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Petition from the Yearly Meeting of Quakers, 3 October 1789

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States.

The Address of the people called Quakers, in their annual assembly convened:

Firmly believing that unfeigned righteousness in public as well as private stations is the only sure ground of hope for the Divine blessing, whence alone rulers can derive true honor, establish sincere confidence in the hearts of the people, and feeling their minds animated with the ennobling principle of universal goodwill to men, find a conscious dignity and felicity in the harmony and success attending the exercise of a solid, uniform virtue, short of which the warmest pretensions to public spirit, zeal for our country, and the rights of men, are fallacious and illusive.

Under this persuasion, as professors of faith in that ever blessed, all-perfect Lawgiver, whose injunctions remain of undiminished obligation on all who profess to believe in him, “whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do you even so unto them;” we apprehend ourselves religiously bound to request your serious Christian attention to the deeply interesting subject whereon our religious society, in their annual assembly, on the tenth month, 1783, addressed the then Congress, who, though the Christian rectitude of the concern was by the Delegates generally acknowledged, yet not being vested with the powers of legislation, they declined promoting any public remedy against the gross national iniquity of trafficking in the persons of fellowmen; but divers of the Legislative bodies of the different States, on this Continent, have since manifested their sense of the public detestation due to the licentious wickedness of the African trade for slaves, and the inhuman tyranny and blood guiltiness inseparable from it; the debasing influence whereof most certainly tends to lay waste the virtue, and, of course, the happiness of the people.

Many are the enormities, abhorrent to common humanity and common honesty, which, under the Federal countenance given to this abominable commerce, are practised in some of the United States, which we judge it not needful to particularize to a body of men, chosen as eminently distinguished for wisdom as extensive information. But we find it indispensably incumbent on us as a religious body, assuredly believing that both the true temporal interest of nations, and eternal well-being of individuals, depend on doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly before God, the creator, preserver, and benefactor of men, thus to attempt to excite your attention to the affecting subject; earnestly desiring that the infinite Father of Spirits may so enrich your minds with his love and truth, and so influence your understandings, by that pure wisdom which is full of mercy and good fruits, as that a sincere and impartial inquiry may take place, whether it be not an essential part of the duty of your exalted station to exert upright endeavors, to the full extent of your power, to remove every obstruction to public righteousness, which the influence of artifice of particular persons, governed by narrow, mistaken views of self-interest, has

occasioned; and whether, notwithstanding such seeming impediments, it be not in reality within your power to exercise justice and mercy, which, if adhered to, we cannot doubt, must produce the abolition of the slave trade.

We consider this subject so essentially and extensively important, as to warrant a hope that the liberty we now take will be understood, as it really is, a compliance with a sense of religious duty; and that your Christian endeavors to remove reproach from the land may be efficacious to sweeten the labor, and lessen the difficulties incident to the discharge of your important trust.

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