





SPEECH

OR

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS, OF MASS.,

IN NATIONAL HALL, PHILADELPHIA,

AUGUST 28, 1860.

Mr. ADAMS spoke as follows :

I presume that I address the citizens of a place claiming to be the most conservative city in America. By the word "conservative" I mean averse to change, and most particularly unwilling to favor any movement which seems likely to unsettle the established ideas and the customary social and political relations which time has sanctioned and habit has rendered familiar to all. "Conservative." There is much virtue in that word. Although coming from a different and a more excitable community, I think that I, too, may claim to be conservative. I, too, am averse to change; I, too, am very unwilling to unsettle anything that is established on good and sufficient foundations. I even desire to preserve much that is called old, merely because it is old. For that reason, when I am at home I prefer to live in an old house, rather than to build a new one. Not that I think it the best, or the handsomest, or the most convenient, for in all these respects I well know that it is vastly inferior to modern constructions, but solely because it is old, and because my fathers lived there before me. If I choose to put up with the inconveniences of small rooms, or narrow windows, or uneven floors, for the sake of long habit and pleasant association of ideas, I do not know why any one has a right to find fault. Even if there were no other reason whatever, it is enough that I like it, and do not care to change, to justify me in my choice. To this extent it seems to me to be wise and proper to be conservative. Hence, if I apply this reasoning to matters of Government, I should say that I am perfectly satisfied with the Union and the Federal Constitution, with existing State and city and other municipal organizations, and do not therefore want to make a change. Nay, I would go further, and say that I care not to favor any plan which should appear to threaten or to disturb the useful tenor of their operations. This is what I call sound, conser-

vative, national doctrine. I suppose you to approve of it with me, so that to this extent we may be said to be quite agreed. So far, so good.

But now suppose we go a step forward. Let us assume that in course of time something turns up, that, if not attended to in season, threatens to make very serious changes for the worse, in the old system to which we are attached. Supposing, in my old house, for example, I discover the dry-rot beginning in the timbers, or that my foundation is starting a little, or perhaps my neighbor is building to shut out my light, or he is setting up a business that affects the purity of the air; supposing that he undertakes to keep thousands of hogs in a place so near that I have the stench in my rooms at all times of the day or night. What am I to do then? Must *he* be conservative here too? Must I make up my mind that I had better bear all this than make any noise about it? Must I insist on liking this change, and calling it excellent, for fear, if I complain or resist, that I may make my neighbor cross or violent, and that he may threaten to burn his house down, in order that mine may catch fire and burn down too? Perhaps this might be reckoned the conservative course too. But if that is what you call conservative, I certainly cannot agree with you any more. Here I am no longer conservative. I should call such a course folly, if not downright madness. My notion would be to act at once—yes, to remonstrate, to resist, and, if absolutely indispensable, to change altogether. The true conservative policy in such a case is not submission, but *reform*—something that will restore to me the advantages of my old way of life; something that will prevent me suffering by a most unpleasant change.

Fellow citizens, if I now apply the same sort of reasoning to the present condition of our political affairs, you will see at once where I am coming out. The time has arrived for us to look

careless as to the condition of our Federal Government, or we have reason to suspect that a sort of rot is creeping into the timbers, and a malignant disease spreading so as to infect the nation, when the question arises, whether it is not wiser to let it go on without any further attempt at prevention, or whether it is not the really wise course to set about a plan of reformation, so that we may continue to enjoy it, as we have done. In other words, our duty is a reform. We must be up, and abate the evil humors. We must look sharply into the causes that make the trouble, and, if possible, prevent them from being matters grow any worse, for a moment is to be lost. If we act at all, we must do so now, right off, without an interval being.

