

THE CHARLESTON CONVENT
QUESTION.
GREAT AND ENTHUSIASTIC
MEETING.

The Masonic Temple was crowded to its utmost capacity on Thursday evening, by the friends of Religious toleration and impartial legislation. At an early hour the Hall presented abundant evidence of the strong feelings of Catholics on this subject as well as gentlemen of all religious denominations, and the after proceedings evinced a firmness of resolution and union and energy of purpose which promise the brightest results after an organization.—The vast assembly seemed animated by one feeling, and that, the extinguishment of all party preferences, until the honor of Massachusetts is redeemed and the religious and political rights of Catholics guaranteed and protected by the Legislature. This is the common ground upon which we should all meet and act; it is the last resort of all classes of citizens when their rights or privileges are invaded, and in doing so we shall be sustained and applauded by the high minded and intelligent of Massachusetts as well as by every other State in the Union.

At half-past seven o'clock, Dr. H. B. C. GREENE called the meeting to order, and the proceedings of the preliminary meeting were read by the Secretary. The Chairman then stated that the Committee appointed to prepare an Address and Resolutions, would now report, and Mr. W. J. WALSH then read the following

REPORT.

The friends of a prompt and equitable indemnification for the destruction of the Ursuline Convent, in convening a public meeting of the citizens of Boston to take such measures as they in their judgment may think demanded, and expedient in the premises, feel that the reasons which have forced them into a separate and independent organization, should be distinctly presented to the public mind. We deplore in common with the just and high-minded people of Massachusetts the necessity which has driven us into an attitude of Self Defence against the intolerant spirit that laid in ruins that institution, and the equally fierce sentiments of religious bigotry which extinguished the claim of Justice in the Legislature of this Commonwealth. It is with a reluctance, which under the circumstances, our fellow citizens will appreciate, that we bury all distinctions of party and organize for the accomplishment of a great religious and political right which has been audaciously trampled under the feet of a lawless mob and flagrantly and insultingly violated by the Legislative tribunal of the State.—But we are solemnly impressed with the conviction that the highest and most sacred privileges of the citizens have been ruthlessly invaded in the person and property of a large and loyal body of our citizens and we feel it to be an act of imperious Public Duty, demanded by our conscience and our Honor to put forth our united energies in the effort to redeem the broken faith and sullied fame of Massachusetts.

The reasons which impel us to take this peculiar and independent position, are to be found in the fatal incidents of the

destruction of the Convent on Mt. Benedict, and the conduct of our rulers, in that fearful Drama. The right of any body of Citizens to erect public religious or literary institutions, and the duty of Government to protect such institutions, is too clearly understood and acknowledged to require from us a word in its explanation or vindication. It is the most cherished right of the citizen and the most solemn and important obligation of Government. It lays at the bottom of all rights and when its foundations are imperiled by popular commotion or by de-luded and profligate legislators, it becomes the duty of the outraged and the friends of justice and order, to throw themselves into the breach and protect the Constitution while protecting themselves.

The Ursuline Convent of Mount Benedict was such a religious and literary institution. It was conducted by an order of ladies peculiar to the Catholic Church, and its religious discipline was the most tolerant and judicious. In the habits only of its spotless and accomplished conductors, did it differ from the ordinary literary institutions of our country. Within its walls were being educated the daughters of some of the most distinguished men of the Union, drawn there by its elevated purity of character and the unrivalled facilities it afforded for a more thorough and accomplished education, than any other institution in the country. In no particular of its institution, its discipline, its objects, or the result of its establishment could it be justly obnoxious to the people of this State, were it not for the fearful and deplorable religious prejudices that then, and we have the strongest reason to believe exists now, amongst a considerable majority of the population of this state with reference to the opinions and institutions of Catholics. But on the contrary, it was in every respect unexceptionable to public prejudice, and was an honor and an ornament to the educational institutions in New England, and won from the most elevated in political and social position the highest tokens of approbation and respect. This institution affording to its pupils the advantages of a more polished education, than could be gained at any other in the United States, was at the time it was levelled to the ground, solely inhabited by a few helpless nuns, and a considerable number of young females from distant parts of the country, whose only protectors were the lady conductors in the establishment. On the night of the 11th of August, 1834, the prayers of the Convent were sent up to the throne of God for protection, and the inhabitants of that innocent and peaceful household retired to their beds, with the conscious security of helplessness and virtue in the centre of a civilized and christian community.

