

THE AMERICAN INSTITUTION.

THOUGHTS ON SLAVERY.

A POEM.

BY LEWIS STEVENS.

PULASKI, N.Y.
Printed at the Democrat Office

1854

[unnumbered page]

Preface.

In writing the following lines, we have considered man entitled to his equal and inalienable rights, and slavery as conflicting with all of these rights. We say all, for it leaves him nothing but to breathe, and that only for the profit of the master. And that on Christian principles, no one nation or legislative body has a right to convert the people of another nation, or any part of its own, into goods or chattels, or reduce them to any servitude on any other ground than by civil contract. But so far as moral right is concerned, the system of American Slavery would make a Washington or a Kossuth a slave, just as quick as its present subjects. And in this position we are fully borne out by its present usages: for how many slave have one-half, three-fourths, or nine-tenths American blood; nay, how many fathers hold their children, brothers, their brothers, and perhaps their sisters in slavery. Climax of abominations!

It is said that by particular providence they are here. Yes, by a particular providence they were stolen from Africa, cramed into ships holes where many of them suffocated and died. By a particular providence they who lived were reduced to bondage, instead of being freed as they should have been. And by a particular providence, under the influence of chains, slave-jobs, whips, pistols, dirks, dogs, guns and all the civil authorities of the nation from the lowest up to our mighty Congress, they have been crushed, degraded and deprived of all privileges that belong to men as rational and accountable beings. And by a particular providence we believe we shall meet with the awful retributions of Heaven, unless we avert them by repentance and thorough reformation, that is, free them, civilize them, educate them, ellivate them.

Make men of them, for they are men, and have the rights of men.

LEWIS STEVENS

[unnumbered page]

THOUGHTS ON SLAVERY

A Nation boasting to be free,
Is losing fast its liberty.
Our men of rule, we cannot trust,
Faithless, and cruel, and unjust.

They sit with high despotic sway, [5]
To take our Nation's rights away,
And proudly crush beneath their feet
Who e'er refuses to submit.

On many a neck they press the yoke, [10]
Nor will their hateful laws revoke,
But human bones and sinews take,
And of them goods and chattels make.

The source in which this stream began
Was piracy, and theft of man,
Hear it, O! Nation, if ye will, [15]
'Tis piracy and man-theft, *still*.

Beneath their stripes, they writhe and groan,
And pour their prayers, and bleed, and moan,
When for relief, in vain they've cried,
They oft resort to suicide. [20]

They sunder the most sacred ties;
Regardless of the infant cries,
Nor will relent their hearts of stone,
Though mother wail, and fathers groan.

No matter to what point they go, [25]
Where strip't and starry banners flow,
They meet a host of tyrant blood,
To clench their chains or spill their blood.

[page 4]

Their Eagle, with expanded wing,
Her darts will to their vitals fling; [30]
Regardless of their cries and groans,
Will drink their blood, and scathe their bones.

And to our nations great disgrace,
They from our Eagle fly apace; [35]
To shelter in the Lions jaw,
And find protection 'neath his paw.

These men usurp the sacred throne,
And claim dominion for their own,
To sway the sceptre, hold the rod, [40]
And abrogate the laws of God.

So if these starving poor we feed,
Or clothe these sufferers as they need,
Or take the exile stranger home,
Then fine, and prison, are our doom.

They send their tigers through the land, [45]
For human prey, by dell or strand;
And if we dare refuse their word,
Their threats are bayonet and sword.

These tremble, shudder, shriek, and cry, [50]
For safety know not where to fly,
No greeting friends, no cottage warm,
Can stay the fury of the storm.

Shall we their mandates now obey?
And be their hounds to catch the prey?
We will their hateful laws reject, [55]
And helpless innocense protect.

Their action does far more become,
Bandits that in forests roam,
Than men who sit to legislate, [60]
And blend their names with good, and great.

Of robberies, theirs is the worst,
With which the Earth was ever curs't,
They do far more than robbers can,
Their horrid system takes the man.

[page 5]

The helpless they will assail, [65]
Though harmless, thrust them into jail,
And if they cannot pay the fee
They sell them into slavery.

And when they bring them to court, [70]
Also to bribery, they resort,
For here they give a vicious knave,
Ten dollars, if he find a slave.

'Tis villany of the highest grade, [75]
'Tis meanness of the lowest shade,
We ask since men have villains been,
What villanies were half so mean.

O! Liberty, how sweet thy name, [80]
How bright thy glories, wide thy fame,
Thy priceless value can't be told,
Thou work'st the African to gold.

The warm appeal, the fervent prayer,
Nor argument, they deign to hear,
But stearnly, do them all reject,
Their slavery Molock to protect.

