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AN ADDRESS
TO THE
CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
AND
THE PEOPLE OF WEST VIRGINIA.

BY G. BATTELLE,
MEMBER OF THE CONVENTION FROM OHIO COUNTY.

[NOTE.—The following remarks were prepared for delivery in the Convention during the anticipated discussion of the propositions offered for insertion in the Constitution, declaring that no more slaves should be admitted for permanent residence within this State; and that all children born of slave parents in this State, on and after a certain fixed and future period, should be deemed free—subject to such regulations as the Legislature might impose. But the adoption by the Convention, some days prior to the discussion of the question, of the rule limiting speakers to ten minutes, has left the author no other mode of consecutively presenting his views, than the one herein adopted.—He very respectfully submits what is herewith offered, to the judgment of the Convention, and the people.]

It is with unaffected diffidence, Mr. President, that I rise to address the Convention on any subject, but especially upon a topic that is apt to meet with disfavor from some of the members of this body, for whose opinions and character I entertain a very high regard. But my embarrassment is very much relieved, when I remember that in the discussions here of some weeks ago, gentlemen have themselves opened the way in which I propose to travel. They first roundly ignore the discussion of the question, What shall the Convention do with our system of slavery? then discuss it; and then, in debate at least, decide it. Surely one so obscure as myself, need not hesitate to follow, even in an enquiry of otherwise doubtful propriety, where gentlemen so distinguished, and every way so worthy, have already led the way.—And why is not the temperate and free discussion of this question perfectly legitimate to this time, and to the purposes

for which this body has been convened? We are met here by the will of our constituents, as a free Convention—(excuse me, sir, that I do not say a sovereign Convention, a designation which the events of the last few months have led some of us to most heartily distrust)—to form and propose a fundamental law for the adoption or rejection of the people of the proposed new State of West Virginia. It is simply meeting the just and reasonable expectations of the people, that we have already considered, or that we shall hereafter fully discuss, all the departments and agencies of government, as well as the various interests and objects upon which that government acts. Every institution and interest of the people, that is now or that is likely to become the subject of law, is, as I suppose, by the very power that brought us here, placed fully before us for our examination and action. That the institution of slavery, as it exists in our bounds, is the mere creature of law; and that as law creates it, law is competent to remove it, and that, therefore, it is fairly and properly a subject for our consideration, is so plain a proposition, that I think none will deny it. Let it be observed that I am not now discussing the question, what shall we do with this interest? but the prior question, Is it a proper subject for our inquiries? It strikes me there can be but one answer.

And let it further be borne in mind, that it is not proposed that we sit in judgment on the affairs of our neighbors. We are not invited to waste our time in idle criticisms upon

the local concerns of either Georgia or Maine. Of the unprofitableness, to say the least, of all such misguided effort, no one has more decided convictions, or has expressed them more emphatically than myself. But the thing now proposed is, that the people of West Virginia, in reference to an institution completely and absolutely their own—existing on their own soil—deriving its very breath from their own laws, and only from thence—shall, through their representatives here met, look that institution squarely and firmly in the face; that they shall treat it with the same freedom, no more and no less, with which they consider every other interest of the people—that they shall examine it, regulate it, if it needs regulating; confirm it, if it needs confirming; or abate it, if it needs abating; accomplishing in short, a duty which they are not only competent to perform, but which, in some of its fundamental aspects, there is absolutely no other assembly on earth that has the power to touch. I need scarcely add, in a presence like this, that our organic and statute laws bear witness on many an ample page that this question, not only of competency, but of propriety, has long since been settled beyond dispute.

And why should it not be thus? You propose, and most properly, after the most thorough and unflinching scrutiny, to freely pass upon the claims of capital and credit, banks and highways, taxation and representation, lotteries and duels, marriage and divorce, corporations and schools, upon every question, in short involving the rights of either persons or things, within the limits of what we all hope with the blessing of God, is to become a prosperous and renowned Commonwealth. Why should this question, involving the interests and rights of labor—its very status indeed—more fundamental than any of them, be of them all, alone ignored? You propose in reference to other questions, to have a clearly defined policy. Why shall this one upon which all others depend, alone be doomed to uncertainty and peril?

