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(1862)

S P E E C H

OF

HON. WILLIAM D. NORTHEND,

O F S A L E M,

IN THE

SENATE OF MASSACHUSETTS,

March 26th, 1862,

UPON A PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE HOUSE RESOLVES
IN APPROVAL OF THE RECENT MESSAGE OF THE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

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1862.



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Mr. PRESIDENT:—It is impossible for any of us to magnify the importance of the great struggle in which this Government is involved,—important to the entire future of this great people, and not less so to the cause of free institutions throughout the world.

This Government was inaugurated, not without doubt, by our fathers. By a large majority of the people of the old world it was regarded an experiment, unsupported by the great facts of history. Its failure was predicted. But it was everywhere conceded that, if the system could be successful,—if this Government, emanating from and depending upon the people, could sustain itself through those great trials and crises which had been incident to the history of every Government, and in which so many with immense central powers had suffered shipwreck, then that it would mark an era, and would be the signal for an immense and universal advancement in the great cause of liberty and popular institutions throughout the civilized world.

This Government has survived the exigencies and trials of nearly three-quarters of a century, and many of them of such a character as to lead us, and its friends in the old world, to a belief that its permanency and success were substantially demonstrated.

But in the hour of our greatest prosperity, when the people of the country had come to regard the invincibility of the Government as an established fact, and looked forward to a future of uninterrupted peace and prosperity, we are suddenly called to meet a crisis of such magnitude and proportions as no one could have anticipated. The only great and untested trial to our Government, under most inauspicious combinations and circumstances, is now upon us, and in our day and generation the great problem of popular institutions is to be settled for at least a century to come. The

principles our fathers fought for, the Government they established, the prestige of its unexampled success for so long a time, all stand trembling in the balance; and the responsibility for a right issue, with the interposition of a wise Providence, is upon us — upon the individuals of the country, upon the citizens in the army, upon the citizens in the legislative halls, and the citizens in their homes. No one is exempt from responsibility, and upon individual patriotism, and individual efforts, will history declare the great results of this time.

For months we have waited with the deepest anxiety for tidings of success by our army against the stupendous rebellion.

We have recent cause for gratitude that our fellow-citizens in the army are doing their entire duty, and are exhibiting a patriotism and heroism which will, sooner or later, put to an ignominious flight all those arrayed in arms against the Government. But is this all that is to be accomplished? Is the great work of the times finished with the “crushing out” of armed rebellion? Although indispensable, it is but the commencement of the performance of our duties. That finished, we have a country to restore, the Government to be obeyed by a willing people. This result will not depend upon the army, but upon us, — upon the legislators and the people. This is not a war of subjugation. It is a war for and under the Constitution, to protect loyal men oppressed by armed rebellion, and to induce a return to loyalty, and a love and reverence for the Constitution, by showing, as we shall have an opportunity, that cannot and will not be mistaken, that the incendiary statements of the authors of the rebellion were not founded in fact — that they were only plausible pretexts.

This once fully shown, we have a more united and loyal people than we have had for thirty years, and we continue on our great and glorious mission with a power and authority which will more than compensate for all our losses and trials. But if it shall be otherwise, — if the people of this Confederacy, to whom has been entrusted the preservation of the Government in this great crisis, shall determine to forget the instructions of the fathers, — if they shall be governed by their passions, — if demagogues and the tyranny of party shall usurp the seat of patriotism and true loyalty, — if an unbridled and licentious spirit of recklessness shall madden and impel our people to disregard the guaranties

of the Constitution, without which our Government would have never been established, then, sir, I see nothing but ruin and disaster in the future.

Let it, sir, be once distinctly understood, that this Government intends to take advantage of the power which this unprecedented state of affairs has entrusted it with, to the subversion of constitutional rights, and a disregard of constitutional obligations, and the victory of our arms will have been in vain. Loyal men of to-day at the South, will see that their rights are violated, and they will strike the heaviest blows for their protection against usurpation. The authors of the rebellion will be able to triumphantly show to their followers, that the specious pretenses which they had used so successfully, if not based upon fact, have resulted in reality, and the last ray of hope for a restoration of the Government will have disappeared.

The President of the United States, from the day of his inauguration to the present time, has proclaimed that the purpose of this war is the restoration of the Union under the Constitution; and under this proclamation, and for the purposes of it, one half million of our fellow citizens have volunteered for the war. Every act of the Administration has been consistent and only consistent with this proclamation, and we are now called upon to express our opinions upon this policy of the Administration, and I beg leave of the Senate to read from the messages of the President, to show the clear, unqualified and unmistakable position of the Administration upon the prosecution of the war.

President Lincoln, in his Inaugural Message, says :

“I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so. Those who nominated and elected me did so with the full knowledge that I had made this and many similar declarations, and had never recanted them. And, more than this, they placed in the platform for my acceptance, and as a law to themselves and to me, the clear and emphatic resolution which I now read.

“*Resolved*, That the maintenance inviolate of the rights of the States, and especially the right of each State to order and control its own domestic institutions according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential to that balance of power on which the perfection and endurance of our political

fabric depend; and we denounce the lawless invasion, by armed force, of the soil of any State or Territory, no matter under what pretext, as among the gravest of crimes.

