

# THE WESTERN SENTINEL.

A Democratic Journal—Devoted to National and State Politics, Literature, Foreign and Domestic News, etc.

VOL. III.

WINSTON, NORTH-CAROLINA FRIDAY, APRIL 1, 1859.

No 42.

THE  
**SENTINEL.**  
PUBLISHED WEEKLY  
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TERMS OF SUBSCRIPTION.—The Western Sentinel is published every Friday morning, and mailed to subscribers at two dollars a year, in advance; two dollars and a half after six months; and three dollars after a year. For any one procuring six subscribers, and paying the cash in advance, the paper will be furnished one year, gratis.

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AD VALOREM TAXATION.

SPEECH OF MR. BLEDSOE.

Delivered in the Senate of North-Carolina on the 12th of January, 1859, on the bill to alter the Constitution so as to enable the General Assembly to equalize taxation.

[CONCLUDED FROM LAST WEEK.]

If then, Mr. Speaker, the principle of taxation *ad valorem* is correct; if it be correct in its application to every other species of property; if slaves are property; if one species of property as such is not entitled to superior advantages over another; if slaves are acquired and disposed of like other property; if the owners of one species of property are entitled to the same rights and privileges as the owners of every other species of property; if we have a right to invest our money in whatever kind of property we choose, and choose to invest in other property than slaves, because we may think it will pay us better; if slave property requires, and receives more protection under the laws of the State than any other kind of property; if it is as profitable as any other kind of property, and if it is more easily convertible into money than any other kind of property, can any good and sufficient reason be given why slaves should not be taxed *ad valorem* as well as any other kind of property?

The fifth objection to altering the constitution is, that young negroes ought not to be taxed because they cannot make a support, and are unprofitable.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if this objection furnishes an argument against the passage of this bill, it furnishes a much stronger argument against the present system of revenue, for it involves the principle of taxation on profits alone; and if no property ought to be taxed which does not yield an annual profit to its owner, it must be conceded that our present revenue law is based upon an erroneous and unjust principle, and the sooner we abandon it the better. But if young negroes ought not to be taxed because they cannot make a support, and are unprofitable, will not the same objection apply with equal force to forest, waste, oldfields and worn-out lands, untenanted houses, and all other unprofitable property? If, therefore, young negroes ought not to be taxed because they yield no annual profit in cash to their owners, why do you tax unencumbered lands, untenanted houses, vehicles, silver plate, jewelry and various other kinds of property which yield no annual profits, the result would be that industry, energy and enterprise would have to support a government affording equal protection and benefits to indolence, ignorance and sloth. But no Senator will defend a principle so palpably erroneous and unjust. The property of the State is the only legitimate subject of taxation, upon which the State can safely rely for the support of the government and the payment of the public debt. All the property in the State, therefore, of whatever kind should be made to contribute to the payment of the expenses of the government according to its value, whether it yields to its owner an annual profit in cash or not. Unprofitable property requires and enjoys as much protection as that which yields a profit. And if it is necessary to protect that kind of property by law, it should be made to pay for the protection which it needs and receives.

If, Mr. Speaker, your neighbor injures your unprofitable little negro the law gives you as sure and speedy a remedy as if he injures the most valuable hand upon your farm, and you claim the same protection of law over the unprofitable young negro that you do over the adult profitable man. If then, they are equally protected by the government, why should they not be equally subject to taxation to support the government? But annual profit in cash

is not the proper test in deciding what property shall, and what shall not be taxed.

In this country, the object of almost every man is to accumulate an estate, and his object is as fully attained if he grows rich by the annual increased value of his property, as if he receives his annual profits in cash. Therefore if A invests \$10,000 in young negroes from one to ten years of age, and they increase in value ten per cent. per annum over and above their expenses, which is a very low estimate; and B invests \$10,000 in bank stock, which yields him an annual dividend of ten per cent. in cash, it is perfectly plain that A is accumulating an estate as rapidly as B. And if A is growing rich as rapidly as B, and his property requires as much protection and it costs the State more to protect it, why should he not pay as much tax as B? But although young negroes do not pay to their owners an annual profit in cash, it is well known that they pay a larger profit in their annual enhanced value than land, money at interest, stocks, or any other species of property in the State. If then, young negroes enhance in value more rapidly than any other species of property, and if a man grows rich more rapidly by investing his money in them, than if he invests it in any other kind of property, and if it costs the government more to protect them, why should not young negroes be taxed as other property to support the government?