I wish to offer one other preliminary remark.—It is quite certain that first and last, some very unwise and untimely words have been uttered, and acts performed, by outside parties in reference to our system, that had better on every account remain unsaid and undone. What then? Because others to whom our domestic affairs do not belong have sought, offensively it may be, to meddle with them, shall we to whom they do belong refuse a just atten-

tion to them? It is all very easy to say that if people elsewhere had not acted extravagantly Virginia would have freed herself thirty years ago from this burthen. But what shall we say on the other hand of the statesmanship of those of our own rulers, who, with a system directly and continually under their own eye—admitted by themselves to be injurious to the State—have, because great folly existed somewhere else, not only permitted but carefully encouraged that system to strengthen with its growth, until it has well nigh plunged a whole commonwealth from seaboard to river, in irretrievable ruin! It were very childish certainly, and in that sense but natural perhaps to follow the example of the ostrich, which when pursued by its foes, sticks its head in the sand so that it cannot see the danger to which it is thereby all the more exposed. But is it manly, is it wise thus to act? Is there a man among us that does not believe, that had this State at the time alluded to, firmly and wisely met this issue, not only would she now have been abreast of her neighbors in the race for prosperity, but this blasting, desolating war would have never have entered her borders.

Let it further be observed that it is not proposed by any thing before us to interfere in any shape with any existing relation or right.—Where the relation of master and servant exists among us it will, for any thing here proposed, still continue, and so continuing it ought to be, and no doubt will be, protected by sufficient laws. The proposed measure has in it nothing violent, sudden or rash. Its friends are not tenacious of particular phrases, or forms or dates; but they do urge, as both fundamental and vital to the success of the new State, that it shall now be settled in our organic law, that at some reasonable, fixed though future time, this weight upon our energies shall begin its gradual but certain disappearance.

I propose to consider this question first and briefly as a matter of principle; and then as a matter of expediency. The system of slavery, as exhibited in our laws, is wrong in itself. Any candid observer will not fail to discriminate between the *system* and the acts of the individual. The one is always bad; the other may not only be innocent, but oftentimes is so. I shall indulge in no harsh terms concerning the system as thus shown; but I state certainly no more than the plain truth when I say that it cannot be reconciled with the obvious requirements of either justice or morals.

I have already endeavored to discriminate between our system of slavery as

gathered from our laws, and the acts of the individual citizen. My acquaintance with many of the slave owners of West Virginia leads me to still further emphasise that discrimination. Many of them I know to be just and humane—not in consequence of the system, but in spite of it. Men who, though placed by circumstances in contact with a bad law, themselves are governed by a better rule; men who are every way better than the system, and who have steadfastly resisted the temptations to avarice and power, which it has constantly presented to them; who, as masters, parents and citizens, have given examples of virtue worthy of the imitation of us all, and who, in this the hour of their country's great peril, have unwaveringly stood up for that country's honor and flag. I am proud to-day to have had the privilege of numbering some of these—from among the living and the dead—among my most valued friends. And I say further—and let the Convention mark what I am about to assert—that if the proposition now urged is submitted to the people, some of these very men will not only vote for it, but they will be among its most effective supporters. They will see in the measure that which, while it interferes with no existing right or relation, not only gradually and safely settles a disturbing question, but that which immeasurably advances their own prosperity by securing that of the community of which they are members. But waiving this inquiry the point of present interest is the fact that the law—the system itself, and it is of that I speak, is bad; that it presents to the community, with all the sanctions of the public authority, a false principle; and as such, it ought to be in some wise and safe way, abated.

I shall offer no apology in a body like this for inviting attention to this aspect of this question. What is right, or what is wrong, is as I suppose, precisely one of the questions that every man here asks or should ask himself, in every vote he gives, and in every act he performs. Who will say that it shall be disregarded only in the case of those who by no possibility, can ever make here, a vocal or personal appeal? But if it could be presumed that we may ignore this principle in this direction of it, dare we do so, in the direction of our own people, who, it may safely be affirmed, have been and are after all, by far the greater sufferers, by the wrong which this system embodies. The injuries which it inflicts upon our own people are manifold and obvious. It practically aims to enslave not merely another race, but our own race. It inserts in its bill of rights some very high sounding phrases securing the freedom of speech; and then practi-

