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Opposition to the Constitution's Provisions Concerning Slavery

## Plain Truth to Timothy Meanwell *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 30 October 1787

FRIEND TIMOTHY, Thou hast abused thy name and the sect to which thou pretendest to belong, by telling things that are false; hence I conclude that thou dost not mean well.

Thou sayest that “the importation of slaves is allowed by the new federal constitution for twenty-one years,” and thence thou hast falsely insinuated as if friend — and friend — had given their sanction to this unchristian practice. This is the same mode of arguing, that deistical and profane writers adopt to oppose the dictates of Jesus Christ; they take their own construction of some particular phrase, and then applying it to a foreign subject, they think they prove, that our Redeemer was inconsistent with himself; But an enlightened Christian need only look into the book, and the cheat appears evident: Thus it is with thy uncandid assertion. Let us look into the constitution — “The migration or importation of such persons as any of the states now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the congress prior to the year 1808.” — Would not every candid reader conclude from this, that in twenty one year such importations *may be prohibited*; and would he not bless God, that in this new country, we should, in less than 150 years, possess a degree of liberality and humanity, which has been unknown during so many centuries, and which is yet unattained in so many parts of the globe.

What alteration does the new constitution make in the present system adopted by many of the states relative to slavery? NONE contrary to that system; but in favor of it, has taken a power of checking this abominable importation, by laying duties on it. The constitution says, by implication, to such states, — “well done ye good and faithful servants, continue your endeavors to compleat the glorious work — our assistance is not very far distant; for, ere the child now born, shall arrive to an age of manhood, the supreme power of the United States shall abolish slavery altogether, and in the mean time they will oppose it as much as they can.”

I fear, Timothy, that thy disturbed spirit has led thee to make these remarks, before thou hadst read the letter written by the President of the Convention.

“The Constitution (saith he) which we now present, is the result of a spirit of amity, and of that mutual deference and concession which the peculiarity of our political situation rendered indispensable.” Now is it not the duty of every candid objector to consider this before he makes his remarks? The Convention in fact tells every opposer, “Friend we have considered thy objection, but points of small magnitude must give way to general good; if thy objection had been insisted on, as thou insistest, we should have made no constitution at all, for we never could have agreed.”

As to the idea that the new constitution is disagreeable to our society, who ever saw friends prefer anarchy, confusion, and bloodshed to the blessings of good government? and what else

but anarchy, confusion, and bloodshed can be expected from a refusal of this constitution, and the consequent dissolution of the union?

I wish thy reformation, and am thy friend.

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