

flicting impressions by saying, that all point at last to an unity which inspires all, but disdains words, and passes understanding. Our poetry, our religions are its skirts and penumbræ. Yet the charm of life is the hints we derive from this. They overcome us like perfumes from a far off shore of sweetness, and their meaning is, that no tongue shall syllable it without leave; that only itself can name it; that by casting ourselves on it, and being its voice, it rushes each moment to positive commands, creating men and methods, and ties the will of a child to the love of the First Cause. And I can conceive, as soon as it is uttered, it is profaned. The thinker denies personality out of piety, not out of pride. It refuses a personality which is instantly imprisoned in human measures.

"It stands written on the Gate of Heaven, 'Wo to him who suffers himself to be betrayed by Fate.'"¹⁴

I have heard that they seem fools who allow themselves to be engaged and compromised in noble undertakings, but that at last it appears quite otherwise, and, to the gods it so appears from the first. I affix a like sense to this text of Hafiz; for he who loves nobly is not betrayed, but makes a fool of Fate.

Let the men be right, and the action be right, and the marriage be right, with humanity in their united heart for motive and genius, and the effect would correspond. Let us trust Cause and Effect, with a geometer's or a chemist's trust. Here is a lion-hearted hero, who comes from two nobodies.— His father was an Ethiop; and his mother was a cow,—and perhaps his son will be a jack o'lanthorn again. Yes, but there's a history behind these curtains, a history of each, and the instinct always expects when the intellect will come up with it.¹⁵ Always a truth, always a right, an obeying of the commandment of nature, is at the foundation of every beauty in parts or in wholes. The old geometric morals, the old Rectitude, is there, like astronomy and gravitation, to bring us up at last.

14. Attributed to Hafiz in *Der Divan von Mohammed Schemsed-din Hafis*, trans. Joseph von Hammer (1812–13).

15. Henry David Thoreau is the subject of Emerson's original version of this description of "a lion-hearted hero" and the sentence that follows it on history (see *JMN*, 1.3:82, 83; *TN*, 1:236, 245).

Ralph Waldo Emerson. "Address to the Citizens of Concord on the Fugitive Slave Law, 3 May 1851." *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 2 vols. Eds. Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson. Athens and London, University of Georgia, 2001. (vol 1, pp. 259–76)

"Address to the Citizens of Concord on the Fugitive Slave Law, 3 May 1851"

Emerson delivered his address on the Fugitive Slave Law on 3 May 1851 to the citizens of his hometown, Concord. He adapted the address on several occasions during May as a campaign stump speech in an unsuccessful attempt to get John Gorham Palfrey elected to Congress from Middlesex County on the Free Soil Ticket: 9 May in Lexington, 14 May at the City Hall in Cambridge (for which he received \$4 in expenses), 15 May in Worcester, 16 May in Fitchburg (\$2 in expenses), 18 May in Marlborough, 20 May in Sudbury, 21 May in West Cambridge (now Arlington; \$1 in expenses), and 22 May in Cambridge again ("Account Books").

Eleanor M. Tilton also argues for a delivery of the address at Waltham, based on an invitation by William Porter of that city dated 8 May, but there is no evidence that Emerson accepted. Tilton also states that Emerson talked in both Cambridge and Cambridgeport, but her case is garbled and the evidence contradictory, and we have rejected it (see *Letters*, 10:235–36).

Because this was a political address rather than a formal lecture, it was not widely reported by the newspapers. A single paragraph account in the *Liberator* describes the address as "a fine intellectual and moral treat" (9 May 1851, 75). The *Liberator* also mentions a delivery of the address in Cambridge on the fourteenth at which Emerson was booed and hissed by unruly Harvard students ("Mr. Emerson's Lecture," 23 May 1851, 3). Edwin Percy Whipple was present at the occasion and gives his account of it in "Some Recollections of Ralph Waldo Emerson," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 65 (September 1882): 583–84.

The address was first published as "Fugitive Slave Law" in the Centenary Edition (1904) of *Miscellanies* (*W*, 11:177–214). It was reedited as "Address to the Citizens of Concord" in Emerson's *Antislavery Writings*, 53–72. A complete early draft of the address is printed in the electronic textual notes.

FELLOW CITIZENS,
I accepted your invitation to speak to you on the great question of these days, with very little consideration of what I might have to offer: For there seems

to be no option. The last year has forced us all into politics, and made it a paramount duty to seek what it is often a duty to shun.¹

We do not breathe well. There is infamy in the air. I have a new experience. I wake in the morning with a painful sensation, which I carry about all day, and which, when traced home, is the odious remembrance of that ignominy which has fallen on Massachusetts, which robs the landscape of beauty, and takes the sunshine out of every hour. I have lived all my life in this State, and never had any experience of personal inconvenience from the laws, until now. They never came near me to my discomfort before. I find the like sensibility in my neighbors, and in that class who take no interest in the ordinary questions of party politics.

There are men who are as sure indexes of the equity of legislation and of the sane state of public feeling, as the barometer is of the weight of the air; and it is a bad sign when these are discontented. For, though they snuff oppression and dishonor at a distance, it is because they are more impressionable: the whole population will in a short time be as painfully affected.

Every hour brings us from distant quarters of the Union the expression of mortification at the late events in Massachusetts, and at the behavior of Boston. The tameness was indeed shocking. Boston, of whose fame for spirit and character we have all been so proud; Boston, whose citizens, intelligent people in England told me, they could always distinguish by their culture among Americans; the Boston of the American Revolution, which figures so proudly in "John Adams's Diary," which the whole country has been reading; Boston, spoiled by prosperity, must bow its ancient honor in the dust, and make us irretrievably ashamed.² In Boston,—we have said with such lofty confidence,—no fugitive slave can be arrested;—and now, we must transfer our vaunt to the country, and say with a little less confidence,—no fugitive man can be arrested here;—at least we can brag thus until tomorrow, when the farmers also may be corrupted.

