

“Lecture on Pictures”

Douglass delivered “Lecture on Pictures” in Boston’s Tremont Temple on December 3, 1861, one year after being attacked on the same stage during the anniversary meeting of John Brown’s execution (see plate 2.12). His speech was part of the Fraternity Course lectures, created to commemorate the life and teachings of Theodore Parker, the Unitarian minister and militant abolitionist who had died in May 1860. Although Douglass titled his speech “Lecture on Pictures,” it was advertised in the press as “Pictures and Progress.”

The Temple was “filled to overflowing,” and most papers described the lecture as a great success. One reviewer called it “elegant” and Douglass’s logic “irresistible.” Another favorably compared it to the Fraternity lectures already given by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Ward Beecher, and called Douglass “a genius”: “no one has crystalized” the theory and practice of picture making “more clearly than Mr. Douglass; and this seemed to be the feeling of the highly educated and thinking audience.”

One negative review came from William Robinson, a conservative Republican who wrote under the pen name of “Warrenton” for *The Springfield Republican*: Robinson said the speech “came near being a total failure,” and then mocked Douglass’s stature as a preeminent writer and orator: “a nigger ain’t much better than a white man after all!”

In this first sustained lecture on photography, Douglass connects picture making to faith in progress, especially the progress of the war.



The title of my lecture has the excellent merit of indefiniteness. It confines me nowhere and leaves me free to present anything from which may be derived instruction or amusement. With this latitude of range, allow me to say that I am profoundly grateful for the honor of being called to lecture in this most popular course. I take it as a compliment to my enslaved race that while summoning men before you from the highest seats of learning, philosophy, and statesmanship, you have also summoned one from the slave plantation. On this, the committee of management have, in one act, labeled their course both philanthropic and cosmopolitan.⁵

I confess that lecture reading is not my fort, and that consenting to stand here at all comes more from confidence in your indulgence, than from any confidence in my own ability.⁶

Our age gets very little credit either for poetry or for song. It is generally condemned to wear the cold metallic stamp of a passion-

less utilitarianism. It certainly is remarkable for many achievements, small and great, which accord with this popular description—and yet, for nothing is it more remarkable than for the multitude, variety, perfection and cheapness of its pictures. The praises of Arkwright, Watt, Franklin, Fulton and Morse are upon all lips.⁷ But the great father of our modern pictures is seldom mentioned, though as worthy as the foremost. If by means of the all-pervading electric fluid Morse has coupled his name with the glory of bringing the ends of the earth together, and of converting the world into a whispering gallery, Daguerre, by the simple but all-abounding sunlight, has converted the planet into a picture gallery.⁸ As munificent in the exalted arena of art, as in the radiation of light and heart, the God of day not only decks the earth with rich fruits and beautiful flowers, but studs the world with pictures. Daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, photographs and electrotypes, good and bad, now adorn or disfigure all our dwellings.⁹ It has long been a standing complaint with social reformers and political economists that mankind have everywhere been cheated of the natural fruit of their own inventive genius: &c.

I shall not stop here to argue whether this broad and bitter complaint is well or ill-founded. It is enough for the present that it does not stand against the wonderful discovery and invention by Daguerre. Men of all conditions may see themselves as others see them. What was once the exclusive luxury of the rich and great is now within reach of all. The humblest servant girl, whose income is but a few shillings per week, may now possess a more perfect likeness of herself than noble ladies and even royalty, with all its precious treasures, could purchase fifty years ago.¹⁰ Yet Daguerre might have been forgotten, but for incorporating his name with his wonderful discovery. That so little is said of the author of this pictorial abundance is explained only on the principle that men are prone to value things more for their rarity than for their excellence. We drink freely of the water at the marble fountain, without thinking for the moment of the toil and skill employed in constructing the fountain itself.¹¹

That Daguerre has supplied a great want is seen less in eulogies bestowed upon his name, than in the rapidity and universality with which his invention has been adopted. The smallest town now has its daguerreian gallery, and even at the crossroads where stands but a solitary blacksmith's shop and what was once a country tavern but now [is] in the last stages of dilapidation, you will find the inevitable daguerreian gallery, shaped like a baggage car, with a hothouse window at the top, adorned with red curtains, resting on Gutta Perchian springs and wooden wheels painted yellow. The farmer boy gets an iron shoe for

his horse and metallic picture for himself at the same time, and at the same price.

