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DISCOURSE

OF

DR. BRECKINRIDGE,

DELIVERED ON THE

Day of National Humiliation,

JANUARY 4, 1861.

AT LEXINGTON, KY.

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DISCOURSE.

It is in circumstances, my friends, of terrible solemnity, that this great nation presents herself in an attitude of humiliation before the Lord God of Hosts; in circumstances of great solemnity, that she stands before the bar of all surrounding nations, under that universal public opinion which gives fame or stamps with infamy; and hardly less solemn than both, is her attitude at the bar of distant ages and especially our own posterity, that awful tribunal whose decrees can be reversed only by the decree of God. It is the first of these three aspects, either passing by in silence or touching very slightly the other two, that I am to consider before you now. And what I shall chiefly attempt to show is, that our duties can never be made subordinate to our passions without involving us in ruin, and that our rights can never be set above our interests without destroying both.

In taking this direction, let us bear in mind that the proclamation of the chief Magistrate of the Republic which calls us to this service, asserts, in the first place, that ruin is impending over our national institutions; and asserts in the second place, that so far as appears to him no human resources remain that are adequate to save them; and in the third place, that the whole nation according to his judgment ought to prostrate itself before God and cry to him for deliverance. Upon this I have to say, in the great name of God, and by the authority of Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world, these two things: *First*, that national judgments never come except by reason of national sins; nor are they ever turned aside except upon condition of repentance for the sins which produced them; and *Secondly*, that repentance for sin, as it is the absolute and universal, so it is the infallible condition of divine pardon and acceptance, not only in the case of individuals, but more obviously still and more immediately in the case of nations, since nations, as such, have no existence in a future life. Wherefore, if we are in the way of fearful evils we are also in the way of clear duty, and therein we may hope for assured deliverance in the degree, first, that every one will go before another in earnest endeavors to rectify in himself all that is abominable to God; and, secondly, that every one will evince towards others, the forbearance which he desires that God should extend towards him. Wherefore, also, we may boldly say that the remedy from God to us need not be expected to manifest itself by means of political parties

or by means of combinations of political leaders, or by means of new political compacts, or by means of additional legal enactments, or by means of more explicit constitutional provisions; but that it must come from God to us, and be made manifest through a profound movement in the source of all power in free governments, namely, first, in the hearts of individuals, men turning from their sins, their follies and their madness: and secondly, in the uprising of an irresistible impulse thus created, which over the length and breadth of the land shall array itself in the power of God against every endeavor to bring upon us the evils which we are imploring God to avert.

The first and greatest of these evils that we beseech God to avert, and that we should strive with all our might to prevent, is the annihilation of the nation itself, by tearing it into fragments. Men may talk of rights perpetually and outrageously violated—they may talk of injuries that are obliged to be redressed—they may talk about guarantees without which they can submit to no further peace—and there is doubtless much that has force and much more that is captivating to ardent minds in such expositions of our sad condition. For what problem half so terrible was ever agitated upon which it was not easy to advance much on every side of it? I will not consume the short time allowed to me in examining such views. What I assert, in answer to them all is, that we have overwhelming duties and incalculable interests which dictate a special line of conduct, the chief aim of which should be the preservation of the American Union, and therein of the American nation.

To be more explicit, it seems to me that there are inestimable blessings connected with the preservation of our National Union; and that there are intolerable evils, involved in its destruction. For the blessings: there is the blessing of peace amongst ourselves, there is the blessing of freedom to ourselves and to our posterity, there is the blessing of internal prosperity secured by that peace, and freedom, never before excelled, if attained, by any people; there is the blessing of national independence secured by our invincible strength, against all the powers of the earth combined, there is the blessing of our glorious example to all nations and to all ages; there is the blessing of irresistible power to do good to all peoples, and to prevent evil over the face of the whole earth; there is the blessing of an unfettered Gospel and an open Bible and a divine Saviour, more and more manifested in our whole national life as that life deepens and spreads, subduing and possessing the widest and the noblest inheritance ever given to any people, and overflowing and fructifying all peoples besides. It is the problem sought to be solved from the beginning of time, and, to say the least, the nearest approximation made to its solution, namely, the complete possession of freedom united with irresistible national force, and all directed to the glory of God and to the good of

man. And this is that glorious estate now declared to be in fearful peril, and which we are called upon to beseech God to preserve unto us.

