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SPEECH

DELIVERED BY

WAITMAN T. WILLEY,
OF MONONGALIA,

ON

MR. MOORE'S RESOLUTIONS

ON

FEDERAL RELATIONS,

IN THE

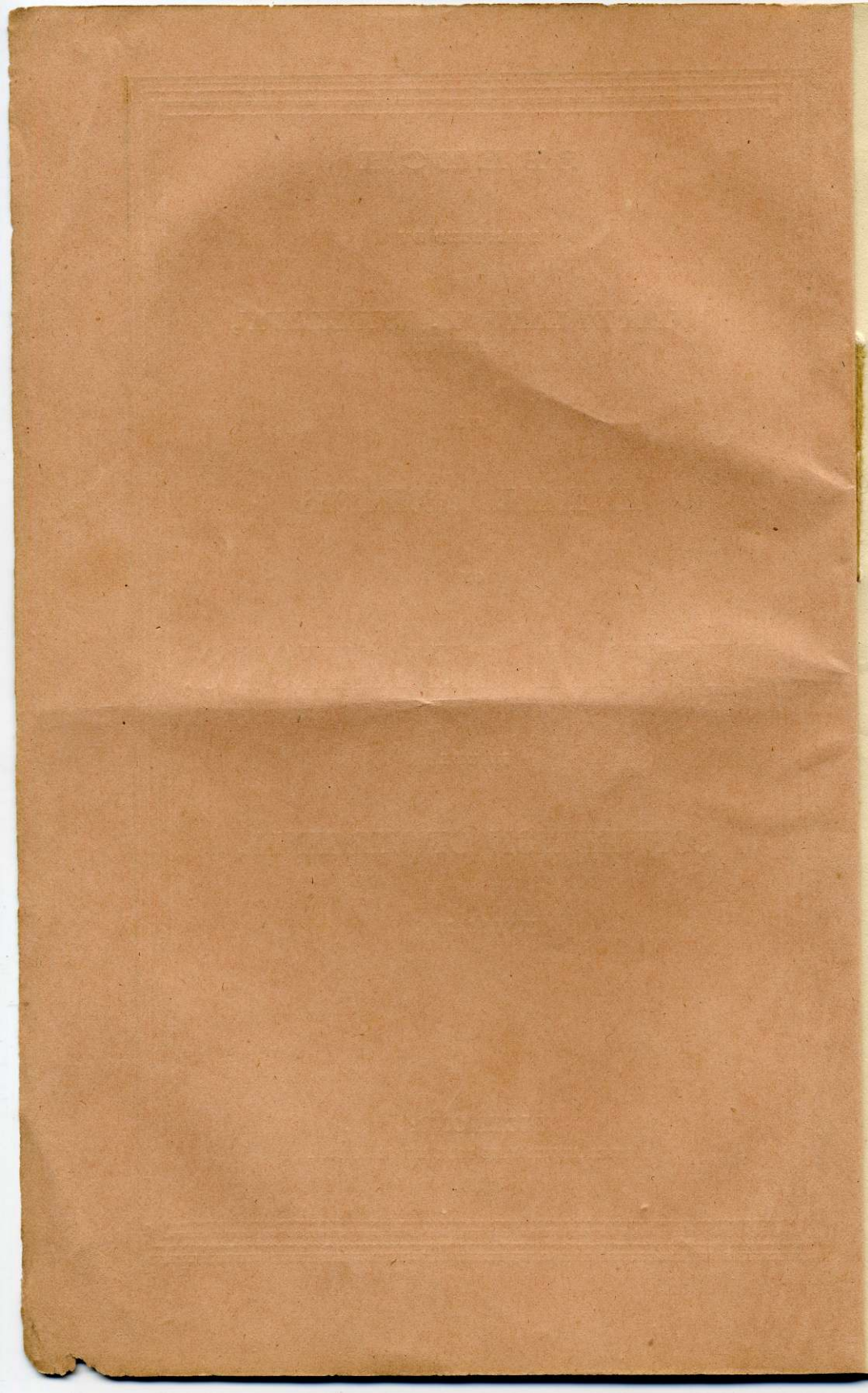
CONVENTION OF VIRGINIA,

MARCH 2, 1861.

RICHMOND:

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SPEECH.

Mr. PRESIDENT: I suppose the Convention has arrived at one conclusion, which is very satisfactory, and that is, that I am not at all versed in the artifices of parliamentary tactics. I had no idea, sir, when yielding to gentlemen the courtesies of permitting them to offer resolutions, of having the time which I proposed to occupy, devoted to the interesting procedure of taking the ayes and noes. But, sir, it is quite likely that that process will be as interesting to this Convention as listening to any remarks which I shall be able to make. I had some misgivings, indeed, this morning, whether, under the existing state of my health, and especially of my voice, I should avail myself of the courtesy extended to me by the Convention on Saturday last. But, inasmuch as it was not then my purpose, and is not now my purpose, to enter into an argument upon the main points of the great issues before this Convention, I will ask your indulgence, sir, for a short time while I shall direct your attention, as best I may be able, to some considerations upon the objections urged by gentlemen on this floor against the policy of Virginia, according to my apprehension of what is her best policy.

And here, sir, allow me to remark, that we have indeed fallen upon evil times. Allow me to say, that I have looked with fearful apprehension, not merely upon the magnitude of the great questions which brought this Convention together, but I have looked with no less apprehension upon influences which have been brought to bear upon the deliberations of this Convention, as destructive of the fundamental principles of a free people. And, sir, is more with a desire to vindicate the right of free speech than with any expectation that I shall be able to enlighten this body, that I choose, as a member representing free a people, to rise here for the purpose of expressing freely my opinions upon the questions which have brought us together.

