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SPEECH

OF

HON. E. C. INGERSOLL,

ON

THE JOINT RESOLUTION TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION ABOLISHING SLAVERY.

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JUNE 15, 1864.

The House having under consideration the following joint resolution, submitting to the legislatures of the several States, a proposition to amend the Constitution of the United States.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, (two thirds of both houses concurring,) That the following article be proposed to the several States as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which, when ratified by three-fourths of said legislatures, shall be valid, to all intents and purposes, as a part of the said Constitution, namely:

ARTICLE XIII.

SEC. 1. Slavery being incompatible with a free government, is forever prohibited in the United States, and involuntary servitude shall be permitted only as a punishment for crime.

SEC. 2. Congress shall have power to enforce the foregoing section of this article by appropriate legislation.

Mr. INGERSOLL, of Illinois, said:

Mr. SPEAKER: Having very recently taken a seat in this body, it was my intention to have contented myself with voting for all such measures as I believed to be just and expedient, and against such as I believed to be unjust or inexpedient without taking part in the discussion of such measures. But in justice to the liberty-loving and Union-loving men who sent me here, and in justice to myself I ask the indulgence of the House for the few minutes which have been generously given me by my friend, the the honorable gentleman from California, [Mr. SHANNON,] out of his hour, in which to discuss the joint resolution now under consideration. I have the proud honor to represent a district in which a very great majority of the people are thoroughly and unalterably anti-slavery. They are in favor of justice and against oppression and wrong everywhere and in every form. There are two grand objects for the accomplishment of which they have already freely given of their best blood and treasure, and stand ready to-day to give much more of both, if necessary, for the absolute and unconditional crushing out of this most wicked and devastating rebellion, and for the complete and utter extinction of human slavery, the sole and fear-

ful cause of the rebellion. I know full well if the lamented Lovejoy, my honored and noble predecessor, could come to-day from the unseen world and take his place among us, his manly and eloquent voice would be heard in this Hall, as in days past, with all the earnestness of his great soul, pronouncing in favor of the adoption of this resolution, in favor of universal liberty and the rights of mankind. The cause of liberty and equal and exact justice lost a noble and heroic friend when he died, and the Union cause and the country lost one of their best and boldest champions. A grateful people hold him in affectionate remembrance, and it is to be hoped they may emulate his many virtues. He died in the midst of his great and good work; but God, in His infinite wisdom and goodness, did not suffer him to depart until the abolition of slavery in this country was approaching with rapid step the grand and glorious day of its consummation. And I say with all my heart, may Heaven speed the day. Universal liberty was the child of his heart, and he lived long enough to see that divine child adopted as its own by the nation.

Sir, I hope this resolution may pass by the necessary majority to give it validity. All truly honest and philanthropic men throughout the world will have reason to rejoice and will rejoice if it so passes. It would be heralded over the world as another grand step upward and onward in the irresistible march of a christainized civilization. The old starry banner of our country, as it "floats over the sea and over the land," will be grander and more glorious than even before. Its stars will be brighter; it will be holier; it will mean more than a mere nationality; it will mean universal liberty; it will mean that the rights of mankind, without regard to color or race, are respected and protected. The oppressed and the down-trodden of all the world will take new courage; hope will spring afresh in their struggling and weary hearts; and when they look upon that banner in distant lands they will yearn to be here, where they can enjoy the inestimable blessings which are denied them forever on their native shores.

Mr. Speaker, it would seem that this resolution should be adopted by a unanimous vote. Yet I fear we shall lose it. The slave power has not yet lost all its influence in this Congress. The pock-marks of slavery are plainly visible on the faces of many of the members of the Opposition. They were inoculated and corrupted by it in the days of its wanton power. Its woeful and baneful influence is upon them still. Slavery has been their idol. They have worshiped at its shrine in the days of its power, and even now, when it is going to an ignominious grave, they rally around and protect and defend it in all its hideous ghastliness as though it were really divine. We may admire their pluck, but we must condemn their action, their want of patriotism, their inappreciation of liberty, and their entire lack of generous sentiment common to humanity. They are blinded by prejudice. They are politically corrupt, under an undue desire to regain that power which they so ingloriously lost during the last Democratic administration, or, I should say, maladministration. Being the slaves of the slave power, we cannot expect much of them until we have made them free and hewn down their prejudices.