The sixth objection to altering the constitution is, that it will injure the institution of slavery.

In what way, Mr. Speaker, will it injure the institution of slavery in North Carolina to tax slaves as property and not as persons? Will the institution of slavery suffer by putting slaves as property on an equal footing with all the other property in the State in reference to taxation? What is the Abolition and Black Republican idea of the right of property in slaves? It is that slaves are *not* property. What is the Democratic idea of the right of property in slaves? It is, if Senator Douglas is to be regarded as a good authority upon that subject, "that slaves are property, and hence on an equality with all other kinds of property."

The issue, then, between the Democratic party, both North and South, and the Black Republican and Abolition party is, whether slaves are to be regarded as persons or property. That was the issue in the late campaign in Illinois, between Douglas and Lincoln; and hence, while Douglas proclaims to the world that, "the Democracy of Illinois, in the first place accepts the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in the case of Dred Scott, as an authoritative interpretation of the constitution;" and, "in accordance with that decision, holds that slaves are property, and hence on an equality with all other kinds of property," we find Lincoln at Alton declaring, and shouting and applause from the Black Republicans and Abolitionists, his opposition to the idea of property in slaves, and exultingly asking—"and when this new principle—this new proposition that no human being ever thought of three years ago, is brought forward, I combat it as an evil tendency to dehumanize the man, to take away from him all the right to be supposed or considered as human. I combat it, therefore as being one of the thousand and one things doing in these days for the purpose of preparing the public mind for making property, and nothing but property, of the negro in all the States of this Union."

Now, Mr. Speaker, if the right of property in slaves is recognized by the ablest statesmen and jurists in the Union, by the Democratic party North and South, by the laws of Congress, by the supreme Court of the United States, by the constitution of all Southern States, and confirmed by the opposition of Black Republicans how, I ask, can any sane man suppose for a moment that the institution of slavery can be injured by taxing slaves as property in North-Carolina? But if the institution of slavery should suffer in North-Carolina, who, I ask, will be responsible for it, those who propose to place it on an equal footing and identify it with the other property of the State, or those who attempt to exempt slaves from the same rules that apply to every other kind of property, and thereby "abandon the strongest ground of defence against the assaults of the black Republicans and Abolitionists?"

If slave property were taxed *ad valorem*, and paid its just and equitable share of the expenses of the government, would not the owners of every other species of property be interested in its protection, whether they owned slave property or not? If so, would it not give strength to the institution to make the alteration proposed? And if it would give strength instead of injuring the institution, is it not the true interest of slave-owners to advocate the change? In Georgia, Florida, Tennessee and other southern States, slaves are taxed as property, *ad valorem*; and no one ever heard that the institution of slavery had been injured or weakened in those States by being taxed as property, and, I apprehend, they are as good southern States, and as free from abolitionism and black republicanism as North Carolina.

If the institution of slavery has suffered in Georgia, Tennessee and Florida, by being taxed *ad valorem*, how can it suffer in North-Carolina by being taxed in the same way? If the institution ever suffers in this State, those alone will be responsible for the injury it sustains, who insist upon making a distinction between slaves and other property—the inevitable result of which will be, the alienation of non-slaveholders from it, and the breeding of prejudice in their minds.

But, Mr. Speaker, if slave owners would consult their real interest, or yield to the impulse of a generous patriotism rather than the suggestions of a blind avarice and step forward and voluntarily surrender a discrimination, the benefits of which they have enjoyed at the expense of their less favored neighbors since 1835, the institution of slavery would be stronger in North Carolina than it has ever been since the organization of the government. Slave-owners, therefore, should be the most zealous advocates of the passage of this bill; for as soon as the restriction is removed from the constitution, and slave property is reduced to an equality with all the other property of the State, every man who owns property of any kind and claims the right to hold it and the protection of the government over it, becomes interested in slaves as property, and is bound by self-interest, as well as the law of the land, to protect slaves as property under any emergency which may arise. If then, the institution of slavery will be strengthened by making slave property contribute to the support of the government, in proportion to its value as property, and by interesting in that way every non-slaveholder in its protection; and if on the other hand it will be weakened by their owners claiming protection over slaves as property, and insisting on taxing them only as persons, thereby making a distinction between slaves and other property, and thus alienating from, and prejudicing against it the entire non-slaveholding population, who I ask, Mr. Speaker, will prove to be the best friends to the institutions of the South, those who advocate or those who oppose the passage of the bill under discussion? I charge no North Carolinian with being an Abolitionist or Black Republican.

