ROCHESTER, N. Y., JUNE 3, 1859.

VOL. XII.---NO. 25.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS' PAPER IS PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY MORNING, No. 25, Buffalo Street, (opposite the Arcade,) Rochester N. Y.

TERMS OF SUBSCRIPTION.

Single copies, one year (invariably in advance)
\$1 50; five copies and over \$5 00.
Posrage.—Inside of Monroe County, free; to any part of New York State payable in advance, 3 cts. to any part of the United States, 6 cts. per

AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

SPEECH OF HENRY WARD BEECHER,

CHURCH OF THE PURITANS, NEW YORK, BEFORE THE

American Tract Society of Boston, On Thursday Morning, May 12th.

It is not possible for Christians to have come to these anniversaries this year, without a solemn sense of the presence of God moving in the affairs of the world, with a majesty and revealed power transcending the ordinary measure of the Divine Providence. He is measure of the Divine Providence. He is now speaking, as only God can speak, by the voice of fear, by the pangs of terror, by the shakings of revolutions, by wars, and by rumors of war. Every man who is accustomed to read the Word of God with his eye upon the times, as its best interpretation, and who reads the times in which he lives by the illumination of God's Word, must be aware that we stand upon the eve of great things, either for good or lor mischief, and if for mischief, only for greater good by and by; for, when God sows trouble, that is the seed out of which he means to reap righteousness in the end.

There is no more any quiet in all the earth; there is no longer anywhere apathy; there are almost no places on the globe where men are torpid, except in Tract Societies; and every land, every continent, every race, every nation, is stirring as forests shake when winds are moving upon them. All men are looking out to know what things are about to befall the earth. In our own way, we, too, in this happy land, are agitated. We are not stirred up by war, nor alarmed by rumors of war.— We are not shaken by revolution, nor shat-tered by intestine dissension; and yet, many hearts among us are hot. Passions are wild here; mighty conflicts are waged; and yet, the laws are unbroken, the peace of the State abides sure, the household is serene, secular affairs flow in their ordinary channels deep and strong as the flow of rivers.

in other lands break out into wars, with as only produce discussions? How is it that we settle by our breath, and by ink, those interests which abroad are settled by the sword, and by crash of wasting artillery? Why do not those wild and tumultuous elements which in ther lands rend communities as earthquakes crack the earth, bring revolutions to us? Because God has taught us upon this side of the ocean that liberty, which cures evils, also prevents them. Discussions in schools and in popular assemblies is better than all diplomacy and crafty statesmanship for the interests of peace; for where the tongue is tied, the sword is free. America binds up the sword by giving the tongue liberty. It is our faith that liberty does not belong alone to the hand and to the foot, but to the thoughts, to the conscience, and to the tongue to give forth what conscience and the understanding work out. Therefore it is, while emperors, and kings, and little kings, and priests, and little priests, are being tossed up as ships or chips are tossed on the broad ocean of storms, we, agitating deeper questions, are preserved in

I know that there are some men who fear the results of discussion among us, and diet national rupture and disunion. there are whose keel is fear, and all whose ribs are cowardice, and whose whole life is but a quaking voyage of apprehension. They are always about to sink. The function of their life is gone if there be no ill-omened auguries darkening the future. Some men there are who sleep on this matter of disunion. They wake on it. It is their food at morning; it is their noonday meal; they supupon it. It is their Sunday devotion, and their week-day horror. Disunion! You might just as well fear that the continent would break in two because running rivers cleanse their waters on its back, and the restless ocean forever laps its sides, as that this Union will

a Satan would gain by it nuch that Christ might. Why, then, are we not in danger? Simply because we have learned to trust the people, and to make them praiseworthy by intelligence, by moral education, and by the unrestrained, yet regulated use of their rights as free men. Other lands make the individual weak, to make the State strong; but we teach and believe that the h of the State is in the strength of its individual members. We put trust, not alone in collective man, but in the individual man.-And that we may not be deceived by the whole force of our educational institutions and our political arrangements, we seek to make the individual man, the land over, praise-

Our nation, by its organic political institutions, is but a continental debating society.-Our newspapers, and winged books, daily bear before every individual of the land every ques-tion that affects the welfare of the State. Our people are invited, and provoked, to the most searching scrutiny, to the formation of their own independent opinions, to the fullest ex-pression of their convictions, and to the utmost liberty of waging moral battle for that which they deem right and just. And when, out of

this universal activity, out of the conflict of its independence, and, in appropriate

telligent people.

