

A "CONFLICT OF AGES."

When the first "proclamation of freedom" was issued on the 22d of September last, unaccompanied as it was with a statement of the considerations which had induced the President to depart from the policy previously prescribed to himself in the conduct of the war, we were tempted, in giving publication to the paper, to adopt the following hypothesis on the subject. We quote from the *Intelligencer* of last September 23d :

"We are not without the suspicion that the President has taken this method to convince the only class of persons likely to be pleased with this proclamation of the utter fallacy of the hopes they have founded upon it. This opinion, we may add, derives confirmation from the fact that he suspends for some months the enforcement of so much of his declaration as denounces the emancipation of slaves in punishment for contumacy on the part of the Insurgent States, while he gives immediate force and effect, so far as force and effect result from proclamations, to the regulations prescribed by the new article of war and the provisions of the confiscation act in the matter of slaves."

According to these "regulations" and "provisions" all slaves escaping from the Insurgent States within our army lines were declared free, and as it had been confidently predicted that such an official declaration and pledge, coming from the President, would lead to a general "stampede" of slaves from the South, and thus upturn the very basis of the insurrection, it seemed to us that, if he had no other motive in issuing the proclamation, he might at least have promised himself the incidental advantage of testing by it the sagacity of the political advisers who were most urgent in their "pressure" for such a manifesto.

Addressed, as this manifesto was, (in the invitation it extended,) to the "loyal blacks" of the South, it was not, so far as regards its practical efficacy, a matter of any importance how it was viewed at the North; for, whatever may have been the theoretical objections of any in that quarter to the form or substance of the proclamation, it is obvious that if there was among the "loyal blacks" that degree of alacrity and facility to escape from the service of their rebel masters which was ascribed to them by the patrons of the proclamation, we should see a demonstration that would soon put to shame the cavils of "hair-splitting critics."

We have long since absolved ourselves from the duty of considering "the proclamation" in the light of the political principles it involves, and, eschewing further controversy on the topic, we wait only as impartial journalists to chronicle its results, as they are developed by events and admitted by the friends of the measure.

Among the most determined friends of the measure, as we all know, is that able politico-religious journal, the *New York Independent*, to whose columns we are accustomed to look for the clearest and most definite statement of the current views entertained by the party to which it belongs. In its issue of the last week our able contemporary, under the head of "The Conflict of Ages," thus refers to the disappointment of the hopes which had been founded on the "proclamation of freedom." We quote them, as before said, not for the purpose of controversy, but simply as signs of the time for the information of our readers :

"As it becomes at length apparent that the ship of State is launched upon a long and difficult voyage, and can find her haven only through storms and perils, a very natural feeling of disappointment arises in the public mind, and even among those who have a real interest and confidence in the principles which govern our national course. At first we hoped to see slavery buried and defeated under the peaceful forms of legislation; when that hope was destroyed by the outbursts of rebellion, we looked to see the system speedily overthrown by the mere fortune, nay, by the very fact, of war; this failing, we trusted that the proclamation would work a speedy accomplishment of our triumph, until at length we begin to discover that conflicts and trials are yet before us. This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting, nor even then without great and sore convulsions."

Our contemporary then proceeds to reconcile its readers to the prospect before them by adducing for their instruction and comfort certain analogies of nature and history, which are suggestive of patience under the chronic tribulations incident to all great and beneficent changes, whether occurring in the physical or social world. It cites the experience of the geologist, who, seeing how powerful is the influence of the existing and normal agencies of nature, is tempted to imagine that the rain and the dew, the sunshine and the frost, are adequate to account for all the changes that the earth has experienced. In so doing, adds the *Independent*, he is in danger of forgetting "that there have been convulsions in which the loftiest peaks have been submerged and the bed of the ocean upheaved into mountains. So we are apt to imagine that our familiar agencies of reform, which by their steady influence accomplish so much, are the only ones that are needed; and we forget that through all the course of history there have been great volcanic periods, in which the stable earth has rocked beneath the feet of men; and that these violent agencies have borne a necessary part in the great progress of society."

And the lessons of history are made sources of appeal, for the purpose of showing that in Europe the system of feudal and pridal slavery was only gradually exterminated by a combination of military and moral agencies. Foremost among these "military agencies" were, it says, the wars of the crusades. Under this head, it reasons as follows :

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"When the Crusaders roused, the whole stagnant life of the peasants to activity, and sent hither and thither throughout France, on the high business of the holy war, thousands of strangers whom the law could not consider slaves, it was no longer possible to act on the supposition that every stranger was a slave. The nobles, too, were in numberless cases absent, or had sold their feudal estates and rights to the burgeses; and the old vigilance of a multitude of petty tyrants was henceforth baffled. Every where among the serfs a class of men began to spring up, accustomed to carry arms in their hands, to go whither they would, and to call no man master: and thenceforth Europe began to be *free*."

"Such were the principal circumstances which inaugurated the birth of a class of freemen in modern society. The old system had first to be broken up; whole orders and classes of men had to be ground to powder between the humble population on the one side, and the monarch on the other, to make way for liberty. Then Christian sentiments found room for their operation. The conscience of a penitent master might then find some relief in emancipating the serfs he had long oppressed: and, '*pro remedio anime*,' the dying sinner might be impelled to do justice. The great work of the Crusades was the destruction of that slaveholding aristocracy which had been for generations an incubus upon society, repressing all growth of freedom, and crushing each hopeful germ of improvement. For the destruction of this remorseless horde of graduated tyrants no price was too great to be paid. The profoundest agitation that society has ever witnessed, the bloodiest wars that the earth has ever beheld, the most profuse expenditure of treasure, the most extraordinary uprisings and invasions that history records—all this for a period of two hundred years, in order to terminate the

slaveholding of Europe! That was the meaning of the Crusades: the Divine purpose in the existence of Moham-medanism."

In the light of these analogies and parallels, our learned contemporary is conducted to the following useful and instructive deduction with regard to the probable duration of the secular conflict on which we have now entered for the destruction of slavery. Pointing the moral of its elaborate article, it says:

"Let us not be surprised, then, if the extirpation of our long slavery should prove a serious and difficult achievement. Let us not distrust the principles of justice and freedom, nor the God who has ever been their strength, if we find that long conflicts and great dissensions are before us. The struggle may try our powers, and test our faithfulness and our endurance to the utmost. It will be only in accordance with the divine methods of the past if it should. The nations who look coldly on the long agony of our convulsion may believe it fatal, and, with selfish satisfaction, may pronounce the grandest nation of all history 'as dead as the Heptarchy:' but they know not the greatness of the principles which are at stake, nor the vitality of the people which God has prepared for the assertion of them."

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