

WILSON'S SLAVE POWER IN AMERICA.¹

History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America. By Henry Wilson. Boston: James R. Osgood & Company, 3 Vols., 8vo., pp. 670, 720, and 774.

This ponderous work is what the well-informed reader would expect from its author. The first volume professes to treat the rise of slavery in the United States, from its beginnings up to the admission of Texas. The second continues the history of the sectional controversies about it, to the election of Lincoln. The third treats of the war and its results.

Of this huge "partisan document," it may be justly said, that its staple material is sophistry and misrepresentation, and its very title an insult and falsehood. In the sense of the author, there has been no "slave power" in America. It suited the purposes of the conspirators among whom Mr. Wilson acted all his political life, to advance their project of riding into sectional domination by means of the Abolition phrensy, to imagine a "slave power" in the South, which cherished the counterpart design to his: that of usurping the authority of the United States to extend slavery, at the expense of others' rights, over the whole country. But in fact, the States whose citizens owned slaves, never were a "slave power" in any sense but this: that they endeavored to employ the rights guaranteed to them by the laws to protect their legal property; just as Ohio sought to protect the property of her citizens in their swine; Kentucky hers in their mules; and just as Mr. Wilson sought to protect his property in shoes. The only differences were that the South never imitated his protection of his shoe-making profits by partial and dishonest tariffs; and that those interested in the swine, the mules, and the shoes, were not compelled to a constant self-defense, because they did not experience from us the constant and lawless assaults on their rights, which Mr. Wilson's set aimed at our industries and lawful interests.

¹—Appeared in *Southern Planter and Farmer*, July, 1857.

The book, whose very title is false, may be safely expected to furnish abundance of similar material in its pages. The reader has to go a very short distance, indeed, to find this expectation verified. The preface, in its first paragraphs, informs us that in 1860, 1861, "treasonable menaces had ripened into treasonable deeds. A rebellion of gigantic proportions burst upon the nation with suddenness and fierceness." * * * "These crimes against the peace, the unity, and the life of the nation, and these sacrifices of property, of health, and of life, were the inflictions of the slave-power, in its maddened efforts to make perpetual its hateful dominion." These six lines contain just seven manifest misstatements. There was no "nation"; for the United States were then a confederation of sovereign States, and consequently there was no "national life," in Mr. Wilson's sense. Secondly, it was hence impossible that one of these sovereign constituents could commit "treason" against its own creature, the common agent. Hence, thirdly, there could be no rebellion in the case. Fourthly, the resistance of the Southern States against usurpation was not sudden; it had been uniformly and long foretold, and was the deliberate and fore-declared result of the vital aggressions aimed at their existence. Neither, fifthly, was there any "fierceness" about it, in Mr. Wilson's sense. The South prosecuted its defensive war with a humanity and moderation chivalrous, and, in the light of subsequent events, even Quixotic. Mr. Wilson's imagination had evidently not recovered, when he penned this preface in 1872, from the impression of "fierceness" derived from his own panic at Bull Run, when he fled so fast from the "rebels" he had come to see conquered. Sixthly, none of the miseries of this war were inflicted by the States of the South, whom Mr. Wilson chooses to stigmatize as the "slave power"; for they desired only to be let alone in possession of their constitutional rights. The war was caused deliberately by Mr. Wilson and his party, who, as none know better than he knew, with calculated malice invaded our rights, goaded us to resistance, and refused all compromise, in order to avail themselves of the Abolition phrensy to revolutionize the government, establish their own faction in power, and gratify their spite against the men whom they could never forgive for being injured by them. The South made the war only in the sense in which the lamb of the fable

muddied the stream by drinking below the wolf. Seventhly, and last, the Southern States never had any "dominion," hateful or otherwise, to perpetuate, and never sought any. They never aimed to be anything but what the laws entitled them to be, coequal parties to an equitable confederation. The only "dominion" they ever had was this: that their statesmen had so commended themselves by their ability, patriotism, purity, and disinterestedness to the confederacy, that the majority of the Northern as well as the Southern citizens had preferred them to demagogues of the Wilson type. *Hinc illae lachrymae!* The true solution of these three ponderous tomes is, that they are the howl of his malice at the American people's preference for Southern gentlemen over such as him, and of his gratified revenge for the slight.

