

Boston. Aug 9. 1856

Gentlemen:

Upon my return last evening, after a short absence from the city, I found your letter of the 30th ult. inviting me to take part in the proceedings of the Whigs of Maine, assembling in mass meeting.

I appreciate most highly the honor and kindness of this invitation, and should have had true pleasure in accepting it. The Whigs of Maine composed, at all times so important a division of the great national party, which under that name with or without official power, as a responsible administration, or as an organized opinion, has done so much for our country, our whole country_ and your responsibilities at this moment are so vast and peculiar, that I acknowledge a keen anxiety to see, not wait to hear, with what noble bearing you meet the demands of the time. If the tried legions to whom it is committed to guard the frontiers of the union falter now, who anywhere can be trusted?

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Date: Aug. 9, 1856

Description: Letter from Rufus Choate to E.W. Farley responding to an invitation to speak at the Maine State Whig Meeting to be held in Waterville, Maine.

ted to share in your counsels, and grateful for such distinction. I cannot wholly decline to declare my own opinions on one of the duties of Whigs, in what you will describe, as "the present crisis in the political affairs of the country".

I cannot now, and need not pause to elaborate or defend them. What I think, and what I intend to do, permit me, in the briefest and plainest expression, to tell you.

The first duty then, of Whigs, not merely as patriots, and as citizens, loving with a large and equal love our whole native land, but as Whigs, and because we are Whigs, is to unite with some organization of our Countrymen, to defeat and dissolve the new geographical party, calling itself Republican. It would more exactly express my opinion to say, that at this moment it is our only duty. Certainly, at least, it comprehends, and it postpones all others; and in my judgment the question for each and every one of us is, not whether this candidate or that candidate, would be our ~~first~~ first choice; not whether there is some good talk in the worst platform, and some bad talk in the best platform; not whether this man's ambition, or that man's servility, or boldness, or fanaticism, or violence is responsible for putting the wild waters in this uproar; but just this, by what vote can I do most to prevent the madness of the times from ~~working~~ ^{working} its maddest act - the very acety of its madness - the permanent formation and the actual present tri-

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umph of a party which knows one half of America, only to hate and dread it; from whose unconsecrated and revolutionary banner fifteen stars are erased or have fallen; in whose national anthem the old and charmed airs of the Eutaw Springs, and the Kings Mountain and Yorktown, and those later of New-Orleans ^{Buena Vista} and ~~Monterey~~ ^{Chapultepec} breathe no more. To this duty, to this question, all others seem to me to stand for the present postponed and secondary.

And why! Because, according to our creed, it is only the United America which can peacefully, gradually, safely, improve, lift up and bless with all social and personal and civil blessings, all the races and all the conditions which compose our vast and various family; it is such an America, only, whose arm can guard our flag, develop our resources, extend our trade, and fill the measure of our glory; and because, according to our ^{convictions} ~~conditions~~, the triumph of such a party puts that Union in danger. That is my reason. And for you, and for me, and for all of us, in whose regards the Union possesses such a value, and to whose fears it seems menaced by such a danger, it is reason enough. Believing the noble ship of State to be within a half cable's length of a lee shore of rock, in a gale of wind, our first business is to put her about and crowd her off into the deep open sea. That done, we can regulate the stowage of her lower tier of powder, and select her cruising ground, and bring her officers to

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Court martial at our leisure.

If there are any in Maine, and among the Whigs of Maine, I hope there is not one, but if there are any, in whose hearts, strong passions, vaulting ambition, jealousy of men or sections, unreasoning and impatient philanthropy, have turned to hate or coldness the fraternal blood and quenched the spirit of national life at its source; with whom the Union of slave states ~~and~~ ^{and} Free states under the actual constitution is a curse, a hindrance, a reproach, with these of course our view of our duty and the reason of it, are a stumbling block and foolishness. To such you can have nothing to say, and from such you can have nothing to hope. But if there are those again who love the Union as we love it, and prize it as we prize it; who regard it as we do, not merely as a vast instrumentality for the protection of our commerce and navigation; and for achieving power, eminence, and name among the Sovereigns of the earth, but as a means of improving the material lot, and elevating the moral and ~~material~~ ^{moral} nature and ensuring the personal happiness of the millions of many distant generations. If there are those who think thus justly of it, and yet hug the fatal delusion, that because it is good, it is necessarily immortal; that it will thrive without care; that anything created by man's will is above or stronger than his will; that because the reason and virtues of our age of reason and virtue could build it, the passions and stimulations of a day of ~~for~~ ^{for} frenzy cannot pull it