Is there any body here that denies the fact that some of them are indispensable? I know of no better names, if be the office-holders and their friends, who do not the country, who consider themselves particularly benefited by keeping things as they are. With this exception, whatever else we will let out, at least in the free States, and very many in the slave States, agree in this point. Dissatisfaction with the existing administration of the General Government is general, if not universal. Look for a moment at the various political organizations that have sprung up in this canvass for the Presidency. All but one of the four, and that one apparently composed of office-holders, insist upon reform. At least two-thirds of what was lately the Democratic party in the free States are as loud-mouthed at all this as any one. They declare their want of confidence in Mr. Buchanan and his adherents, and their conviction of a necessity for reform—that is, a thorough change of men and measures. The friends of the old Whig party—say just the same; and the Republicans are more emphatic than either on that point. There has not been so much unanimity of sentiment on any one subject in politics for thirty years, since the time of the second election of James Monroe. It stands to reason, then, that there must be very strong grounds for such a singular result. This universal conviction among persons not in agreement about anything else, goes to prove that not only are there great abuses in the Government, but that there is an absolute necessity for immediate measures of correction. This, then, is not a time for folding our hands, or standing aside, and calling it conservatism. No. In this case, true conservatism is change. It is reform. It is the restoration of the old, by cutting out without hesitation the material that is rotter or diseased, and putting in its place what is sound and new.

Having settled this among ourselves, having agreed that our present duty is reform, the next subject to consider is the best and most practicable way to get at it. And here it is necessary to remind you that no reform can be really effective, which is not carried into execution by vigorous and capable hands. It will not do to trust the operation to the feeble or the incompe-

tent. There must not only be capacity in the agents, but there must also be corresponding strength in the popular confidence to sustain them. We all of us very well know that a single man, let him be ever so well fitted for the task, could of himself do nothing. He must have support and co-operation on the part of others. And just in the proportion that these others are strong enough and numerous enough to constitute what is called popular opinion, will be the probability of establishing some system that may be useful and permanent. To expect of a small party organization, even supposing that accident should make it possible to try, that it should succeed in executing any distinctive policy of its own, would be unreasonable, if not positively absurd. Such a serious thing as reform cannot be confined within the circle of the Executive department.

The spirit that animates it must be spread among the people at large, and among their representatives everywhere. Especially must it predominate in both branches of the Legislature. We all know that everything like the cutting off of abuses must meet with dogged and steady opposition from those classes the most subject to be affected by it. They will set heaven and earth in motion to resist the movement from step to step. They will resort to the thousand and one expedients to raise jealousies and disseminate distrust, which are found so effectual in bringing to nought the best-conceived enterprises. In order to overbear all this resistance, and make it of no effect, there is a necessity for a united and compact association of the common strength. Men must be combined into a political party, acting together for the securing of common objects. They must understand and have confidence in one another. They must have a head to devise as well as hands to execute and multitudes to confirm. Without the presence of all these elements, no real movement under a popular form of government is likely to terminate in good. Without harmony and union of numbers, there can be no satisfying popular opinion. Hence the inexpediency at all times of inaugurating any kind of novel policy in a Government where there is not a large array of people prepared to accept and to maintain it.

Now, let me ask of you, if you really believe such a reform necessary at this time, where will you look for the requisite agency to execute it? You must find some popular organization or other to act with, or you will do nothing at all. You have got to select your instruments; you have got to elevate your candidates for high place in the Government, before you can begin to hope to do any good. Who shall they be? That is the question. In order to arrive at some conclusion, let us consider what state of things it is that we have before us.

I have already alluded to the fact that we have four distinct forms of popular organization in the present canvass for the Presidency. You all know them well enough to save me the need of much explanation. There is the party supporting Mr. Breckinridge, and that supporting

Mr. Douglas. These are the fragments of the former Democratic party, but now opposing each other with more vehemence than they do their old adversaries. Then there is the party of Mr. Bell, composed, as I said before, almost exclusively of old Whigs. And, lastly, there is the Republican party, which presents Mr. Abraham Lincoln.

One thing is here worthy of notice; and that is, that it is universally acknowledged to be true, that but one of these four parties stands the smallest chance of success in electing its candidate by the popular voice. The very best that the three others can hope for is to gain electoral votes enough to defeat any choice at all. By this means, as you all know, the election of a President would be transferred by the Constitution to the House of Representatives. Here it is well known that one out of the four must be shut out. The Constitution confines the selection between those three having the highest number of votes. And at the proper time the House must proceed to elect one out of three. Of these three, nobody doubts that Mr. Lincoln would be one. But who the two others may be, I think nobody at this moment is ready to predict with confidence. The prevailing opinion now is, that it would be Messrs. Breckinridge and Bell, and that Mr. Douglas would be shut out.