cally and in detail puts a lock on every man's mouth and a seal on every man's lips who will not shout for and swear by the divinity of the system. It amuses the popular fancy with a few glittering generalities in the fundamental law about the liberty of the press, and forthwith usurps authority, even in times of peace, to send out its edict to every postmaster, whether in the village or at the cross roads, clothing him with a despotic and absolute censorship over one of the dearest rights of the citizen. It degrades labor by giving it the badge of servility; and it impedes enterprise by withholding its proper rewards. It alone has claimed exemption from the rule of uniform taxation; and then demanded and received the largest share of the proceeds of that taxation. Is it any wonder in such a state of facts, that there are this day, of those who have been driven from Virginia, mainly by this system, men enough with their descendants, and means and energy, scattered through the West, of themselves, to make no mean State?

But another and a deeper injury which this system inflicts upon our people, is in its swift tendency to pervert the popular mind. It cannot have escaped the observation of any one here, that law—civil law, whether fundamental or statute—is one of the most potent educators of the people, whether for good or ill. It addresses and demands obedience of every citizen. The work which we and those other tribunals which we shall call into being, will perform, will be as ubiquitous as the light throughout the new Commonwealth, ruling in the business of the people; presiding unseen, it may be, but still potentially present, in their social intercourse; coloring and fashioning their very thoughts; and holding in its hands their fortunes and their lives. It will be, in a word, the law of the land, and as such it will, in some shape or other, visit every dwelling, and come home to every bosom. What we do here will be the rule, not only of practice, but of principle to thousands, may I not say millions yet to come.—Shall we not see to it, that that rule, neither by its utterances, *nor by an equally expressive silence*, shall not tender to the people, with all the solemn sanctions of the public authority, some deadly error that shall poison at its very fountain, the life blood of the State.

We have all listened here to the occasional and incidental, but most touching recitals of the delusions into which masses of our people have fallen, who are involved in the meshes of this terrible rebellion. I will not say that these extenuations as thus uttered, do not do honor to

the heads and hearts of gentlemen conceiving them. But what has caused these blinding delusions? God help us all! for I fear that none of us are wholly innocent in this business. Our own slave code—organic and statute, written and unwritten—has furnished the fruitful soil whence has sprung full armed—perjury and rebellion, and treason and war. I have somewhere heard the story of a watch, most elaborately and artistically fashioned, which should have gone always right, but which did go always wrong. It was examined and re-examined and re-adjusted, with the same result, until a magnet was discovered near the balance wheel, which disturbed its every motion. This removed, all worked well. Our old system, if left unrestricted in the new State machinery, will prove in the future, as in the past, the effectual disturber of its action.

I know very well that sentiments such as these have not been often heard, of late, in Constitutional Conventions of this State. But I know as well, that they have been heard in Virginia's purest days, and from the lips of Virginia's most eminent sons; and I but repeat as a learner, the lessons they have taught me. Beginning with Washington—continuing with Jefferson, Madison, Henry, and a host of others in that unrivalled galaxy of names,—disapprovals of the system as a question of principle, as well as on political grounds, everywhere abound. And I may say further, that up to a comparatively recent period, not a single utterance can be found from any prominent American statesman, South or North, which in substance differs from this testimony. Nor has the old voice lacked a response, even in later times. The most eminent citizen of Virginia birth, since the former period—the echoes of whose voice still linger in the vallies of his own adopted Kentucky, rousing her gallant sons to the support of that Union which, living and dying, he loved so well—left, almost with his parting breath, as his legacy to his countrymen, his testimony to the wrong of the system, and his scheme for its removal. I know that this Convention will justify me when I say that this is a goodly fellowship, and that the place for reproach to any American citizen, is not in steadfastly adhering to it, whatever may be said in the case of his differing from it. If I have been led into error, these are my seducers: nor has any modern light yet dawned upon me which has caused me to distrust or discard such teachers.