I would that this lesson of the freedom of ment. When, at length, discussion and its benefits had been learned as their prosperity is turning perfectly by all as it has been by some; or, rather, as perfectly by some among us, as it has nent perils, he assumes

been by all the rest of the community. But it would seem as if some men gained education only by the loss of common sense. There are thousands in whom prosperity and intelligence love wrought a conceit which makes them a satful of the common people Truy them in social position, and stand together in classes, with mutual flatteries and a common upon the occasion of the late An classes, with mutual flatteries and a common upon the occasion of the late Ann onceit. They are bound together in a com- the chief speaker, and the most s mon emptiness, as the staves of a barrel are Daniel Lord. The following are bound together around the vacuity of an unfilled centre. Nor have I ever before seen a tors of the Tract Society, he saysmore remarkable instance of the contempt with donors, they give their property to the which conceited men look upon free discussion, ity; it is an entire gift, parting with that which was exhibited upon the platform of the Tract Society, at its recent an every man, woman and child knows, niversary, on the boards of the Opera House in New-York. Whatever prejudices have therefore, all those who have contribited against the morals of an make up this fund from the beginning opera house, must, since that platform held such actors, receive double force; and I am sure that no ordinary play, and no opera, bad even as Don Juan itself, can have a more misting the fund. They gave it away. But for a the share the popular mind, than the share exhibition which took place on that occasion, and by the reverend and legal actors. There it was that one of the most diswhat plan it was solicited and received the popular mind, than the plan did they give it?

There it was that one of the most diswhat plan it was solicited and received the plan of its management. actors. There it was that one of the most distinguished civilians of New York was pleased to inform the audience, in a speech preliminary to the gagging of that audience, that a deliberative body was not a safe place for the discussion of grave questions. The Reverend Daniel Lord it was—for so I read his title in trust property. The Society does not the safe place for the management in the very way and to cise object intended. It is thus emittrust property. The Society does not safe place for the most discussion of the property is to be protected voted to this plan. And every constitute of the most discussion of the report of the Tribune, though when he took orders I am not informed—the Reverend Daniel Lord—and surely Daniel, must, at this time, have thought himself in the lion's den again—declared that the excited feelings of deliberative bodies and popular assemblies viate in its use or management from were not favorable to investigations of truth.

flagrations kindled by free discussion.

needed that any should remind them of their duty to the poorest among the ignorant—four milmost ignorant among the ignorant—four million American slaves, is itself enough disgrace. That when the voice of a Christian people, sounding louder and louder every year, and coming up from twenty States, like the sound of many waters and mighty thunderings, demanding that the Society, which professed to express in its publications the full truths of the Christian religion should give unterance to the proceeds thus:

"The plan of this charity is contained in its written constitution; and, first, let us consider, who are its beneficiaries. They are said of printing a tract in a language which those to whom it was to be sent did not understand? And yet how does that difference to receive the benefits? By the circulation they are addressed will not receive, Tracts on slaver might be able in their teaching. Christian religion, should give utterance to some religious truth bearing upon this most serious and most grievous evil of our times and nation, they should stop their ears, and taking connected significant connected significant states. Circulation may larry be they are not receive, Tracts on slavry might be able in their teaching; tracts against polygamy the like; but how idle to attempt to send the latter to the Mortalization and nation, they should stop their ears, and discuss or settle controversies; not to declare the intervention of the charge of the taking counsel of sinister fear and secular interests, refuse to bear their testimony; that every year dumbness should be defended by This is the limit of its action, on the plainest couldnot be circulated, must be determined them as a Christian virtue, and moral cow- reading of the paper." ardice plead as a duty, was enough to bring up again into our ears that solemn denuncia tion which eighteen hundred years ago made Jerusalem tremble-" Woe unto you scribes,

stood again, in this extemporized temple, the management, uncontradicted, declaration priest and lawyer, determined to justify their that the object for which the funds of the own recreancy, and to forbid other people the rights of that free speech which they had guiltily refused to employ. And this anniversary meeting of the Tract Society had for its ples of its managers or members; was not to

which yet he will change the face of affairs in this whole land. None of those things which you think, which I think, which all men are thinking, which they themselves, per force, think, were allowed to be spoken, but only pettifogging things, technical things, managing, wire-pulling, cancusing things. Their object was to keep men from talking who had something earnest to say, and let those men. something earnest to say, and let those men talk who desired to say nothing. It was, therefore a plea against fullness, richness and substance of moral conviction, in favor of emptiness and pretense. And it became very exident that the time had come care to the conviction of the convergence of the American Conviction of the convergence of the American Conviction of the Convictio emptiness and pretense. And it became very evident that the time had come when this American Tract Society, which had priority in American Tract Society, which had priority in the tract Society in t

interests and judgments and experiences of a whole people, final results are obtained, they take the form of laws, and walk among us supreme, not simply by the enactment of legislators, but supreme by the convictions of an interest and in the conduct of his among the same and in the conduct of his among the legislators, but supreme by the convictions of an interest and, in appropriate the conduct of a conduct of a conduct of his among the con