The tameness is indeed complete. It appears, the only haste in Boston, after the rescue of Shadrach last February, was, who should first put his name on the list of volunteers in aid of the marshal.³ One is only reminded of the Russian poltroonery,—a nation without character, where, when they cheat you, and you show them that they cheat, they reply, "Why, you did not think we were Germans; we are only Russians;" that is, we all cheat. I met the smoothest of Episco-

1. Emerson wrote in his journal of the Fugitive Slave Law: "I will not obey it, by God" (*JMN*, 11:412).

2. John Adams (1735–1826), second president of the United States (1797–1801), whose ten-volume *Works of John Adams* (1850–56), edited by Charles Francis Adams, had just begun publication.

3. The escaped slave Shadrach Minkins had been rescued from custody in Boston on 15 February 1851, an early attempt to prevent the implementation of the Fugitive Slave Law.

pal clergymen the other day, and allusion being made to Mr. Webster's treachery, he blandly replied, "Why, do you know I think *that* the great action of his life." It looked as if, in the city, and the suburbs, all were involved in one hot haste of terror,—presidents of colleges and professors, saints and brokers, insurers, lawyers, importers, and manufacturers;—not an unpleasing sentiment, not a liberal recollection, not so much as a snatch of an old song for freedom, dares intrude on their passive obedience. The panic has paralysed the journals, with the fewest exceptions, so that one cannot open a newspaper, without being disgusted by new records of shame. I cannot read longer even the local good news. When I look down the columns at the titles of paragraphs, "Education in Massachusetts," "Board of Trade," "Art Union," "Revival of Religion," what bitter mockeries!

The very convenience of property, the house and land we occupy, have lost their best value, and a man looks gloomily on his children, and thinks 'What have I done, that you should begin life in dishonor?' Every liberal study is discredited: Literature and science appear effeminate, and the hiding of the head. The college, the churches, the schools, the very shops and factories are discredited; real estate, every kind of wealth, every branch of industry, every avenue to power, suffers injury, and the value of life is reduced. Just now a friend came into my house and said, "If this law shall be repealed, I shall be glad that I have lived; if not, I shall be sorry that I was born." What kind of law is that which extorts language like this from the heart of a free and civilized people?

One intellectual benefit we owe to the late disgraces. The crisis had the illuminating power of a sheet of lightning at midnight. It showed truth. It ended a good deal of nonsense we had been wont to hear and to repeat, on the nineteenth of April, the seventeenth of June, and the fourth of July.⁴ It showed the slightness and unreliableness of our social fabric; it showed what stuff reputations are made of; what straws we dignify by office and title, and how competent we are to give counsel and help in a day of trial: It showed the shallowness of leaders; the divergence of parties from their alleged grounds; showed that men would not stick to what they had said: that the resolutions of public bodies, or the pledges never so often given and put on record of public men, will not bind them. The fact comes out more plainly, that you cannot rely on any man for the defence of truth, who is not constitutionally, or by blood and temperament, on that side. A man of a greedy and unscrupulous selfishness may maintain morals when they are in fashion: but he will not stick. However close Mr. Wolf's nails have been pared, however neatly he has been shaved, and tailored, and set up on end, and taught

4. The Battles of Lexington and Concord were fought on 19 April 1775. The Battle of Bunker Hill was waged in Boston on 17 June 1775.

to say, "Virtue and Religion," he cannot be relied on at a pinch: he will say, morality means pricking a vein.

The popular assumption that all men loved freedom, and believed in the Christian religion, was found hollow American brag. Only persons who were known and tried benefactors are found standing for freedom: the sentimentalists went down stream. I question the value of our civilization, when I see that the public mind had never less hold of the strongest of all truths. The sense of injustice is blunted,—a sure sign of the shallowness of our intellect. I cannot accept the railroad and telegraph in exchange for reason and charity. It is not skill in iron locomotives that marks so fine civility as the jealousy of liberty. I cannot think the most judicious tubing a compensation for metaphysical debility. What is the use of admirable law-forms and political forms, if a hurricane of party feeling and a combination of monied interests can beat them to the ground? What is the use of courts, if judges only quote authorities, and no judge exerts original jurisdiction, or recurs to first principles? What is the use of a Federal Bench, if its opinions are the political breath of the hour? And what is the use of constitutions, if all the guaranties provided by the jealousy of ages for the protection of liberty are made of no effect, when a bad act of Congress finds a willing commissioner?

The levity of the public mind has been shown in the past year by the most extravagant actions. Who could have believed it, if foretold, that a hundred guns would be fired in Boston on the passage of the Fugitive Slave bill?⁵ Nothing proves the want of all thought, the absence of standard in men's minds, more than the dominion of party. Here are humane people who have tears for misery, an open purse for want, who should have been the defenders of the poor man, but are found his embittered enemies, rejoicing in his rendition,—merely from party ties. I thought none that was not ready to go on all fours, would back this law. And yet here are upright men, *compotes mentis*—husbands, fathers, trustees, and friends, open, generous, and brave—who can see nothing in this claim for bare humanity and the health and honor of their native state, but canting fanaticism, sedition, and "one idea."

Because of this preoccupied mind, the whole wealth and power of Boston,—two hundred thousand souls, and one hundred eighty millions of money,—are thrown into the scale of crime; and the poor black boy, whom the fame of Boston had reached in the recesses of a rice-swamp, or in the alleys of Savannah, on arriving here, finds all this force employed to catch him. The famous town of Boston is his master's hound. The learning of the universities, the culture of ele-

5. One hundred guns were fired on the Boston Common after the passage of the Fugitive Slave bill.

gant society, the acumen of lawyers, the majesty of the Bench, the eloquence of the Christian pulpit, the stoutness of Democracy, the respectability of the Whig party, are all combined to kidnap him.

