# CORRESPONDENCE.

ANNAPOLIS, Md., Sept. 11, 1855.

Dear Sir:—A large body of the people of this county, composed of Whigs and Democrats, believing that in the existing condition of political affairs a crisis has arisen which threatens to peril the best interests of the country, and the principles on which the Constitution of the United States are founded, and by which it has been maintained, is united, regardless of all pre-existing partizan views, for the patriotic purpose of preserving, to the extent of their power, unimpaired that Constitution and those principles. This Body is organized and will make a strenuous effort, at the election to be held in November next, to elect a Ticket selected by a Union Convention, which assembled in this city on the 25th day of August ult., pledged, if elected, to represent and carry out the sentiments and opinions of the Convention and those whom they will represent.

The undersigned, appointed a Central Committee, under a Resolution of this Union Convention, believe that an expression of your views upon the National topics which are agitating the country and are now being especially canvassed in Maryland, will be most acceptable to your friends and to the people of the State generally, and respectfully invite you to communicate them in such form as may be most agreeable and convenient to yourself.

We remain dear sir,
Most respectfully,
Your friends and ob't servt's.,
JOHN WALTON,
THOMAS FRANKLIN,
RICHARD C. MACKUBIN,
GEO. W. HUGHES,
E. S. RILEY,
OWEN DISNEY,
ELI J. HENKLE,
Central Committee.

To Hon. Thomas G. Pratt,
Annapolis.

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ANNAPOLIS, 13th September, 1855.

Gentlemen:—I have received your favor of the 11th instant, and in view of the position I hold as one of the Representatives of the State in the Senate of the United States, I fully recognise the obligation which rests upon me to give a full exposition of my opinion upon the dangers which threaten our country in the momentous crisis presented by the existing condition of political affairs.

As I understand your communication, you are the organ of a Body of my fellow-citizens who have patriotically determined to abandon all "pre-existing partizan views" for the purpose of organizing a *Union Party*, independent of, and distinct and separate from, all other existing Political Parties, under whose banner the Conservative Voters of all Parties may rally for the preservation of the Constitution and the true interests of our country.

The least possible reflection will make it manifest to all, that a mere fusion of Whigs and Democrats brought about by a common hostility to a third antagonistic political organization, to be abandoned when success shall be attained, and the persons composing the Ticket you have presented to be at liberty to return after their election to the party to which they antecedently belonged, would be unworthy of the great struggle you propose to make; and instead of unfurling a Union Banner, under which all may rally, to arrest the pending danger to their country, will only tend to secure the political ascendency in the Legislature of that one of the old parties which may have a majority upon such Fusion Tickets through the State, or which may be successful in electing its partizans, where such Fusion Tickets are not presented. In a word, all will see, that if as in the city of Baltimore, and other portions of the State where the Democratic Party have the majority the Ticket presented shall be wholly composed of Democrats, the result of success of the Fusion Tickets in the counties would be necessarily to give the preponderance to that party in the next Legislature. I cannot think that the Whigs are invited to co-alesce for this purpose, and I, therefore, assume that I am right in supposing that the object of my fellow-citizens in whose behalf you address me, is to establish such a distinct and separate party as I have indicated.

I am fully convinced that coming events will before the next Presidential election, compel those who desire to preserve the Federal Union, to abandon their connection with the existing political parties, and form such a new party as you have proposed to initiate.

I proceed to give briefly the reasons which have forced upon me this conviction.

The element of political discord which so portentously threatens the weal of our common country, and which, if not in some way controlled, must produce a disruption of the Federal Union, is the SLAVERY QUESTION.

The Constitution of the United States not only recognises the slave, *as the property* of the master, but guarantees to the master the restoration of the slave, when he shall escape from the domicil of the master into any other State of the Union; and the Supreme Court of the United States have decided that this clause of the Constitution imposes upon the Federal Government, through its officers, the obligation of making such restoration. It is known to all, that Congress, passed in 1850 the Fugitive Slave Law, which simply confers upon the Executive branch of the Federal Government the means of discharging this Constitutional obligation, decided by the Supreme Court to be imposed upon it. I need not remind my fellow citizens that this and the other measures introduced at the same session for the purpose of quieting the excitement upon this subject, which then threatened, as now, the tranquillity of the country, were passed by the patriotic exertions of Clay, Cass and others, who, without distinction of party, united in their support; and I need not remind any, that the repeal of this Fugitive Slave Act, from the day of its passage to the present time, has been the avowed object of the Abolitionists throughout the country. The result of the recent Congressional Elections exhibits the alarming fact that these agitators have succeeded in electing to the House of Representatives of the United States, a majority who avow their intention to repeal this law, and who also avow their intention to effect their object by placing its repeal as an amendment upon some one, or all of the appropriation bills. The Senate of the United States will never consent to such an amendment; and the result will be, that the Federal Government will be left without the means of paying the executive, judicial, military, diplomatic and civil functionaries by whom the Government is conducted. A crisis will in this way arise, which will force the conservative citizens of all sections to unite in one common political organization for the preservation of the Government.

