

the May Flower. They were men who lived there soberly, righteously, honestly, and shrouded a whole community in grief when they died. Men whose character and position is not indeed our boast, for we were not taught in a school which prides itself on the virtues of its ancestors more than its own; but which is ever our bright example, so that we have no higher aspiration than to do as much good in our day and generation as they did in theirs; to live as widely honored, and to die as profoundly regretted.

I say some of us, with such memories and such aspirations, have left the spot of our birth, and made our residence in Maryland. And I wish it understood we came not here as adventurers or mendicants. We came here as pensioners upon nobody's bounty, craving nobody's hospitality; we asked and ask no favors; we have brought something into Maryland, and have carried nothing out. Some scores of years, from our earliest manhood, we have labored here in our several vocations, openly, seen and known of all men. And we fearlessly challenge a scrutiny of the record we have made for ourselves thus openly, when we say with him of old — "we have wronged no man; we have corrupted no man; we have defrauded no man." With our record fully known, we are here at the command of our fellow-citizens to act upon this great question, the peers in our own right of every man upon this floor, and peers in right of those who sent us here, and whom we strive to represent.

The question then is submitted to this body thus made up, and we are to meet it by reason. Whatever may be our interests in the past, the present, the Maryland of to-day is ours in common, and the Maryland of the future is ours. We, as well as the native and the manor born, are to live under the laws which shall be made. And our children who have been born here are to abide by, the result of our acts.

And the great question now before us is: Shall slavery longer continue to exist in Maryland? Objections are raised; we are met at the very threshold with the great and paramount objection that we lack the power to extinguish slavery. It is said that emancipation is an interference with vested rights, rights which are guaranteed by the fifth amendment of the Constitution of the United States. It is said that there is no law for the action which we propose to take, that there is no precedent for it. And this objection, that we violate vested rights, guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, is urged with apparent seriousness by the very men who, ten days ago, were carrying to its utmost limits the doctrine of State sovereignty; and who are also the very men who, time out of mind, have taught the doctrine that slavery is a domestic institution, under the exclusive control of the States themselves,

and with which the National Government has nothing to do. Now, however, for a present purpose, they teach that the State has no power whatever over it, because the National Constitution protects it. Now, I grant to its fullest extent that the United States Constitution may restrain the National Government from appropriating slaves to public use without just compensation; modified only by its power and its obligation to "provide for the common defence and promote the general welfare." But the whole history of that amendment to the Constitution shows that it was designed as a limitation upon the power of the National Government, but not at all as a fetter upon the action of the States themselves, to which was reserved the right and power which we have reiterated in this bill of rights, the sole and exclusive right "to regulate the internal government and police thereof." The fact is too plain for serious argument.

And it is equally plain that in the work in which we are now engaged, we are unfettered by any previously existing restrictions of a similar nature in our own fundamental law. No law for it, Mr. President? We are constructing the *lex legum*, the law upon which all the laws of our State are to be founded, upon which they are to be constructed after or when approved by the sovereignty of the State, the people. It then overrides all laws, and is itself the highest law which we can recognize. No precedent? We are making precedents. No precedent, I grant, in our own State, but we are making one. And there is precedent enough to guide us in this matter in other States.

At the same time, while holding that we are not fettered or restrained in our action in any sense or form by the Constitution of the United States, I firmly concede that that provision in the United States Constitution is but the plain utterance of the doctrine of common honesty; that it is true everywhere, that no man, and no body of men, great or small, has the right to take for its own use that which belongs to another without just compensation; that a State is unjust if it takes for its own use the property of the humblest citizen without paying for it. But the question of compensation is not before us in the present article. It is simply a question at this time of the continuance of slavery, and, therefore, I do not propose to discuss that objection now. When we come to consider another article of the Constitution, it will be time enough to investigate vested rights, and see to what extent they control the rights of other human beings too long divested of them, and whether it is to be the law in this State that the right of person or the right of property shall override, when the two come in conflict. I, therefore, shall not dwell upon that point.

We are met next with the objection drawn