The old commercial maxim that demand regulates supply is reversed here.¹² Supply regulates demand. The facilities for travel has sent the world abroad, and the ease and cheapness with which we get our pictures has brought us all within range of the daguerreian apparatus.

I think it may be fairly doubted if this pictorial plenty has done much for modest distrust of our good looks. No one hesitates thus to commit himself to the judgment of posterity. A man who nowadays publishes a book, or peddles a patent medicine and does not publish his face to the world with it may almost claim and get credit for singular modesty. Handsome or homely, manly or mean, if an author's face can possibly be other than fine looking, the picture must be in the book, or the book be considered incomplete.

It may also be proper here to notice that pictures are decidedly conservative. It would be difficult to determine as between a man's picture and a man's religious creed, which of the twain is most conservative in its influence upon him. The one is the measure of outer man and the other of the inner, and both are positive law on the points to which they apply. Once fairly in the book and the man may be considered a fixed fact, public property. In nine cases out of ten, he so regards himself. The picture may be like him or not like him, or like anybody else than him. But this trifling circumstance, however much he may regret it, cannot be allowed to make any manner of difference in his conduct.

On no account whatever, either indifference to an improved taste or a change of fashion, can he be allowed any liberties with the style of his coat, the shape of his collar, or the cut of his hair. His position is defined, and his whole *persona* must now conform to, and never contradict, the immortal likeness or unlikeness in the Book.

Byron says a man always looks *dead* when his Biography is written.¹³ The same is even more true when his picture is taken. There is even something statue-like about such men. See them when or where you will, and unless they are totally off guard, they are either serenely sitting or rigidly standing in what they fancy their best attitude for a picture.

The stern serenity of our photographic processes, in tracing the features and forms of men, might deter some of us from the operation, but for that most kind natural Providence, by which most men easily see in themselves points of beauty and excellence, which wholly elude the observation of all others.

There is scarcely any weakness which is more common, or of which men are more ashamed, than that of conceitedness and vanity of personal appearance. And yet, it may be doubted if any man ever sat for a

picture or stood for a bust, without being conscious of more or less of that girlish weakness.

The stringent and celebrated order given to his artist by Oliver Cromwell, may seem to make him an exception to this criticism. "Paint me as I am" sounds well, and accords well with the popular idea of the manly character of the stern old Puritan. It is taken to mean: I want no favor, no flattery, no fraud—"paint me as I am," nothing extenuate, nor aught set down in malice. But certain facts common to humanity might suggest another meaning and another motive, quite as human and quite as likely, if not quite so creditable! Men do not often lose their self-love in their all-abounding love of truth. To himself and to his friends and admirers, Cromwell's person, not less than his genius, was admirable. "Paint me as I am" may therefore mean, "I am handsome enough, don't try to improve upon the original." It is somewhere said of him that he esteemed the huge wart on his face as less a deformity than a beauty.¹⁴

As to the moral and social influence of pictures, it would hardly be extravagant to say of it, what Moore has said of ballads, give me the making of a nation's ballads and I care not who has the making of its laws.¹⁵ The picture and the ballad are alike, if not equally social forces—the one reaching and swaying the heart by the eye, and the other by the ear.

As an instrument of wit, of biting satire, the picture is admitted to be unrivalled. It strikes human nature on the weakest of all its many weak sides, and upon the instant, makes the hit palpable to all beholders. The dullest vision can see and comprehend at a glance the full effect of a point which may have taken the wit and skill of the artist many hours and days.

