

A LECTURE
ON
SECESSION,

BY
Gen. Andrew Jackson,

DELIVERED AT DODWORTH'S HALL, ON THE
EVENING OF SUNDAY, JAN. 19, 1861.

MRS. CORA L. V. HATCH, MEDIUM.

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LECTURE BY GEN. ANDREW JACKSON.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, FRIENDS, BROTHERS, PATRIOTS :

I address you this evening in behalf of my country and of yours of my freedom and of yours. A government which has its foundation in the highest inspirations and the holiest ordinances of Heaven, is, I am told, about to be destroyed. Heaven forbid that it should be so ! But while this danger is imminent, let us examine the causes, and endeavor, if possible, to find out the secret impulse which prompts the vile and traitorous sons of despotism and pollution to attempt to overthrow that which has for so many years been the highest, the brightest, and the truest government on earth.

It will be remembered that my administration was always characterized by justice and a firm adherence to my consciousness of right ; that nothing could ever move me from my principles, nor from the strict tenor and text of the Constitution, which I believed to be founded in right. Therefore you can well imagine with what feelings I come before you this evening to represent, not only the principles of the Government which I did administer, but also the principles of a Government to which you owe your birth,

your prosperity, your future welfare, and the glorious welfare of your offspring.

I will point out to you, as briefly as possible, the circumstances which existed when this Confederacy and Constitution was formed, and show you that there exist now no questions, political or otherwise, that did not then exist, and that what is alleged to be the cause of the present attempt at the dissolution of this Government is a sheer fabrication, founded upon political chicanery, despotism, folly and degradation.

When the Constitution of your United States was formed, and was sought to be ratified by the various States which then composed the Colonies, afterwards called the United States of America, there existed precisely the same elements, and many more subjects of diverse opinion and controversy than now. There was, first, the despotism and tyranny of monarchical power that refused to grant to the Colonies their just rights, for which, in 1776, these united colonies waged successful war against Great Britain. Afterwards, for the purpose of mutual protection against invasion, it was deemed advisable to form a Confederacy—that Confederacy to represent the *people* of the United States, and not, as is contended by some political demagogues, the "Sovereign States" of America.

In consequence of diversity of climate, interests, and population, it was necessary to have certain sectional lines. Those lines already existed to a certain extent, and therefore it was deemed advisable to retain them to prevent confusion. But the Constitution was formed by the voice of the people to govern the people, and no single individual State was called upon as a separate sovereignty to sign or ratify that Constitution, but the representatives of each State were called upon to ratify it for the people of that State. Therefore it was that not in one, nor two, but many years of debate, amendment and controversy, the Constitution was adopted and

ratified by all the States of the then existing Union. Those States were obliged to consult their sectional interests ; they were obliged to call in question the various political and social differences then existing ; they were obliged to question peculiar rights, to touch upon delicate points that then more than now bore upon the interest, welfare and prosperity of the Union. And those of you who are at all familiar with the political history of that time, are very well aware that the question that is now the hobby and the bone of contention among your politicians was as formidable then as now ; that it constituted not a sectional or strictly State policy, but a national fact ; that it was considered and reconsidered ; that concession after concession, plan after plan, was sought for, in order to prevent any future difficulty upon this subject of African slavery. And you very well know that it has not changed in its relations to the General Government since then ; and that while the people of the North, then possessing slavery, but possessing it very unwillingly, desired that it should be abolished, the South clearly and distinctly understood that it would be against its policy and interest to have it abolished. Therefore it was made a constitutional fact that slavery should exist within any or every State of the Union, as the people of that State should decide ; and if they decided that it was against their interest and policy to hold slaves, slavery should be abolished ; if not, it should be protected and sustained under the Constitution. And it is known to every political historian, that those who then held converse and secret session upon the welfare of the nation understood that it was best to prevent any future disquiet or discussion upon this subject, and therefore that it should be left as a matter of purely sectional interest, with which the General Government had nothing to do, and for which it would not be responsible, save that it would protect the interests of all the States of the Union.

How would it look for a government which had for its very foundation the innate equality of all the world, to adopt, as any portion of its Constitution, human slavery? And much more, how would it answer for it to make any part of its Constitution refer absolutely to human slavery? No; the Constitution was the standard for all time; slavery was but a matter of policy, fleeting, perhaps, but in any event subject to the temporary adjustment of the people where it existed. Should it be a matter of regret that the Constitution of a free people was predicated upon the slavery of any of the human race? Nay; but should it be a matter of regret either, that in consequence of that slavery which was entailed upon them, there should be disintegration, quarrel and contention, when a great nation was at stake? Nay. Of two evils the less was chosen, and all questions of interior policy were left to each individual and separate State, thus throwing the responsibility from the General Government to the special governments of States, and rendering it a matter entirely of individual adjustment.