In my opinion many of the Opposition members would vote for this resolution if they could be convinced that slavery could no longer be made available to them as a political power. But they know it as certain as fate that if slavery goes down the present Democratic organization goes down with it. Hence their herculean efforts to save slavery; but they cannot succeed in their unholy and detestable work. The liberty-loving and loyal

people of this country have sworn in their hearts that the rebellion and slavery shall both go down, and forever. And they will keep that oath. When we have succeeded in burying the rebellion and slavery, if we could only petrify the pro-slavery Democracy, what a becoming and fitting tombstone it would make to mark the place of their burial:

There can be no objection on legal grounds to amend the Constitution in the precise manner pointed out by that instrument itself. Article five of the Constitution provides for its own amendment as follows:

“ART. 5. The Congress, whenever two thirds of both Houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose amendments to this Constitution, or, on the application of the Legislatures of two thirds of the several States, shall call a convention for proposing amendments, which, in either case shall be valid to all intents and purposes, as part of this Constitution, when ratified by the Legislatures of three fourths of the several States, or by conventions in three fourths thereof, as the one or the other mode of ratification may be proposed by the Congress; provided, that no amendment which may be made prior to the year 1808 shall in any manner affect the first and fourth clauses in the ninth section of the first article; and that no State, without its consent shall be deprived of its equal suffrage in the Senate.”

It is plain to be seen, then, that this resolution contemplates no violation of the Constitution. Then why this objection to adopting it and submitting the proposed amendment to the Legislatures of the several States not in rebellion? Are you of the Opposition afraid to trust the representatives of the people? In reality I believe you are. You fear, and have good cause to fear, that the necessary majority of States will ratify the proposed amendment, and make it thereby a part of the Constitution. Then slavery will no longer need defenders and protectors in our national Congress. “Othello’s occupation” will be gone indeed. You will go hungry for place and office, and slavery can no longer gratify your unholy ambition. But the people will rejoice, the friends of freedom everywhere will rejoice, and our country will be infinitely more prosperous, more glorious, and grander than ever before.

But the Opposition object to the adoption of this resolution at the present time, because they say Mississippi, South Carolina, and other States in rebellion can have no voice upon the question of its ratification. Is this a good objection? I answer not. Why is it that Mississippi and South Carolina can have no voice upon this question? It is because they voluntarily entered into this rebellion. Had they not done so they would have had equal right and enjoyed equal privilege with Illinois upon this question.

Are we, because a portion of the States inaugurated and still carry on this rebellion, to suspend all legislative action which might affect things or institutions in such States? I say not. Let those who inaugurate and carry on the rebellion take the consequences. We are responsible to the Constitution and the loyal people, not to the disloyal and rebels. It is truly said that at almost any time it is well to do right. It is well to eradicate an evil. That slavery is an evil no sane, honest man will deny. It has been the great curse of this country from its infancy to the present hour. And now that the States in rebellion have given the loyal States the opportunity to take off that curse, to wipe away the foul stain; I say let it be done. We owe it to ourselves; we owe it to posterity; we owe it to the slaves themselves to exterminate slavery in this country forever by the adoption of the proposed amendment to the Constitution. If we fail to do it, now that we have the power, not only will our constituents but posterity and humanity hold us responsible, and remember us only to condemn.

I hold that slavery and rebellion are so closely allied that any act, legislative or military, which cripples the one tends to destroy the other. If slavery could be abolished to-day the rebellion would end to-morrow. If the rebellion could be put down to-day slavery would go down to-morrow. So that in my opinion any act that we can do, which is lawful in itself, to weaken slavery, if we should fail to do it, we would be criminally culpable.

I believe slavery is the mother of this rebellion, that this rebellion can be attributed to no other cause but slavery; from that it derived its life and gathers its strength to-day. Destroy the mother, and the child will die. Destroy the cause, and the effect will disappear. Slavery has ever been the enemy of liberal principles. It has ever been the friend of ignorance, prejudice and all the unlawful, savage, and detestable passions which proceed therefrom. It has ever been domineering, arrogant, exacting, and overbearing. It has claimed to be a polished aristocrat, when in reality it has only been a coarse, swaggering, and brutal boor. It has ever claimed to be a gentleman, when in reality it has ever been a villain. I think it is high time to clip its overgrown pretensions, strip it of its mask, and expose it in all hideous deformity to the detestation of all honest and patriotic men.