The crisis is interesting as it shows the self-protecting nature of the world, and of the divine laws. It is the law of the world, as much immorality as there is, so much misery. The greatest prosperity will in vain resist the greatest calamity. You borrow the succour of the devil, and he must have his fee. He was never known to abate a penny of his rents. In every nation, all the immorality that exists breeds plagues. Out of the corrupt society that exists, we have never been able to combine any pure prosperity. There is always something in the very advantages of a condition which hurts it. Africa has its malformation; England has its Ireland; Germany, its hatred of classes; France, its love of gunpowder; Italy, its Pope; and America, the most prosperous country in the universe, has the greatest calamity in the universe, negro slavery.

Let me remind you a little in detail how the natural retributions act in reference to the statute which Congress passed a year ago. For these few months have shown very conspicuously its nature and impracticability.

It is contravened,

First. By the sentiment of duty.

An immoral law makes it a man's duty to break it, at every hazard. For Virtue is the very self of every man. It is therefore a principle of law, that an immoral contract is void, and that an immoral statute is void. For, as laws do not make right, but are simply declaratory of a right which already existed, it is not to be presumed that they can so stultify themselves as to command injustice.

It is remarkable how rare in the history of tyrants is an immoral law. Some color, some indirection was always used. If you take up the volumes of the "Universal History," you will find it difficult searching. The precedents are few. It is not easy to parallel the wickedness of this American law. And that is the head and body of this discontent, that the law is immoral. Here is a statute which enacts the crime of kidnapping,—a crime on one footing with arson and murder. A man's right to liberty is as inalienable as his right to life.

Pains seem to have been taken to give us in this statute a wrong pure from any mixture of right. If our resistance to this law is not right, there is no right. This is not meddling with other people's affairs: This is hindering other people from meddling with us. This is not going crusading into Virginia and Georgia after slaves, who, it is alleged, are very comfortable where they are:—that amiable argument falls to the ground: but this is befriending in our own state, on our own farms, a man who has taken the risk of being shot, or burned alive, or cast into the sea, or starved to death, or suffocated in a wooden box, to get away from

his driver; and this man who has run the gauntlet of a thousand miles for his freedom, the statute says, you men of Massachusetts shall hunt, and catch, and send back again to the dog-hutch he fled from.

It is contrary to the primal sentiment of duty, and therefore all men that are born are, in proportion to their power of thought and their moral sensibility, found to be the natural enemies of this law. The resistance of all moral beings is secured to it. I had thought, I confess, what must come at last would come at first, a banding of all men against the authority of this statute. I thought it a point on which all sane men were agreed, that the law must respect the public morality. I thought that all men of all conditions had been made sharers of a certain experience, that in certain rare and retired moments they had been made to see how man is man, or what makes the essence of rational beings, namely, that, whilst animals have to do with eating the fruits of the ground, men have to do with rectitude, with benefit, with truth, with something which *is*, independent of appearances: and that this tie makes the substantiality of life, this, and not their ploughing or sailing, their trade or the breeding of families. I thought that every time a man goes back to his own thoughts, these angels receive him, talk with him, and, that, in the best hours, he is uplifted in virtue of this essence, into a peace and into a power which the material world cannot give: that these moments counterbalance the years of drudgery, and that this owning of a law, be it called morals, religion, or godhead, or what you will, constituted the explanation of life, the excuse and indemnity for the errors and calamities which sadden it. In long years consumed in trifles, they remember these moments, and are consoled.

I thought it was this fair mystery, whose foundations are hidden in eternity, which made the basis of human society, and of law; and that to pretend anything else, as, that the acquisition of property was the end of living, was to confound all distinctions, to make the world a greasy hotel, and, instead of noble motives and inspirations, and a heaven of companions and angels around and before us, to leave us in a grimacing menagerie of monkeys and ideots. All arts, customs, societies, books, and laws, are good as they foster and concur with this spiritual element; all men are beloved as they raise us to it; all are hateful as they deny or resist it. The laws especially draw their obligation only from their concurrence with it.

I am surprised that lawyers can be so blind as to suffer the principles of law to be discredited. A few months ago, in my dismay at hearing that the Higher Law was reckoned a good joke in the courts, I took pains to look into a few law-books. I had often heard that the Bible constituted a part of every technical law-library, and that it was a principle in law that immoral laws are void. I found, accordingly,

that the great jurists—Cicero, Grotius, Coke, Blackstone, Burlamaqui, Montesquieu, Vattel, Burke, Mackintosh, and Jefferson—do all affirm this.⁶

I have no intention to recite these passages I had marked:—such citation indeed seems to be something cowardly—for no reasonable person needs a quotation from Blackstone to convince him that white cannot be legislated to be black—and shall content myself with reading a single passage.

Blackstone admits the sovereignty—“antecedent to any positive precept of the law of nature”—among whose principles are, “that we should live honestly, should hurt nobody, and should render unto every one his due,” and so forth. “*No human laws are of any validity, if contrary to this.*” “Nay, if any human law should allow or enjoin us to commit a crime” (his instance is murder) “we are bound to transgress that human law; or else we must offend both the natural and divine.” Lord Coke held, that where an act of Parliament is against common right and reason, the common law shall control it, and adjudge it to be void. Chief Justice *Hobart*, Chief Justice *Holt*, and Chief Justice *Mansfield* held the same.⁷ Lord Mansfield in the case of the slave *Somerset*, wherein the *dicta* of Lords Talbot and Hardwicke had been cited to the effect of carrying back the slave to the West Indies, said, “I care not for the supposed *dicta* of judges, however eminent, if they be contrary to all principle.”⁸ Even the *Canon Law* says, *in malis promissis non expedit servare fidem*: “neither allegiance nor oath can bind to obey that which is wrong.”