Lo, they as Pilate take their stand, [85]
To seek the safety of the land,
These men released they are afraid
A dreadful tumult will be made.

The vilest herd earth ever saw, [90]
Are clamering we have a law,
And by this law and Congress powers,
Their bodies and their souls are ours.

The law that makes one man a knave, [95]
And binds another as a slave,
The pirate bands that wreak with blood,
Have laws and statutes just as good.

And yielding to this wicked throng, [100]
Regardless of the right or wrong,
And now to keep the tumult still,
They yield their victims to their will.

[page 6]

But these base deeds may not succeed,
No more than ancient Pilates did,
But gathering storms of vengeance come
And quickly seal our nation's doom.

For Lo, a tumult did arise, [105]
And Roman banners spread the skies,
And conquering armies proudly trod
'Mid flaming towers and gushing blood.

What noble deeds for men of state [110]
Who would be numbered with the great,
To use their legislative power,
To crush the weak and rob the poor.

That they may in great splendor ride, [115]
And live in luxury and pride,
But not from earnings of their own,
But those whose souls in bondage groan.

They drive them to the sultry field, [120]
That they to them their wealth may yield,
And that they may extort the more,
They ply the lash and drain the gore.

But yet the story is not told,
Urged on by raging thirst for gold,
They take their wife, they steal their child,
Their daughter sell to be defiled.

These men were bred in college walls [125]
And now are raised to senate halls,
Intrusted with the people's power,
The nation's light the nation's flower.

Such flowers are of the upas race¹ [130]
Their glory is mankind's disgrace,
Their light is from the shades of hell,
Whose rays beam darkness visible.

Well might such villains haste away, [135]
And vanish from the face of day,
Retire into some dismal den,
As filthy as their slave pen.

¹ Possibly 'upper race'.

[page 7]

They don't possess what they never can,
The rights they claim in fellow man,
Such rights to man, God has not given,
'Tis treason 'gainst Earth and Heaven. [140]

'Tis fixed as Heaven's eternal throne,
On God's authority alone;
The things you'd have men do to you,
The same as you to others do.

But what does Slavery know of right? [145]
Its laws are but the laws of might;
It takes from man what God has given,
It robs him of both Earth and Heaven.

To serve this vile satanic cause,
Shall mortals nullify god's laws? [150]
His word will stand in that dread day,
When Heaven and Earth shall pass away.

They press on us the slavery laws,
And force us to sustain its cause,
And if we fear them less than God, [155]
They'll smite us with their iron rod.

They have their sacred trust betrayed,
A heard of slaves, our Nation made,
Of men they don't deserve the name,
Our freedom's curse, our nations shame. [160]

Now like some foul, ferocious beast,
By carnage theirs, for blood increased,
They'd push vile Slavery's damning reign,
From Georgia, to the western main.

Should they but send the scorpion's sting, [165]
Or the plague's destructive wing,
Push slaughtering armies o'er the field,
Or make us to black famine yield;

They then far less would curse the land, [170]
Than when they slavery's reign extend,
And blast the nation with its breath,
This leprous plague of mortal death.

[page 8]

For 'tis a truth we can't deny,
'Tis plain as stars on yonder sky,
By all the nation's read and known, [175]
Our freedoms lost, our glory gone.

And those who now elected stand,
To highest rule in all the land,
Are pledged to choke and put to death
All that survives of freedom's breath. [180]

AMERICA, of proudest name,
Is this thy glory, such thy fame?
How vain thy boast in freedom's cause
With slavery chains, and slavery laws.

As well one might with boastful swell, [185]
His noble deeds of virtue tell,
While forth the ruthless Monster stands,
With blood and bribery on his hands.

They should be from their stations hurl'd,
Themselves made slaves to serve the world, [190]
And their own bones and sinews bared
By yokes for other necks prepared.

For those who human rights dispise,
And tread men down, that *they* may rise,
They neither are to good, nor great, [195]
To share an ancient Haman's fate.

But not our ruling men alone,
Can senseless hear their victims groan,
But joined they are by one vast throng,
To roll the slavery car along. [200]

I'm thunderstruck! astonished stand!
To see the thousands of our land,
Who to slavery yield the sway,
And cast their freedom boon away.

What stupid blocks, what senseless fools, [205]
To be reduced to slavery tools!
The yoke on their own necks to take,
And be made slaves, for slavery's sake.

[page 9]

For 'tis a fact as clear as light,
These opposites can ne'er unite; [210]
A truth that loudly on us calls:
If Slavery stands, our Freedom falls.

