REPUBLICS AND EQUALITY.

Some supporters of liberal principles, in their anxiety to secure justice for colored people, rely upon an argument that will not bear examination. They argue that colored men should become voters in the conquered States, under that constitutional provision which guarantees to every State "a republican form of government." If there were no better argument than this in support of an act of justice, the colored race might bid farewell to all hope of becoming politically the equals of the whites. There is nothing in a republican polity that necessarily excludes slavery. That form of wrong and oppression has existed in almost every republic, and perhaps in some form it has existed in all republics. Athens was a republic, and approached much nearer to the democratic standard than any other great republic that ever has existed; and slavery was prominent among Athenian institutions. The Roman republic has a great name, as for centuries it had a great place; and slavery was known in it on a scale that would have startled even Carolinians, could they see it—for a Roman dealer in men would have kidnapped and sold a Carolina gentleman as readily as he would have stolen an African woman for the market of the Balearic Islands. Florence was a republic, and we know that slavery existed there. Venice was a republic, and existed as such down to a date within living memory; and the Venetians held slaves, bought slaves, sold slaves, and made not a little money by their disregard of human rights. Holland was a republic, and her republican career is held to constitute one of the most splendid portions of human history; and not only was Holland a slaveholding country, but she was distinctly distinguished for the lead that she took in the slave trade—and to her belongs the dishonor of having introduced slavery into the old territory of the United States. England had a republican polity in the latter days of the Long Parliament, and under Cromwell's rule; and slavery then existed in her colonies, and she sold prisoners of war into bondage. Our country certainly was a republic during almost eighty-five years before the beginning of the secession war; and slavery was one of its most conspicuous institutions; and the African slave trade was not made to cease here until more than thirty years after the Declaration of Independence. Instances of the kind might be multiplied very easily, but it is not necessary to cite them, it being evident that if the existence of slavery in a country proves it not to be a republic, there has never been such a thing as a republic of any note on the face of the earth. The crime of slaveholding has been as common with the most cultivated of republicans as ever it was with the coarsest of the corsairs of Barbary. It is as incorrect to assume that a republican polity necessarily excludes slavery as it would be to assume that a monarchical polity necessarily includes slavery, an assumption that would be negatived at once by reference to France and England, which are monarchical governed, though the English polity differs in almost all respects from that of France. The action of the Czar of Russia shows that it is possible for even a despotic to be a more effective enemy of slavery than some eminent republicans have been.

The men who made the Constitution of the United States, and the people who ratified that Constitution, know what they were about, and they provided that every State should have a republican government in the same instrument in which they recognized the existence of slavery. Were they not republicans? If they were not republicans, what were they? And if they were republicans, what has happened to make a change in the meaning of words? We have no right, because we have conquered the slaveholders, to give a new meaning to an old word, which is the property of others as well as of ourselves, which we hold in common with many other peoples. Suppose that Cuba should become a nation, and should adopt a republican form of government, retaining slavery among her institutions; should we refuse to recognize her because she had insisted upon keeping her colored population in bondage? We might do so on moral grounds, and our action would be defensible; but we could not do so with reason on the ground that her course was contrary to republicanism. She would pointedly cite our own history against us, and other countries would say she was right.

The cause of human rights stands in no need of national power, and it did need it, such perversion would be inadmissible. We are bound to complete the great work of abolishing slavery, and to elevate the colored people to the condition of equality before the law, by higher considerations than are derivable from any interpretations that can be made of this or that clause of the Federal Constitution. We are bound to proceed in the course which we were forced to adopt, by a sense of justice, and we should be so bound were our polity strictly monarchical, instead of being, as it is, strictly republican. Slavery being utterly wrong, and without any redeeming characteristic, it follows that all that proceeds from it is wrong, and should be removed. We have, through success in war, and in that way alone, obtained the power to abolish slavery; and through the further exercise of that power we should proceed to the completion of work which cannot be passed over without peril to the republic. Colored people were excluded from the enjoyment of political rights because they were slaves, or because they belonged to a race that furnished slaves. We should make root-and-branch work with the prejudices that flowed from slavery, as we have agreed to do with slavery itself. The dawn of a better day, apparently, has begun. To stop now is as wise as it would be to say that dawn should not be followed by sunrise. The action required of us is morally dictated, it is something above mere politics. There is an abundance of political reasons why we should be just to the colored race; but even if we could suppose them not to exist—were it possible to separate sound policy from good morals—we should be bound to elevate the freedmen to equality with ourselves. Humanity dictates that freedmen should become free men, that between them and the rest of the population of the country there should be no political distinction allowed to exist. We are pledged to their elevation by solemn compact. The emancipation proclamation did thus pledge us. It is impossible honorably to escape from this. When President Lincoln pledged himself, as the nation's head, to abolish slavery as an act of war, did not that pledge carry with it the additional pledge to place those who should be unchained in the state of human beings? Thus do we interpret the proclamation, because we hold that it never could have been intended that four millions of human beings should be left without any regular or recognized place in a country where men who are denied the enjoyment of political rights are denied everything that belongs to manhood. The national faith is enriched to the continuance of a policy that was adopted at a dark hour of the war, and which cannot now, in the time of triumph, be departed from, or interrupted, without bringing dishonor upon us as a people. We cannot honestly repudiate our promise to a people who furnished us 150,000 fighting men, and who are entitled to share in that which has been, in part at least, preserved by their valor and their labors. As honestly could we repudiate our promise to pay our creditors. The republican argument is worthless, for republicans have often supported slavery, and sometimes they have disregarded their pledged faith; but the argument that is based on justice, humanity, religion, and common sense and sound policy, is irresistible—and that listened to, and acted upon, would soon decide the greatest and gratest question that now troubles the American people.