Let us, for the sake of argument, suppose that this is so, and that the candidates are Messrs. Lincoln, Breckinridge, and Bell. Which of these would you select, with any hope of executing your project of necessary reform?

Very certainly it would not be Mr. Breckinridge. For he is the only one of all the candidates who is wholly against reform. He thinks things well enough as they stand. He is supported by all the office-holders, under whom the abuses complained of have been tolerated. He is the candidate of Mr. Buchanan, who has not deemed it unbecoming the dignity of his office to come forward and advocate the election of his successor. Of course, if you vote for Mr. Breckinridge, you vote in effect to approve the policy of the very Administration which it is so universally deemed indispensable to condemn. Of course, then, if you are honestly a reformer, Mr. Breckinridge cannot be your choice.

Very certainly you would not select Mr. Bell. For though his will might be good enough to execute a reform, it is very plain that the basis of his popular support would not be in any way commensurate with its successful execution. We all know the precise extent of the co-operating power on which he could rely in the Legislative department as at present constituted. We all know that in the Senate he would have just two friends out of the sixty-six members, and one of these he is certain to lose next year; and in the House he might get as many as twenty-four out of two hundred and thirty Representatives. Now I ask you, as men of sense, what sort of an Administration would you be likely to have, so far as any certainty of a definite policy of reform is

concerned, with such a basis of popular confidence as is shown here?

But let us change the programme again, and suppose Mr. Bell to be the candidate shut out of the House by the Constitution, and Mr. Douglas to come in in his place as one of the three highest candidates. Is Mr. Douglas any more promising agent of reform? Not a bit. In the Senate of the United States he has but a single friend, and he is certain to lose him next year; whilst in the House the number of his friends can scarcely be said to exceed twenty. It would seem, then, that, so far as effective assistance in the great work is concerned, there is little to choose between these two. Each of them is equally powerless in controlling the means of executing his designs.

Then, again, you should call to mind the circumstances under which the election of either of these candidates would be made. He must be chosen in the House of Representatives. That is to say, you will, with your eyes open, put either Mr. Bell or Mr. Douglas into that body, to take his chance against Mr. Lincoln. In other words, you will set one candidate for reform against another, with no expectation of electing your friend, excepting by the aid of the adherents of Mr. Breckinridge, who are known to be totally opposed to reform. I shall not now enlarge upon the dangers to which the country will be exposed by the process of an election in the House, nor upon the opening it would make to all sorts of intrigue, and to corruption, even worse than any that we are trying to break up. The time has been when many of the worthy and respectable citizens who seem now to look with complacency upon the possibility of squeezing Mr. Bell into such a scene, were among the loudest to deprecate the happening of any such contingency, and to exhort their fellow-citizens not to throw away their votes, which could elect a good candidate, in the wild expectation of helping the cause of some third person who could not be chosen.

I remember that was the talk in 1844, when we were many of us engaged in the advocacy of Henry Clay against Mr. James K. Polk. I remember that at that time I did what I could, within the range of my feeble powers, to present that doctrine to the minds of those who were leaning to the support of a third candidate. I remember, also, that many of them persevered in their policy; and that through their action Mr. Clay was defeated, and Mr. Polk was finally elected. And the issue of that election, and its effect upon the subsequent policy of the country, we all know. Just so it may again be now, supposing any friends of reform to vote for Mr. Bell or for Mr. Douglas, well knowing that the election of either of them by the people is utterly out of the question, but hoping that by some sort of legerdemain, by hook or by crook, if the election can be defeated before the people, and they can go into the House of Representatives, one or the other of them will succeed there.

How is he to do it, excepting through the votes of the Administration States, friends of Mr.

Breckinridge? Surely the Republicans will not abandon their strong ground. It would be unreasonable to expect so large a party to move a foot from the position they occupy as the true friends of reform. To trade, or to barter, or to higgler for votes, at the expense of their principles, would at once shatter the confidence in their honesty, which is their only solid basis of support. But if there can be little hope in that quarter, then these reformers must go to their opponents, to those who uphold the present Administration, to those who have been giving countenance to, if they have not themselves been actively engaged in, the very abuses which it is the object of all honest men to correct. Of course, it follows that any combination made with these persons that will secure the election of either of the candidates can only be made by a surrender, or at least a compromise, of the hostility which should animate them against the commission of wrong by them. Need I add, that an election alone would not be enough? It would be absolutely indispensable to a person chosen, to have some basis broad enough to rest his Administration upon. That basis must be made of those who vote for him. It will then happen that the very class of people who are now held responsible for their misdeeds must be continued in office, to contend with a Republican opposition not disposed to qualify, or compromise, or tolerate the wrong-doers. In other words, there would be no change, no reform at all, and the work would yet remain to be done at some future election.