And in doing so, sir, while I shall expect to observe all the courtesies of gentlemanly debate, and should be very sorry to utter a word which would be out of order; yet I shall, nevertheless, claim the privilege of expressing my mind freely and fully, independent of any influences here or elsewhere. Sir, the

right of free speech is a fundamental principle of republican liberty. Whenever that is destroyed the people's liberties are destroyed. And it matters not, sir, whether that destruction be the result of an imperial edict, or whether it be the result of popular violence and intimidation; in either case we are slaves. Is it not so, sir? Does not history attest this great fact in all her pages. The scholar has read the demonstration of this truth in the classic pages of the historians of republican Greece. The pages of Roman history are no less pregnant with memorable exemplifications of the same fundamental truth. Whilst the Forum was free, whilst the Senate was free, whilst there was freedom of speech, Rome was free; but when Cicero, the last great defender of the Roman Senate and freedom of speech, perished, and his head was gibbeted on the Forum, where his eloquence had thundered against his country's oppressors, liberty fled from Rome, and the palsy of political dissolution settled forever upon that great empire.

Modern history has also furnished its example—an example abhorrent to every principle of humanity. Need I refer you to the reeking scaffold, smoking all day long with the best blood of France? Need I refer you to the deep, dark dungeons of Paris, groaning with suffocating victims doomed to death, because of no other offence than having given utterance to their opinions? Need I point you to her temples, desecrated by the expulsion of the ministers of God, by the introduction of the foul orgies of a festering, intolerant infidelity? These, sir, were the pitiable, ultimate results of an over-awed and silenced Senate. The voice of liberty was drowned, and the oracles of God were silenced by the clamors of a revolutionary populace, and liberty herself, despairing of relief, fled for refuge, and found it only in the arms of an absolute despotism. Sir, shall we have these scenes of Jacobin violence renewed in our land? Shall we inaugurate a Reign of Terror here? No, sir! And when this great right has been assailed here, I for one, as one of the representatives of a free people, stand up to vindicate it; and though I may not utter words that will be entitled to much weight in the consideration of the members of this Convention, I will, nevertheless, utter them in all sincerity here.

Mr. President, as I have already said, it is not my intention to enter into any process of argumentation in reference to the main issues involved in this debate. I propose, sir, a cursory, running examination of some of the great evils brought to the notice of this Convention by the gentlemen on the other side, demanding, as we are told here, the extreme remedy of breaking up this Government.

Allow me, sir, to remark in the outset that I admit the evils in all the extent and magnitude in which they have been pre-

sented. I am not here, sir, to apologize for them. I am here to acknowledge, I am here to denounce, I am here to repudiate these errors; but I am not here to consent to break up this Government. I am here for the purpose of endeavoring to correct those grievances, and to vindicate the honor of Virginia, not by abandoning her position in this great Confederacy, but by bringing her oppressors to acknowledge those errors and to redress her grievances.

And allow me to inquire just here, Mr. President,—granting that those evils exist, acknowledging them in all their extent and magnitude,—what fault has there been on the part of the General Government of the United States? Why break up this Union? Will any gentleman be so kind as to particularize a single instance worthy of debate, in which the Federal Government has been derelict in the discharge of its duty, or has failed to accomplish the purposes of its organization? If individual States of this Confederacy have been guilty of malfeasance, as I acknowledge they have been, what reason, logically considered, is there, in consequence of that fact, why we should break up the Federal Government, which must be acknowledged by all, to have accomplished the design of those who constructed it?

Now, sir, I will make another remark in relation to these evils. The remedy proposed by gentlemen on the other side, is secession. Now, sir, if it be true, as many able gentlemen on this floor think it to be true, as many of the ablest jurists of this land have decided it to be true, that there is no constitutional right of secession, that of itself ought, among a law-loving and law-abiding people like Virginians, to be an argument of no small consideration. I am not here, sir, to argue the question of the right of secession. I do not intend to weary the Convention by entering into a discussion of that question. I shall not even pause, sir, to vindicate the founders of our Constitution from the imputation, which seems to me would certainly apply to them, of a most gross self-stultification in organizing a great Government, in establishing a more perfect Union, by collecting together a heterogeneous mass of political elements that might dissolve and fall asunder any day. I never shall be made to believe that Washington, and Madison, and Franklin, and the other great sages who constructed the Union in the first place, and organized our Federal Government, brought their labors to no greater result than this; that is to say, to bring the States of the Federal Union together, give them a simple introduction to each other, and place them side by side, under the flag of the country, without any legal bond to bind the Union. Sir, I believe in no such voluntary association. In my opinion, if this be the correct construction of the Federal Constitution, we have never had a Union at all; these States have never been united,

but they have been living together in a kind of unlawful cohabitation; and when gentlemen are able to establish that principle, then I will be more willing to enable them to destroy that illicit intercourse.

I said, Mr. President, that it was not my purpose to argue the question of constitutional law involved in this proposition, but I trust that it may not be considered improper to advert for a moment to the operation of that principle, if granted to be true. Many times the proper construction of a law may be best ascertained by following it out into its practical results. Well now, sir, I never could conceive that when the Federal Government was purchasing the territory of Louisiana, and the freedom of the mouth of the Mississippi and of the Gulf, for the purpose of protecting and encouraging the great trade of the interior empire of States, which, by the sagacity of our wise men, was foreseen springing up in the West—I say I could not conceive that this Government would have made that purchase at the expense of a great deal of money, and of a great deal of trouble, upon the contingency that the little State of Louisiana might at her own pleasure foreclose these great advantages of commerce against all these interior States.

Again, sir, I cannot suppose that the purchase of Florida—another little State—which cost us in the first place, I believe, some five millions, and a great many more millions in establishing forts and arsenals, and in driving the Indians out of her marshes, until the sum that that little State has cost us will amount perhaps to fifty millions—I say I never can suppose that our Government made that purchase, and expended all that money, under the contingency that this little State, after all these services had been rendered, after her territory had been made free, after the savages had been driven from her domain, might quietly walk out of the Union and leave us the bills to pay.

