

TREASON IN CONGRESS.

SPEECH

OF

HON. JAMES A. GARFIELD,

OF OHIO.

IN REPLY TO THE SPEECH OF HON. ALEXANDER LONG IN
FAVOR OF ABANDONING THE WAR AND RECOGNIZING THE SOUTHERN CONFEDERACY.

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, APRIL 8, 1864.

At the conclusion of Mr. Long's speech Mr. GARFIELD obtained the floor and said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I should be obliged to you if you would direct the Sergeant-at-Arms to bring a white flag and plant it in the aisle between myself and my colleague who has just addressed you.

I recollect on one occasion when two great armies stood face to face, that, under a white flag just planted, I approached a company of men dressed in the uniform of the rebel confederacy, and reached out my hand to one of the number and to him I respected him as a brave man. Though he wore the emblems of disloyalty and treason, still underneath his vestments I beheld a brave and honest soul.

I would reproduce that scene here this afternoon. I say, were there such flag of truce—but God forgive me if I did it under any other circumstances!—I would reach out this right hand and ask that gentleman to take it; because I respect his bravery and his honesty. I believe what has just fallen from his lips is the honest sentiment of his heart, and in uttering it he has made a new epoch in the history of his war. He has done a new thing under the sun; he has done a brave thing—braver than to face cannon and musketry—and I honor him for his candor and frankness.

But now I ask you to take away the flag of truce; and I will go back inside the Union lines, and speak of what he has done. I am reminded by it of a distinguished character in Paradise Lost. When he had rebelled against the glory of God and "led away a third part of Heaven's sons, conjured against the Highest;" when after terrible battles in which mountains and hills were hurled by each contending host "with jaculation dire;" when, at last, the leader and his host were hurled down "nine times the space that measures day and night," and, after the terrible fall, lay stretched prone on the burning lake, Satan lifted up

his shattered bulk, crossed the abyss, looked down into Paradise, and, soliloquizing, said :

“Which way I fly is hell ; myself am hell.”

It seems to me in that utterance he expressed the very sentiment to which you have just listened ; uttered by one no less brave, malign, and fallen. This man gathers up the meaning of this great contest, the philosophy of the moment, the prophecies of the hour, and, in sight of the paradise of victory and peace, utters his conclusion in this wail of terrible despair, “Which way I fly is hell.” He ought to add, “Myself am hell.”

MR. CHAIRMAN, I am reminded of two characters in the war of the Revolution as compared with two others in the war of to-day.

The first was Lord Fairfax, who dwelt near the Potomac, a few miles from where we are sitting. When the great contest was opened between the mother country and the colonies, Lord Fairfax, after a protracted struggle with his own heart, decided that he must go with the mother country. He gathered his mantle about him and went over grandly, solemnly, and impressively to join the fortunes of Great Britain against the home of his adoption.

But there was another, who, at the outset, cast in his lot with the struggling colonies, and continued with them till the war was well nigh ended. But in a day of darkness which just preceded the glory of the morning, that other man, deep down in the infernal pits of his black heart, hatched the treason to surrender forever all that had been gained to the enemies of his country. BENEDICT ARNOLD was that man.

Fairfax and Arnold find their parallel in the struggle of to-day.

When this war began, many good men, amazed and confounded in the mad whirl of events, stood hesitating and doubting what they ought to do. Their doctrine of State rights, their sympathies, all they had ever loved and longed for were in the South ; and, after long and painful hesitation, some of them at last went with the enemies of the nation.

At that time Robert E. Lee sat in his home across the river here, doubting and delaying, and going off at last, almost tearfully, to join the enemies of his country. He reminds me in some respects of Lord Fairfax, the stately royalist of the Revolution.

But now, when hundreds of thousands of brave souls have gone up to God under the shadow of the flag, and when thousands more, maimed and shattered in the contest, are sadly awaiting the deliverance of death ; now, when three years of terrific warfare have raged over us, when our armies have pushed the rebellion back over mountains and rivers and crowded it into narrow limits, until a wall of fire girds it ; now, when the uplifted hand of a majestic people is about to let fall the lightning of its conquering power upon the rebellion ; now, in the quiet of this Hall, hatched in the lowest depths of a similar dark treason, there rises a Benedict Arnold and proposes to surrender us all

up, body and spirit, the nation and the flag, its genius and its honor; now and forever, to the accursed traitors to our country. And that proposition comes—God forgive and pity my beloved State!—it comes from a citizen of the honored and loyal Commonwealth of Ohio.

