

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

HIS INTEREST IN THE SLAVERY QUESTION AS IT AFFECTED THE SOUTH.

DANIEL R. GOODLOE'S PAMPHLET.

It was Written at Louisburg in the Summer of 1841 and Submitted to President Adams who had it Published--Some New and Original Arguments Contained in the Book--Abolitionists Paid Attention Only to the Moral Side of the Question.

Written for Sunday News and Observer

WASHINGTON, D. C., June 28. I made the acquaintance of Mr. Adams in March, 1844. I called on him at his house, on F street, near Fourteenth. He owned two adjoining houses, which, a few years ago were enlarged, by putting two additional stories on them. They are now known as the Adams building, and are rented out to the government, and to various business firms. I sent in my card, or more likely, my name, as I knew very little about cards in those days. My purpose was to show him an essay I had written on the subject of slavery. It is entitled, an "Inquiry into the causes which have retarded the accumulation of wealth and increase of population in the Southern States;" in which the question of slavery is considered in a politico-economical point of view.

No allusion is made in the essay to the moral question involved. It was written upon foolscap, on both sides of the sheets, which was the country fashion of writing in those days. I may add, that the essay was written at Louisburg, in the summer of 1841. I called the attention of Mr. Adams to the positions taken which I had a right to consider as new, as they had never been stated by any political economist. He then began to read, and read the essay from beginning to end, twice, before saying a word, and having gone through with it in this careful manner, he gave his opinion in terms which made me very proud. I think I will be excused for stating them. He said, "Mr. Goodloe, this is a most able essay." He asked me if I proposed to publish it. I told him I wished to have it published, but was not able to have it put in pamphlet form. He then proposed a newspaper, and said that a young man named Greeley was publishing an anti-slavery Whig newspaper in New York, but that he was not acquainted with Mr. Greeley; and that he would send it to his friend Charles King, who was then the editor and publisher of the New York American. The essay was published in the American in the last days of March of that year. Two years later I had a pamphlet edition published here in Washington; which was afterwards copied into some anti-slavery newspapers. But it never made any deep impression on the abolition mind.

The propositions in the essay which attracted Mr. Adams' particular attention, were the following: After stating the ordinary objections to slavery as an economical system, that it injuriously affects the prosperity of the country by its tendency to degrade labor in the estimation of the poor and to engender pride in the rich, as well as its effects in keeping away foreign immigration, I proceeded to say:

"It would not be attempted to deny the existence, or the operation of the causes assigned, or my present purpose will be to show that the chief evils of slavery to the body politic result from principles more stubborn and powerful than its moral effects upon the people.

"If a farmer in Ohio own one hundred acres of land, with the cattle, the food to subsist them, and utensils of husbandry necessary in its tillage, he will, as is observed, be able to enter upon its cultivation with an additional ready capital sufficient to supply his laborers with maintenance. Thus, if the food and shelter of a free laborer be worth fifty dollars per annum, and one laborer be necessary to the cultivation of ten acres, then five hundred dollars would be the additional capital necessary in the case above supposed. The laborer's wages invariably come out of the sale of the crop, and consequently there existed no necessity for the employer to have it by him.

"The illustration may be varied by estimating the amount of capital necessary to the making of a given product--one hundred bales of cotton, for instance. If, as is asserted, one man can produce ten bales of cotton, (of course, the product per hand is immaterial to the illustration), then the capital necessary to the production of one hundred bales, apart from the land, etc., as above, will be five hundred dollars.

"I will inquire now the amount of capital necessary to employ slave labor in the cultivation of one hundred acres of land, or the production of one hundred bales of cotton. If men slaves be worth seven hundred dollars, and the food and clothing of a slave fifty dollars per annum, the cultivation of one hundred acres of land by the labor of ten slaves in Alabama, requires a capital of seven thousand five hundred dollars apart from capital invested in land, etc. I have based the illustration for convenience upon the supposition that the labor of men only is employed, but it is perfectly obvious that the principle is true, generally of all free and all slave labor."

I gave other illustrations, drawn from manufacturing pursuits, as well as agriculture; and in all of them, it follows, that the employer of slave labor must have a capital equal to the value of his slaves, over and above what is necessary. In 1864, I sent this pamphlet to the eminent political economist, John Stuart Mill. I was induced to do so from having seen in his great work on that subject, a remark which caused me to think that he might have seen the truth in regard to slavery. I had examined a whole volume in the Congress Library filled with treatises on political economy, and found that none of them saw it. Turning to Mill's chapter on Slavery, I find that he, too, was in the old rut. His remark, which induced me to think that he should have seen the truth, was made in reference to national debts, and to mortgages. He had stated that in estimating the wealth of a nation, neither