You well remember, therefore, that not upon the subject of African slavery, but absolutely upon a disposition to trifle with the sacred foundation of this Government, some politicians, and some States whose leaders have been void of principle and patriotism, have always attempted to create disturbance and disquiet, either for the purpose of establishing a monarchy, a despotism, a moneyed aristocracy, or of destroying the harmony and peace of this Union. I remember, as though it were but yesterday, what a struggle I had to maintain the fidelity of this Government, and those who condemned me for that act might now thank me for their prosperity, success, peace and happiness; and the only regret of my life was, that I did not carry into execution an act which probably would have removed the seeds of the present discord and contention.

The Constitution of the United States is the parent, the positive

parental head, of which all of the States of the Union are the offspring. To this Constitution they owe their existence; to this Constitution are they indebted for their commerce, their social, civil and religious institutions—for all that constitutes their present growth and prosperity. It is the wise, just and lovely parent to whom they have ever turned in hours of trouble, affliction, strife and contention, and always found assistance and protection.

But there was one unruly child even long ago; this same Carolina, which had not then thrown off her swaddling-clothes, attempted to assume the reins of individual power, and disregarded her allegiance to the parent Government, in consequence of supposed wrongs, which were imaginary. This arose, as you are all aware, upon the tariff question. While I would not recognize a demand which was made in a spirit of disobedience and folly, and would quell, as soon as I would kill a serpent, anything like rebellion or treason, I would, nevertheless, give to her and to all the States of the Union alike, anything that was reasonable, just, and proper. Thus it was, that while with firmness and decision I met that spirit of rebellion and treason, and made that unruly child acknowledge her allegiance to the General Government, I at the same time removed the cause of her complaint.

And when subsequently, during the first period of my administration, there arose another question which involved the welfare and prosperity of the country, I took such a stand as to draw down upon my head almost the united condemnation of the political leaders of the United States. I refer to the United States Bank, whose location was then in Philadelphia, but whose branches and ramifications extended to every city of importance in the Union. Instead of a power so limited, regulated and controlled, as to be of use to the country, it assumed the form of a huge monopoly, a monster, and threatened to devour all the interests of the country,

and swallow up in its all-absorbing maw the whole liberty of this professedly free people. Not only had it assumed such gigantic proportions, but it absolutely threatened the disintegration of the Union, by establishing a moneyed aristocracy, which could at any time control the election, and thus prevent the expression of popular opinion. You well know how successfully this was used against my election, and how I swore by my sacred oath, that if I ever did occupy the Executive chair, I would destroy it. And so I did ; not from personal malice, but from principle and patriotism. And to day, you owe your prosperity as a nation, to that one act which destroyed the greatest viper that ever attempted to thrust its fangs into the Nation's heart, though it seemed to have entirely escaped the observation of the most critical statesmen of that day, as was proved by the fact that when the first blow of my administration was struck at the hydra, it called to its aid the astute Webster, the patriotic Clay, and the most profound lawyers which the government then afforded, in defense of its existence. Nevertheless, you who live to-day, reap the reward of that overthrow, for had it not taken place, there would have now existed such a moneyed aristocracy as would have destroyed the whole fabric of your liberty.

Thus originated, by my successor, Martin Van Buren, the Sub-Treasury system, which now gives to the Government the power to control its own finances.

And now, he who was not afraid to assist me in successfully carrying out the work of overthrowing that which I believed to be wrong, though the whole world has bid defiance, occupies the position of Chief Justice of your Supreme Court, than whom a wiser and better man can not be found.

But what of this question to-day ? After more than half a century of prosperity, we are told that the Constitution, founded on justice and goodness, is wrong ; that it has not met the require

