

"Repeal of the Missouri Compromise,"

Nashville (TN) *Republican and Nashville Whig*, November 7, 1859

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THE REPEAL OF THE MISSOURI COMPROMISE.

Without any intention or desire of relieving northern fanaticism from a full share of the responsibility of the present unhealthy state of the public mind upon the subject of slavery, we have held, in common with the conservative press everywhere—in common with the *New York Herald*, the organ of the present administration—that to the re-opening of the slavery agitation by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, is to be traced the primal cause of all these troubles. The Democratic party is responsible for this unfortunate legislation. The results were anticipated by the oldest and wisest statesmen of the country of both sections, and their prophetic warnings were heard in the Senate chamber and elsewhere. They were unheeded, and their worst fears—their most disastrous apprehensions—are being realized. For however insignificant in reality the late outbreak at Harper's Ferry may be, in the language of the *Richmond Whig*, we remark that "events are often important, not on account of their immediate magnitude, but on account of their significancy. A pimple on the cheek may be a very trifling disorder, but if it betokens erysipelas, it is the indication of disease which may prove fatal. And so it is in the political world. The importance of any event, however insignificant in itself, must be measured by the principle it involves, or the policy it indicates." So it is with this Harper's Ferry movement. The disclosures which have followed indicate clearly that of itself it is only a feature of the "irrepressible conflict" which the Seward's, Gidding's, Forbes' and others, are waging against the South. Whether it come in the shape of "stampedes of slaves," or violent outbreaks, it is the same in effect. It will, if persisted in, destroy the Republic.

The *Union and American* attempts to shield its party from any part of the responsibility of this state of things, and takes the ground that the introduction and passage of the bill to repeal the Missouri Compromise was not, or did not result in, a re-opening of the slavery agitation. That paper says: }

We protest that the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska act and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise was not a "re-opening of the slavery agita-

tion." The agitation which preceded the passage of that act has never been exceeded in bitterness and intensity. The Southern Convention which met in this city in June, 1850, while protesting against the constitutionality of the restrictive line of 1820, proposed as a final settlement of "agitation," to waive such constitutional objection, and extend the line to the Pacific. The proposition was hooted at by the whole Opposition North, and was voted down. The legislation of 1850 certainly did nothing to allay excitement. The fugitive slave law, although only a recognition of a constitutional right, was as bitterly assailed, and caused as great agitation North, as did the subsequent repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Finally, it was believed that the only manner in which the "agitation" could be quieted was by leaving the question of slavery to be settled by the people interested, and by withdrawing the whole subject from Congress. The Kansas Nebraska act, containing a section repealing the Missouri restriction, was passed for this purpose.

Freely admitting that "the agitation which preceded the passage of that act [the repeal of the Missouri Compromise] has never been exceeded in bitterness and intensity," we remind our contemporary of the very pertinent fact that this bitter and intense agitation grew out of the proposition to pass this same act, and we still adhere to our position that this legislation was "a re-opening of the slavery agitation."

The issue which our contemporary makes is one which depends entirely upon the history of the times to settle. Our neighbor claims, in effect that "the legislation of 1850 certainly did nothing to allay excitement," and the slavery agitation was not settled when Mr. Pierce went into office, and made support of the Kansas Nebraska act a test of Democratic fealty. We deny the proposition, and shall refer at present only to a few of the Democratic evidences of our correctness, out of the large mass which illustrate the history of those times.

We may remark, however, as our contemporary refers to the Southern Convention which met in this city, that the leaders of that movement themselves acquiesced in that legislation as a final settlement, among them the senior editor of the *Union and American* himself, and that the passage of the Compromise measures of 1850 was the death knell of the spirit of secession and

Slave Stampedes on the Southern Borderlands

National Park Service Network to Freedom / House Divided Project at Dickinson College

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Southern disunionism which gave rise to that Convention. The columns of the *Union* of that day show that the Compromise was regarded as a final settlement of the slavery question. The Democratic Convention that nominated Franklin Pierce passed the following:

"Resolved, That the Democratic party will resist all attempts at revising, in Congress or out of it, the agitation on the slavery question, under whatever shape or color the attempt may be made."

