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J. M. Ashley

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ADDRESS

—OF—

Hon. J. M. ASHLEY

—BEFORE THE—

“OHIO SOCIETY OF NEW YORK,”

At its Fifth Annual Banquet, Wednesday evening, February 19, 1890.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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NEW YORK, February 20, 1890.

MY DEAR GOVERNOR ASHLEY:

At the banquet of the Ohio Society of New York last evening, the President of the Society was, by unanimous vote, directed to ask you to furnish to the Society for publication a copy of your admirable paper on the passage through the House of Representatives of the United States of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. In performance of this duty, I beg leave to present to you their request.

Let me add, personally, that this formal expression was supplemented individually by every one of those present with whom it was my fortune to converse. I am sure that I speak for all present in expressing my individual appreciation of the greatness and historic value of that action of which you were so largely the inspiration, and in which you were the foremost actor.

Yours, very truly,

WAGER SWAYNE.

Hon. J. M. ASHLEY.

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NEW YORK, February 21, 1890.

GENL. WAGER SWAYNE,  
President Ohio Society of New York,  
195 Broadway.

MY DEAR SIR:

Herewith please find copy of my address as delivered before your Society at the fifth annual banquet on the 19th inst.

It gives me pleasure to comply with a request in which is conveyed so complimentary an approval by the Society and yourself of the address.

I only regret that I did not have time to speak more in detail of the personality of the immortal twenty-four who voted with us, and thus made possible the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment.

Truly yours,

J. M. ASHLEY.





*Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Ohio Society of  
New York :*

The official acts of the great actors in the conflict of civilization with the barbarism of slavery are faithfully recorded in the nation's archives and open to the inspection and compilation of the coming historian.

You will not expect me to-night to do more than briefly notice some few of these men with whom it was my good fortune to be associated during the time Congress had under consideration the propositions to abolish slavery at the National Capitol and the Thirteenth Amendment.

When the story of our great anti-slavery conflict shall have been written it will make one of the most ideal chapters in our matchless history.

That chapter will tell the coming generations of men the story of the immortal victory achieved by the American people for democratic government and an undivided Union; a victory whose far-reaching consequences no man can even now foresee.

In the fullness of time to every nation and people great leaders are born, and some one or more of these earnest leaders, by the utterance of a simple moral truth in a brief couplet or in a single epigrammatic sentence, have often in the world's history changed the opinions of thousands.

Especially true was this of the written appeals and public addresses of the great anti-slavery leaders in this country for more than a quarter of a century before the rebellion. He was indeed a dull and insensible man who during our anti-slavery crusade did not grow eloquent and become aggressive when writing and speaking of slavery as the great crime

of his age and country. To me, as a boy, the men who made up this vanguard of anti-slavery leaders always appeared to be exceptionally great men, men who walked the earth with unfaltering faith and a firm tread, with heads erect, so that their prophetic eyes caught the dawn of Freedom's coming morn. They were brave, strong, self-reliant men, whose words and acts all testified that their great hearts "burned to break the fetters of the world." These men had no thought of witnessing during their lifetime the triumph of the cause which they had so unselfishly espoused; they were tireless and invincible workers. The alluring promise of success nowhere held out to them hope of political reward. To an unpopular cause they gave all they had of time, money and brains, not doubting that those who should come after them would be able to command and so to direct the moral forces of the nation as ultimately to enact justice into law by "proclaiming liberty throughout all the land to all the inhabitants thereof." Under this banner they went forth, conquering and to conquer, and in all their impassioned appeals they "sounded forth the bugle that never called retreat."

To have voluntarily enlisted and fought with this liberating army until our starry banner was planted in triumph on the last citadel of American slavery, is an honor of which the humblest citizen and his children may justly be proud, an honor which will grow brighter in all the coming years of the Republic.

I was so young when I enlisted in this liberating army that I cannot fix the date.

At the home of a neighbor, a Virginian by birth, and until the close of his manly life a resident of Kentucky, I heard, with wondering emotions, the first song in which a slave was represented as appealing to his captors for his freedom. I was but nine years old, but that song with its story touched my heart, and, though I never saw it in print, I never



forgot it. The verse of this song that arrested my attention and remained fixed in my memory is as clear to me *to-night* as it was more than half a century ago.

It was the plaintive appeal of an escaped slave, in simple rhyme, such as slaves often sang to tunes with which all are familiar who have heard the old-fashioned plantation melodies.

In that appeal to his captors

“ He showed the stripes his master gave,  
The branded scars—the sightless eye,  
The common badges of a slave,  
And said he would be free or die.”