Again, sir, there is Texas, an empire in itself, which cost us some ten or fifteen millions to acquire, in the first place; which cost us by the war brought upon this country, hundreds of millions more. You, sir, remember, and I remember myself that the very effort to acquire this great State had well nigh dissolved the Union, that it agitated it from centre to circumference—and we encountered all that for what? Is it that now, when she has scarcely more than been admitted into the Union, when we have paid all this money to acquire her, when scarcely the agitation occasioned by her acquisition has subsided, she may pass out of the Union, and leave us in this predicament? It seems to me that to admit such a solecism in the fundamental law of the Government would be, I was going to say, ridiculous.

But, Mr. President, let us look at a few more consequences.

If the doctrine of the right of a State to secede at her own good will and pleasure be true, then, sir, we may engage in a war, the enemy may be pressing us hard, and yet in the very hour of our trial, in the very crisis of the country's extremity, a State may retire from the Union, and out of danger; and if she be sovereign and independent when she goes, may form a treaty of alliance with the enemies of the Government, and turn her guns against her former associates. Or she may wait until the war is concluded—a war in which the blood of her confederates may have been shed in defending her soil—and, when the enemy is repelled, when the debt incurred by the war is resting on the country, politely make her bow, retire from the Union, and leave the other States to pay the debt incurred in defending her soil and in vindicating her honor? Can it be possible that Washington, and Madison, and Franklin, and the other sages of the Revolution have organized a Government upon such an absurd basis as this.

But, sir, when did this doctrine first find a lodgment in the public mind? I think, sir, it is rather a modern invention. If I have read aright the debates in the Virginia Convention for the ratification of the Federal Constitution, the idea of the right of a State to secede was absolutely spurned from the councils of that great body. I know, sir, where it is said we are to find this. We are told we find it in the celebrated resolutions and proceedings of the Virginia and Kentucky Legislatures in 1798-99. What, sir, is the correct interpretation of the doctrine contained in these resolutions and proceedings? To whom shall we apply for the correct exposition of it? We would go, sir, to the artificer for a correct explanation of his machine; we would go to the lawgiver for a correct exposition of his law, and although, these resolutions have been quoted as authority, yet, Mr. Madison, their author, frequently stated in his letters to Mr. Everett, Mr. Trist, Mr. Cabell and Mr. Stephenson, that no such construction can properly be placed upon these resolutions and proceedings. No, sir, it was a new idea. It was an idea repudiated by Mr. Madison, at the very time of the adoption of our Federal Constitution. I will read a very short extract, from a letter written by Mr. Madison to Alexander Hamilton, in 1788, while the question of ratifying the Federal Constitution was yet pending in the State of New York. Here, sir, is the language which he used in the letter to which I have referred, and which was written at that early day:

“The Constitution requires an adoption in toto and forever. It has been so adopted by the other States. An adoption for a limited time would be as defective as an adoption of some of the articles only. In short, any condition whatever must vitiate the ratification. What the new Congress, by virtue of the power

to admit new States, may be able and disposed to do in such a case I do not inquire, as I suppose that is not the material point at present. I have not a moment to add more than my fervent wishes for your success and happiness. *The idea*, (and these are the words to which I wish particularly to refer,) *of reserving the right to withdraw was started at Richmond*, and considered as a conditional ratification, which was itself *abandoned* as worse than rejection."

There, sir, is the opinion of Mr. Madison himself, the author, and, I might almost say, the finisher of that great instrument, the Constitution of these United States.

It is true, sir, we had a little sprinkling of secession in the early history of this Government, but not much. The first that we had was, I believe, in the Hartford Convention. It was there, I think, that the doctrine was first enunciated. Very little of it, however, appeared until afterwards, about the year 1830. It then made its reëppearance, but the iron logic of General Jackson, and the inexorable decree of the great Democratic party put their heel on it that day, and it never recovered from the defeat it then received until very recently. General Jackson said:

"To say that any State may at pleasure secede from the Union, is to say that the United States are not a nation; because it would be a solecism to contend that any part of a nation might dissolve its connexion with the other parts to their injury or ruin without committing any offence."

And, Mr. President, if you look a little into history—and I am almost tempted to do it—you will find that even in the States—our sister States that have seceded—this idea of secession is rather a modern idea. And, sir, it is always best, I believe, to speak to the record. We find, at least, as late as 1821, South Carolina herself held this proposition in resolutions declaring her principles; that is to say, that she was opposed to "arraying on questions of national policy, the States as distinct and independent sovereignties, in opposition to, or what is much the same thing, with a view to exercise control over the General Government," and felt it "their indispensable duty to protest against a measure of which they conceive the tendency to be so mischievous."

And then, sir, in the State of Mississippi the doctrine is one of modern adoption; for, during the excitement which grew out of the compromise measures of 1850, there was a Convention called in the State of Mississippi for the purpose of passing an ordinance of secession and dragging Mississippi out of the Union. But the people put their foot on that effort, as the popular majority put its foot on the effort which was recently made to drag her out of the Union. I wish to read a resolution passed

by the Convention in Mississippi at that time, called in pursuance of an act of the Legislature, to take into consideration the propriety of seceding from the Union. Here, sir, is the resolution:

“*Resolved, further, That in the opinion of this Convention, the asserted right of secession from the Union on the part of a State is utterly unsanctioned by the Federal Constitution, which was framed to establish, and not to destroy, the Union of the States, and that no secession can in fact take place without a subversion of the Union established, and which will not virtually amount in its effects and consequences to a civil revolution.*”

That was the deliberate expression of the popular voice of the people in Mississippi in Convention assembled, about the year 1851; and a like sentiment prevailed at that very time in Georgia, but it was put down by the able efforts and able arguments of Mr. Cobb, late Secretary of the Treasury. He was a candidate for Governor, and the issue in that State turned, as I understand it, upon the right of a State to secede, and against that issue he was elected. He took ground against that right, and that I may not be placed in an attitude perhaps of asserting what I cannot maintain, I beg leave to read a few short extracts from his argument; one of the ablest arguments I ever read against the constitutional right of a State to secede from the Union. He said on that occasion:

“If it had been a recognized, undoubted principle that each State was bound to remain in the Union only so long as it suited its own convenience, no one can doubt that these States, instead of withholding their assent to the Constitution, after it had been adopted by the requisite number, would have come at once into the Union, with the intention of immediately withdrawing from it upon the refusal of the other States to adopt such amendments as they desired; but, regarding the effect of their ratification of the Constitution *in an entirely different light from the secessionists of the present day, they adopted quite a different policy.* So far as we can gather light and information from the opinions and actions of the men who framed and adopted the Constitution, it all goes to strengthen and confirm the conviction I have already expressed *against the existence of any such right.*”

I will not detain the Convention by the tedious process of reading further extracts from that very valuable argument. I have been betrayed, contrary to my expectations, far from the line of remark I intended to make, and far from the notes that I had made to guide me in my remarks, when I arose to address you. I come, then, to notice in a cursory and brief manner the objections that I have to the remedy proposed for the evils that now impend over us—that is, the secession of Virginia from the Union. I have made memoranda of those evils as announced

by the gentleman from Orange, and by other gentlemen upon this floor, and I propose now hastily—and I am afraid it will be unsatisfactorily—to give a brief, and cursory commentary on the views advanced by those gentlemen.

The first arguments in favor of secession alleged, I believe, by the gentleman from Orange, (Mr. Morton,) were the bitterness and acrimony with which Southern institutions are constantly assailed by the Northern press, Northern schools, and by the Northern pulpit. I would inquire of the gentleman from Orange and of this Convention, how do they expect that the mere act of secession will silence the Northern press, school-house and pulpit? I want to know how the mere act of secession—when we have thrown off all allegiance to the common Government; when we have left our brethren, if it may be proper to call them so, with a bitter hatred rankling in the bosom to be still more intensified by a direct antagonism; when we have thrown off all the obligations of a common Government, common country and a common nationality—will advance us one inch towards the silence of the Northern press, pulpit or school-house? It will only aggravate the evil; it will only add poison to the virulence and acrimony of which they now complain, and will give vigor and effect to the very objections which these gentlemen are urging as a cause for Virginia seceding from the Union.

Again—another argument in favor of secession, urged by these gentlemen, was to be found in the efforts made by the Northern abolitionists to induce our slaves to abscond—in the operations of the underground rail road—in the personal liberty bills and the inefficiency of the fugitive slave law for the recovery of fugitives. Now, sir, secession is proposed as a remedy to cure these evils. How will it accomplish this object? As I told you, I am not going into a legal argument here. I come here as a plain man from the mountains, looking to common sense as my guide. As I said, secession, for the evils of which we complain, is proposed as the remedy. How will it work, for instance, in reference to the recovery of our slaves? Let us look at this matter. You dissolve the Union. What then? The common national obligation is destroyed. Will not the negro find it out? The motives to flee across the line would be increased, because the negro would know that whenever he crosses that line he will be free. There will be no fugitive slave law for his recovery, and he will know it. There will be no *posse comitatus* to aid in the delivery of the slave to his master; there will be no federal arm to enforce the recovery of Anthony Burns at the point of the Northern bayonet. There will be none of the power of the law, the power of the Constitution and the power of a common

nationality to do this. How, then, will secession remedy the evils of which gentlemen complain? As I have shown you, it will only increase and aggravate them.

But then again, these gentlemen say: there are the personal liberty bills of the North. In the first place I would ask, why should we condemn the General Government on this account? Why should we dissolve the Union because some of the States, members of this Confederacy, have seen proper to do wrong? We denounce those bills and consider them as not only an insult to Virginia and the whole South, but also to the people who ordained them. They are an insult to common sense. But what has been their operation? They have never been enforced, but have remained a blank upon the statute book. Northern courts have uniformly declared them to be unconstitutional and to be null and void; and however offensive in character or spirit they may be, the truth is, that they have never interposed one jot or tittle of hindrance in the way of the recovery of a single fugitive slave.

But I pass to a third argument which gentlemen have urged in favor of secession, and that is, that the Republican party threaten to exclude the South from the common territory and to destroy the equality of the States. I for one will never submit to such a law, and I want for myself and for Virginia an equal right in the territories, but I will not go off upon the subterfuge or pretext of secession. [A hiss.]

I have heard hisses many a time. I believe it is a matter of history, that it was the hissing of a goose that saved Rome; and if the hissing with which my sentiments have just been received will excite a proper indignation and examination of Virginia's rights all through the State and in the bosom of the Convention it will save another Rome—it will save Virginia.

The PRESIDENT—The Chair will remark to the gentleman, that he did not hear any manifestation of disapprobation. If he had, he would undoubtedly have ordered the gallery to be cleared.

Mr. WILLEY—Let it pass—we are even now; I reckon. [Laughter.]

As to the inequality in the territories, I have said that I will never submit to it. But, then, what remedy is offered to me to redress that wrong. Let me, before I refer to that, however, ask what danger is there of our rights being invaded? Are we not a law abiding people, and has not the supreme judicial tribunal of the land decided to guarantee, to the full extent, the right of every slaveholder in the land to carry his property into all the territories of the United States? Such is the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States. But suppose there were no such decision, and we had to redress our rights in

another way. I ask, gentlemen, to point out to me how it is that secession will give us the right to the territories that we demand? Let us look at this matter practically. Are we to acquire our equal rights in the territories of the United States, by seceding from the United States; by turning our backs upon those territories; by giving up all our right, claim and interest in those territories? Did ever the imagination of man conceive such an unsatisfactory means of redressing so great a wrong?