As well we talk of sunshine dark,
Of firey snow, or frosty spark;
As tyranny, that's good and kind, [215]
Or Slavery with pure Freedom joined.

What do these shameful deeds portend?
Who should not tremble at the end?
To see upon the platform plan
The pledge to crush and chattel man. [220]

This system is too base to tell,
'Tis deep, and dark, as shades of Hell,
Regards no rights, stops not at blood,
Puts men to death, and mocks at God.

See pirate monsters lurking round [225]
Where human victims may be found,
Who may by them best prest and sold,
And gratify their lust for gold.

To Afric's coasts they haste away,
To make its helpless sons a prey, [230]
And when obtained with much dispatch,
They crush them down beneath the hatch.

Thus crammed into that breathless hole,
As if no body nor a soul,
To groan, to grieve, to weep and sigh, [235]
To suffocate in filth, and die.

But borne upon the mighty deeps,
While o'er the waves the canvass sweeps,
Of these poor wretches some survive,
And barely reach our shores alive. [240]

Here in this land of Christian light,
So stern in justice, firm in right,
Where eagle banners proudly wave,
The freeman's home the tyrant's grave.

[page 10]

Shall not this land undo their thongs, [245]
Retrieve their rights, redress their wrongs,
And set the helpless captives free,
And sound to them their jubilee?

But to our grief and great surprise,
With tears fast gushing in our eyes, [250]
We see them hail the pirate band
And take these chattels at their hand.

This subject now is set at rest,
We do this piracy detest,
You are mistaken in the powers [255]
These were our fathers deeds—not ours.

You do espouse your father's cause,
And blend it with our nations laws;
You do far worse than they have done,
You finish up what they begun. [260]

Now if our standard be erect,
And we the innocent protect,
If here the man his right obtains,
How come these millions in their chains.

To human natures deep disgrace, [265]
We man's most sacred rights efface,
We are a pirate land become
We steal men from their mother's womb.

By sacred birth all men are free,
If innocence have right to be, [270]
A man cannot be born a slave,
And he who holds him is a knave.

To carry on this pirate work,
See chains and pistols, dogs and dirk,
And slave pen with its dismal cell, [275]
The very portico of hell.

AMERICA, how lost thy fame!
How stain'd they glory, vile thy name!
Thy crimes are crimes of deepest dye,
Thy proud profession is a lie! [280]

[page 11]

Such villanies can ne'er be blest,
On them our hopes should never rest,
They soon will bring our glory low,
And whelm our land in waves of woe.

If we would be the nations light, [285]
We must regard all human right,
Do right to each do right to all,
Do right although the heavens fall.

Thus saith the Father to the Son, [290]
O God forever is thy throne,
Right is the sceptre of thy hand,
Thy kingdom shal forever stand.

But men have God's laws rejected,
Left the helpless unprotected,
Thought to prosper by transgression, [295]
Thought to rise by vile oppression.

But their counsels ever failed them,
And their toils have nought availed them,
Therefore earth is in commotion,
Restless as the troubled ocean. [300]

Crowns have faded,
Thrones have tumbled,
Kingdoms wasted,
Empires crumbled,
But the Godly heaven secureth, [305]
And the righteous throne indureth.

Lo our seas already heaving,
Will they yet be disbelieving?
Pause a moment!
Look ye yonder, [310]
See that cloud,
Hear it thunder!

See the storm in fury rising,
Yet they're reckless, how surprising,
Stop, O stop the dread commotion! [315]
Right the wrong and calm the ocean.

[page 12]

O, Boston, spot of scenes so brave,
Once Freedom's cradle, now its grave,
Thy brilliant gold is dim become,
And slavery here has found a home. [320]

How are thy great and mighty slain,
How vanquished on old Salem's plain,
How stained the glory of thy day,
Thy shield how vilely cast away.

O tell it not in Massidon, [325]
Nor publish it in Askelon,
Lest heathens should deride our name,
And stamp us with deserved shame.

Her noble sons of patriot race,
Both saw and felt their deep disgrace, [330]
They drank the wormwood and the gall,
And wept to see their standard fall.

On you let no soft dews distill,
Nor fragrant showers on Bunker Hill,
But withering winds with dismal wail, [335]
Bear from its height the mournful tale.

Arise ye dear departed dead,
Pour out your tears where once you bled,
Intomb that tower to freedom's fame,
And blot it with eternal shame. [340]

See how their mighty powers unite,
Come on the battlefield for fight,
The marshal with his hosts so brave,
Is now resolved to make a slave.

O infamy! O villany! O shame! [345]
And more,
All human language is too poor,
To give such cursed deeds a name.

These are our laws, they must be kept,
Though truth be from our nation swept, [350]
Though freedom from our banners fly,
And every virtue bleed and die.