Certainly those who insist that slaves shall be taxed as persons only, and not as property, have practically admitted the truth of the Abolition and Black Republican doctrine, that slaves are persons and not property "abandoned their strongest ground of defence against the assaults of the Abolitionists and Black Republicans."

The seventh objection to altering the constitution, Mr. Speaker, is, that the East will pay too much tax if the system of taxation *ad valorem* is adopted.

Those who raise the objection, seem not to understand, or fail to appreciate, the justice and equality of the principle. In its practical application, no citizen would be called upon to pay tax on more property than he owned, and on none over which he did not claim the protection of the government. If every man paid tax only on what he was worth, on the value of his estate, certainly no one would have just cause of complaint; and no liberal or patriotic citizen would complain, whether he was an eastern or western man worth \$10,000 each, pay the same amount of tax into the public treasury, for the support of the government and the payment of the public debt, how can it be made to appear that the East will pay more than is just and equitable share of the expenses of a government affording equal protection to the citizens and property of the East and the West?

But it is said that the East owns more slaves than the West, and therefore, it will have to pay more tax under this system than it ought to pay. If the East owns more slaves, Mr. Speaker, it owns more property; and if it owns more property, it requires more protection; and if it requires more protection, it costs more to protect it; and if it costs more to protect it, should it not contribute to the support of the government in proportion to the protection it enjoys?

The bill under consideration does not propose or contemplate a discrimination in favor of or against any particular class of citizens or property, or any particular section of the State in the collection of the revenue necessary to support the government. But on the contrary proposes to place all the citizens and all sections of the State upon a perfect equality in reference to taxation, except such as the General Assembly may, as a matter of courtesy or expediency, exempt from taxation. Now, if all are placed upon a perfect equality, who can suffer by the passage of this bill?

the other, which will they surrender, the principle, or the restriction?

How then, Mr. Speaker, can it be called an eastern or western measure? It is a great question of State policy, involving not only a great cardinal principle of government, but the financial interest of every section and of the whole State.

The eighth objection to altering the constitution is, that it will drive slaves out of the State.

But Mr. Speaker, where will these slaves and a government, under which they are as well protected as by this bill, expense? Money is the motive power by which the machinery of government is propelled, and taxation the only means by which the supply of that motive power can be kept up, and property and persons the only subjects from which that supply can be drawn. Where then can they find a government which will protect them in the enjoyment of their property, and exempt it from taxation?

But Mr. Speaker, if there is a Senator upon this floor, or a citizen within the limits of North Carolina, whose soul is so contracted, whose heart is so utterly destitute of every emotion of patriotism as to be unwilling to contribute his just proportion to the support of the government which protects his life and his property, I say let him go; he will leave the State for the good of the State. I am now ready to bid him a hearty good-bye, and when he takes up the line of march from the "Old North State" because he is unwilling either to sustain her interest or credit with his means, or her honor with his life, I for one will bid him God-speed.

And, Mr. Speaker, I have but one request to make of those who leave, and that is, that when they arrive at their journey's end, and are asked why they emigrated, and they assign as the reason, that they were required to pay their fair, equal and just proportion of the taxes necessary to support the government, that they do tell from whence they came—do not hail from North-Carolina.

The ninth objection to altering the constitution is, that constitutions are made for the protection of minorities, and therefore, ought not to be changed. I admit, that constitutions are made for the protection of minorities as well as of majorities, and that minorities ought to be protected as well as majorities; but that is no argument in favor of the restriction in the constitution which the bill under consideration proposes to remove, or against the passage of the bill; for the object of the bill is, not to put the minority in a worse condition than the majority, but to put them on an equality with the majority. If all the citizens and property of the State were now upon an equality in reference to taxation, and the bill under consideration proposed to alter the constitution so as to discriminate against the minority and in favor of the majority, then the objection would hold good; but the object of the bill being to break down a discrimination in favor of a minority, and to establish a perfect equality between them and the majority, the objection fails. And the minority certainly cannot complain at being placed on an equality with the majority; for while the rights of minorities ought to be respected and protected, they cannot reasonably expect more protection or greater privileges than majorities; it is enough if they are respected and protected as equals.