Again: it is alleged that Black Republicanism has got possession of the Government, that the South is in a minority, and, therefore, that it will be at the will and pleasure of a Black Republican Government. I will read you a short extract from the opinion of Mr. Jefferson in his inaugural address of 1801, I believe it was. I commend it to the attention of my Democratic brethren; for, representing, as I do, a Democratic constituency, [laughter,] I have the right to call them brethren.

He summed up in this address, as among the essential principles of our free institutions, "the preservation of the General Government in its whole constitutional vigor as the sheet-anchor of our peace at home and safety abroad; a jealous care of the right of election by the people—a mild and safe corrective of abuses which are lopped by the sword of revolution where peaceable remedies are unprovided; and absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority—the vital principle of republics, from which there is no appeal but to force, the vital principle and immediate parent of despotism."

I am not here, Mr. President, to defend the election of Abraham Lincoln. I believe that his election was virtually a fraud upon the people of the United States. I am utterly opposed to the manner in which he was nominated—nominated, as he was, by a sectional party, and upon a sectional platform, with no representation in the body which nominated him from the South; but he was nominated and elected according to the forms of law. As to the errors and wrongs of his administration, I would meet them as I would meet all other errors and wrongs, by the force of reason, until reason has no force, and then I would resort to the *ultima ratio*.

But, we are told that we are in a minority, and that the Black Republicans may swallow us up. Who placed us in the minority? In the first place it is a fact that Lincoln is elected by a meagre plurality of the votes of the people of the United States. But I would inquire who placed us in the minority? What would have been the complexion of the next Congress of the United States if our sister States, as they are called, had hearkened to our voice and entreaty? We implored them to wait, to pause, to deliberate and cooperate with us and see if there were no constitutional means, no peaceful means of pre-

-serving this Government and redressing our rights? But they would not wait, and went off, contrary to our wishes, contrary to our entreaties. Now, I inquire, in view of these indubitable facts, who placed us in the minority? Sir, it was these sister seceding States. It is a fact that cannot be controverted, that the next House of Representatives of the United States, if these States had been true to themselves and true to Virginia, would have contained a majority of not less than thirty against Lincoln's policy. The Senate is so organized that if the Government had been preserved as it was on the 6th of November last, the friends of the South would have had a majority in that body all through the constitutional term of Mr. Lincoln as President. You see now who placed us in a minority, and yet the bug-bear of being in a minority is paraded before our eyes, connected, at the same time, with most sympathetic demonstrations of affectionate regard for our Southern sisters.

Then there was the Supreme Court as another protection for us; and with all these protections against the policy of the Northern Republican party, what danger had the South to apprehend—what practical danger, I ask? None at all.

Mr. Lincoln could not have appointed a member of his Cabinet without the consent of the South—he could not have appointed an officer in the whole Federal Government, whose salary amounted to a thousand dollars, without the consent and ratification of the South—and we never would have had a law objectionable to the South presented to him to be signed, and made final according to the provisions of the Constitution. Let us then hear no more about a minority. Let us hear no more about tender sympathies for our seceding sisters, who have left us in this minority; who have left us to be trampled under foot; left us to the mercy of that party against whom our indignation is sought to be raised by eloquent appeals every day. I appeal to history and to the candid knowledge of every member upon this floor, if these statements I have made are not borne out by the facts. They cannot be denied. We are in a minority, it is true, but our seceding sister States placed us in that minority.

It was alleged, Mr. President, by the honorable gentleman from Orange, (Mr. Morton,) the other day, that the honor of Virginia required that we should secede. I beg to know how the honor of Virginia is to be vindicated by a secession from the Union? Have we been wronged? Have we been reviled? Have our rights been trampled upon in the Union? I admit that they have; but I claim that honor and chivalry demand that we should stand fast, give not an inch to our foe, turn not our faces from him, but vindicate our rights to the letter and to the death, if need be, right where they have been assailed.

That seems to me to be Virginia's honor and Virginia's consistency.

One gentleman, here, in his eloquent speech the other day, referred to another argument—I must say that it was an extraordinary argument to be addressed to Virginians—and he illustrated it very forcibly and with a great deal of detail. He alleged in effect, that Lincoln would so employ the patronage of the Federal Government as to corrupt Virginia. It is an argument that I would not dare to make to my constituents—that I would not like to make in any section of Virginia; and I will say, that if Virginia is of such easy virtue as to be corrupted from her integrity by a little paltry pap from the Federal treasury, her honor is not worth preserving.

Gentlemen have also referred to the John Brown raid, which met with such condign punishment, and deservedly so. What did this raid demonstrate? It demonstrated the ample power of Virginia to vindicate her violated rights and her dishonored soil. She seized upon the traitors and the felons, and, without let or hindrance, hung every rascal of that marauding band, and she vindicated the law to the full extent. Dissolve this Union—take away the common obligation of a common Government, how then will the case stand? Instead of one John Brown raid in seventy-five years of our history, we may have John Brown raids every month, and, perhaps, every week, all along our borders. Instead of frightening the women and children and exciting the alarm of the people at Harper's Ferry and vicinity, the peaceful valleys and blooming hills of four hundred and fifty miles, close upon a hostile border in the section of the State where I live, will be subjected to these same John Brown raids, if, indeed, there is such hostility in the North as gentlemen assert there is. I believe there is not. I only mean to answer the argument.

But the argument that struck my mind with the greatest force was, that there is, in point of fact, an irrepressible conflict between the North and South; that the social system, the system of civilization, of education and the interests of the people of the two sections are so diverse, that it will be impossible to construct a government that will harmonize them and enable them to live together in peace.

