

Selections.

FREEDMEN'S BUREAU.

MR. SUMNER'S SPEECH.

In SENATE, Wednesday, June 9, 1864.

The Senate, as in Committee of the Whole, proceeded to consider the bill (H. R. No. 51) to establish a Bureau of Freedmen's Affairs: The select committee on slavery and freedmen reported the bill with an amendment to strike out of the bill all after the enacting clause, and insert the following in lieu thereof:

That an office is hereby created in the Treasury Department to be called the Bureau of Freedmen, meaning thereby such persons as have become free since the beginning of the present war, under the care of a Commissioner, with an annual salary of \$4,000, who shall be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate; and there shall be a chief clerk, acting also as disbursing officer, under bonds to the United States, with an annual salary of \$2,000, and also such number of clerks, not exceeding two of each class, as shall be necessary, who shall be appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury.

SEC. 2. *And be it further enacted,* That the Commissioner shall have authority, under the direction of the Secretary of the Treasury, to create departments of freedmen within the rebel States, so far as the same may be brought under the military power of the United States; and each department shall be under the supervision of an assistant commissioner, with an annual salary of \$2,000, to be appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury, and with authority to appoint local superintendents and clerks, so far as the same may be needed, at a compensation not exceeding the ordinary rate for similar services, subject, in all respects, to the approval of the Secretary.

SEC. 3. *And be it further enacted,* That the military commander within any department shall, on the application of the assistant commissioner thereof, supply all needed military support in the discharge of the duties of such assistant commissioner, unless there are controlling military reasons for withholding the same; and any military commander may be appointed assistant commissioner, without increase of salary.

SEC. 4. *And be it further enacted,* That the Commissioner, under the direction of the Secretary of the Treasury, shall have the general superintendence of all freedmen throughout the several departments, and it shall be his duty especially to watch over the execution of all laws, proclamations, and military orders of emancipation, or in any way concerning freedom, and generally, by careful regulations, in the spirit of the Constitution, to protect these persons in the enjoyment of their rights, to promote their welfare, and to secure to them and their posterity the blessings of liberty.

SEC. 5. *And be it further enacted,* That the assistant commissioners shall have authority, within their respective departments, to take possession of all abandoned real estate and all real estate, with the houses thereon, liable to sale or confiscation, or to any claim of title by the United States, and not already appropriated to Government uses; and also to take possession of all personal property found on such estate, and to rent on lease all such real estate, or any part thereof, with the personal property thereon, and to act as inspectors of the same; or, in case no proper lessee can be found, then to cause the same to be cultivated or occupied by the freedmen, on such terms, in either case, and under such regulations, as the Commissioner may determine. *Provided,* That no freedmen shall be held to service on any estate above mentioned, otherwise than according to voluntary contract reduced to writing and certified by the assistant commissioner or local superintendent; nor shall any such contract be for a longer period than twelve months.

SEC. 6. *And be it further enacted,* That the assistant commissioners and local superintendents shall be ready, as advisory guardians, to aid the freedmen in the adjustment of their wages, or, where they have rented plantations or small holdings, in the organization of their labor; that they shall take care that the freedmen do not suffer from ill-treatment or any failure of contract on the part of others, and that on their part they perform their duty in the premises; that they shall further do what they can as arbitrators, to reconcile and settle any differences in which freedmen may be involved, whether among themselves or between themselves and other persons; and in case such differences are carried before any tribunal, civil or military, they shall appear as next friends of the freedmen, so far as to see that the case is fairly stated and heard. And in all such proceedings there shall be no disability or exclusion on account of color.

SEC. 7. *And be it further enacted,* That lessees heretofore made by the supervising special agents of the Treasury Department, under the authority of the General Order 331, of the Secretary of War, dated October 3, 1863, and in accordance with the regulations of the Treasury Department, shall have the same effect as if made by assistant commissioners under this act; and such agents shall have the same powers in the premises as are given herein to assistant commissioners: *Provided,* that no lease shall be made by them for a longer period than one year, and that immediately upon the organization of any department of freedmen, such agents shall cease to execute their functions within such department, and shall deliver over to the assistant commissioner thereof all property and papers held by them as agents. But all expenses necessarily incurred by such agents in any department, prior to its organization under this act, shall be defrayed by the Secretary of the Treasury out of any moneys in his hands arising from the leases made by such agents.