On the other hand, the evils of rending this nation. Which of the blessings that I have enumerated—and I have enumerated only those that appeared to me to be the most obvious—which of these is there—peace, freedom, prosperity, independence, the glory of our example, the power to do good and to prevent evil, the opportunity to give permanent efficiency all over this continent, and in a certain degree all over this earth to the gospel of God; which of these blessings is there that may not be utterly lost to vast portions of the nation—which of them that may not be jeopardized over this whole continent; which of them is there that may not depart forevermore from us and our posterity in the attempt to destroy our oneness as a people, and in the results of that unparalleled self-destruction? Besides all this, how obvious and how terrible are the evils over and above, which the very attempt begets, and which our after progress must necessarily make permanent if that attempt succeeds. First, we have already incurred the perils of universal bankruptcy before the first act is achieved by one of the least important of the thirty-three States. Secondly, we have already seen constitutional government both in its essence and in its form trampled under foot by the convention of that State; and all the powers of sovereignty itself, both ordinary and extraordinary, assumed by it in such a manner that life, liberty and property have no more security in South Carolina than anywhere under heaven where absolute despotism or absolute anarchy prevails, except in the personal characters of the gentlemen who hold the power. Thirdly, we have already seen that small community preparing to treat with foreign nations, and if need be introduce foreign armies into this country: headlong in the career in which she disdains all counsel, scorns all consultation and all entreaty, and treats all ties, all recollections, all existing engagements and obligations as if her ordinance of secession had not only denationalized that community, but had extinguished all its past existence. Fourthly, we see the glorious flag of this Union torn down and a colonial flag floating in its place; yea, we see that community thrown into paroxysms of rage, and the Cabinet at Washington thrown into confusion because in the harbor of Charleston our national flag instead of being still further dishonored, yet floats over a single tower! What then did they expect, who sent to the harbor of Charleston, to occupy the national fortress there, the son of a companion of Washington, a hero whose veins are full of revolutionary blood, and whose body is covered with honorable scars won in the service of his country? Why did they send that Kentucky hero there if they did not intend the place they put into his hands to be kept, to the last extremity? But I need not en-

large upon this terrible aspect of what is coming to us all if the Union is destroyed. These are but the beginnings of sorrows. The men and the parties who initiate the reign of lawless passion, rarely escape destruction amid the storms they create, but are unable to control. Law comes from the depth of eternity, and in its sublime sway is the *nexus* of the universe. Institutions *grow*; they are not *made*. Desolated empires are never restored. All history furnishes no such example. If we desire to perish, all we have to do is to leap into this vortex of disunion. If we have any just conception of the solemnity of this day, let us beseech God that our country shall not be torn to pieces; and under the power of these solemnities let us quit ourselves like men in order to avert that most horrible of all national calamities.

Let us consider, in the next place, those rights, as they are called, by means of which, and in their extreme exercise, all the calamities that threaten us are to be brought upon us at any moment: nay, are to be so brought upon us that our destruction shall be perfectly regular, perfectly legal, perfectly constitutional! In which case a system like ours—a system the most enduring of all others, whether we consider the history of the past or the laws which enter into its composition—a system the hardest of all others to be deranged, and the easiest of all to be readjusted when deranged; such a system is alleged to have a secret in it, designed expressly to kill it, at the option of the smallest fragment of it. I allude to the claim of the right of Nullification and the claim of the right of secession as being Constitutional rights: and I desire to explain myself briefly in regard to them.

According to my comprehension there is a thorough and fundamental difference between the two. The power of nullification, supposing it to exist, would be an extreme right within the Union, and is necessarily temporary in its effect, and promptly tends to the termination of the difficulty upon which it arises. And this settlement may occur by the action of our complex system of government in various ways. It may be in the way of some compromise of existing difficulties; or in the way of repeal, by one party or the other, or in the modification of the obnoxious laws; or in the way of some judicial decision settling the difficulty. Or—which is the true remedy—instead of Nullification, by an appeal to the people at the polls, who are the source of all power in free governments, and by obedience to their decisions when rendered—by voting, instead of fighting. Or at the worst, by an appeal to arms; but even in that case the result necessarily secures the continuance of the pre-existing system of government on the restoration of peace; let that peace be by victory on which side you please. The doctrine of Nullification stands related to the doctrine of State Rights—precisely as the doctrine of Consolidation stands related to the old federal