Nowhere is this power better understood, or where it is practiced with better results, than in England. *Punch* is a power more potent than Parliament.¹⁶ He commands both Lords and Commons, and does not spare even Windsor Castle. Always on the side of liberal ideas and progress, he is no more welcome in Austria than the *Liberator* in South Carolina.¹⁷

It is commonly said over there, that a man not great enough to be caricatured in *Punch*, is not great enough to carry a measure in Parliament. The inventive fertility of its conductors is the greatest marvel. It never repeats and is never exhausted. It not only has the art of laughing contagiously, but, what is more important, it knows how to laugh in the right place and in the right time. John Bull reports all its wise sayings at the breakfast table—and only laughs when *Punch* gives the word—though that shall be at his own expense.¹⁸

In our country, though we have no *Punch* of this wry sort, though we have plenty of the other, the picture plays an important part in

our politics and often explodes political shams more effectively than any other agency. All have remarked that men can better bear to be denounced as knaves than to be laughed at as fools.

In the making of our presidents, the political gathering begins the operation, and the picture gallery ends it.¹⁹ The winner, in order to out-vote, must out-laugh his adversary.

Success is the admitted standard of American greatness, and it is marvelous to observe how readily it also becomes the standard of manly beauty. There is marked improvement in the features of the successful man, and a corresponding deterioration in those of the unsuccessful. Our military heroes look better even in pictures after winning an important battle than after losing one. The pictures do not change, but we look at them through the favorable or unfavorable prevailing public opinion. Honest old Thomas Whitson, a man possessing far more wit than beauty, was not far wrong when he said that even he should be handsome upon a favorable change in public opinion.²⁰

It is perhaps on the same principle of prospective beauty that ministers sometimes console the race to which I belong, assuring them that though black and ugly on the Earth, they will all be white and beautiful in heaven.

Next to bad manuscripts, pictures can be made the greatest bores. Authors, editors, and printers suffer by the former, while almost everybody has suffered by the latter. They are pushed at you in every house you enter, and what is worse, you are required to give an opinion of them.

Now, it is easy enough for one who thoroughly understands the art, to criticize pictures generally, but who can comment satisfactorily upon the various performances of our youngest daughter when that amiable young lady is right at your elbow? To say anything is positively dangerous—and to say nothing is more so. It is no kindness to a guest to place him in such circumstances. Pictures, like songs, should be left to make their own way in the world. All they can reasonably ask of us is that we place them on the wall, in the best light, and for the rest allow them to speak for themselves. Music is excellent, but too much of it will disturb the nerves like the filing of a saw.

Of all things the mental atmosphere surrounding us is most easily moved in this or that direction. The first causes of its oscillations are often too occult for the most subtle. The influence of pictures upon this all-surrounding and all-powerful thought element may some day furnish a theme for those better able than I to do it justice. It is evident that the great cheapness and universality of pictures must exert a powerful, though silent, influence upon the ideas and sentiment of present and future generations. The family is the fountainhead of all mental and

moral influence. And the presence there, of the miniature forms and faces of our loved ones, whether separated from us by time and space, or by the silent continents of eternity, must act powerfully upon the minds of all. They bring to mind all that is amiable and good in the departed, and strengthen the same qualities [in the living].²¹

But it is not of such pictures that I am here to speak exclusively. I am at liberty to touch [on] the element out of which our pictures spring. There are certain groups and combinations of facts and features, some pleasant, some sad, which possess in large measure the quality of pictures and affect us accordingly. They are thought pictures—the outstanding headlands of the meandering shores of life, and are points to steer by on the broad sea of thought and experience. They body forth in living forms and colors the ever varying lights and shadows of the soul.

It is worthy of remark to begin with that of all the animal world man alone has a passion for pictures. Neither dogs nor elephants ranging nearest to man in point of intelligence show any sensation of pleasure in the presence of the highest work of art. The dog fails to recognize his own features in a glass. The power to make and to appreciate pictures belongs to man exclusively.