I implore you, brethren in this House, not to believe that many births ever gave pangs to my mother State such as she suffered when that traitor was born. [Suppressed applause and senation.] I beg you not to believe that on the soil of that State another such growth has ever deformed the face of nature and darkened the light of God's day. [An audible whisper, "Vallandigham."]

But ah, I am reminded that there are other such. My zeal and love for Ohio have carried me too far. I retract. I remember that only a few days since a political convention met at the capital of my State, and almost decided to select from just such material a Representative for the Democratic party in the coming contest; and to-day, what claim to be a majority of the Democracy of that State, declare that they were cheated or they would have made that choice. I therefore sadly take back the boast I first uttered in behalf of my native State.

But, sir, I will forget States. We have something greater than States and State pride to talk of here to-day. All personal and State feeling aside, I ask you what is the proposition which the enemy of his country has just made? What is it?

For the first time in the history of this contest, it is proposed, in this Hall, to give up the struggle, to abandon the war, and let treason run riot through the land! I will, if I can, dismiss feeling from my heart, and try to consider only the logic of the speech to which we have just listened.

First of all, the gentleman tells us that the right of secession is a constitutional right. I do not propose to enter into the argument. I have expressed myself hitherto upon State sovereignty and State rights, of which this proposition is the legitimate child.

But the gentleman takes higher ground—and in that I agree with him—namely, that five million or eight million people possess the right of revolution. Grant it; we agree there. If fifty-nine men can make revolution successful, they have the right of revolution. If one State wishes to break its connection with the Federal Government, and does it by force, maintaining itself, it is an independent Nation. If the eleven southern States are determined and resolved to leave the Union, to secede, to revolutionize, and can maintain that revolution by force, they have the revolutionary right to do so. Grant it. I stand on that platform with the gentleman.

And now the question comes, is it our constitutional duty to let them do it? That is the question, and in order to reach it I beg to call your attention, not to an argument, but to the condition of affairs which would result from such action—the mere statement of which becomes the strongest possible argument.

What does this gentleman propose? Where will he draw the line of division? If the rebels carry into successful secession what they desire to carry, if their revolution envelops as many States as they intend it shall envelop, if they draw the line where Isham G. Harris, the rebel Governor of Tennessee, in the rebel camp near our lines, told Mr. Vallandigham they would draw it—along the line of the Ohio and the Potomac—if they make good their declaration to him that they will never consent to any other line, then I ask what is this thing that the gentleman proposes to do?

He proposes to leave to the United States a territory reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and one hundred miles wide in the centre! From Wellsville on the Ohio river to Cleveland on the lakes is one hundred miles. I ask you, Mr. Chairman, if there be a man here so insane as to suppose that the American people will allow their magnificent national proportions to be shorn to so deformed a shape as this?

I tell you, and I confess it here, that while I hope I have something of human courage, I have not enough to contemplate such a result. I am not brave enough to go to the brink of the precipice of successful secession and look down into its damned abyss. If my vision were keen enough to pierce to its bottom, I would not dare to look. If there be a man here who dare contemplate such a spectacle, I look upon him as the bravest of the sons of women or as a downright madman. Secession to gain peace! Secession is the tocsin of eternal war. There can be no end to such a war as will be inaugurated if this thing be done.

Suppose the policy of the gentleman were adopted to-day. Let the order go forth; sound the "recall" on your bugles, and let it ring from Texas to the far Atlantic, and tell the armies to come back. Call the victorious legions back over the battlefields of blood, forever now disgraced. Call them back over the territory they have conquered and redeemed. Call them back, and let the minions of secession chase them with derision and jeers as they come. And then tell them that that man across the aisle, from the free State of Ohio, gave birth to the monstrous proposition.

Mr. Chairman, if such a word should be sent forth through the armies of the Union, the wave of terrible vengeance that would sweep back over this land could find no parallel in the records of time. Almost in the moment of final victory the "recall" is sounded by a craven people not deserving freedom! We ought every man to be made a slave forever should we sanction such a sentiment.

The gentleman has told us there is no such thing as coercion justifiable under the Constitution. I ask him for one moment to reflect, that no statute was ever enforced without coercion. It is the basis of every law in the universe—human or divine. A law is no law without coercion behind it. You levy taxes, coercion secures their collection. It follows the shadow of the thief and

brings him to justice. It lays its iron hand on the murderer; tries him and hangs him. It accompanies your diplomacy to foreign courts, and backs the declaration of the nation's rights by a pledge of the nation's strength. But when the life of that nation is imperilled, we are told that it has no coercive power against the parricides in its own bosom!!