doctrine of a strong central Government. In both cases, the theory of a great party has been pushed to a logical absurdity, which subverted our political system. That the will of the greater part should prevail—and that the smaller parts should have the power of appeal to this will, at the polls—and in judgment upon every principle of civil and political liberty—was the ultimate form in which this great doctrine entered into the political creed of that old Republican party which came into power with Mr. Jefferson in 1801, and was expounded as they held it in those famous resolutions of Kentucky and Virginia in the latter part of the last century. Its connection with that whole theory of every mixed political system, is not only absolute but is vital. More especially is it so with our complex system. It has been carried, as it stands connected with the constitutional, and much more with the reserved rights of the States, to an extreme on that side, opposite to the extreme of Consolidation. But even in its extremest form it bears no proportion in mischief to the doctrine of Secession. Considered in its true and original form, I judge it to be indispensable to the preservation of our political system; and that the opposite mode of interpreting our political duties and rights and remedies terminates in subjugating the States to the General Government, and in subjugating both the General Government and the exposition of every political principle to the Supreme Court of the United States. The former system is natural and permanent—the latter is absurd and invites rebellion. This great phenomenon has occurred in this country, that, by reason of the extraordinary ability of some of the advocates of the system which passed away in 1801, it has assumed a new form and a new life in general opinion; and seconded by the peculiar constitution of the Supreme Court of the United States, the old Republican or Democratic notions upon this great subject, though constantly triumphant in the country, have been constantly disallowed in the interpretations of that Court. I judge that the doctrine of Secession is an extreme reaction against this Federal interpretation of the relations of the States to each other and to the nation. For when you arrive at an interpretation which is final and hateful to immense parties and interests; and there is no remedy but arms, secession or absolute submission; the expression of popular will against the interpretation you have made, brings society to a condition that in an excitable race and amongst a free people can hardly be expected to be safe or easy to be managed. You have therefore this perilous and extraordinary claim of the right of secession under this extreme reaction; differing absolutely from the idea of the old States Rights party, and differing absolutely even from nullification itself.

Secession is a proceeding which begins by tearing to pieces the whole fabric of government, both social and political. It begins by rendering all redress of all possible evils utterly im-

possible under the system that exists, for its very object is to destroy its existence. It begins by provoking war and rendering its occurrence apparently inevitable, and its termination well nigh impossible. Its very design is not to reform the administration of existing laws, not to obtain their repeal or modification, but to annihilate the institutions of the country and to make many nations out of one. If it is the constitutional right of any State to do this, then we have no National Government and never had any. Then, also, it is perfectly idle to speak of new Constitutions, since the new Constitutions can have no more force than the Constitution already despised and disobeyed. Then, also, the possibility is ended—ended in the very theory of the case, and illustrated in the utter failure of its practice—of uniting republican freedom with national strength in any country or under any form of government. But according to my belief, and according to the universal belief of the American people but a little while ago, no such right, legal or constitutional, as that of secession, does or can exist under any form of government, and least of all under such institutions as ours.

And first of all, no State in this Union ever had any sovereignty at all independent of and except as they were *United States*. When they speak of recovering their sovereignty, when they speak of returning to their condition as sovereigns in which they were before they were members of the confederacy called at first the United Colonies, and then the United States; they speak of a thing that is historically without any foundation. They were not States, they were colonies of the British, the Spanish, the French, and the Dutch governments; they were colonies granted by royal charters to particular individuals or particular companies. Pennsylvania was the estate, the property of William Penn; Georgia the larger part, perhaps the whole of it, of General Oglethorpe. They were settled under charters to individuals and to companies—settled as colonies of foreign Kings and States by their subjects. As such they revolted. As such, before their revolt, they united in a continental government more or less complete. As such united colonies they pronounced that famous Declaration of Independence, which after a heroic struggle of seven years, still as united colonies, they made good. That great Washington who led that great war was the commander-in-chief for and in behalf of these united colonies. As such they were born States. The treaty of peace that made them independent States, was concluded with them all together—as United States. What sovereignty did Kentucky ever have except the sovereignty that she has as a State of these United States, born at the same moment a State of the American Union, and a separate sovereign State? We were a district of Virginia. We became a State and we became one of the United States at the same moment, for the same purpose, and for good and all. What I mean by this, is to point