Some of our so-called learned naturalists, archeologists, and ethnologists have professed some difficulty in settling upon a fixed, certain, and definite line separating the lowest man from the highest animal.²² To all such I commend the fact that man is everywhere a picture-making animal. The rudest of men have some idea of tracing definite lines and of imitating the forms and colors of objects about them. The verist savage has found means of doing this upon his own cuticle. Savages have been found with the form of a European coat tattooed on their skins. The rule I believe is without an exception and may be safely commended to the Notts and Gliddens, who are just now puzzled with the question as to whether the African slave should be treated as a man or an ox.²³

Rightly viewed, the whole soul of man is a sort of picture gallery, a grand panorama, in which all the great facts of the universe, in tracing things of time and things of eternity, are painted. The love of pictures stands first among our passional inclinations, and is among the last to forsake us in our pilgrimage here. In youth it gilds all our Earthly future with bright and glorious visions; and in age, it paves the streets of our paradise with gold, and sets all its opening gates with pearls.²⁴

But childhood especially delights in symbols. Our natural and primary instructors, both as nations and individuals, are symbols and songs. For this child state, let the broad world be filled with the music of song—and pictures. The world has no sight more pleasant and hopeful,

either for the child, or for the race, than one of these little ones in rapt contemplation of a pure work of art. The process is one of self-revelation, a comparison of the pure forms of beauty and excellence without, with those which are within.²⁵

Men talk much of a new birth. The fact is fundamental. But the mistake is in treating it as an incident which can only happen to a man once in a lifetime; whereas the whole journey of life is a succession of them. A new life springs up in the soul with the discovery of every new agency by which the soul is raised to a higher level of wisdom: goodness and joy.

The poor savage, accustomed only to the stunning war whoop of his tribe and to the wild and startling sounds in nature of winds, waterfalls, and thunder, meets with a change of heart the first time he hears the divine harmonies of scientific music: and the child experiences one with every new object by means of which it is brought into a nearer and fuller acquaintance with its own subjective nature. With every step he attains a larger, fuller and freer range of vision. All the pictures in the book are known before a single lesson is learned. They speak to him in his own tongue.

On the hillside, in the valley, under the grateful shades of solitary oaks and elms, the boy of ten, all forgetful of time or place, calls to books or to boyish sports, looks up with silence and awe to the blue overhanging firmament, and views with dreamy wonder its ever-drifting drapery; tracing in the clouds and in their ever-changing forms and colors the outlines of towns and cities, great ships and hostile armies of men, of horses, solemn temples, and the Great Spirit of all: Break in if you please upon the prayers of monks or nuns, but I pray you, do not disturb the divine meditations of that little child. He is unfolding to himself the divinest of all human faculties, for such is the picture-making faculty of man.

It is a chief element of all that is religious and poetic about us. To the eye and spirit it is what music is to the ear and heart. We may enjoy all the delights of the concord of sweet sounds long before we understand the subtle principles and processes of their harmonious combination. Their mission, like that of music, is to refine the taste, ennoble the spirit, and to lead on, through all the depressing vicissitudes of life, the longing soul by glorious prophecies of ever unfolding beauty and excellence.

I have said that man is a picture-making and a picture-appreciating animal and have pointed out that fact as an important line of distinction between man and all other animals. The point will bear additional emphasis.

It lies directly in the path of what I conceive to be a key to the great mystery of life and progress. The process by which man is able to invent his own subjective consciousness into the objective form, considered in all its range, is in truth the highest attribute of man's nature. All that is really peculiar to humanity, in contradistinction from all other animals, proceeds from this one faculty or power. It is that which has sometimes caused us, in our moments of enthusiasm, to lose sight of man as a creature, finite and limited, and to invest him with the dignity of a creator.²⁶

It is said that the best gifts are most abused, this among the rest. Conscience itself is misdirected: shocked at delightful sounds, beautiful colors and graceful movements—but sleeps at ease amid the ten thousand agonies of war and slavery.

This picture-making faculty is flung out into the world like all others—subject to a wild scramble between contending interests and forces. It is a mighty power, and the side to which it goes has achieved a wondrous conquest. For the habit we adopt, the master we obey in making our subjective nature objective, giving it form, colour, space, action and utterance, is the all important thing to ourselves and our surroundings. It will either lift us to the highest heavens or sink us to the bottomless depths, for good and evil know [no] limits. A man once fairly started in the wrong direction runs with ever increasing speed like a frightened child in the wilderness, from the distant echoes of his own footfalls.

