



HISTORY

OF

PENNSYLVANIA HALL,

WHICH WAS

DESTROYED BY A MOB,

On the 17th of May, 1838.

*(Philadelphia: Marrison and
Gunn, 1838)*

“Error of opinion may be safely tolerated, where reason is left free to combat it.”—*Jefferson.*
Is truth more dangerous than error?



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the power of the slaveholder in equal degree. The acquisition of Louisiana gave new impulse to this power, but it was never practically demonstrated, until the application by Missouri to be admitted into the Union. It was on this occasion that *the first triumph was obtained on the floor of Congress, by the slaveholding power, over the Constitution of the United States*, as well as that of Missouri. The people of Missouri formed for themselves a Constitution, in which they had given their Legislature full authority to prohibit the introduction of any slave into that state, for the purpose of speculation, or as an article of trade or merchandise. When she presented herself for admission into the Union, the slaveholding power in Congress objected to the exercise of this authority remaining with her legislators, and the final compromise was not to compel Missouri to change her Constitution, but that her Legislature, by a solemn public act, to be made in pursuance of a resolution of Congress, should provide and declare that the before-mentioned provision in her Constitution should never be construed to authorize the passage of any law, and that no law should be passed in conformity thereto, by which any citizen of either of the states of this Union, should be excluded from the enjoyment of any of the privileges and immunities to which such citizens were entitled, under the Constitution of the United States. This compromise, which I consider one of the darkest pages in the history of Congress, though submitted to by the people of Missouri, was severely rebuked by them at the time. This was the first open step to place slavery under the provisions of that Constitution which was formed for the safety and security of liberty. It assumes the principle, though covertly, that man may be made property, and that a citizen of either state, has a right to make merchandise of him if a slave, to use him in trade as a chattle, to sell him in any state in which slavery exists, for the purpose of speculation, and that such state has no power to prohibit the sale. This to my mind is a monstrous principle, and at open variance with every provision of a Constitution, immolated, in this compromise, on the altar of slavery. The slaveholding power having thus obtained a foothold on the ramparts of the Constitution, by a violation of its spirit and its letter, now claims that violation as evidence of the right itself, and boldly asserts that the Constitution recognises slavery as one of the institutions of the country, and that the right of the slaveholder to his slave is derived from that instrument. It is here the question must be met, and decided. The arrogance of the slaveholding power, in trampling down the right of petition, and denying the freedom of debate, are only consequences resulting from this assumption of power, and is a foretaste of what we may expect, when it shall have completely established itself (should it be permitted to do so) within the provisions of the Constitution. That instrument will then be no longer what it now is, the home of Liberty. It will be made its grave. This is the first great and combined interest in this country which strikes at equal rights, but all other special and local interests have the same tendency, when they claim peculiar or exclusive privileges.

The monied interest is next to be feared, and whenever that or any other shall have acquired sufficient strength to induce or influence Congress to legislate for its special benefit, there will be an end to that equality of rights which the Constitution designed to establish for the benefit of all.

That our liberties are assailed, and individual as well as political rights disregarded by men in high places of power, none I think will presume to deny; but that the Union or the Constitution are yet so far endangered as to create despondency, I can by no means admit. The unnatural matter which slavery is attempting to engraft upon the Constitution, will soon be

blown off by the breath of popular opinion. The remedy for all evils in the system or administration of our government is in the hands of the people, and FREE DISCUSSION—discussion without fear of the pistol of the duellist, the knife of the assassin, the faggot of the incendiary, or the still more dangerous fury of the unbridled mob,—that free discussion which the people *must* and *will* have, soon will work out an effectual cure. It is not in the nature of man to remain for ever deprived of his rights in a country like our own.