If I have made myself understood, then I think you will see that the only way by which we can hope to gain a real good in the election is by effecting a choice by the popular vote in the first instance. And this can only be done by uniting heartily in the support of Abraham Lincoln. We all know that this canvass differs in its nature from any preceding one for twenty-five years past. We all know that if Abraham Lincoln be not elected by the people, there is no probability that anybody else will be. It is for us to determine whether he shall be President by our votes, or whether somebody else whom we may not desire shall have a chance to wriggle through the House of Representatives. This is the true question; and if you are really the friends of reform which you profess to be, the only way open to your success is through the elevation of Abraham Lincoln and of his friends, who, with your aid, are numerous enough and determined enough to carry their point, in the face of all the resistance that can be combined into opposition.

But, independently of all considerations connected with the practicability of executing any movement of reform whatever, there is another and more potent reason why the selection of Abraham Lincoln as the agent is absolutely an imperative duty. A reform, to be in any way beneficial, must be searching and thorough. It must go down to the very root of the matter. Now, however much the professions may be sounded abroad from the other parties, there are

reasons connected with the nature of their position and alliances which render it hardly reasonable to anticipate from them any very energetic effort to probe the abuses of the present Government to the core. It is the Republican party alone which declares its wish to expose the influence which the advocates of slavery exert in introducing and perpetuating these abuses in the General Government. It is here that the real trouble is to be found. If any of you have a doubt of this, let him look at the evidence in the Covode investigation, article Lecompton. Then he will see what slavery has to do with corruption. Everything else is merely superficial. The true evil is to be found in the fact that the slaveholding interest has been driven to the expedient of attempting to bribe the people of the free States with their own money, in order to maintain itself in the control of the Government. That is the solemn truth, and the history of the Lecompton struggle proves it beyond contradiction.

And here I must stop to say a few words about this matter of slavery. I know very well that in this city there are a great many people who dislike to meddle with it, and who honestly believe that if all of us would only consent to stop talking about it, and to shut our eyes so as not to see it, then the country would be perfectly happy. To all such persons I have only to say this in answer: There are some things which men can do, and it is right and proper in all such cases for them to try. Success will, perhaps, compensate for the exertion. But whenever they undertake to control a power that is entirely beyond their reach, then they are wasting both their time and pains. They may as well give it up first as last. For anybody to insist that an evil does not exist, when everybody knows that it does, is pure folly. If my neighbor's house is burning, and the flames are already throwing their red glare into my windows, of what use is it to me to shut my eyes and say there is no fire? Will that save my house? If a heavy flood is covering the roofs of the smaller tenements around mine, and is rapidly rising to my third story, how will it benefit me to keep my eyes fixed straight up in the sky, and say that there is no rain? Will such a course stay the water? For my part, I consider it proof of great feebleness of character to insist upon ignoring the pressure of an evil, because it is unpleasant to be forced to think of a remedy; to suffer it to grow without molestation, because any attempt to check it may be attended with difficulty. It has been very clear to my eyes for many years, that this subject of slavery in America has got to be met by the people of the United States sooner or later—that there is no way to escape its baneful influence—and that the only thing left for us is to take right hold of it, examine it calmly, quietly, in a statesmanlike manner, to fix its relations to the government of the country at the minimum rate of its disturbing force, and there to keep it for the future forever. I do not believe in the wisdom of the policy that has been adopted along back, which is, to let it have its

full swing, under the pretence that it is the safest plan to let it entirely alone. I do not believe that it is right to pretend that it does not gain strength in the Federal Government, when we see with our eyes how completely the Senate, the President, and the Supreme Court, are controlled by it. I do not believe in the propriety of holding still about the attempt to saddle upon us a wicked policy, because, if we do not, we may run the risk of driving the slaveholding States to desperate and suicidal extremes.