All wishes, all aspirations, all hopes, all fears, all doubts, all determinations grow stronger and stronger precisely in proportion as they get themselves expressed in words, forms, colours, and action.

The work of the revivalist is more than half done when he has got a man to stand up in the congregation as an indication of his need of grace. The strength of an iron halter was needed for this first act, but now like Rarey's horses, he may be led by a straw.²⁷

Of all our religious denominations, the Roman Catholic understands this picture passion best. It wisely addresses the religious consciousness in its own language—the child language of the soul. Pictures, images, and other symbolical representations speak to the imagination. The mighty fortress of the human heart silently withstands the assaults by the rifled cannons of reason, but readily falls before the magic power of mystery. Remove from the church of Rome her cunning illusions—her sacred altars, her pictures, her images, her tapers, her mitres, her solemn pomp, and her gorgeous ceremonies, the mere shards of things, and her magical and entrancing power over men would disappear. Take the cross from before the name of the archbishop—and he is James or John like the rest of us.

Protestantism relies more upon words and actions than upon paints or chisels to express its sentiments and ideas—and yet the most successful of her teachers and preachers are but painters: and succeed because they are such.

Dry logic and elaborate arguments, though perfect in all their appointments, and though knitted together as a coat of mail, lay down the law to empty benches.

But he who speaks to the feelings, who enters the soul's deepest meditations, holding the mirror up to nature, revealing the profoundest mysteries of the human heart to the eye and ear by action and by utterance, will never want for an audience.

Only a few men wish to think, while all wish to feel, for feeling is divine and infinite.

Feeling and mystery are not, however, the only conditions of successful painting, speaking, or writing. No man can have permanent hold upon his fellows by means of falsehood. He must conform to the Cromwellian rule. Better remain dumb than utter a falsehood—better repeat the old truth forever than to spin out a pure fiction. With the clear perception of things as they are, must stand the faithful tendering of things as they seem. The dead fact is nothing without the living impression. Niagara is not fitly described when it is said to be a river of this or that volume falling over a ledge of rocks two hundred feet, nor is thunder when simply called a jarring noise. This is truth, but truth disrobed of its sublimity and glory. A kind of frozen truth, destitute of motion itself—it is incapable of producing emotion in others.

But on the other hand, to give us the glory as some do without the glorified object is a still greater transgression and makes those who do it as those who beat the air.

We are all deeply affected by Hogarth's pictures.²⁸ The secret is to [be] found only in the fact that he painted life both as it is, and as it seems. The power of his pictures is the power of truth.

His characters, like those of Shakespeare, are clothed with flesh and blood, and are warm with the common sympathies of the race. They speak to us in a known tongue, and of men and women here on the earth, where men and women live, and not among the stars, where men and women do not live. They are not angels nor demons—but much of both in their tendencies and possibilities. They are our brothers and sisters: thinking, living, acting very much as we easily fancy we might have done in their places.

Man everywhere worships man, and in the last analysis worships himself. He finds in himself the qualities he calls divine and reverently bows before them. This is the best he can do. It is the measure of his

being. The God of the merciful and just man is merciful and just despite the church creed: and the God of the selfish and cruel man is a king in wood, stone, iron, or in imagination after his own image, no matter what he has sworn to believe in the church creed.

Our angel has a human face and the wings of a bird. Both are of the Earth—Earthy—but this too, is the best we can do in angel picturing, for man can never rise above humanity—even in his religion.

The church that we build unto the Lord, we build unto ourselves—and the style which pleases us best pleases best our God. At one end we have the shed-like building of the Quaker, and at the other the splendid architecture of the Roman Catholic.

The sword we present to our military hero and the banner we present to our regiment we present to ourselves, and the joy of the receiver is the joy of the giver.

Man warms, glows, and expands only where [he] sees himself asserted broadly and truly. This is the crucible in which we try all laws, religions, morals, and governments.

But man is not a block of marble—measured and squared by rule and compass—so that his inches can be set down on a slate.

All that would permanently minister to him must, like himself, contain the element of progress.