He begins his "history" (!) Vol. 1., Chap. 1., by ascribing the existence of slavery to men's selfish desire to live at other people's expense. This solution suits the slavery of his own State very well; for they, having no aliens nor savages among them by providential dispensation, went all the way to Africa to steal them for slaves. But the account which the Bible gives of the origin of slavery (Gen. ix. 25-27), is, that it came as the remedy for the depravity of the enslaved; and that it was the righteous means ordained by God to protect civilized society against the vice, laziness, theft, and violence of degraded persons, whose wickedness and ignorance rendered them unsafe depositories for the franchises of citizenship. Mr. Wilson is an ardent specimen of that species of "Christian" whose Bible is no rule when it crosses his spite or his crotchet. The Bible account of the matter is one expressly appropriate to the South; for we, when we became free commonwealths in 1776, retained slavery as the necessary and just remedy for the presence of the savage Africans, with whom the "Christians" of New England and Old England, those simon-pure Abolitionists, had deluged us against our protest.

The author then proceeds: "American slavery * * * converted a being endowed with conscience, reason, affections, sympathies, and hopes, into a chattel. It sunk a free moral agent, with rational attributes and immortal aspirations, to merchandise. It made him a beast of burden in the field of toil, an outcast in social life, a cipher in the courts of law, and a

pariah in the house of God. His master could dispose of his person at will," etc., etc.

Here, again, the errors are at least as numerous as the propositions. American slavery did not make the moral personality of the bondsman "a chattel," but *established property in his labor*; precisely the thing which Mr. Wilson possessed in his shoe factory operatives, in a much more selfish and grinding form than our system. We did not make the African a "beast of burden in the field," but a laborer, more humanely treated than Mr. Wilson's hirelings. We did not make him an "out-cast in social life"; he possessed among his equals abundant social ties and enjoyments, and was, moreover, connected by real and tender domestic sympathies with his master's family; a thing which Mr. Wilson never dreamed of extending to the families of his hirelings. The bondsman was not "a cipher in the courts of law." His life, person, and chastity were shielded by the same law which protected his master; and his rights had such full recognition here, that he could sue his own master, with every advantage in the litigation, for his own liberty, if he could show any suspicion of unjust detention in bondage. He was not "a pariah in the house of God." He worshipped and partook of the Lord's Supper in the same sanctuary with his master; and with at least as little social distinction as existed between Mr. Wilson and the white hireling who had been, perhaps, his late comrade on the shoe-bench. The master could not "dispose of his bondsman's person at will." The law among us secured his personal safety, life, chastity, Sabbath-rest, and subsistence, against his own master. Now, to appreciate the wickedness of this train of atrocious libels, one must remember that this man, if he ever took pains to inquire into the real nature of what he was denouncing, must have met with refutations of them all at his first step, and that, unless he literally stopped his ears, he must have often heard them disclaimed and refuted in the Senate of the United States by Mr. Calhoun, Mr. Hunter, and Mr. Chestnut.

The reader will be curious to know what the author does with the slave-holding and slave-trading record of his own State, both of which were of the blackest and most diabolical sort. To assume that an American Senator of Mr. Wilson's type knew something of the authentic history of his own country, might be

a very violent surmise. But it would appear that this man knew he was deceiving; because he refers expressly, Vol. I., p. 6, to Moore's "Slavery in Massachusetts," a book which tells the plain story. He glozes about the protest of one or two old gentlemen, in the early days of the colony, and some abortive and deceitful legislation against the slave trade. He quotes quite at large the protests of the Quakers (whom Massachusetts was then persecuting!) He informs us that little Rhode Island was actively engaged in the slave trade, and that Newport was a great *emporium* for this nefarious traffic. But he takes care not to tell us that in 1637, when the Plymouth colony was but seventeen years old, it made trial of its infant strength by sending out the slave ship "Desire;" that the most fiendish laws were deliberately passed and habitually enforced, for kidnapping, enslaving, and deporting the Indians near them, from whose hospitality they had secured their homes; that the "General Court" of Massachusetts recognized the trade as legal, and took a share in its profits, in the shape of an impost; and that the United States census of 1790 found six thousand slaves in this little and barren territory. These facts are all substantiated by Moore, Winthrop's Journal, and other well-known authors.