out the fact that the complex system of government which we have in this country, did always, does now, and in the nature of the case, must contemplate these States as united into a common government, and that common government as really a part of our political system, as the particular institutions of the separate sovereignties are a part of our political system. And while, as you will observe, I have attempted, while repudiating the doctrine of nullification, to vindicate that doctrine of State rights, which as I firmly believe is an integral and indispensable part of our political system; yet on the other hand, the doctrine that we are a nation and that we have a national government, is and always was just as truly a part of our system as the other. And our political system always stood as much upon the basis that we are a nation, as it stood upon the basis that that nation is composed of sovereign States. They were born into both relations; so born that each State is equally and forever, by force of its very existence and the manner thereof, both a part of this American nation and also a sovereign State of itself. The people therefore can no more legally throw off their national allegiance, than they can legally throw off their State allegiance. Nor can any State, any more legally absolve the allegiance of a people to the nation, than the nation can legally absolve the allegiance due by the people to the State they live in. Either attempt considered in any legal, in any constitutional, in any historical light, is pure madness.

Now the pretext of founding the right of secession, upon the right to change or abolish the government, which is constitutionally secured to the people of the nation and the States, seems to me, and I say it with all the respect due to others, to be both immoral and absurd. Absurd, since they who claim to exercise it are, according to the very statement of the case, but an insignificant minority of those in whom the real right resides. It is a right vested by God, and recognized by our constitutions as residing in the greater part of those who are citizens under the constitution, which they change or abolish. But, what in the name of God, and all the possible and all the imaginable arrogance of South Carolina, could lead her to believe that she is the major part of all the people that profess allegiance to the constitution of the United States? And it is immoral, because it is trifling with the sound rights of others, with the most solemn obligations on our own part, and the most vital interests of all concerned. And it is both immoral and absurd in one, because as a political pretext, its use in this manner invalidates and renders perilous and odious, the grandest contribution of modern times to the science of government, and therein to the peace of society, the security of liberty, and the progress of civilization, namely: the giving constitutional validity to this natural right of men to change or to abolish the government under which they live, by voting, when the major part see fit to do so.

It is trifling with this great natural right, legalized in all our American constitutions, fatally caricaturing and recklessly converting it into the most terrible engine of organized legal destruction. More than that; it is impossible in the very nature of the case and in the very nature of government, that any such legal power or any such constitutional right could exist; because its existence pre-supposes law to have changed its nature, to have become a mere device; and pre-supposes government to have changed its nature and ceasing to be a permanent ordinance of God, to become a temporary instrument of evil in the hands of factions as they successively arise. Above all places under Heaven no such right of destruction can exist under our American constitutions, since it is they that have devised this very remedy of voting instead of fighting; they that have made this natural right a constitutional right; they that have done it for the preservation and not for the ruin of society. And it has preserved it for more than seventy years, the noblest form of human society, in constant security, and it could if justly exercised preserve it forever.

But let us go a little deeper still. It cannot be denied that the right of self-preservation, both in men and States, is a supreme right. In private persons, it is a right regulated by law in all communities that have laws. Amongst nations, there is no common supreme authority, and it must be regulated in their intercourse with each other, by the discretion of each; and arms are the final appeal. In our system of government, there is ample provision made. In all disputes between any State and a foreign nation, the General Government will protect and redress the State. In disputes between two States, the Supreme Court is the constitutional arbiter. It is only in disputes that may arise between the General Government and a particular State, that any serious difference of opinion as to the remedy, has manifested itself in this country; and on that subject it is the less necessary that I add anything to what has been said when speaking of nullification, as the grounds of our existing difficulties are not between disaffected States and the General Government chiefly if at all; but they are difficulties rather founded on opposite states of public opinion touching the institution of negro slavery, in the northern and in the southern States.

It may be confidently asserted that if the power of nullification, or the power of secession, or both of them, were perfectly constitutional rights, neither of them should be, under any circumstances, wantonly exercised. Nor should either of them, most especially the right of secession, ever be exercised except under extreme necessity. But if these powers, or either of them is a mere usurpation founded on no right whatever, then no State may resort to rebellion or revolution without, in the first place, such a necessary cause as may not be otherwise maintained; or, in the second place, without such a prospect of success

as justifies the evil of rebellion or revolution, or else such intolerable evils as justify the most desperate attempts. Now it is my profound conviction that nothing has occurred, that nothing exists, which justifies that revolution which has occurred in South Carolina, and which seems to be impending in other Southern States. Beyond all doubt, nothing has occurred of this description, connected with any other interest or topic, except that of negro slavery; and connected with that, my deep assurance is, that the just and necessary cause of the slave States, may be otherwise maintained than by secession, revolution or rebellion; nay, that it may be incomparably better maintained otherwise; nay, that it cannot be maintained in that way at all and that the attempt to do so will be fatal as regards the avowed object, and pregnant with incalculable evils besides.