Again, he tells us that oaths taken under the amnesty proclamation are good for nothing. The oath of Galileo, he says, was not binding. I am reminded of another oath lately taken; an oath on the lips to which the heart made no response. I remember to have stood in a line of nineteen men from Ohio, at the bar of this House, before the Omnipotent Judge, on the first day of the session, I remember that with uplifted hands, those nineteen men took an oath to support and maintain the Constitution of the United States. And I remember that another oath was passed around and each member signed it as provided by law, utterly repudiating the rebellion and its pretenses. Does the gentleman not blush to speak of Galileo's oath? Was not his own its counterpart? But the parallel fails. The great philosopher took an oath under compulsion, but denied it in the name of truth. The shameless representative sought the place he now holds; took the official oath without compulsion; and now, in the name of treason, breaks it without remorse.

He says the Union can never be restored because of the terrible hatred engendered by the war. To prove it he quotes what some southern man said a few years ago, that there is no hatred between peoples in the world like that between the North and the South. And yet that North and South have been one nation for eighty-eight years!

Have we seen in this contest anything more bitter than the wars of the Scottish border? Have we seen anything fiercer than those terrible feuds in the days of Edward, when England and Scotland were the deadliest foes on earth? And yet for centuries those countries have been cemented in an indissoluble union that has made the British nation one of the proudest of the earth!

I said a little while ago that I accepted the proposition of the gentleman that the rebels possessed the right of revolution. The decisive issue between us and the rebellion is, whether they shall revolutionize and destroy, or we shall subdue and preserve. We take the latter ground. We take the common weapons of war to meet them; and if these be not sufficient, I would take any element which will overwhelm and destroy; I would sacrifice the dearest and best beloved; I would take all the old sanctions of law and the Constitution and fling them to the winds, if necessary, rather than let the nation be broken in pieces and its people destroyed with endless ruin.

What is the Constitution that these gentlemen are perpetually flinging in our faces whenever we desire to strike hard blows against the rebellion? It is the production of the American people. They made it, and the creator is mightier than the creature.

The power which made the Constitution can also make other instruments to do its great work in the day of its dire necessity.

Mr. ELDRIDGE. I desire to ask the gentleman a question. I want to know if he did not just say that with nineteen others he stepped forward to the Speaker's desk and swore to support the Constitution.

Mr. GARFIELD. I did; and I am very happy the gentleman has reminded me of it at this time; I remember, in the very preamble of that Constitution, it is declared to be ordained for the purpose of promoting the general welfare and providing for the common defense; and on that very statement of its declared object, I not only lifted up my hand and swore to support that Constitution; but it makes me now sorry there had not been a sword in it when I lifted it up, to strike down any and all who would oppose the use of all the means God has placed in our power for overthrowing the rebellion forever.

I am reminded here of a fact which I had well-nigh forgotten. Last summer a Union spy came to our camp bringing two letters addressed to "Major General John C. Breckinridge, C. S. A." They were letters of introduction stating that the bearer desired to obtain a commission in the rebel army, and commending him as a gallant and reliable man whom Breckinridge could trust. One was signed by a man who lately held a seat in this House! [Cries of "Name him!" from the Democratic side of the House.]

Mr. GARFIELD. I will produce the letter in due time. It is not here with me. The other was from an associate of his, prominent in the local Democratic politics of the State of Indiana. I am responsible for producing those letters. [Cries of "Name."]

Mr. HOLMAN. I hope the gentleman will give the names now.

Mr. GARFIELD. When I produce the letters any further testimony that may be called for can be had at my hands.*

* The following are the letters referred to above. They were read in the House April 19. I have omitted, for manifest reasons, the name of the person in whose favor they were written:

ROCKVILLE, IND., July 14, 1863.

Maj. Gen. JOHN C. BRECKINRIDGE,

Dear Sir: I take great pleasure of recommending to your favorable acquaintance Mr. _____, of Greencastle, this State. He wishes to visit the South, and not be subjected to any danger from such a visit.

Mr. _____ was connected with the army for some months as a quartermaster of the — Indiana volunteers, but resigned immediately after the evacuation of Corinth, Miss., by your forces, and has had no sympathy or connection with the army since. Any duty he may agree to perform you may rely upon it that it will be faithfully done. Any favor shown him will be reciprocated by me whenever any opportunity offers.

I am, General, yours, with much respect.

(Signed)

JNO. G. DAVIS.

DEAR SIR:

GREENCASTLE, IND., July 1, 1863.

