

**THE WRONG OF SLAVERY, THE
RIGHT OF EMANCIPATION, AND
THE FUTURE OF THE AFRICAN
RACE IN THE UNITED STATES,
1864**

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The Wrong of Slavery, the Right of Emancipation, and the Future of the African Race in the United States, 1864 by Robert Dale Owen

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ROBERT DALE OWEN

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WRONG OF SLAVERY
THE "RIGHT OF EMANCIPATION,"
AND
THE FUTURE OF THE AFRICAN RACE
IN THE UNITED STATES.

BY
ROBERT DALE OWEN.

"Over the entire surface of the globe the races who compel others to labor,
without laboring themselves, fall to decay."—COCUUX.

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PREFACE.

It is little more than three years since the first insurgent gun was fired against Fort Sumter: three years, as we reckon time; a generation, if we calculate by the stirring events and far-reaching upheavals that have been crowded into the eventful months.

Things move fast in days like these. War changes the legal relations of the combatants. War, in its progress, presents unlooked-for aspects of affairs, brings upon us necessities, opens up obligations. The rebellion—creator and teacher as well as scourge and destroyer—confers new rights, discharges from old bonds, imposes bounden duties.

Great questions come to the surface,—questions of national policy, demanding solution. In deciding some of these, we find little aid from precedent; for our condition as a nation is, to a certain extent, unprecedented.

We have been trying an experiment that never was tried in the world before. We have been trying to maintain a democratic government over thirty millions of people, of whom twenty millions existed under one system, industrial and social, ten millions under

another. The twenty millions, chiefly of one race, carried out among themselves a Declaration made eighty-eight years ago touching the equal creation and the inalienable rights of man. The ten millions consisted, in nearly equal portions, of two races,—one the descendants of voluntary emigrants who came hither seeking freedom and happiness in a foreign land; the other deriving their blood from ancestors against whom was perpetrated a terrible wrong, who came in chains and were sold as chattels. From these forced emigrants and their descendants were taken away almost all human rights, the right of life and of perpetuating a race of bondsmen excepted. Laws denied to them the rights of property, of marriage, of family, of education, of self-defence. The master-race sought to live by their labor.

The experiment we have been trying for more than three-quarters of a century was, whether, over social and industrial elements thus discordant, a republican government, asserting freedom in thought, in speech, in action, can be peacefully maintained.

Grave doubts, gloomy apprehensions, touching the nation's Future, have clouded the hopes of our wisest public men in days past. Even the statesmen of the Revolution saw on the horizon the cloud no bigger than a man's hand. Gradually it rose and spread and darkened. The tempest burst upon us at last.

Then some, faint-hearted and despairing of the Republic, prophesied that the good old days were gone, never to return. Others, stronger in hope and faith,

recognized, through the gloom, the correcting and reforming hand of God. They acknowledged that the experiment had failed; but they confessed also that it ought never to have succeeded. In adversity men look into their hearts, there to read lessons which prosperity had failed to teach them.

The experiment ought never to have succeeded, because it involved a grievous offence against Humanity and Civilization. In peace, before the act of slaveholders made them public enemies, we scrupled to look this offence in the face, seeing no remedy. But war, which has its mission, opened our eyes and released our hands. Times disturbed and revolutionary bring their good as well as their evil. In such times abuses ripen rapidly; their consequences mature, their ultimate results become apparent. We are reminded of their transitory character. We are reminded that, although for the time and in a certain stage of human progress some abuses may have their temporary use, and for this, under God's economy, may have been suffered to continue, yet all abuses have but a limited life: the Right only is eternal. Great, under such circumstances, are our responsibilities; momentous are the issues, for good or for evil, that hang upon our decisions.

In this small volume, which busy men may read in a few hours, I have sought to bring together, in condensed form, the facts and the law which bear upon our present condition as a nation.

My task has led me over a vast field. In briefly tracing, from its inception in this hemisphere, the rise and progress of the great wrong which still threatens the life of the nation, I have followed the fortunes of a vast multitude, equal in number to the population, loyal and disloyal, black and white, of these United States. I have sketched, by the light of authentic documents, the dismal history of that multitude through three centuries and a half; seeking out their representatives, and inquiring into the numbers and the condition of these, at the present day. In so doing, I have arrived at conclusions which, to those who have never looked closely into the subject, may seem too marvellous for belief.

I invite a critical examination of my narrative and of the documents and statistics upon which rest its details and conclusions, not doubting that the candid reader will become convinced of its substantial truth. I have spared no pains to attain accuracy, well knowing that thus only can I expect to bring home the great lesson which such an episode in human history is eminently fitted to teach.

Passing, then, from the story of the wrong to look into its remedy, I have touched upon that inquiry in its various legal and constitutional aspects: as, the connection of slavery with the Constitution; how far that instrument admits, and how far it abstains from admitting, the existence of such a system; further, the character of what is termed slave-property; the right of emancipation in the insurrectionary States; the

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right of emancipation in the loyal slave States; the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court in the premises; the effect of the President's Emancipation Proclamation as well upon slaves within our lines as upon slaves still in the enemy's hands; and the force of that Proclamation both during war and after its conclusion.

In the same connection, I have treated of Emancipation as a great measure of national policy, essential to the preservation inviolate of the Constitution, indispensable to the re-establishment of peace, inseparable from the future maintenance, North and South, of domestic tranquillity.

In concluding this branch of the subject, I have spoken of Emancipation as a solemn national duty which, now that the constitutional obstacle has been removed, we cannot, consistently with what we owe to God and man, neglect or postpone. I have shown that our faith is pledged, and cannot be broken without bringing upon us the contempt of the civilized world.

Finally, after having traced the connection of the two races in the past, and set forth the duty of one race towards the other in the present, I have sought to look forward and inquire how they are likely, when both shall be free, to live together in the future; whether we shall have a race among us unwilling or unable to support itself; whether admixture of the races, both being free, is probable or desirable; whether, without admixture, the reciprocal social influence of the races on each other promises good or