SEC. 8. *And be it further enacted,* That the Commissioner shall apply the proceeds arising from leases in the several departments to pay the salaries and other expenses under this act, so that the bureau here established may become at an early day self-supporting; and any proceeds over and above the annual expense thereof shall be paid into the Treasury of the United States.

SEC. 9. *And be it further enacted,* That it shall be the duty of all officers, civil and military, charged with the execution of any law, proclamation, or military order of emancipation, or in any way concerning freedmen, not mustered into, nor regularly engaged in, the military service, to make return to the Commissioner of all their proceedings in execution thereof, under such regulations as shall from time to time be prescribed.

SEC. 10. *And be it further enacted,* That the Commissioner shall, before the commencement of each session of Congress, make full report of his proceedings to the Secretary of the Treasury, who shall communicate the same to Congress. And the assistant commissioners shall make quarterly reports of their proceedings to the Commissioner, and also such other special reports as from time to time may be required.

Mr. SUMNER. Mr. President, the Senate only a short time ago was engaged for a week in considering how to open an iron way from the Atlantic to

the Pacific. It is now to consider how to open a way from slavery to freedom.

I regret much that only thus tardily we have been able to take up the bill for a Bureau of Freedmen. But I trust that nothing will interfere with its consideration now. In what I have to say, I shall confine myself to a simple statement. If I differ from others, I beg to be understood that it is in no spirit of controversy, and with no pride of opinion. Nothing of this kind can enter justly into any such discussion.

I shall not detain the Senate to expose the importance of this measure. All must confess it at a glance. It is at once a charity and a duty.

By virtue of existing acts of Congress, and also under the proclamation of the President, large numbers of slaves have suddenly become free. These may now be counted by the hundred thousand. In the progress of victory, they will be counted by the millions.

As they derive their freedom from the United States, under legislative or executive acts, the national Government cannot be excused from making such provisions as may be required for their immediate protection and welfare during the present transition period. The freedom that has been conferred must be rendered useful, or at least saved from being a burden. Reports, official and unofficial, show the necessity of action. In some places it is a question of life and death.

It would be superfluous to quote at length from these reports, which all testify alike, whether from Louisiana, South Carolina, Fort Monroe, Vicksburg, Tennessee, Arkansas. I know not where the call is most urgent. It is urgent everywhere; and in some places it is the voice of distress.

Wherever our arms have prevailed, the old social system has been destroyed. Masters have fled, and slaves have assumed a new character. Released from their former obligations, and often adrift in the world, they naturally look to the prevailing power. Here, for instance, is testimony which I take from an excellent report made in the department of Tennessee, under date of April 29, 1863:

"Negroes, in accordance with the acts of Congress, free on coming within our lines, circulated much like water; the task was to take care for and render useful.

They rolled like eddies around military posts; many of the men employed in accordance with Order No. 72, district West Tennessee; women and children largely doing nothing but eating and idling, the dupes of vice and crime, the unsuspecting sources of disease."

From this statement, Senators may form an idea of the numbers who seek assistance.

But the question is often asked as to the disposition of these persons to labor. Here, also, the testimony is explicit. I have in my hand the answers from different stations on this point.

"Question. 'What of their disposition to labor?'

Answer, Corinth. 'So far as I have tested it, better than I expected; willing to work for money, except in waiting on the sick. One hundred and fifty hands gathered five hundred acres of cotton in less than three weeks, much of which time was bad weather. The owner admitted that it was done more quickly than it could have been done with slaves. When detailed for service, they generally remained till honorably discharged, even when badly treated. I am well satisfied, from careful calculations, that the contrabands of this camp and district have netted the Government, over and above all their expenses, including rations, tents, &c., at least \$3,000 per month, independent of the work done and all the property brought through our lines from the rebels."

Cairo. 'Willing to labor when they can have proper motives.'"