I take this method of introducing to your favorable consideration Mr. _____, a resident of this place. He wishes to enter the service of the South in some capacity, so that he can be of some assistance to your cause. I can safely recommend him to you as an energetic and faithful man in any capacity you may place him,

Mr. Chairman, let me mention another class of facts in this same connection. We were compelled last year to send our secret service men to ferret out the insidious work of that organization known as the "Knights of the Golden Circle," which was attempting to corrupt the Army and destroy its efficiency. It was found that, by the most subtle and secret means, the signs and pass-words of that order were being made known to such men in the Army as were disaffected or could be corrupted. Witness also the riots and murders which their agents are committing throughout the loyal North, under the lead and guidance of the party whose Representatives sit yonder across the aisle. And now, just as the time is coming, when we are to select a President for the next four years, one rises among them and fires the beacon, throws up the blue-light which will be seen and rejoiced over at the rebel capital as the signal that the traitors in our camp are organized and ready for their hellish work. I believe the utterance of to-day is the uplifted banner of revolt. I ask you to mark the signal that blazes here, and see if there will not soon appear the answering signals of traitors all over the land. If I am wrong in this prediction I shall be thankful, but I am only too fearful of its truth.

Let me say in conclusion, if these men *do* mean to light the torch of war in all our homes; if they have resolved to begin the fearful work which will redden our streets and this Capitol with blood, the American people should know it at once, and prepare to meet it.

On the following day, in answer to a statement of Mr. Cox of Ohio, Mr. GARFIELD said:

My colleague misrepresents me, I presume unintentionally, when he says that I have, on two occasions, declared my readiness to overleap the Constitution. That I may set myself and him right on that question, I will say, once for all, that I have never uttered such a sentiment. I believe, sir, that our fathers erected a Government to endure forever; that they framed a Constitution which provided, not for its own dissolution, but for its amendment and perpetuation. I believe that that constitution confers, on the executive and legislative departments of the Government, the amplest power to protect and defend this nation against all its enemies, foreign and domestic; that we are clothed with plenary power to pursue

and I know he can be of valuable assistance to you. Mr. ——— was for some time connected with the Union army, but became disgusted with the party in power and resigned in consequence thereof. Any favor that may be shown him will, I am satisfied, never be betrayed.

I am, General, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

(Signed)

D. R. ECKELS.

Gen. JOHN C. BRECKINRIDGE, C. S. A.

John G. Davis was a member of the 32d, 33d, 35th and 36th Congress, and the predecessor of the present member from the Terra Haute district [Mr. VOONERS] D. R. Eckels was a territorial judge under Buchanan, and is now a prominent Democratic politician in the same district with Mr. Davis.

rebels in arms, either as traitors, to be convicted in the courts and executed on the gallows, or as public enemies, to be subjected to the laws of war and destroyed on the battle-field. We are at liberty to adopt either policy, or both, as we deem most expedient.

But, sir, gentlemen on the other side of this chamber profess to be greatly embarrassed by constitutional restrictions. They tell us that the Constitution confers upon us no right to coerce a rebellious State; no right to confiscate the property of traitors; no right to employ black men in the military service; no right to suspend the writ of *habeas corpus*; no right to arrest spies; no right to draft citizens to fill up the army; in short, no right to do anything which is indispensably necessary to save the nation and the Constitution.

It was in answer to such claims that I said, in substance, *if all these things were so*, I would fall back on the *unalienable* right of self-preservation, and overleap the barrier of the Constitution; but I would leap into the arms of a willing people who made the Constitution, and who could, in the day of dire necessity, make other weapons for their own salvation. The nation is greater than the work of its own hands. The preservation of its life is of greater moment than the preservation of any parchment, however replete with human wisdom.

I desire the clerk to read an extract from an authority which, I am sure, the gentleman will acknowledge. It bears directly on the point in debate—

Mr. COX. Who is the authority.

Mr. GARFIELD. Thomas Jefferson.

The Clerk read as follows:

Mr. Jefferson, in a letter to J. B. Colvin, September 20, 1810, says:

“The question you propose, whether circumstances do not sometimes occur which make it a duty in officers of high trust to assume authorities beyond the law, is easy of solution in principle, but sometimes embarrassing in practice. A strict observance of the written laws is doubtless *one* of the high duties of a good citizen, but it is not the *highest*. The laws of necessity, of self-preservation, of saving our country when in danger, are of higher obligation. To lose our country by a scrupulous adherence to written law would be to lose the law itself, with life, liberty, property, and all those who are enjoying them with us; thus absurdly sacrificing the end to the means.—*Jefferson's Works*, vol. 5, p. 542.

Mr. GARFIELD. That extract states more ably than I can, the very doctrine I have advocated.