ments of the people ; that it has not proved itself explicit enough on the subject of slavery, and that the position of the North to-day is widely different from what it was then. And we hear the demand of new amendments to the Constitution, or compromises, that would, necessarily, be humiliating or destructive. I say now, as I always did say, if there has been any act, passed by any of the States, which is wrong, it is the duty of those States to repeal those acts. If the Northern States have made war upon slavery— which they have done—if they have repeatedly ignored the rights of the South, and, by their legislation, confirmed that which is thrown against the Government, then those acts should be repealed. If they are right, of course they should adhere to it. There is but one side of a question of right, and that side can be clearly seen with half an eye. It does not require to refer to the Constitution to see what this word or that word means. The spirit of the Constitution is as clear and distinct as though it were engraven upon the tablets of every man's memory, or emblazoned in letters of burnished gold along the sky. The Constitution means just what it says—that each State has the right to legislate upon the subject of slavery as it shall choose, and no other State has a right to interfere with it ; and the General Government will protect the institutions of any State that are not at variance with the Constitution. Could anything be more explicit ? And yet your political leaders and fanatical moralists attempt to maintain that the Constitution did not mean slavery ! What in the name of Heaven did it mean ? There was nothing else but slavery concerning which such words could be employed, and it is all folly and nonsense to talk of not meaning slavery, when that was the very question about which concessions were made at the time the Constitution was framed.

Again, during my administration, when I discountenanced entirely the acts of treason and rebellion, I held also to the opinion that the

question of abolition, which was then but in its infancy, was a mere sham—an excrescence, perhaps, consequent upon the too rank growth of ideas incident to the prosperity of the nation—and I think so now. There are some men, particularly at the North, who have no other profession than that of fanaticism—no other means of livelihood. Remove the subject of agitation, and their avocation is gone. It is a temporary fleeting excitement. It is the slime which arises upon the surface of stagnant water. Your country has been at rest. All its energies have been directed towards commerce, and matters of pecuniary interest. The people have not been aroused to the requirements of a just administration. But once arouse them and, let the under-current of popular feeling express itself in this direction, and where is abolitionism? It is a mere sham—a false cry, which politicians use to frighten States out of the Union.

South Carolina has no more right to separate herself from the Union, because the States of the North have performed acts that are not in accordance with her wishes or interests, than has one member of a family the power to withdraw, because another has done a wrong act. What has the father done that she should deny her parentage? If there is a quarrel among the children, the father must settle it; it is his duty, his prerogative to do so.

Were I in the position that I once occupied, I would not wait to see if it is constitutional, because I know that it is, but I would say: The first man who breathes or thinks secession, is a traitor, and must die. And I would meet the spirit of abolitionism, if it assumed any proportion in the Government, or if any person on the floor of Congress dared to advocate it as a governmental matter, in the same way.

But now that these things do exist, and the child has absolutely rebelled against the parent—and not only one, but two, three, four,

aye seven, of these children are following in the same wake of that vicious, relentless child—what is to be done? The politicians—not the people—of the North, in firm adherence to that which is wrong, say: “We will not yield unless you grant us such and such compromises. You must say that slavery shall not exist in the territories, or at least North of the Missouri compromise line”—thus making it a question absolutely of paying for that which is right. I would say to the South, Never do it. If you lose your last heart's blood, do not yield one point in that direction. For the North must do that which is right. Ask no more; take no less.

It is the duty of the States of the North to repeal every act at variance with the Constitution. If they refuse to do that, why the acts are simply void, and the General Government has only to exercise its laws. The South should not offer or yield to any compromise which purchases the doing of that which is right. She should not ask in her stubbornness for any more. I think she does not. But I do say that while the North is at fault, while abolitionism may have sown the seeds of the present political crisis, while the South has been greatly wronged and should seek amends for that wrong, the remedy is not in rebellion against the Constitution and the Government. If Carolina is so anxious to assume her own individual power, why does she not return her portion of the revenue that was given under my administration? Why does she not seek to establish such financial resources as will enable her successfully to carry out her projected scheme of individual sovereignty? She cannot do it; -it is impossible; and all this bullying and threatening is simply an attempt to upset and overthrow the Federal Government. The South knows very well that when the question is once fairly met, the people of the North will grant all that is required. South Carolina does not desire it; the secessionists in other States do not require it. All they want is to break up this Government

and establish another confederacy predicated upon despotism, tyranny and aristocracy.

Now, how is this to be met? Not in the spirit of submission, not by waiting to see what South Carolina will do. Poor child! She might commit suicide, and then it would be too late to do anything. The first thing that should have been done, was to have rooted out and destroyed this spirit of rebellion in its very inception, before it had assumed the form of an ordinance, before a convention had been held, before delegates had been appointed, before even the election of a President had been made as a scape-goat for rebellion and treason. The very threat to overthrow the Federal Government in the event of a certain result of the Presidential election, was sufficient to warn the administration against the intention of those traitors. It is very well for him to say he did not think they would carry matters so far; but had it he power to whisper in Jim Buchanan's ear, I would say, "You are a coward, a traitor, a fool. You dare not express what you think, nor represent the people who have placed their prosperity and welfare in your hands."

