

part 862

A FRIENDLY WORD

TO MARYLAND:

A LECTURE,

DELIVERED BY

FRED'K DOUGLASS, Esq.

IN BETHEL CHURCH,

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LECTURE.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW-CITIZENS: My first sentiment is one of gratitude. I rejoice exceedingly in the privilege now afforded me. I thank you for the warmth and earnestness of this welcome.

Looking forward with much interest to this visit to the city of my boyhood, I expected a cordial welcome at the hands of the companions of my youth: but I could not anticipate the extent and depth of this welcome. From my heart, I thank you for this expression of your good will.

Now I owe you a little debt, and perhaps, I ought to pay it at once, since short credit makes lasting friends. I owe you an apology, not a long one—for even a short apology is distasteful and tedious.

First of all, let me say I am not responsible for all that you may have heard and read concerning me—certainly not for the hand-bill announcing me for a speech this evening.

I have sometimes seen myself referred to as an orator, but for the life of me, I cannot tell why that reputation is accorded me. I have excited some interest years ago in telling a simple story of human bondage, such as a thousand other Maryland colored boys could have told with equal skill and effect—but beyond that there is little excuse for making this

noise and getting together this vast audience to night. If I could make a speech any where, you would think I could do it right here, in this city of Baltimore, here among my old friends, in this church, standing on the very spot where I first came to worship, more than thirty years ago, where I listened to the gentle voice of father Waters, for the first time; where I heard Peck and Cannon thunder the gospel into sinners' ears; here in this city, where in my boy days I listened to the eloquence of Lewis G. Wells, Joseph Wilson, William Douglass, and other eminent colored preachers; here in this city where I have followed the soldiers all day, to take a whipping for my absence at night; here where I have fought the "*town boys*" on city block, on Sunday, and limped home to bed at night bruised and marred for my pains; here in this city where I abandoned all these evil courses, and became a thoughtful boy. Well, just for this reason, you must not expect much at my hands this evening.

My Friends: This occasion is suggestive of many reminiscences, comparisons, and contrasts—some pleasant, some sad—but all instructive.

I left the State of Maryland more than a quarter of a century ago, I was then in the full fresh bloom of early manhood, when each sense and faculty of the mind is wide awake, keenly alive and intensely active—not one lock of all my hair, was tinged by time or sorrow—I was full of the aspirations of youth, and perhaps ambition also. But now though not old, I am not young, and the early frosts of winter are already beginning to thicken visibly on my head, and many of the fancies of youth have yielded to the disenchanting power of time, and the stern realities of practical life.

Time has, I am glad to see, touched many of you

gently—I see a few faces here that I saw thirty years ago, some of them but slightly changed. They are lit up by the same fires that warmed and cheered me in youth, but alas! I miss from this congregation many who would have been here were they still among the living. But I will not trust myself with the train of thought and feeling which rises in this direction. I rejoice that any of us have been spared to meet again on earth, and especially that we are permitted to meet here on the soil of our birth—to meet not only as men, but as Marylanders—children of Maryland—the *land* at whose sparkling fountains we first quenched our thirst—the land whose fields, when we were hungry, first gave us bread—to meet here, upon our own dear native soil, overspread with the holiest recollections both of joy and sorrow is an high privilege and one never to be forgotten. No speaker, I think, ever appeared before a public assembly, in circumstances more unusual and striking than I do this evening.

Had any man told me, four years ago, that I should be here to night, speaking to a Baltimore audience, I should have thought him about as insane as if he had predicted that I should some day go on a mission to the inhabitants of the moon!

But this is a day of wonders. We are surprised by some strange occurrence, some unlooked for event, some startling change, almost every hour.

I detest egotism, in a public speaker, but the circumstances are personal. The fact that I am where I am, is really the subject, and the whole subject for our consideration this evening. My life has been distinguished by two important events, dated about twenty-six years apart. One was my running away from Maryland, and the other is my returning to Maryland to night.

How shall I speak to you, on such an occasion. All former experience at public speaking, avails me nothing here. The very interest of the occasion is a check on speech.

When a man confronts Niagara, for the first time in his life, he is awed into silence by the grandeur and sublimity of the scene. The voice of nature, so august and impressive, overwhelms the voice of art.

You have called upon me to speak, and I have obeyed your call; but what can I say, which will be half so eloquent, commanding or touching, as the thought that now fills every mind and thrills every heart. Even these dumb walls, and this silent air in all their stillness, are full of most eloquent and convincing speech. They whisper to our very inmost souls, that the spirit of liberty has been here, and like the breath of the Almighty, has touched our chains, and left them broken.

That Maryland is now a glorious Free State, that the revolution is genuine, full and complete, that there need be no doubt of it whatever, on the subject, the fact that I speak here to night, and that you listen, with none to molest, or make us afraid, is a satisfactory attestation, and will be so regarded wherever the fact is known.

