


ANDREW G. CURTIN

NDREW GREGG CURTIN, American statesman and diplomat, and Governor of Pennsylvania (1861-67), was born at Bellefonte, Pa., April 22, 1817, and died there Oct. 7, 1894. He obtained his education at Milton Academy, after which he studied law at Dickinson College, was admitted to the Bar in 1839, and beginning to practice in his native county, soon attained prominence in his profession. Engaging in politics as a Whig, he was an active worker for Harrison in 1840, and four years later canvassed the State for Henry Clay. In 1854, he was appointed secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and ex-officio superintendent of common schools, in which post he did much to further education and reform the school system of the State. It was his report to the legislature, in 1855, that led to the establishment of normal schools. In 1860, he was elected Republican Governor of Pennsylvania and in his inaugural he advocated suppression by force of Secession. When the call for troops was made by the President, in April, 1861, Curtin responded with alacrity, companies of soldiers sent by him reaching Washington, April 18, these being the first volunteer troops to reach the capital. By his direction, 15,000 additional volunteers were held in readiness at Harrisburg. Their services were shortly after accepted by the government, and Governor Curtin continued this patriotic activity throughout the period of the Civil War. After serving as Governor a second term, he retired for a while to private life, but from 1868 to 1872 was minister to Russia. On his return to the United States he supported Greeley for the Presidency, and since then allied himself with the Democratic party. In 1881, he entered Congress as Democratic representative and served until 1887 through two successive terms.

THE PEOPLE'S HERITAGE SQUANDERED

[The House having under consideration the bill to repeal section 22 of the act to incorporate the Texas Pacific Railroad Company, approved March 3, 1878, and to declare the forfeiture of the land grant therein made, and for other purposes, Mr. Curtin said, June 26, 1884:]

MR. SPEAKER,—No American citizen can be insensible to the great benefits conferred on the trade, commerce, and advancement of all the material interests of this country by railroads. It would have been better for the railroads and those who invest money in them, infinitely better for the people who travel and transport

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goods over them, if they had been confined to the common and statute law as common carriers only. I cannot but believe that the immunities and powers given to our railroad system beyond the rights and powers of common carriers, by water and other means of transportation, would have been infinitely better for them and for the country. But the legislation of this country in the States and by the Congress of the United States in its wisdom has conferred upon railroad companies powers far beyond the purposes for which they may be equally useful to the people and at the same time not oppressive in their exactions.

Mr. Speaker, it was generous, nay it was patriotic, in the States owning vast domains in the West to give to this people lands to which they had a perfect title and which they generously surrendered for the national good. It was an inspiration of American statesmanship that led Jefferson to purchase Louisiana and the vast territories included in the purchase; and in the war with Mexico this great people conquered and gave to the public still more lands. For seventy-five years the lands given to this country were held in sacred trust for the people, to make homes for the homeless and to give lands to the landless.

Fifty-three millions of acres, sir, were given to the States for internal communications, for the advancement of trade and commerce, the settlement of the States, and for the purpose of education. Two hundred millions of acres have been voted to railroad corporations. In 1862 the Congress of the United States passed a law known as the Homestead Law. That, sir, was beneficent and generous legislation. It gave to the overflow of population in the Atlantic States a welcome to a home and a title to land where the American freeman could settle, turn the virgin soil to the light of the

sun, and build upon it a home for himself and his family, and in the fulness of time acquire by his residence a fee-simple title. From 1861 until 1874 these unprecedented and munificent gifts were made to railroad corporations. Since 1874, when the change occurred in the majority of the House, not one acre has been given away, and not one land grant has been revived or extended.

Corporations are almost a necessity, and vast benefits have arisen from such grants and the work accomplished through them, but of immeasurably more value are the lands to the people of this Republic. I repeat, sir, that from 1874 to this time not one acre of land has been given to a corporation and not one grant that has lapsed by reason of the failure on the part of the corporations to comply with its conditions has been revived or extended beyond the time of its limitations.