Grand Junction. 'Have manifested considerable disposition to escape labor, having had no sufficient motives to work.'"

Holly Springs and Memphis. 'With few exceptions, generally willing, even without pay. Paid regularly, they are much more prompt.'"

Memphis. 'Among men, better than among women. Hold out to them the inducements, benefit to themselves and friends, essential to the industry of any race, and they would at once be diligent and industrious.'"

Bolivar. 'Generally good; would be improved by the idea of pay.'"

Here, also, is a glimpse at Newbern, North Carolina, under date of February 29, 1864:

"Immediately on my return here, on the 12th of October, I instituted measures for placing the different abandoned plantations within our lines in this State under proper management and cultivation. As soon as it became known that, as supervising Treasury agent, I had charge of this property, I was visited by hundreds (and I might correctly say thousands) of contrabands, along with numerous white persons, desiring to obtain privileges to work upon the same."

And here is the testimony of Gen. Banks, in Louisiana:

"Wherever in the department they have been well treated and reasonably compensated, they have invariably rendered faithful service to their employers. From many persons who manage plantations, I have received the information that there is no difficulty whatever in keeping them at work, if the conditions to which I have referred are complied with."

I do not quote further, for it would simply take time. But I cannot forbear from adding that the report from the commission on freedmen, appointed by the Secretary of War, accumulates ample testimony on this head, all showing that the freedmen are anxious to find employment. But your Treasury testifies to their productive power, for it contains at this moment more than a million dollars which have come from the sweat of freedmen.

It is evident, then, that the freedmen are not idlers. They desire work. But in their helpless condition they have not the ability to obtain it without assistance. They are alone, friendless, and uninformed. The curse of slavery is still upon them. Somebody must take them by the hand; not to support them, but simply to help them to that work which will support them. Thus far private societies in different parts of the country, at the East and the West—especially at all the principal centres—have done much toward this charity. But private societies are inadequate to the duties required. The intervention of the national Government is necessary. Without such intervention, many of these poor people, freed by our acts in the exercise of a military necessity, will be left to perish.

The service required is too vast and complex for unorganized individuals. It must proceed from the national Government. This alone can supply the adequate machinery; and extend the proper network of assistance, with that unity of operation which is required. The national Government must interfere in this case precisely as in building the Pacific railroad. Private charity in our country is active and generous, but it is powerless to cope with the evils arising from a wicked institution; nor can it provide a remedy where society itself has been overthrown. There are few who will not admit that something must be done by the Government. Cold must be that heart which could turn away from this call. But whatever is done must be through some designated agency, and this brings me to another aspect of the question.

The President in his proclamation of emancipation has used the following language: "I recommend to them"—that is to the freedmen—"that in all cases, when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages." Such is the recommendation from that supreme authority which decreed emancipation. They are to labor, and for reasonable wages. But the President does not undertake to say how this opportunity shall be obtained; how the laborer shall be brought in connection with the land; how his rights shall be protected; and how his new-found liberty shall be made a blessing. It was enough, perhaps, on the occasion of the proclamation, that the suggestion should be made. Faithful labor and reasonable wages! Let these be secured, and everything else will follow. But how shall these be secured?

Different subjects as they become important are committed to the care of special bureaus. I need only refer to patents, agriculture, public lands, pensions, and Indian affairs, each under the charge of a separate Commissioner. Clearly the time has come for a Bureau of Freedmen. In speaking of a Bureau of Freedmen, I mean a bureau which will be confined in its operations to the affairs of freedmen, and not travel beyond this increasing class to embrace others, it may be of African descent. Our present necessity is to help those who have been made free by the present war; and the term freedmen describes sufficiently those who have once been slaves; and it is this class which we propose to help during the transition period from slavery to freedom. Call it charity or duty, it is sacred as humanity.