the national debt, nor private mortgages would be taken into the account; as the effect would be to count the value of the property twice over. A national debt, as he truly said, is a mortgage upon the property of the whole people; and a private mortgage only shows the interest which the mortgagee has in the estate of the mortgagor. In like manner, the value of slaves to their owners should not have been counted as a part of the national wealth, since it was only a mortgage which one man held upon the labor of another and the abolition of slavery only cancelled the mortgage, without destroying the value involved--the capacity of the slaves to labor. It was a transfer of titles; and what one man lost the other gained, while the State lost nothing; but, on the contrary, was great gainer, by destroying a system which was continually diverting capital from its legitimate uses. And hence it was that, in 1860, when the South had three billions of capital invested in slaves, its commerce was all in the hands of the Yankees; and it had next to no manufactures. Its towns were few and small and far between, and languishing. They are now all flourishing. Here in North Carolina, the towns have grown more--three times more--in thirty years than they had done in the previous two centuries--and it is because people who make money cannot buy negroes. Moreover, the cotton and tobacco crops have been doubled.

I wrote to Mr. Mill in August, 1864. He was then in the south of France; and failed to receive my letter and the pamphlet for some months, but in December he wrote me from "Saint Veran, Avignon, Vaucluse, France." He said: "You are so clearly right as to the political economy of the question, that one is only surprised at its being necessary to take so much pains to make the matter obvious to others. But the absurdest opinions are often the most tenacious of life. What can be more ridiculous than to suppose that a laboring man is an item in the wealth of the country that possesses him, when he is owned by a fellow-man, but not an item in it when he owns himself!"

"But great merit may be shown in explaining truths which ought not to need explanation, and that merit your pamphlet possesses in a high degree.

"I am indebted to you for an excellent illustration of the point you notice in my Principles of Political Economy, which I shall not fail to make use of in a new edition which I am now preparing."

Mr. Mill lost his wife, to whom he was greatly devoted, shortly after this letter was written, which sad event broke into his philosophical pursuits for some time; and he afterwards went into Parliament; so that so far as I am informed, his new edition was never published. But only one who has access to his "Principles of Political Economy," may turn to his Chapter on Slavery, which is brief, and see for himself that Mr. Mill had failed to see the "obvious" truth, "which ought not to need explanation."

In 1865, I wrote an elaborate article which was published in the National Agricultural Report of that year, which is entitled the "Resources and Industrial Condition of the Southern States." In it I have brought out the foregoing principles more fully than in the pamphlet. In this article I say:

"The absorption of capital in this unproductive form of slavery was the great pecuniary curse of the South. It was not that the South had uselessly invested in the beginning half its wealth, for time would have overcome that loss; but the great evil consisted in the perpetually recurring and increasing misapplication of capital. Slavery had become the great interest of the South. It swallowed everything. Of every accumulation of capital, the majority was sure to assume that form. There was no recovery, no regeneration, but in the destruction of the system. * * * Henceforth there will be no more of the unproductive investment of capital in human beings, and every dollar from which a revenue is to be drawn will contribute something to the national wealth. The slaveholders have never been understood by the people of the North, in one respect. They have been made to bear the economical reproach which properly belonged to slavery itself. They have been regarded as idle, prodigal, and thriftless; whereas, they are, as a class, energetic, sagacious and thrifty. They made money and grew rich, while their system of slavery was inflicting the deepest injury upon the country. Now that slavery is overthrown, they will exert their energies in methods promotive of the general, as well as of their own particular welfare."

In October, 1865, I wrote an article for the New York Times, which appeared as an editorial. It is entitled "The Industrial Prospects of the South." In the article I make the following prediction of what must follow as consequences of the abolition of slavery:

"The abolition of slavery has removed the great hindrance to trade, commerce, and manufactures. That institution absorbed the accumulated industry of the South without adding anything to its productive resources. It was not capital hoarded, but capital sunk. It was three thousand millions of money invested in a useless monopoly of labor, when the labor would have been more productive if left free, and uncounted as capital. * * * This unproductive absorbent of capital being removed, there can be in future, no such useless investment. The annual accumulations must take some other form. A large part will doubtless be spent upon luxuries as heretofore; but no investment can in future be made in slaves. And all capital which would have taken that unproductive form must now take one which will be at once advantageous to the individual and to society. This is a great point gained, and we think we are not mistaken in assuming that the consequences will soon develop themselves."

I think that no one can fail to see that the wonderful development of the South in recent years is due to the abolition of slavery, as predicted in the foregoing pages.

As I have stated, the Abolitionists, as a class, never paid much attention to the radical, indisputable truths set forth in my pamphlet; but gave all their energies to the moral question; to the wickedness of slavery, and the South; and at the same time losing sight of the fact that

nineteen of every twenty of the original importations of negroes from Africa were brought here by Northern and English slave-dealers. They don't like to hear this truth now. The English people, too, became wonderfully virtuous, after their slavery was abolished, in 1838; and were greatly shocked at the wickedness of the Americans--until they thought they saw an opportunity of breaking up the Union by the secession movement; when they wheeled about, and took the side of the South.

I set out with writing a sketch of John Quincy Adams, but egotism has caused me to leave Hamlet out of the play of Hamlet. But I will make amends next week.

DANIEL R. GOODLOE.

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