For eighty years the bogus aristocracy of slavery have left nothing undone to corrupt and demoralize the people and their Representatives.

For eighty years they have attempted to clothe this monster in the radiance of divinity, when in reality it should only be draped in the blackness of its own enormity. In order to maintain their power they had so molded public opinion, even in the grand free States of the North, that many honest but deluded men were willing to concede that slavery, if not divine, was not so bad an institution after all, that "the devil was not so black as he is painted." The North, against its sense of justice and right, for the sake of peace and Union, has, time and time again, humiliated itself in its own and the eyes of the world by conceding to the unallotted and ambitious demands of slavery.

At the formation of our Constitution slavery demanded that a section should be incorporated therein restraining Congress from passing a law prohibiting the importation of negroes prior to the year 1808. The North, in violation of its sense of honor, got down upon its knees and consented that it should be "written in the bond," thereby conceding the right to this bogus aristocracy to freight its ships with human beings stolen from their native land and consigned to an ignominious slavery only equaled by its savage cruelty.

Again, in 1793, they demanded a fugitive slave law; that is to say, that free northern men should be their blood-hounds. The North again assented, and went into the blood-hound business. In 1850 they again demanded more and fiercer blood-hounds. The North, true to its instincts of peace and union, but false to its honor, agreed that the blood-hounds should be forthcoming. For one—and I am happy to say that I am not alone—I am tired of this blood-hound business, and voted on Monday last to abolish it. The Opposition are in favor of its continuance; I am for this amendment to the Constitution, in order to take from these adherents of the slave power the ignominy and degradation consequent upon so base an occupation.

Again, in 1820, the same relentless monster demanded of the North more territory for the use of slavery. The North again got upon its knees

and admitted Missouri with a slave constitution, and again suffered the mortification of self-degradation.

Again, in 1854, they demanded the repeal of the Missouri compromise line. Again, in northern men, whom they had demoralized and corrupted by the contaminating influence of slavery, united to a corresponding lust for office, they found the willing tools wherewith to consummate this treachery. Liberty received a blow in the face, and slavery was taken by the hand.

Again, in 1857, the slave power brought all its energies to bear to convert this territory, which had been thrown open to it by the repeal of the Missouri compromise line, into a slave State. To the infamy of James Buchanan's Administration be it said, with a few honorable exceptions, it lent the whole force and power of its authority to the accomplishment of this foul crime. But, thank God, the people of the North at last had become aroused, and they determined that slavery should no longer be the master of liberty. They felt it in their hearts, they expressed it with their lips, that they would no longer be the tools of slavery, or the indifferent spectators of its encroachments. They declared that Kansas should be free. The slave power swore it should be slave; and then and there this war commenced which is now deluging this land with blood. After a long and not a bloodless struggle justice and freedom triumphed, and Kansas to-day is a beaming star of liberty in the western horizon. The South saw in this triumph the ultimate overthrow of their most cherished institution. They became alarmed, and felt and knew that if the people of the North were unwilling to submit to further degradation thereafter they must depend on themselves for the protection of slavery, as their northern friends were powerless to stem the tide which was rising and swelling toward universal liberty.

So, in 1860, at the Charleston convention they demanded that additional guarantees for slavery be incorporated in the platform of the Democratic party. The northern Democracy saw at once that to yield to them on this point was certain defeat. The South repudiated Douglas in that convention for the reason that they did not believe him sound on the slavery question. As an evidence of his unsoundness they pointed to his Freeport speech, made in 1858, in joint debate with President Lincoln. In this speech he enunciated the doctrine that Territorial Legislatures possessed the power to exclude slavery from the Territories by "unfriendly legislation." This was anything but orthodox in their view. Another objection to Senator Douglas was that he had been opposed to the Le-compton-Kansas constitution. Consequently Douglas was thrown overboard. They demanded that slavery should be recognized as a national institution, and that Congress should protect it in the Territories by affirmative legislation. The northern Democracy positively refused to accede to this. The consequence was that the southern Democracy seceded, and nominated their own candidate, upon their own platform, thereby breaking up the Democratic party and depriving it of all hope of success in the then approaching presidential campaign. Who can say but that the northern wing of the Democratic party is responsible for this war; for had the northern Democracy been willing to concede at that convention to the demands of the South, and accept a platform agreeable to it, the nominee of that convention would have been elected President, and this "cruel and bloody war," as the Opposition delight to call it, would have been avoided, or, at any rate, postponed. Let the responsibility rest