But we pass to more recent facts. Mr. Wilson, Vol. II, Chap. XLV., of course lauds the vulgar old murderer, John Brown, as one of the purest, noblest, and most disinterested of heroes and Christian martyrs. He has no objection to the crimes of the old cut-throat, save that they pursued the wrong method for assailing slavery, and prejudiced the character of the party to which they belonged. The Senator does not claim any credit for Brown's exploits; but he does not seem to care at all to veil the fact that he was cognisant of his plans, and took no effectual steps to prevent their execution. That is to say, this sworn Senator of the United States sat silent while he knew that treason against not only the State of Virginia, but the United States, was brewing; and he did nothing to arrest the crime, save dissuade from it on grounds of party policy. It was well for his neck that the laws of the United States did not retain the doctrine of constructive treason, and that the Constitution and Government were so soon destroyed; else the historian might have shared the fate of his hero.

As a specimen of his historical accuracy, we may note, Vol.

III., Chap. XII., where he assures us that the "capture of Washington was among the first things laid down upon the rebel *programme*." * * * "To seize the capital and all the departments of the Government; to hold Mr. Buchanan in abject surveillance during the remainder of his term, or, if he should prove too refractory, to eject him for a more serviceable tool; to prevent the inauguration of Mr. Lincoln, and make Jefferson Davis, or whoever should be chosen leader of the new *regime*, President—these were the real and avowed purposes of the conspiracy." On what evidence does the reader suppose he asserts this marvelous fiction? Either upon the reports of those notoriously accurate persons, anonymous newspaper-scribblers, or the gasconading of some excited stump-speaker! Or else he absurdly wrests the expressed purpose of the leaders of the Confederacy, *after it became rightfully an independent power*, and had been reluctantly forced into a defensive war, to end that war with the least effusion of blood, by capturing the hostile capital! He also asserts, upon evidence equally baseless, the purpose of the Confederates to reopen the African slave trade; although, as appears, Vol. III. Chap. IX., he had under his eye the unanimous adoption by the Confederacy of a Constitution, which prohibited that trade far more effectively than the Constitution of the United States.

In Vol. III., Chap. XLII., Mr. Wilson gives his version of that act of usurpation and lawlessness, the Emancipation Proclamation. The narrative is singular. He desires to represent this act as the deliberate result of Mr. Lincoln's progress in conscientious conviction and statesmanlike insight. He would fain have us believe that he grew honestly to it from a more defective view. But even the brazen armor of the Wilson forehead seemed to be not quite hard enough for this assertion. He therefore conveys it to us as the testimony of that sheet, always so impartially and correctly informed upon American affairs, the *London Times*. Now, Mr. Wilson can hardly have been more ignorant of the real history of that step than other well-informed contemporaries. He knew that Mr. Lincoln, as well as the Freesoil platform on which he was elected, always and expressly disclaimed the right and purpose to meddle with slavery in the States; that Mr. Lincoln spoke this doctrine and swore to it at his inauguration. He knew that there was no truth what-

ever in the pretext that the right to liberate the seceded States' slaves had emerged as a war power, because he had himself, after his Bull Run footrace, voted solemnly, along with the Congress and President, that the war was not to be prosecuted for purposes of emancipation, but only to restore the Union as it had been; and that Mr. Lincoln had been accustomed to reiterate this doctrine continually, in answer to all the urgency of the Abolitionists. Only a fortnight before the Emancipation Proclamation appeared, he had been urged by a committee of these fanatics to use the war to free the negroes; when the "martyr-President," with the suavity and refinement which were usual with him, made about this reply, as he almost expelled them from his presence: "You must either be fools, or must think me a fool, that you ask me to do this thing which I have no right to do, and which I have sworn I cannot lawfully do. The Constitution does not empower me to make war to free negroes, but to restore the Union." Yet, *in ne fortnight thereafter*, he did the perjured thing! Mr. Wilson doubtless knew the solution of the question, Whence this summersault? The solution was this: that the great British public, though passionately anti-slavery, had at length been so thoroughly awakened (largely through the sagacious efforts of Admiral M. Maury) to the deceitfulness and injustice of the Yankee war; that public opinion was pressing the ministry irresistibly towards that just act, the recognition of the gallant Confederacy. It was then that Lord John Russell, the Liliputian prince of the pettifoggers and Abolitionists, instructed his envoy at Washington, Lord Lyons, to inform Mr. Lincoln's Government that there was no artifice by which the British people could longer be restrained more than a few weeks from recognition, except the playing upon their anti-slavery passions by making the war tangibly a war for abolition. This was the news which caused Mr. Lincoln to hasten to forswear himself. This is precisely the amount of credit which the great "Liberator," and the party he represented, deserved at the hands of their "fellow-citizens of African descent."