I did not know until then that the slave-master had the right to whip, brand and maim his slave. It was at the home of this venerable anti-slavery man (who made the world better for his having lived in it) that I first learned this fact, and it was at his house that I first heard repeated many of the fiery utterances of Cassius M. Clay, of Kentucky. After showing an appreciation of these anti-slavery sentiments I was frequently lifted on a chair or table by our old anti-slavery neighbor and taught to declaim from the speeches of Cassius M. Clay and others. I was so fascinated by a paragraph from a speech made by Governor McDowell, of Virginia, that it always gave me pleasure to speak it, as I often did, with such earnestness as to secure me as honest applause in that quiet anti-slavery household as any I ever commanded on the platform in after years.

I never forgot that appeal of Governor McDowell, and often used it after I grew to manhood, and quoted it in one of my early speeches in Congress, as I again quote it here:

“ You may place the slave where you please, you may dry up to your uttermost the fountain of his feelings, the springs of his thought, you may close upon his mind every avenue to knowledge, and cloud it over with artificial night, you may yoke

him to labor as an ox—which liveth only to work, and worketh only to live; you may put him under any process which without destroying his value as a slave, will debase and crush him as a rational being—you may do all this; and yet, the idea that he was born free will survive it all. It is allied to his hope of immortality—it is the eternal part of his nature which oppression cannot reach. It is a torch lit up in his soul by the hand of Deity, and never meant to be extinguished by the hand of man.”

I speak of these seemingly unimportant incidents of my boyhood to confirm what I said in opening touching the influence which one brave, truthful man can exercise over thousands, and to illustrate the tremendous power a single thought may often have over the acts and lives of reader and hearer. From my ninth to my thirteenth year my father was preaching on a circuit in the border counties of Kentucky and West Virginia, and afterwards in Southeastern Ohio.

During our residence in Kentucky and West Virginia I did not know a single abolitionist except the family which I have described, and not until I was in my seventeenth year did I meet and become acquainted with Cassius M. Clay and John G. Fee. Sometime afterwards I met James G. Burney, who became the abolition candidate for President in 1844.

The leaders of the church to which my father belonged, and, indeed, the leaders in all Southern churches in those days, publicly affirmed “that slavery *per se* could exist without sin,” a doctrine which I regarded then, as I do now, as a perversion of the teachings of Christ. It has always been a source of satisfaction to me that my mother, who was a conservative woman, never gave in her adhesion to this rascally defense of “the sum of all villainies.”

At that time, in all the border counties of Kentucky, slavery existed in a milder form than in any other part of the Southwest, and the slave owners

whom I knew were much better men than one would in this day believe possible under any slave system.

And yet the system in its practical working was so monstrous that before I had grown to manhood I had publicly pronounced against it, and, as many before me know, I fought it with an energy which never tired, and a faith which never faltered.

While entertaining the anti-slavery opinions of Jefferson and the men of 1776, and everywhere proclaiming them without concealment, I was elected to Congress in 1858, when in my thirty-fourth year, and for the first time took my seat in a deliberative body in the Thirty-sixth Congress during the administration of Mr. Buchanan.

At that time the pro-slavery conspirators were preparing for armed rebellion, and for the desperate attempt, which they soon made, to establish a slave empire on the ruins of the Republic.

There I met many anti-slavery leaders of age and experience, to whose ranks I was eagerly welcomed.

I entered upon the straight and narrow path that led to victory. I faltered but once. That was on the vote on the Crittenden Resolution in July, 1861. The vote was 117 yeas; noes, 2. Mr. Potter of Wisconsin and Mr. Riddle of Ohio voting *No*.

I had been appealed to by almost every public man of my acquaintance in Washington and by my personal and political friends to vote for the resolution, and not assume the responsibility of separating myself at such a time and on so important a matter from my party. When my name was called I shook my head, as was then the custom; my name was called the second time, and I again shook my head, the blush of shame tingling my face, as it has every time I have thought of that act or looked at the record since and read, "Not voting, J. M. Ashley." I never felt the sense of shame so keenly before nor since; and turning to Mr. Corwin, my venerable colleague, as the vote was announced, I said,

with emotion, "Governor, that is the most cowardly act of my life, and no power on earth shall again make me repeat it." "Why, General," he exclaimed, with evident warmth, "*I voted for it.*" I saw that I had, in the excitement of the moment, offended him, and I made haste to assure him that I intended nothing of the sort, as all would have done who had offended so lovable, companionable and just a man as Governor Corwin. I promptly extended my hand and said, "Yes, Governor, but you do not see things as I do." I need hardly add that after this I did not again refuse to vote on any question, nor did I, during my entire service, give a single vote that to-night I would change.