“I now reiterate these sentiments, and in doing so I only press upon the public attention the most conclusive evidence of which the case is susceptible, that the property, peace and security of no section are to be in anywise endangered by the now incoming Administration.”

In his Message to the special session of Congress on July 4th, he says:

“Lest there be some uneasiness in the minds of candid men as to what is to be the course of the Government toward the Southern States after the rebellion shall have been suppressed, the Executive deems it proper to say, it will be his purpose then as ever to be guided by the Constitution and the Laws, and that he will probably have no different understanding of the powers and duties of the Federal Government, relatively to the rights of the States and the people under the Constitution, than that expressed in the inaugural address. He desires to preserve the Government that it may be administered for all as it was administered by the men who made it.”

In his Message to the present session of Congress in December, the President refers to his two former messages upon this subject, and says, “Nothing now occurs to add or subtract to or from the principles or general purposes stated and expressed in those documents.”

In his Message of March 6th, the President recommends to Congress the adoption by them of a joint resolution, to the effect that the United States ought to co-operate with any State which may adopt a gradual abolishment of slavery, by giving pecuniary aid for such purpose.

This course has been approved by eminent and conservative statesmen for many years, and its adoption at the present time is specially recommended, with the hope that it may induce some of the Northern slaveholding States to emancipate their slaves, and by so doing weaken the hopes of the leaders of the insurrection. The resolution contemplates only such action as is strictly within the limits of the Constitution. As the President correctly states in the Message proposing the resolve, —

“Such a proposition on the part of the General Government sets up no claim of a right by Federal authority to interfere with slavery within State

limits, referring as it does the absolute control of the subject, in each case, to the State and its people immediately interested. It is proposed as a matter of perfectly free choice with them."

The President further says :

"The point is not that all the States tolerating slavery would soon, if at all, initiate emancipation ; but that while the offer is equally made to all, the more Northern shall by such initiation make it certain to the more Southern, that in no event will the former ever join the latter in their proposed Confederacy. Initiation, because, in my judgment; gradual and not sudden emancipation is better for all."

These plain and intelligible enunciations of the principles by which the Administration proposed to be guided, met with the approval of the entire people of the loyal States, excepting the class whose basis of operations is outside the Constitution. Men of all parties joined in a patriotic and enthusiastic support of the President upon this distinct line of policy, who would not upon any other ; and all who now advocate a different principle of action not only place themselves in opposition to the Administration, but initiate a partisan conflict. This war on the part of the Federal Government is either for the purpose of restoring and maintaining the supremacy of the Constitution, or for the destruction of it. There is no middle ground. If Senators believe there is such a necessary antagonism between slave labor in one State and free labor in another, that they cannot exist together in the future, they should reflect how far this belief justifies an attempt at separation. I believe there is no such antagonism, and the experience of seventy years demonstrates it.

I have not favored the passage of any resolutions by the Legislature upon the conduct of national affairs ; and have taken no part in discussions referring to past issues, but these resolutions have been pressed upon us and we shall be wanting in duty if we remain silent. It is proposed to endorse a portion of the President's policy without reference to the remainder. Such a course, as stated by the Senator from Hampden, Mr. Thompson, in his eloquent remarks, might imply a repudiation of the policy not referred to. All Senators who have spoken, have stated that the people concurred in the entire policy of the President. If this is true, why not express it here. The policy of the Presi-

dent has been continuous, connected and consistent, and should be endorsed as a whole. I believe that it has been wise, judicious, patriotic. The people believe so. Senators who state that the policy of the President previous to March 6th is approved by their constituents and record their votes against the proposed resolve, will be misunderstood by the people. We should act with a view to our great responsibilities in the present, with a wise regard to the future, forgetting all past differences and party divisions.

Our greatest and most holy duty is to sustain the Government. Every other consideration, however important, is secondary to it. The evils of slavery were known to the fathers, as they are known to us, yet they permitted them, in order that they might achieve the paramount and supreme good of a Government for this whole people. Let us not assume to be better or wiser than they were. These evils cannot be properly relieved by violence or the arbitrary use of power. They were not born in a day. They cannot be cured in a day. Providence will work out its own great results. This war is for the purification of the nation, but not by the overthrow of the Government, or a perversion of any of its fundamental principles. Events sublime, colossal, irresistible, are at work. If we listen, we can hear their mighty tread. We cannot hasten or aid their progress by the exercise of extraordinary powers. Our duty is to exercise faith, patience, in the support of the Government. Let us do this, and God will protect the right, and in his own way, and in his own good time, will purify us from the wrong.

I know of no way for the restoration of the Union, unless the pilots of the great ship of State shall be guided by the North Star of the Constitution. If this shall be obscured—if we veer to the right hand or to the left, we shall find ourselves on a dark and tempestuous ocean, with no haven for safety. Our brave soldiers and seamen will have fought to no purpose. Ellsworth, Lyon, Lander, and the host of other noble patriots who have offered up their lives, will have died in vain; and history will record the humiliating truth, that because the sons would not perform the conditions imposed by the fathers, they lost forever for themselves and their posterity, the most precious inheritance ever bequeathed to a great and prosperous people.