

Horace Greeley Denounces New York City Merchants

Business & Slavery

The New York Merchants & the Irrepressible Conflict

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Horace Greeley wrote in what was probably his most bitter diatribe against New York merchants:

“They fully adopt and approve the results of years of frauds, violence, outrage, and crime. They sustain the fruits of a political conspiracy conducted and perfected by loaferish, drunken, armed vagabonds, whose presence in their counting rooms or their offices, their halls, or their ante-chambers, they would not for an instance tolerate. They put themselves before the world, the confederates and accomplices after the fact, of the most scandalous frauds ever perpetrated in our history... We wish to ask gentlemen of probity, of character, like Mr. Henry Grinell, and Mr. Moses Taylor, and Mr. Gardiner Howland, and Mr. E. Caylus, who are opposed to forgery in private, why they desire to sustain it in public affairs? Is cheating and swindling any better in Kansas than it is on South Street, that they should countenance and approve it there while they would denounce it here? . . .

We say, then, that for what you are doing you have not a shadow of an excuse, and that your volunteered approval of the plan of admitting Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution makes you sharers and participators in the guilt of crimes which should make the nation blush. But, gentlemen, your responsibility does not stop here. By your public acts you are undermining public and private virtue- you are shaking the pillars of national integrity. How do you appear before the country? Why, as substantial citizens, honorable citizens, high-minded citizens claiming consideration for those moral qualities that adorn private life; yet, under no pressure of party or personal exigency, deliberately coming out, and under your own signature, voluntarily endorsing and approving the crimes of lying, fraud and forgery. And it is not done in a corner. Ever ballot-box stuffer, every political swindler and renegade in the country, knows it. Every liquorish scoundrel who makes politics a trade and cheating at elections a practice knows it. Every contemptible pipelayer and political intriguer knows it. Yes, gentlemen; and they must henceforth regard the benevolent authors of Arctic expeditions, the Howlands, the Dillons, the Shermans, the Posts as men who not only wink at such frauds as they practice, and for which they inwardly feel and know they deserve the Penitentiary, but absolutely approve them. The subterranean vaults of crime underlying society everywhere grows resonant with applause over such accessions of respectability, such homage to open-handed villainy. Gentlemen signers of the meeting to approve the final results of intensified Border-Ruffianism, who profess to hold your heads high in society as men of character, we leave you to settle this matter with your conscience. Go on in your corrupting and demoralizing process and how long think you before you have sown the wind to reap the whirlwind? Professing to have a stake in society, you prostrate the standard of public morality, prostrate your own character, break down the barriers between honesty and dishonesty, and then wonder, will you, at the rising tide of crime and general debauchery?”