

SELECTIONS FROM THE WAUKESHA
AMERICAN FREEMAN

THE NEW CONSTITUTION DENOUNCED

[February 9, 1848]

We have no time nor room to speak at large of the new constitution. Indeed, we have but just got hold of a copy of it. From a hasty review of it we should say that while in some respects it is an improvement upon the former, in others it is far behind it. It contains that same infamously black word "white"; and if there were no other objections to it, it should be voted down by every friend of human rights. For it contains in theory the principle of contempt for the rights of man. The right of suffrage, notwithstanding the flippant prating of misnamed Democrats to the contrary, is an inalienable right; and when the constitution denies it to any, though a black man, it in principle denies it to all men; and it therefore allows it to some as a matter of mere convenience, and not as a right. Every man who voted for the word "white" is unsound in the true Democratic faith and should be rejected as unprincipled by the people. And so should the constitution. Just read the first section of the declaration of rights: "All men are born equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights," etc. And then stab the "inherent right" of suffrage in the case of the colored man! The hypocrites! No consistent Liberty man can vote in favor of this constitution. More anon.

AN ARGUMENT FOR RATIFICATION

[February 23, 1848]

MR. EDITOR: In the last *American Freeman* you close an article on the constitution about to be submitted to the people for adoption or rejection, in these words: "No consistent Liberty man can vote in favor of this constitution." Now, sir, I consider this a rash and inconsiderate attempt at party dictation, and one that merits at the hands of Liberty men a severe rebuke. This, as well as all other questions submitted to the people, should be carefully considered by every voter for himself, and that course pursued which duty plainly dictates.

Although I have ever expressed my determination never to vote for a constitution that placed the right of suffrage on the color of man's skin, yet I now see reasons for changing that position, and with your permission I will give some of those reasons to the public. And I presume a large portion of the Liberty party, when they come to vote on the constitution, will be governed by similar reasons; at least so far as my knowledge extends, Liberty men in this section take the same view of the subject that I do.

When the last constitution was submitted to the people the right of free suffrage was also submitted separately; and it was found that a large majority of the people were opposed to the extension of the right of suffrage to colored men. This was a manifestation of a wrong public sentiment. Nevertheless it was the expressed will of a majority; and a sound Democratic rule is that "the majority must rule." Therefore, in accordance with this principle the last convention was bound to exclude colored men from exercising the right of suffrage, at least till they had again submitted it to the people. Had the question never been submitted at all to the people, the case would have been entirely different; but as it is, the obvious duty of Liberty men is to correct public sentiment on this subject; and the convention, as if in anticipation of the speedy accomplishment of this object, provided that the legislature might at any time extend the right of suffrage to colored men, to take effect whenever a majority of the voters of the state should so decide.

Now it is certain that we can never get a constitution with equal suffrage guaranteed till public sentiment is corrected; and even if we could, the great cause of human rights would gain but little if a large majority of the people of the state were opposed to it. The reason why I supposed I could not vote for the constitution was because I thought it would be a sacrifice of principle. But how can it be a sacrifice of principle when that principle is not in the least affected by my vote; for in the present instance we stand equally as good a chance to establish the inalienable right of suffrage by adopting the constitution, as in rejecting it. In either case we must enlighten the public mind and get the sanction of the people, before we have accomplished our object. Then, if the principle for which we contend is not in the least affected by our course in the present instance, where is the inconsistency of voting "for the adoption of this constitution"? I cannot for my life see any, and

I think, sir, if you can, your discernment is sufficient for the splitting of a hair.