“No engagement (to a sovereign) can oblige or even authorize a man to violate the laws of nature. All authors who have any conscience or modesty, agree, that a person ought not to obey such commands as are evidently contrary to the laws of God. Those governors of places who bravely refused to execute the barbarous orders of Charles IX to the famous Saint Bartholomew’s, have been universally praised; and the court did not dare to punish them, at least, openly. ‘Sire’, said the brave Orte, governor of Bayonne, in his letter; ‘I have communicated your majesty’s command to your faithful inhabitants and warriors in the garrison, and I have found there only good citizens, and brave soldiers; not one hangman: therefore, both they and I most

6. Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), Dutch jurist; Edward Coke (1552–1634), English lawyer and attorney-general; William Blackstone (1723–80), English lawyer and author of *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–69); Jean Jacques Burlamaqui (1694–1748) and Emmerich de Vattel (1714–67), Swiss jurists; Edmund Burke wrote on individual liberty; James Mackintosh (1765–1832), Scottish philosopher and lawyer; Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), third president of the United States (1801–09) and founder of the University of Virginia.

7. English chief justices Henry Hobart (d. 1625), John Holt (1642–1710), and William Murray, Lord Mansfield (1705–93).

8. The English jurists Charles Talbot (1685–1737) and Philip Yorke, first earl of Hardwicke (1690–1764), English lord chancellor who helped establish that country’s system of equity.

humbly entreat your majesty, to be pleased to employ your arms and lives in things that are possible, however hazardous they may be, and we will exert ourselves to the last drop of our blood.”⁹

The practitioners should guard this dogma well, as the palladium of the profession, as their anchor in the respect of mankind; against a principle like this, all the arguments of Mr. Webster are the spray of a child’s squirt against a granite wall.

Second. It is contravened by all the sentiments.

How can a law be enforced that fines pity, and imprisons charity? As long as men have bowels, they will disobey. You know that the Act of Congress of September 18, 1850, is a law which every one of you will break on the earliest occasion. There is not a manly whig, or a manly democrat, of whom, if a slave were hidden in one of our houses from the hounds, we should not ask with confidence to lend his wagon in aid of his escape, and he would lend it. The man would be too strong for the partisan.

And here I may say that it is absurd, what I often hear, to accuse the friends of freedom in the north with being the occasion of the new stringency of the southern slave-laws. If you starve or beat the orphan, in my presence, and I accuse your cruelty, can I help it? In the words of Electra, in the Greek tragedy,

“’Tis you that say it, not I. You do the deeds,
And your ungodly deeds find me the words.”¹⁰

Will you blame the ball for rebounding from the floor? blame the air for rushing in where a vacuum is made or the boiler for exploding under pressure of steam? These facts are after laws of the world, and so is it law, that, when justice is violated, anger begins. The very defence which the God of Nature has provided for the innocent against cruelty, is the sentiment of indignation and pity in the bosom of the beholder. Mr. Webster tells the President, that, “he has been in the north, and he has found no man whose opinion is of any weight who is opposed to the law.” Ah! Mr. President, trust not the information. The gravid old universe goes spawning on; the womb conceives and the breasts give suck to thousands and millions of hairy babes formed not in the image of your statute, but in the image of the universe; too many to be bought off; too many than that

9. In August 1572, Charles IX of France, following the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of up to 10,000 Huguenots in Paris, wrote to his provincial governors, ordering them to put to death Huguenots who attempted any form of assembly. Several governors refused to obey this edict. There is no hard evidence to confirm the story of Vicomte d’Orthe’s response, which may be apocryphal, though in fact no massacre took place in Bayonne.

10. Sophocles (ca. 496 - 406 B.C.), Greek playwright, probably wrote the play *Electra* at about 430 B.C.; see ll. 626 - 27.

they can be rich, and therefore peaceable; and necessitated to express first or last every feeling of the heart. You can keep no secret, for, whatever is true, some of them will unseasonably say. You can commit no crime, for they are created in their sentiments conscious of and hostile to it; and, unless you can suppress the newspaper, pass a law against bookshops, gag the English tongue in America, all short of this is futile. This dreadful English speech is saturated with songs, proverbs, and speeches that flatly contradict and defy every line of Mr. Mason’s statute.¹¹ Nay, unless you can draw a sponge over those seditious Ten Commandments which are the root of our European and American civilization, and over that eleventh commandment, “Do unto others as you would have others do to you,” your labor is vain.

Third. It is contravened by the written laws themselves, because the sentiments, of course, write the statutes.

Laws are merely declaratory of the natural sentiments of mankind, and the language of all permanent laws will be in contradiction to any immoral enactment: And thus it happens here: statute fights against statute. By the law of Congress March 2, 1807, it is piracy and murder punishable with death, to enslave a man on the coast of Africa.¹² By law of Congress, September 1850, it is a high crime and misdemeanor punishable with fine and imprisonment to resist the re-enslaving a man on the coast of America. Off soundings, it is piracy and murder to enslave him. On soundings, it is fine and prison not to re-enslave. What kind of legislation is this? What kind of Constitution which covers it? And yet the crime which the second law ordains is greater than the crime which the first law forbids under penalty of the gibbet. For it is a greater crime to re-enslave a man who has shown himself fit for freedom, than to enslave him at first, when it might be pretended to be a mitigation of his lot as a captive in war.

Fourth. It is contravened by the mischiefs it operates.