The return of the dove to the ark, with a leaf, was no surer sign that the flood had subsided from the mountains of the east, than my coming among you is a sign that the bitter waters of slavery have subsided, from the majestic hills, and fertile valleys of Maryland. Since I came to manhood, slavery and I could not live in peace in the same State, and I could not now be here but that slavery is absent. Do you want to know why I left my native State for a strange land. I will tell you who you are to blame for it. The fathers of this republic waged a seven years war

for political liberty. Thomas Jefferson taught me that my bondage was, in its essence, worse than ages of that which your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose: Your statesmen and orators, your poets and songsters, your press and your pulpit, were constantly glorifying the blessings of liberty. "*Where liberty dwells, there is my country*" was whispered in my ears, by a thousand invisible speakers. But above all, there was one idea, rule or principle, call it what you will, which entirely took possession of me, even in childhood, and which stood out strongly, invincible against every argument drawn from nature and scripture in favor of slavery. What was that idea, rule, or principle? This it was: "Every man is the *original, natural, rightful, and absolute* owner of his own body; or in other words, every man is himself, is *his* self, if you please, and belongs to himself, and can only part from *his* self ownership, by the commission of crime. This idea was as deeply fixed in my mind forty years ago, when living with my old master on Col. Edward Lloyd's estate, as it ever was after going North and listening to the arguments of William Lloyd Garrison, Gerret Smith, and Wendell Phillips. My right to seek a free country was as palpable, as my desire to be free was irresistible. I own that some violence was done to my feeling and sense of honor, in leaving without giving notice of the fact, and without saying good-bye, to many of my old friends. But greater men than I have taken a hasty plate of soup, and had their movements controlled by necessity, military and otherwise.

Among the contrasts suggested by this occasion, is the fact, that I left here a slave, a fugitive slave, I return to you a freeman, doubly a freeman; first in that I was by nature born free, and was bought out of slavery by generous friends in England; and now,

secondly, by the free constitution which Maryland has just adopted and proclaimed as the law of the State.

Then Maryland was a Slave State, now Maryland is a Free State. Then freedom was the dream, the hope and the prayer of the colored people—now it is a glorious fact accomplished. Then I left the State in a hurry—but now I can leave it by easy stages and at my leisure. Then I left, shaking the dust from my feet, as leaving a doomed city, now I return to greet with an affectionate kiss, the humblest pebble from the shores of your glorious Chesapeake. I did not leave because I loved Maryland less, but freedom more. Then the word emancipation could not be spoken safely, now it is the acknowledged law. Then the spread of knowledge among colored people of this State was esteemed as dangerous to the institutions of the State—now the chief danger is from the prevalence of ignorance. Then, even the Sabbath School was, in the rural districts, prohibited; now it may spring up, unchecked everywhere. Then, I taught school in this city, by stealth; now the same can be done openly. Then, Mr. Austin Woolfolk traded openly, in the bodies and souls of men, as though they were horses, sheep, or swine; now this infernal traffic, even then despised by respectable society, in this State, has come to an end. Then, a whipping post stood opposite the county wharf, on Fell's Point, and was thought to be essential to good order; but now the barbarous relict has no existence. Then, the colored man was viewed with distrust by the white people generally; now, thank Heaven, he excites no alarm even in the breasts of the most timid. Then, we had few friends in Maryland; now Maryland is herself our friend, and extends her broad and benevolent shield over our heads to protect us from that bondage, which rebels and traitors are endeavoring to establish upon everlasting foundations.

Let me be fully and clearly understood; I do not come here to reproach Maryland for what happened within her borders in years gone by. Let the dead past bury its dead. I come not to condemn the past but to commend and rejoice over the present. Even in the gloomiest days of her history, and of my own, I have felt an inexpressible affection for my native State, and hailed with the joy of an exiled son, every indication of progress and civilization she has presented. I have not now, and never had any malice to gratify; I loved Maryland, but hated slavery. "The head and front of my offending hath this extent no more." I never have known the hour, when I would not have performed, for my old master himself, any friendly office, within the range of my ability, had he required it at my hands. At home or abroad, in public and in private, I have continually carried with me a deep and sincere interest in the welfare of my native State. But enough of this.

I did not come here to make professions, or to make a display of any kind; but to throw out a few thoughts upon the new relations and duties involved in the emancipation policy just adopted in this State.

I have a few things to say both to the white and colored citizens of this State, and I crave the indulgence of both classes, and the attention of both classes, for I have at heart the welfare and happiness of both classes.

You, my white fellow-citizens, under the guidance of an enlightened conscience, and a wise patriotism, have by your suffrages, and without dictation or coercion, made the State of Maryland a free State. You have, as a loyal State, in accordance with all the requirements of your constitution, in the exercise of your right as the citizens of the State, as well as of the United States, to manage your own State affairs, with-

out any interference by the Federal Government, through any one of its departments of power, have decreed in the most solemn and august manner possible, that slavery shall at once, and forever, cease, and have thus placed Maryland, in all her activities, life and destiny, in peace and in war, with the free States of the Union.

