

"To the Citizens of Jefferson County," Louisville (KY) *Examiner*,

July 28, 1849

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(From the Louisville Courier.)

To the Citizens of Jefferson County.

The canvass for the convention has been progressing with spirit for several weeks, and although there have been frequent speakings, yet, because of the busy season, few are familiar with the topics which are discussed. Fearing that some friends may be called on to vote, without having heard what may be said, it is deemed advisable, in this way, to inform them of the sayings for and against the proposed reforms.

There seems to be no difference of opinion as to the tenure of office. All agree that it should be for a limited period. There is some difference of opinion as to the mode of appointing to office; my preference is, that the Secretary of State, Auditor, Treasurer, Commissioner of Land Office, Judges of the Circuit and Appellate Courts, should be chosen by joint ballot of the General Assembly; but I would prefer the election of these officers by the people, to the present plan of executive nomination. All county officers should be elected by the people. The absorbing question, however, is the emancipation of the slaves. Upon this there is a direct issue. Before giving my views upon this subject, the opinions of my opponents—these gentlemen who are opposed to all schemes of emancipation, and by consequence desire the perpetuation of slavery—will be stated and responded to.

1. They say emancipation is unconstitutional. This proposition and its discussion seem to be limited to Jefferson county. It is evident General Washington thought it constitutional, when he expressed the hope it would be done in Virginia by law. Doubtless, Mr. Jefferson thought so. We all know Mr. Clay is of that opinion.

New York, in 1799, since the formation of the United States Constitution, adopted a system of gradual emancipation, to take effect on the 4th day of July of that year.

What is remarkable, not a citizen in the county, except the pro-slavery candidates for the convention and Legislature, has been heard to express a doubt as to its constitutionality.

2. In connection with the above, they assert that neither the free negro nor those to be emancipated can be forced by law to leave the State.

In answer, permit me to ask by what authority a free negro is now sold into bondage in this State; we all know this is done, and the law is sustained. It is because all persons who are excluded by the constitution from possibly becoming citizens are personally subject to legislative enactments. Negroes, mulattoes and Indians cannot be citizens under the constitution, (nor should it be changed in that particular) consequently a law could be passed requiring all such to leave the State under such penalties as would insure its enforcement. Besides, the manumission of our slaves can be on condition, to take effect upon their removal.

3. That there is less crime in a slave than in a free State.

This is attempted to be proved by comparing the number of convicts in different penitentiaries. It is believed that all observation proves the position, that crime follows in the channel of commerce. More satisfactory proof of this could not be found any where than at home. Louisville is the only important commercial point in the State; she has less than a sixteenth part of the population, and she sends as many convicts to the penitentiary as the whole balance of the State. Besides, by our law slaves are excluded from the penitentiary, and who can estimate the amount of crime committed by them, which is only punished by their masters, and never publicly known.

4. That slavery, by relieving the whites from the drudgery and hardship of hard work, adds to the length of life of the whites.

The suggestor of this new principle in philosophy, in his eagerness to sustain his new theory, destroys it unconsciously by adding, "even our negroes live longer than the whites in the free States." This position has never been alluded to in private conversation but to be laughed at. The discoverer says that he finds by examining the census, that there are more persons of extreme old age in the slave States, than in the free States, and concludes, therefore, that slavery must add to our longevity. The effect of climate seems to be overlooked. But the theory can be best established by giving a list of the names of those who have lived so long, with their modes of life, and if this can be done the belief is, that it will appear not one can be found to have reached three score and ten who did not at some time of his life perform active and continuous labor.

5. That slavery tends to make our men more chivalric and brave than those of the free States.

It is admitted that it makes them more haughty and arrogant, and leads to the use of the pistol and Bowie knife, often upon boomer friends to the ruin of families; any other superiority is more imaginary than real.

6. That slave labor is more profitable than free labor.

This assumption appears so ridiculous that but little attention has been paid to it.