But free discussion must be practised to produce its salutary effects. You and your fellow citizens of Philadelphia have set a noble example. Though the sectarian and bigot may exclude you from his sanctuary, and the cringing sycophant to power may shut you out from the Halls erected at your expense and consecrated to justice, yet you are not discouraged, but have again erected your own Hall for a noble purpose—for the purpose of that free discussion, without which religion would languish, and liberty and justice would die. I congratulate the friends of equal rights every where on this praiseworthy effort. I trust its influence will be productive of much good to the human race. I hope that it may cross the mountains and descend the valley of the Mississippi, until free discussion shall have restored the purity of the Constitution, and the reign of righteous law. It will be then, and not till then, that the value and merit of your proceeding in this matter will be duly appreciated, and Pennsylvania will be considered as having furnished new evidence that she is, in reality, the Keystone of our political arch, THE ARK OF OUR POLITICAL SAFETY.

With great respect, I am, gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

THOMAS MORRIS.

Joseph M. Truman, Wm. H. Scott, Wm. McKee, Samuel Webb—*Committee.*

The following poetical address, written by JOHN G. WHITTIER for the occasion, was then read by CHARLES C. BURLEIGH.

ADDRESS.

Nor with the splendors of the days of old—
The spoil of nations, and "barbaric gold"—
No weapons wrested from the fields of blood,
Where dark and stern th' unyielding Roman stood,
And the proud Eagles of his cohorts saw
A world, war-wasted, crouching to his law—
Nor blazoned car—nor banners floating gay,
Like those which swept along the Appian way,
When, to the welcome of imperial Rome,
The victor warrior came in triumph home,
And trumpet peal, and shoutings wild and high,
Stirred the blue quiet of th' Italian sky;—
But calm, and grateful, prayerful, and sincere,
As Christian freemen only, gathering here,
We dedicate our fair and lofty Hall,
Pillar and arch, entablature and wall,
As Virtue's shrine—as Liberty's abode—
Sacred to Freedom, and to Freedom's God!

O! loftier Halls, 'neath brighter skies than these,
 Stood darkly mirrored in the Ægean seas,
 Pillar and shrine—and life-like statues seen,
 Graceful and pure, the marble shafts between—
 Where glorious Athens from her rocky hill
 Saw Art and Beauty subject to her will—
 And the chaste temple, and the classic grove—
 The hall of sages—and the bowers of love,
 Arch, fane, and column, graced the shores, and gave
 Their shadows to the blue Saronic wave;
 And statelier rose on Tiber's winding side,
 The Pantheon's dome—the Coliseum's pride—
 The Capitol, whose arches backward flung
 The deep, clear cadence of the Roman tongue—
 Whence stern decrees, like words of fate, went forth
 To the awed nations of a conquered earth,
 Where the proud Cæsars in their glory came,
 And Brutus lightened from his lips of flame!

Yet in the porches of Athena's halls,
 And in the shadow of her stately walls,
 Lurked the sad bondman, and his tears of woe
 Wet the cold marble with unheeded flow;
 And fetters clanked beneath the silver dome
 Of the proud Pantheon of imperious Rome.
 O! not for him—the chained and stricken slave—
 By Tiber's shore, or blue Ægina's wave,
 In the thronged forum, or the sages' seat,
 The bold lip pleaded, and the warm heart beat—
 No soul of sorrow melted at his pain—
 No tear of pity rusted on his chain!

But this fair Hall to Truth and Freedom given,
 Pledged to the Right before all earth and Heaven,
 A free arena for the strife of mind,
 'To caste, or sect, or color unconfined,
 Shall thrill with echoes such as ne'er of old
 From Roman Hall, or Grecian Temple rolled;
 Thoughts shall find utterance, such as never yet
 The Propylea or the Forum met.
 Beneath its roof no gladiator's strife
 Shall win applauses with the waste of life—
 No lordly lictor urge the barbarous game,
 No wanton Lais glory in her shame.
 But here the tear of sympathy shall flow,
 As the ear listens to the tale of woe—
 Here in stern judgment of the oppressor's wrong
 Shall strong rebukings thrill on Freedom's tongue—
 No partial justice holds th' unequal scale—
 No pride of caste a brother's rights assail—
 No tyrant's mandates echo from this wall,
 Holy to Freedom and the Rights of All!
 But a fair field, where mind may close with mind,
 Free as the sunshine and the chainless wind;

Where the high trust is fixed on Truth alone,
 And bonds and fetters from the soul are thrown,
 Where wealth, and rank, and worldly pomp, and might,
 Yield to the presence of the True and Right.