A wicked law cannot be executed by good men, and must be by bad. Flagitious men must be employed, and every act of theirs is a stab at the public peace. It cannot be executed at such a cost, and so it brings a bribe in its hand. This law comes with infamy in it, and out of it. It offers a bribe in its own clauses for the consummation of the crime. To serve it, low and mean people are found by the groping of the government. No government ever found it hard to pick up tools for base actions. If you cannot find them in the huts of the poor, you shall find them in the palaces of the rich. Vanity can buy some, ambition others, and money others. The first execution of the law, as was inevitable, was a little hesitating; the

11. James Mason (1798 - 1871), senator from Virginia, drafted the Fugitive Slave Law.

12. Congress passed a law on 2 March 1807 prohibiting the African slave trade and the importation of slaves into America after 1 January 1808.

second was easier; and the glib officials became, in a few weeks, quite practised and handy at stealing men.

But worse, not the officials alone are bribed, but the whole community is solicited. The scowl of the community is attempted to be averted by the mischievous whisper, "Tariff and southern market, if you will be quiet; no tariff and loss of southern market, if you dare to murmur." I wonder that our acute people, who have learned that the cheapest police is dear schools, should not find out that an immoral law costs more than the loss of the custom of a southern city.

The humiliating scandal of great men warping right into wrong was followed up very fast by the cities. New-York advertised in southern markets, that it would go for slavery, and posted the names of merchants who would not. Boston, alarmed, entered into the same design. Philadelphia, more fortunate, had no conscience at all, and, in this auction of the rights of mankind, rescinded all its legislation against slavery. And the "Boston Advertiser" and the "Courier," in these weeks, urge the same course on the people of Massachusetts.¹³ Nothing remains in this race of roguery, but to coax Connecticut or Maine to out-bid us all by adopting slavery into its constitution.

Great is the mischief of a legal crime. Every person who touches this business is contaminated. There has not been in our lifetime another moment when public men were personally lowered by their political action. But here are gentlemen whose believed probity was the confidence and fortification of multitudes, who, by fear of public opinion, or, through the dangerous ascendancy of southern manners, have been drawn into the support of this foul business. We poor men in the country, who might once have thought it an honor to shake hands with them, or to dine at their boards, would now shrink from their touch, nor could they enter our humblest doors. You have a law which no man can obey, or abet the obeying, without loss of self-respect and forfeiture of the name of a gentleman. What shall we say of the functionary by whom the recent rendition was made? If he has rightly defined his powers, and has no authority to try the case, but only to prove the prisoner's identity, and remand him, what office is this for a reputable citizen to hold? No man of honor can sit on that bench. It is the extension of the planter's whipping-post: and its incumbents must rank with a class from which the turn-key, the hangman, and the informer are taken,—necessary func-

13. Emerson is referring to such sympathetic editorials as this one on "Fugitive Slave Agitation" from the *Boston Daily Advertiser*: "The senseless excitement which was raised at New Bedford on Sunday last, by the active circulation of a false report, shows how ready a portion of the public are to become the dupes of a few designing men. . . . This transaction is a most unfortunate one, from the impression which it must produce abroad of the character of our community and the fidelity of our people to the Constitution" (20 March 1851, 2).

tionaries, it may be, in a state, but to whom the dislike and the ban of society universally attaches.

Fifth. These resistances appear in the history of the statute, in the retributions which speak so loud in every part of this business, that I think a tragic poet will know how to make it a lesson for all ages.

Mr. Webster's measure was, he told us, final. It was a pacification, it was a suppression, a measure of conciliation and adjustment. These were his words at different times; "there was to be no parleying more"; it was "irrepealable." Does it look final now? His final settlement has dislocated the foundations. The state house shakes like a tent. His pacification has brought all the honesty in every house, all scrupulous and good-hearted men, all women, and all children, to accuse the law. It has brought United States' swords into the streets, and chains round the court house.

"A measure of pacification and union." What is its effect? To make one sole subject for conversation and painful thought throughout the continent, namely, slavery. There is not a man of thought or of feeling, but is concentrating his mind on it. There is not a clerk, but recites its statistics; not a politician, but is watching its incalculable energy in the elections; not a jurist, but is hunting up precedents; not a moralist, but is prying into its quality; not an economist, but is computing its profit and losses. Mr. Webster can judge whether this sort of solar microscope brought to bear on his law is likely to make opposition less.

The only benefit that has accrued from the law is its service to education. It has been like a university to the entire people. It has turned every dinnertable into a debating club, and made every citizen a student of natural law. When a moral quality comes into politics, when a right is invaded, the discussion draws on deeper sources: general principles are laid bare, which cast light on the whole frame of society. And it is cheering to behold what champions the emergency called to this poor black boy; with what subtlety, what logic, what learning, what exposure of the mischief of the law, and, above all, with what earnestness and dignity the advocates of freedom were inspired. It was one of the best compensations of this calamity.

But the Nemesis works underneath again. It is a power that makes noonday dark, and draws us on to our undoing; and its dismal way is to pillory the offender in the moment of his triumph. The hands that put the chain on the slave are in that moment manacled. Who has seen anything like that which is now done?

The words of John Randolph, wiser than he knew, have been ringing ominously in all echoes for thirty years,—words spoken in the heat of the Missouri debate. "We do not govern the people of the north by our black slaves, but by their own white slaves. We know what we are doing. We have conquered you

once, and we can and will conquer you again. Aye, we will drive you to the wall, and when we have you there once more, we will keep you there, and nail you down like base money.”¹⁴ These words resounding ever since from California to Oregon, from Cape Florida to Cape Cod, come down now like the cry of Fate, in the moment when they are fulfilled. By white slaves, by a white slave, are we beaten. Who looked for such ghastly fulfilment, or to see what we see? Hills and Hallets, servile editors by the hundred, we could have spared.¹⁵ But him, our best and proudest, the first man of the north in the very moment of mounting the throne, irresistibly taking the bit in his mouth, and the collar on his neck, and harnessing himself to the chariot of the planters?