But, on the other hand, among the many reasons for supporting the constitution, allow me to present but one, and that is that the question of slavery or freedom, which is now agitating this nation from one extremity to the other and which will soon be met in our national legislature, calls upon the friends of human rights for prompt and efficient effort to prevent the triumph of slaveocracy and secure the blessings of liberty. In the present contest raging in the halls of our national legislature for the extension of slavery it is of the utmost importance that the influence of Wisconsin should be felt for freedom. The four votes of Wisconsin upon the further extension of slavery cannot with safety to the cause of human rights be dispensed with. For as to the final result of this question we all have our fears; and I deem it of the utmost importance that the North should be strengthened all that it is possible to strengthen it. This may be regarded as one of the most important periods in our nation's history. Then why, in a crisis like the present, should Liberty men falter? Why be found chasing a shadow, when the substance is within their reach? I shall never envy that man's reflections who, when he sees slavery extended over territory now free, shall be able to trace back to his vote on our present constitution this dread calamity, for I consider it impossible for either party to elect a man to Congress from this state who is not in favor of the principle of the Wilmot Proviso; for at the last election even Moses M. Strong, one of the most proslavery men in the Democratic party, took strong and decided ground against the further extension of slavery. And I know not a man in either party of any prominence who, if he were in Congress, would vote against the Wilmot Proviso. With this view of the subject I cannot see how any Liberty party man who is blessed with common sagacity can hesitate for a moment to "vote for the adoption of this constitution." But I am aware that I am exceeding the limits of a correspondent. But I could not say less; this is my apology.

RACINE, February 10, 1848

S. B. PECK

COMMENT ON MR. PECK'S LETTER

[February 23, 1848]

Mr. Peck's communication, which will be seen in another column, is certainly a singular communication for a Liberty man to

write. The principles of the argument, if they deserve the name, would, if carried out, disband at once the Liberty party, for they are in flat contradiction of all those grand principles of action which have always been cherished by Liberty men as the very apple of their eyes. The principles of the Liberty party have been "right against expediency"—the principle of Mr. Peck's communication is "expediency against right." Because we said in an article a few weeks ago that no consistent Liberty man could vote for the constitution, Mr. Peck charges us with a rash and inconsiderate attempt at dictation. Now he has read, we suppose, the proceedings of the Liberty Association of Wisconsin, in very full meeting, when the party, as thus represented, without a single dissenting voice, took the same ground. Was that dictation? Cannot a man express freely an opinion he has formed some ten years since, which has been strengthened by all his experience, investigations, and reflections, without being considered rash? But we do not suppose Mr. Peck meant much by the phrase after all. Mr. Peck has been, in the days of his ignorance, rashness, and inconsideration, of the same opinion with us. But he has now made the discovery that a principle is not violated when a man tramples it under foot, if the blessings which it promised will be realized just as soon as though he had honored the principle. The religionist in Christ's time might have reasoned in favor of his crucifixion, that the grand objects of religion would be promoted even more by crucifying Christ than by letting him live. Therefore it would not be murder to crucify him. Another rare specimen of Mr. Peck's deductions. The people had vetoed the suffrage question; and the convention had no right to form a constitution with free suffrage. Consequently all those who voted for free suffrage committed a sin against democracy and right.

And finally Mr. Peck says he can give but one reason among many for voting for the constitution. We suppose that he gives the best specimen in this: It is that we must have a delegation in Congress to vote for the Wilmot Proviso. Mr. Peck knows perfectly well that the constitution will be adopted whether he or we vote for it or not, so that he is just as sure of a delegation in Congress if he should honor the claims of God and conscience and humanity upon him, as he will be in voting down antislavery principles by voting up a proslavery constitution. But to intelligent Liberty men Mr. Peck's communication will need no refutation.

NEW CONSTITUTION—COLORED SUFFRAGE

[February 23, 1848]

The following resolutions will show to all whom it concerns how the Liberty men in Wisconsin, in convention assembled, regard the constitution so far as respects the question of suffrage. We commend them to Mr. Peck and all others who seem to be sighing after the leeks of Egypt. They were passed at a very full meeting of the Liberty Association of this territory without a dissenting voice:

9. That the right of suffrage is not a conventional but an inalienable right, and belongs to every man in virtue of his manhood.

10. That to admit any other doctrine or to sanction the slightest violation of the principle is to endanger, so far as dependent upon the ballot, the interests and rights of all, to open the door for the disfranchisement of all.

11. That the principle which in Wisconsin disfranchises the colored man is a part and parcel of the same principle which at the South reduces him to and holds him in the condition of chattel servitude. The principle which robs the colored man of one right only needs scope and opportunity to rob him of all rights.