When I looked around, and saw that almost every other man in that assembly was a gray-haired man; that hundreds of them were pastors inured to discussion all their lives—men who had given their thoughts both to booled and to the discussion all their lives—men booled and to the discussion all their lives—men beard this eminent legal gentleman, himself a gray-haired man, to whom impetuosity and first seemed anything but congenial, descanting upon the danger of being consumed by the wild be think that there was just about as much need of sending fire-engines to grave yards to put out tombstones, as of repressive measures in such an assembly to extinguish the conflagrations kindled by free discussion.

Here let me say that with all the fairness of this statement, it is thorough the fairness of this statement, it is t When I looked around, and saw that almost Here let me say that with all the agrations kindled by free discussion.

That the Tract Society should ever have ended that any should remind them of the but her of the but he

for or against slavery; but to enlighten its countr, where they would be excluded. And beneficiaries by the circulation of tracts.—

Let the public, then, ponder this declara-tion made by the eminent attorney, in the presence of the management of the American Fract Society at its Anniversary meeting, in the Opera House. Let every man in the And now, upon this day, in compact of evil, United States ponder this received, and, by sary meeting of the Tract Society had for its primary object, this one thing,—to gag men, and to prevent free discussion. They dreaded honest men's tongues. They knew that if those that were there gathered together, had had the right to pass in review their conduct, in the light of God's law, in the light of God's providence, in the light of sober and Christian reason, they called not together and the might it of the means anything, it means that tracts are to be circulated by the Society without regard to what there are the circulated by the Society without regard to whither men are willing to receive the truth of Christ, and that if they are not, they are in the might it of the clergy, but the trick sters of the law, prepared with every mean.

they called an expect should be seen to the companion of the sters of the clergy, but the trick sters of the law, prepared with every mean device of caucus and political maneuver, to anticipate and ward off free speech, and shield themselves behind this enforced silence. Not one word was allowed to be said at that meeting upon those questions which the Almighty God has sent upon this nation; which, in spite of wrath, and leagued resistance of men of might, and wealth, and worldly wisdom, he has, for twenty-five years, sunk deeper and deeper in the hearts of men, with which he hath already revolutions of sentiment, and by which yet he will change the face of affairs in this whole land. None of those things which you think, which I think, which all men are thinking, which they themselves contained and silver, like diamonds and lawyer crew, that then, as now again in our lay, held the holiest places, that they might extend the foundation of the meated from the foundation of the me

the field over the other that held there its If such things are right before a Jury; it discraceful Anniversary, should again resume be deemed right to gain a temporary vist

for one's clients, at the expense of fact, and from any Courts of Jistice, it certainly will not be deemed right by the reflecting and ious community, for a man to stand upon eligious platform of a prominent benevo-Ligitus platform of a prominent benevo-t-Society and to declars so deceptive and alse a thing as that the lunds of this Soci-r vere solicited, and were originally given, the purpose simply of circulating tracts that any regard to the contents which they was missing well unlessed they that more universally well understood than that the operican Tract Society was organized for

> of maral truth, is an assertion so mon-so infidel to all faith in Scripture, and n itself, that I marvel that so many hat knew better, did not stop their illed advocate on the spot, and correct a presentation which, in the end, cannot be to be most damaging to the interests are special pleaders and pettyfogging

cording to this doctrine, then, if smugshould become a practice along our Northern coast, and maritime churches d lave smuggling deacons, and smuggling ter, and smuggling members, the manent of the American Tract Society would no right to declare their views in respect moral character of this act; and unhey could have tracts already grown, on subject, hanging on the bushes, or wrapup in the cerements of the past, they d have no right to declare principles on subject. When the American Tract So-issued the most searching and fearless s, discussing the evils of intemperance, transcended their power, and abused their according to their own attorney; they no business "to declare the principles of anagers or members" on this subject.

hen any great evil in the growing light hen any great evil in the growing light hristianity is lifted up by the providence od and made the mark at which the Church and address its moral power, the Tract Secondary of the providence of their trust, this do circ be true that we have do the providence of Christian men respecting as the thuries of Christian men respecting which is not to discuss, but to circular the providence of the first of the condition of the Gospel, which is not to the Gospel, we are mere mechanical pursue of the culation. The Society is to know

thousands of men, throughout ewhat passes through it than a fanning hat knows neither the grain which es nor the chaff which it drives away .-

we quote again: However proper, then, a treatise might however suitable, if it could be circulated to do mod, yet it cannot be circulated it as a reliminary question of fact by the managersof the Society."

