

**"IMPROVEMENT" OF THE HARPER'S FERRY AFFAIR.**

The advocates of Slavery have for years past boasted of the superior stability and security of Southern society, as compared with free society in any part of the world. They have felicitated themselves especially upon their exemption from all the disturbing and agitating isms which, in the free States, occupy so much of the public attention, and cause dissension in the churches and parties of that section, and sometimes deprive men and women of their reason. They pointed, with glowing pride, to the calm repose of the Southern mind. No new theories of liberty, religion, or social life, ever found advocates, we were told, where the "patriarchal institution" held sway. All their ways were pleasantness, and all their paths were peace. These high Pro-Slavery authorities seemed deeply to deplore the forlorn condition of the States which are not blessed with the "peculiar institution." Their sympathies were moved, they mourned over the "failure of free society," and exhorted their Northern brethren to retrace their steps, restore Slavery, and thus save themselves from impending wreck and ruin.

Such was, a few brief weeks ago, the tone of Southern journals. But, while indulging in dreams of perpetual peace and security, a half-mad enthusiast, with seventeen followers, strikes a blow which shakes the whole fabric of Southern society to its centre. Fifteen States, as large as half of Europe, are convulsed with rage and fear. The Federal Government, backed by two of the oldest and most powerful of the Southern States, fly to arms, in order to rescue a town of two thousand inhabitants from the hands of eighteen men! No better illustration of the absurdity of the boasted security of slaveholding society could be imagined than these facts furnish. It is true that the slaves did not rise against their masters, for the reasons assigned by the Richmond *Enquirer*, viz: that on the northern borders of Virginia they find it easier to run away than to conquer their freedom. Slavery, says the Richmond Democratic organ, only exists by sufferance in Northern Virginia. The negroes and the masters are said to be aware of the ease with which emancipation can be effected by crossing over into Pennsylvania; and it would be incurring unnecessary risk of life to fight for freedom, when it can be obtained so easily and quietly. But, further South, the *Enquirer* thinks, and we think, the result of such an invasion might have been quite different; and the greatest vigilance will be, and should be, used to prevent a similar occurrence. It is lamentable to know that a large portion of our country is subject to be panic stricken by the machinations of a dozen or twenty men; but the fact is so, and it is folly to attempt its concealment. Insurrections forever impend over countries which hold one half of the people in absolute chattel slavery to the other half.

The South, notwithstanding the fine arguments in favor of Slavery with which her people have been amused for some years past, is beginning to realize this great fact; and, in spite of the excitement and anger which the Harper's Ferry invasion has produced, the effect must be a permanent feeling of dissatisfaction with a state of things so incompatible with peace and security. Here, then, is the first great consequence of that affair.

But, from dissatisfaction, insecurity, and conscious weakness, the public mind of the South will be led to question the utility of an institution which brings these evils in its train. Discussion must follow; the madness of party and the prejudice of education must give way before the imperious necessities of the hour. Something must be done to abate the constantly threatening danger. What shall it be? The immediate and voluntary abolition of Slavery cannot be expected. Slave property is too valuable to expect its immediate and voluntary relinquishment, while to maintain the system in its present form of unmitigated and unrestrained chattelhood is now evidently fraught with peril. A dissolution of the Union, so far from mending the matter, would only serve to precipitate the apprehended catastrophe.

The house of refuge for runaway slaves would by that event be brought down from Canada to the frontiers of Maryland and Virginia, Kentucky and Missouri. No amount of vigilance could prevent stampedes on a far greater scale than that on which they have hitherto been conducted. The value of Slavery in all the States bordering on the north would rapidly depreciate, and the only security for that species of property would be in sending it immediately to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico. The border States would in this way be made free much sooner than they can be under the protection of the Union; and either the old war of Freedom and Slavery would again arise in the Southern Republic, or the free States belonging to it would secede, and join the North.