There is very little use, in our opinion, in trying to get out of our present difficulties by legal quibbling such as disfigured much of the Republican agitation before the war, attempts to put upon particular words or phrases of the Constitution, such as "persons held to service," a sense not only non-natural but refuted by abundant historical testimony. All this was part of that excessive worship of the letter of the organic law which at last ended in making the most tremendous moral and political evil seem in the eyes of a large portion of the nation a very small matter compared to even the most trifling apparent violation of constitutional provisions. We do not mean to say that this reverence for the letter did not do good service and has not rendered essential aid in enabling the nation to bear the tremendous strain which has just been imposed on its organization. But our course, ever since Mr. Lincoln issued his emancipation proclamation, has been based on a very different principle from that on which the Republican agitation
was conducted. He decided that the Government was warranted by the spirit of the Constitution—whatever the letter might say—to do what ever was necessary to save the national life, and the country has abundantly confirmed his decision. We have just reached by a slow and painful, but very sure, process the conclusion that it is absolutely necessary to the safety of the Union that not only should the form of govern ment in all the States be “republican,” in the sense in which that term was understood at the time of the Revolution, but the form of social organization must be democratic. Now President Johnson has just as much right, under the construction of his constitutional powers which has recently prevailed, to take such precepts as may seem to him necessary to secure this result as to secure the abolition of slavery. We cannot find in the Constitution any express warrant for destroying the institution of slavery any more than for his making all men equal before the law. But if the one power may be deduced, as it has been, from the necessity of the case, certainly so may the other.

We ask him now to take care that the new society at the South shall not be reorganized in such fashion that a man may be excluded from civil rights for the ridiculous reason that his skin is of a particular hue, not because any provision of the Constitution can be twisted into a prohibition of such a qualification, but because he has the power to prevent it, because the national safety requires that he should exercise this power, and because his failure to exercise it will tend to the establishment of class government at the South, which, as the experience of all ages and nations has proved, is the form of all others most hostile to real liberty and real progress, most subversive of human rights, and most productive of agitation, violence, and internal discord. And we in America find an additional reason for asking it in devout regard for our own reputation. As long as any such distinction is covered or sanctioned by the national laws, we make ourselves a laughing-stock every time we undertake to preach democratic principles to the rest of mankind.

THE SLAVE IN THE CHARIOT.

When the victorious Roman general rode in triumph to the Capitol, as he stood in his ivory car, crowned with laurel, and decked in purple and gold, listening to the Jo Triumph of his proud soldiery and exult ant fellow-citizens, an Ethiop was behind him in the chariot. Not for the purposes of an ordinary domestic attendant, not as a mere appendage of luxury. Contemporary commentators agreed that the slave's presence suggested an admonition to the emperor's pride, though it was a Christian father who first gave definite expression to the warning, and put into the servant's mouth the words, “Remember that thou art mortal!”

And we are holding our triumph ; the triumph not of an individual but of a whole nation; the greatest triumph that the world ever saw. We have (reverently be it spoken) led captivity captive: we drag in our victorious train a host of treasons and shames and abases, cast down from their pride of place. Do not we too need a slave in our chariot?