In such discussions as these, the nature of the institution of slavery is perfectly immaterial. So long as the Union of the States survives, the constitutional guaranty and the federal power, which have proved adequate for more than seventy years, are that much added to whatever other force States or sections may possess to protect their rights.—Nor is there, in the nature of the case, any reason why States with slaves and States without slaves, should not abide together in peace, as portions of the same great nation, as they have done from the beginning. The unhallowed passions of men: the fanaticism of the times; the mutual injuries and insults which portions of the people have inflicted on each other; the cruel use which political parties have made of unnatural and transient popular excitements; and, I must add, the unjust, offensive, and unconstitutional enactments by various State Legislatures at the North; the repeal of the Missouri Compromise by Congress; the attempt of the Supreme Court to settle political principles deemed to be of vast importance by all parties, in the Dred Scott case, which principles were not in the case at all; the subsequent conduct of the Federal Government and of the people in Kansas; the total overthrow of the Whig and American parties, the division and defeat of the Democratic party, and the triumph of the Republican party; the ordinance of secession of South Carolina: the agitation pervading the whole nation, especially the greater part of the Southern States; and to crown all, and if possible to make all desperate, the amazing conduct of the President of the United States amidst these great disorders; this is the sad outline of this slavery agitation, the posture of which for a moment is thus exhibited, no one knowing how soon new and fatal steps may hurry us still farther. What I assert in the face of so much that is painful and full of peril, and what I confidently rely will be the verdict of posterity, is that all this, terrible as it is, affords no justification for the secession of any single State of the Union—none for the disruption of the American Union. They who make the attempt, will find

in it no remedy for the evils from which they flee. They who goad others to this fatal step, will find that they have themselves erred exceedingly. They who have had the lead in both acts of madness, have no hope for good from coming ages, half so great, as that they may be utterly forgotten. Posterity will receive with scorn every plea that can be made for thirty millions of free people, professing to be Christian, in extenuation of the unparalleled folly of their self destruction, by reason that they could not deal successfully with three or four millions of African slaves, scattered amongst them. Oh! everlasting infamy, that the children of Washington did not know how to be free!—Oh! degradation still deeper, that children of God did not know how to be just and to forbear with one another!

It is said, however, it is now too late.—The evil is already done. South Carolina has already gone. Florida, it is most likely went yesterday, or will go to day, even while we are pleading with one another and with God to put a better mind in her. Soon, it may be possible within the present month, all the Cotton States will go. We, it is added, by reason of being a Slave State, must also go. Our destiny, they say, our interests, our duty, our all, is bound up with theirs, and we must go together. If this be your mind, distinctly made up, then the whole services of this day are a national mockery of God; a national attempt to make our passionate impulses assume the dignity of divine suggestions, and thus seduce the Ruler of the Universe with complicity with our sins and follies, through which all our miseries are inflicted upon us. Let it be admitted that a certain number of States, and that considerable, will attempt to form a Southern Confederacy, or to form as many new sovereignties as there are seceding States. Let it be assumed that either of these results is achieved, and that either by way of peace or by war. Let all be admitted.—What then? Thirteen States by their delegates formed the present Constitution, more than seventy years ago. By the terms of the Constitution itself it was to be enforced when any *nine* of these thirteen States adopted it—whether by convention of their people or otherwise, is immaterial to the present matter. Thirteen States made the Constitution by their delegates. A clause is inserted in it that it shall go into effect when any nine of the thirteen States adopt it, let any four refuse as they might. If they had refused what would have happened would have been, that these four States, born States, and born United States, by the Declaration of Independence, by the war of the Revolution, by the peace with Great Britain, and by the articles of confederation, would by a common agreement among the whole thirteen, have refused to go further or to make any stronger national government; while the other nine would have gone further and made that stronger national government.—But such was the desire of all parties that there should be no separation of the States at all, that the whole thir-

