

Jacob A. Hou
99.

LETTERS

FROM

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

TO

HIS CONSTITUENTS

OF THE

TWELFTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
IN MASSACHUSETTS.

TO WHICH IS ADDED

HIS SPEECH IN CONGRESS,

DELIVERED

FEBRUARY 9, 1837.

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Congress from presenting their petitions. There is an express provision of the Constitution that Congress shall pass no *law abridging* the right of petition; and here is a resolution, declaring that a member ought to be considered as regardless of the feelings of the House, the rights of the South, and an enemy to the Union, *for presenting a petition.*

Regardless of the feelings of the House! What have the feelings of the House to do with the free agency of a member in the discharge of his duty? One of the most sacred duties of a member is to present the petitions committed to his charge—a duty which he cannot refuse or neglect to perform, without violating his oath to support the Constitution of the United States. He is not, indeed, bound to present all petitions. If the language of the petition be disrespectful to the House, or to any of its members—if the prayer of the petition be unjust, immoral, or unlawful—if it be accompanied by any manifestation of intended violence or disorder on the part of the petitioners, the duty of the member to present it ceases; not from respect for the feelings of the House, but because these things themselves strike at the freedom of speech and action, as well of the House as of its members. Neither of these can be in the slightest degree affected by the mere circumstance of the condition of the petitioner, nor is there a shadow of reason why the feelings of the House should be outraged, by the presentation of a petition from slaves, any more than by petitions from soldiers in the army, from seamen in the navy, or from the working-women of a manufactory.

Regardless of the rights of the South! What are the rights of the South? What is the *South*? As a component portion of this Union, the population of the South consists of masters, of slaves, and of free persons, white and colored, without slaves. Of which of these classes would the *rights* be disregarded by the presentation of a petition from slaves? Surely not those of the slaves themselves; the suffering, the laborious, the *producing* class. Oh, no! there would be no disregard of *their* rights