

RESOLUTIONS

OF THE

LEGISLATURE OF KENTUCKY,

Against any interference on the part of the General Government, societies, or individuals, on the subject of slavery in the District of Columbia.

MARCH 16, 1836.

Laid on the table, and ordered to be printed.

RESOLUTIONS RESPECTING ABOLITION SOCIETIES.

The select committee to whom was referred so much of the message of the Lieutenant and acting Governor, as relates to the abolition societies at the North, together with the preambles and resolutions of the States of North and South Carolina, in relation to the same subject, have had the same under consideration, and beg leave to report:

That although your committee have not been able to ascertain the precise number and extent of such societies, yet they are satisfied of their existence, and that their object is to produce an entire abolition of slavery in the United States, by printing and circulating, through the post offices and other modes of communication, tracts, pamphlets, almanacs, and pictorial representations, the manifest tendency of which is to produce a spirit of discontent, insubordination, and perhaps insurrection, with the slave population of the country.

Your committee have not thought it a part of their duty to present to the House, upon this occasion, a formal vindication of the justice and propriety of the institution of domestic slavery. To do so, would involve a recognition of the right of those Northern abolitionists to question it. For this institution, the people of Kentucky hold themselves responsible to no earthly tribunal, but will refer their cause to Him alone, through the mysterious dispensations of whose providence, dominion has been given to the white man over the black. He alone may judge of its compatibility with His will; and of its political expediency, we who witness its practical operation are best competent to speak.

The Commonwealth of Kentucky, so long as she remains a sovereign member of this confederacy, can never permit *another State* to assail her local institutions, much less a combination of private individuals. If the States of this Union were bound together by no common tie; if the Federal constitution were annihilated, every principle of international law would still prohibit the citizens of one State from interfering with the domestic policy of another. How much more forcible, then, is their obligation to abstain from such interference, when we are united together by a common instrument, which guaranties to each State where the in-

stitution of slavery exists, its perfect inviolability. Yet the strange scene is exhibited to the world, by the abolition societies, of private individuals combining to effect that which the States of which they are members are restrained, by the sacred provisions of the constitutional compact, from attempting. Had all this been the work of foreign incendiaries, meditating the most effectual mode of assailing our peace and quiet, whatever sentiments of indignation may have been inspired, it would have caused no surprise. But when it proceeds from those with whom we are united by every tie which can bind a people together in concord and affection, your committee cannot restrain the expression of surprise and mortification.

Your committee will not deny that recent manifestations of public opinion at the North, have inspired them with the gratifying hope, that the wild and fanatical spirit which guides and directs the conduct of the abolition societies, have not yet been imparted to the great body of the people; yet the history of the world too fatally attests the deep and irreparable mischief which may be effected by the organized action of a few zealous enthusiasts, especially when their minds become so heated and sublimated as to imagine themselves the special executors of the Divine will. They *must* grow and strengthen, and whenever they become sufficiently numerous to exercise an influence in the political contests by which a free people are perpetually shaken, the history of the American Union, with all the high and glowing visions which now gladden the heart of the patriot, will have been written.

Whilst, however, your committee have been gratified with the spirit which has characterized the numerous and respectable meetings of our Northern brethren upon this deeply interesting subject, and their emphatic denunciations of the plans of those misguided fanatics, they would have been still more gratified had they thought proper to interpose the more powerful and effectual remedy of penal legislation. But your committee do not entertain this hope; enough has transpired to convince them, that under the miserably perverted name of free discussion, these incendiaries will be permitted to scatter their firebrands throughout the country, with no check but that which may be imposed by the feeble operation of public opinion. Your committee are as deeply impressed with the value of the high privilege which is secured to the citizen by the constitution of the country—the right of full and free discussion, as can be those who are prostituting it to such unhallowed purposes. But the freedom of the press is one thing—its licentiousness another; whilst the one is justly dear to every freeman, the other is the object of deep reprobation. It cannot be that the right of discussion at the North carries with it the right to excite a portion of the population of a sister State to rapine and murder. When the constitution of the country guaranties to every citizen the right to publish and speak his opinions upon all subjects, it wisely fixed the limitation that he shall be responsible for the abuse of that privilege. Your committee are unable to conceive a grosser prostitution of the freedom of the press, than the efforts of the abolitionists to stir up a portion of the population of eleven States of this Union to rebellion and bloodshed. May we not, however, appeal to the constitution of the land in behalf of the tenure by which we hold our property, with the same confidence that they appeal to their constitutional right of discussion. The rights which are sought to be violated by these

fanatics, are not less sacred by all the sanctions of the charter which binds us together, than is the unrestricted freedom of the press, to which they appeal in vindication of their right to scatter their licentious productions among us.

Your committee would assure our brethren at the North, that this Commonwealth is still animated by the same ardent devotion to the Union of these States, which has ever marked her political history; but they feel that they would be violating the high trust reposed in them by the House, did they not in terms firm, yet respectful, admonish them of the certain and tremendous consequences which must attend this officious and dangerous interference with their domestic institutions. If, as your committee fear, all invocation upon the justice of the North be in vain, it remains for the Commonwealth of Kentucky to look to her condition--to declare to the world her determined resolution to maintain inviolate her domestic institutions, and make good that declaration by all the safeguards which legislation can create.

Your committee would respectfully recommend the adoption of the following resolutions:

Resolved by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, That this Commonwealth alone has power to regulate and control the subject of domestic slavery as it exists within her territory; and any attempt on the part of the Federal Government to interfere with it in any manner, would be at war with the solemn sanctions of that instrument which binds us together.

Resolved, That the General Assembly views with unqualified reprobation, the formation of abolition societies at the North, for the purpose of circulating incendiary publications among the slaveholding States of the Union, as a violation of the original basis of the Federal compact, and calculated to endanger the integrity of this Union.

Resolved, That any attempt by Congress to abolish domestic slavery within the District of Columbia, would be regarded by this Commonwealth as a breach of the implied faith of the nation towards the citizens of that District, and as a usurpation of power, which, if acquiesced in by the slaveholding States, must end in the ultimate disregard, by that body, of the constitutional tenure by which they now hold their property.

Resolved, That our sister States, where domestic slavery exists, be, and they are hereby assured of the earnest co-operation of the State of Kentucky, to resist, at all hazards, every effort to interfere with that subject, either by Congress, any State, or combination of private persons.

Resolved, That his Excellency the Lieutenant and acting Governor be requested to transmit a copy of this report and resolutions to the Executive of each State, and to each of our Senators and Representatives in Congress, with a request to said Executive to lay the same before their respective Legislatures.

JNO. L. HELM, *Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

CYRUS WINGATE, *Speaker of the Senate.*

Approved 1st March, 1836 :

J. T. MOREHEAD.

By the Lieutenant and acting Governor:

A. P. COX, *Secretary.*