teen unanimously adopted the new Constitution, putting a clause into it that it should not go into effect unless a majority so great as nine to four would sign it. I say if a minority of States had not adopted the new Constitution, it would have occurred, that they would have passed by common consent into a new condition, and for the first time have become sovereign States. As you well know none of them refused permanently. What I make this statement for, is to show that, taking that principle as just and permanent, as clearly laid down in the Constitution, it requires at least eleven States out of the existing thirty-three States to destroy, or affect in the slightest degree, the question as to whether or not the remaining States are the United States of America, under the same Constitution. Twenty-two States, according to that principle, left after eleven had seceded, would be as really the United States of America under that Federal Constitution, as they were before, according to the fundamental principle involved in the original mode of giving validity to the Constitution. Kentucky would still be as really one of these United States of America, as she was at first when, as a district of Virginia, who was one of the nine adopting States, she became, as such district, a part thereof.—And by consequence, a secession of less than eleven States, can in no event, and upon no hypothesis, even so much as embarrass Kentucky in determining for herself, what her duty, her honor and her safety require her to do.

This fact is so perfectly obvious, that I presume if the six New England States were to revolt, and to establish a new confederacy, there is not a man in the State of Kentucky who would be led thereby to suppose that our relations with the Union and the Constitution were in the slightest degree affected; or that they were on that account under the slightest obligation to revolt also. It may sound harsh, but I am very much inclined to think that there are many thousands of men in Kentucky who might be apt to suppose that the secession of the New England States would be a capital reason why nobody else should secede. It is the principle, however, which I am attempting to explain.

The answer to this view, I am aware is, that we are a Slave State, and that our relations are therefore necessarily different with respect to other Slave States, as compared with the Free States, or with the nation at large. The reply to which is various: First. The Institution of Slavery, as it exists in this country, presents a threefold, and very distinct aspect. First, the aspect of it in those States whose great staples are rice, sugar and cotton, commonly and well enough expressed by calling them the Cotton States. Then the aspect of it presented by those States in portions of which these fabrics are raised, and in other portions of which they are not; which we may well enough call the mixed portion of the Slave States. And then its aspect in

those slave States which are not producers of those great staples in the midst of which, and out of which these great commotions come. What I assert is, that the relation of slavery to the community, and the relation of the community by reason of slavery to the General Government and the world, is widely different in all three of these classes of States. The relation of slavery to the community, to the Government, and to our future, in Missouri, in Kentucky, in Virginia, in Maryland, in Delaware, is evidently different from the relation of slavery in all these respects in Louisiana, in South Carolina, and in all the other Cotton States. In the meantime, also, the relation is different from both of those, wherein it exists in what I have called the mixed States; in Arkansas, part of which is a farming country, and a part of which thoroughly planting; in Tennessee, part cotton, and the eastern part a mountainous farming country; in Texas and North Carolina, where similar facts exist; and perhaps in some other States.

What I desire is that you get the idea I have of the matter; that while it is true that all the slave States have certain ties and sympathies between them which are real, and ought not to be broken; yet, on the other hand, it is extremely easy to carry this idea to a fatal and a false extent, and to ruin our ourselves forever under the illusion begotten thereby. In Kentucky, the institution of slavery exists about in the proportion of one slave to four white people, and the gap between the two races is widening at every census. In South Carolina there are about five slaves to three white persons, and the increment is on the slave side. In the Cotton States, I know of no way in which the institution of slavery can be dealt with at all, except by keeping the relation as it stands, as an integral portion of the body politic, unmanageable except in the present relation of the negro to the white man: and, in this posture, it is the duty of the nation to protect and defend the Cotton States. In regard to Kentucky, the institution of slavery is in such a position that the people can do with it whatever they may see fit, both now, and at any future period, without being obliged, by reason of it, to resort to any desperate expedient, in any direction.

