the control by congress over slavery in the Territories has been made to assume in our national politics.

It must be borne in mind that the present aspect of parties in this country is very far from revealing the real state of public opinion upon any new and exciting question which may suddenly arise. We have seen two great national parties—the old Whig and the American—completely disorganized within a few years. The enormous mass of voters who acted with one or the other of those parties—and the greater part of whom are now acting with the Republican or the Democratic party—are far from being committed so permanently to either that it can be predicted with certainty what course they will take if matters come to the worst. Moreovor there are very few States in the Union in which there is such unity of sentiment as to insure even a decided and constant majority upon either side of the most important political questions; and nothing is more common in many of the States than sudden and great revolutions of opinion.—Even with the perfect certainty that every slave State will resist with arms any interference with its security as connected with its slaves, there are topics connected with the time and manner of that resistance which might easily terminate very fatally, and topics connected with slavery itself, (the slave trade, for example,) on which the most determined difference of opinion has manifested itself. While such considerations ought to warn the most upright and sagacious public man of the great danger they are in of being deceived by party clamor, and ought to terrify such as are unscrupulous, they teach us that, after all, the heart of the nation may be sound, and that it only needs to be convinced of its peril that it may, by one mighty outburst of patriotic enthusiasm, crush every party that has trifled with its convictions, and overwhelm every public man that has betrayed it.

Concerning the political relations of slavery under the Federal Constitution, and the rights and duties of the slave States of the Union, it is perfectly immaterial whether the institution of negro slavery, as it exists in this country, is good or bad; and all Congressional discussion of that point is as irrelevant as it is ordinarily empty. We live under a written Constitution, and have for more than seventy years been expounding it, commenting on it, and applying it constantly to the business of life. There may be topics, and they not unimportant, upon which one generation has differed from another, one party from another, one class of statesmen, judges, and lawyers from another, as to the true sense of the Constitution, and the true weight to which interpretations of it are entitled, whether those interpretations are made by one or other Department of the Government.—No doubt, of late years, the tendency of opinion has been to attribute far more sacredness to judicial interpretations than the founders of the Republic allowed; and therefore we witness such fierce debates as to the true sense of the Dred Scott decision. With all possible veneration for the Federal Constitution, we are not to forget that it was made for us, not we for it; and, with all loyalty both towards the National and our State Governments, let us remember that the highest of all loyalty is to society itself, which is above every form it can possibly put on. Under all forms of society, the all pervading questions are political questions—questions which never can be permanently settled in free governments, except through representative bodies, and then in accordance with the public conscience.

The question of slavery, as it relates to the nation, falls under these general considerations in a remarkable manner. Thus, in the first place, slavery was almost universal, and the slave States the immense majority

at the formation of the Federal Constitution. Now the slave States are in a minority, their whole population is a minority, and that minority, both of States and people, is steadily becoming relatively weaker. In the second place, there has occurred a prodigious change in the value of slaves and of the product of their labor, as well as in the state of public opinion on the subject of slavery itself. At the formation of the Federal Constitution there was no particular hostility to slavery in one section above another, and no particular zeal for its extension and perpetuity in any section. But at present the great majority in most of the slave States zealously desire both the the extension and the perpetuity of slavery, and the almost unanimous population of them all regard it as so completely involved in the very fabric of society that no interference with it from without can be endured; while the great mass of the people of the North consider the institution positively evil, and an immense party among them is organized on the conviction that the interests of the free States and of the white race are jeoparded by the claims of the slave States, and their alledged control of the Federal Government in the interest of slavery—the repression if not the tolal extinction of which is what the South understands them as seeking.

Now, looking at the matter in this light, and rejecting all pretexts, the solitary condition which can satisfy the North is that the South should claim nothing under the Constitution which that Constitution, fairly interpreted, did not always secure to her. And the solitary condition which can satisfy the vital necessities of every slave State is, that the Constitution shall be so interpreted, and the government so administered, that it shall enjoy the same peace, security, and equality of rights in the Union which it would enjoy if it were a free State. What seems to me clear at present is that no such violation of either of these conditions has yet occurred to justify either party in proceeding to such extremities as would be justifiable if it had occurred. And it is equally clear that the apprehension of an impending violation of the rights of either party cannot justify any irregular, much less any extreme proceeding, any further than may be necessary and effectual to prevent that impending violation. Moreover, the highest and most enduring interests of all parties conspire with their sacred obligations, binding them to act with mutual justice, good faith, and forbearance. But suppose the dominant party at the North to have already violated beyond endurance the solitary condition with which the safety of the South allows her to be satisfied; even then, it is the furthest possible from being true that the secession of a portion of the slave States, or the disruption of the Union on the slave line, is a necessary, a wise, or even an allowable alternative.—It is true the States are sovereign States. But is equally true that the nation is a nation—the American people a people. Great nations cannot suddenly disappear, like a cloud of insects; nor do powerful nationalities fade in a day, like the flower or the grass. It took the Roman Empire a thousand years to die; and the Hebrew nationality has survived through all the possible fortune of four thousand years.

To rend a nation in twain is a far more terrible procedure than for a nation to recover itself by an internal struggle. Nothing can be more certain than that slavery cannot be perpetuated on this continent by means of the rending of this nation. With a single nationality like ours, internal struggles, no matter how often they may occur, can ever be greatly protracted, and can never fatally arrest the progress of society; but, in precisely such a case as ours, the permanent rending of the nation is a catastrophe, the progress of which promises nothing so assuredly as the mutual dissolution of both the parts, and the end of which can produce nothing

Maryland Historical Society

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)

1860