Great occasions produce great men. The State of Ohio furnished her full quota for the crisis of 1861:

Joshua R. Giddings, the leader of the "old guard, one blast upon whose bugle horn was worth a thousand men."

Salmon P. Chase, Senator, Governor, Cabinet Minister and Chief Justice, who ranked next to Lincoln in leadership.

Thomas Ewing, profound statesman, great lawyer, and Cabinet Minister under General Harrison in 1841.

Edwin M. Stanton, the great War Secretary, earnest, fearless, tireless.

Judge McLean, the ideal Judge, representing on the bench the coming civilization, the writer of the dissenting opinion in the Dread Scott case.

Judge Swayne, judicial, conscientious, a great worker and the early friend and confidant of Lincoln.

Benjamin F. Wade, bluff, positive, ready to meet the enemy in the field or forum.

John Sherman, keen, politic, far-sighted and successful.

In the House—Thomas Corwin, Bingham, Lawrence, Hutchins, Spaulding, Schellaberger, Schenck, Hayes and Garfield.

Our War Governors, Dennison, Todd and Brough, unequaled as organizers and in administrative power.

On the Democratic side there were Senator Thurman and Representatives Vallandigham, Pendleton, Cox and Morgan, with many able men in private life, who were active in demanding our "authority and precedents" for all we proposed, and much that we did for which we had no "precedent."

In the army Ohio eclipsed the world. That wonderful triumvirate of commanders, Grant, Sherman and Sheridan, were without models and without equals. And then we had McPherson, Garfield, Steadman, Swayne, Cox and Buckland, and hundreds besides, who, on the field and in the forum, made the name of Ohio everywhere synonymous with great deeds and heroic acts.

In such a cause, with such leaders, success was foreordained.

When the official records of Congress during the administration of Mr. Buchanan are examined by the historian of the future, and the so-called compromise proposition of the Union-saving Committee of thirty-three (of which Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts was Chairman) is compared with the Thirteenth Amendment, which three years later became part of our National Constitution, it will be difficult for him to find reasons for the extraordinary revolution in public opinion which these two proposed amendments to our National Constitution present.<sup>1</sup> And here I wish I could walk backward with averted gaze, and with the broad mantle of charity cover the political nakedness of our own beloved State, which, by the vote of its Legislature, committed the indefensible folly of ratifying the pro-slavery amendment proposed by the Committee of thirty-three, and thus officially consented to its becoming a part of our National Constitution.

To me the propositions of the so-called "Peace Congress," over which ex-President John Tyler, of



Virginia, presided, were preposterous and offensive, and the "pledge" of the "Crittenden Resolution" a delusion and a snare, cunningly designed to paralyze and manacle us.

Every sane man who to-day reads the numerous proposed constitutional amendments with which Congress at that time was deluged will recognize the fact that they were all studiously and deliberately prepared for the avowed purpose of protecting slavery by new and more exacting guarantees.

This celebrated Compromise Committee of thirty-three reported and recommended an amendment which practically made slavery perpetual.

It was in these words:

"ARTICLE 12th. No amendments shall be made to the Constitution which shall authorize or give Congress the power to abolish or interfere within any State with the domestic institutions thereof, including that of persons held to labor or service by the laws of such State."

Imagine, if you can, what the other propositions were, if *this* was the most favorable which the Compromise Committee of thirty-three could obtain for us.

Two days before Mr. Lincoln's inauguration this abasement was made to the slave barons by a two-thirds vote of both Houses of the Congress of the United States, and the act was approved by President Buchanan.

I do not believe a more shameless exhibition on the part of a civilized people can be found in history.

Prior to this proposed surrender to the slave barons, a number of the Southern States had passed ordinances of secession, and defiantly organized a government, with Jefferson Davis as President.

That such humiliating concessions were as defenseless then as they would be now, and as offensive to the civilization of the nineteenth century, will not be questioned.



The nation had not then learned that the strength of a statesman lies in his fidelity to justice—not in his concessions to injustice.

Our official records, for nearly half a century before the Rebellion, presented one unbroken series of fruitless compromises with the slave barons, until in their pride and arrogance they believed themselves able to direct successfully any revolution and ride with safety any storm.

