

SPEECH

OF

HON. EPHRAIM R. ECKLEY,

OF OHIO,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, March 26, 1864.

Mr. ECKLEY said :

Mr. CHAIRMAN: More than three months have elapsed since we first met as members of the Thirty-Eighth Congress. During that time I have heard what has been said, and witnessed what has been done. No Congress ever met with greater responsibilities. A war, greater in magnitude than any the world ever saw, is raging around us, dealing out its untold calamities, and leaving behind a train which the historian will grow weary in attempting to describe, and, sick and discouraged, will give it up in despair. But if reason had ruled our counsels, and able, faithful, and patriotic men had been intrusted with the administration of the Government, this war with its long train of evils could have been avoided.

For more than a quarter of a century the States now in rebellion had been preparing for the overthrow of the Government. Through the means of a powerful political organization they had done much toward effecting their diabolical purpose. By that means they had annexed Texas, had inaugurated a war with Mexico, had attempted to spread African slavery over all our Territories, had tried to keep young California out of the Union as a free State, and had broken up that time-honored compact, the Missouri compromise, that the black pall of human slavery might overshadow the virgin plains of Kansas, and had held up the threat of civil war as the consequence of opposition to these measures.

The fearless love of freedom of the bold adventures on the Pacific coast for a time postponed the evil hour, by the formation of a free State without the aid of Congress. The vigorous emigration to the fertile and inviting regions of Kansas drove out the hordes of bandits and lawless vagrants who, as the emissaries of the Southern States, were attempting by violence to carry out the folly of Congress and defeat the will of the people of that Territory by trampling down their most sacred rights, which were guaranteed to them by the Constitution, and secured as an inheritance by the God of their fathers. In despite of their organized bandits, their acts of lawlessness, of fraud, perjury, and murder, she emerged from the flames purified by the fire, and laid at the feet of the Government her free institutions, and demanded a place in the sisterhood of States, with a Constitution prohibiting slavery forever.

The Southern States were, through the means of Southern Conventions, attempting to control the commerce of the country and to prevent their people from trading in Northern cities. Southern men were seeking seats in Congress for the avowed pur-

pose of bringing about a dissolution of the Union. While these things were taking place a close political organization governed the Democratic party both North and South. They acted together and voted side by side. If one faltered he was denounced and expelled from his party.

The unprecedented acts, the revolutionary measures of the South, alarmed the North, and they attempted to arrest them in their wild and dangerous conduct, proposing no means not clearly within the Constitution; for they had a right to say that the annexation of Texas was unwise, that a war should be avoided, and that our Territories should be free.

These eventful things had now passed, and the shock of the excitement had not impaired the power of the Government. Its departments, executive, legislative, and judicial, were in full force. Through the political organization of Southern rebels and Northern Democrats every department of the Government was under their control when approached the great struggle of 1860.

History has already recorded the misplaced and betrayed confidence of the country. At this important time the robber's hand held the purse-strings of the nation; thieves occupied the Cabinet; treason unrebuked boldly proclaimed itself in the Senate and in the House; weak imbecility filled the Executive Chair, and corruption stalked boldly forth at noonday.

In this condition of things came the day of political trial, when, in the manner prescribed by the Constitution, the present able and patriotic Chief Magistrate was chosen President of the United States, and the power departed from the South. The Southern States now set about their diabolical work. One after another they declared their ordinance of secession, placed themselves in open hostility to the Government, disregarding its laws and defying its power. Civil war had actually commenced, and Sumter was reduced. The President elect, amid threats of assassination, reached the capital, and organized his administration; but the Treasury had been robbed, our arsenals were empty, our Navy scattered, while the capital itself was beleaguered and threatened by an army of rebels.

During this eventful chapter of high-handed, bold, and treasonable designs, neither the President, Senator, or Representative sounded any note of alarm, or employed any means, or sought any aid, to arrest the murderous hand, now raised to take the life of the Government and plunge us into civil war. What patriot but must blush at conduct such as this? What American but regrets the day when such a party held the power of the Government? And what philanthropist that will not weep as he looks over the graves of the mighty dead, visits the scenes of deadly conflict, or ponders over the broken circles and bereaved hearth-stones of those who have suffered by this terrific war, which might have been prevented by the party then in power? A party that now coolly asks to be reinstated in the administration of the Government; that proposes to restore a country it has distracted; to give peace to a weary people that it had broken up;

to enforce the laws, the majesty of which they had disregarded, and restore a Constitution, the power of which they had condemned. But how do they propose to do it? By a dishonorable compromise, giving up the contest, and recognizing the independence of the Southern confederacy. Such a profanation of the temples of civil liberty could receive naught but the indignant scorn of the American people; the heart would sicken at the spectacle; the world would judge us unworthy of free government; and the doom of anarchy and ruin would be our inheritance; while the progenitors of the destruction of such a Government as this would live in history as the Ephesian incendiary, immortal in infamy. They would take their places side by side with Cromwell, Catiline, and Judas, would live despised by the good and the great, scorned by the world, and at whom the beasts as they passed would turn up their noses in disgust.