Vol. III., Chap. XLVII., contains our author's advocacy and account of the enormous innovation of universal negro suffrage. On p. 672, he intimates that the few sensible men who opposed this perilous measure were very naughty children, in

that they imputed a partisan desire to manufacture voters for the Radical ticket, as the motive. He would have us believe that their motives were the most disinterested possible, and their deliberation the most cautious, patient, and candid; but that, turn whichever way they could, they found themselves shut up to the measure of universal negro suffrage, by their gratitude to the two hundred thousand negro soldiers who had eaten rations for the salvation of "the life of the nation," by the logical consistency of their principles of equality, and above all, by the truculent determination of the "ex-rebels" to trample on the colored man, unless he were defensively armed with the ballot. The Senator should have foreseen how dreadfully this nice story was to be damaged by the "peaching" of an accomplice. Unfortunately, Gen. Sherman, in his most veracious Memoirs, tells us that Mr. Chase, the power behind the throne at Washington, assured him in May, 1865, that it was the purpose of the Government to bestow universal suffrage on the negroes, and avowed the very reason which Mr. Wilson pretends to disclaim. *Sherman's Memoirs*, Vol. II., p. 373.

The author died in 1872, bequeathing to his country the curse of his public career, and this large legacy of error and prejudice, to poison the stream of history for those who believe in him. Since his death, the party whom he represented has been covered with so many infamies by its crimes against liberty and public virtue, that it is becoming hard for even the Yankee mind to conceal from itself the dishonesty of Radicalism. The best, and indeed the only, refutation of false history like this, will be the developments of the future. The day will come when all men will recognize the truth that the freesoil, the warlike, and the reconstruction exploits of Mr. Wilson's party had precisely as much patriotism and sincerity as its *Credit Mobilier*, its salary-grab, its executive and legislative bargains, and its returning boards. This is the only answer to slander of the South, to which the audience for whom he wrote will listen. True as all well-informed men know our criticisms to be, they will pass for nothing with his people at this time.

It may be asked, Why repeat, then, these futile corrections of pertinacious falsehood, since intelligent men at the South are so fully informed of them, and others will not heed them? We write for the generation of young men now growing up at

the South, to whom the old *regime* can only be known as history. They will be prone to feel, with an ingenuousness natural to the Southern gentleman, as to his fathers, that it is scarcely conceivable a man who had been Vice-President, should write so large a book, so prejudiced and false in its very structure. In the facility of their charity and truthfulness, they will find it hard to appreciate the reality. For their sakes the correct history must be perpetually reasserted, and its falsifications unmasked. The task is a tedious and repulsive one: to refute again oft-refuted slanders and sophisms. But it must be done, or we shall have a generation of sons befooled into Mr. Wilson's venomous estimate of their fathers' deeds, and drugged with his poisonous heresies.

This book impresses the candid reader with several facts and inferences which are consolatory or instructive. Mr. Wilson displays, in his vain-glorious desire to be a martyr for truth, the estimate which respectable and sensible men at the North almost universally held of his party at its origin. He tells us, truthfully, that Abolition was at first denounced, alike by the Senate, the Bench, and the Pulpit, as a crime and a mischievous and senseless fanaticism. The explanation is, that the men of 1833, in the North, while no friends of slavery for their own society, yet knew enough experimentally of its real nature to understand the diabolical wickedness of Abolition. Respectable Northern public men had not then become factionists. They had some respect for law and covenants. They knew what Africans and slavery were. Hence, they knew Abolitionism to be, what it has proved itself, the dire enemy of the Constitution, the African, and the white man, at once. It was only after the school-master and school-marm, the hirelings of a political faction, and its Dugald Dalgettys, the politicating parsons, had educated a new generation upon the *pabulum* of fiction and hatred, that the Wilson tribe began to appear statesmen and patriots, and his liels history.

The attentive reader will rise from the perusal of this book also impressed with another fact: the Freesoil party never designed anything short of the utter overthrow of Southern rights. Every page reveals, directly or indirectly, that it was not free-soil in the territories, but the destruction of the South, which was its real aim. The pretense of the Lincoln platform, that the

right of the States over their own institutions was inviolable, fades away as one reads, into an invisible veil. There is here the consolation that the resistance of the South, which was the occasion, **NOT THE CAUSE**, of so much woe, was not an act of gratuitous heat. It was the work of the Southern masses, and not, as Mr. Wilson pretends to believe, of the leaders. Our leaders were mostly behind the emergency, and were still crying to the people, Peace! when there was no peace. But the honest sense of the people had an intuition of the true state of the crisis; that it was their vital rights which were aimed at. This book convinces the reader again that the people were right.