Gentlemen tell us in glowing strains of their deep devotion to Virginia, and of their pride in their share of her glory.—But the inquiry is a pertinent one: To

which Virginia do gentlemen refer? for I insist that not merely geographically, but historically and intrinsically, there are two. Do they refer to the Virginia of the Father of his Country, and his illustrious compatriots, who were at once, and in great part, the founders of the Republic, as well as the fathers of the State? Or do they refer to the Virginia of Wise, and Floyd, and Letcher, and Pryor, and the rest? Shades of the mighty dead! forgive me the sacrilegious juxtaposition of your names! But to which Virginia do gentlemen refer? Is it the Virginia of Washington, or the Virginia of the infamous Ex-Governor, who, far surpassing any professions here made of his devotion to Virginia, gave as his latest proof of the intensity of his love, his raid into one of her fairest and most fruitful vallies, barbarously laying it waste with fire and sword? Surely it must be—it cannot be otherwise—that it is Virginia as she was, and not as she is, that gentlemen love so well; and in this all good men everywhere will join them. And for me also to love there is still another, born out of tempests and storms, and to which this body has given a name. To the people of West Virginia, who, faithful among the faithless, have clung as with the grasp of death, to the old Union, which their fathers loved so wisely and so well, my devotion goes forth without measure or stint. In all self-respectful truthfulness, I say it: from my inmost soul, I honor and reverence them. Every man of them, whether a dweller in the mountains or in the city, is my brother and my friend; and God being my helper, I am his to the end. But by the same rule, and in the same measure, from my soul, and by my very manhood, I loathe, and detest and abhor, so much of that other and degenerate Virginia, as attempted, not ten months ago, through a portion of its representatives, to transfer me and mine, and my neighbor and his—at night and in secret—with our all of honor and liberty and life, to the rule of the most infamous and diabolical usurpation and despotism, that the annals of time record.

I propose in the next place, to consider this proposition in the light of expediency. It is always expedient to do right, and if what has already been advanced, be admitted as true, the present inquiry is already answered. But let us proceed to the practical question. What do the best interests of the people of West Virginia demand at our hands to-day? I take it for granted that we all desire, in behalf of the new State which we are seeking to inaugurate, that it shall at once, and with no tardy pace, enter upon that high and hon-

orable career of prosperity that has been so long and so iniquitously denied us as a people; that our virgin lands shall be tilled; that our immense mineral wealth shall be disembowelled, that school houses and churches shall crown our hill tops, and that the whole land shall smile with fruitful fields and happy homes. To the attainment of ends so desirable, we will all agree that it is indispensable that population, capital and enterprise, shall flow into our borders, and through our valleys; and above all that we must have as that which lies at the base of all material prosperity, *labor*; and that labor must be *free*. It is the truth to say, and it is enough to say that we have tried enforced labor and it has failed. Nor is our experience singular in this regard. It is the world's experience everywhere. I shall not trouble the Convention with hackneyed statistics. Let any man lift up his own eyes and see. At no time and in no place has slave labor sufficed save for the coarsest employments, and for the least measure of real and general prosperity. The thing to be done then seems so plain a duty as scarcely to admit of a moment's hesitancy or doubt.—It is to make labor, white labor free. It is to fling its fetters forever to the winds; and bid it everywhere among our health inspiring mountains and streams, stand proudly up in the strength of its own God-given manhood. You may propound in a thousand seductive forms the old problem, how the two conflicting systems may be made to blend and harmonise and prosper; you will meet for all your pains with but the old answer of failure. You may woefully invite, as others have done before you, population within your borders; its mighty current will still roar around your very barriers, but it will not enter, and dashing far beyond you, as of old, it will seek, and successfully seek other homes in other lands. Nor is this all or the worst. Let us not deceive ourselves; as it has been under the old State with the old system, so will it be under the new State with the old system. This current of population will not only not replenish you, but as it has been for years past, it will itself be replenished by thousands upon thousands whom you can ill afford to spare making their exode from you. The choice is a simple one and easily made. Let us for the sake of a prejudice, a caprice, a passion it may be, keep our old system, broken, decayed, worthless though we know it to be; and with it we must be content to take as its unfeeling appendage, our untamed forests, our untaught youths and our enfeebled and sluggish growth. But could it on the other hand be authoritatively announced that at any reasonable fixed though future time,

this incubus was to be shaken off, in the very hour of that announcement, you might safely, multiply the value of your lands by two, and before the winter snows shall have melted from your mountain tops, the feet of the coming multitude would be heard in your streets, and be seen thronging on your highways; and this young giant here in the West, delivered at last from the toils that have bound him would feel a new energy in every limb, and a fresh thrill of life in every vein.