But here a practical question arises with regard to the Department in which this bureau shall be placed. There are reasons for placing it in the War Department—at least during the continuance of the war. There are other reasons for placing it in the Department of the Interior, which has charge of the public lands, Indian affairs, pensions, and patents. But whatever may be the reasons on general grounds for placing it in one of these two Departments, there are other reasons, of special importance at this moment, which point to the Treasury Department. Indeed, after careful consideration, the committee were satisfied that it was so clearly associated with other interests already intrusted to this Department, that it could not be advantageously administered elsewhere. Although beginning this inquiry with a conviction in favor of the War Department, I could not resist the conclusion of the committee.

Look, for one moment, at the class of duties already imposed upon the Treasury Department in connection with the very homes of these freedmen.

Congress has, by special acts, conferred upon the Secretary of the Treasury extraordinary powers with regard to trade in the rebel States. There was, first, the act of July 13, 1861, entitled "further to provide for the collection of duties on imports and other purposes," which declared that commercial intercourse with any State or part of a State in rebellion, when licensed by the President, "shall be conducted and carried on only in pursuance of rules and regulations prescribed by the Secretary of the Treasury." And it is further provided that

"The Secretary of the Treasury may appoint such officers at places where officers of the customs are not now authorized by law, as may be needed to carry into effect such licenses, rules, and regulations."—*Statutes at Large*, vol. 12, p. 257.

There is another act of Congress, approved July 13, 1862, supplementary to the latter act, which confers additional powers upon the Secretary of the Treasury with reference to trade with "any place in the possession or under the control of insurgents against the United States."

There is also the act of June 7, 1862, entitled "An act for the collection of direct taxes in insurrectionary districts within the United States, and for other purposes." In this act it is provided (section nine,) that, "where the board of commissioners shall be satisfied that the owners of lands have left the same to join the rebel forces, or otherwise to engage in and abet this rebellion, and the same shall have been struck off to the United States at said sale, the said commissioners shall, in the name of the United States, enter upon and take possession of the same, and may lease the same, together or in parcels, to any person or persons who are citizens of the United States; and (section ten) the commissioners "shall from time to time make such temporary rules and regulations and insert such clauses in said leases as shall be just and proper to secure employment and support, at wages or upon shares of the crop, of such persons and families as may be residing upon the said parcels or lots of land, which said rules and regulations are declared to be subject to the approval of the President." (*Statutes at Large*, volume twelve, page 424.) The execution of this act is lodged in the Treasury Department.

Then comes the act of Congress, approved March 12, 1863, entitled "An act to provide for the collection of abandoned property and for the prevention of frauds in insurrectionary districts within the United States." Under this act the Secretary was authorized "to appoint a special agent or agents to receive and collect all abandoned or captured property in any State or Territory of the United States, designated as in insurrection against the lawful Government of the United States." The act proceeds with details on the subject.

Such are the powers conferred by Congress upon the Treasury Department concerning trade and abandoned property in the rebel States. These were followed by a general order from the War Department, as follows:

[General Orders, No. 331.]
WAR DEPARTMENT,
ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
WASHINGTON, October 9, 1863.

The President orders:
1. All houses, tenements, lands, and plantations, except such as may be required for military purposes, which have been or may be deserted and abandoned by insurgents within the lines of the military occupation of the United States forces in States declared by proclamation of the President to be in insurrection, will hereafter be under the supervision and control of the supervising special agents of the Treasury Department.

2. All commanders of military departments, districts, and posts will, upon receipt of this order, surrender and turn over to the proper supervising special agent such houses, tenements, lands, and plantations not required for military uses as may be in their possession or under their control; and all officers of the Army of the United States will at all times render to the agents appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury all such aid as may be necessary to enable them to obtain possession of such houses, tenements, lands, and plantations, and to maintain their authority over the same.

By order of the Secretary of War:
E. D. TOWNSEND, Assistant Adjutant General.

By this order, as it appears, the Treasury Department has been substituted for the War Department in jurisdiction over "houses, tenements, lands, and plantations deserted and abandoned by insurgents within the lines of military occupation." This is broad, but it is positive.

In pursuance of these acts of Congress, and of this order of the War Department, the Secretary of the

Treasury has proceeded to appoint special agents and to establish a code of regulations. I have in my hands now a small volume, entitled "Commercial Intercourse with States Declared in Insurrection, and the Collection of Abandoned and Captured Property," containing the statutes and also the departmental regulations on the subject. It appears that there is now an organization under the Secretary of the Treasury, and also a system, both of reasonable completeness, to carry out these purposes.