But, sir, is that argument sound? I think it will not bear the test of close examination. Against this mere speculative opinion I oppose stubborn facts. Against this mere prediction I present actual history. I appeal to the record of the past operation and effect of the Federal Union. It is no longer a problem to be solved, and, just here, allow me to advert to the argument of the gentleman whom I saw in his seat awhile since, but who, I believe, has now left the hall—the distinguished gentlemen

from the county of Middlesex, (Mr. Montague.) He referred to a portion of the farewell address of the Father of his Country, the other day. A most remarkable document to refer to for authority for secession. He referred to that portion of it, in which the Father of his Country, in the morning of our Government, besought his countrymen to give it a fair trial, to make the experiment fully and not abandon it until it has had a fair trial. It has had a fair trial; it has been in existence seventy-five years. Look at the result of the experiment. I shall not attempt to describe it. Some traveller records that, in the great temple of St. Paul's, there is a tablet upon which the name of Sir Christopher Wren, the great architect is engraved. Beneath it is this inscription—"Do you ask for his monument? *Circumspice*, Look around!" In reference to the great experiment of the Union, to which the gentleman from Middlesex, (Mr. Montague,) appealed, I can only say with reverence, awe and patriotic emotion—"Look around!"

Whose heart does not throb, as an American citizen, in view of this experiment? Look around you, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, from the Gulf to the Lakes, from Texas to Maine. Three-quarters of a century ago we were only four or five millions of people in number, and but a few scattered and impoverished States. Now we are thirty-four States—for I will not admit that our sisters are finally gone—with cities rivaling in wealth, population, power and magnitude the oldest cities of the oldest Empire of the world; with a people unsurpassed for intelligence, for all the appliances and means of self-subsistence, for happiness and prosperity, and the like of whom the sun of God has never before shone upon. It is such an experiment as this to which the gentleman from Middlesex refers, and we are yet only upon the threshold of our glorious destiny, if we will be but faithful to our duties as true American citizens. What a scene opens before the imagination of the true American patriot, as his eye gazes down the vista of futurity? I like to look upon the flag of my country; I like to contemplate its starry folds, and when I think, that originally there were but thirteen stars upon it, and that now there are thirty-four, I am reminded of an incident in the history of one of the infidels of France. Walking out one bright unclouded night he met with one of the Christian philosophers of that Empire, who was on his way to his observatory, and engaging him in conversation, he propounded this question to him: "Where is your God?" The Christian philosopher pointed him to the stars, sparkling all over the Heaven's blue arch, but still this exhibition affected him not. He then introduced him into his chamber, and turning his telescope heavenward, and bidding him look, as field after field of glorious starry worlds passed before his vision, the infi-

del, awed and overcome by the sublime sight, could not but bow in meek reverence before the majesty of God and his works and exclaim—"There is a God!"

Allow me to say, Mr. President, that the starry field upon our country's flag shall still increase, until the telescope of the future shall reveal a galaxy of stars, representing States only bounded by the oceans which surround this hemisphere, and centuries hence, the boldest political infidel, bowing before the majesty of the Union, shall be compelled to acknowledge its power.

Let us now look, Mr. President, at the evils that must result from secession.

The first, in my opinion, would be, that our country would not only be divided into a Northern Confederacy and into a Southern Confederacy, but, sooner or later, it would be divided into sundry petty Confederacies. We would have a Pacific Confederacy, a Confederacy of the States of the Mississippi Valley, a Northern Confederacy, a Western Confederacy, an Eastern Confederacy, and a Southern Confederacy. And what the result of all this would be, I leave to the decisions of history, recorded on many a mournful page of human story. It may be read in the desolations of Greece. It is chronicled in the disintegration and downfall of the Roman Empire. It is written in characters of blood, hardly yet dry, drawn from the veins of the compatriots of Garibaldi, struggling to regain the blessings and power of the ancient Italian unity.

We would have between these several Confederacies a perpetual warfare, criminations and recriminations, inroads, strife and discord, until the energies and the wealth of this great people would be utterly destroyed and exhausted. We have now in the Central American States, and the Mexican States, a fit representation of what we would become under the condition of things which I have depicted. And what is the condition of these States? They are sub-divided into so many Republics as that I venture to say there is not a member on the floor of this Convention, can tell their names. Such would be the ultimate result of the secession policy which we are now called upon to adopt, and the evil that will result from disunion. And I beg the attention of my friend, Mr. Morton (the reporter presumes)—I hope I may be permitted to call him so—to what I am going to say upon another subject. I say, sir, that a dissolution of the Union will be the commencement of the abolition of slavery, first in Virginia, then in the border States, and ultimately throughout the Union. Will it not, sir; will it not make a hostile border for Virginia, and enable slaves to escape more rapidly because more securely? Will it not virtually bring Canada to our doors? The slave will soon be apprized of this. His mo-

tive to escape will be increased. He will know that when he reaches the line he is safe, and escape he will. The owners of slaves, aware of this fact, will either themselves remove farther South, or they will sell their slaves, to be sent farther South. Thus the area of soil, divested of slave labor along the border, will be constantly widening—and rapidly widening, until ere long it will begin to encroach upon the States immediately South of Virginia, and banish slavery still further from the border, until finally it will sweep it from the country. That is the idea of Charles Sumner, of Lloyd Garrison, and of Wendell Phillips. That is what they say; they want to surround the slave States, in the language of Sumner, “with a belt of fire.” How is that to be done? We maintain that we have a right to carry our slaves into the territories. Let the Union be dissolved and let the South yield these Territories. And what then? They would inevitably become free States. They would be foreclosed against slavery, and the Slave States would be literally hemmed in by a cordon of hostile elements, the influence of which they would try in vain to resist.

Again: whether rightfully, or wrongfully, it must be acknowledged that the moral sense of the world is against the institution of slavery. The Northern States will of course declaim against it; all Northern influence will be directed towards its overthrow, and the influence of the world in its commercial policy, in its treaty stipulations, in its literature, in its social influence, and in all the power and patronage of its civilization, will be directly or indirectly modified and applied so as to bear upon the institution of slavery. Especially would this be the case, when the South, severed from the Union, would become comparatively a weak and secondary power among the nations.