The young hearts within that splendid institution, when they pressed to their nightly pillows, could not comprehend the danger that hovered over their devoted heads, when the bonfires curled up to their windows, and the hideous yells from the rabble, came rolling upon their ears with fierce and dreadful portent. That fearful preparation for the most awful deed

that ever in the heart of a humane and Christian people, awoke the silence of midnight, was followed by a furious and tremendous onslaught of torch and blade, and the sacred and classic edifice, in the presence of the magistrates of Charlestown and thousands of spectators, was soon a smouldering heap of ruins, its inmates driven in their night clothes into the fields, followed by the execrations and threats of the painted fiends, who immolated their peaceful dwelling. In a few hours, was this horrible work consummated, and the Nuns and Pupils of the Convent, sent houseless and helpless upon the chance bounty of the public.

The perpetrators of this appalling outrage, from causes similar to those which produced it, escaped the punishment of the laws, and the magistracy of the State was powerless in bringing them to justice as it was in preventing the demolition of the Convent. Under these circumstances so terrible in their influence to produce indignation and retaliation, the Catholics of Massachusetts, with calmness and dignity, awaited a returning sense of justice, and have, up to this hour, forbore the commission of any act which could in the slightest degree compromise the high and honorable position in which their wrongs and moderation have placed them. The magnitude of their injuries was not sufficient to blind them for a moment to their duty as citizens, and they turned with a stern and hopeful heart to the great channel of appeal,—the Legislative tribunal of the State. In that body they encountered a spirit as hostile to their rights as reigned and triumphed at the plunder of Mt. Benedict. Three times has that appeal been spurned with indignity from the halls of Legislation; three times have the Catholics been denied indemnity for an outrage, the history of which makes the heart of humanity bleed with shame and sympathy; three times have the delegated Legislators of Massachusetts descended to the low bigotry of the mob who destroyed it, by refusing the reparation which the principles of justice and equity so eloquently demand: three times has the flag of Massachusetts been raised to screen the horrors of that night, and three times trailed in the path, and covered with the odium which the voice of the civilized world has bestowed upon the demons of Mt. Benedict.

The last act of Legislative indignity is still fresh in the minds, and to be read on the burning cheek of every Catholic in the State. Wrong has accumulated upon wrong, until the magnitude of the original outrage is lost in the deeper and calmer invasion and prostration of the Catholics' rights, by the Legislature. Their steady and consistent hostility to this great question of public justice, has failed to disturb the tranquility, or incite to indignant opposition, the Catholic body. Eight years have they calmly awaited the ebbing of the tide of prejudice from the shores of Massachusetts, and the return of a spirit of honor and equity which should repair the dreadful wrong that had been done them. But they have stood in silence and patience in vain, until a voice from the ruins of Mt. Benedict appeals to them

to take some measures to bury the blackened monuments of the horrors of that night, and extort from the reluctant conscience of this Commonwealth, the recognition of its infamy, and the reparation of the wrong.

With these views of this question we have assembled in our capacity as citizens of the State, and as a duty which that proud condition should awaken in the breast of all, we propose the adoption of peaceable, constitutional measures, to ensure a higher degree of certainty, that another year shall not roll over the dishonored name of Massachusetts, without the appeal of justice being answered in the Legislature of this Commonwealth. Therefore

Resolved, That the great rights of our religions liberty, personal safety, and property, were ruthlessly trampled under the feet of the ferocious mob of Mount Benedict, in the most populous part of the Commonwealth, and beneath the eye and without the interposition of the magistracy, whose duty it was, under the the Constitution, to protect the persons and property of the Nuns of the Ursuline Convent.

Resolved, That the right of freedom of conscience is one lying at the heart of the Constitution, and no mob ought with impunity, under an organized Government to assail and imperil the lives of persons while in the enjoyment of that privilege, and that the next act of a government whose weakness cannot prevent, is to REPAIR the outrage.

Resolved, That the several Legislatures of this State, for the last nine years, have manifested their contempt of the public rights of Catholic citizens, and their insensibility to those sound and honored principles of justice and equity, which should at all times govern and control Legislators in the discharge of their honorable functions, and a flagrant indifference to the public honor and fame of the Commonwealth, which appeals to all who hold these principles of vital importance to denounce and reprobate.

Resolved, That the rejection of the ORDER OF ENQUIRY by the last General Court, is a high-handed and intolerable invasion of the great Right of Petition, inasmuch as that right embraces the other right, to be heard respectfully, and answered in the forms and with the spirit of impartial and just Legislators, and that such an act merits the execration of every good citizen in Massachusetts.

Resolved, That the refusal, by the House of Representatives, to permit the Yeas and Nays on the question of that Order, was a piece of Legislative cowardice, and fear to incur individual responsibility, which is only paralleled in dishonor, by the rejection of the Order itself, and that in conduct like this we recognize a spirit not far removed from that which led on the rioters to the attack and pillage of defenceless women.

Resolved, That the feelings and the rights of Catholics have been grossly outraged by the constant and unbending hostility of their representatives, as well