12. That in view of these self-evident truths no fundamental law submitted to the people of Wisconsin for their approval which fails to provide for the full, practical recognition of the equality and inalienability of the suffrage right can receive the sanction of any Liberty man; but as he values the great fundamental principle of republicanism and of his party organization, he is bound to repudiate and reject it.

The new constitution which is soon to be submitted to the people for adoption or rejection disfranchises the colored man; renders him ineligible to any office—legislative, executive, administrative, or judicial; and even takes away from him the right to vote on the adoption of the constitution itself. We will not deny that the constitution has some good features—that it contains some things which we should be glad to see adopted as the organic law of our noble territory; but while it tramples under foot the rights of human nature and stabs to the heart every right in the universe, atheistically scoffing at the rights of Jehovah himself, we cannot vote for it; and we cannot see how any man claiming to be a Liberty man can do so. When will men learn that rights are rights; that God's are no more, and man's no less? The individual who is not willing to award to man the rights belonging to his nature, to his position in the scale of being, is unjust, dishonest, and will not award to God the rights that belong to His nature, to His position in the scale of being, only as he deems it expedient. He cannot do it on any principle of honor, honesty, or justice. If the framers of this in-

strument did but know it, they have proclaimed themselves the enemies of the human race and of the God who made them. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful in that which is much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? He that regardeth not the rights of his poorest brother whom he hath seen regardeth not the rights of God whom he hath not seen.

Why cannot these despisers of man perceive that a colored man has in him all the elements of our appropriate humanity, every single foundation principle of rights which any man or angel or all men and angels in the universe possess? That when they deliberately put the heel of oppression upon him they in principle put it upon all the moral beings with all the moral rights of the moral universe, God himself included. There is no escape from this conclusion. A damage done to the rights of the least of Christ's little ones is a damage done to the rights of Christ. "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it unto me." But the right of suffrage is not an inalienable right, it is said. Very well. For the sake of argument admit it. Still it is to be exercised by somebody. Who shall exercise it? White people? But there are no perfectly white people. Black people? It is said none are perfectly black. You do not make a property qualification; you do not demand a reading and writing qualification; nor a moral qualification.

Then in the name of common honesty and common decency, not to say of democracy, why do you drive the iron of oppression into the souls of colored men—why disfranchise them? They are better acquainted, as a general thing, with our institutions than foreigners. The reason is that these men are the tools of slaveholders. They wish to do them a favor. These miserable creatures are the bloodhounds of the South; and for the sake of obtaining Southern favor and party promotion they are willing to bay on the track of the poor colored man. These men know they have no valid reason for thus outraging human nature and human rights, the principles of democracy and the rights of God. They do it to please the South and keep good their party. And shall we sustain them in this crusade against our Father and his less favored children? We trust not.

But the right of suffrage is an inalienable right. This will be apparent on a moment's reflection. We all admit that life, liberty,

and the pursuit of happiness are the rights, the inalienable rights, of every human being, and that men have an inalienable right to institute governments for the protection of these inalienable rights. But the inalienable right to protect these rights grows out of the fact that every human being has these rights; consequently if any human being has a right to mingle in those activities for the protection, by government, of these inestimable rights, then every human being has; but the colored man is a human being—therefore the colored man has an inalienable right to vote for or against a constitution, to be an elector under it, and to be eligible on the same principles with other men to any office—legislative, executive, administrative, or judicial. The moment you attempt to limit this right, that moment you do violence to the democratic principle, the principle of human equality, of human brotherhood, and are assuming in principle the arrogance and the tyranny of an aristocracy. For instance, if a given number shall impiously exclude the colored men from the inalienable right to participate in the formation of government, for the protection of their inalienable rights, they may, on the same principle, exclude from the same rights those Indians who are citizens of the United States—and if the Indians, then all foreigners—and if all foreigners, then all landless men—and if all landless men, then all men who have not over one hundred and sixty acres of land—and if these, they may with no more injustice exclude all but a noble and kingly few, and thus form an oligarchy, and if an oligarchy then a kingdom, if there is only sufficient concentration of power; but it is objected that that cannot be done. Well, if it cannot, no thanks to the principle. Wrapped up in the principle are the seeds of the rankest despotism that curses the earth.