The state of things I have sketched necessarily produces a general resemblance, indeed, because slavery is general—but, at the same time innumerable diversities, responsive to the very condition of slavery, of its prospects, and of its relative in the body politic, in the different slave States. And you never committed a greater folly than you will commit if, disregarding these things, you allow this single consideration that you are a slave State—to swallow up every other consideration, and control your whole action in this great crisis. We in Kentucky are tolerant of opinion. Inform yourselves of what is passing, of an opposite character, throughout South Carolina: and reflect on the change that must pass on you, before you would be

prepared to tear down the most venerable institutions, to insult the proudest emblems of your country's glory, and to treat constitutions and laws as if they were play-things for children; before you are prepared to descend from your present noble posture, and surrender yourself to the guidance and dictation of such counsels and such statesmen as rule this disunion movement. Nothing seems to me more obvious, and nothing is more important to be pressed on your attention at this moment, than that the non-cotton States stand in a position radically different in all respects from the position in which the Cotton States stand, both with regard to the institution of slavery, and with regard to the balance of the nation. The result is that all these States, the Cotton States, and the mixed States, and the non-cotton slave States, and the free States, may enjoy peace and may enjoy prosperity under a common government, and in a common Union, as they have done from the beginning; where the rights of all, and the interests of all may be respected and protected, and yet where the interests of every portion must be regulated by some general consideration of the interests which are common to everybody. On the other hand, in a confederacy where cotton is the great idea and end, it is utterly impossible for the mixed, much more for the non-cotton States, to protect adequately any of their rights, except the right of slavery, to carry out any of their purposes except purposes connected with slavery, to inaugurate any system of policy or even to be free, otherwise than as they servilely follow the lead, and bow to the rule of the Cotton States. The very instant you enter a confederacy in which all is regulated and created by the supreme interest of cotton, every thing precious and distinctive of you, is jeopardized! Do you want the slave trade re-opened? Do you want free trade and direct taxation? Do you want some millions more of African cannibals thrown amongst you broadcast throughout the whole slave States? Do you want to begin a war which shall end when you have taken possession of the whole Southern part of this continent down to the isthmus of Darien? If your design is to accept the principles, purposes and policy, which are openly avowed in the interest of secession, and which you see exhibited on a small scale, but in their essence, in South Carolina; if that is your notion of regulated freedom and the perfect security of life and property; if that is your understanding of high national prosperity, where the great idea is more negroes, more cotton, direct taxes, free imports, from all nations, and the conquest of all outlying land that will bring cotton; then, undoubtedly, Kentucky is no longer what she has been, and her new career, beginning with secession, leads her far away, from her strength and her renown.

The second suggestion I have to make to you is, that if the slave line is made the line of division, all the slave States seceding from the Union, and all the free States standing unitedly

by the Union ; what I assert in that case is, that the possibility of the perpetuity of negro slavery in any border State terminates at once. In our affected zeal for slavery, we will have taken the most effectual means of extinguishing it ; and that in the most disastrous of all possible ways.—On the contrary, if this Union is to be saved, it is by the cordial sympathy of the border States on one side, and on the other side of the slave line that it must be saved. We have nothing to hope from the extreme States on either side ; nothing from the passionate violence of the extreme South—nothing from the turbulent fanaticism of the extreme North. It is along that slave line—and in the spirit of mutual confidence, and the sense of a common interest of the people on the north and on the south of that line ; that the nation must seek the instruments of its safety. It is Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, on the one side ; and Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri—God send that I might add with confidence Tennessee and North Carolina—on the other side ; these are the States that are competent to save this Union. Nothing, therefore, can be more suicidal, than for the border slave States to adopt any line of conduct which can justly deprive them of the sympathy and confidence of the border free States—now largely possessed by them.—And nothing is more certain than that a patriotic devotion to the Union, and a willingness to do all that honorable men should do, or moderate men ask, in order to preserve it—is as strongly prevalent at this moment, among the people of the border free States, as amongst those of the border slave States. The great central States I have enumerated—must necessarily control the fate both of the nation and of the continent—whenever they act in concert ; and the fate, both of the nation and the continent, is utterly inscrutable after the division of them on the slave line—except that we know that when Sampson is shorn of his strength, the enemies of Israel and of God will make the land desolate. Fronting on the Atlantic Ocean through many degrees of latitude, running back across the continent so as to include an area larger than all Western Europe, and finer than any of equal extent upon the globe, embracing a population inferior to none on earth, and sufficiently numerous at present to constitute a great nation ; it is this immense power, free, to a great extent, from the opposite and intractable fanaticisms of the extreme States on both sides of it, that is charged with the preservation of our national institutions, and with them our national power and glory. There are two aspects of the case thus put,—in either of which success by peaceful means, is impossible : first, if these great central States fail to apprehend this part of the great mission committed to them : secondly, if the Cotton States, following the example of South Carolina—or the Northern States adhering to extreme purposes in the opposite direction—by either means render all peaceful adjustment impossible.

