

1835. Samuel J. May, New York Merchants vs. the Abolitionists

Source: Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Antislavery Conflict* (Boston, 1869), 127-28. Reprinted in William Loren Katz, *Eyewitness: A Living Documentary of the African American Contribution to American History* (Revised and Updated). New York: Simon & Schuster, 172.

At the annual meeting of the American Antislavery Society in May, 1835, I was sitting upon the platform of the Houston Street Presbyterian Church in New York, when I was surprised to see a gentleman enter and take his seat who, I knew, was a partner in one of the most prominent mercantile houses in the city. He had not been seated long before he beckoned me to meet him at the door. I did so. "Please walk out with me, sir" said he, "I have something of great importance to communicate." When we had reached the sidewalk he said, with considerable emotion and emphasis: "Mr. May, we are not such fools as not to know that slavery is a great evil, a great wrong. But it was consented to by the founders of our Republic. It was provided for in the Constitution of our Union. A great portion of the property of the Southerners is invested under its sanction; and the business of the North, as well as the South, has become adjusted to it. There are millions upon millions of dollars due from Southerners to the merchants and mechanics of this city alone, the payment of which would be jeopardized by any rupture between the North and the South. We cannot afford, sir, to let you and your associates succeed in your endeavor to overthrow slavery. It is not a matter of principle with us. It is a matter of business necessity. We cannot afford to let you succeed. And I have called you out to let you know, and to let your fellow-laborers know, that we do not mean to allow you to succeed. We mean, sir," said he, with increased emphasis- "we mean, sir, to put you Abolitionists down- by fair means if we can, by foul means if we must."