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down, if such there are among you, to them address yourselves with all the earnestness and all the eloquence of men who feel that some greater interest is at stake and some mightier cause in hearing than ever yet tongue has pleaded or trumpet proclaimed. If such minds and hearts are reached all is safe. But how specious and how manifold are the sophisms by which they are courted.

They hear and they read much ridicule of those who fear that a geographical party does endanger the Union. But can they forget that our greatest, wisest and most hopeful statesmen have always felt, and have all in one form or another, left on record their own fear of such a party? The judgments of Washington, Madison, Clay, Webster, on the dangers of the American Union, are they worth nothing to a conscientious lover of it? What they dreaded as a remote and improbable contingency; that against which they cautioned, as they thought distant generations; that which they were so happy as to die without seeing, is upon us. And yet some men would have us go on laughing ^{and singing} like the traveller in the satire with his pockets empty, at a present peril the mere apprehension of which as a distant and bare possibility could sadden the heart of the father of his country and dictate the grave and grand warning of the Farewell Address.

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to be formed within ~~the~~ ^{one} geographical section and confined exclusively to it; although its end and aim is to rally that section against the other on a question of morals, policy and feeling on which the two differ eternally and unap-
~~peasably~~ ^{practically}; although from the nature of its origin and ob-
jects no man in the section outside can possibly join it or accept office under it without infamy at home; although therefore it is a stupendous organization practically to take ~~the~~ power and honor and a full share of gov-
ernment from one whole family of states and ~~substantially~~
bestow them substantially all upon the antagonist family; al-
though the doctrines of human rights which it fathers out of
the declaration of Independence, that passionate and eloquent
manifesto of a revolutionary war, and adopts as its funda-
mental idea, announces ^{to} ~~the~~ ^{the} Southern apprehension a cru-
sade of government against slavery for without Kansas; al-
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as a whole, in ~~prose~~ ^{prose} and verse, the leading articles of its pa-
pers and the speeches of its orators, are to excite contempt or
hate or fear of one entire geographical section, and hate, or
dread, or contempt, is the natural impression it all leaves
on the Northern mind and heart; yet that nobody any-
where ought to be angry, or ought to be frightened; that
the majority must govern, and the North is a majority;
that it is ten to one nothing will happen; that if
the worst comes to worst the South knows it is wholly to
blame, and needs the Union more than we do, and will
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never first, that the question is not what ought to endanger the Union, but what will do it? Is it man as he ought to be, or man as he is, that we must live with or live alone? In appreciating the influence which may disturb a political system, and especially one like ours, do you make no allowance for passions, for pride, for infirmity, for the burning sense of even imaginary wrong? Do you assume that all men or all masses of men in all sections uniformly obey reason; and uniformly and wisely see and calmly seek their true interests? Where on earth is such a fool's Paradise as that to be found? Conceding to the people of the fifteen states the ordinary and average human nature, its good and its evil, its weakness and its strength, I, for one, dare not say that the triumph of such a party ought not to be expected naturally and probably to disunite the States. With my undoubting convictions I know it would be folly and immorality in me to risk it.

Certainly there are in all sections and in all states, those who love the Union under the actual constitution as Washington did, as Jay, Hamilton, and Madison did; as Jackson, as Clay, as Webster loved it. Such even is the hereditary and habitual sentiment of the general American heart. But he has read life and books to little purpose, who has not learned, that "bosom friendships" may be "to resentments soured", and that no hatred is so keen, deep and ~~precious~~ ^{precious} as that.

"And to be wroth with one we love
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He has read the book of our history to still less purpose, who has not learned that the friendships of these states, sisters but rivals, sovereigns, each with a public life, and a body of interests, and sources of honor and shame of its own and within itself, distributed into two great opposing groups are of all human ties most exposed to such rupture and such transformation.