[page 13]

Yes, serve the Devil in full shape,
Be his jack-ass and ape,
For him labor, for him play, [355]
For him kick and for him bray.

Take your spear and sword and gun,
Let your work be nobly done,
Disregard all human right,
Crush the black man and the white. [360]

Violence are all his laws,
This will best sustain his cause,
By carnage, violence and blood,
He ruled the world before the flood.

Yes, onward in this glorious work, [365]
Join chains and pistol, dogs and dirk,
Assured he will reward thee well,
First on earth and then in hell.

Such laws are not from worlds above,
They don't originate in love, [370]
They're from the hosts that did rebell,
First on earth and then in hell.

Now from that smoking pit they rise,
To darken earth, insult the skies,
From man his manhood take away, [375]
And blot him from the face of day.

In solemn truth we do deny,
And all the slavery powers defy,
To show upon the Gospel plan,
Man's right to chattel fellow man. [380]

Our Legislator from the skies,
Does every nation equalize,
And to the world with joy we tell,
He touched the middle wall, it fell.

He comes to ope the prison door, [385]
And preach the gospel to the poor,
To set the helpless captive free,
And cause the sightless eye to see.

[page 14]

He calls the world his good to share,
His light and easy yoke to bear, [390]
And by their own experience prove,
That all his laws are laws of love.

On Zions mount behold he stands,
No slavery chains disgrace his hands,
With blessings rich, and full, and free, [395]
He sounds the nation's jubilee.

When did he you this right concede,
When draw, and sign, and seal the deed,
What did you for these chattels pay,
Come, name the price, the place, the day. [400]

Unless you can such deed produce,
Ask not our aid, it's of no use,
We cannot join in deeds so fell,
Against such crime we must rebell.

What obligations on them rest, [405]
That they should in the dust be pres't,
Their heads should be a footstep made,
That we might reach a higher grade.

'Tis not enough they irons wear,
And scourges lay their sinews bare, [410]
But if their Moloch still requires,
They'll raise the stake and light the fires.

If from the faggot pile he bounds,*
The flashing rifle quick resounds,
And pierced by its flitting balls, [415]
Their helpless victim prostrate falls.

Though scorched and weltering in his gore,
Their savage vengeance asks for more,
Dead to all sense of guilt and shame,
They thrust him in the curling flame, [420]

And to their lasting deep disgrace,
Their ministers will shameless face,
To these poor helpless tribes will tell,
Such is their fate if they rebell.

* A slave burnt for striking a man.

[page 15]

The law that's from the world above, [425]
Is based on equity and love,
Forbids that you to others do,
What you'd not have them do to you.

Would they be willing to receive [430]
What they themselves to others give,
And from that cup to take their sips,
Which they have placed to others' lips?

To be reduced to chattel stock,
And laid upon the auction block,
Like beasts of burden bought and sold, [435]
To make men rich in goods and gold?

And were they forced to join that gang,
Whose weeping heads dejected hang,
By beastly monsters urged along,
Would Hail Columbia be their song? [440]

From home and kindred forced to go,
To fields where rice and cotton grow,
Be crushed into the slavery press,
To toil and groan without redress?

Then from their task with weary reel, [445]
To sordid hut and scanty meal?
And on some filthy rag to lie,
With bleeding heart and streaming eye?

And wait the dreaded voice to hear,
Like thunder grating on his ear, [450]
Or meet the tyrant's hellish grin,
And feel the lash that parts the skin?

Could they but reach the Congress floor,
With bodies cut and drenched in gore,
Both long and loud would be their pleas, [455]
Against such villainies as these.

But must these evils be indured,
Till they were of pro-slavery cured,
Then soon would rise the burning day,
When slavery chains would melt away. [460]

[page 16]

But these are not of ills the worst,
With which we were by Slavery curs'd;
For 'tis a truth we can't dispute,
It makes the man a demon brute.

It is a brothel wide and great, [465]
A filth and stench, in church and state;
Yet for it courtier, and divine,
Will plead as devils for the swine.

Defrauded of the marriage rite, [470]
These sable tribes like herds unite;
No right to will, no power to choose,
No character to gain or lose.

Then come along the lordly white, [475]
To revel as their lusts delight,
And their own children raise to sell;
Such conduct puts the blush on Hell.

Here myriads of the Saxon race, [480]
Are doomed to Slavery's deep disgrace,
Their fathers men of high renown,
While they in chains of bondage groan.

'Tis not the African alone
That's doomed in Slavery's chains to groan,
But their own sons and daughters fair,
The fetters bind, and scourges tear.