In determining where the Bureau of Freedmen should be placed, it becomes important to consider the interests which it is proposed to guard; and this brings me to another aspect of the question.

Looking at the freedmen, whose welfare is in question, we shall find that their labor may be classified under two different heads; first, *military*; and secondly, *predial*, or relating to farms. There will be still other laborers, including especially mechanics; but these will be chiefly in the towns. The large mass will be included in the two classes I have named. It is, therefore, these two classes that are to be particularly considered.

1. The first class is already provided for. It appears that one hundred thousand freedmen are already engaged in the military service as soldiers or laborers. Others will continue to be engaged in this way. These are all naturally and logically under the charge of the War Department; nor do they need the superintendence of the proposed bureau. The act of Congress equalizing their condition in the army of the United States is better for them than any bureau.

2. But there will remain the other larger class, consisting in the main of women and children, and farm laborers, who must find employment on the abandoned lands. To this labor they are accustomed. These lands are their natural home. But this class must naturally and logically come under the charge of the Department which has charge of the abandoned lands. Conceding that all in the military service fall under the superintendence of the War Department, it follows with equal reason that all who labor on the lands must fall under the superintendence of the Treasury Department, so long, at least, as this Department has charge of the lands.

This conclusion seems so reasonable that your committee were not able to resist it. But the testimony of persons who have given particular attention to the question is explicit also, so that experience is in harmony with reason. I have in my hands a letter from Colonel McKaye, an eminent citizen of New York, and also a member of the commission to inquire and report on this subject, appointed by the Secretary of War. After visiting South Carolina and Louisiana, expressly to study the necessities of freedmen, and to ascertain what could be done to benefit them, he thus expresses himself:—

"In the first place, everybody who has had any practical experience of the working of the plantations, or of the superintendence of negro labor, will tell you that the control of the abandoned plantations and the care of the colored people must be in the same hands."

You will not fail to observe how positive this expert speaks. According to him, all who have had "practical experience" insist that the care of the freedmen and of the plantations should be "in the same hands;" and so important does he regard this point that he names it first of all—"in the first place."

But Colonel McKaye is not alone. Here is a letter from Hon. Robert Dale Owen, chairman of the Commission on Freedmen, appointed by the Secretary of War, which testifies as follows:—

"It will never do to have Treasury agents who lease the lands to white men and War Department agents, who assign the same lands to colored people. Nothing but confusion and conflict of authority can result. It will not work at all. But even if it would, why employ two sets of agents to do what one set can do much better? And who is to inspect the leased plantations and see to it that neither employers nor employed are wronged? The men who gave the leases? But they are Treasury agents, and have nothing to do with freedmen. Or the freedmen's commission? But what authority can they have over men who do not hold their leases from them? The men who have the care of the laborer ought to have the leasing of the land and the inspection of the leases; and they should be authorized to lease equally to white and to colored people."

Such a statement is an argument. This conclusion has the support also of General Banks, in a letter addressed to one of the Freedmen's Commission. Here are his words:—

"The assignment of the abandoned or forfeited plantations to one department of the Government, and the protection and support of the emancipated people to another, is a fundamental error productive of incalculable evils, and cannot be too soon or too thoroughly corrected."

The able and elaborate report from the Freedmen's Commission, just published, considers this question carefully. Nothing could be more explicit than the following testimony:—

"But in the judgment of the commission, the most serious error in connection with the present arrangements for the care and protection of these people arises out of the assignment to a different agency of the care and disposal of the abandoned plantations. To enter into the detail of all the evils and abuses that have arisen out of this error, and which are unavoidable so long as it continues to exist, would occupy too great a space in this report. Suffice it to say that it is the source of the greatest confusion, and a perpetual collision between the different local authorities, in which not only the emancipated population, but the Government itself, suffers the most serious injuries and losses.