The danger that our victory may intoxicate us lies not so much in its completeness—though that alone would be sufficient cause of much exultation—as in the fact of its being carried out amid almost universal incredulity and very general delusion. It would be difficult, indeed, to produce a case where so full a success was so little expected by those outside of the struggle. We have no trustworthy means of getting at the world's public opinion in medieval, still less in ancient times, nor would it matter much if we could, for mutual ignorance and want of communication made international opinions then of small value. In modern times we find no parallel. The nearest approach to so general a mistake is that made about Napoleon, when he had apparently swallowed the whole European continent, and men expected every day that he would dispose of the island which alone resisted him. But the anticipations of his final victory were less due to sympathy than to fear. Not so the comparatively calm judgment of the Old World against us. While our foes derided our attempts to subjugate the nation which Davis had created,” our friends admitted that the war must sooner or later become one “for boundary,” that we might check the progress of slavery, but could not reconquer all the revolted States. Even at home the bulk of our wealth and learning was not very hopeful, for in truth, as a mere matter of reason, the chances seemed against us. Meanwhile the mass of the people, with a grand instinct of self-preservation, went on, blundering as they went, but still advancing. Homer compares one of his heroes on the battle field to an ace, and the wise man of Europe regarded the persistence of the American people as an exhibition of donkeyism on the largest scale. Suddenly the forces of treason crumble away, in a night as it were, and the republic stands triumphant at every point. The sayings of the schools are convicted of miserable inadequacy. “Democracies are the most patriotic; aristocracies the wisest; autocracies the strongest”—so ran the formula. But our democracy has shown itself by success to be wiser than the aristocrats abroad, who swore it could never succeed, and the aristocrats at home, who thought to conquer it: it has shown strength at least equal to that of any absolute monarch. The one great anti-democratic influence in the country is overthrown by a purely popular movement. Slavery and treason have fallen together, because the people resolved to put really in practice the theory of their Government. A similar success on the part of an individual would be apt to inspire him with inordinate confidence. If, for instance, he had persevered in a lawsuit not only contrary to the wishes and advice of his neighbors, but with small encouragement from his own counsel, he would naturally feel conceited, especially if it was won through some peculiar plan of his own. And is a whole nation more impervious to the seductions of victory? Are we not tempted to go forth in the belief that our star can never again be dimmed, that democracy is impeccable, infallible, invincible?

Of one thing we may be certain, that there will be no want of flatterers to tell us as much. Sensation editors, who have grown rich on every wickedness and weakness of public or private development; place-hunting politicians, who turned at the eleventh hour and would now hunt the master as eagerly as they once hunted down the slave—these and others will cry out—will? they have already begun to cry out—that we are to be told and instruct the world, that we have inaugurated new rules of government, of finance, perhaps of human nature. Now then is the time for the slave in the chariot to speak.

It is but four years since an imposing and overwhelming majority of the American people placed in the Presidential chair a puppet, a man of straw, behind whom the chief traitor, occupying exactly the place that gave him best opportunity to work out his plans, filled the garrison with his cohorts, undermined the citadel, and laid the train. And all this was done for the sake of the Union! When all the Northern States but two voted for Franklin Pierce, they did so in the full conviction that to vote for the man who made Jefferson Davis his Secretary of War was the only way by which the Union could be preserved. Might not the European here exclaim, that the old rule was true after all? Where was the wisdom of our democracy then? But this can never happen again. We have got rid of the sole annually, the only disturbing force. No such “peculiar institution” can be founded again; no “chivalry” of such a caste can ever spring up among us. The objection is plausible. We have so long been met and hampered at every turn by slavery, have so long been accustomed to regard the negro question as the one melancholy obstacle in the way of a political millennium, that with it all other ills seem to vanish. But let us consider more closely whether some elements of peril are not still left.

For instance, there is the Church of Rome, which, having small taste for religious controversy, we prefer to regard merely as a political body. Is there nothing in its tenets, as recently promulgated with authority by its acknowledged head, which if practically carried out would assail our civil liberties? Have not its aggressions once already provoked a movement which, thinly disguised as a crusade against foreigners, threatened to set the country on fire, and only yielded then to that great dragon of slavery which overleaped all the smaller serpents?

And where we in no possible part from the pestilent, irresponsible power of moneyed corporations, which in its secret workings has been known to buy up whole legislatures and corrupt the political honesty of whole States? Is there no danger that the spirit which dictates the temperance legislation may lead to less defensible interferences with individual liberty by the majority?

Is there no danger that, with our notorious tendency to extremes, we may, in our well-founded dread of “State Sovereignty,” rush into the opposite error of over-centralization, and place too much power at Washington, where before there was apt to be too little? Will it be said that these are imaginary perils? So people spoke of the slave