

## COMMUNICATION.

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(For the Presbyterian.)

## ASPECT OF OUR TIMES.

All history shows that in every nation the mass of the people are on the side of what in the present day are called conservative principles in the management of public affairs. Only a few, and these, generally speaking, persons who from their restless dispositions are incapable of securing much advantage either to themselves or others in any circumstances, look to profit amid the agitations of changes brought about by violence. The greater number seek to secure their portion of good in the more settled avocations to which the community is addicted. Love of order, love of ease, dislike of trouble, hope of gain, even a sense of right, but, more perhaps than all these, that reverence with which every child learns to regard the prevailing customs of that elder society, in which it is his ambition one day to take a respectable place, tends to make each successive generation follow in the footsteps of that which went before it.

Indeed revolutions are not brought forth by the generations in which they are conceived. But, when the fathers, by speaking against existing institutions, have taught their children to despise and dislike them, their doom is settled, and pass away they must, either by violence or sudden death or silent and gradual decay. Nothing therefore seems more certain than that institutions, which have lost favour in the eyes of the great conservative body of any community, must totter and fall, and the reign of their supporters come to an end. Their dethronement becomes only a question of time and mode, but descend from their place of pride and power they must. As the great conservative body falls gradually away from them, they find themselves thwarted at every turn, and impeded in all their movements, and at last fairly brought to a stand-still in their usual course of proceedings. But those who wish to bear rule cannot stand still. They adopt therefore, what is the very horror and aversion of conservatives, a course of violence and innovation, and the conservative mass swings fairly round to the side of their adversaries, and power and preeminence infallibly follow to that side on which it inclines. When feeling no longer safe within the barriers of old laws and inveterate customs, they come forth from these strongholds to entrench themselves behind new enactments, it avails nothing that the new lines of fortification are traced out with all the ancient formalities, and the foundations laid with all due solemnity, by men duly authorised and arrayed in all the insignia of official

dignity. They will find that what seemed a sceptre that could not be broken has become a frail reed in their hands and a mere mockery of the word of power. Their adversaries, having brought them to a stand-still in their old course of action, and forced them into a new one, where they can contend with them on more equal terms, will soon strip them of their official honours, and spoil them of their prescriptive privileges and put an end to their tenure of power.

Now, as certain parties which have hitherto exercised a great and predominating social influence in their respective spheres of action, seem all fairly to have forfeited conservative support, we augur that their downfall is at hand; and that in consequence the progress of society will take new directions, producing immense changes over the whole face of the Earth. The precise nature and extent of these changes it is impossible to foresee or predict, but come they must, and we may hope that they will prove as beneficial as they are certain to prove great and extensive in the height and depth and length and breadth of their operation.

The first of these parties we consider as having lost favour in the eyes of the conservative public, and therefore destined to fall, we shall notice, is that which desires to perpetuate Negro slavery on this continent. The very fact that its supporters have been constrained to avow their intention to make the institution *permanent* is enough to seal its doom, for the millions of freemen who have no interest in it will never resign themselves to the eternal disgrace of suffering such an opprobrium to exist in the midst of them. But every one, acquainted with the literary, philosophical, political and theological history of the United States, knows that this domestic institution, as it is sometimes called, long enjoyed something more than forbearance from nearly all the leading minds in their republic. It was not eulogised by all, but the lightness of the censure, as compared with the enormity of the offence, dealt out to it by their very highest moral authorities, almost amounted to approval. For, as conspicuous merit is condemned by faint applause, so is flagrant guilt acquitted by gentle reproof. Now, however, it is no longer thus. The great conservative body of the country is withdrawing both countenance and support from the domestic institution. Clergymen and Churches are becoming more than ashamed to furnish excuses for it. They are beginning to ask whether they ought not solemnly and publicly to testify against its longer continuance. The tide of public opinion is evidently on the turn. It is felt that a decision must be come to, either to abolish the institution or render it permanent; the spirit of the age forecloses the one decision, there is therefore no alternative but to consider how the other can best be carried into effect.

Henceforth no formal enactments in support of slavery will accomplish their declared objects. They will prove a dead letter for the most part and, when they take effect, it will only be to accelerate the inevitable catastrophe by hastening the march of events which lead on to it. This is evidently the effect of the fugitive slave law. When the slave-holder, lest his slaves should escape from their bonds, endeavoured to secure them by wreathing the other end of the chain about the neck of every freeman in the republic, he had recourse to a very foolish device for the accomplishment of his purpose. He has given his slaves yoke-fellows, whom he cannot restrain or bind over to do his behests, and so maddened them by his outrageous and insulting attempt that they will break away from him at all hazards, and, in casting the ignominious fetters from themselves, it will burst asunder those of the hapless negro at the same time. The effect of this law has been to draw a slave chain across every man's door-steps in the Union. He cannot come in or go out, but he finds it in his path. Nay it is attached to him go where he will. If he travel into foreign countries, it must go with him. Let him gather it up and stow it away as carefully out of sight as he can, he is in constant dread that it will drop out and proclaim his disgrace. He might turn fiercely upon gentlemen if they should look askance at it when it comes into view; but what can he do when ladies and children, point to it, ask him, if he is not ashamed of such an appendage. Ladies and children will speak and ask all manner of inconvenient questions, and they have all read Uncle Tom's Cabin, and are quite prepared to catechise any citizen of the freest nation on Earth upon the subject of the domestic institution, who is so unlucky as to fall in their way. He is constrained to see the sceptre of his national idol, the glorious Republic pointed at with the finger of scorn, fashioned by laws which he has sanctioned into a slave clog, and fastened by an authority, which he is bound to maintain with his blood, to the foot of miserable men against whom he can charge no offence but the colour of their skin. Whatever the present generation of citizens in this great Republic may do, it seems a thing certain that the young people growing up in it under present influences will wipe off at no distant day this conspicuous blot from the National Escutcheon. They may not be the greatest people on earth, as they fondly seem to imagine, but they are a great people, the greatest on this continent, and the only one that can make its voice heard in the general council of nations. So it does not become us to undervalue them. They form the bulwark of the independence of America, North and South. To them it is due that no foreign power will ever attempt to assert supremacy on this side of the Atlantic. That