And fitting is it that this Hall should stand
 Where Pennsylvania's Founder led his band,
 From thy blue waters, Delaware!—to press
 The virgin verdure of the wilderness.
 Here, where all Europe with amazement saw
 The soul's high freedom trammelled by no law;
 Here, where the fierce and warlike forest-men
 Gathered, in peace, around the home of PENN,
 Awed, by the weapons love alone had given
 Drawn from the holy armory of Heaven—
 Where Nature's voice against the bondman's wrong
 First found an earnest and indignant tongue—
 Where Lay's bold message to the proud was borne;
 And Keith's rebuke, and Franklin's manly scorn!—
 Fitting it is that here, where Freedom first
 From her fair feet shook off the old world's dust,
 Spread her white pinions to our Western blast,
 And her free tresses to our sunshine cast,
 One Hall should rise redeemed from Slavery's ban—
 One Temple sacred to the Rights of Man!—

O! if the spirits of the parted come,
 Visiting angels, to their olden home—
 If the dead fathers of the land look forth
 From their far dwellings, to the things of earth—
 Is it a dream that with their eyes of love,
 They gaze now on us from the bowers above?
 Lay's ardent soul—and Benezet the mild,
 Steadfast in faith, yet gentle as a child—
 Meek-hearted Woolman,—and that brother-band,
 The sorrowing exiles from their "FATHER LAND,"
 Leaving their homes in Krieshiem's bowers of vine,
 And the blue beauty of their glorious Rhine,
 To seek amidst our solemn depths of wood
 Freedom from man, and holy peace with God;
 Who first of all their testimonial gave
 Against th' oppressor,—for the outcast slave,—
 Is it a dream that such as these look down,
 And with their blessing our rejoicings crown?

Let us rejoice, that while the Pulpit's door
 Is barred against the pleaders for the poor—
 While the Church; wrangling upon points of faith,
 Forgets her bondmen suffering unto death—
 While crafty Traffic and the lust of Gain
 Unite to forge Oppression's triple chain,
 One door is open—and one Temple free—
 A resting-place for hunted Liberty!
 Where men may speak, unshackled and unawed,
 High words of Truth, for Freedom and for God.

And when that Truth its perfect work hath done,
 And rich with blessings o'er our land hath gone—
 When not a slave beneath his yoke shall pine,
 From broad Potomac to the far Sabine:
 When unto angel-lips at last is given
 The silver trump of Jubilee in Heaven;
 And from Virginia's plains—Kentucky's shades,
 And through the dim Floridian everglades,
 Rises to meet that angel-trumpet's sound,
 The voice of millions from their chains unbound—
 Then, though this Hall be crumbling in decay,
 Its strong walls blending with the common clay,
 Yet, round the ruins of its strength shall stand
 The best and noblest of a ransomed land—
 Pilgrims, like those who throng around the shrine
 Of Mecca—or of holy Palestine!—

A prouder glory shall that ruin own
 Than that which lingers round the Parthenon.
 Here shall the child of after years be taught
 The work of Freedom which his fathers wrought—
 Told of the trials of the present hour,
 Our weary strife with prejudice and power,—
 How the high errand quickened woman's soul,
 And touched her lip as with the living coal—
 How Freedom's martyrs kept their lofty faith
 True and unwavering, unto bonds and death,—
 The pencil's art shall sketch the ruined Hall,
 The Muses' garland crown its aged wall,
 And History's pen for after times record
 Its consecration unto FREEDOM'S GOD!

LEWIS C. GUNN, of Philadelphia, then addressed the audience on the "*Right of Free Discussion*," in an extemporaneous speech, which he has since written out.

ADDRESS OF LEWIS C. GUNN.