Ohio and Kentucky raise the same kind of crops, viz: wheat, barley, oats, rye, buckwheat, corn, potatoes, hay, hemp, tobacco, cotton, silk, and sugar, and the corn and wheat alone in Ohio are of more value than all the foregoing products of Kentucky. Disinterested writers, upon national wealth, say slave labor is a tax instead of a gain. Observation leads us to the same conclusion, for it is a generally admitted fact that if the owner had the value of his slaves in money, he could do much better, even at farming, by hiring white labor, than he does with his slaves. They are most profitable to their owners when hired out, but in a majority of cases the hirer pays a heavy tax to sustain a foolish pride. We know that slaves are careless, indolent, slothful and wasteful. Such labor cannot be compared to free labor, expecting to enjoy its full reward.

7. That there is no country to which the negro can be removed where he can live and prosper.

It is believed the collection of evidence on this subject, given in a pamphlet some days since, will satisfy the enquirer after truth. Besides, there is a letter before me from Rev. W. McLain, agent of the Colonization Society, in which he says: "For the last ten years we have not lost five per cent in the process of acclimation. There has never been a colony planted with as little sacrifice of life as Liberia."

8. That the expense of removing the negro will impoverish the State.

This objection is entitled to serious consideration. Bear in mind that there is a sufficiency of land in Liberia, bought and paid for, to give every negro in Kentucky five acres, and that the government of Liberia has stipulated that they may settle on the lands and be entitled to citizenship. The emigrant then, should have enough to take him to his land and to sustain him twelve months. Only so much money as will pay his passage will be required—all the balance can be furnished from our workshops and abundant agricultural products. Now when we reflect that all this is proposed to be accomplished by the hire of the negroes, the mountain of difficulty sinks into a mole-hill.

mole-hill.

More Europeans come to the United States annually than there are negroes in our State, and they are brought for about \$10 per head. When the commerce of Liberia shall increase so as to give return loads to vessels, the negroes can be carried to Africa nearly as cheap as the European can be brought here—the difference in distance will make but little difference in prices.

9. That \$60,000,000 of the wealth of the State, the taxed value of the slaves, will be destroyed.

Let us look into this. We tax near twenty millions of acres of land. Put it at that for the calculation. Three dollars per acre will give you the value of your slaves. The land is now rated for taxation, on average, at \$6 57 per acre, the addition of \$3 would make it \$9 57; whilst the lands of Ohio average \$11 40, and those of New York over \$20 per acre. What is the cause of this disparity?

Now hear the other side.

The emancipationists say they go for a separation of the two races—hoping and believing that it will be for the lasting benefit of both. They do not admit that it is among human possibilities for the negroes to get the supremacy here, and looking upon amalgamation with the negroes as impossible, they believe the extermination or removal of the negroes inevitable.

They say that slavery is a social, moral, and political evil—that slave labor is unproductive—that now is the time, when we are at peace as a nation, and blessed with teeming plenty, to set about removing this incubus upon the body politic. The plan proposed is substantially, that the slaves in being say five years hence, shall serve for life—that those born thereafter shall serve, the females to 21, and the males to 35 years of age—the children to go out with the mother, nor should husband and wife be separated, but the first free should be hired until the other becomes free.

After they attain the respective ages, they are to be hired until enough is raised to take them to Liberia.

Our opponents say that this will be depriving them of their property—that they hold their slaves by the same right they hold other property, and are as much entitled to the future increase of their slaves, as to the future produce of their farms.—That England, a monarchy, acted in better faith with her subjects, than we propose to our fellow citizens, when she set 200,000 slaves free in her West India Isles. She paid £20,000,000 to the owners.

The answer is: The Bible informs us that man was given "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowls of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." Thus we say man has a natural right to his lands and his stock, and he has but to conform to conventional requirements to enjoy them in peace. Not so with slavery; it is the creature of brute force, it has the guaranty of law, and may be rightfully termed a legal monster. When we buy a negro, we know that we hold him under authority that is liable to be revoked, but that same authority would not be justified in interfering in the same way with any of our natural rights. Does any one doubt the right of the approaching convention to say that slavery shall no longer exist in Kentucky? Surely not few. But they would have no such right to deprive us of our land and our cattle; such an act would dissolve society. Let us look at England's acts. She liberated instantly more than half her slaves.

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She liberated instantly, many of her slaves, others she apprenticed for a short time. It was little else, however, than immediate emancipation, for which she paid less than \$150 a head; now are not the services of the negro according to our plan, of more value than this amount of money?