If "the legislation of 1850 certainly did nothing to allay excitement," as our contemporary now declares, and the question had not been settled, the Democratic party certainly passed a very absurd resolution.

But in what condition did Gen. Pierce himself regard the question? In his *inaugural Address* he said:

"I fervently hope that the [slavery] question is at rest, and that no sectional or ambitious sectional excitement may again threaten the durability of our institutions or obscure the light of our prosperity."

In his regular message to Congress, December, 1853, after reviewing the state of the country, Mr. PIERCE again said:

"We are thus not only at peace with all foreign countries, but, in regard to political affairs, are exempt from any cause of serious disquietude in our domestic relations."

Did he leave it for his successor to say as much? In the same document from which the above is quoted, we find the following:

"It is no part of my purpose to give prominence to any subject which may properly be regarded as at rest by the deliberate judgment of the people. But while the present is bright with promise, and the future full of demand and inducement for the exercise of active intelligence, the past can never be without useful lessons of admonition and instruction. If its dangers were not as based, they will evidently fail to fulfill the object of a wise

design. When the grave shall have closed over all who are now endeavoring to meet the obligations of duty, the year 1850 will be recurred to as a period filled with anxious apprehension.

"A successful war had just terminated. Peace brought with it a vast augmentation of territory. Disturbing questions arose, bearing upon the domestic institutions of one portion of the confederacy, and involving the constitutional rights of the States. But notwithstanding differences of opinion and sentiment, which then existed in relation to details and specific provisions, the acquiescence of distinguished citizens, whose devotion to the Union can never be doubted, has given renewed vigor to our institutions, and restored a sense of repose and security to the public mind throughout the Confederacy. That this repose is to suffer no shock during my official term, if I have power to avert it, those who placed me here may be assured.

"The wisdom of men who knew what independence cost, who had put all at stake upon the issue of the revolutionary struggle, disposed of the subject to which I refer, in the only way consistent with the union of these States, and with the march of power and prosperity which has made us what we are.

"No statesman put forth the narrow views of casuists to justify interference and agitation, but the spirit of the compact was regarded as sacred in the eye of honor, and indispensable for the great experiment of civil liberty, which, environed by inherent difficulties, was yet borne forward in apparent weakness by a power superior to all obstacles. There is no condemnation which the voice of freedom will not pronounce upon us, should we prove faithless to this great trust. While men inhabiting different parts of this vast continent can no more be expected to hold the same opinions or entertain the same sentiments, than every variety of climate or soil can be expected to furnish the same agricultural products, they can unite in a common object, and sustain common principles essential to the maintenance of that object."

This is enough for to-day—it is enough for all time to meet the absurd announcement of our contemporary that "the legislation of 1850 certainly did nothing to quiet the excitement." The country was quiet as far as this question was concerned, when Franklin Pierce was nominated—quiet when he was elected, in spite of the excitement and tumult of a Presidential campaign—quiet when he was inaugurated, as he admits himself—quiet when Congress met in December, 1853, and when he said, as quoted above, "that this repose is to suffer no shock during my official term, if I have power to avert it, those who placed me here may be assured."

How was this solemn pledge kept? How long was it before the hydra headed monster was disinterred from the grave in which union loving men of all parties had buried it, and paraded before the country in the guise of a repeal of the Missouri Compromise?

If the *Union* can predicate its defence of the democratic party against the charge of responsibility for the evils which have grown out of the slavery agitation upon no stronger grounds than that the repeal of the Missouri Compromise was not a *re opening* of that agitation, it will have to blot out the history of the country to carry its point. That history abounds in evidences to sustain our position—evidences which no sophistry can shake—no dodging avoid.

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