

These attacks have now assumed the more dangerous shape, not only of organized political conspiracies, to prevent the exercise of that right, and of refusing, under penalties and political degradation, the assistance of their civil authorities; but the supreme power in some of those States, by their Legislature, has passed laws, under which they have attempted to convict; and have succeeded in convicting; and have threatened with infamous punishment, and confinement in their penitentiaries, those of our citizens who, upon a lawful errand, using the means and appliances secured by the Supreme Law of the land, have recaptured and taken back to the jurisdiction, whence they had been decoyed or stolen, the fugitives whose safe restoration is guaranteed by that law as their property. No grosser outrage, no more complete and disgraceful violation, not only of good faith, but of solemn compact, and sworn duty under it, can be imagined.

Nor have the wilder of that sort stopped here. We have seen a neighboring State invaded by a band of miscreants, who attempted insurrection, and threatened the horrors of a servile war; and who have justly paid the penalty of their crime in the forfeiture of their lives.

The Governor of Virginia informed me that he had reason to believe an effort would be made, by parties in Pennsylvania, to pass across our State into Virginia, to rescue those men from the custody of their authorities; and notwithstanding my own repeated inquiries gave me no reason to suppose or suspect such an attempt, I thought proper to take such precautions as should secure the capture and detention of any such bands, or of suspicious persons; but deemed it prudent to take them in such mode, as should not add to the alarm and apprehension, which some designing persons, for ends of their own, endeavored to increase in the public mind.

While I approved, therefore, of the steps taken by Major General Steuart, of the Light Division in Baltimore, in despatching troops to the scene of the outbreak upon receipt by him of the intelligence; and of the aid rendered by the military in Frederick county, I also directed the Sheriffs of Washington, Allegany, and Frederick counties to guard the State boundary, on the Pennsylvania line, and along the Potomac River, summoning to their aid a sufficient number of deputies, to preserve the public order, to arrest and detain all suspicious persons, strangers, and others, who could not give a proper account of themselves, or who should be travelling armed, or in such numbers and in such manner as to excite reasonable suspicion of the lawfulness of their purpose. Those officers promptly acted in the matter; and the result was a continued quiet and a perfect peace among ourselves, which was not elsewhere secured by military parade and the rigor of martial law.