where it legitimately belongs. It is dishonorable in any man to say that the Republican party is responsible for this war, when, as I have shown, it perhaps might have been avoided had the northern Democracy been willing to have covered themselves with a thicker coating of degradation than they had ever before worn, and sacrificed their dignity and manhood to the behests of slavery.

I am well aware that the Opposition persistently charge that the abolitionists are responsible for the war and are the authors of the war. This charge is as false as is the assertion that slavery is divine. Had there been no slavery in this country there never would have been an abolitionist or an agitator; the inhuman and barbarous system of slavery created the abolitionist and the agitator. In this instance the evil produced the good—the wrong the right; and the good and the right must prevail. Slavery has piled up the mountain which will fall upon it and crush it to dust. Slavery alone is the cause of the war, and he who attributes this war to any other cause than slavery is wide of the mark. The man who to-day, after three years of war and desolation, would raise even a straw to shield or protect slavery, deserves, and at no very distant day will receive, the merited condemnation of a united, happy, prosperous, and liberty-loving people.

It is a humiliating and saddening spectacle to witness how persistently and unrelentingly the Opposition pursue our most worthy President, and with what vehemence they denounce his war policy, if such policy in their opinion tends in the least to interfere with the institution of slavery. If, under the war power of the Administration, a rebel sympathizer, who disgraces the soil of Illinois, is arrested and imprisoned, if a disloyal paper is suppressed, they at once set up a tremendous howl about personal liberty and the freedom of the press. If an attempt is made to expel or censure a member of Congress for uttering disloyal sentiments, another distressing howl goes up in protestation against the Administration. Their denunciation is all against Lincoln. They utter none against Davis. Our soldiers may be starved in Libby prison; they may be butchered in cold blood, as at Fort Pillow and elsewhere; Union men all through the South may be indiscriminately plundered and then dragged to the gallows, and they have no voice to raise against it or denounce it. The reason of this is obvious. They care more to regain political power than for the triumph of liberty and justice.

The eloquent and scholarly SUMNER may be knocked down in the United States Senate by a southern ruffian and blackguard: northern dough-faces say, "Served him right." A Giddings and an Adams may be censured in the House of Representatives because they have the manhood to raise their voices in behalf of liberty and justice: northern dough-faces cry out again, "Served them right." The incorruptible Parker, Codding, and Garrison may be mobbed, stoned and imprisoned, for daring to give utterance to the sublime and eternal principles of truth, and liberty, and justice, and these same northern doughfaces rise up and cry out, "Served them right." A northern man imbued with the spirit of liberty may, within the limits of a slave State, have the effrontery to raise his voice against oppression, and say, "Your system of slavery is wrong, and you ought to abolish it:" a coat of tar and feathers or the halter may be administered as a corrective of such heretical expressions, and the northern doughfaces again cry out, "Served him right." A minister of the gospel may find it to be his duty to say to his people, "It is right that

you should do unto others as ye would they should do unto you;" that you ought to let the bondman go free; and he is immediately denounced as an abolition agitator, and the varnished hypocrites of his church call upon him at once and say they cannot tolerate the expression of such opinions in the pulpit, as they are calculated to irritate the South, and he must stop them or they will withdraw their support. Consequently the poor, good preacher must close his lips to such divine and heaven-born truths or starve, and this, too, in a free State; and again the northern doughfaces say, "Served him right." To crown all this record of infamy, the martyr, Elijah P. Lovejoy, is mobbed and murdered on the free, broad prairies of Illinois, simply for the crime of publishing a paper dedicated to the advocacy of the rights of mankind; and again these northern doughfaces cry out, "Away with him," "Served him right." O liberty, where is thy power? O justice, where is thy strength? But thank God that day is gone, and gone forever. Let us take courage; the world is better; their sufferings and their trials were not in vain; liberty is stronger; justice is surer; and the idols of oppression, ignorance, and prejudice, which have been worshiped so long, are crumbling to dust. And so the good work goes bravely on. It is as irresistible as the avalanche and as grand as the Alps.