But again, if the owner does not wish to come under the operation of the law, he has five years in which to sell his negroes, and if he does not take either of the foregoing terms, he has five years to remove with his negroes to a State where slavery is tolerated. The reply to this, is that we force the slave owner to leave his native country. Our answer is, that he is not forced, but acts with a view to his interest; but that his staying here with his negroes will force our children to leave their homes to make room for the negroes. If we will turn our attention to the education of our children, and prepare them to take the place of the masters and slaves who leave us, the country will be greatly the gainer, in more ways than one.

There is another point of view in which the slaveholder may receive instruction in considering this question. We see the facility with which property changes hands. When we reflect that slavery necessarily makes our children more indolent and extravagant, if not more dissipated, is it venturing too much to predict that if things remain as they now are, the children of our non-slaveholding neighbors will in thirty years own a majority of the negroes. Here is food for thought. We know if the slaves are removed other laborers must supply their places. If they come from other States each one, in all probability, will bring with him five times as much as the slave whose place he comes to fill has taken away, so that in that case the State would be more than a five-fold gainer, for in addition to the wealth, she will have received a white citizen and lost only a slave negro. But a much greater gain than that is proposed and hoped for. It is to qualify our children for the cultivation of our rich lands, now worked almost entirely by slaves, and keep them among us with the assurance they shall enjoy the blessing. In that way our own children will fill up the vacancies, and not leave us dependant on emigration, but independent of it.

It is said by some, that those who have no slaves should not vote so as to effect slave property. Suppose our country should call for men to defend her rights and honor, would our slave holders say to such, you have but little interest in the Government—you own no negroes—stay at home, we will breast the storm and fight for our country. Has this ever been the case with such patriots? Suppose a servile insurrection should take place, would the slave owners say to those who do not own slaves, you have no interest in the matter and should not interfere? With the same propriety that might be said, as to say they have no right to vote. No, they would appeal first to their patriotism, and if that failed, they would turn you to the law and show that they were bound to assist in quelling the insurrection and restoring order. Look at the slave stampede in Fayette last year; some 70 or more negroes ran away and passed through portions of three or four large slaveholding counties, and could not be arrested until they got among the non-slaveholders of Bracken county; these good people did not hesitate in the performance of their duty—the negroes were taken and returned to their masters—this was inter-

fering with slave property—did the slave owners condemn this act, and declare it interference?

If we have no regard to our own interest, we should look to the future condition of our children. We have now near two hundred thousand slaves; they are nineteen times as numerous now as they were fifty years since. Suppose they are doubled in every coming twenty-five years. In one hundred years there will be over three millions. What then is to become of our children?

Look at stubborn truths. In 1810 Indiana had but a delegate in Congress, and Kentucky had nine representatives. They were equal in representation, having ten each in 1840, and in 1850, if the ratio is fixed at one hundred thousand, Kentucky will have 7, Indiana 10, and Ohio 20 representatives. Should not such truths induce every man to do his duty? It is evident slavery is a hindrance to the intelligence and improvement of the masses. Look at our country: truth contains the admission—the free white laborers, those who get their "living by the sweat of their faces," the bone and sinew of the land, constituting four-fifths of the white population, are driven back to the hills, hollows, and poor lands, leaving the rich lands to be cultivated by slaves. Thus circumstanced, the poor, from the sparseness of their settlements, cannot sustain schools, consequently, their children grow up in ignorance. The estimate is that twenty thousand voters in our State, at the last Presidential election, could neither read or write. When we reflect that our government relies for its support upon the intelligence of the people, is not this tendency of slavery appalling?

We desire the new constitution may be amendable as the present one, and that it shall provide further,—that a clause may be changed or amended, or that a clause may be stricken out, or a new one added by the votes of the Legislature and of the people, as is now required to call a convention; except that nothing is gained to require the Legislature to act in any given number of days.

Friends, the emancipationists have no feeling in common with the abolitionists; they detest them and their principles, and look upon them next to the men who would fasten negro slavery upon us forever,—as enemies to the prosperity of the State. So long as the negroes are here, it is best for all that they should be slaves. Masters should, therefore, be prevented from freeing their slaves, without provision being made for their removal from among us.

Being too old, and having too much at stake to flatter, the foregoing is submitted to your serious consideration, by your friend,

W. F. THOMASON.