

question of admitted experience, a question which according to all past history has met with a solution in a particular way, you assume the opposite and contradict all past history, upon a question of expediency; and then not for yourselves alone, but for those who are to come after you, you act as if they were unable to form a judgment, as if you could have before you what they will have before them, the then present condition of the country, and refuse to them,—although they may have the means to do so, although they may have the will to do so, although they may deem it perfectly proper to do so,—the privilege which you give them upon every other subject of expediency.

I do not intend to refer to individual instances of outrage upon the rights of persons, but I hold in my hand a letter from a lady stating that herself, her mother, and her aunt, an aged female, have been entirely dependent upon the hire of certain slaves which she received as her portion of the estate. She loses these; yet not a dollar for emancipation. If there was a prospect of future payment, possibly people in this condition might find some relief from money lent to them on speculation, and I should say it was not a very forlorn speculation. If the power is left at all to the legislature to perform that act of justice, I think it would not be a very forlorn speculation that the time would arrive when a very different sentiment would prevail with regard to this subject.

That brings me to consider a question to which I now ask the sober thought of this body, when undertaking to decide a question of expediency for those who are to come after us. Let every gentleman, on this floor, for one instant, if only for one instant, reflect seriously upon the fact whether he is now in a condition to judge of this or any other cognate question with as much calmness, as much discretion, as much probability of arriving at a just conclusion, as he would be were the circumstances of the country entirely different from what they are. Is there a man among us who has attained the age of maturity, who is not sensible—I will not say that he is not free from prejudice, free from excitement, free from all indulgence of passion and feeling, for I will not ask a question so perfectly obvious to everybody—but that these influences operate upon his mind? Is there a man who is prepared to say that his opinions and his acts are free from any influence from surrounding circumstances? When we see the whole country in the condition it is, blood flowing by oceans, lives thrown away as if they were worthless, families distressed at every altar and at every fire-side, mourning and grief to be found in the countenance of every man, woman and child in the country, the finances of the country disturbed and every man feeling its depression, is there a human being so insensible,—

is there living a man that God Almighty has made to come into the world without some defect in his intellectual formation, a sane man, who can deny the influence of these causes upon him? It is impossible—impossible.

You have had it here, right in our midst, at our very door. Resolutions have been offered here framed in that state of excitement. Look at your resolutions; look at your proceedings; look at everything you have done or said; go out of doors and look at everything done there. The effect upon the feelings of every individual in the country is just as manifest to every human being. Is this the temper and state of mind in which gentlemen are qualified to act, not for themselves only, but for posterity in all time to come?

Will gentlemen say that those who live after us, when, as they believe, we shall have a country happy in all the elements which can constitute peace, when comfort and joy shall be carried to the heart and breast of every citizen, will not be more competent than we to judge what ought to be done hereafter upon a question of expediency?

Now, to carry this argument to its legitimate conclusion; let me not be told that this constitution is to go to the people for their ratification or rejection. The people of all parties in the State are just now as completely governed by passion and feeling in respect to this matter as we are. In my humble judgment it is not a time when the people are as competent to judge as they were before this war, or as they will be after this war.

I do not wish to use harsh words. If I were to describe or give character to this proposition in words which I think would properly designate it, I should not conform to the practice to which I wish to conform on all occasions, a practice which would make me refrain from expressing any unkind personal feeling to those around me. I am perfectly prepared to believe, perfectly willing to hope, that every gentleman who will vote on this proposition will be able with his hand on his heart to appeal to his Maker for the purity of his purpose, the integrity of his mind, and the honesty of his opinions. But how that thing can be, is to me perfectly extraordinary. I am completely befogged as to that, for I have not seen, I have not heard one solitary word of argument which can justify this proposition.

I have to say that I do hope some calm reflection at least will operate upon the minds of some individuals. Let us lay over this question for a time. Possibly the condition of the State will be changed; nobody can tell. I am happy to see that peace overtures have been opened, very hopeless in their terms, perhaps, regarding what has passed upon either side. Still it is the first daylight we have been able to see beyond the dark