It is the purpose of all the testimony which the commission has been able to obtain, not in the Department of the Gulf only, but everywhere, in relation to this matter.

The unhesitating judgment of every person, official or other, not interested in the opportunities it affords for peculation, with whom we have consulted, coincides with that of General Banks. All without exception declare that no system can avail to effect the great objects contemplated, that does not assign to one and the same authority the care and disposal of the abandoned plantations, and the care and protection of the emancipated laborers who are to cultivate them.

And after the most thorough investigations, I am authorized in saying that this is the deliberate judgment of the Commission."

It was on this ground of reason, and yielding to the influence of such authoritative opinions, that the committee were led to believe that there was no alternative on this practical question.

In the course of their inquiries, the committee sought the opinions of the Secretary of the Treasury. With the heavy burdens of his Department resting on his shoulders, he does not desire any additional labor, but he does not conceal his conviction that the care of the freedmen must for the present be associated with the care of the lands. He would be glad to be relieved of all the responsibilities connected with the subject; but he hopes that it will not be divided between two different departments. In that event, it is feared that there will be little good from either.

I have dwelt with some minuteness on this question, because it seems to be the practical point on which there may be a difference of opinion. Already gentlemen have taken sides, and newspapers also. I regret this difference; but I trust that a calm and dispassionate consideration of the subject will render it innocuous. The first thought of all should be the cause.

There is another question which ought not to be passed over in silence, arising out of the desire to protect the freedmen from any system of serfdom or enforced apprenticeship. It is well known that among the former slave-masters there are many who continue to count upon appropriating the labor of their slaves, if not under the name of slavery, at least under some other system by which the freedmen are effectually bound to service. The very phrase "bound to service," standing alone, is the pleonastic definition of slavery itself. One of these slave-masters in a public speech said, "There is really no difference, in my opinion, whether we hold them as absolute slaves or obtain their labor by some other method. Of course we prefer the old method, but that question is not now before us." Such barefaced avowals were not needed to put humane men on their guard against the conspiracy to continue slavery under another name.

The bill now before the Senate provides against any such possibility by requiring *first*, that the assistant commissioners and local superintendents shall not only aid the freedmen in the adjustment of their wages, but that they shall take care that the freedmen do not suffer from ill treatment or any failure of contract on the part of others; and *secondly*, that the contracts for service shall be limited to a year. The latter provision is so important that I give it precisely:—

"Provided, That no freedmen shall be held to service on any estate above mentioned, otherwise than according to voluntary contract, reduced to writing, and certified by the assistant commissioner or local superintendent; nor shall any such contract be for a longer period than twelve months."

Here is a safeguard against serfdom or enforced apprenticeship which seemed to your committee of especial value. In this respect the House Bill was thought to be fatally defective, inasmuch as it interposed no positive safeguards.

I do not know how extensive the desire may be to set slavery again on its feet under another name. But when we take into consideration the selfish tendencies of the world, the disposition of the strong to appropriate the labor of the weak, and the reluctance of slave-masters to renounce their habitual power, I have felt that Congress would not do its duty on this occasion if it did not by special provision guard against any such outrage. There must be no slavery under another *alias*. This terrible wrong must not be allowed to skulk in serfdom or compulsory labor. "Once free, always free;" such is the maxim of justice, and of jurisprudence. But any system by which the freedmen may be annexed to the soil, *ulscripti glebe*, will be in direct conflict with their newly acquired rights. They can be properly bound only by contract; and considering how easily they may be induced to enter into engagements ignorantly or heedlessly, and thus become the legal victims of designing men, it is evident that no precautions in their behalf can be too great.