Sir, I am in favor in the fullest sense of personal liberty. I am in favor of the freedom of speech. The freedom of speech that I am in favor of is the freedom which guaranties to the citizen of Illinois, in common with the citizen of Massachusetts, the right to proclaim the eternal principles of liberty, truth, and justice in Mobile, Savannah, or Charleston with the same freedom and security as though he were standing at the foot of Bunker Hill monument; and if this proposed amendment to the Constitution is adopted and ratified, the day is not far distant when this glorious privilege will be accorded to every citizen of the Republic. I am in favor of the adoption of this amendment because it will secure to the oppressed slave his natural and God-given rights. I believe that the black man has certain inalienable rights, which are as sacred in the sight of Heaven as those of any other race. I believe he has a right to live, and live in a state of freedom. He has a right to breathe the free air and enjoy God's free sunshine. He has a right to till the soil, to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, and enjoy the rewards of his own labor. He has a right to the endearments and enjoyment of family ties; and no white man has any right to rob him of or infringe upon any of these blessings.

I am in favor of the adoption of this amendment to the Constitution for the sake of the seven millions of poor white people who live in the slave States but who have ever been deprived of the blessings of manhood by reason of this thrice-accursed institution of slavery. Slavery has kept them in ignorance, in poverty, and in degradation. Abolish slavery, and school-houses will rise upon the ruins of the slave mart, intelligence will take the place of ignorance, wealth of poverty, and honor of degradation; industry will go hand in hand with virtue, and prosperity with happiness, and a disinthrilled and regenerated people will rise up and bless you and be an honor to the American Republic.

Slavery has shed every drop of blood which has been spilled in this war. It has filled thousands of graves with our heroic dead. It has filled our hospitals with our shattered heroes. It has swept American commerce from the ocean. It has carried desolation and mourning to the hearthstones of our northern homes from Maine to California; conse-

quently I am the unyielding and persistent enemy of slavery and the earnest supporter of any and all lawful measures for its speedy and effectual extinction. It is this demon of slavery which has called from their happy homes in Illinois one hundred and seventy-five thousand of her sons as brave and heroic as ever the sun shone upon. Donelson, Shiloh, Arkansas Post, Vicksburg, and many other well-fought fields attest their devotion to liberty and Union. Their self-sacrificing heroism to maintain the honor and glory of the Republic has won for them a fame more enduring than granite and a place in the hearts of their countrymen so long as liberty shall be loved and justice respected.

I wish we could emulate the example of the soldiers. The Democrat and the Republican have gone together, side by side, fighting these great battles for liberty and Union. They have allowed no former political differences to divide them, or to weaken their devotion to the cause. They have fought side by side. If the Democrat falls in battle the Republican gathers him in his arms, composes his limbs in death, hollows out a little place in the earth, and therein deposits his heroic and sacred remains; he covers him tenderly with the earth; he marks the spot where he lies, that you may know a hero sleeps there; he drops a tear upon the grave, and rushes again into the thickest of the fight. If the Republican falls, his Democratic comrade extends to him the same sacred charity, forgets that he was a Republican, and only remembers that he was a heroic soldier of the Union. Why cannot we, far from the roar of the battle, secure in the enjoyments of peace—secured only by the heroism and devotion of the Army—forget that we ever have been partisans, and unite, with heart and hand, for the suppression of the rebellion and establishment of “Liberty and Union, one and inseparable?”

Mr. Speaker, I have already occupied too much time. There is a great deal more that I would like to say, but I must forbear. I implore the House to adopt this resolution. I implore it to stand by the Army and the country and the war policy of the Administration, and the day is not far distant when we may rejoice in the glorious consummation of the eternal principles of liberty, truth, and justice. “There shall be no more slavery and no more oppression, no more tyranny and no more injustice, and our voices may go up together in one grand diapason which will ascend to heaven over a country reunited, over a people disenthralled, and God will bless us.