It has been the wise and uniform policy of this country to avoid entangling foreign alliances. We have wisely cherished what has been called the Monroe policy, and zealously inhibited the European powers from exercising dominion, or establishing their authority on this side of the Atlantic. But let disunion take place—let this great nation be severed into several petty republics, and what will become of this policy of our fathers? What would become of the Monroe doctrine, which the Government has so often pledged itself to maintain, should this policy of secession be carried out? Divide us into a number of petty confederacies, and what will become of that doctrine? England will seize on the Island of Cuba, the great gate to the Gulf and the mouth of the Mississippi, and it will not be long before we find her setting up claims for debt against Mexico, and making that claim a pretext to descend upon Mexican territory and hold it as indemnity. She will do with her as she has done every

where else that an opportunity or pretext has been afforded her. She will take advantage of our division and weakness, to extend her power on this continent, and we cannot resist. How will the South resist those encroachments? She has no navy, and no army, and if we reflect upon the proverbial greed for power and territorial extension, that has always characterized England, we behold dangers which might well admonish the South against a resort to any policy that involves division and weakness. With such nations and such influences, all around the Southern States, hemmed in by such adversaries, without the power of expansion, how long can a Southern confederacy endure? How long can slavery exist? And I put it to gentlemen to say whether these suggestions are not more than fancy?

Then, sir, there is another thing we must look to. It is a very easy matter to pull down a house, but a difficult matter to build it up. It is easy, perhaps, to break down this Government; but, sir, when we break it down it will not be so easy a matter to build it up.

Again, gentlemen ask us, will we join the North or will we join the South. I say neither one nor the other. We will stand upon the old Constitution. Let our destinies be placed upon that; and not upon some miserable basis, which is liable to be changed to accommodate every fancied necessity. But, sir, there are other perils to which this new government would be exposed, and I would have gentlemen reflect upon that.

What sort of government will we get instead? Look at what they are doing in Montgomery. What have they done? I had supposed, sir, that standing in the midst of a Convention like this, I would recognize the great principle that all power was derived from the people. I had supposed, sir, that I was in the midst of a Convention—since the expression of the late election, requiring us to send back to them for ratification or rejection, whatever action we take here—that recognizes the fact that our people were determined not to submit to any decision which should not have their full and undoubted sanction. How does the matter stand in the seceded States? Alabama went out of the Union with a popular majority against her action. The same may be said of Mississippi; and it is recently ascertained that Louisiana did the same thing.

It seems to me that this Southern Confederacy is disposed to repudiate the principle that the political power resides in the people. Will Virginia agree to that? What had the people to do with the choice of the members of the Congress at Montgomery? Nothing. It is a kind of self-constituted body. It was not chosen by the people. It was called without their choice or sanction. And yet it has ordained a government and imposed it on the people without their election or sanction. It

has appointed a President and Vice-President without any popular election or ratification. A totally new government is formed, without popular sanction, which is imposing taxes, raising armies, and levying war, all without any direct authority or election of the people! Could absolute despotism do more? And yet it is to such a government as this that gentlemen wish to attach us. Gentlemen cry out against the tyranny of their own Government, and yet denounce us because we hesitate to allow ourselves to be thrust into the embraces of such a military despotism. Whither are we tending? to anarchy or despotism?

What may we expect, sir, in a government that acts in this manner? What may we expect, sir, but a strong military government, very nearly approaching a military despotism. I refer to these things merely to suggest the idea of the system of government which the policy of these States foreshadows. And these Cotton States, thus premonishing us of future oligarchy, or constitutional monarchy, or military despotism, must always have the balance of power in any confederacy we shall form with them.

I would ask the Convention to bear with me a little while longer. I regret that I feel myself unable to repay the courtesy which is manifested to me.

I say, sir, that secession necessarily implies the placing of this State upon a proper war footing. Sooner or later war is inevitable. If we enter into negotiations with the Federal Government, and separate peaceably, war may be avoided for a time, but we shall ultimately become engaged in a war. Secession, therefore, implies a necessity of putting this State upon a war footing.

Now, gentlemen are acquainted with the geography of Eastern Virginia, and no doubt can well appreciate the difficulty of defending our long sea border. But what I wish more particularly to direct attention to is this: Look at our Western border; go down to the Kentucky line—to the lower end of Wayne county, and follow our border from Wayne, by Cabell, by Mason, by Jackson, by Wood, by Pleasants, by Tyler, by Wetzel, by Marshall, by Ohio, by Brooke, by Hancock nearly to Pittsburg—two hundred and fifty or perhaps three hundred miles of hostile border, upon which lies one of the most powerful States of the Union—Ohio. And then we go back by Hancock, Brooke, Ohio, Marshall, Wetzel, Monongalia and Preston, which exhibit one hundred and fifty or two hundred miles more of hostile border, upon which lies the most powerful State in the Union—the great State of Pennsylvania. Look how we are fixed—stuck in like a wedge between the enemy and the Red Sea—450 miles of hostile borders surrounding us, liable to be

swept from border to border by the range of an Armstrong gun, for 100 miles of our territory.

Now, sir, look at our position. Between us and you there is the almost impassible barrier of the Alleghany Mountains; and you, gentlemen, of Eastern Virginia, have not seen proper to give us enough legislative aid to transpierce these mountains that we might have direct communication with you. We are cut off from the Eastern section of the State. How would we stand in a Southern Confederacy? Why, sir, we would be swept by the enemy from the face of the earth before the news of an attack could reach our Eastern friends. Will you leave us in that condition? Will you drive us out of the State and leave us at the mercy of our enemies? Will you place us in this extremity? Will you bring this desolation upon us? Will you expose our wives and children to the sword?—to the ravages of civil war?—to the perpetual scourge of the interminable raids which will inevitably follow upon a dissolution of the Union? You see that we shall be the weakest point of a Southern Confederacy, and, therefore, the point of an attack? Will you make North-West Virginia the Flanders of America, and convert our smiling valleys into the slaughter-pens of as brave and loyal a people as dwell in the “Old Dominion”? I hope not. I think there exists sufficient fidelity to us to justify me in saying, no, you never will. What then must you do, should you take the alternative of secession? The Legislature, I understand, are about appropriating a million of dollars for the defence of the State. A million of dollars! Why, sir, I have consulted with a military gentleman on the subject of the probable cost of putting the State in a proper condition of defence, and after stating to him the extent of hostile border which we had to defend, and the difficulties of access, and other like considerations necessary to be taken into the estimate, he said that it would require not less than one hundred millions of dollars to put the State of Virginia in a proper state of defence.