At last we came to know that all our concessions were regarded by them as irrevocable; that nothing but new concessions would be accepted by them, and that they would only consent to remain in the Union on the express condition that we should bind ourselves for all time to record their pro-slavery decrees in every department of the National and State governments.

The rebels witnessed our efforts at an adjustment with shouts of derision and defiance, and said, “Now we have the Yankees on a down grade, and on the run.”

They learned afterwards to their sorrow that, however true this might have been under the leadership of Buchanan, it was no longer true under the leadership of Lincoln. Yet, alas! it is true, that immediately after the election of Mr. Lincoln and before his inauguration, many men who had been active anti-slavery men quailed before the approaching storm, which their own brave appeals for liberty had aided in producing.

They comprehended what civil war, with all its attendant horrors, meant to a civilized people, and shrank from its terrible consequences, and as the acts of their representatives proved, they were willing to do everything in their power to avoid it. These timid anti-slavery men were representatives of the wealth, the manufacturing industry, the commerce, the peaceful farm-life of the North and West, and the best civilization of the age. They were for peace; they believed in an appeal to the

conscience and heart of the nation, at the ballot box, and in loyally submitting to the verdict when rendered. They never would have appealed from the ballot box to the cartridge box. The great heart of the North was still and for a time held its breath while re-echoing with hope the sentiment of their beloved Quaker Poet, when, just before the Rebellion, he uttered this sublime prayer:

“ Perish with him the thought,  
That seeks, through evil, good ;  
Long live the generous purpose  
Unstained by human blood.”

While I did not adopt, without qualification, the memorable utterances of Daniel O’Connell, the great Irish leader, when he declared “ that no revolution was worth the shedding of one drop of human blood,” I everywhere proclaimed “ that in this country, so long as the press was free and speech was free, and the ballot was free, no revolution was worth the shedding of one drop of human blood.”

The speeches, appeals and acts of the leaders of the two sections were entirely characteristic.

The Southern leaders, instead of quailing before the storm which their passionate appeals had raised, defiantly mounted and rode the storm, fit types of the barbarism which they championed.

When the North, with the loyal men of the border States, fully comprehended the fact that there could be no peace nor union unless the Rebellion was suppressed by force, and slavery, which made the Rebellion possible, was abolished, they buckled on their armor and went forth to conquer.

During the first session of Congress, after Mr. Lincoln became President, I introduced a bill for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. It contained but one short section, and simply enacted “ that slavery, or involuntary servitude, should cease in the District of Columbia from and after the passage of this act.” I sent it to the Committee on the

District of Columbia, of which I was a member, and Roscoe Conkling, of New York, was chairman. When the bill was read in the District Committee, it was by common consent referred to me, as a sub-committee of one. The excitement and indignation which that bill caused in the District Committee, and the undisguised disgust entertained for me personally by the pro-slavery members of the Committee, would be amusing now, but it was a matter of serious moment then.

I felt certain that a majority of that Committee did not intend to let me report that bill or any other of like character to the House for a vote. As soon as it was known that I had the matter in charge, by direction of the District Committee Mr. Chase sent for me, and discussed the proposition which I had introduced, and suggested instead, a bill which should compensate the "loyal slave owners" by paying them a "ransom," which should not exceed three hundred dollars a head for each slave, and enforced his argument by adding that Mr. Lincoln was seriously considering the practicability of compensating the border States if they would take the initiative and emancipate their slaves, and he added, "I want you to see the President, and if possible prepare a bill which will command the necessary votes of both Houses of Congress and the active support of the Administration."

I saw the President next day and went over the ground with him, substantially as I had with Mr. Chase, and finally agreed that I would ask for the appointment of a Senator on the part of the Senate District Committee to unite with me to frame a bill, which the Senate and House Committees would report favorably, and which should have the President's approval, and the support of as many of the Representatives from the border States as we could induce to vote to "initiate emancipation," as Mr. Lincoln expressed it.

Fortunately for the success of the compensation policy, the Senate District Committee designated as that sub-committee-man, Lot M. Morrell, of Maine, to confer with me and prepare such a bill as Mr. Lincoln and Chase had outlined.

After several meetings a bill was finally agreed upon which appropriated one million dollars to pay loyal owners for their slaves at a price not to exceed \$300 each.

This bill had the approval of Mr. Lincoln and Chase and other anti-slavery leaders, before it was submitted to the District Committees for their action and recommendation to each House of Congress.