The fairest American fame ends in this filthy law. Mr. Webster cannot choose but to regret his loss. He must learn that those who make fame accuse him with one voice; that those who have no points to carry, that are not identical with public morals and generous civilization, that the obscure and private who have no voice and care for none, so long as things go well, but who feel the disgrace of the new legislation creeping like a miasma into their homes, and blotting the daylight,—those to whom his name was once dear and honored, as the manly statesman to whom the choicest gifts of nature had been accorded, disown him: that he who was their pride in the woods and mountains of New England, is now their mortification,—they have torn down his picture from the wall, they have thrust his speeches into the chimney. No roars of New York mobs can drown this voice in Mr. Webster’s ear. It will outwhisper all the salvos of the “Union Committee’s” cannon. But I have said too much on this painful topic. I will not pursue that bitter history.

But passing from these ethical to the political view, I wish to place this statute, and we must use the introducer and substantial author of the bill as an illustration of the history.

I have as much charity for Mr. Webster, I think, as anyone has. I need not say how much I have enjoyed his fame. Who has not helped to praise him? Simply, he was the one eminent American of our time, whom we could produce as a finished work of nature. We delighted in his form and face, in his voice, in his eloquence, in his power of labor, in his concentration, in his large understanding, in his daylight statement and simple force; the facts lay like strata of a cloud, or like the layers of the crust of the globe. He saw things as they were, and he stated them so. He has been by his clear perception and statement, in all these years, the best head in Congress, and the champion of the interests of the northern sea-board.

14. John Randolph (1773–1833), U.S. senator from Virginia (1825–27).

15. Probably Isaac Hill (1789–1851), proslavery New Hampshire editor and politician; Benjamin Franklin Hallett (1797–1862), proslavery editor of the *Boston Post*.

But as the activity and growth of slavery began to be offensively felt by his constituents, the senator became less sensitive to these evils. They were not for him to deal with: he was the commercial representative. He indulged occasionally in excellent expression of the known feeling of the New England people: but, when expected and when pledged, he omitted to speak, and he omitted to throw himself into the movement in those critical moments when his leadership would have turned the scale. At last, at a fatal hour, this sluggishness accumulated to downright counteraction, and, very unexpectedly to the whole Union, on the seventh of March, 1850, in opposition to his education and association, and to all his own most explicit language for thirty years, he crossed the line, and became the head of the slavery party in this country.

Mr. Webster perhaps is only following the laws of his blood and constitution. I suppose his pledges were not quite natural to him. Mr. Webster is a man who lives by his memory, a man of the past, not a man of faith or of hope. He obeys his powerful animal nature;—and his finely developed understanding only works truly and with all its force, when it stands for animal good; that is, for property. He believes, in so many words, that government exists for the protection of property. He looks at the Union as an estate, a large farm, and is excellent in the completeness of his defence of it so far. He adheres to the letter. Happily, he was born late,—after the independence had been declared, the Union agreed to, and the Constitution settled. What he finds already written, he will defend. Lucky that so much had got well-written when he came. For he has no faith in the power of self-government; none whatever in extemporising a government. Not the smallest municipal provision, if it were new, would receive his sanction. In Massachusetts, in 1776, he would, beyond all question, have been a refugee. He praises Adams and Jefferson; but it is a past Adams and Jefferson that his mind can entertain. A present Adams and Jefferson he would denounce.

So with the eulogies of liberty in his writings,—they are sentimentalism and youthful rhetoric. He can celebrate it, but it means as much from him as from Metternich or Talleyrand.¹⁶ This is all inevitable from his constitution. All the drops of his blood have eyes that look downward. It is neither praise nor blame to say that he has no moral perception, no moral sentiment, but, in that *region*, to use the phrase of the phrenologists, a hole in the head. The scraps of morality to be gleaned from his speeches are reflections of the minds of others. He says what he hears said, but often makes signal blunders in their use to open the door of the sea and the fields of the earth, to extemporize government in Texas, in California, and in Oregon, and to make provisional law where statute law is not ready.

This liberalism appears in the power of invention, in the freedom of think-

16. Prince Klemenz von Metternich of Austria (1773–1850), foreign minister and statesman.

ing, in the readiness for reforms; eagerness for novelty, even for all the follies of false science, in the antipathy to secret societies; in the predominance of the democratic party in the politics of the Union, and in the allowance of the voice of the public, even when irregular and vicious,—the voice of mobs, the voice of Lynch law, because it is thought to be on the whole the verdict, though badly spoken, of the greatest number. All this forwardness and self-reliance covers self-government; proceeds on the belief, that, as the people have made a government, they can make another; that their union and law are not in their memory, but in their blood and condition. If they unmake a law, they can easily make a new one. In Mr. Webster's imagination, the American Union is a huge Prince Rupert's drop, which, if so much as the smallest end be shivered off, the whole will snap into atoms.¹⁷ Now, the fact is quite different from this. The people are loyal, law-loving, law-abiding. They prefer order, and have no taste for misrule and uproar. The destiny of this country is great and liberal, and is to be greatly administered. It is to be administered according to what is, and is to be, and not according to what is dead and gone. The Union of this people is a real thing, an alliance of men of one stock, one language, one religion, one system of manners and ideas. I hold it to be a real and not a statute Union. The people cleave to the union, because they see their advantage in it: the added power of each.

I suppose the Union can be left to take care of itself. As much real Union as there is, the statutes will be sure to express. As much disunion as there is, no statutes can long conceal. Under the Union, I suppose the fact to be that there are really two nations, the north and the south. It is not slavery that severs them, it is climate and temperament. The south does not like the north, slavery or no slavery, and never did. The north likes the south well enough, for it knows its own advantages. I am willing to leave them to the facts. If they continue to have a binding interest, they will be pretty sure to find it out: if not, they will consult their peace in parting.