Le every honest Christian man in theso Unitd States consider this abominable doctrine that he duty of a Christian Tract Society, in circulating the truth, is to be judged and limited by the wishes of the corrupt and wicked men If wicked men are willing to receive light pon their wickedness, the Tract Sociev is permitted to send them knowledge; but viked men do not desire that light should in into their darkness, Mr. Lord declared, thetwithout a perversion of their trust, the

pon themselves endless mischiefs, because bey would not forbear, because they would ast upon the unwilling face of darkness, the yet, Mr. Lord dared to say—and there was not one priest upon the platform that there is to contradict the declaration—that tracts avery, and tracts against polygamy, and must not be sent either to those that uilty of either sin, unless they knew fund that these sinners were willing

them?

the what the Tract Society with all their piety, and all their ostentatious con-

scientiousness, has at last led the Church to; and that truth of Christ which was revealed to be, not the suppliant and the slave of men's caprices and appetites, but the master of their conscience, the lord of their faith, the supreme arbiter of their lives—that truth which is God's only vicegerent upon earth, open-browed, clear-eyed, and with a tongue that speaks in every language the same things, and with divine authority, is, by this last declaration of the American Tract Society, through their attorney, to ask permission of the intemperate before it declares the sins of intemperance; the sins of intemperance is the sins of intemperan

and the racing crew whether they may print tracts against the special immoralities to which they are liable; to ask the thief whether they may circulate tracts upon dishonesty; the may circulate tracts upon dishonesty; the in deliberative popular assemblies, by advice, by suggestion, by persuasion, by reasoning, by of justice, for, says Mr. Lord, "Tracts on deliberative wisdom? When, since the days robber whether they may set forth the claims of justice, for, says Mr. Lord, "Tracts on Slavery might be very able in their teaching, tracts against polygamy the like, but how idle to attempt to send the latter to the Mormons, or the former teachers." or the former to other parts of the country where they would be excluded."

But this is not all. Let us, for a moment, argue the question upon Mr. Lord sown ground.
We demand to knew by what right it is said
that tracts will not be read in the South on
the duties of master and slaves. How has it been ascertained that they will not be wel-come? Have these men taken counsel of pocome? Have these men taken counsel of po-litical fire-brands? Have they taken counsel of their cowardice? Have they taken coun-sel of those men who, long committed against the agitation of slavery, are now ashamed to seem to yield, and to own, by yielding, that their whole past career has been mistaken? The proper method of ascertaining whether tracts would be read, is to make them, to offer them. would be read, is to make them, to offer them ; would be read, is to make them, to offer them; and when judiciously constructed tracts have been tried, with all kindness and perseverance and are turned back upon the depository of the Society, then it will be time for them to declare that they have been rejected. But to stand upon the precipice of their cowardice; to grow dizzy by the mere looking over into the chose below, to refer any that the chose below, to refer any that the chose below, to refer any that the chose below it to refer any that the chose below it to refer any the chose below it to refer any that the chose below it to refer any t to grow dizzy by the mere looking over into the abyss below; to refuse any attempt whatever, practically to test the question,—this belongs to those peculiar notions of Ckristian belongs to those peculiar notions of Ckristian impulse."

In the court of justice ever, in the hundreds and thousands, and heart the court of justice ever, in the hundreds and thousands, and heart the court of justice ever, in the hundreds and thousands, and heart the court of justice ever, in the hundreds and thousands, and heart the court of justice ever, in the hundreds and thousands, and heart the court of justice ever, in the hundreds and thousands, and heart the court of justice ever, in the second of men, throughout at the court of justice ever, in the second of men, throughout at the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second of the court of justice ever, in the second