Desire rises with gratification. What pleased in the morning fails to please in the evening. The manna must be fresh or it is good for nothing.²⁹

The whining school boy with satchel and shining morning face is entranced by sights and sounds in nature which lose all their enchanting power over him when he touches that ambitious point of life, where Shakespeare paints him bearded like a pard—jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel, seeking the bubble reputation even in cannon's mouth.³⁰

Failing to meet this requirement, [the] teacher, the sect, the party, the nation, the government must fail.

The United States government is yet within a century of its birth. It is not old, as we span the lives of nations. It is still in the inner circle of boyhood. It is a big boy, however, and has grown immensely and rapidly. It has risen in three-quarters of a century from three millions to thirty.³¹ It is great in population, great in wealth, great in knowledge, great in commerce, great in nearly all the fundamental elements of national greatness.

But yesterday the Republic of America sat as a queen among the nations of the earth, knowing no sorrow—smiling in safety while crowns and coronets were rent, and thrones and dynasties were toppling in Europe.³²

Today, every pillar in our great national temple is shaken. We have fallen asunder in the centre. War and blood have burst forth with savage ferocity among brothers. A million of men are in arms—and the end is not yet.

To what cause may we trace this dreadful calamity? Not the secondary cause, but the grand original cause.

Some say to sectionalism. But there is nothing in the geographical divisions of the country which should cause trouble.

Lands intersected by a narrow frith abhor each other
And mountains interposed make enemies of nations
Which else like kindred drops had mingled into one.³³

But even this cause does not hold here, for all our rivers and mountains point to unity and oneness. There is no reason why the cornfields of the North should quarrel with the cotton fields of the South.

Some say it is the slaveholders who have brought this great evil upon us. I do not assent even to this.

Others say that the real cause of all our troubles may be traced to the busy tongues and pens of the abolitionists.

The cause is deeper down than sections, slaveholders, or abolitionists. These are but the hands of the clock. The moving machinery is behind the face. The machinery moves not because of the hands, but the hands because of the machinery. To make the hands go right you must make the machinery go right. The trouble is fundamental. Two cannot walk together except they be agreed. No man can serve two masters. A house divided against itself cannot stand.³⁴ It is something to ride two horses going the same way, but impossible when going opposite ways.

The folly is just here:

We have attempted to maintain a union in defiance of the moral chemistry of the universe. To join together what God has put asunder—³⁵ We have thought to keep one end of the chain on the limbs of the bondman without having the other on our own necks.

Anchoring the ship of state to the dull dead mass of slavery, we have set sail for a prosperous voyage—and we have got our sails and rigging blown away, and our cable broken as the result of our experiment.

Here is the trouble, plain before all Israel & the sun & c.³⁶ Slavery and rebellion go hand in hand.

But since the evil has not been prevented, how shall it be remedied?

My opinion may not be worth much, but such as it is, *it* is freely given.

Thus far, it must be confessed that we have struck wide of the mark,

and very feebly withal. The temper of our stead is better than the temper of our minds.

While I do not charge, as some have, that the government is conducting the war on peace principles, it is plain that they are not conducting it on war principles.

We are fighting the Rebels with only one hand when we ought to be fighting them with both. We are recruiting our troops at the North when we ought to be recruiting them at the South. We are striking with our white hand, while our black one is chained behind us. We are catching slaves instead of arming them.³⁷ We are repelling our natural friends to win the friendship of our unnatural enemies. We are endeavoring to heal over the rotten cancer instead of cutting out its death-dealing roots and fibres. We seem a little more concerned for the safety of slavery than for the safety of the Republic.

I say here and now that if this nation shall be destroyed—the government shall be broken to pieces, the union of these states dissolved—it will neither be for want of men nor money nor bravery, but because the Government at Washington has shouldered all the burdens of slavery in the prosecution of the war—and given to its enemies all its benefits.

Witness: The treatment of Frémont's Proclamation.

Witness: The removal of General Butler.

Witness: The removal of Commodore Stringham.