Personally, I did not agree with Mr. Lincoln in his border State policy, but was unwilling to set up my judgment against his, especially when he was supported by such men as Chase, Fessenden, Trumbull, and a large majority of Union men in both Houses of Congress. I therefore yielded my private opinions on a matter of policy, for reasons which I then gave and will presently quote, and because I was determined that that Congress should not adjourn until slavery had been abolished at the National Capital.

I did not want to appropriate a million of dollars from the National Treasury to pay the slave owners of the District of Columbia for their slaves, because I was opposed to officially recognizing property in man, and for the additional reason that I was confident that before the close of the war slavery would be abolished without compensation. And I believed then, and believe now, that at least two thirds of all the so-called "loyal slave owners" in the District of Columbia who applied for and accepted compensation for their slaves, would at that time have welcomed Jefferson Davis and his government in Washington with every demonstration of joy.

On the 12th of March, 1862, by direction of the Committee for the District of Columbia, I reported

the bill to the House as it had been agreed upon by Mr. Morrell and myself, with the approval of Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Chase and others.

On the 11th of April, 1862, the bill, as amended by the Senate, passed the House by a vote of 92 for to 38 against, and at once received the signature of the President.

In the speech which I delivered that day I said :  
 “I do not believe that Congress has any more power to make a slave than to make a king,” and added,  
 “If then there is, as I claim, no power in Congress to reduce any man or race to slavery, it certainly will not be claimed that Congress has power to legalize such regulations as exist to-day touching persons held as slaves in this District by re-enacting the slave laws of Maryland, and thus do by indirection what no sane man claims authority to do directly.”

\* \* \* “If I must tax the loyal people of the nation a million of dollars before the slaves at the National Capital can be ransomed I will do it. I will make a bridge of gold over which they may pass to freedom on the anniversary of the fall of Sumter, if it cannot be more justly accomplished.”

As the nation had been guilty of riveting the chains of all the slaves in the District, and Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Chase, and so large a majority of the friends of the Union desired the passage of this act, believing that it would aid them in holding the border slave States, I yielded my own opinions, and voted to pay the loyal owners of the District for their slaves, and thus aided Mr. Lincoln in initiating emancipation by compensation. But events were stronger than men or measures, and this was the first and last of compensation.

On the 14th of December, 1863, I introduced a proposition to amend the Constitution, abolishing slavery in all the States and Territories of the nation, which, on my motion, was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary. In a speech during that session



of Congress urging the submission of such an amendment, I said: "I advocated from the first the emancipation of all slaves, because I believed ideas more formidable than armies, justice more powerful than prejudice, and truth a weapon mightier than the sword."

The fall of Vicksburg and the great victory of Gettysburg had solidified the Union men North and South, and assured them of ultimate success.

The crushing defeat of Hood at Nashville by Thomas, the investment of Richmond by Grant, and Sherman's triumphant march from the mountains to the sea, was an announcement to the world that all armed opposition to the Government was approaching its end.

It now only remained, that the statesmen who had provided for and organized our great armies should crown their matchless victories with unfading glory, by engrafting into our National Constitution a provision which should make peace and union inseparable by removing forever the cause of the war, and making slavery everywhere impossible beneath the flag of the Republic.

On the 15th of June, 1864, the House voted on the proposed constitutional amendment, and it was defeated by a vote of 94 for it and 64 against it. I thereupon changed my vote before the announcement was made, as I had the right to do under the rules, and my vote was recorded with the opposition in order that I might enter a motion for reconsideration.

In the *Globe*, as the vote stands recorded, it is 93 for to 65 against. This vote disappointed, but it did not discourage me. Had every member been present and voted, it would have required 122 votes to pass the amendment, whereas we could muster but 94, or 28 less than required.

As I now look back, and review with calmer emotions than I did then the great battle we were



fighting, I comprehend more fully the power of that simple and sublime faith which inspired all the living heroes in that historic hour.

In his "Twenty Years of Congress" Mr. Blaine has given me credit, in full measure, for introducing and pressing the first proposition made in the House of Representatives for the abolition of slavery in the United States by an amendment to the National Constitution, and for effective parliamentary work in securing its passage. Personally, I never regarded the work which I then did as entitling me to special recognition. It was to me a duty, and because I so felt, I have never publicly written or spoken about my connection with it, and should not have done so before you to-night but for the pressing invitation of our President, who acts as if he regarded it as part of his duty, while charged with the care of this Society, to bring every modest Ohio man to the front.

There was at that time so many noble and unselfish men in the House of Representatives entitled to recognition for effective work in behalf of the Thirteenth Amendment, that I have always preferred not to single out any one member as entitled to more credit than another. I certainly did not expect any such complimentary recognition as Mr. Blaine has so generously given me.