To a foreigner it may seem strange that in this boasted land of liberty it is necessary to speak on the right of free discussion. Accustomed to hear our vauntings of freedom of speech and of the press, of mind and of conscience, this is the last subject which he would expect to hear argued anywhere in the United States, much less in the state of Penn, and in this city of brotherly love. But, strange as it may seem, the churches and public halls of Philadelphia are closed against the advocates of human rights; and, I believe, there is not a building in this city, except the one in which we are now assembled, large enough to accommodate such a meeting as this, which could have been obtained for the advocacy even of that most valuable of all rights—the right of free discussion. The fact can be no longer concealed, that in this land this right is not enjoyed. There are two and a half millions of slaves who are never allowed to speak in their own behalf, or tell the world freely the story of their wrongs. There are also half a million of so called free people of color, who are permitted to speak with

but little more liberty than the slaves. Nor is this all. Even those who stand up in behalf of the down-trodden colored man, however white their skins may be, are slandered, persecuted, mobbed, hunted from city to city, imprisoned, and, as in the case of the lamented Lovejoy, put to death! It is unnecessary here to refer to Amos Dresser, who, for exercising the privilege of a freeman, and acting in behalf of freedom, was publicly whipped in the streets of Nashville. I need not speak of another devoted friend of the oppressed, whose face I see in this assembly, who, some years ago, was immured in a Baltimore prison, and has since been led like a criminal to a jail in Boston, for no other crime than publishing what his conscience and his judgment told him was the truth. Nor need I give a detailed account of the many mobs which have disgraced our country within the last three or four years—mobs collected together and infuriated, because some independent minds and warm hearts had undertaken to canvass the sublime merits of slavery and the dangers "of emancipation." You are all familiar with the scenes in Congress during its last sessions. You are all familiar with the tragedy at Alton. What, I ask, do these things prove? Do they not clearly show that we do not enjoy the right of free discussion? We may speak without reserve, it is true, on the subject of banks, and on many other political and moral questions; but when slavery is selected as the theme, when it is proposed to discuss the inalienability of human rights, then, forsooth, our lips must be locked and our thoughts imprisoned. Our *right* here is assailed, and it is a stab at the *right* to speak on any and every other subject. What do we mean by the *right* of free discussion? Is it merely the privilege of "saying what the prevailing voice of the brotherhood will allow?" This definition, I know, has been recently given by a popular minister in the enlightened city of Boston;—aye, and the fact shows how corrupt we have become as a people, how we have suffered one of our dearest rights to be almost wrested from us, and have bowed ourselves down before the haughty and tyrannical slaveholder. The right of free discussion is "the privilege to speak and write what the prevailing voice of the brotherhood will allow!" Indeed! Then our boasted right is not a right, but only a privilege—a privilege depending on the "voice of the brotherhood," who one day may will for us to speak, and the next for us to be dumb,—or this week may command our silence, and the next crowd in throngs to give a listening ear to our discussions. Depending on circumstances, and yet a right? Why, it is a contradiction in terms. If it is depending on circumstances, then it does not inherently belong to us—we have derived no right from our Creator. A privilege is a privilege, and not a right. Now freedom of speech we spurn as a privilege; we demand it as our own, and we shall exercise it, too, in the face of all the mobs which may array themselves in threatening attitude before us. Our right to speak freely—the dictates of our minds and consciences is derived from our Creator, and we have no permission to surrender it ourselves, nor has any other man the permission to wrest it from us. Thus you see that abridging our freedom of speech on the subject of slavery, is tantamount to saying that freedom of speech on all subjects is not our *right*, but that we must depend for it upon "the voice of the brotherhood;"—that voice determining on what subjects we may speak, what kind of thoughts we may utter, and the language in which they must be clothed. Here, then, on the question of slavery the battle must be fought. At this part of the citadel the first attack has been made; and here the true friends of the right must rally, and disperse the enemy, before they have forced a passage and taken the castle. For this reason alone it is, that so many, since Lovejoy's murder, have taken a decided stand in favor of the abolitionists, although opposed to them in