My notion may be wrong, but I hold it from conviction, that the way to deal with this matter is in no respect different from that which common sense teaches us to deal with every other critical question in life. That is, to examine it patiently, firmly, boldly, and, after a full and satisfactory investigation of its political bearings, and of the bad effects it may produce to us, as a nation, to adopt and to execute a plan of counteraction, in no bad spirit, but purely to save the whole country from being unnecessarily and injuriously affected by that, a thing which ought to be strictly confined within the limits in which it actually exists. In my mind, this is or ought to be always known as a Government favorable to human freedom; and so far as any influence or any exertion that I may be able to use is concerned, however feeble that is, it will remain such. And whenever the institution of slavery appears to me to be endeavoring to undermine the policy of the Government, so as to turn it against freedom and for slavery, I shall take a citizen's liberty to speak out about it, just the same as I should about any other doctrine or policy that I hold to be mischievous or dangerous to the public good.

Now, let me go back a moment to where I was when I first touched this matter of slavery. I was saying that no reform could be at all thorough in the General Government which did not begin by changing the spirit in which it was administered, in connection with this particular interest. Nobody who is not willing to blind his eyes and to close his ears to what has been going on during the last eight years can fail to understand the use that has been made of the Federal authority to the maintenance and extension of the slave power in that time. We all know well enough how the last Administration acted after the repeal of the Missouri compromise, in favoring the various desperate attempts to force a slaveholding Government upon the free Territory of Kansas. These facts have gone into history, and are beyond the possibility of contradiction. So we all know how assiduously the present Administration continued and enlarged that policy by the abuse of its influence over members of Congress from the free States in the case of the Lecompton Constitution and the English bill, as well as by its indefatigable exertions to palm off the extra-judicial opinions of a slaveholding bench of Judges of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case upon the people of the country, as being established and recognised law. We all remember this.

We all feel the use that has been made of the

Executive authority in these cases, to discourage the doctrines of liberty, and to extend the influence of slavery. Now, I maintain that this sort of action should be all of it reformed by the voice of the people. It is all wrong from the beginning, and it ought to be made right. But nobody will be likely really to make it right, unless it be Abraham Lincoln and his friends in the Republican party. Mr. Bell certainly will not; and Mr. Douglas, if we are to judge by his submission to take any slaveholding decree that the same Judges may hereafter make, and an ultra slaveholding candidate for Vice President on his back in advance, will not be likely to get very far. There is, then, no other choice for the true believers in reform. All efforts made in any other direction will be in a great measure wasted. If you honestly mean to restore freedom as the rule of action for a Government professing to be founded on the principles of the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln is your man.

Even in the secondary light of money transactions, let us now see the connection which slavery has had in fostering the corrupt practices of the present Government. I do not know whether you have yet been made fully aware of the fact, which appears tolerably well established by the testimony given before the Covode Investigating Committee of Congress, that the people's money—yes, your money and my money, which we give exclusively for the purpose of paying the ordinary expenses of the Federal system—has been constantly and perseveringly directed into particular channels called contracts, by means of which such great profits have been given to particular persons, as to enable them to devote large sums to the object of sustaining presses, and securing the election to Congress of Representatives in the free States who will justify and defend any and everything which the slaveholding party may require. Nay, even more than this. Your money and my money has been used without scruple to sow the seeds of division and discord among ourselves to such a degree, that even though a large majority may desire to effect some useful and permanent reform, we shall be sure to fail in doing anything at all, because we do not agree in our choice of the agents through whom to execute it. This was the policy of 1856, when the friends of Mr. Fillmore, in their innocent simplicity, were led directly into the Democratic trap, baited with the principles of Native Americanism. The divisions then fostered in this very city and county of Philadelphia was the real cause of the failure at that election of the movement for reform, and of the continuance of the corrupt practices which have been since exposed. But although the evidence of this truth is sufficiently displayed, the same agencies are once more at work, in the hope of once more effecting the same object. In the free States at least, the name of Mr. Bell is held forth solely for the purpose of division and the continuance of the corrupting slaveholding supremacy in the General Government. And hostile as the same authority has shown itself to the success of Mr.