And has the executive no power? Is the administration a nullity? Is the government a sham—a flimsy representation of nothing? The voice of the people under the Constitution elected Buchanan to office; he holds the reins of the Executive; it is his duty to do that which is for the interest of the people who have placed him in power. It is an office of trust, the highest in the nation, and shall he sit down and say, "I did not think they meant rebellion," when secret concave, intrigue and rebellion existed directly under his nose? Is he so blind that he cannot see? Shame! No; the truth is, he has been bought, first by their false pretenses, and secondly by the loud clamor which has been raised in his ears of the non-compromising people of the North. He has been led to believe that in the

event of such a result of the recent election, as we have seen, the interests of the South are entirely lost, whereas he holds the reins of government absolutely in his power and says to South Carolina, "Don't do this ; but if you must, I can do nothing." What would you think of a father who had lavished all his means to educate one of his sons and had actually established him in business for himself, making him only responsible to the parental head for what means he had derived from that source, who—when that son, under a pretense of something offensive on the part of some of his brothers, should say, "I will acknowledge your rule no longer,"—would not call upon that son either to acknowledge his allegiance or to refund all that had been paid him, and if he must go to destruction, go upon his own responsibility? Would you not say he was a milk-sop, a fool, a coward? And is not the parent the proper source of protection and remedy for that child? And what would you think of a child who would attempt to kill his own father because his brother had offended him? Why, such a homicide was never heard of.

Now Carolina would destroy this Government, in order that she might assume a power that she is not capable of maintaining, and establish a confederacy that she would not adhere to for a year. The question must be met and dealt with fairly. It is not one that requires long deliberation. If the small-pox or cholera, or any other disease, were prevalent among you, a medical man would not refer to the Constitution to see if it was right for him to administer medicine. A physician would not refer to the Constitution to see if it was right to prevent the people from dying, but would administer such remedies as were necessary, especially if all confidence had been placed in him, and he, as the physician of the people, was depended upon to take such measures as were deemed advisable. But the present executive waits to see if it is constitutional—

though he had not read and re-read the Constitution from his very infancy—as though he had not seen a successful administration under the Constitution—as though he had not been my very pupil in the administration of Government. He asks if it is constitutional to suppress rebellion or treason—if it is constitutional to hang a traitor—when the very spirit of the Constitution is death to all treason !

I do believe that had I the power, the very first act which I would do would be to hang Buchanan, not because of the vituperation that has been heaped upon him, but because I do think him such a fool and coward that I could not endure his presence. He is not a dangerous man, but then he is of no use.

We are told by those peace-loving patriots who sit down to read the Constitution while the very seeds of civil war are being sown, and are growing up into gigantic proportions, and disunion is talked of as commonly as stocks or money on 'change, that any such measures on the part of the Executive would bring on bloodshed and civil war.—I would have suppressed the rebellion before they had time to transport one rifle to the South—before they had time to think of taking up arms, seizing United States forts, and taking possession of the federal property. The question would then have been, not whether it is wrong to create war, but whether it is right to take the life of a traitor. And what is a traitor's life worth, after all? Compare it with the millions of lives that may be sacrificed. Now, when rebellion has assumed such formidable proportions, and is stalking everywhere, while people are goaded on to madness by political demagogues, and are endeavoring to sever their allegiance to this Government, as if it were an enemy seeking to devour them—was there ever such folly? If the Constitution had been wrong, how would such prosperity have attended its administration, and how would such vast acquisitions of territory have

been made? If the Constitution had been wrong, why did all the States adopt it? If the Constitution had been wrong, why was it not discovered before?

No; the question is neither of constitutional faults nor of Northern abolitionism; but the secessionists are afraid—though it would be cowardly in them to acknowledge such a fear—that there is a ~~secret undercurrent which had its germ under my administration,~~ which threatened to overthrow their movement. They vainly hoped that with the death of its originator that germ was destroyed. But it seems it became too deeply sown.

The animosity between the two sections of the country has been excited on the one hand by exaggerated accounts of the misfortunes of African slaves. The imaginations of the young have been excited with tales of horror, and people have been led to believe that slave-holders are little better than heathens, who treat their servants as an ugly drunken man treats his dog or his wife. On the other hand, in the South the children have been fed on hatred of the North, and the people have come to entertain the idea that the abolitionist is a monster that threatens to devour their very hearthstones and devastate their country. Is it then singular that with such misrepresentations and falsehoods, the people should seize upon the first opportunity which their political leaders present for a dissolution of the Union? And is it reasonable to suppose that any other voice than that of the Executive of the Federal Government could quell this disturbance; that any other power than that which originated this Government, could administer relief in this crisis?

