."

But, sir, from the commencement of the contest for Speaker, Free-Soilers at all times stood ready to aid in electing the candidate of either party, if such candidate publicly adhered to the Wilmot proviso. This intention was made known, probably, to every member of this body. The gentleman from Indiana, as already stated, boldly and unreservedly avowed his adherence to that measure. I had not any doubt as to his sincerity. With these views, I felt constrained, as an honest man, as an independent member of this body, to vote for him. With that belief I could not have conscientiously done otherwise.

But my colleague appears to regard an avowal of sentiments as dishonorable. On this point he will permit me to differ from him. I regard the withholding of a candidate's views as positively dishonest, and therefore dishonorable. Such I know to be the prevailing sentiment of northern Ohio.

For years it has been the practice in this Hall for the Speaker so to arrange the committees having charge of all petitions relating to slavery, as to suppress them in the several committees to which they are referred. Members here from the North present these petitions; they are respectfully referred; they there remain forever unheard of afterwards. The representative, if called on for information, replies that he presented the petition;

that it was referred; "but that the committee had neglected their duty in not reporting upon it." The constituent denounces the committee as recreant to freedom; but regards his representative as a faithful public servant. Sir, he is not aware that his representative deceives him; that he has been defrauded by the very man whom he praises. The constituent is unconscious that his representative voted for the Speaker, with the full knowledge and perfect expectation that he would place on those committees a certain class of members for the very purpose of suppressing these petitions. He is ignorant of the fact that their suppression is as really and substantially the act of his representative as though such representative had burned the petition with his own hands. This fraud upon the public mind should be exposed. The people of the North should understand it. When, two years since, I was assailed for refusing to vote for the gentleman from Massachusetts, and published my vindication, I said to the people of my district, in the most emphatic language I could command, that their petitions in regard to this slave trade would be suppressed by the committees which the Speaker had appointed. I foretold the fraud about to be practised upon them. What was then prophecy has now become history. During the two years of his administration, not one of the many thousand petitions against the slave trade, sent to those committees, has since been heard from.

For two years, sir, the people of the North have been defrauded, deceived, and imposed upon. The Constitution of our country has thus been violated and trampled under foot; and the voice of northern philanthropy has been stifled by the votes of northern Whigs. Free Soilers were lately called on to become parties to this deception; to approve this fraud; to unite in these violations of the Constitution by suppressing the right of petition, and to vote for the candidate who has thus contributed his official influence to consummate these infringements upon northern honor and northern rights. I regret that the duty of making these exposures has devolved on the humble individual who addresses you. I wish the task had fallen upon some one more able to do justice to the righteous cause we advocate. I feel, deeply feel, the manner in which these recorded facts involve the official conduct of gentlemen here. It is true that the country has a right to know them. Their suppression by me would involve a dereliction of duty on my part; yet, sir, I feel an extreme reluctance in publishing to the world matters thus involving the official acts of my fellow-members. I certainly should not have done so at the present time, except for the attacks made upon me. I am assailed because I will not unite in these deceptions, these frauds, these violations of the Constitution, by which oppression and the slave trade are upheld and maintained. Sir, I regard governments as constituted for the high and holy purpose of securing the people in the enjoyment of "life, liberty, and happiness." These undying truths were proclaimed by our patriot fathers; they were placed on record by them. They, sir, were not ashamed nor afraid to avow them. I most solemnly, most devoutly, cherish and support them. Nor will I at any time sustain for the office of Speaker of this body any man who disbelieves these fundamental truths, or who hesitates to avow them.