The tenth objection to the passage of the bill is, that it is dangerous to make frequent alterations in the constitution. The constitution, Mr. Speaker, framed in 1776 by the representatives of the people, by their authority and designed to be most conducive to their happiness and prosperity, seems to have answered the purpose for which it was framed, for fifty-nine years. It was admirably adapted to the condition and circumstances of the people for whom it was framed, and by whom it was adopted, and we cannot too much admire the wisdom and patriotism of those to whom was entrusted the duty of framing it. But the condition and circumstances of the people having undergone a change, it was thought expedient and necessary to alter the constitution in 1835. I am sorry that I have to say, that the alteration in reference to taxation was no improvement. But as the constitution was made by the people, for the purpose of promoting their happiness and prosperity, they have the unquestionable right, and ought to alter it, whenever it fails to accomplish the object for which it was framed. No statesman ever supposed that a constitution framed in 1776, or even in 1835, would be adapted to all the circumstances and meet all the wants of the State in 1859. It was doubtless expected that succeeding generations would alter it to suit themselves. But suppose they did not contemplate its alteration, have we not as much right to alter the constitution as our fathers had to frame it in 1776, or as those who altered it in 1835? If then, Mr. Speaker, we have the right to alter the constitution, and the interests of the people demand it, what danger is to be apprehended by the passage of this bill? If the interest of the people requires the alteration, is it not our duty as faithful representatives to make it? And if their representatives refuse to consult their interest and make the proposed alteration,

will not the people in the exercise of their sovereign power, make the alteration themselves in their own way? They ought to do it, and they will do it.

But when I insist upon an alteration of the constitution, that is in perfect harmony with the cardinal principles of our government, the interest of the people, and necessary to the preservation of the faith and honor of the State, I am met with the cry of the East! the East! the East! which reminds me of the response made to Paul, when he preached the gospel of eternal truth to the Ephesians, who in like manner cried out, "great is Diana of the Ephesians! great is Diana of the Ephesians! great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

But, Mr. Speaker, I admonish those who urge this objection, to consider well the ground they occupy, before they press it too far. They seem to have lost sight of the fact that the slave-owners of the East do not constitute the East; that although there is a majority of slaves East, there is a majority of slave holders West of the Capital; and that if all the slave-owners in the State were residents of one county, it would have a population but little larger than that of Wake. I make this statement, Mr. Speaker, not to alarm them by an exhibition of their weakness, but to induce them to pursue the line of policy so clearly indicated by interest, prudence and patriotism.

But, Sir, the last, the least urged, but the greatest real objection is, a distrust of the people. Notwithstanding the government of North Carolina is the creation of the people, and the constitution was framed by the people, and declares "that all political power is vested in and derived from the people only," and stands a towering and glorious monument of the intelligence and patriotism of our fathers, and the wisdom of their posterity, there are still those who distrust their honesty and doubt their capacity for self-government. There are still those who cling to the old federal idea that the people are their own worst enemies, and ought to be governed rather than govern themselves. If they are correct, the constitution which declares "that the people of this State ought to have the sole and exclusive right of regulating the internal government of the State," and "that no man or set of men are entitled to exclusive or separate emoluments or privileges from the community, but in consideration of public services, instead of being a monument to the intelligence and patriotism of the people, is a living shroud upon the truth of history.

But, Mr. Speaker, the intelligence, honesty and patriotism of the people, and their capacity to govern themselves, are triumphantly vindicated by the moral grandeur and political power of the best and sublimest example of free government ever presented to the eye of man.

If, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the people had the right in 1776 to frame a constitution and establish a government for themselves, and did frame "a constitution most conducive to their happiness and prosperity," and that constitution afforded equal protection to all the citizens and property of the State, and imposed equal burdens upon all; and if the convention of 1835, in violation of the great principle of democratic republican equality upon which the government was established, incorporated into it a restriction upon the General Assembly in reference to taxation discriminating against nineteen twentieths of the people of the State; and if the financial condition of the State as well as a just appreciation of the principles of our government requires the alteration proposed; if the injustice and inequality of our revenue laws are the result of this restriction; if the constitution was ratified without the restriction being detected by the people; if the people have been satisfied with the constitution because, until recently, the discrimination was oppressive; if the restriction was not one of the compromises of 1835; if the public debt was incurred under the present revenue system; if the constitution should be altered and negroes taxed as other property *ad valorem*; if young negroes ought to be taxed as property because they are property; if it will not injure the institution of slavery to tax slaves *ad valorem*; if the east will not pay more than its just and fair proportion of the taxes; if it will not drive slaves out of the State; if the minority of the people being slave-owners will be as well protected as the majority; if there is no danger in altering the constitution; if the people are not distrusted; if "all political power is vested in and derived from the people only;" if the people are capable of self-government; if they ought to have the sole and exclusive right of regulating the internal government and police of the State; if the principles of the government the interest of the people and the faith and honor of the State demand the passage of the bill, the alteration of the constitution, the abandonment of the present system of revenue, and the adoption of a system of taxation *ad valorem*, can, Mr. Speaker, the ingenuity of man suggest a valid objection to the passage of this bill by the constitutional majority? But I am aware of the opposition with which the bill is to meet. I am not ignorant of the prejudices existing against it in the minds of Senators.—But I challenge the investigation and discussion of the objects of the bill, either in