It is well known that in some of the British West Indies an attempt was made, at the period of emancipation, to establish a system of apprenticeship which should be an intermediate condition between slavery and freedom. But the experiment failed. In some of the islands it was abandoned by the planters themselves, who frankly accepted emancipation outright. And in all it finally fell, blasted by the eloquence of Brougham. Here is a passage from one of his speeches:—

"They who always dreaded emancipation, who were alarmed at the prospect of negro indolence, who stood aghast at the vision of negro rebellion should the chains cease to rattle, or the lash to resound through the air, gathering no wisdom from the past, still persist in affrighting themselves and scaring you with imaginary apprehensions from the transition to entire freedom out of the present intermediate state. But that intermediate state is the very source of all their real danger; and I disguise not its magnitude from myself. You have gone too far if you stop here, and go no further; you are in imminent hazard if, having loosened the fetters, you do not strike them off; if, leaving them ineffectual to restrain, you let them remain to gall and to irritate and to goad. Beware of that state yet more unnatural than slavery itself, *liberty bestowed by halves!*"—*Third Series Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 40, p. 1312.

"I have demonstrated to you that everything is ordered, every previous step taken, all safe, by experience shown to be safe for the long-desired consummation. The time has come, the trial has been made, the hour is striking; you have no longer a pretext for hesitation, or faltering, or delay. The slave has shown by four years blameless behavior, and devotion to the pursuits of peaceful industry, that he is as fit for his freedom as any English peasant, ay, or any lord whom I now address. I demand his rights; I demand his liberty without stint; in the name of justice and of law, in the name of reason, in the name of God, who has given you no right to work injustice."—*Ibid.*, p. 1314.

But surely there is no need of eloquence or persuasion to induce you to set your faces like flint against any such half-way system. Freedom that has been declared must be secured completely, so that it may not fail through any pretension or fraud of wicked men. The least that can be done is what is proposed by your committee.

Much more might be said on the whole subject, but I forbear. I have opened to consideration the two principal questions. If the Senate agree with the committee, first, on the importance of keeping the superintendence of the freedmen and of the lands in the same hands, so as to avoid local conflict and discord, and, secondly, in the importance of providing surely against any system of serfdom or adscription to the soil, the bill of the committee must be adopted.

For the sake of plainness, I ask your attention to the main features of this bill, under the following heads:—

1. It provides exclusively for freedmen, meaning thereby "such persons as were once slaves," without undertaking to embrace persons generally of African descent.

2. It seeks to secure to such freedmen the opportunity of labor on those lands which are natural and congenial to them, and on this account it places the superintendence of the freedmen in the Department which has the superintendence of the lands.

3. It provides positively against any system of enforced labor or apprenticeship, by requiring contracts between the freedmen and their employers, to be carefully attested before their local officers.

4. It establishes a careful machinery for the purposes of the bill, both as regards the freedmen and as regards the lands.

But the bill may be seen not only in what it does, but also in what it avoids doing. It does not undertake too much. It does not assume to provide ways and means for the support of the freedmen; but it does look to securing them the opportunities of labor according to well-guarded contracts, and under the friendly advice of agents of the Government, who shall take care that they are protected against abuse of all kinds. It is the declared duty of these agents "to protect these persons in the enjoyment of their rights, to promote their welfare, and to secure to them and their posterity the blessings of liberty." Under these comprehensive words, all that is proper and Constitutional will be authorized for their welfare and security, while liberty and labor will be made to go hand in hand. Thus far in the sad history of this people labor has been compelled by Slavery. But the case at last will be reversed. It will be Liberty that will conduct the freedman to the fields, protect him in his toil, and secure to him all its fruits.

In closing what I have to say on this subject, allow me to read the official testimony of the Commission on Freedmen, appointed by the Secretary of War, in their recent report on this subject:—

"We need a freedman's bureau, not because these people are negroes, but because they are men who have been for generations despoiled of their rights. The commission has heretofore, to wit, in a supplemental report made to you in December last, recommended, to effect the above objects, the establishment of such a bureau; and they believe that all that is essential to its proper organization is contained, substantially, in a bill to that effect, reported on April 12, from the Senate committee on slavery and freedmen."

This is the bill which is now under consideration.

It will be for the Senate to determine, under the circumstances, what it will do. My earnest hope is that it will do something. The opportunity must not be lost of helping so many persons who are now helpless, and of aiding the cause of reconciliation, without which peace cannot be assured. In this spirit I leave the whole subject to the good judgment of the Senate. If anything better than the work of the committee can be found, I hope that it will be adopted; but meanwhile I ask you to accept that which is now offered.