thousands of men, throughout a states, who will assuredly receive, tude, suitable tructs upon this states, who with conscientions earn the truth. I declare my convicted living in the slave states, by ten hate slavery wastle more than a state of the slavery wastle more than the hate slavery vastly more than do the may of the American Tract Society; are ogists for it; are less indifferent to it. ogists for it; are less indifferent to and its words; are more in sympathy with that spirit of liberty in the New Testament, which has consumed so much evil in the world, and is destined to consume every vestige of slain their popular assemblies and protest very and of oppression. There are thousands There is not a State Legislature in all this of ministers that will circulate tracts written Confederacy that would choose or dare to purin a spirit of Christian love bearing witness sue a course which was known to be against than the slave States of America. Nowhere else has the conscience lain so long fallow; style them. nowhere else are men more open to honest And before truths, spoken in a manly way; nowhere else are men more frank in recanting when they Executive Committee permit Mr. Lord to arare wrong; nowhere else more fearless in do ing that which they see to be right. And I there were, that were venerable when some of believe, in my soul, that if instead of our the Committee were born. Men were there Northern doughfaces, the management of this in scores, whose reading and habits of wise American Tract Society could be put into the reflection have made them as able in stateshands of any of thousands of men who might be selected from the slaveholders of the South, we should have a better expression from them which to accumulate wisdom than the pastor's of Christian truth on the subject of human office; and from out of discussions; rights, than now we are able to obtain from these men, whose highest conception of duty seems to be to do right by the permission of evil, to scatter light under the direction of ment and of every habit of thought they had

tee? What right have the members, who have exerted their power of management by the election, to interfere with this veto power? But the attempt to instruct the Committee assumes to take away not the veto of one, but the discretion of all. The plan of the charity has not in it such an inconsistency.—And how impracticable to execute such a construction of it. The publication and circulation of tracts must depend on occasions, on emergencies, to be acted upon as they rise.—It has been wisely committed to a select, an elected body, on the American idea of a rep-

cientiousness, has at last led the Church to; resentative system; not on the rash, reckless

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Are they also to be supposed to be continued in judgment? Has Mr. Lord found out, likewise, among the other memorable that our colonies sprang up on these shores, has it ever before been known that a great religious society, dependent upon the churches for its support, should sit without rebuke to

hear the practice of discussion and deliberation in popular bodies described? And yet, the Managers of the American Tract Society permitted Mr. Lord to characterize our American religious assemblies in language "A popular meeting, swayed by passionate eloquence, sympathizing in local feelings, would be a most unsafe depository of the functions in question. It is also likely to be composed most extensively of those who reside nearest to the place of meeting, and the course of the charity would thus be made dependent, in a degree, on the place of meeting.

pendent, in a degree, on the place of meeting; and might vary as that should be New York, or Boston, or Syracuse, or Rochester.

Common to our commont against the selfishness and the wrong of those the deliberate judgment of the great majority that defraud the laborer of his wages. Nay, of their constituents. There is not a body there are thousands of men who believe that known to our system that is not compelled to slavery is a divine institution, who yet desire hold, and that practically does not hold, in the to have the duties of the master more thor utmost respect, the known judgment and oughly explored and taught; who earnestly wishes of the masses of men in this communidesire to carry themselves toward their slaves ty. It is reserved for the American Tract Sowith some degree of conscientiousness and ciety to stand up in the midst of churches, and Christian fidelity. There is not in these Uni- of a Christian community that in immense mated States, there is not upon this continent, jorities condemn their conduct, and declare there is not on the broad field of the world, a themselves superior to such considerations province of labor more inviting, more urgent, an elected body, by being representative, made that promises a more abundant remuneration, superior to the rash democracy of popular deliberative assemblies, as Mr. Lord is pleased to

rogate their superiority? Venerable men

And before whom were these disparaging

words uttered? In whose presence did

seems to be to do right by the permission of evil, to scatter light under the direction of darkness, and to establish righteousness by the consent of iniquity. I will myself stand pledged—if any word of mine may be a guaranty—that if the American Tract Society will print appropriate tracts up. The block in a Christian temper, and with Christian fidelity expressing the truth of God, I will circulate twenty million pages in one year. If the Society will take the offer, I will take the job.

Mr. Lord then goes on to describe the duties of the managers of this property. The life members of this Society, together with the life directors, at an annual meeting, elect the President, the Vice-President, the Secretaries and the Directors. Then these directors, together with the life directors, elect the Executive Committee. This Executive Committee then assumes all the authority and mittee then assumes all the authority and have been taken away from them, are always functions of the Society. The whole force of forbidden to complain. The sceptre and the the Society dies when they have put the Executive Committee into their chairs. In respect to this, Mr. Lord says: "How idle, then, to instruct this Committee? What right have the members, who