The commotion in the country indicated its only course, that was, to bury past political differences and unite all parties in putting down the rebellion. The Republicans, then holding the political power in most of the Northern States, abandoned their organization, and with them united many loyal Democrats and what remained of the American party, and formed the Union party that holds now, and is destined to hold the power in this Government.

The remnant of the Democratic party, such as is represented on the other side of this Hall, refused to coalesce to save the country. Party with them was paramount to every other consideration. They had been weakened in the North by the loss of the loyal men that had acted with them. They were further divided by the acts of the rebel States. Their great power was in the South. And the Northern and Southern wings were now separated from each other. In battle array stood great armies between them; yet who has not marked the wonderful coincidence of thought and expression of the remote sections of this great party? The South claimed that they possessed the constitutional right of secession. And Mr. Buchanan said the Government had no power to coerce. Jefferson Davis charged that our Army went South to murder and plunder. And it is repeated here that the mission of our Army was blood and famine. Davis said that the arrest of citizens was a violation of their constitutional rights. It is repeated from this Hall that arbitrary arrests are unconstitutional. Davis said that the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* by the President was without the shadow of authority; and we hear it declared here that the only safeguard of the citizen's liberty has been trampled down. The Southern rebels say that our resources are exhausted, and that bankruptcy was staring us in the face. The same thing is amplified in this House. Mr. Voorhees said :

"Our fall from bounding wealth and unlimited resources to pinched and shrunken poverty and cowering bankruptcy, is as certain and as fatal under our present policy as the fall of Lucifer, the morning star, from heaven."

The rebels say that the President is exercising a more despotic

power than any crowned head of Europe. It is said in this House by Mr. VOORHEES that—

“It will not be long if our present career is unchecked until the terms dictator, king, and emperor will be as familiar in Washington as in the palace of St. Cloud.”

The members of the confederate congress say the South is powerfully supported in the North by the conservative Democratic element that will come to their relief. It is said here by Mr. VOORHEES :

“And I here to-day, in the spirit of one who expects and desires his posterity and theirs to live together in the ancient and honorable friendship of their fathers, warn the Southern people not to look forward to separation and independence, but to embrace every opportunity for co-operation with the conservative men of the North, who will aid with their lives, if need be, to secure them all their rights and institutions as free and equal citizens of the United States.”

The *Richmond Enquirer* declares that

“The North, distracted, exhausted, and impoverished, will, through the agency of a strong conservative element in the free States, soon treat with them on acceptable terms.”

The gentleman from New York [Mr. FERNANDO WOOD] declares that

“We will have to treat with the rebels, that the war was commenced without cause, and continued without glory, and will end in disintegration and destruction if carried on for another administration. Peace must come.”

Davis said in a speech before the Legislature of Mississippi that

“On the other side of the river our prospects are brighter than ever before, and ere long he hoped that he would be enabled to proclaim Missouri free. Kentucky, too, was an object of solicitude to him, and he spoke of her gallant people in the kindest and most commendable terms.”

And my honorable colleague [Mr. C. A. WHITE] earnestly declares that

“We can never conquer the South, and we must compromise.”

The rebels charge that

“This is an inhuman war waged against the institutions of the South;” and forty-two members of this House solemnly resolve that this is an inhuman war, and they should have added the words of Mr. FERNANDO WOOD, “Commenced without cause, and prosecuted without glory.”

I might collect the sentiments of those at Richmond and here until I could fill a volume, in which the most discriminating mind could not detect a difference. Indeed, a stranger, if he listened to the debates here, would think himself in the confederate congress. I do not believe that if these Halls were occupied to-day by Davis, Toombs, Wigfall, Rhett, and Pryor, they could add anything to the violence of assault, the falsity of accusation, or the maglinity of attack with which the Government has been assailed, and the able, patriotic, and devoted men who are charged with its administration have been malignd in both ends of the Capitol. The closing scenes of the Thirty-Sixth Congress, the treasonable declarations there made, contain nothing that we cannot hear in the freedom of debate without going to Richmond or to the camps of treason, where most of the actors in those scenes are now in arms against us.

Many of the errors of our lives are attributed to the weakness of our nature, the impressions of association, and the early influence of education. It has much to do in forming our characters and making us useful and wise. The same causes may produce the converse of these. None understood that better than did the Southern politicians. For more than half a century they had labored, and not without success, to indoctrinate the country in the baneful doctrines enunciated in the celebrated Virginia and Kentucky resolutions of 1798, which contained the *veriest* poison

to stable government, and was nothing more and nothing less than the doctrine of secession, as claimed by the rebel States.

