

has taken almost the exclusive monopoly of the legislation of the State. Now, what has endangered the institution of slavery? Four years ago the Constitution of your country was like a wall of fire around that institution. As the gentleman from Baltimore city (Mr. Cushing) said this morning, you could go into the streets of Boston, and summon the military force of Massachusetts to aid you to get your slave and return him to bondage; and however reluctant they might be to come, still they would come. The whole Northern country was a hunting-ground for escaped slaves. And there was no power in their State governments, or in any other government, to touch the institution of slavery. It was securely walled in and hedged up on all sides. The Constitution of the United States was the hedge about it, the wall of fire to protect it. But in the day of their power, in the day of their madness, they repudiated that protection, they attempted to break down the Constitution which protected and sheltered them. It is their own fault that slaves have depreciated in value; it is their own fault that slavery is insecure. They have done it themselves; they have worked their own destruction, and if slavery dies it dies in the house of its friends. They have wrought the ruin of their own institution. They were not content with the security and establishment of slavery in all the slave States, but they must extend it over all the territories of the United States; and they even contemplated the re-opening of the African slave trade. As long as they had the control of the Government in all its departments, they were willing to wield it for their own purposes. But the moment the sceptre passed into other hands, that moment they took up arms to destroy the Government which they could no longer control. And then they raise the piteous howl here about the depreciation of their slave property.

The gentleman from Charles (Mr. Edelen,) among other arguments made use of this: That if slavery is abolished in Maryland, all the slaves will be turned loose upon the soil of this State, and there will be a tide of this population come in here that will overrun the State, and fearfully interfere with the rights of white labor. But before he had proceeded much farther he said that the negroes were lazy and indolent—and others bore him out in that remark—and that the most of them would get into our penitentiaries and almshouses. Now, both of these propositions cannot be correct. Either this class of our population are not so poor and worthless and thriftless as they are represented to be, or else they cannot make such formidable competitors for white laborers.

Now, the emancipation of slaves in Maryland will not add anything to the number of negroes in this State. We want now vastly more labor in the State of Maryland than we have.

Many of our fields are to-day uncultivated for the want of labor. In fact there never was a time in Maryland when we had labor enough. Give these people the same motives that you give other people to work; give them wages for their labor, repeal your laws disqualifying them from engaging in the same pursuits as other men, give them an even chance to make a livelihood, and they will work well enough.

The gentleman from St. Mary's (Mr. Billingsley) says that this attempt to abolish slavery in the State of Maryland is the result of a sickly sentimentality, of a morbid philanthropy, and has no foundation in reason and justice. Now, I can understand why gentlemen who entertain these views oppose this measure. And I will do them the justice to say that had I been brought up as they have been, had I been nurtured among slaves, and had my property been in slaves, I should perhaps feel as they do. But that is by no means certain, for there are men upon this floor who act with me, and yet they are slaveholders. But the presumption is that under the same circumstances I would act as they do. And there are many reasons why they should do so. They have had their lot cast in rather pleasant places. They have not only had slaves to labor for them, but they have had the entire control of the whole machinery of government, state and national. Now, the reason they oppose the introduction of this article into the bill of rights is that they know that free soil will produce free schools; free schools will engender free thought; and free thought will elevate the masses. They think that society is just now a great deal topsy-turvy any way; that there is a great deal of confusion in the old fabric, and with a view to restore the equilibrium they are opposed to the abolition of slavery, and want to keep things in their old trim. Now, in these slave counties where this state of things predominates, do you see the greasy mechanic, the small-fisted farmer, the man who has worked his way up by his own industry, and who has acquired a little education—do you see one of that class of men come up here from those counties? Very rarely. The controlling classes want to hold the power they have got; and it is but natural that they should oppose this article. For, incorporate this provision into your Constitution, and you will immediately introduce free schools; and free schools will excite free thoughts and free opinions; and there will be a rush of free immigration into those counties, and a different class of men will get hold of the helm. It is with this view that they oppose this matter. They want to hold the power of the State, and they can only hold it by keeping the masses in ignorance.

The gentleman from Charles (Mr. Edelen) puts this question. How does it happen that,