Douglas, it is not averse to the use of such power as he may acquire in the free States, by catching votes under a separate organization and for a delusive doctrine, to the end of dividing and weakening and destroying the movement for reform. *Divide et impera* was a maxim of ambitious leaders thousands of years ago. *Divide and rule by dividing your opponents* is the instinctive lesson of a great political association now.

Fellow citizens, I address you in the words of sad and serious soberness, without exaggeration, and without an attempt to appeal to your passions. Are you seriously and truly discontented with the course of the present ruling power at Washington? Do you believe that it has squandered your money, abused your power, and perverted your principles, for the sake of sustaining a policy which your conscience and your reason unite in pronouncing to be wholly unjustifiable? Do you entertain a hope that something may be done to rescue the reputation of the country, now notoriously discredited in the eyes of the world by the mortifying disclosures of the last few years? Do you really believe in the truth of the declarations made by your ancestors, that there is such a thing as human liberty, too sacred to be touched by any tyrannical hand; that there is such a thing as Government intended to protect human rights, and not to destroy them; that there is such a thing as love, the exponent of benevolence in construing the privileges of mankind; that, in fine, there is such a thing as downright, independent honesty, without which no forms of authority can be anything but a mockery? I say, fellow citizens, do you believe in all these things? Then the hour for you to be up and doing is *now*. The way is open. Unite with the only association of men who have it in their power, and who likewise desire to effect your object. Declare for the party of reform. The honest men of America constitute an immense majority of the population. The only thing needed at this time is that they should unite to dictate a policy, and to name the men to execute it, and the honor of the country may yet be redeemed. We may again be what we once were, proud of the work of our hands, because it is good.

Fellow citizens, I come not here before you to praise particular men, or to censure others. I never was, in my youth, a hero-worshipper, neither do I feel disposed to become so at my present time of life. My preference is rather to analyze the principles that move the action of great political combinations of men, than to dwell upon the merits or demerits of single individuals. Yet I cannot forget the importance of selecting suitable agents to carry out even the best purposes. I acknowledge the necessity of explaining the reasons for my confidence in the candidates I support, as well as for my faith in the principles I profess. With Mr. Lincoln I have never had the opportunity of a personal acquaintance. I cannot, therefore, speak of him from knowledge. But I have taken some pains to inform myself, by reading his published speeches, and by inqui-

ry from persons who have means of knowing him familiarly. And the result of my reflections is this. I think that his discussion in 1858, with Mr. Douglas, shows him to advantage as a better logician and a sounder statesman, whilst he is incomparably superior in one great province of political duty—I mean in tracing the connection between the higher law of pure morality with the obligations of public life. From the character of his argument, I should infer that he was a man of ability—and still more, that he was a man of integrity. Whatever else there may be in a party of reform, one thing we must have, and that is an honest man, an incorruptible man, an independent man. Such a man the testimony of all my witnesses unites in representing him to be. That is the man for the present emergency. I believe that we may safely trust him.

But let the intentions of the person for whom we vote be what they may, it should be recollected that his ability to execute them must, after all, depend upon the degree in which he is supported by the popular view. I do not conceal from myself that, if elected, Mr. Lincoln is destined, in all probability, to serious trials of his firmness as well as of his energies. Whatever these may be, his best action will gain prodigiously in force from the knowledge that he enters upon his duties the representative of an overwhelming mass of public sentiment. Especially is this essential because from the necessity of the case he must, at first at least, look for his support mainly in the free States of the Union. We all know that there exists in the slaveholding States a species of despotism which renders even the expression of an opinion adverse to its supremacy somewhat dangerous. And this despotism undertakes to deny the right of any one there to advocate or support Mr. Lincoln. The proper remedy for this is time for the development of his policy. Resting upon the broad basis of the confidence of a very large number of the voting population, this space of time can be afforded to him; and opportunity will be given to show that, however thorough the reform, it will be effected by legitimate means, and only for legitimate ends.