Mr. Wilson evinces also the vast mischief done to their own section by a certain type of Southern men, once much admired among us. The slaveholder of this class was usually a gentleman of some culture, and by affectation a philanthropist. He had probably been educated at Harvard, Amherst, Yale, or Princeton. Accustomed to the simple, unaffected honesty of Southern cultivated sentiment, and the disinterestedness of Southern patriotism, he was simply incapable of believing in the duplicity and one-sidedness of Northern politics. When his more clear-sighted neighbor cautioned him, his answer was: "For shame! Do not yield to prejudices so bitter." So, in his unsophisticated eyes, all that glittered from the Yankee mint of opinion, passed for gold. He imbibed with docility the fictions which were given him as history, and the pretentious social science which had libels and boasts for its main facts. When he returned from the North, and contrasted its prosperity, bloated with commercial plunderings of the South, and protective tariffs and bounties, and endless jobs, with the leanness of the South, he accepted the solution which his professor of this profitable philosophy had so industriously "dinned into him," that this was the curse of slavery. Thus, so soon as he became a petty politician, he sought occasion to utter the spurious wisdom of his alien teacher. Thus he became, unintentionally, an echo of the slanders of the enemies of his own people. He ascribed to slavery a depression which, but for that most energetic and economical form of labor, would have depopulated the South, and which was really the result of the calculated oppression of New England, through the Federal Congress. He babbled the imaginary political economy of men who never saw

slavery, and who argued from assumed facts which never existed, its impoverishing effects. He was even criminal enough to echo the shameful indictments against the morals of his own people, which had been cunningly thrust into his mouth. No where was this species of nascent politician more prominent than in Virginia, in the Legislature which followed the "Southampton insurrection." These young members ventilated their logic and self-importance by spouting in Richmond all the false facts and absurd theories which they had imported from Yale and Harvard, about "the fearful insecurity of the system, its injustice, its wastefulness, and its debauching effects upon morals." The future found these young gentlemen, indeed, in two widely sundered classes. Those whom Mr. Wilson quotes with most admiration, if they survived, were found among our most despised renegades. The rest, as soon as their beards were grown, learned better wisdom, and with a happy inconsistency, became staunch Southern men. But the mischief was done. They had given the truculent assailants of their fatherland a text. When the most brilliant of them, James McDowell, in his wiser years, essayed to stay the tide of fury and aggression in the Federal Congress, he was answered from his own speeches in the General Assembly of Virginia. And Mr. Wilson has again taken care to embalm all the most extravagant of these declamations in his storehouse of slander, as the testimony of Virginia's own best sons against her. He tells his readers nothing of the other side. He professes his wonder that Virginia, after these emphatic confessions, *did nothing*. He says nothing of the sober logic of wiser men among the Virginians, which speedily blew away all this froth of youthful eloquence, leaving the sober reason of all calmed into the clear truth that the old system was safest, best, and most beneficent to the African. He never heard, we presume, of the masterly essay of President Dew of William and Mary, in which that accomplished man combined the finest resources of the historian, the jurist, and the political economist, to evince the shallowness of the emancipation rhetoric. It was such discussion as this which reassured Virginia and opened the eyes of all her young anti-slavery men, save such as were ripening into future scalawags. But meantime they had slandered their own mother, and her embittered enemies will take good care not to let the slanders die.

In conclusion, one rises from the perusal of this book with a mournful impression. What must be the future of a people, the majority of whom accept such writings as this for history? This science is the very eye of statesmanship. With false history for pilot, can the ship of state land anywhere but on the breakers? That people which "lives, breathes, and has its being" in an enveloping atmosphere of falsehood in history and *opisms* in philosophy, has nothing before it but to unlearn its heresies in a fearful school of experience. And what prospect has the South for just or even merciful rule, when subjugated by a people who believe Senator Wilson's black representations about us? *His book has passed already through four editions.* The disdainful and imperious North, pleased to see those whom she has violently crushed accused of all guilty things, will never condescend to look at any reply, until a retributive Providence compels her to read it in the calamitous fruits of her creed.