It is all folly to talk of the limited power of the executive. He is not called to do anything outside of the limits of his power. He is only called upon to say to Carolina, "It is not the North that you fear, it is a false pretense; what you are seeking is to over-

throw my authority, and if you want to fight, I am ready." There would have been no more talk about secession if the first man who threatened it had been suspended in their midst.

But I am told that secession is a thing already accomplished, and there is no remedy now but bloodshed or peaceable acquiescence. There is no such thing in the constitution of governments as peaceable secession from any authority which has been once recognized, save for a sufficient cause. Now, I do contend that the South has cause for finding fault—that she has been grievously wronged and sorely tried. But if she has not seceded before, it is no time for her to do so now. The remedy is within, and not outside of the Federal Government.

But the question, after all, is not now what is constitutional, is not now the peaceable secession of a State, is not now what is right and proper in the exigency, but is there a Government at all? This is what the people are asking, and vainly, too, alas! For, aside from a single act of firmness and decision, the Executive has done nothing to quell the spirit of disturbance and rebellion. He has actually sat in converse with traitors, received them into his presence, held counsel with them, and treated them with deference. If I had met them, it would have been with an order for their arrest.

The Constitution can and must be preserved. This Union, so long the citadel of power and beauty, must not fade away. Are you an offspring of this glorious Union, who have inherited your wealth, your prosperity, your intelligence, your social and religious institutions from this great paternal head? Are you to say to your children, "I have nothing to leave you but anarchy, despotism and ruin?" Are you to say, "From this glorious temple, this mansion of my fathers, I will depart in peace, without raising my voice or my hand in defense of the very institution that I have inherited."

No, I will not believe it. I am sure that when the voice of the people shall be heard, not one million, but two, three, four millions of lives will be ready to be sacrificed to insure the freedom of coming generations. What is a man's life worth if it will not bring to his offspring the freedom of the government under which he has been born? What are your lives worth who are seeking to build up fortunes and names that your posterity may be benefited, if you would not willingly and eagerly lay down your lives to give to your posterity that which is greater than wealth—that they might retain the name of American citizens, born under the glorious Constitution which your forefathers framed? And I would say, and all would say, that you are worse than cowards and traitors if you would not, without the slightest compulsion, take up arms at once in favor of your Government, which has so long sustained you. I know that it will be so. I have too much confidence in the intelligence and patriotism of the millions that compose this Confederacy, to believe that they will sit still and see their glorious temple shattered to atoms, and its fragments thrown to the four winds of heaven. It cannot be! Great God, it must not be! By the Eternal, if I have any power, I will so control the Executive that he shall assume the position which he has so long hesitated to do—or that he shall drop into his grave a condemned, despised, scoffed-at traitor, who dares not lift his hand or voice in defense of his country, and there shall be one in his place who will not only be fearless but prompt and decisive in the administration of the Government.

I have done, not with the subject, but with the time allotted me. I will only say, that under the eye of Heaven and with the assistance of all those who in the early history of your country claimed it as a privilege, and a glorious privilege, to lay the foundation of that of which you have reaped the benefits, I will do that which is in

my power—call upon the nation and the Government to execute its laws. If a million of lives are sacrificed, the other twenty-nine million will have the benefits of freedom. And in the name of your Constitution, in the name of your country, in the name of your forefathers, in the name of your children, your honor, your free institutions, I conjure you, give no ear to that insidious voice of treason which says, peaceable secession will put an end to all this difficulty. That has been the secret poison that has wrought the present result, and unless it is put down promptly by the voice of the people, the nation will sink into nothingness.

And I would say to you of the North, repeal those acts which are wrong and unconstitutional. The Nation requires it, your Government requires it, the Constitution requires it, the children that are coming forth to represent your Government require it, all your future welfare and glory among men require it. Ask no compromise; let the South grant what ever it will, but do not assume the name of being bought to do that which is right.

Do this and rebellion will be at an end, or if it is not, there is a power which can soon put it down. The God of Justice and of Liberty has not so long suiled upon your country, and my country, in vain. He has not so long witnessed its prosperity and success with indifference, and he will not permit those who are remorseless, void of conscience and of heart, to rob it of its beauty and its power, nor to drag down justice from her high temple, nor to destroy the national ensign and banner which has floated for so many years in honor of Freedom, Justice and Liberty.

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