For years the Democratic party had exhumed this heresy from the rubbish to which the good sense of mankind had consigned it, and through the influence of Southern politicians made it a cardinal doctrine of their political faith. I propose to read the resolution adopted by the convention that nominated Mr. Buchanan in 1856 :

“ That the Democratic party will faithfully abide by and uphold the principles laid down in the Kentucky and Virginia resolutions of 1798, and the report of Mr. Madison, made to the Virginia Legislature in 1799; that it adopts these principles as constituting one of the main foundations of its political creed, and is resolved to carry them out in their obvious meaning and import.”

The party that could solemnly pledge itself to the support of such a doctrine, so dangerous and treasonable as that, is to be deplored. When it was yet young, its fearful character called out from the shades of retirement, in the evening of his eventful and honorable life, that stern patriot and orator, Patrick Henry, that he might cause to be wiped from the records of his own Commonwealth that foul stain that the traitor's hand had placed upon it. Before he accomplished the work of regeneration he died. The resolutions lived, nursed and fostered by a political party and used as a shield and protection for every traitor that was found defying the power of the Government. To-day we are reaping their bitter fruits. The fields of carnage, the scenes of blood, the bereaved widow, the weeping maiden, and the heart-broken orphan, all point you to the fruits of the doctrine of secession contained in that damnable heresy that to-day the rebel States are attempting to carry out by the physical power of arms. Up to this hour the Democratic party, though divided, have not recanted, either North or South, this treasonable doctrine. There it stands, as much the creed of that party to-day as it was the day they proclaimed it to the world. No one can fail to see the evil consequences of such a doctrine when carried into practice. It was conceived in fraud and it closes in blood. For its wickedness it is doomed to perish, and with it shall perish also its advocates. The justice of the world, the peace of mankind, and the judgment of experience have doomed them to political death, and that host of conquering heroes who now hold every field on which their gallantry was displayed or glory won, will consign them to a sepulcher so deep that the hand of resurrection will never reach them.

Another reason is given why we should submit to dishonorable terms of compromise : that is, the pecuniary difficulties and the inability of the Government to carry on the war; an allegation that is not true. It is as dangerous to our prospects to declare that we must call back our armies because we have not bread to feed them, or garments to clothe them, as it is to declare that we have not men to continue the contest. Either would be injurious, and both are false. We have both men and means. Our whole agricultural region is full; our factories and workshops supply our wants and glut the market beside with their surplus. Indeed,

sir, we could withstand a famine almost as long as that which God sent on Canaan. Our hills are covered with our gamboling flocks, and our valleys are musical with the lowing of our herds; our storehouses groan beneath their loads of cereal grains; our fields are green with hope and promise; and a million of men but await the call of their country to put on the panoply of war. The most formidable Navy the world ever saw rides out upon the ocean, guarding our four thousand miles of coast, and protecting our commerce on every sea. Our material resources are so great that they astonish even ourselves. A country so vast in magnitude, so fertile in productions, and so rich in natural advantages, was never the boast of any people. The agricultural productions alone of our country amount to the enormous sum of \$3,000,000,000 per year; our works of art produce per year \$3,000,000,000 more; our commerce and public improvements add their \$4,000,000,000 to that.

And there is still another branch of our wealth not included in the above. In the report of the Director of the Mint at Philadelphia it appears that the receipts of bullion for the year ending October 10, 1861, amounted to \$121,000,000. The recent discoveries of gold in new regions will add largely to that, and we may safely count on the receipt of \$200,000,000 per year. With these vast resources who but those in sympathy with the rebellion would intimate our inability to carry on this war to a successful and honorable termination? None but those with whom the wish is father to the thought. We could carry a debt five times as large as that already incurred, a condition of things by no means desirable, but better for us and far better for our posterity than to leave them without a Government or country with the present debt upon them. The present debt is not greater in proportion to the resources to meet it than was the debt of Pennsylvania or Ohio in 1841.

The war has, in my judgment, progressed with wonderful success. Three fifths of the territory held by the rebels at its commencement has been subjugated, and over which our flag now floats, with a loss to them of the ocean coast, the entire Gulf, and that great artery of commerce, the Mississippi river, with nearly all its tributaries. Napoleon, in his thirst for power, or Lord Wellington, in his most successful campaigns, never accomplished so much in the same length of time. The future is full of hope. Unless we are betrayed by Northern people our final triumph is not far in the future. Of that we need have no fears. The number in the North whose sympathies are with the traitors is but small. In voting they cannot endanger a single loyal State, and as belligerents they are entirely harmless.