Witness: The recent proclamation of General Sherman.³⁸

Remarks on the president's letter to Frémont.³⁹

I have been often asked since the war began why I am not at the South battling for freedom. My answer is with the Government. It wants men, but it does not yet rank me or my race with men. Let the fact go down to posterity in vindication of my race, if not in condemnation of the Government, that reasons of state, such as did not control the policy of General Jackson at New Orleans, nor the fathers of the Republic, have thus far compelled the Republican Party now in power to deny the black man the honor of bearing arms against slaveholding rebels for the preservation of the Government.⁴⁰

One situation only has been offered me, and that is the office of a body servant to a colonel: I would not despise that if I could by that means be of any service to the cause of impartial freedom. In that temple there is no seat too low for me.

But one thing I have a right to ask when I am required to march to the battlefield, and that is that I shall have a country or the hope of a country under me, a government that recognizes my manhood around me, and a flag of freedom waving over me!

We have recently held a solemn fast and have offered up innumer-

able prayers for the deliverance of the nation from the manifold perils and calamities that surround it.⁴¹ I say nothing against these prayers, but I know well enough that both the work of making and the work of answering them must be performed by the same hands.

If the loyal North succeed in suppressing this foul and scandalous slaveholding rebellion, the fact will be due to the amount of wisdom and force they bring against the rebels in arms. Thus far we have shown no lack of force. A call for men is answered by a half a million. A call for money is answered by hundreds of millions, and a call for prayers brings a whole nation to its altars; but still the rebellion rages. Jeff Davis is defiant. United States ships run the gauntlet of rebel guns within a few miles of Washington, and the rebels are quietly talking of going into winter quarters.

What is the remedy? I answer, have done, forever, with the wild and guilty fantasy that man can hold property in man.

Have done with the idea that [the] old union is either desirable or possible.

Accept the incontestable truth of the irrepressible conflict, which is now emphasized by all the horrors of rebellion.

Banish from your minds the last lingering shadow of a hope that your government can ever rest secure on a mixed basis of freedom and slavery. Lay the ax at the root of the tree, and hurl the accursed slave system into the pit from whence it came.⁴²

The pretense that the Constitution stands in the way of [our] abolition plan for putting [down] the rebels is but a miserable pretense. Slavery has never been large enough to get itself named in the Constitution; but if every line and syllable of the Constitution contained an explicit prohibition of the abolition of slavery, the right of the nation to abolish slavery would still exist in full force, since the right to preserve itself from dissolution is before all laws—and is the foundation and authority of all laws and government.

But will our government at last arrive at this conclusion? That depends much upon the virtue of the North, and much more upon the villainy of the South: and I confess to a little more hope from the latter than from the former.

We are fighting not only a wicked and determined foe, but a desperate and maddened one. We are fighting our former political masters, who are enraged at the thought of our resistance, men who have ruled us for sixty years. If hard pressed, as they will be, they will break through all the restraints of civilized warfare, and compel the government to strike the blow for freed[om].

Events are greater than either party to the conflict, and rule both.

The first flash of rebel powder against the starving garrison at Sumter instantly changed the whole policy of the nation. Until then, the North in all its parties and parlours was found dreaming of compromise: a peaceable adjustment, state "sovereignty," rights of "secession," "no coercion," repeal personal liberty laws, call national convention, "change the Constitution"—flitted in the fevered brain, and fell from the quivering lip of the Northern people, and from our statesmen—cowering before the apprehended calamities of disunion, and the threats of civil war. These dreams have vanished before the onward progress and all-bending power of events.

Tonight, with saints and angels, with the glorious army of martyrs, of whom the world was not worthy, the brave spirit of John Brown serenely looks from his eternal rest, beholding his guilty murderers in torments of their own kindling—and the faith for which he nobly died, rapidly becoming the saving faith of the nation. Two years ago young John Brown was hunted in Ohio like a felon. Today he is a captain under the broad seal of the U.S. Government.⁴³

Humanity sweeps onward. Where today the martyr stands—
On tomorrow crouches Judas with the silver in his hands.
Far in front the cross stands ready, and the crackling faggots burn
While the hooting mob of yesterday with silent awe return
To glean up the scattered ashes in history's golden urn.⁴⁴

Only one brief year ago and this great city, the Athens of America, was convulsed by the rage of a howling mob, madly trampling upon the great law of liberty and progress, incited thereto by a fanatical devotion to the law of slavery.⁴⁵ It blocked your streets. It shut up your halls. It defied your Government, and madly clamored for the blood of one whose name adds lustre to the very name of Boston.⁴⁶

Where is that mob tonight?