Having no right to complain, the resistance of the violent men in the slaveholding States will lose its popular force, and the treats of secession and disunion will do injury only to those who make them. This process of menace has been carried on so incessantly for years back, to deter us from doing our plain duty to the country and ourselves, that I, for one, am thoroughly tired of it. I do not believe it will be sustained by the sober and sound sense of the quiet citizens of the South. We have humored and indulged it so long, and given way so constantly, to the sacrifice of our own convictions of right, without producing the smallest effect in putting a stop to it, that it seems to me expedient now to try the other way for once. Let us do right. Let us insist upon reform in the policy of the General Government exclusively within the sphere in which we have the most unquestionable privilege to exercise the authority vested in



a constitutional majority of the people, and then let us see who will be so unreasonable as to call our action into question by a resort to suicidal measures. It is said to be a custom with the Japanese, that when a man imagines himself to have been affronted by another, he does not call that other to account, but straightway proceeds to rip up his own bowels, and thus put an end to himself. So it may be, indeed, with the good people of the slave States. They may choose to kill themselves purely to spite us. But I do not believe it: I have too good an opinion of their common sense. They are impulsive, it is true, but they are by no means idiots. They have demagogues, who go about talking nonsense merely to excite men's passions, as well as we. But the great body of the citizens I believe to be perfectly sound: and if once convinced that the majority seek only to reinstate in the Government the very same principles upon which it was originally started, under the direction of George Washington, they will disavow all treasonable counsels, and consent to share in the blessings which, under our happy system, all parts of this magnificent country equally enjoy.

It remains, then, to be seen, whether the honest and independent voters of the United States are so far convinced of the responsibility pressing upon them at this crisis as to unite together to reform the Government, and to give stability to a liberal administration. The question is between order and system, as prefigured by the elevation of Lincoln, and intrigue, confusion, weakness, and discord, among a batch of competing candidates, not one of whom has the confidence of any large portion of the people. Choose ye, then, under which banner you will enlist. Can I permit myself to doubt which it will be? If I did, I should be insulting your understanding not less than denying your patriotism.

Let us suppose for a moment that Mr. Breckinridge could be elected. How are you going to gain by that? Mr. Breckinridge is the candidate of the extreme wing of the slaveholding, secession, disunion people in the Southern States; the same men who threatened last winter that they would prevent a Speaker from being elected by a plurality, even though they knew that success in such a plan might bring on a dissolution of the Government; the same men who talked the rankest treasonable talk all the season about what they would do if the people of these States should elect certain persons to the Presidency whom they did not like. I am very well aware of the fact that Mr. Breckinridge himself has disavowed all sympathy with such doctrines, by the earnestness with which he has reiterated his devotion to the Union. But it is always well in similar cases to extend our view a little beyond the mere incident of the election. We are bound to bear in mind, when we vote for a candidate, the precise position in which he may be placed after he is chosen—who are his friends and advisers, and what his policy will be. Obviously Mr. Breckinridge can find these only in the quarter from which he will have been sustained before he is chosen. We have then a right to

presume that his Administration will be simply an aggravated form of the present one. We have a right to presume that the cardinal principle of it will be the perpetuation, the protection, and the extension of slavery—the fortification of the political doctrines proclaimed in the Supreme Court by the decision on Dred Scott; and I do not hesitate to declare it, as my own opinion, that an early measure will be the retraction of the old policy of the country on the abolition of the slave trade. All this I say is unavoidable, whatever may be the personal feelings of Mr. Breckinridge, if he succeeds as the candidate of the extreme party of the slaveholders. He must go with his friends, or he can do nothing. He must be the exponent of extreme opinions, or he will be at the mercy of his opponents, and his Administration will come to an end as lamentable as the present one has done. In the mean time, the country will gain no respite from the agitation which has so long disturbed it. For you may rest assured, that so long as the old principles of human liberty are not recognised as the rule of action in the General Government, just so long will there be an Opposition that will leave nothing undone within its legitimate sphere to effect a peaceful and permanent establishment of its policy. With this power, victory is only a question of time.