I have not time in these hasty lines, and there is no need, to speculate on the details of the modes in which the triumph of this party would do its work of evil. Its mere struggle to carry the Government, as that struggle is conducted, is mischievous to an extent incalculable. That thousands of the good men who have joined it deplore this is certain, but ~~it~~ does not mend the matter. I appeal to the honor and conscience of my country, that if it were the aim of a great party, by every species of access to the popular mind; by eloquence, by argument, by taunt, by sarcasm, by recrimination, by appeals to pride, shame, and natural rights, to prepare the nation for a struggle with Spain or England, ^{or Austria} it could not do its business more thoroughly. Many presses, many speakers, ~~very many~~, set a higher and wiser example, but the work is doing. If it accomplishes its object and gives the Government to the Northern section of States, I turn my eyes from the consequences. To the fifteen states of the South that Government will appear an alien Government. It will appear worse. It will appear a hostile Government. It will represent to their eye a vast region of states organized

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upon Antislavery, flushed by triumph, cheered onward by the voices of the pulpit, tribune, and press; its mission to ~~incorporate~~ inaugurate freedom and put down the oligarchy; its constitution, the glittering ^{and} sounding generalities of natural right which shake up the declaration of independence -
 And these and thus is the beginning of the end.

If a necessity could be made out for such a party, we might submit to it as to other unavoidable evil, and other certain danger. But where do they find that? Where do they pretend to find it? Is it to keep slavery out of the Territories? There is not one but Kansas in which slavery is possible. No man fears, no man hopes for slavery in Utah, New Mexico, Washington, ^{Oregon or Nebraska} Minnesota. A national party to give them to freedom is about as needful and about as sensible as a national party to keep Maine for freedom. And Kansas! Let that abused and profaned soil have ^{calm} peace within its borders, deliver it over to the ^{natural} national law of peaceful and spontaneous immigration; take off the ruffian hands; strike down the rifle and bowie knife, guard its ^{infancy} infancy and youth till it comes of age to choose for itself, and it will choose freedom for itself, and it will have forever what it chooses -

and fails when this policy, so easy, simple and just, is tried fairly, it will be time enough to resort to revolution. 44

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When this policy, so easy, simple and just, is tried and fails fairly, it will be time enough to resort to revolution. It

is in fact, because the duty of protection to the local settler was not performed, that the Democratic party has already, by the action of its great representative convention resolved to put out of office its own administration. That lesson will not and must not be lost on anybody. The Country demands that Congress, before it adjourns, give that Territory peace. If it do, time will inevitably give it freedom.

I have hastily and imperfectly expressed my opinion through the unsatisfactory form of a letter as to the immediate duty of Whigs. We are to do what we can to defeat and disband the geographical party. But by what specific action we can most effectually contribute to such a result is a question of more difficulty. It seems now to be settled that we present no candidate of our own. If we vote at all then, we vote for the nominee of the American or the nominee of the Democratic party. As between them I shall not venture to counsel the whigs of Maine but I deem it due to frankness and honor to say that while I entertain a high appreciation of the character and ability of Mr. Fillmore, I do not sympathize in any degree with the objects and creed of the particular party that nominated him, and do not approve of their organization and their tactics. Practically too, the contest in my judgment is between Mr. Buchanan and Col. Fremont. In these circumstances I vote for Mr. Buchanan. He has large experience in public affairs; his commanding capacity is universally acknowledged; his life is without a stain. I am con-

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strained to add that he seems at this moment, by the concurrence of circumstances, more completely than any other man to represent that sentiment of nationality, tolerant, warm, and comprehensive, without which, without increase of which, America is no longer America; and to possess at once the power and ^{the} dispositions to restore and keep that peace, within our borders, and without, for which our hearts all yearn; which all our interests demand, through which and by which alone we may hope to grow to the true greatness of nations.

I have the honor to be
your Obedient Servant.

Rufus Choate

To the Hon E. W. Farley and others
the Whig State Committee of Maine.

Presented to me by the Honorable Ephraim Wilder
Farley at New Castle in the State of Maine
this Twenty second day of July, A.D. 1870.
Cyrus Woodman.

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