

Political

Shall Cuba be Admitted as a Slave State?

MR. GIDDINGS TO GOV. CORWIN.

From the Ohio State Journal.
JEFFERSON, Ohio, Oct. 13, 1858.
Hon. THOMAS CORWIN: Dear Sir:
The election of yesterday constitutes you a Member of the XXXVIIth Congress, and restores me to the privilege of a private citizen.

I can give to this declaration no other construction than an assurance that, if the Executive shall negotiate a treaty for the purchase of Cuba, and obtain its ratification by the Senate, you will be bound to respect the right of property which the Spanish masters hold in their slaves; and, on account of such right, you will vote for the admission of Cuba as a Slave State if her people ask it.

Coming from one to whom the question will probably be submitted, this declaration is certainly important. The admission of Cuba as a Slave State must greatly affect the interests, the rights, and the honor of our people. You will permit me to suggest that this doctrine of "property in human flesh" has ever been repudiated by the people of Ohio, even while we were a Territory. In both our first and present Constitutions it is most unequivocally rejected. In all our legislation, by the decision of all our Courts, it has with perfect unanimity been disavowed.

When it was first presented to the Supreme Court of the United States for decision, an eminent Jurist of Ohio (Judge McLean) boldly denied its existence under the Federal Constitution; and exposed its absurdity with such powers of logic and eloquence, that no Slaveholding Judge was then willing to meet or deny his doctrine.

When in 1835 it was presented to the House of Representatives in Congress, and referred to the Committee on Claims, my predecessor, the Hon. E. Whittlesey, another son of Ohio, met it ably; and in a report reflecting honor upon himself and the State which he represented, showed from official records that the doctrine which you assert had up to that time or been repudiated by Congress. In accordance with these precedents, I have, during my service in that body, opposed it as often as presented for consideration; and, to this day, as often as it has been agitated in Congress it has been rejected.

At the formation of our Federal Constitution, Mr. Madison declared it would be wrong to admit in that instrument that "man can hold property in man,"—to which every member of the convention yielded a tacit admission. But the people were not satisfied with a silent negation of such doctrine, and two years afterwards Congress proposed to amend the Constitution by declaring, "That no person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property, without due process of law;" that is without trial and conviction before some tribunal having jurisdiction of the offense; and this proposition was adopted by the States, and now forms a part of the Constitution. I need not say that the Republicans of 1776 and those of 1856 declared it to be a "self-evident truth" that all men (including slaves as well as their masters) are endowed by their Creator with the inalienable right to liberty, and that our Federal Government was founded for the express purpose of securing to every human being within its exclusive jurisdiction the enjoyment of this right.

And should Cuba be annexed to the United States, and thereby brought under our jurisdiction, the Republicans will be bound to respect the right of every individual to enjoy his liberty under the laws of the United States, while they will be equally bound to reject any claims of property which Cubans may set up to the souls and bodies of each other.

To these doctrines of our Republican Fathers, of the statesmen and jurists of Ohio, to the letter and spirit of our State and Federal Constitutions, to the platform and policy of the Republican party, you seem to have placed yourself in the most unmistakable antagonism. I say you seem to have placed yourself in this attitude. You are so reported, and if you have been misrepresented in any respect, it is due to the people of the State as well as to yourself that your true position be known; and I thus address you over my own signature, in order that you may feel at perfect liberty to explain the language you are reported to have used, as well as to correct any error of facts or of argument into which I may have fallen in this letter. I know that you desire to be understood, and approve my earnestness and plainness. I have long labored to restore our Government to the doctrine on which it was founded. My hopes of our country are based upon that respect for the rights of every member of the human family which gives equal protection to each, and which the Republican party are pledged to maintain wherever the Federal Constitution holds exclusive jurisdiction—regarding as they do an unmitigated despotism, an outrage upon human nature, a crime which no sophistry can

disguise, and no circumstances can justify. You further assert that we will be bound to admit Cuba as a Slave State if she desires it after annexation. To this I believe the Republican are unanimously opposed. The very object and design of annexation is to extend and increase the despotism of Slavery; to give the foreign Catholics of Cuba, assisted by the Democratic party, the power to elect our President and Vice-President, and control the administration of our Federal Government for an indefinite period in the future. To effect this object the present Administration is willing to give the free population of Cuba superior power and influence over the interests, the rights and honor of our people to that which we ourselves exert, by allowing them three votes for every five slaves they may hold in bondage. Republicans deny that Congress or the Federal Government hold any right or authority thus to take from the people of the Free States the control of their own rights, their own honor, and transfer them to the discretion and keeping of Cuban slaveholders.