You are no longer a border slave State, vexed between two extremes, enduring all the evils of slavery, without sharing one of its supposed advantages, but a central Free State, destined, in my opinion to become morally, and politically, as you are geographically, the key-stone State of the Union. In the very sense of honor which bowed the State so long to the fortunes of the slave States, I behold the germ of your greatness. Having slavery among you, you felt bound to stand by every section identified with you in that respect. It was a sense of honor, and honorable to your honor, but it was also a misdirected sense of honor. But what a foundation is here to build upon. To a man without a conscience it is idle to talk of an educated conscience. Where there is a high sense of honor, there is ample foundation for every virtue and for every height of greatness.

I speak only the words of truth and soberness, when I say, that if I were called upon to designate the particular part of this country, indicated by nature, by climate, by soil, by its lofty mountains, and its rich valleys, by its rivers, inlets and bays, by all its relations geographically, and morally, to be the cradle of the highest type of manhood on this continent, I should point to Maryland. You are free alike from the enervating and protracted heat of the South, and from the protracted and paralyzing cold of the North, while your central position, makes you broader in your tolerance and freer from sectional prejudices, than other

and more outlying States. In fact, Maryland is in every way, suited to be intensely American, extending her sympathy and affections, to all extremes and ends of the Republic.

Having lived to see slavery abolished in Maryland, I expect now to live to see the day, when the former slaveholders of this State, will rejoice as heartily as we do, that this system has been swept from the State. For though the slave suffered by slavery, the master suffered also. If the chain was on the slave's ankle, it was also on his master's neck. I have often said when speaking on this subject at the North, that of the two, I preferred the condition of the slave, to that of the slaveholder. There is sound philosophy in the lines of Cowper :

"I would not have a slave," &c.

The very idea of holding property in man is revolting. Property in man; the first time I heard that word, said Daniel O'Connell, it sounded as if some one were stamping upon the grave of my mother. Henry Ward Beecher says, the thought of a little child sold at auction, made him feel as if looking at a tender sister being bled. Look at the system as a statesman and a lawyer, Lord Brougham, when he was Henry Brougham, thus scouted the pretensions of slavery: "Tell me not of rights, talk not of the property of the planter in his slaves, I deny the right, I acknowledge not the property. In vain, you appeal to laws and statutes that sanction such a claim. There is a law above all the enactments of human codes, the same throughout the world, the same in all time, such as it was before the daring genius of Columbus pierced the night of ages, and opened to one world the sources of power, wealth and knowledge; to another all unalterable codes: such it is at

this day ; and by that law unchangeable and eternal, while men despise fraud, and loathe rapine, and abhor blood, they shall reject, with indignation, the wild and guilty phantasy, that man can hold property in man."

Thomas Jefferson, looking upon slavery, said he trembled for his country, when he reflected that God was just, and that his justice could not sleep forever. In getting rid of slavery, you have placed the State of Maryland, in harmony with the views and wishes, of the noblest of the national fathers, and what is far more important, in harmony with the eternal laws of the moral universe.

So much, my white fellow-citizens, you have done and well done, there is however one other thing needed, to make your good work complete and perfect. Liberty is logical, as well as slavery ; the one demands the restoration of all rights, as sternly as the other demands the destruction of all rights. In a state of slavery, any degree of liberty to the slave is dangerous to the master, but in a state of freedom, every invidious abridgment or limitation of liberty is dangerous and hurtful to the welfare of society.

I stand here, therefore, to advocate, as the soundest policy, for free Maryland, the doctrine and practice of absolute civil and political equality ; I would sweep away all those laws by which any class of your people, innocent of crime, have been deprived of the right to testify in certain cases, in your courts of law, I would put away entirely the old man with his deeds, and assume the logical ultimate of a free constitution. Dont put this new wine of liberty, into the old bottles of slavery. Dont mend this new garment with old cloth. Dont keep any part of slavery above ground, now that the monster is dead. Let the shadow and the substance go down together, and let

them sleep forever, in a common grave. You dont need the smoke, when the candle has gone out.

While slavery existed in the State, there was a plausible argument against allowing colored men to testify against white men in courts of law, but now that the State is free, these arguments can have no force whatever. There is no longer any special motive for falsehood on the part of black men any more than white, and each has an equal motive for promoting the ends of justice. Since both must fall or flourish by the same law, both should stand equal before the law, receiving alike its rewards and its penalties.