the Senate or elsewhere. I demand to-day upon the floor of the Senate, for my constituents, that equality at the treasurer's office, which is recognized at the ballot-box and to which they are entitled under the great principles of equality, upon which the constitution was framed and the government established. I appeal to the interests, the liberality, the sense of justice, and the patriotism of Senators in behalf, not only of my own constituents, but of the great mass of the people of North Carolina to vote for this bill and strike down a discrimination which is alike unequal, unjust and oppressive. If that demand is disregarded, and that appeal unheeded by the representatives of the people, then I appeal from the decision of the Senate to the source of all political power, the people themselves.

The Value of A Good Name.

The recklessness and folly of youth are seen in nothing so much, as in the low estimate they seem to make of the opinions of the aged, the wise and the good, in regard to character. What old people will think of them; they stop not to inquire, as if their opinions were worth nothing.—Hence the rapid advances which young men make now-a-days in every species of vice, and their bold and daring demeanor on the brink of ruin.

The time was when young men respected and feared the judgments of the aged. When, if betrayed into the crimes of swearing, drinking, gambling, or licentiousness, they were at some pains to conceal their shameful dereliction, and labor to impress parents and aged persons with better sentiments in regard to their deportment. But now how changed.—Dereft by bad discipline, as they now are, of a becoming respect for superiors—lost to shame, and inflated with notions of pride and self-control, they unblushingly commit their deeds of darkness under the eye of the aged, and gloat upon their open and unrepented indulgence in the worst crimes.

And this is to be taken by society, if they are to be believed, not as a proof of their want of shame, of a becoming modesty, or a lack of respect for the aged, but as evidence of an unbridled pretensions, contempt for hypocritical pretensions. We beg pardon; we make no plea for hypocrisy. If a man be guilty of crime, we scorn the meanness which prompts him to wipe his mouth and pretend to be innocent. But if the young have fallen into crimes, which deservedly destroy the confidence of the aged, it certainly cannot help the case, when they glory in their shame. A proper regard for the opinions of society, would lead to concealment, because of the shame, and an effort at amendment before the habit was confirmed. But we regret to say, in many cases, the reverse of this is too often exhibited.

But is there no value in a good name? No profit in possessing the confidence of the aged, the wise and the good? It would seem not, were we to judge of the low estimate the young seem to place upon their opinions. How few young men now-a-days seem to pursue such a line of conduct as will justify a good opinion. How small is the confidence which seems to be reposed in them. And how else can it be, when indolence, feckleness, self-will, pride, profanity, intemperance and lewdness, prevail to so great an extent among them. This is a dark picture. Thank Heaven, it is not universal. There are here and there, young men, who labor to secure a good name. They respect age and value public sentiment. Hence they demean themselves well and show by their love of work, of sobriety, chastity, integrity and their noble bearing, that they deserve a good name.

How precious is such a treasure? It is better than riches or fame. It is a safeguard in danger; a passport to position; a sure road to competency, influence and usefulness, and a reliance that never forsakes us. It lightens the burdens of life—cheers us on the confines of the grave, and leaves, after we are gone, a sweet fragrance in the memories of the good, never to be wasted. Young man! it is the best boon you can confer on your parents—the best legacy you can leave your children.

In all thy restless, fretful strivings, be sure if all other good things elude thy grasp, to lay hold on and secure, a good name.

STRAWBERRIES IN FEBRUARY.—The Marianna (Fla.) Patriot of the 16th ult., says Dr. E. Phillips of that place has had ripe strawberries in his garden several days.

EDWARD EVERETT'S LABORS.—Edward Everett has paid to the treasurer of the Mt. Vernon fund, up to the present day, \$60,808 81.

THE DANVILLE CONNECTION.—The Greensborough Patriot learns that an enthusiastic meeting of the friends of Dan River Coalfield Road was held in Wentworth on Tuesday last week, and enough of stock was at once subscribed or pledged to secure the charter.