As to the scheme of presenting Mr. Bell, with the idea of reinstating the old Whig notions, I must be permitted to say that I regard it as almost exclusively designed in the free States to maintain and uphold the existing authority in the Federal Government. It is aimed as a blow at the Republican movement, by dividing the sentiment which ought to animate the free States. The proof of this is found in the way that it has been tolerated by the friends of the other candidates opposed to Mr. Lincoln. They all understand the fatuity of the idea of restoring a defunct party. As well might you undertake to push back the current of the Mississippi! As well might you pretend that you would place a statue on the eternally-frozen apex of Chimborazo! No man, with the smallest conception of what belongs to the character of a statesman, will presume to affirm that that can have been a nomination made in good faith, which is made without any regard to the questions that really agitate the nation, and which is based upon principles that not a handful of men can be found in America to dispute. If Mr. Bell could by any possibility be elected, the first thing he would have to do would be to take his side on present questions between the two, and the *only* two, parties really based upon existing conflicts of opinion. Without the co-operation of members of one or the other of these two parties, he could not carry on the Government a week. We all know that, who know anything of the practical operation of our system. The President of the United States, as the head of a great party, is a very powerful officer. But if without opinions and without men to support a policy, he is no heavier than a feather blown about by every wind. The attempt, then, to present him to the

country as a candidate without distinctive principles on the issues of the day, is either made without good faith, and solely to distract the ranks of the reformers—or, if honestly made, it is purely a sentimental movement, without a particle of practical value in the disposal of a single living question. In either case, a vote given for Mr. Bell would count no more towards any valuable result in our present emergency than it if were thrown away upon any one of us here present.

With respect to the third candidate, Mr. Douglas, the same remark cannot be applied to him. He is distinguished for one idea, which he proposes as a sovereign remedy for every existing difficulty. He has repeated it so frequently, that there is no excuse for any of us if we do not master it. He is for permitting people everywhere to do as they like about slavery, provided only that they have come together and decided the point under an organic act of some kind or other. To him the difference is wholly immaterial, whether they establish or prohibit slavery, whilst living under the jurisdiction of the United States. He would recognise their action in either case with equal good will. I presume that he would, of course, follow out his doctrine to its farther logical consequences, and entertain a similar impartiality if the same community came with polygamy, or incest, or a promiscuous intercourse, or private assassination, or any other institution of that sort likewise incorporated into their social system. My objection to this doctrine is, that it is sadly defective in morals, and equally unsound in politics. To say that no community would ever be likely to do anything so bad, and therefore that my objection has no practical value, is not a good answer. For the history of the world will show that at one time or another each of these practices has been legalized by some community.

Hence, I am not prepared to sever the cord which in my mind always indissolubly connects great principles of morals with every discussion of legislation and of government. Neither am I prepared to throw to the winds all regard for the fundamental doctrines of the patriots of the last century, which rested the rights of men upon something a little less arbitrary and capricious than distinctions of race; which protected liberty against the assault of mere brute force, even

though the latter came clothed in all the solemnity of a law of its own making. If these are all the improvements patented by the distinguished Senator from Illinois, they carry but little value in my eye. It may, indeed, be true, that in general their practical effect might be to throw all the new Territories into the hands of the more active and enterprising settlers from the free States, who would be sure to destroy slavery by the process of unfriendly legislation. And thus the preponderance of freedom would be permanently established. But there is such a thing as purchasing an advantage at too dear a rate. I must continue to esteem Thomas Jefferson a better legislator than Mr. Douglas, as well as a more comprehensive statesman. He sowed great principles, to yield their rich stores of wholesome fruit in all coming time, whilst our contemporary scatters wheat and tares indiscriminately, and with perfect indifference which may grow up strongest, and choke the other. I know not how it may be with others, but, in my humble judgment, Mr. Douglas's success would scarcely indicate that restoration of the purest doctrines of the fathers which it is the desire of most of us to bring round.

There is, then, but a single safe way of disposing of the present question. That is, to vote for the candidate of a party which is united, and harmonious, and sincerely bent upon an honest and patriotic object—the restoration of the Government to its original policy, the establishment of a system of liberty and law. Elect Abraham Lincoln, and you will give to the world a pledge that you have not lost the spirit of your fathers: that you are still, as they were before you, the friends of intelligent and well-regulated freedom all over the globe. Philadelphia can do much towards this desirable result. She owes it to herself, to her ancient reputation, to her future fame, to give her helping hand in this emergency, to determine the national policy in a wise and liberal direction, and to confirm the Government, instead of permitting it to fall into impotent hands of petty factions. I know that you who are here present will do your duty, and so will multitudes who are not within the reach of my voice: and Heaven, in its mercy, grant that your and their truest efforts in this election be crowned with the only success that we desire—the prosperity and the glory of our common country.