I am an advocate of free trade, as well as of free-men. I am no protectionist. In respect to the rights of men I am more opposed to the doctrine of protection than in respect to anything else. I would have no discriminating tariff protecting iron, at the expense of wool, or wool, at the expense of iron. He who calls for protection, confesses his weakness. Fair play is all that any should ask ; every man on his own merits. The same principle applies to men and things.

My white fellow-citizens : Let me defend you from your friends. You belong to the best branch of the Indo-caucasian race : you belong to the anglo-Saxon branch of the great human family. The world is rocked by your power, and filled with your achievements. To the civilization of the nineteenth century, your race is the main spring. Your language is the language of history, science and song, and you are now, and in all the likelihoods of the case will always be the all controlling race in this State, and on this continent. Knowledge is power, and you have knowledge : Wealth has influence, and you have wealth : Courage and skill, command respect, and

you have courage and skill: Majorities rule, under our form of government, and you are the majority. Whatever may be the case in respect to colored people, it may be safely affirmed that white men are fully able to take care of themselves. The Americans go to any part of the known world and compete with any race under heaven. Marylanders have gone to Russia, with her composite races, and confusion of tongues, and have come home loaded with gold and live in affluence.

But you will ask, what of all this? I will tell you: There are a class of writers and speakers among you, who seem to distrust your ability to cope with the colored people, without special protection. They seem to be haunted with the idea, that to invest the colored race with equal rights, is dangerous to the rights of white men: and it is this absurd notion, this mischievous heresy, this slander upon the ability of the white race which I would here and now expose and repel. I would defend you from yourselves.

I deny that the black man's degradation, is essential to the white man's elevation. I deny that, that the black man should be tied, lest he outstrip you in the race of improvement. I deny the existence of any such necessity, and affirm that those who allege the existence of any such, pay a sorry compliment to the white race.

The old doctrine that the slavery of the black, is essential to the freedom of the white race, can maintain itself only in the presence of slavery, where interest and prejudice are the controlling powers, but it stands condemned equally by reason and experience. The statesmanship of to day condemns and repudiates it as a shallow pretext for oppression. It belongs with the commercial fallacies exposed long ago by Adam Smith. It stands on a level with the contempt-

ible notion, that every crumb of bread that goes into another man's mouth, is just so much bread taken from mine. Whereas, the rule is in this country of abundant land, the more mouths you have, the more bread you can put into your mouth, and the more money you can put into your pocket, the more I can put into mine. As with political economy, so with civil and political rights.

The more men you make free, the more freedom is strengthened, and the more men you give an interest in the welfare and safety of the State, the greater is the security of the State.

I shall not stop here to argue these general propositions. They rest in the fundamental principles of republican government. If republican government has any foundation in reason, if its claims are good against the claims of monarchial and despotic government, these propositions are also founded in reason, and are good against all objections.

Do you ask me to state frankly, just what you, my white fellow-citizens, ought to do for the colored citizens of this State? I will tell you, without compromise, qualification or concealment. You ought just so soon as it is possible, to get such a measure through the legal form, blot out the law restricting the elective franchise to white men, and allow colored men to vote, and to hold any office of honor and trust to which the people may be pleased to elect them.

I know that there are objections to this measure, of a very formidable character, and some of my friends have kindly advised me not to present this subject yet, for fear of prejudicing other more obvious claims.

But I know of no better time than this for pressing any claim founded in sound policy, and in justice. The public mind is now everywhere grappling with

fundamental principles. We are looking for the solid rock, upon which to rest the foundation of the State. I believe that the white citizens, are no exception to the general rule. They are brave enough to hear, and earnest enough to consider the highest claims of justice. Four years of war arising out of old political and moral errors, must induce them to inquire diligently for the true path to permanent peace and prosperity.

The grand mistake of the past has been the treatment of colored men as exceptions. Principles of law and justice, readily applied to other men, have been held to be inapplicable to them. Liberty held to be the natural condition for other men, has been denied to the blacks, or considered a doubtful experiment. The elective franchise, enjoyed by all other classes, native and naturalized, has been withheld from men of color. So also with the right to hold office, and sit on juries.

The time has arrived when this principle of exclusion should be abandoned by the State of Maryland, especially in respect to the elective franchise. If the negro knows enough to pay taxes, he knows enough to vote; if the negro can form an opinion respecting the claims of rival candidates and parties, and knows good from evil, as all your laws concerning his conduct imply, he knows enough to vote. If he knows an honest man from a thief, he knows enough to vote. If he knows enough to commit crime and to be hanged or imprisoned, he knows enough to vote. If he knows enough to fight for his country when assailed by invasion from abroad, or rebellion at home, he knows enough to vote. Talk not of his ignorance, degradation and servility, he is a man, and if he knows as much when sober, as an Irishman knows when drunk, he knows enough to vote on long established American usage.

If voting is a natural right, you violate a natural right in withholding this right from a people born among you. If it is only a conventional right, you do us a conventional wrong in withholding it.