But one thing appears certain to me, that, as soon as the Constitution ordains an immoral law, it ordains disunion. The law is suicidal, and cannot be obeyed. The Union is at an end as soon as an immoral law is enacted. And he who writes a crime into the statute book, digs under the foundations of the capitol to plant there a powder magazine, and lays a train.

Nothing seems to me more hypocritical than the bluster about the Union. A year ago, we were all lovers of the Union, and valued so dearly what seemed the

17. "Prince Rupert's Drop," a tadpole-shaped solid glass object formed by dropping a small glob of molten glass into cold water and leaving it to cool. This process results in a tremendous stress between the outside layer, which is cooled by water, and the inside, which is still warm. Because of the surface tension, the thick, bulbous end can be struck with a hammer, while even the slightest scratch of the thin tail releases the internal stress so forcefully that the entire piece shatters. These were introduced to England in the 1640s by Prince Rupert of Bavaria (1619–82).

immense destinies of this country, that we reckoned an impiety any act that compromised them. But in the new attitude in which we find ourselves, the personal dishonor which now rests on every family in Massachusetts, the sentiment is changed. No man can look his neighbor in the face. We sneak about with the infamy of crime, and cowardly allowance of it on our parts, and frankly, once for all, the Union, such an Union, is intolerable. The flag is an insult to ourselves. The Union,—I give you the sentiment of every decent citizen: "The Union! O yes, I prized that, other things being equal; but what is the Union to a man self-condemned, with all sense of self-respect and chance of fair fame cut off, with the names of conscience and religion become bitter ironies, and liberty the ghastly mockery which Mr. Webster means by that word? The worst mischiefs that could follow from secession and new combination of the smallest fragments of the wreck, were slight and medicable to the calamity your Union has brought us."

It did not at first appear, and it was incredible, that the passage of the law would so absolutely defeat its proposed objects: but from the day when it was attempted to be executed in Massachusetts, this result has become certain, that the Union is no longer desirable. Whose deed is that?

I pass to say a few words to the question, What shall we do? First, What in our federal capacity in our relation to the nation? And, second, what as citizens of a state?

I am an unionist as we all are, or nearly all, and I strongly share the hope of mankind in the power, and, therefore, in the duties of the Union; and I conceive it demonstrated,—the necessity of commonsense and justice entering into the laws.

What shall we do? First, abrogate this law; Then, proceed to confine slavery to slave states, and help them effectually to make an end of it. Or shall we, as we are advised on all hands, lie by, and wait the progress of the census? But will slavery lie by? I fear not. She is very industrious, gives herself no holidays. No proclamations will put her down. She got Texas, and now will have Cuba, and means to keep her majority. The experience of the past gives us no encouragement to lie by.

Shall we call a new convention, or will any expert statesman furnish us a plan for the summary or gradual winding up of slavery, so far as the Republic is its patron? Where is the South itself? Since it is agreed by all sane men of all parties—or was yesterday—that slavery is mischievous, why does the South itself never offer the smallest counsel of her own? I have never heard in twenty years any project except Mr. Clay's.¹⁸ Let us hear any project with candor and respect.

18. Henry Clay (1777–1852), U.S. secretary of state, was instrumental in preparing the legislation that included the Fugitive Slave Law.

Is it impossible to speak of it with reason and good nature? It is really the project fit for this country to entertain and accomplish.

Everything invites to emancipation. The grandeur of the design; the vast stake we hold; the national domain; the new importance of Liberia; the manifest interest of the slave states; the religious effort of the free states; the public opinion of the world;—all join to demand it.¹⁹

It is said, it will cost a thousand millions of dollars to buy the slaves,—which sounds like a fabulous price. But if a price were named in good faith,—with the other elements of a practicable treaty in readiness, and with the convictions of mankind on this mischief once well-awake and conspiring, I do not think any amount that figures could tell, founded on an estimate, would be quite unmanageable. Every man in the world might give a week's work to sweep this mountain of calamities out of the earth.

Nothing is impracticable to this nation, which it shall set itself to do. Were ever men so endowed, so placed, so weaponed? Their power of territory is seconded by a genius equal to every work. By new arts the earth is subdued, roaded, tunneled, telegraphed, and gas-lighted; vast amounts of old labor are disused, the sinews of man being relieved by sinews of steam. We are on the brink of more wonders. The sun paints: presently we shall organize the echo, as now we do the shadow. Chemistry is extorting new aids. The genius of this people, it is found, can do anything which can be done by men. These thirty nations are equal to any work, and are every moment stronger. In twenty-five years, they will be fifty millions. Is it not time to do something besides ditching and draining, and making the earth mellow and friable? Let them confront this mountain of poison,—bore, blast, excavate, pulverize, and shovel it once for all, down into the bottomless Pit. A thousand millions were cheap.

But grant that the heart of financiers, accustomed to practical figures, shrinks within them at these colossal amounts, and the embarrassments which complicate the problem. Granting that these contingences are too many to be spanned by any human geometry, and that these evils are to be relieved only by the wisdom of God working in ages,—and by what instruments,—whether Liberia, whether flax-cotton, whether the working out this race by Irish and Germans, none can tell, or by what scourges God has guarded his law; still the question recurs, What must we do?

One thing is plain, we cannot answer for the Union, but we must keep Massachusetts true. It is of unspeakable importance that she play her honest part. She

19. The African nation of Liberia had been founded in 1822 by blacks funded by the American Colonization Society and was declared a republic in 1847. A number of reformers suggested black emigration to Liberia as a solution to the slavery crisis.

must follow no vicious examples. Massachusetts is a little State. Countries have been great by ideas. Europe is little, compared with Asia and Africa. Yet Asia and Africa are its ox and its ass. Europe, the least of all the continents, has almost monopolized for twenty centuries the genius and power of them all. Greece was the least part of Europe. Attica a little part of that,—one-tenth of the size of Massachusetts. Yet that district still rules the intellect of men. Judaea was a petty country. Yet these two, Greece and Judaea, furnish the mind and the heart by which the rest of the world is sustained. And Massachusetts is little, but, if true to itself, can be the brain which turns about the behemoth.

