

## INTRODUCTION

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OF all the questions which have interested and divided the people of the United States, none since the foundation of the Federal Union has been so important, so far-reaching, and so long contested as slavery. During the first half of the nineteenth century the other great national questions were nearly all economic — taxation, currency, banks, transportation, lands, — and they had a strong material basis, a flavor of self-interest; but though slavery had also an economic side, the reasons for the onslaught upon it were chiefly moral. The first objection brought by the slave-power against the anti-slavery propaganda was the cry of the sacredness of vested and property rights against attack by sentimentalists; but what dignified the whole contest was the very fact that the sentiment for human rights was at the bottom of it, and that the abolitionists felt a moral responsibility even though property owners suffered. The slavery question, which in origin was sectional, became national as the moral issues grew clearer; and finally loomed up as the dominant question through the determination of both sides to use the power and prestige of the national government. From the moral agitation came also the personal element in the struggle, the development of strong characters, like Calhoun, Toombs, Stephens and Jefferson Davis on one side; like Lundy, Lovejoy, Garrison, Giddings, Sumner, Chase, John Brown and Lincoln on the other.

Among the many weak spots in the system of slavery none gave such opportunities to Northern abolitionists as the loco-