Thus the constitution admits the principle of kingly despotism. The premises from which we arrive by unbroken logical links of deduction to these conclusions are expressly stated in Article 1, section 1, headed "Declaration of Rights"—"All men" are born equally free and independent, and having certain inherent rights; among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the "consent of the governed." Now the colored men are just as much a portion of the "governed" as any other portion of the people; and on the principle by which the constitution rides over their rights, it in principle rides over the rights

of human nature and proclaims the monstrous principle of despotism. Our new constitution absolutely defends the rights of kings and autocrats.

But it involves the principle of chattel slavery. For by the same assumption of power by which the constitution takes away the inalienable rights of the colored man to participate in the formation of a government to protect his inalienable rights, it could forbid him the right of participating in the benefits of the school fund, the right of marrying anyone lighter in complexion than himself, to be out after eight o'clock, to be eligible to any of the learned professions, to own land, to own himself. We tell our readers that our very democratic constitution involves the rights of kings and chattel slavery. And we say farther that it denies the prerogatives of God himself. And shall Liberty men vote for such a constitution? Shall Liberty men come down from their lofty elevation of principle to dabble in the atheistic principle of expediency? Shall we now learn to do evil that good may come? Shall we choose the least of two evils, or, in the language of Dr. Taylor, the "least of two evils"? Our power lies more in our integrity than in our numbers. Nay, it lies in our integrity.

We believe, as we believe in our existence, that had it not been for the vacillating of our friends, turning aside at local elections, dabbling in the corrupt ethics of the day, the belief that "a man may stab one great principle to the heart if he can only foster two good principles by the act," a substitution of gain for Godliness, a dickering and trafficking in principle, we should have had one of the great parties on their knees at the shrine of Liberty long ere this. Let every Liberty man keep his conscience clean by voting for principle, by standing fast to the whole truth, by voting in such manner as would (should all vote with him) secure the great objects of justice and mercy. We are anxious to see our friends present one embodied phalanx at the coming election—to see them write the emphatic word "no" on this mongrel, God-dishonoring, liberty-hating, man-crushing document.

INIQUITY OF THE CONSTITUTION

[March 1, 1848]

DEAR SIR: The new constitution finds pretty general acceptance among the people in these parts. I have not heard a tongue in either of the predominant parties wag a word of disapprobation of it, not-

withstanding its antidemocratic suffrage article. And I perceive by one of the Madison papers that the Abolition paper in Waukesha is the only paper in the territory that has audacity to speak out against the document. All the rest have by common consent, it seems, buried the hatchet under the peaceful tree of "compromise" and have agreed in the plenitude of their wisdom to insult that large class of Democrats in the territory known as Liberty men by walking deliberately over those great principles, which they contend ought to be embodied in every decent republic. I wonder what these Democrats would have said if to the odious word "whites" in the suffrage article the convention had affixed a proper qualification. Would not there have been a stir among the Democratic papers at the idea that one man, though a fool, owning a jackass could vote, over the Dr. Franklins, who had nothing? Ah, what would the sapient editor at Madison have thought of the "compromises" then? Oh, it is your bull that gored my ox. Now, in my humble opinion, "a man's a man for a' that," whether he owns property or has a black skin. But the exceeding wisdom of the article in question will appear if you look at it in the light of the glorious "compromise" by which that article was enacted. It allows the serf from Russia, the wronged and abused slave from Austria, the ignorant Circassian from Asia, the dark-hued Spaniard, Italian, and Turk, all, to vote, because they make some pretensions to being "white"! But a native American, though endowed with all the learning of Euclid, though possessed of all the genius and eloquence of a Dumas, is debarred that inestimable privilege because, in the depths of God's great goodness, he has a black, not a copper-colored skin. How grand, glorious, ennobling is such a democracy!

To those members in the convention who stood up manfully for the right our thanks are due; but for those proud, haughty men whose democracy is not even skin deep, but who would, if they dared, debar all from the right of suffrage, of whatever color, who did not possess five dollars, let political execration follow them.

No Liberty man who respects himself or his principles will dishonor his mother by voting for the new constitution.

EAST TROY, February 22, 1848

GUILLAUME