Another scene of deepest taint, [485]
Which language has no power to paint,
Exposed in the public fair,
And sold to shame, their daughters are.

Behold that trim and fair quadroom, [490]
With sparkling eye as bright as noon,
Here crushed by slavery to the dust,
And vilely sold to brutal lust.

Exquisite form and beauties rare, [495]
With graceful hands and waving hair,
She's sold, she's bought to be defiled,
Father, O now behold thy child!

[page 17]

No father's hand may her protect,
No mother's counsels can direct,
But thrown a loose to passions wild,
Again we say, behold thy child. [500]

And here she is compelled to join,
A dog, a devil, or a swine,
And clutched within his filthy arms,
To shed her tears, and waste her charms.

O! Institution how divine, [505]
How brightly thy radiant glories shine,
Let ministers espouse they cause,
And magistrates enforce thy laws.

Let Congress forth majestic stand,
And all the vast pro-slavery band, [510]
Let Hell come forth and join the throng,
And devils echo in the song.

Perhaps you say I am to warm,
As said a Pitt, "I can't be calm,"
When on this worst of crimes I dwell, [515]
The foe of God the imps of Hell.

O! God, and has it come to this,
Such vile abuse, such deep disgrace,
That man no more the man remains,
But captive led in satans chains? [520]

What land since rolling time began
Has more betrayed the fallen man
Than *this* the boast of Freedom's fame,
Of Bible God, and Christian name.

For what could Satan more invent, [525]
Were all his art and malice spent,
Than what's in Slavery's cause embraced,
Which has our nation thus disgraced?

See merging from that slavery den,
Come devils forth in shape of men, [530]
To take men fettered hands and foot,
And drag them to that dark retreat.

[page 18]

Here black, and starless are their skies,
And gathering storms around them rise,
While hoarse the muttering thunders roar, [535]
And storms of vengeance on them pour.

And drear and barren is the field,
To them it can no comforts yield,
Though richest luxuries on it grow,
To them it is but sleet and snow. [540]

To them no blooming spring appears,
No rising hope their bosom cheers,
But darkness in its wintry reign
Forever holds them in its chain.

Here haggard beasts enclose them round, [545]
The greedy wolf and bloody hound,
To guard them with malicious care,
And if they fly in pieces tear.

Here scorpions throw their poison dart,
And O, the anguish and the smart, [550]
He writes in agonies of pain
But O, how fruitless to complain.

Here horror in its triumph reigns,
Here grate the fetters, clank the chains,
Here break the piercing shriek and cries, [555]
And hope, man's latest comfort dies.

Will Heaven's just vengeance always sleep?
The Lord his righteous anger keep?
He will lift up His iron rod,
Say to the Nation "I AM GOD." [560]

Then earthquakes dread will shake the land,
And loftiest towers will tottering stand,
And plagues devour, and death shall spoil,
And purple torrents drench the soil.

Our Eagle speed her flight away, [565]
Egyptian darkness blot the day,
And starry banners shuddering fall
And judgments deep engulf them all.

[page 19]

Egyptian pride must feel His power,
Which has oppressed and robbed the poor, [570]
When God shall rise to plead His cause,
And execute his righteous laws.

O! Father, still they wrath forbear
And still thy righteous anger spare,
In mercy lift thy gracious hand, [575]
And kindly save our sinking Land.

O! may their hardened hearts relent,
And they of their vile deeds repent,
And Thy fierce anger turn away,
In knowing *this* their gracious day. [580]

My Country loved, I weep for thee,
“Land of the brave, home of the free.”
While reaking gore they glory dyes,
And loud to Heaven for vengeance cries.

While in our cause we freely speak, [585]
It is the good of *all* we seek,
The wealth of north and southern soil,
And distant lands where Plebians toil.

For while we thus pro-slavery stand,
We bind a curse on every land, [590]
But let AMERICA BE FREE,
‘Twould be the wide World’s JUBILEE.

Ye who have crossed the rolling flood,
And brought your freedom with your blood,
Who would suppose that men so brave [595]
Would condescend to have a slave!

Proud Britain’s sons bold saxon race,
Now wipe away this deep disgrace,
And if you love sweet liberty,
Then let the African be Free. [600]

Pour on these sable sons of night,
The rays of Education’s light,
To them the Gospel freely give,
Let these dry bones revive and live.

[page 20]

Then will your glory shine afar,
Earth's rising sun and morning star,
And Nation's 'merging from their night,
Be guided by your cloudless light.

[605]

Arise COLUMBIA free born son!
And put the ruthless monster down,
Your banners wave o'er land and sea,
And tell the *World* COLUMBIAS' FREE!

[610]

FINIS