The *real* objection of the Abolitionists to this law, is, that it restores the slave to his master. They do not oppose the manner in which the law proposes to effect this object, but, their objection is to the end proposed to be attained—the restoration of the slave to the Master. The Constitution says that the fugitive slave "shall be delivered up," and the Supreme Court say that this imposes the obligation "to deliver up" upon the Federal Government. It is therefore apparent that these Abolitionists object not to the law, but to the Constitution, and to the discharge of the obligation to deliver up the slave, which is imposed by the Constitution upon the Federal Government. I submit, therefore, that the conclusion is irresistible *that every conscientious Abolitionist must be a Disunionist*. Indeed, very many of them openly avow their opposition to the Constitution and their desire to dissolve the Union; whilst all who conscientiously believe it to be wrong to "deliver up the slave to his master" must desire a repeal of that Constitution and dissolution of that Government, which impose such obligation.

In addition to the danger to the Union from the Abolitionists, it must not be disguised, that there are many of our fellow citizens South, who believe that the interests of the South would be better protected by a separation of the slave from the non-slaveholding States, and who would not stir hand or foot to prevent so calamitous a result. We have seen in Congress the extremes of both sections acting together in opposing measures introduced and advocated by the conservative portion of both sections as essential to the preservation of the Union. You are, therefore, right in my judgment in supposing that a crisis has arisen in the political affairs of the country, which requires the conservative citizens of all parties and all sections to surrender their prejudices upon the altar of their common country, and to unite as one party to preserve the Federal Constitution and Government.

The question then recurs—could the conservative voters of the whole country be induced to rally under either of the existing political organizations?

In prosecuting this inquiry let us first look to the Whig party. Would the Democrats of the country consent to abandon their organization, and agree to rally under the Whig banner? Let our Democratic friends answer; and I am sure they will all admit that this would be an impossible achievement. If I am right in this, then I am sure that our Democratic friends will admit that it would be as unreasonable to expect, and as impossible to obtain from the Whigs of the country their consent to abandon their organization, and join the Democratic ranks. I need not ask whether it would be possible to induce the entire conservative portion of the Whig and Democratic voters to give up their respective political organizations for the purpose of uniting with the American party; and I assume that it would be equally impossible to get the whole conservative portion of the American order to join either the Whig or Democratic organizations.

But independent of the insuperable difficulty which would occur in inducing the members of all parties to join either one of the existing parties, it is manifest to my mind that neither of the existing parties would answer the purpose you propose to effect by the establishment of a new party. I am free to confess that very many of the Northern Whigs are free soilers or abolitionists; and whilst the same fact may unfortunately be predicated with equal truth of the Democratic party North, the repudiation by the delegations from every non-slaveholding State (except New York) in the recent Philadelphia Convention, of the 12th or conservative slavery article adopted by that Body, clearly demonstrates that the Northern organization of that party is openly, avowedly opposed to Southern interests, and cannot consequently be relied on by the conservatives of the country in the approaching crisis.

The only hope of the South, as a component part of the Union, is in maintaining a strict observance of the Constitution; and in my judgment the American party committed a great error in adopting the 8th Article of their platform at Philadelphia. This article, in substance, declares that no Roman Catholic, whether native or naturalized, and that no naturalized citizen, of whatever religious belief, shall be eligible to any office, executive, legislative, judicial or diplomatic. That article is in these words:

"VIII. Resistance to the aggressive policy and corrupting tendencies of the Roman Catholic Church in our country by the advancement to all political stations—executive, legislative, judicial or diplomatic—of those only who do not hold civil allegiance, directly or indirectly, to any foreign Power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, and who are Americans by birth, education, and training; thus fulfilling the maxim, "*Americans only shall Govern America.*"

It seems to me to be impossible to doubt that the Constitution, secures to the naturalized citizen certain privileges, and amongst them, that of eligibility to all offices except that of President and Vice President of the United States, and that it secures to all the native citizens of the country *equal* civil, religious and political rights.

Would not an act of Congress, or of a State Legislature, which declared that no Catholic citizen or naturalized citizen should be eligible to any office, be clearly unconstitutional?