Now, sir, if secession implies the putting of the State of Virginia upon a war footing, then I appeal to this Convention to say whether the people are prepared to meet the burdens necessary to put her in that condition. What is our debt now? Forty millions of dollars or thereabouts. Will our people suffer any more taxation? Are gentlemen ready, here, if it can be avoided without dishonor, without degradation—are gentlemen willing to impose such crushing weight of taxation? Are they willing to send back to the people an ordinance of secession which will imply that they shall be subjected to millions after millions for the purpose of placing the State on a war footing? The people will never endure it if it should be done. They cannot endure it. They have not the ability to endure it.

I wish I had strength, Mr. President, to repay the kind attention of the Convention to my remarks. I will ask only their further indulgence, while I present another idea to their consideration. I allude to the fact that in the Union, Virginia is a central State; out of the Union, she would be a border State.

Look at her position now. I have often looked at it, reflected over it, and I confess that I felt a pride, and not a little wonder, as I contemplated her great advantages in point of resources, and all the facilities for commercial and manufacturing enterprise. Look at her immense sea-board. Look at Norfolk, which possesses the most magnificent harbor on the face of the earth, with the mighty arm of the Chesapeake stretching forth to grasp the trade of the North, and drawing it towards this great seaport. Look at the magnificent champaign country extending towards the interior, inviting the energies and wealth of the capitalist for the construction of rail roads. Many of them are already partially built, and are in a fair way of commanding a monopoly of the Southern and South-western trade, and directing it to its great natural outlet at Norfolk. There are in my own section of the State, North-western Virginia, mineral resources and recently discovered fountains of oil, extensive enough to furnish the basis of an empire's greatness; and these, when developed, will necessarily add to the power and wealth of the whole State. In that section, I should not be surprised if, in twenty-five years, the white population will exceed the aggregate white population of all Virginia besides. Look at our geographical position. What relations do we sustain to the Pacific? If a great national line of rail road is built to the Pacific, and direct intercourse thus established between the Atlantic and the Pacific some Virginia city will be the terminus or depot; perhaps Richmond or Norfolk. Already the "Iron Horse," the great representative of American energy and enterprise is pushing his way up the Pacific slope—already he is snuffing the air from the summit of the Rocky Mountains, eager to rush down across the Valley of the Mississippi, laden with the "wealth of the Indies," that long sought desideratum of our statesman, and deposite his rich freight along the shores of our Chesapeake.

Let Virginia secede and all these bright prospects are forever dashed to pieces.

I beg gentlemen to look at the geography of Virginia, and say if they would be willing to be dragged out of this Union to join some miserable Southern Confederacy, as a mere outside appendage?

Mr. President, I will bring my remarks to a conclusion by mentioning another evil that would grow out of the secession of Virginia from the Union, and that is, that it would destroy our

nationality; it would destroy the prestige of the American name and of American citizenship.

How is it now, sir? Wherever our country's flag with its thirty-four stars, floats on the breeze, any Virginian may stand up and proudly point to that banner as a flag that represents his country and his country's greatness and power. Sir, it is a noble flag. It is a flag upon which victory has perched without interruption for seventy years—a flag which Perry carried in his hand through the din and smoke of battle and placed it victoriously upon the enemy's vessel—an enemy who once held the empire of the sea—a flag which waved in triumph at the head of our army in its victorious march from Vera Cruz to the capital of Mexico, and at last floated over the palaces of the Montezumas—a flag which protects our commerce in every port and on every sea—a flag which, in short, represents our national power, gives full protection to every American citizen, go where he will—whether among the savages in the Steppes of Russia, or among nobles in the abodes of kings or emperors, or wherever else he may choose to wander. Secession will trail that glorious banner in the dust—destroy its prestige and power—and leave the American citizen to wander abroad, if he shall dare to go abroad, an object of contempt, for chuckling tyrants to point the finger of scorn at, while they say, “Behold the last pitiable demonstration of the fallacy of the dogma of man's capacity for self-government.”

But it is said our Union is already dissolved; and there is no use in talking about these things. I think not, sir. The Union is not dissolved in the true sense of the term. It still lives, and will live while Virginia stands firm. Let Virginia maintain her position; let her stand fast where she ever stood, and this Union can never be permanently dissolved. Some of the States may secede, as they have done, but they will be like asteroids flung off from the sun, hot, hissing through the trackless ether. But, sir, the sun still shines. The Union still remains while Virginia is steadfast. And I trust in God, that such will be the centripital influence of her moral power in the Union, as to bring back these wandering stars into their proper orbits in the great system of American States.

My voice is failing, sir, and I shall be compelled to come to a close. I wish to say, before I do so, that I will not discuss what I conceive to be the remedy for our ills, simply from the fact that I believe it would be improper for me to do so, being a member of the Committee on Federal Relations, having that matter in hand. Were I to do so, it may look like seeking to forestall my own freedom of decision and judgment, which I have no desire nor intention of doing. I shall, therefore, avoid any argument or expression which might have any such tendency.

Allow me, Mr. President, again to tender to you and this Convention, my most cordial and hearty thanks for the attentive manner in which my remarks have been listened to; the attention and courtesy manifested were beyond their merits, far, very far indeed.

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