I must not be understood, sir, to intimate for an instant that this great government should not be held to its contracts, bad as they were in the beginning. "Keep thy covenant proclaimed upon the plains of Mesopotamia so long since in the dark past" applies to individuals as well as to governments and people, and is a safe rule of conduct for all humanity; and where our government has made a contract let us fulfil it to the letter, but do not let the gift of this great government and people be revived into life by management or artifice.

There runs through this entire bill the clearest evidence of management by individuals to take a million of acres of land which should have been dedicated to the people as their homes when they acquire title under the Homestead Law.

This government can be strong and the Republic maintained in its strength only by the occupancy of land by the

holders of small property. History is philosophy teaching by example; and tell me in all the line of history where a government republican in form has existed where a few people owned the land and the masses were serfs or peons or small tenants. All the roads of the empire lead to Rome is the boast of history. Armies marched from Rome to conquer and pillage foreign countries. They brought to Rome wealth and power, producing centralization, and too much of the immorality they found in Asiatic countries. Such was the centralization in that great republic that at last a few people, rich and powerful, owned all the lands of the country.

A distinguished citizen of Rome returning from foreign service found upon the slopes of the Alps, in Tuscany and Lombardy, where the Roman law should have given the soldiers one fourth of the lands, one fourth reserved to the state to be sold and the money returned to its treasury, one half to be given to the Roman freemen for homes. Tiberius Gracchus found in all the provinces on the slopes of the Alps scarcely one Roman freeman who owned an acre of land. Returning to Rome, as the tribune of the people, he introduced a law, and in it was generous to the rich patricians.

There were political rings at that time in Rome as there are unfortunately in this country at the present day. The rich and the powerful had their following of henchmen and servitors, and when the law was proposed by Gracchus he made it generous to the patricians, as it provided that they should be paid for the homes by the freemen who had been deprived of them. It was a just, a generous, and a liberal offer. It was just to the patricians; it was equally just to the people; but the rich and the powerful would not accept his generous offer. From the tribune they followed him

through the streets of Rome, clubbed and stoned him to death, and threw his body into the Tiber.

Then, sir, equality and liberty commenced to decay and darkness fell upon the civilized world; learning fled to the cloisters; in their ignorance rulers could not even sign their names to their decrees. There was anarchy and pillage and wrong and oppression throughout the civilized world.

I say, Mr. Speaker, that history teaches by example. We can look back and gather wisdom from the events of the past, but who will claim power to look forward and anticipate what is in the future? That condition of the Roman republic has not failed to interest friends of humanity from that time to this.

At the beginning of the French revolution, when France was entering upon revolution and the people struggling for the right to be relieved from oppression, when the exactions of tyrannical landlords had robbed them of all their just rights, reduced to poverty and frenzied by oppression the French people rose in their majesty, and in their struggle for their just rights convulsed the commerce and trade and civilization of the world for fifteen years. But in the end the domain was taken from the church and state and France was divided into small estates by purchase.

There are 10,000,000 property-owners in France to-day, with a population of 37,000,000. There are less than 4,500,000 in this land of liberty with its population of 55,000,000. At that fearful era in the history of the world, Mirabeau, who was a real friend of humanity, uttered from the tribune in the States-General words of wisdom and eloquence:—

“Thus,” said he, “perished the last of the Gracchi by the hands of the patricians, who, having received the mortal

blow, flung a handful of dust toward heaven attesting the avenging gods, and from this dust rose Marius—Marius less great in having exterminated the Cimbri than in having quelled in Rome the aristocracy of the nobility.”

There were never words more sublime in sentiment or more beautiful in rhetoric uttered in the classic age. Burke was never grander in the British Commons or our own Webster in the Senate. And, sir, mark the conclusion—the beauty of the prophecy and the purity of the philosophy: “Privileges,” said Mirabeau, “must have an end—the people is eternal.” The wisdom of that prophecy and philosophy is not unprofitable in this discussion.

And now, Mr. Speaker, without proposing to speak of the details of this bill, I must refer to it in general terms, as gentlemen on both sides have given all the data necessary for a proper conclusion. I have, sir, the most profound respect for the chairman of the committee on the judiciary for his learning, his integrity, and his patriotism, and yet I find in his bill, as expounded upon the one side and the other, that this land is to be taken from the people by artifice and not by fair dealing. