

BENJAMIN H. HILL

BENJAMIN HARVEY HILL, American politician and lawyer, was born in Jasper Co., Ga., Sept. 14, 1823, and died at Atlanta, Ga., Aug. 19, 1882. He was educated at the University of Georgia, and after studying law and being admitted to the Bar, began to practice his profession at La Grange, Ga. He entered the State legislature in 1851, and was for ten years a leader of the Georgia Whigs. As a member of the Secession convention summoned by his native State in January, 1861, he advocated the cause of the Union, until the ordinance of secession was passed; he then acquiesced in the decision thus made by his State. He was a prominent adherent of the Confederate cause, serving in the Confederate Senate throughout the Civil War, and in May, 1865, was arrested and for a time imprisoned in Fort Lafayette, in New York harbor. In his "Notes on the Situation in Georgia," issued in 1867-68, he opposed the reconstruction measures of Congress, but in 1870 issued "An Address to the People of Georgia," advising them to "accept the situation." For the next two years he withdrew from public life, but in 1872 supported the Greeley nomination for the Presidency, and in 1875 entered Congress as Democratic representative. In 1877, he was elected to the United States Senate. Hill was noted for his eloquence alike in the court-room and in Congress, and was likewise recognized as an able constitutional lawyer. Among his best-known congressional efforts are his reply in the House to Blaine, and his speech in the Senate denouncing Mahone's coalition with the Republican party. A monument has been erected to him in Atlanta, Ga.

ON THE PERILS OF THE NATION

DELIVERED BEFORE THE YOUNG MEN'S DEMOCRATIC UNION,
OCTOBER 8, 1868

PEOPLE OF THE NORTH,—In deference to the earnest wishes of a committee from the Young Men's Democratic Union Club, and the request of personal friends, some of whom differ with me in political views, I depart from my original intention not to make a speech in the North, and appear before you this evening.

I do not come to ask any favor for the Southern people. The representative, however, of that people who have ex-

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perienced burdens of despotic power, and the insecurity of anarchy, I come, all the more earnestly, to address you in behalf of imperilled constitutional free government. Will you hear me without passion?

The South—exhausted by a long war and unusual losses—needs peace; desires peace; begs for peace. The North—distrustful, if not vindictive—demands guarantees that the South will keep the peace she so much needs.

In countries where wars have been more frequent, the important fact is well established by experiment, that magnanimity in the conqueror is the very highest guaranty of contented submission by the conquered. It is to be regretted that you seem not to have learned this lesson. A people who will not be magnanimous in victory are not worthy to be, and will not always remain, victors.

In the next place, if you of the North would only open your eyes and see the plainest truth of the century—that the Southern people fought for what they believed to be their right—you would find at once a sufficient guarantee for peace. The South believed honestly, fought bravely, and surrendered frankly; and in each of these facts she presents the most ample title to credit. Why will you not see and admit the fact which must go into history, that the Southern people honestly believed they had a right to secede? Some of the wisest framers of the constitution taught that doctrine. Many of the ablest men in the North, as well as in the South, of every generation, have taught this doctrine. Some of your own States made the recognition of that right, the recognition of their acceptance of union. Even your own Webster—your orator without a rival among you, dead or living—taught that this right existed for cause—certainly for much less cause than now exists. Will you, then, persist in

saying that the Southern people are all traitors for exercising, or attempting to exercise, what such men and such States taught was a right? Will you say they did not honestly believe such teachers? Was it their intent to commit treason?

Here lies the whole cause of our continued troubles. The North will not admit what all other people know, and what all history must concede—that the South honestly believed in the right of secession. As a result of this infidelity to such plain fact, you assume that the Southern people are criminals. This idea is the sum of all your politics and statesmanship. It must be abandoned. It must be repudiated thoroughly and promptly. There can never be any peaceful and cordial reunion possible while one half the nation regard the other half as criminals. How can you trust criminals? Why should you desire Union with criminals? If the Southern people are honest, their assent to the non-secession construction of the constitution is a sufficient guarantee. If they are not honest, but criminals, no promise they could make ought to be trusted. Power is the only guaranty of fidelity in criminals, and if you cannot believe and cannot trust the South, you must, indeed, abandon the constitution and govern with power forever, or you must give up the South as unworthy to federate with you in an equal government of consent.

I speak frankly. If you cannot abandon this miserable theory and habit in your politics, in your religion, and in your schools, of regarding the Southern people as criminal traitors for attempting what good men, and wise men, and great men taught was their right, you will make peaceful reunion under free institutions utterly impossible.

You must hold them as friends, or let them go as foreign-

ers, or govern them as subjects. If you govern them as subjects you must share the penalty, for the same government can never administer freedom to one half and despotism to the other half of the same nation.

Rise above your passions, then, and realize that herein is your guaranty: The South believed honestly, fought bravely, and surrendered frankly.

Again. The exhausted condition of the South ought to inspire you with confidence in her professions of a desire for peace. Are you afraid for her to recover strength? Take care lest the desperation of exhaustion prove stronger than the sinews of prosperity. Peace is not desirable without its blessings.

But you of the North will not try magnanimity: will insist that the Southern people are traitors; and that an exhausted people are dangerous, and you must have guaranties. In your papers, from your pulpits, behind your counters, on your streets, and along your highways, I hear the perpetual charge that the South fought to destroy the government, committed treason and murder, and every inhuman crime, and that she is still intractable and rebellious, and dangerous, and insincere, and must concede and give guaranties.

Well, I am here to show you that the South has made every concession that an honorable people would exact, or an honest people could make. . . .

People of the North, will you not rise above passion, and save your own honor, and our common free government by doing plain justice to a people who accepted your pledge, and trusted your honor?

I beg you to understand the facts of actual history before it is too late. I repeat and beg you to note what the South has already conceded as the results of the war:

First. The South conceded at Appomattox, that the arguments of the ablest statesmen America ever produced, in favor of the right of secession as a constitutional remedy, had been replied to in the only manner they could be effectually replied to, by physical force; and the South consented that this judgment, written by the sword, should have legal force and effect.

Second. The South, by her own act, made valid the emancipation of her slaves in the only way in which that emancipation could be made valid, and thus gave up the property the North sold her, without compensation.

Third. The South has solemnly repudiated her debts, contracted in her defence, and has agreed to pay a full share of the debt contracted for her subjugation.

Fourth. The South has permitted without hindrance, the Congress to enter her States and establish tribunals unknown to the constitution, to govern a portion of their population in a manner different from the governments of the States.

Fifth. The South has agreed to make the negroes citizens and give them absolutely equal civil rights with the whites, and to extend to them every protection of law and every facility for education and improvement which are extended to the whites.

Sixth. In a word, I repeat, the South has agreed to everything which has been proposed by the civil or military governments of the United States and by every department of that government, except the single demand to disfranchise their own best men from their own State offices, at a time when their counsels are most needed, or to consent that negroes and strangers may disfranchise them.

For this, and for this only, all their other concessions are spit upon, and they are denounced as intractable, insincere,

rebellious, and unwilling to accept the results of the war! Shame upon leaders who persist in such charges; and shame upon a people who will sustain such leaders! . . .

But what will the South do? I will tell you first what the South will not do, in my opinion.

The South will not secede again. That was her great folly—folly against her own interest, not wrong against you. Mark this: That folly will not be repeated. Even if the people of the South desire the disruption of the federal government, their statesmen have the sagacity to see that that result can more effectually come of this secession of the North from the constitution. Those ominous words “outside of the constitution” are more terribly significant than those other words “secession from the Union.” The former is a secession having all the vices of the latter greatly increased and none of its virtues. Certainly none of its manliness, straightforward candor, and justification. So note this: The South does not desire nor seek disunion. If she desired it she does not deem another secession necessary to bring it about. Disunion will come from Chicago, in spite of Southern opposition.

The South will not re-enslave the negro. She did not enslave him in the first instance. That was your work. The South took your slave-savage and gave him the highest civilization ever reached by the negro. You then freed him and kept the price of his slavery, and you alone hold the property that was in human flesh.

But the Southern whites will never consent to the government of the negro. Never! All your money spent in the effort to force it will be wasted. The Southern whites will never consent to social and political equality with the negro. You may destroy yourselves in the effort to force it, and then

you will fail. You may send down your armies and exhaust the resources of the whole country for a century and pile up the public debt till it lean against the skies; and you may burn our cities and murder our people—our unarmed people—but you will never make them consent to governments formed by negroes and strangers under the dictation of Congress by the power of the bayonet. Born of the bayonet, this government must live only by the bayonet.

Now, I will tell you some things which, in my opinion, the South will do.

The South would accept the election of Mr. Seymour as a verdict of the Northern people that the general government was to be administered according to the constitution, and she would rejoice and come out of her sorrow strong, beautiful, and growing.

The South will accept the election of General Grant as a verdict by the Northern people that the constitution is a nullity and that they will that the general government be administered outside of it. But the South will then submit passively to your laws, but in her heart hope will still cleave to the constitution. It is her only port of safety from the storm of fanaticism, passion, and despotism.

The South surrendered secession as a constitutional remedy at Appomattox, but she did not surrender the constitution itself, nor the great principles of freedom it was intended to secure.

Whether Mr. Seymour or General Grant shall be elected, the Southern States—each State for itself—will quietly, peacefully, but firmly take charge of and regulate their own internal domestic affairs in their own way, subject only to the constitution of the United States. What then will you of the North do? What will President Grant do? Will you

or he send down armies to compel those States to regulate their own affairs to suit you outside of the constitution? Will you?

It is high time this people had recovered from the passions of war. It is high time that counsel were taken from statesmen, not demagogues. It is high time that editors, preachers, and stump speakers had ceased slandering the motives and purposes of the South. It is high time the people of the North and the South understood each other and adopted means to inspire confidence in each other. It is high time the people of each State were permitted to attend to their own business. Intermeddling is the crime of the century. If it was folly in the South to secede it was crime in the North to provoke it. If it was error in the South to dissolve the Union it is crime in the North to keep it dissolved.

The South yields secession and yields slavery, and yields them for equal reunion. People of the North, now is the auspicious moment to cement anew and for still greater glory our common Union. But it must be cemented in mutual good will, as between equals and under the constitution. Such a Union the South pleads for. I care not what slanderers say, what fanaticism represents, or how selfish and corrupt hate and ambition pervert; I tell you there is but one desire in the South. From every heart in that bright land, from her cotton fields and grain farms, from her rich valleys and metal-pregnant mountains, from the lullabies of her thousands of rippling streams and moaning millions of her primeval forest-trees, comes up to you but this one voice—this one earnest, united voice: Flag of our Union, wave on; wave ever! But wave over freemen, not subjects; over States, not Provinces; over a union of equals, not of lords and vas-

sals; over a land of law, of liberty, and of peace, and not of anarchy, oppression, and strife!

People of the North, will you answer back in patriotic notes of cheering accord that our common constitution shall remain or in the discordant notes of sectional hate and national ruin that there shall be protection for the North inside of the constitution and oppression for the South outside of it?

If the latter then not only the Union, not only the constitution, but that grand, peculiar system of free federative governments so wisely devised by our fathers and known as the American system, and of which the constitution is but the instrument and the Union but the shadow—will die, must die, is dead!

Have you ever studied this American system of government? Have you compared it with former systems of free governments, and noted how our fathers sought to avoid their fatal defects? I commend this study to your prompt attention. To the heart that loves liberty it is more enchanting than romance, more bewitching than love, and more elevating than any other science. If history proves any one thing more than another it is that freedom cannot be secured in a wide and populous country except upon the plan of a federal compact for general interests, and untrammelled local governments for local interests.

Our fathers adopted this general plan with improvements in the details of profound wisdom which cannot be found in any previous system. With what a noble impulse of common patriotism they came together from distant States and joined their counsels to devise and perfect this system, henceforth to be forever known as the American system.

The snows that lodge on the summit of Mount Washington

are not purer than the motives that begot it. The fresh dew-laden zephyrs from the orange groves of the South are not sweeter than the hopes its advent inspired. The flight of its own symbolic eagle, though he blew his breath upon the sun, could not be higher than its expected destiny! Alas, are these motives now corrupted? Are these hopes poisoned? And is this high destiny eclipsed, and so soon,—aye, before a century has brought to manhood its youthful visage? Stop before the blow is given and let us consider but its early blessings.

Under the benign influences of this promising American system of government our whole country at once entered upon a career of prosperity without a parallel in human annals. The seventy years of its life brought more thrift, more success, more individual freedom, more universal happiness with fewer public burdens than were ever before enjoyed or borne by any portion of the world in five centuries. From three millions of whites we became thirty millions. From three hundred thousand blacks we became four millions—a greater relative increase than of the whites with all the aid of immigration. From a narrow peopled slope along the dancing Atlantic we stretched with wide girth to the sluggish Pacific. From a small power which a European despotism, in jealousy of a rival, patronizingly took by the hand and led to independence, we became a power whose voice united was heard throughout the world and whose frown might well be dreaded by the combined powers of earth. Our granaries fed and our factories clothed mankind. The buffalo and his hunter were gone, and cities rose in the forests of the former, and flowers grew, and hammers rang, and prayers were said, in the playgrounds of the latter. Millions grew to manhood without seeing a soldier, or hearing a cannon, or knowing the shape

or place of a bayonet! And is this happy, fruitful, peaceful system dying—hopelessly dying? Has it but twenty days more to live a struggling life?

People of the North, the answer is with you. Rise above passion, throw away corruption, cease to hate and learn to trust, and this dying system will spring to newer and yet more glorious life. The stake is too great for duplicity and the danger too imminent for trifling. The past calls to you to vindicate its wisdom; the present charges you with its treasures, and the future demands of you its hopes. Forget your anger and be superior to the littleness of revenge. Meet the South in her cordial proffers of happy reunion and turn not from her offered hand.

From your great cities and teeming prairies, from your learned altars and countless cottages, from your palaces on sea and land, from your millions on the waters and your multiplied millions on the plains, let one united cheering voice meet the voice that now comes so earnest from the South, and let the two voices go up in harmonious, united, eternal, ever-swelling chorus, Flag of our Union! wave on; wave ever! Aye, for it waves over freemen, not subjects; over States, not Provinces; over a union of equals, not of lords and vassals; over a land of law, of liberty, and peace, not of anarchy, oppression, and strife!