Therefore, warranted by the facts, I declare my conviction that the developed resources of the country leave no room to doubt the ability of the Government to meet every demand legitimately incurred; if the same ability continues which has marked the management of the Treasury Department during this day of commotion and the same skillful hand continues to guide the

helm, the ship will outride the storm and land us in a haven of safety without a single rent in the sails of our credit.

In order to secure our triumph in this struggle the necessary means must be employed, and they must have a cordial support. Thus far we have had to contend with two enemies: the one in arms, and the other opposing all measures and trying to defeat the legitimate and necessary policy. The lofty inspiration, the wise measure, the patriotic object, and the necessary proposition have not failed to be denounced by both the tongue and pen of the partisan. Should this fair fabric be overturned and the boon of civil liberty lost to this people, the driveling demagogue, who by his appeals to ignorant followers or who by falsehood destroyed its credit, is equally guilty with the traitor in arms, and far more to be despised.

Great forbearance, untiring patience, and mature wisdom are essential to meet the questions that are forced upon us, as incidental to the great revolution now going on. For the manner in which we shall perform our duty the enlightened world, the ages of posterity, and the God of justice will hold us responsible.

Among the things incident to this war is having cast upon us four million African slaves, who are now or will be free. The moral duty to provide for them is one of transcendent obligation.

Two and a half centuries ago a Dutch ship came up the James river, freighted with human beings, and discharged its mortality among the planters of Virginia. This was the commencement of the institution of slavery on this continent. It was then small, but it grew into great power, eventually controlling the policy of the Government, and wedding to its interest the political party represented on the other side of this Hall. Finally, it plunged the country into the yawning gulf of civil war. It has raged for three years with unabated fury. The duty of the loyal citizen in this was plain, and his course clearly marked. It was that this great crime against humanity, condemned by the Christian world, at war with the justice of Heaven, and denounced by the mild teachings of revelation, for thus attempting to undermine the foundation-stones of freedom had forfeited its life and deserved to die. We could not engage in this bloody contest, exhaust our substance, and sacrifice our manly sons who have gallantly, amid the terrific fire of battle, borne our banner in triumph over a hundred stricken fields, to secure this damnable institution its existence forever. No! Our own safety, the demands of humanity, and the injunctions of Heaven doomed it to death.

There never was a measure of more wisdom or of purer justice than the proclamation of emancipation. No state paper ever had so great an effect. It not only gave hope and encouragement to the Army, but it gave assurance that the cause of this rebellion would be wiped out. It ended all hope of the recognition of the confederacy by foreign powers, and it taught the rebels that their only support was their own weakness.

Its fruits already are manifest in the freedom of Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Virginia, and Maryland—all

free, now and forever. The balance of them but wait the progress of our arms to rid themselves of this blighting curse and take their places side by side in the great galaxy of free States.

This fact casts upon us the further duty of taking care of the emancipated or providing for them to take care of themselves. We have already placed arms in their hands, and when they have achieved the freedom of their race and aided in achieving the freedom of ours it will not do to send them back to slavery. An act of such gross injustice would call down the vengeance of Heaven upon us.

History has not left us without an example of what our fate will be should we be guilty of so great a crime. When the Lacedæmons were confronted with a powerful army, and their all staked upon the result of a single battle, for a while the contest seemed doubtful, but fate turned against them; their columns, thinned and weakened, began to give way, when five hundred slaves threw themselves into the breach, drove back the invading hosts, and victory perched upon the standards of that ancient people.

What were they to do with their slaves? They had won the victory, they had saved the fate of the day, and even this barbarous people would not remand them to their chains. They were like the gentlemen on the other side—they were jealous of their freedom; and to relieve themselves from both they drove them to the place of execution and deliberately murdered them.

But the vengeance of Heaven overtook them, offended justice smote them, their country, torn by wars, was devastated, their cities sacked, and they as a people obliterated from the earth. The wild beasts now roam unmolested over their plains, the bramble grows in their streets, and their palaces, once merry with the song of contentment, are desolate and abandoned, the foxes bark from their windows and the owl hoots from their domes.

We shall not follow their example, nor will we incur the just fate that overtook them. We will, governed by the broadest philanthropy, do our duty to this unfortunate waif that for more than three centuries has been floating upon the tide of human avarice and crime.

If wisdom prevails in our councils the gallantry of the greatest Army the world ever saw will soon bring us peace and restore our country; a peace that will be honorable and lasting. The causes of distraction will be removed, and our country, baptized anew in the fires of war, will come forth purified, and with renewed vigor will enter upon her mission of future usefulness and glory. She will assume a higher position among the nations of the world, with the last blotch of shame washed from her escutcheon. Securely seated upon the mountain summits of her own freedom, in one hand holding out to the world the olive-branch of peace and in the other the thunderbolt of rightful but reluctant war, bounded by the oceans, the lakes, and the Gulf, there may she sit forever, with the stars of Union on her brow and the rock of freedom beneath her feet.