

incapable of exercising any of the privileges of freemen," is impossible. One of these fundamental principles is the right to petition congress. The usefulness and importance of this right was understood by our forefathers when it was secured to the people by the constitution.

Only once has this right,—a right which was enjoyed by the old Romans, a right which the Magna Charter conferred upon the Anglo-Saxons,—been challenged in this republic. The trouble arose over the agitation of a question, which had called forth greater thought of greater minds than any other political problem ever submitted to thinking men. Slavery—"that clinging curse that enfolded the new republic as in a winding sheet of moral death"—slavery challenged the right of petition.

Southern members tried to stop all agitation of anti-slavery in Congress. At every session, for ten years, they passed a resolution in the House of Representatives, which forbade to every memorial upon slavery, the recognition of even a reference to a committee. This took from the people a privilege which might have righted many a wrong. It not only effected the right of petition, but entirely banished the slave question from the house. It took from the people their right to petition for the redress of their grievances, destroyed freedom of debate, and hushed the voice of the representations of the people. The effect of this resolution, if conscientiously adhered to, was not only to close the door of the House against the Declaration of Independence, but even against the constitution of the United States. If it had passed without opposition, America would no longer have been the same self-relying, energetic nation. The right of petition is a necessary attribute of national citizenship. This attempted infringement upon the sacred right served only to anger the north, and gave the wavering abolitionists a new impulse.

For every great cause, God raises a great man. When the name of John Quincy Adams was called to give his final vote on this resolution, he answered neither aye nor no. Rising from his chair, calm and apparently undisturbed, he exclaimed, "I hold this resolution to be a direct violation of the constitution of the United States, the rules of this house, and the rights of my constituents." That aged hero had begun his last fight. Before the famous resolution was adopted, he had declared a relentless war against it.

Why does it seem to have been part of his destiny to become the champion of petition? Was he an abolitionist? No, he did not believe that slavery was a positive evil. Was it due to party affiliations? Again no; he declared that he was set free from the thralldom of partisan connection and on every question would act independently. He believed, rather, that liberty, freedom, and even the existence of this nation rested upon the right to petition congress. "The constitution," he said, "declared that the right of petition should never be abridged." He thought that the right was derived from nature, and was common to mankind. Every individual might supplicate those around him, those superior to him, or ask justice of the proudest monarch that treads the earth. Yes, he could even send up his petitions to the Creator of worlds, to the Father of us all, for mercy. Believing that governments as well as individuals, are bound by the Gospel precept, "do unto others as you would that others should do unto you," what wonder that the aged hero fought for the right of petition?

The struggle over this question was long and fiercely contested. It was a struggle to determine whether the north would quietly conform to the dictations of the conservative south, or whether it would be free to assert the liberty of its own enlightened spirit. It was a struggle to determine whether this nation would be free or slave, a republican or a

despotic government. There was only one man in that house willing to undertake the offensive and oppressive task.

The position of Mr. Adams was a peculiar one. In that struggle, he stood within two worlds. He belonged partly to the new. He was the last of one age, he was the first of another. He stretched one hand back to the past to the thought that abolition now was premature; the other rested upon the shoulder of the belief that the rights of man demand justice and humanity. All depended upon this one man. If freedom of speech remained, Adams must be heard. If the right of petition prevailed, Adams must succeed. If our republican institutions were left uninjured, Adams might finally triumph.

With all of this depending on him, could it be expected that this man, almost seventy, would live to accomplish this last and crowning achievement in a great and successful career? His whole life seems to have been a preparation for his final triumph.

That part of the work for abolition which was to be done in congress, he must accomplish. There he was to encounter the mighty efforts which were made to stifle the great cry of humanity before that national assembly. There he was to conquer the united south by perseverance, firmness, and hard work, prosecuted with energy, and indomitable will. He had obstacles to encounter at every step—ill health, the ridicule of the press, the indifference of his constituents, and worse still, he was to be branded by the world as a fanatic. Sir John Eliot suffered imprisonment and death, because he believed that the government could not be carried on without the consent of the people. Luther and Savonarola were denounced as heretics, because they were opposed to the corrupt practices of the Catholic Church. Because he came to better mankind, the Savior of the world was nailed to the cross. The men of progress have always been called fanatics. Every great cause has need of them. Because Mr. Adams believed that justice should be shown to the negro, he was denounced by his fellow men. Because he persistently persevered in his efforts to introduce anti-slavery petitions the members sought to convict him of treason.

But no odds could appall him. Numbers could not overawe him. Politically he stood alone in that assembly. No one was in sympathy with him. He could call no man his friend. Yet all feared him. They had no respect for his gray hairs, but they trembled when a measure was proposed which could not receive his approbation. That whole body dared not meet him in open debate, for his logic was powerful, and his knowledge unsurpassed. They were slow to arouse his opposition, for they knew that his sarcasm was unrivalled, and the dexterity of aim with which he delivered his invectives, was unerring. Under every disadvantage, he labored for the consummation of his purpose. At the opening of each session of congress, he moved that the resolution should be stricken out. For ten years he had striven against that plain violation of the right of the people. For ten years the storm of slave holding persecution had raged around him, but to no effect. The north had rallied to his support, and the day of his triumph had now fully come. A kind providence had destined him to live "not only to see, but himself to win it." His motion to strike that infamous rule from the manual, was sustained. Congress at last discovered and applied the true and enduring remedy for agitation, when it was decided to hear and heed the demands of freedom, justice, and humanity. The abolitionists had succeeded in the assault in the outworks of slavery. The attempt to hush the voice of the people had failed, for the aged hero had conquered in his last fight.

What honor is due this man! By his persistent efforts he overcame a host of foes. He was the first to set the example