I say Massachusetts, but I mean Massachusetts in all the quarters of her dispersion; Massachusetts, as she is the mother of all the New England states, and as she sees her progeny scattered over the face of the land, in the farthest south and the uttermost west.

The immense power of rectitude is apt to be forgotten in politics. But they who have brought this great wrong on the country have not forgotten it. They avail themselves of the known probity and honor of Massachusetts, to endorse the statute. The ancient maxim still holds, that never was any injustice effected except by the help of justice. The great game of the government has been to win the sanction of Massachusetts to the crime. Hitherto, they have succeeded only so far as to win Boston to a certain extent. The behaviour of Boston was the reverse of what it should have been: it was supple and officious, and it put itself into the base attitude of pander to the crime. It should have placed obstruction at every step. Let the attitude of the state be firm. Let us respect the Union to all honest ends. But also respect an older and wider union, the law of nature and rectitude. Massachusetts is as strong as the universe, when it does that. We will never intermeddle with your slavery,—but you can in no wise be suffered to bring it to Cape Cod and Berkshire. This law must be made inoperative. It must be abrogated and wiped out of the statute book; but, whilst it stands there, it must be disobeyed.

We must make a small State great, by making every man in it true. It was the praise of Athens, "she could not lead countless armies into the field, but she knew how with a little band to defeat those who could." Every Roman reckoned himself at least a match for a province. Every Dorian did. Every Englishman in Australia, in South Africa, in India, or in whatever barbarous country their forts and factories have been set up,—represents London, represents the art, power, and law of Europe. Every man educated at the northern schools carries the like advantages into the south. For it is confounding distinctions to speak of the geographic sections of this country as of equal civilization.

Every nation and every man bows, in spite of himself, to a higher mental and moral existence; and the sting of the late disgraces is, that this royal position of

Massachusetts was foully lost, that the well-known sentiment of her people was not expressed. Let us correct this error. In this one fastness, let truth be spoken, and right done. Here, let there be no confusion in our ideas. Let us not lie, nor steal, nor help to steal; and let us not call stealing by any fine names, such as "union" or "patriotism." Let us know, that not by the public, but by ourselves, our safety must be bought. That is the secret of southern power, that they rest not in meetings, but in private heats and courages. It is very certain from the perfect guaranties in the Constitution, and the high arguments of the defenders of liberty, which the occasion called out, that there is sufficient margin in the statute and the law for the spirit of the magistrate to show itself, and one, two, three occasions have just now occurred and passed, in any of which, if one man had felt the spirit of Coke, or Mansfield, or Parsons, and read the law with the eye of freedom, the dishonor of Massachusetts had been prevented, and a limit set to these encroachments forever.²⁰

20. William Parsons (ca. 1570–1650), lord justice of Ireland.

"The Anglo-American"

7 December 1852

(1852–1855)

Emerson first delivered "The Anglo-American" under the title "The Anglo-Saxon" on 7 December 1852 before the Young Men's Association in Cincinnati, Ohio. Even though it was sometimes reported under some version of the title "Anglo-Saxon Race," Emerson continued to use "The Anglo-Saxon" as his title for the lecture when he delivered it on 16 December 1852 in Dayton, Ohio; on 30 December 1852 as the third of seven lectures in a *Conduct of Life* series before the Mercantile Library Association in St. Louis, Missouri, for which he received \$500 for the series; on 10 January 1853 as the first in a series of three lectures in Springfield, Illinois (\$110 for the series); on 20 January 1853 as the first of two lectures before the Library Association in Cleveland, Ohio (\$60 for the two lectures); on 27 January 1853 at the Bache Institute in Philadelphia (\$75); on either 10 February 1853 in Portland, Maine (*JMN*, 13:475) or 11 February 1853 before the Augusta Lyceum in Augusta, Maine ("Account Books"), for which he received \$30 in Augusta; and on 24 February 1853 before the Concord Lyceum in Concord, Massachusetts. Emerson undoubtedly used "The Anglo-Saxon" for his lecture on "Traits and Genius of the Anglo-Saxon Race," which he delivered on 25 November 1852 before the Young Men's Association in Troy, New York (\$40; lecture fees are from the "Account Books").

A report in the *Troy Daily Times* on Emerson's delivery of "Traits and Genius of the Anglo-Saxon Race" in November 1852 stated that the lecture "exhibited deep thought, but not sufficient care in its arrangement" (26 November 1852, quoted in *Letters*, 4: 325n). In Cincinnati a few weeks later, "The Anglo-Saxon" was "listened to with much attention and interest"; however, the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* stated that the topic "was handled in a manner peculiar to the distinguished lecturer," who did "not possess the graces of elocution in any eminent degree—owes nothing to *manner*, and is indebted to his *matter* for his great reputation in the literary world." The *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer's* report may be a genuine assessment of Emerson's performance, or it may suggest the reporter's pique at Emerson's request, which was printed on 8 December 1852 in Cincinnati's *Daily Gazette* and *Daily Times*, that reporters "forbear making a sketch of his discourse" (the first assessment is quoted from an unidentified source in Mead, *Yankee Eloquence in the Middle West*, 34; the second assessment, from the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* of 9 December 1852, is quoted in *ibid.*; Emerson's request to reporters is quoted in *ibid.*, 34n).

Nevertheless, on the whole Emerson appears to have been pleased with this lecture.