Some of them are doubtless in the regiment from Mass., which recently marched to Virginia singing hymns to the memory of John Brown.⁴⁷

Where are the men who incited that mob? Urging upon the government to finish the very work which John Brown nobly began.

Two short years ago, as the old man, stretched on his pallet of straw, covered with blood, marred by sabre gashes in the hands of his enemies, not expecting to recover from his wounds—among those who came to torment him in this dark hour of distress, and to berate him for the awful sins of treason and rebellion, was one Senator Mason of Virginia. Where tonight is this haughty and supercilious senator? In your

own Fort Warren! What is his crime? Treason and rebellion.⁴⁸ I need not ring the changes on this point.

Nothing stands today where it stood yesterday. The choice which life presents is ever more between growth and decay, perfection and deterioration. There is no standing still, nor can be. Advance or recede, occupy or give place, are the stern and inoperative alternatives, [the] self-existing and self-enforcing law of life, from the cradle to the grave.⁴⁹

He who despairs of progress despises the hope of the world, and shuts himself out from the chief significance of assistance—and is dead while he lives.

Great nature herself, whether viewed in connection or apart from man, is in its manifold operations a picture of progress and a constant rebuke to [the] moral stagnation of conservatism.

Conceive of life without progress and sun, moon and stars instantly halt in their courses. The restless ocean no longer heaves on high his proud dashing billows. The lightning hides itself in somber sky. The tempest dies on the mountain—and silent night, dark, shapeless, sightless, voiceless, settles down upon the mind, in a ghastly—as frightful as gloom—as the darkness of Byron's painting.⁵⁰

But on the other hand, how glorious is nature in action. We get but an outside view, and while still amazed and curious, on goes the great mystery of mysteries—creating, unfolding, expanding, renewing, changing perpetually, putting on new forms, new colours, using new sounds, filling the world with new perfumes, and spreading out to the eye and heart unending scenes of freshness and beauty.

It gives us a thousand flowers for a single fruit and a thousand eggs for a single fish or bird, and yet earth, sea, and air overflow with all-pervading and never resting life.

In addition to the progressive lessons taught in the physical world, man has one written down in his own constitution, superior to all others.

Other animals only change the conditions of their existence in obedience to great natural causes over which they have no control. But the sublime mission of man is the discovery of truth—and all conquering resistance to all adverse circumstances, whether moral or physical.

By the cultivation of his intellect, by the development of his natural resources, by understanding the science of his own relations to the world, man has the marvelous power of enlarging the boundaries of his own existence.

Material progress may for a time be separated from moral progress. But the two cannot be permanently divorced.

It is natural, when the demand for bread and clothing and shelter has been complied with, man should begin to think and reason. When

this is done, let all the subtle enemies of the welfare of man, in the protean shapes of oppression, superstition, priestcraft, and slavery—plainly read their doom.

Steam and lightning and all manner of labor-saving machinery have come up to the help of moral truth as well as physical welfare.

The increased facilities of locomotion, the growing inter-communication of distant nations, the rapid transmission of intelligence over the globe—the worldwide ramifications of commerce—bringing together the knowledge, the skill, and the mental power of the world, cannot but dispel prejudice, dissolve the granite barriers of arbitrary power, bring the world into peace and unity, and at last crown the world with just[ice], liberty, and brotherly kindness.

In every lightning coire may be recognized a reformer.⁵¹ In every bar of railroad iron a missionary. In every locomotive a herald of progress—the startling scream of the engine—and the small ticking sound of the telegraph are alike prophecies of hope to the philanthropist, and warnings to the systems of slavery, superstition, and oppression to get themselves away to the murky shades of barbarism.