But we are told that from causes now at work, the old system is destined to soon pass away from the new State in any event, and that, therefore, we need take no action concerning it here. If this be the fact why not have it "so nominated in the bond?" That it should be so written down, if true, is but simple justice to all parties; it is but justice to our own people—both to those who do not desire, and to those who do desire the extinction of our present system, that they each in their respective relations to it, may know how to adjust themselves to the new order of things; it is but justice to those whose coming among us, I think we all agree, is well nigh indispensable to the attainment of that prosperity we all desire. That these people have ample opportunity for choice in the matter of their location, whether here or elsewhere, does not admit of a doubt. That they will require a certain condition in coming here all past experience proves. Is it reasonable then to expect them to accept as conclusive, the mere verbal declarations of gentlemen touching a future and contingent event, deemed by them so vital? Will they not be apt to press upon you the very pertinent inquiry, if the fact be as stated why not, when you may do so without harm to the just rights of any one, put it in the "bond?"

But is it so certain that the expectations of gentlemen will be realized without a provision to that end? It is a well known fact, that a majority at least of the delegates framing the Federal Constitution, believed that after the cessation of the African slave trade, slavery itself would soon become extinct in this country. As indicative of this, it is remarkable that the word slave does not once occur in that instrument; and in the passages where obvious reference is had to persons in such a condition, other and more general terms are employed—a fact, as Mr. Madison tells us, that was not without design. But has it passed away? Sir, look around you for the answer. Our history in this respect shows, as does the world's history, that this system is exceedingly tenacious of life. It dies hard. While it has disappeared from a great many of the

States, in others at the beginning of this war it was stronger than ever, and in no State has it, I think, become extinct otherwise than by specific enactment. In the States of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and others, it is certain that it was thus terminated. I should be most happy to believe, as gentlemen flatter themselves, that this system among us, would gradually and gracefully give way without any action here. But such is not its history elsewhere. A lust of power is its peculiar besetment. It has virtually controlled the councils of this nation almost from the beginning. For forty years with a population, a part at least of that time, two to one against it, it has made no demand, and claimed no exemption that it did not obtain. In our own State the like order of things has prevailed. It demanded in the matter of representation that one man in the east should be equal to two in the free west. It was done. The west bowed its head and received the yoke, and has worn it even to this day. It demanded your money to build its highways; it prohibited you from building yours with your own. It demanded enormous expenditures for its defence against imaginary dangers. Votes from the free west were all too willing to accord them. And now gentlemen tell us that there will be but eight per cent of this element in the new State. Sir, the whole past proves that it will rule you, if it were but the half of it.

And what after all has prompted the almost unanimous and life long wish of our people for a new State in West Virginia. It cannot be the debt of the State, for this feeling began before the debt had acquired any great magnitude; and much as it had grown before this war, you propose to pay an equitable share of it. It cannot be the intervening of a mere mountain range, for precisely the same range divides but does not alienate the east and west portions of our neighboring State of Pennsylvania.—The true answer is to be found in the wish of the people, not always expressed perhaps, but none the less real to escape from the utterly selfish domination of this system. What will you have gained in the new State if you have but effected an exchange of masters? And let it be born in mind that this system is firmly rooted in many portions of our proposed territory, and should you wipe out every syllable on the subject from the new Constitution when adopted by the people even in that form, this system will still be as thoroughly protected here by law as it is in Louisiana. Another point should not be overlooked. When this rebellion is crushed out cotton will hardly remain the king that he has heretofore so proudly boasted himself to be.—

Our new State will contain large tracts of unoccupied land with light taxes thereon. Is it at all improbable that a certain species of property in the region east of us, that has hitherto migrated mostly southward, will after the lapse of a short time come this way; thus continuing and strengthening its power among us, indefinitely. But however this may be, the question still recurs as that which will be pressed by thousands of practically interested inquirers, what is to be the status of labor in the new State? I insist sir, that the question is fundamental and vital. Without labor it matters but little what kind of a constitution you make here; or indeed whether you make any at all or not. Will you not speak the word that shall enable it? Will you not, now that you may forever wipe from the brow of your own toiling white fellow citizens, the brand this system has placed there? Will you while you enact a clearly defined principle touching every other interest, pronounce no policy in regard to that which lies at the bottom of them all? Will you under the influence of some fatal repulsion on the one hand, or attraction on the other, fix your attention chiefly on some remote, and minute and immaterial appendage to the building, quite indifferent as to how secure or how false the foundation may be!