Would not the determination of a dominant party, having the power to effect its object, that no such citizen should hold office, be equally violative of the spirit of the Constitution? The only distinction would be that the injured citizen, in the one case, would possess the power to have the law declared void by the proper judicial tribunals, whilst, in the other case, his constitutional privileges would be equally violated without remedy.

But I submit to the sober judgment of the American party that the exclusion of our Catholic fellow citizens from their party, is not only wrong for the reasons already assigned, but that it is suicidal, looking to the American party as a Southern political organization. It is well known to them that slavery is generally denounced from the Northern pulpits as a *moral* wrong, and that a spirit of religious fanaticism upon this subject is thus being taught, which it will be most difficult to reach or eradicate by reason.

We know that the Church which has, perhaps, a larger number of members than any other in the Union, and which has been equally as remarkable for the exemplary piety of its members, as for its wide spread usefulness, has unfortunately differed so widely upon this subject as to render necessary a separation of the church North from the church South; and that from the former we cannot expect the promulgation of sound Constitutional opinions upon the subject of slavery. On the other hand, the abolitionists of the North are fully aware of the fact which seems to have escaped the recollection of the American party of Maryland, that the Catholic church everywhere is entirely right upon this subject—that church does not hold it to be morally or religiously wrong to hold slaves, but on the contrary, by precept and example teaches it to be religiously and morally right to hold them. The doctrines of the Catholic Church are universal in their application to its members; and no member of that Church can believe that to be wrong, which the Church teaches to be right. It is well known to those whom I have the honor to address, that the Catholic Church, or one of the orders of that Church have held, and I believe now hold slaves in Maryland; and as owner, treated and dealt with them as property. It is, therefore, clear that the members of that Church cannot become Abolitionists, and that we of the South may as confidently rely for the maintenance of our Constitutional rights upon the Catholic of Massachusetts, as upon the Catholic of Louisianna or Maryland.

I was not consequently surprised to learn that the Southern Delegates in the Philadelphia Convention, were generally opposed to the introduction of this 8th Article, and that it was in fact passed by the preponderating vote of their Northern brethern; for whilst it was natural that the Abolition portion of that Convention should proscribe those from whom they could never have aid or comfort, it seems to me that the American party South must see the false position they have been forced to occupy by those with whom it is impossible they can permanently affiliate.

If the American party had omitted from their Platform of principles, the objectionable features adverted to, they might have found in their ranks many Naturalized *American* Citizens, many patriotic Catholics, and other Americans, who would have united in the effort to obtain a modification of the Naturalization Laws, and in maintaining the principle "that Americans shall rule America."

I am fully pursuaded that those Naturalized and Catholic Americans who belonged to the Whig party, will never desert their Whig brethern with whom they have achieved victory and suffered defeat, and who now stand by them, and are ready to be sacrificed in the maintenance of their Constitutional rights.

It is then, gentlemen, the solemn conviction of my judgment, that the formation of a new party, having for its Platform, *the Constitution of the United States*, around whose banner, *citizens* of all parties—of all sections of the Union, may rally, without the sacrifice of self respect, pride or feeling—offers the surest, if not the only means of success to those who would be the Conservators of their country

I can, gentlemen, suggest no more appropriate name than that of "*Union*," for the party you propose to organize; the name is appropriate to a party having for its object the union of the conservatives of all parties for the preservation of the Constitution and the Union.

No appeal, I am satisfied need be made to the Whigs of Maryland to induce them to join this "*Union Party*;" their present state of party disorganization would naturally make them willing to join any *new* party with whose principles they could concur; and their patriotism would make them all the ardent supporters of the "*Union Party*." I am aware that, by reason of the more general organization of the Democratic Party, as well in Maryland as in other States, that by reason of pride of name engendered by former successes, an appeal to that party to abandon their organization, and rally under another banner and another name, may be, for the present, of more doubtful success. It is, to my mind, almost certain that the Democrats of the city of Baltimore, even now, at this late hour, by proposing to the Whigs to join them in forming the Union Party, have it in their power to achieve success, and will have the satisfaction of rearing and conducting to victory a new party, whose proud destiny it will be to save the American Union.

The course here indicated offers in my judgment the only hope of success; and if the Democratic party of Baltimore, and other parts of the State, will not join their brethern of this county in making this effort for the country, upon them will rest the disastrous consequences of inevitable defeat.

I have the honor
To be with great respect,
Your friend, &c.,
THOMAS G. PRATT.

To Messrs. Walton, Franklin, and other gentlemen of the Committee.

MdHS 1974 [1642-1700]