Educated in the political school of Jefferson, I was absolutely amazed at the solid Democratic vote against the amendment on the 15th of June. To me it looked as if the golden hour had come, when the Democratic party could, without apology, and without regret, emancipate itself from the fatal dogmas of Calhoun, and reaffirm the doctrines of Jefferson. It had always seemed to me that the great men in the Democratic party had shown a broader spirit in favor of human liberty than their political opponents, and until the domination of Mr. Calhoun and his States-rights disciples, this was un-

doubtedly true. On the death of General Harrison in 1841, and after John Tyler became the acting President, I date the organized conspiracy of the slave barons, which culminated in the Rebellion.

A man of singleness of purpose and disinterestedness, possesses a wonderful power which is soon recognized by his associates in the Congress of the United States. The leading men in both Senate and House, and in nearly all the executive departments, knew that my only ambition was to accomplish the task with which (as Mr. Blaine expresses it) I was "by common consent, specially charged." The only reward I expected, and the only reward I ever had, or shall ever have, is the satisfaction of knowing that I did my whole duty, nothing more, nothing less. I at once gave special care to the study of the characters and antecedents of thirty-six of the members who did not vote for the amendment on the 15th of June, and made up my mind that if we could force the issue of the Thirteenth Amendment into the pending presidential contest, and Mr. Lincoln should be elected in November, that the requisite number of liberal Democrats and border State Union men who had voted against and defeated the amendment in June might be prevailed upon to vote with us after Mr. Lincoln had been re-elected on that issue. In this faith, and with this hope, I at once began a systematic study of the characters of the men whose cooperation and votes must be secured as a condition to success.

During this six months' experience I learned something of the tremendous power of a single man when making earnest appeals to his colleagues. One source of ever-present embarrassment to me was the fact that I had but little experience in legislation, and that nearly every one of my colleagues to whom I was addressing myself was my senior in years. In this great work I had the earnest support of the Administration, the great majority of the Republican

party, and many earnest men in public and private life.

On the 28th of June, 1864, Mr. Holman, of Indiana, rose in the House, and said "that he desired to know whether the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. Ashley) who entered the motion to reconsider the vote by which the House rejected the bill proposing an amendment to the Constitution abolishing slavery throughout all the States and Territories of the United States, proposed to call that motion up during the present session." In reply, I said that I did not propose to call the motion up during the present session; "but as the record had been made up, we would go to the country on the issue thus presented." And I added: "When the verdict of the people shall have been rendered next November, I trust this Congress will return determined to engraft that verdict into the National Constitution." I thereupon gave notice that I would call up the proposition at the earliest possible moment after our meeting in December next (See *Globe*, June 28th, 1864).

Immediately after giving this notice, I went to work to secure its passage, and it may not be uninteresting if I outline to you the way I conducted that campaign.

The question thus presented became one of the leading issues of the Presidential Campaign of 1864.

The Administration—the Republican party—and many men who were not partizans, now gave the measure their warm support.

Knowing that Henry Winter Davis, of Maryland, and Frank P. Blair, of Missouri, would vote for the amendment whenever their votes would secure its passage, I went to them to learn who of the border-State members were men of broad and liberal views, and strong and self-reliant enough to follow their convictions, even to political death, provided they could know that their votes would pass the measure.

The following is the list of the names of the border-State men, as made up within two weeks after the defeat of the amendment in June, 1864: James S. Rollins, Henry S. Blow, Benjamin F. Loan, ex-Gov. King, S. H. Boyd, Frank P. Blair and Joseph W. McClurg of Missouri; Green Clay Smith, George H. Yeaman, Brutus J. Clay and Lucius Anderson of Kentucky; John A. J. Cresswell, Gov. Francis Thomas, E. H. Webster and Henry Winter Davis of Maryland; Kellian V. Whaley, Jacob P. Blair, and William G. Brown of West Virginia, and N. B. Smithers of Delaware. Of the 19 thus selected 13 voted for the amendment, and marched to their political death.

After conferring with Reuben E. Fenton and Augustus Frank of New York, I made up the following list of liberal Northern Democrats, whose votes I hoped to secure for the amendment:

Moses F. Odell, Homer A. Nelson, John A. Griswold, Anson Herrick, John B. Steele, Charles F. Winfield, William Radford and John Ganson of New York; S. S. Cox, Warren P. Noble, Wells A. Hutchins, John F. McKenney and Francis C. Le Blond of Ohio; Archibald McAllister and Alex. H. Coffroth of Pennsylvania; James E. English of Connecticut, and Augustus C. Baldwin of Michigan.