You are reported as quoting from a speech of Mr. Adams upon the admission of Arkansas as a State, in which that distinguished statesman said he did not regard it as an objection to be urged against the admission of that State that she had not formed an anti-Slavery Constitution. You must be aware that, in the purchase of Louisiana; President Jefferson did not profess to act in pursuance of, or under authority of the Constitution; but, on the contrary, he expressly said the treaty would be void unless the Constitution should be so amended as to authorize it; and that he and other statesmen regarded the subsequent unanimous approval of the treaty by the several States, and by the people of all the States, as equivalent to such an amendment; that the treaty had, at the time Mr. Adams spoke, for more than thirty years been affirmed and sanctioned without a dissenting voice; that sixteen years previously, Congress had, with his entire approval, prohibited slavery in that part of the Louisiana purchase lying north of 36 deg. 30 min. north latitude—just as Republicans will abolish it in Cuba—but leaving Arkansas with her slavery, to which no objection had been previously made. It was in view of these circumstances, with a desire to ratify the past action of Government, so long and so universally approved, that Mr. Adams made the remark to which you refer. They could in no respect apply to a future annexation against the will of any State, or against the will of any respectable portion of our people. His views in regard to the annexation of Texas in 1845, while that policy was cherished by the Executive precisely as that of annexing Cuba is now, will give the views of our departed friend upon a case exactly parallel to that of which you spoke. At the close of the XXVIIth Congress, Mr. Adams and 19 other Members of Congress published an address to the people of the Free States. It was dictated and signed by him.

The address, speaking of the annexation of Texas, declares that "it is impossible for any man to doubt that the formation of several new slaveholding States are the real objects of the Executive." The same inferences (says the address) will show that the particular objects of this new acquisition are the PERPETUATION OF SLAVERY the continued ascendancy of the Slave Power. We hold there is no political necessity for it, no advantage to be derived from it, and there is no constitutional power in any department of Government to effect it. That no act of Congress nor treaty of annexation can impose the least obligation upon the several States of the Union to submit to such unconstitutional act, or to receive into their family or fraternity such illegitimate progeny. We hesitate not to say that annexation, by any act or proceeding of the Federal Government, or any of its departments, would be identical with dissolution.

Such were the opinions of Mr. Adams left on record over his own signature, and I feel authorized to say he cherished them while he lived. It is true that the Free States preferred submission. They went into a new Union with Texas rather than separate from the Slave States. They joined in the war, participated in the sacrifice of eighty thousand human victims, and incurred a debt of two hundred millions dollars; and to this day the people of the Free States are taxed millions of dollars annually to protect the people of Texas in their Slavery, and maintain the ascendancy of the Democratic party by aid of Texan votes. I may also add that the unmanly surrender to that outrage struck the Whig party with moral and political death. And I speak the solemn convictions of my own mind when I say that a like surrender by the Republicans in regard to Cuba ought to be attended with the like result.

But the doctrines avowed by Mr. Adams remained unchanged. I then subscribed to them. I signed the address. It spoke the sentiments of my heart.—Those opinions have been strengthened and intensified by fifteen years of observation and experience.—Resistance to the extension and increase of the slave power constitutes an essential element in the Republican platform on which that party has risen and extended until at this time it wields the moral power of the nation. The surrender of this doctrine would be a surrender, a disbandment of the only party which promises peace or permanence to our government; a party whose triumph is as sure as its adherence to the principles on which it was founded.

It was with inexpressible pain that I read the remarks on the subject which

you are reported to have made. Your numerous friends in this part of the State, I think, unite with me in a cordial desire to see a more full expression of the reasons on which you found your opinions, communicated through the public press, and to attain this object I have ad dressed you with so much frankness.—With much respect your friend,  
J. R. GIDDINGS.

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