## THE COLOURED POPULATION OF MARYLAND.

The excitement which has pervaded this city and State with regard to the subject of the coloured population, has for the present subsided, in consequence of the rejection of the Bill passed by the House of Delegates, in the Senate. That the subject has been agitated at the present time without any coalescence of the parties interested and any consequent satisfactory action thereon, is deeply to be regretted. Of the expediency of any action at the present time, or any change in the policy of the state government with regard to this subject, we very much doubt. The quiet which the state has enjoyed since the legislative act of 1831, is mainly attributable to the course of policy then adopted, viz: that of gradual and voluntary colonization of the free people of colour and manumitted slaves. And although the effect has not been fully equal to what was anticipated or wished, yet certainly all that could have been reasonably expected. The state has been kept free from those unhappy and troublesome excitements, which have pervaded most of the other border states of the Union; and a way has gradually been opened by which she may be ultimately freed from her superabundant free coloured population with honour and justice to herself and advantage to them. If there is existing in the state, as has lately been maintained, two opposite and conflicting interests, (viz: slave and the free labourer, or the tobacco and grain-growing interest;) if there have prevailed opposite principles and feelings, political and religious, with regard to this subject, the one advocating the perpetuity of slavery, and the other its gradual abolition and extinction; those interests, those principles and feelings have been kept quiet and passive through the colonization policy for the past ten years, from a confidence that the ultimate and *true* interests of *all* had thereby been advanced. Recent movements in the state, 'The Slave Holders Convention,' the Bill which passed the House of Delegates, before noticed, and the proceedings of public meetings holden in different parts of the state to petition the Legislature with regard to the subject, have served materially to change the aspect of affairs, and we believe much for the worse. In fact, it could not be hoped that the agitation of this subject, at this time, would be productive of other than bad results, especially as action thereon must assume in some degree a party or sectional character.

The first movement was, as denominated, a Slave Holders Convention, the full proceedings of which we have in our January number, laid before the public. The very calling of this Convention, to say nothing of its acts, was the formation, the embodying of a pro-slavery party in the state, and the separating it from other interests. The acts of this Convention were the submitting of certain propositions to the state legislature, mainly calculated to produce two results which they considered necessary for the preservation of their property, viz: the prohibition of manumission, and the expulsion of all free negroes from the state. Of the same character, also, was the Bill which passed the House of Delegates.

The opposition to the acts of the Convention and the Bill, did not arise from any concert of action or any general assemblage of those to whom the Bill was exceptionable. It was spontaneous and simultaneous throughout



the state, and was expressed by local county Conventions, and public meetings in this city, through the press and the pulpits. Inasmuch as there was no concert of action in what might properly be called the opposition party, so the objections to the Bill, and the principles on which such objections are based, have been various, and even contradictory. We wish our limits permitted the introduction of the resolutions and memorials adopted by these meetings, and to make extracts from the many well written articles which have appeared in the public prints upon the subject. The objections to the Bill, however, may very properly be ranked under two heads, or classes, viz: political and moral.—The first and most general objection of the former character is, that the legislation is unnecessary, as the slave property is already sufficiently protected by the statutes of the state—that the legislation is partial, favouring only one interest of the many, and that, at the expense of all others, by creating a multiplicity of offices, and greatly increasing the duties of those now in existence. It is maintained that it is inexpedient to drive the free coloured population from the state, that their services are essential to the grain growing interests, that the land cannot be tilled without them, that the vacancies occasioned by their exit, could not readily be filled, or their places supplied. The prohibition to manumission is objected to on the assumed ground that the freed negroes decrease very rapidly, whereas the slaves steadily increase; and many acts or clauses of the Bill are declared unconstitutional. What might be termed the moral objections to the Bill, are, that the agitation of the subject in any degree is highly injurous to both the white and coloured population; that the operations of the Bill upon the free coloured people would be cruel and unjust, in depriving them of rights and privileges which they had long enjoyed—that they would be to a great extent debarred the privilege of receiving moral and religious instruction—that the innocent would necessarily suffer in common with the guilty—that many persons now absolutely free would be reduced to slavery—that most of them would be driven from their natural home without any adequate cause—and finally, that the restriction to the right of abolition is unjust and unconstitutional, as it deprives the citizens of the state of the right of obeying the dictates of conscience. These so far as we can judge are the principal grounds on which the Bill is opposed, and the detail of these cover a great deal of ground as do the various clauses and provisions of the Bill itself. And as the intent of the framers of the Bill, and its effect if passed and carried into operation would be to enslave many of the free coloured people and drive the rest from the state; so the intent of the objectors to the Bill and the result of action upon their principles as promulgated would be to retain them among us in their present degraded capacity;—to have our soil tilled by those who must ever remain *serfs*, instead of *freemen*, and to perpetuate this moral slavery of the mind in the black man so long as the white race shall retain the ascendency.

Of the comparative claims to political sagacity or patriotism by either,—the party which would bend legislation in the State of Maryland to the perpetuity of slavery, or the one which would commit the labour of the land to the rapidly increasing free coloured population, who can never be elevated to the rank of *freemen* or become citizens of the state,—of the claims of the two parties to true moral motives of action, philanthropy and justice,—those who would harrass, enslave or drive out sixty thousand people, the

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The Maryland State Colonization Society Papers

XII. Newspapers
A. Maryland Colonization Journal

2. June 1841 (n.s. I, 1)—May 1861 (n.s. X, 24)

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