But it is said that even if the new Constitution is silent upon this question, the Legislature will have full control over it. They certainly will have such control if the Constitution, in terms, gives it to them. But waiving the inquiry whether a question of doubt as to this power might hereafter arise, should it not be formally inserted in the Constitution, why should the Legislature—wise and patriotic though that body is and will be—be expected to act in the direction in which we decline to move? There is not the shadow of a doubt touching the entire competency of this body in reference to this question; Why devolve upon others responsibilities which we decline to meet?

But granting that our system of labor may at some time in the distant future be changed, by whatever agency, why postpone to an indefinite future, that which we may secure for our own times? I have a very great regard for those imaginary, and I hope highly respectable personages, my great grandchildren, and a very high respect for distant generations; with the liveliest interest in their welfare, I wish them, with all my heart, a good time generally. But I must be excused in saying that I have a still warmer feeling for my own children, and for the people of the present times. But why not do for the present that which will so surely enhance

the happiness of both the present and the future? Why require our young State, just entering upon the race for prosperity, to bear one moment longer than is necessary, a burden that has enfeebled older and otherwise powerful communities?

But it is said that the present is a very inauspicious time to move in this matter. By the way, there has seldom been a right time for doing anything on one side of this labor question, in this State; there was always an abundance of time for doing more than was asked for on the other. In so far as this suggestion of delay is prompted by deference to the supposed wishes of the rebel States, it will excite, I judge, in the people of West Virginia, any other feeling rather than that of acquiescence. The doings of those States have forced us to assume our present attitude for our self-preservation. Is it not asking a good deal too much, that that very interest as it elsewhere exists, having plunged us and our people into this sea of troubles, we shall not now be permitted to save ourselves in our own way, without still consulting it? Do the people of West Virginia really belong to the State of South Carolina, or do they belong only to God, their country and themselves?

But objection is made to any action here on another, and I frankly say, much more plausible ground. If I understand it, it is this: that our Union brethren of the border States will be embarrassed and hindered in their heroic struggles with rebellion, by any such action by this body as is now proposed. The coincidence is not a little curious, that precisely the same objection, and almost in the very words in which we now hear it, was urged in the Legislature of Pennsylvania, more than eighty years ago, during the passage of her famous act of emancipation, drawn up, I believe, by Dr. Franklin; but the objection was urged then, as I hope it will be now, without effect. Let it be observed that this occurrence took place in 1780, right in the midst of our revolutionary struggle. This is the historian's statement of the matter:—"Moderate as it was,"—let me say in passing that what is here proposed is much more moderate—"this act did not pass without a good deal of opposition. Several members of Assembly entered a protest against it, acknowledging indeed the humanity and justice of manumitting slaves in time of peace, but denouncing the present act as 'imprudent' and 'premature' and likely to have, by way of example, a most dangerous effect on the Southern States, whither the seat of war seemed about to be transferred." But as already stated, the objection was overruled; and while we

all know something of the beneficial results of that act, I have yet to hear that it worked any injury to the Southern States or any body else.

Sir, from my soul I honor the Union men of Kentucky, Tennessee, and of any other section similarly circumstanced; and living or dying I am one with them in this great struggle. But how can the proposed action here hinder them? Other States have gone through this very process. Is it an event so very alarming or unlooked for that West Virginia, should it become a State at all, should become a Free State? Has not everybody that was not wilfully blind, anticipated it for years? The mere occurrence of the event then by itself, can work no such injury. But we will be told that this measure will be justly looked upon elsewhere as a General Government policy, as its armies advance Southward; and that Union men on the border will be hindered thereby in their efforts to sustain that Government. I think I state the point fairly. There would be some force in this conclusion, were it not for a fatal defect in the premise; *it is not true*. The General Government did recognise, as in duty bound, the reorganized and restored Government of the State of Virginia. It has to this day done nothing beyond that. This Convention is in no sense a General Government organ—it is in no sense a war measure; much less is any one act of this body either the one or the other. The General Government has wisely abstained, so far as I know, from any suggestions to or interference with the deliberations of this body; and speaking only from what is in the reach of every member here, I state only the plain truth when I say that so far from our being convened here under the especial patronage of the Federal authorities, it remains to be seen whether we are here even with their approval.—But we are here at the instance and in the behalf of the people of the proposed new State of West Virginia, and of them alone; to form and prepare a State Constitution for them and for nobody else. And this brings me back to the inquiry which I insist is the only legitimate one in this discussion. What do the interests of the people of West Virginia require at our hands? We are not here to frame a Constitution for either the people of Kentucky or Ohio.—If they prefer their present ones they will keep them; if they want new ones they are abundantly able to make them. And while they attend to their own affairs in their own way, I have yet to learn that they have any thought or desire of offensively interfering with ours. We need not hope to escape the criticisms of our neighbors upon our