Of the 17 Northern Democrats thus selected, eleven voted for the amendment, two were absent, and one who had promised me to vote for it and prepared a speech in its favor, finally voted against. Of the 36 members originally selected as men naturally inclined to favor the amendment, and strong enough to meet and repel the fierce partisan attack which were certain to be made upon them, 24 voted for it, two were absent, and but *ten* voted against it.

Every honorable effort was made by the Administration to secure the passage of this amendment.

At my request Tuesday, January 31st, 1865, was the day fixed for the vote to be taken on the amendment.

A faithful record of the final act of the 38th Congress on this question will be found on pages 523 to 531 of the *Congressional Globe*.

The Speaker stated the question, and announced "That the gentleman from Ohio was entitled to the floor," which under the rules gave me one hour in which to close the debate.

Never before, and certain I am that never again, will I be seized with so strong a desire to give utterance to the thoughts and emotions which throbbed my heart and brain.

I knew that the hour was at hand when the world would witness the complete triumph of a cause, which at the beginning of my political life I had not hoped to live long enough to see, and that on that day, before our session closed, an act, as just as it was merciful to oppressor and oppressed, was to be enacted into law, and soon thereafter became a part of our National Constitution forever.

The hour and the occasion was an immortal one in the Nation's history, and memorable to each actor who voted for the amendment.

Every available foot of space, both in the galleries and on the floor of the House, was crowded at an early hour, and many hundred could not get within hearing. Never before, nor afterwards, did I see so brilliant and distinguished a gathering in that hall, nor one where the feeling was more intense. The Judges of the Supreme Court, the members of the Cabinet, the Vice-President and Senators, most of the foreign Ministers and all the distinguished visitors who could secure seats, with their wives, daughters and friends, were present to witness the sublimest event in our National life.

You will readily understand that this was an occasion to inspire any man of my temperament with a strong desire to speak, and yet it was beyond question my duty to yield all my time to gentlemen of the opposition, who had promised to vote for the



amendment, and desired to have recorded in the official organ of the House the reasons for the vote which they were about to give.

The first gentleman to whom I yielded was the Hon. Archibald McAllister of Pennsylvania, an old-fashioned Democrat of the Jackson school. He was not a speaker, and the brief "statement," as he called it, which he sent to the Clerk's desk to be read for him as he stood on the floor, with every eye in that great hall fixed on his tall form, is so characteristic, and withal expresses so tersely the reasons which impelled him and thousands of other loyal and conservative men to demand the immediate abolition of slavery, that I quote what he said entire.

I will read it to you, and repeat what he said, as nearly as I can, with the same intonation of voice and manner as he read it to me in my Committee room that morning, a few minutes before the House convened.

He said "That it was due to his constituents that they should know why he changed his vote, and that he could not make a speech, that he was so nervous that he dare not even trust himself to read what he had written, and asked me if I would yield him the floor long enough to allow him to send to the Clerk's desk, and have read what he desired to say to his constituents." I never was more anxious to yield the floor to any man than I was to him, and answered, "Certainly, I will be glad to yield you all the time you ask." He then read me this short, and now historical, speech, and I said to him then, as I say to you now, that it was, under all the circumstances, the best and most eloquent speech delivered in the House of Representatives in favor of the Thirteenth Amendment. This is the speech, and the way he read it to me:

"When this subject was before this House on a former occasion, I voted against the measure. I



have been in favor of exhausting all means of conciliation to restore the Union as our fathers made it. I am for the whole Union and utterly opposed to secession, or dissolution in any shape. The result of all the peace missions, and especially that of Mr. Blair, has satisfied me that nothing short of the recognition of their independence will satisfy the Southern Confederacy. It must therefore be destroyed, and in voting for the present measure, I cast my vote against the cornerstone of the Southern Confederacy, and declare eternal war against the enemies of my country."

As soon as he had finished reading it, I grasped his hand with enthusiasm, and heartily congratulated him, and said, "Mr. McAllister, that is a better and more telling speech by far than any which has been made for the amendment, and I believe that it will be quoted hereafter more than any speech made in Congress in its favor."

When the Clerk of the House finished reading this brief speech of this plain, blunt man, it called forth general applause on the floor and in the galleries, and when I afterwards read it to Mr. Lincoln, Chase and others, they were then as pronounced in its endorsement as I am now.