This is putting things on their best footing. It is supposing that the Union can be quietly and peaceably dissolved, and that the whole South will secede in a body. But this is not at all probable. Notwithstanding the present excitement, which is said to be intense, we hazard little in the prediction that the more northern slave States will not secede upon the naked issue of resistance or submission to the rule of a Republican President. A large majority of the people will say, "let us wait until our constitutional rights are invaded, before we proceed to break up the Union;" and as that contingency will not happen, no other consequence will follow the inauguration of a Republican President than the assemblage of a few noisy "Democratic" Conventions in the Southern States, and the adoption of pompous manifestoes.

Whether in the Union or out of it, the dan-

**Slave Stampedes on the Southern Borderlands**

gers arising from Slavery, while it maintains its present form, will continue. What then can be done? What is practicable? It seems to us clear that the South should at least begin to ameliorate Slavery, if not to provide for its abolition. Indeed, amelioration is a preparatory step to the final extinction of the system, while it is absolutely necessary to its peaceful existence. The South should make Slavery what its advocates claim it to be, viz: a patriarchal institution. The slave should be bound to his home, not by the vigilance of bloodhounds and overseers, but by concessions of privileges and rights which have hitherto been withheld from him. The Southern Legislatures should occupy their time, not in fruitless disputation upon Federal politics, but in devising humane measures of reform in their slave codes. Every slave State, perhaps, with the exception of Delaware, permits slaveholders to separate families at their pleasure. Not one of them recognises the relation of husband and wife among slaves. Parents and children, even babes and their mothers, are permitted to be separated, at the caprice or the convenience of any heartless tyrant. It is in vain to say that these things never happen. The law permits them, and no candid Southerner will deny that they occur frequently. Many eminent Southerners, and among them Senator Toombs, have acknowledged that this glaring enormity should be forbidden by law.

Another great evil of Slavery which calls for immediate remedy is the denial of the God-given right of mental and moral improvement. The South must not forget that the Saviour held the possessor of one talent to the same rigid accountability for its improvement as the

owner of ten. It is therefore no apology for the laws against education to say that the blacks are an inferior race.

Admit it, and we yet have the authority of scripture for saying that the superior race, though with ten-fold higher endowments, is held to no more rigid accountability for their improvement than the inferior for its lower order of intellect. But if the inferior is held responsible by the Almighty for the cultivation of his intellectual and spiritual gifts, and if he is to be punished for permitting them to lie dormant, what is to become of the cruel tyrants who compel him to a state of perpetual degradation?

If God is just, and the Bible be true, fearful

must be the retribution which will be visited upon those who, not content with enslaving the body, would also put out the light of the soul.

Here then is another great reform needed. It is demanded alike by justice and expediency.

A third reform should consist in guarantying to slaves the right of holding property, which in their spare hours they may accumulate. This regulation would stimulate thrift and industry, and give the slave a permanent interest in the peace and order of society. It would in some sense make him a conservative.

If these rights and privileges were secured to the slave population by a well-digested code of laws; and if no man were permitted to buy, or sell, or emigrate with slaves, without taking whole families, the effect of such humane regulations could not fail to lighten the yoke of Slavery, and predispose the negroes to wait with patience for deliverance from bondage by peaceful emancipation. The danger of insurrection is in exact proportion to the severity of Slavery, and will be lessened with every sincere effort to alleviate and reform the system. It is true, that to reform Slavery, and elevate the condition of the slave, will be gradually to undermine the system, and prepare for its extinction; but the tendency to emancipation will be peaceful, and with the consent of the masters. To elevate the condition of the slave, and raise him nearer to that of his master, is to bring them into closer sympathy. Reformatory measures will have an equally humanizing effect upon masters and slaves, and incline the former to deal justly. Emancipation will come; and it is for the Southern people to say whether they will prepare for it by wise and Christian efforts to civilize the slaves, or stubbornly wait until wars or revolutions shall give a bloody solution to the problem.

These reforms can be effected without expense or danger, and the only danger is in withholding them. Will not the wise and good men of the South avail themselves of the present unhappy state of the public mind to propose these healing measures? The free discussions on Slavery in the Virginia Legislature in 1832 were caused by the insurrection of the preceding August, and we are inclined to hope that the similar state of agitation and alarm which now exists will cause another outbreak of independent thought, and that it will lead to practical results.