work here—friendly or unfriendly as the case may be.—It is a privilege we take with all the world; and it were unreasonable to expect that it will not be returned.—But be assured, sir, that the only effectual way to disarm it of injury should it come, is by the infusion of a manly self-reliance into our labors.—And I beseech gentlemen, to put away from them at once and forever the delusion, for it is nothing else, that they can successfully ignore this question of the status of labor in the new State.—It will not down at your bidding.—You may postpone it now; but in doing so you only leave it to come up again and again under new and more aggravated forms; the one ever present and ever restless element of irritation and disturbance among us.

I ask, in conclusion, to be indulged in a personal remark. Having been chosen a member of this body, by the generous suffrages of the people of Ohio county, not only without my consent, but entirely without my knowledge, in my absence from home, in entering upon the discharge of duties here which I saw not well how to decline, I have not reached the conclusion to which I have come, without much anxious thought. Almost my only participation hitherto in the discussions of this slavery question, has been by way of protesting to the extent of my humble ability, not only against the interference by strangers with any legal rights of the institution here, but the utter inexpediency of some of those far distant discussions of it, in which some communities have been too prone to indulge. I should, under like circumstances, pursue the same course again. At the same time, I have never concealed my steadfast conviction, either as to the character of the system, or as to the duty of those who have legally and properly to do with it as a civil and domestic institution. It is here that for the first time in my life, I am charged, along with others, with any such direct concern. The direction in which my duty points me, seems plainly indicated.

Another remark. The people of West Virginia have never yet demanded of me by way of apology; on which bank of the river that washes their shore, it pleased God that I should for the first time open my eyes on the light. I shall not to-day either bemean them or debase myself, by tendering such apology. They invited me into

their service in the days of my early manhood; and the very labors of the long years since that time, as well as the memory of a thousand kindnesses received at their hands, have consecrated in my own regard, the citizenship among them which the constitution of our common country so amply secures. My past and my present are here; and if Heaven please, my future will be here, to enjoy or suffer with this people whatever in His providence may yet be in store for us. It has been as a fellow observer, and I will add, as a fellow sufferer with them, that my judgment of the system of slavery among us has been formed. We have seen it seeking to inaugurate, and in many instances, all too successfully, a reign of terror in times of profound peace, of which Austria might be ashamed. We have seen it year by year driving out from our genial climate, and fruitful soil, and exhaustless natural resources, some of the men of the very best energy, talent, and skill among our population. We have seen also in times of peace, the liberty of speech taken away—the freedom of the press annihilated—and the willing minions of this system in hunting down their victims, spare from degradation and insult, neither the young, nor the gray haired veteran of seventy winters, whose every thought was as free from offence against society, as is that of the infant of days. And last but not least, we have seen its own chosen and favored interpreters, standing in the very sanctuaries of our political Zion, throughout the land, blaspheming the holy principles of popular liberty to which the very places where they stood had been consecrated, by dooming my child and every manschild that must live by labor to a virtual and helpless slavery. And as the natural outgrowth of all this, we have seen this huge barbaric raid against popular rights, and against the worlds last hope. It has been the merit of other attempted revolutions that their motive at least was a reaching upward and forward after liberty; it is the infamy of this that it is a reaching backward and downward after despotism. It would put back the hand on the worlds dial a thousand years. It would put out the worlds light in the darkness of utter and dreary despair. Surely, to the extent that we have suffered from these ills, our very manhood calls upon us to guard by all reasonable preventives, against their return.