To the end that there should be no pretext for "filibustering" (as I knew the amendment might be defeated in that way), I determined from the start to so conduct the debate that every gentleman opposed to the amendment who cared to be heard should have ample time and opportunity.

After the previous question had been seconded, and all debate ordered closed, there could be but two roll-calls (if there were no filibustering) before the final vote.

The first roll-call was on a motion made by the opposition, to lay my motion to reconsider on the table. Such a motion is generally regarded as a test vote.

Hundreds of tally sheets had been distributed

on the floor and in the galleries, many being in the hands of ladies. Before the result of the first roll-call was announced, it was known all over the House that the vote was *two* less than the necessary *two-thirds*, and both Mr. Stevens of Pennsylvania and Mr. Washburn of Illinois excitedly exclaimed: "General, we are defeated." "No, gentlemen, we are not," was my prompt answer. The second vote was on my motion to reconsider, which would bring the House, at the next roll-call, to a direct vote on the passage of the amendment.

The excitement was now the most intense I ever witnessed; the oldest members, with the Speaker and the reporters in the galleries, believed that we were defeated. When the result of the second vote was announced, we lacked *one vote* of two-thirds, whereupon many threw down their tally sheets and admitted defeat. I now arose and stood, while the roll was being called on the final vote and said to those around me, that we would have *not less* than four (4), and I believed seven (7) majority over the necessary two-thirds.

As the roll was completed, the Speaker directed that his name be called as a member of the House, and when he voted he announced to an astonished assemblage, "that the yeas were 119, and the nays 56, and that the bill had received the two-thirds majority required by the Constitution." It was a moment or two before the House or the galleries recovered from their surprise and recognized the fact that we had triumphed. When they did, a shout went up from the floor and galleries, and the vast audience rose to their feet, many members jumping on their desks, with shouts and waving of hats and handkerchiefs, and gave vent to their feelings by every demonstration of joy. It was a scene such as I had never before witnessed, and shall never witness again.

Mr. Ingersoll of Illinois said: "Mr. Speaker, in

honor of this sublime and immortal event, I move that this House do now adjourn," which motion was carried.

When this vote was taken, the House had but 183 members, 94 of whom were Republicans, 64 Democrats, and 25 border-State Union men.

If the vote is analyzed, it will be seen that of the 119 votes recorded for the amendment 13 were by men from the border States, and eleven (11) were by Democrats from the free States. If but 3 out of the 24, who voted with us, had voted against the amendment it would have failed. If but four (4) of the 8 members who were absent had appeared and voted against, it would have been lost. Had all the Northern Democrats who supported the amendment voted against, it would have been defeated by 26 votes. Had all the border-State men who voted for it, voted against, it would have failed by 32 votes.

If the border-State men and Northern Democrats who voted for the amendment had voted against, it would have failed by 65 votes.

Mr. Lincoln was especially delighted at the vote which the amendment received from the border slave States, and frequently congratulated me on that result.

Bancroft, the historian, has drawn with a graphic pen the characters of many of the able and illustrious men of the Revolution which achieved our independence. In writing of George Mason, of Virginia, he said: "His sincerity made him wise and bold, modest and unchanging, with a scorn for anything mean and cowardly, as illustrated in his unselfish attachment to human freedom." And these identical qualities of head and heart were pre-eminently conspicuous in all the border statesmen who voted for the Thirteenth Amendment.

It would be difficult in any age or country to find grander or more unselfish and patriotic men than Henry Winter Davis and Governor Francis Thomas

of Maryland, or James S. Rollins, Frank P. Blair and Governor King of Missouri, or George H. Yeaman of Kentucky, or N. P. Smithers of Delaware, and not less worthy of mention for their unchanging fidelity to principle are all the Northern Democrats who voted for the amendment, prominent among whom I may name Governor English, of Connecticut; Judge Homer A. Nelson and Moses S. Odell, of New York; Archibald McAllister, of Pennsylvania; Wells A. Hutchins, of Ohio, and A. C. Baldwin, of Michigan.

Of the twenty-four border State and Northern men who made up this majority which enabled us to win this victory, all had defied their party discipline, and had deliberately and with unfaltering faith marched to their political death. These are the men whom our future historians will honor, and to whom this nation owes a debt of eternal gratitude.

But seven of this twenty-four are now living, the others have gone to

" Join the choir invisible  
Of those immortal dead, who live again  
In minds made better by their presence; live  
In pulses stirred to generosity,  
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn  
For miserable aims that end with self."









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