But even in that case, the mission of these great States is not ended. If under the curse of God, and the madness of the extreme northern and southern States, the preservation of the Union should be impossible; then it belongs to this immense central power, to re-construct the nation, upon the slave line as its central idea; and thus perpetuate our institutions, our principles, and our hopes, with an unchanged nationality. For even they who act in the mere interests of slavery, ought to see that after the secession of the cotton States, the border slave States are obliged even for the sake of slavery, to be destroyed, or to adhere to the Union as long as any Union exists; and that if the Union were utterly destroyed, its re-construction upon the slave line, is the solitary condition on which slavery can exist in security any where, or can exist at all in any border State.

I have considered three possible solutions of the existing state of things. The preservation of the Union as it is; the probable secession of the cotton slave States, and the effect thereof upon the Union, and upon the course Kentucky ought to take; the total destruction of the Union, and its reconstruction upon the slave line. I have considered the whole matter, from the point of view understood to be taken by the President of the United States; namely: that he judges there is no power in the General Government to prevent, by force, its own dissolution by means of the secession of the States; and I have done this, because however ruinous or absurd any one may suppose the views of the President to be, it is, nevertheless, under their sway that the first acts of our impending revolutions are progressing. Under the same helpless aspect of the General Government, there remain two more possible solutions of the posture and duty of Kentucky, and other States similarly situated. The first of these is, that in the progress of events, it may well become the border slave States to unite themselves into a separate confederacy; the second is, that it may well become Kentucky, under various contingencies, to assume a separate sovereign position, and act by herself. Having clearly stated my own conclusions, I will only say that the first of these two results is not one to be sought as desirable in itself, but only as an alternative to be preferred to more dangerous arrangements. For my unalterable conviction is, that the slave line is the only permanent and secure basis of a confederacy for the slave States, and especially for the border slave States, and that the union of free and slave States, in the same confederacy, is the indispensable condition of the peaceful and secure existence of slavery. As to the possible isolation of Kentucky, this also, it seems to me, is not a result to be sought. If it should occur as the alternative to evils still greater, Kentucky ought to embrace it with calmness and dignity, and, awaiting the progress of events, show by her wisdom, her courage, her moderation,

her invincible rectitude, both to this age and to all that are to come, how fully she understood in the midst of a gainsaying and backsliding generation, that no people ever performed anything glorious who did not trust God, who did not love their country, and who were not faithful to their oaths.

It seems to me, therefore, that the immediate duty of Kentucky may be clearly stated in very few words :

First. To stand by the Constitution and the Union of the country, to the last extremity.

Second. To prevent, as for the moment, the impending and immediate danger, all attempts to seduce her, all attempts to terrify her, into the taking of any steps inconsistent with her own constitution and laws—any step disregarding of the constitution and laws of the United States, any step which can possibly compromise her position, or draw her on otherwise than by her own free choice deliberately expressed at the polls, according to her existing laws and constitution, whereby she will choose her own destiny.

Third. To settle in her heart that the rending of this Union the slave line is, for her, whatever it may be for others, the most fatal issue that the times can have ; and the doing this in such a way as to subject her to the dominion of the cotton States for all time to come, is the very worst form of that most fatal issue.

After all, my friends, after all, we have the great promise of God that all things shall work together for good to them that love him. I do not know but that it may be the mind of God and his divine purpose to break this Union up, and to make of it other nations, that shall at last be more powerful than it, unitedly, would have been. I do not know, I do not pretend to say, how the Lord will use the passions of men to glorify his name. He restrains the remainder of wrath, and will cause the wrath of man to praise him. We have his divine assurance that all nations that have gone before us, and all that will follow us, and we ourselves, by our rise, by our progress, and alas ! by our decoy and ruin, are but instruments of his infinite purpose, and means in his adorable providence, whereby the everlasting reign of Messiah, the Christ of God, is to be made absolute and universal.

Great then, is our consolation, as we tremble for our country, to be confident in our Lord ! Great is our comfort, as we bewail the miseries which have befallen our glorious inheritance, to know that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth ! Infinitely precious is the assurance, amidst the trials now impending, and the woes which threaten us, that the heroic self-devotion with which our personal duty is discharged, is one part of our fitness to become partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light !



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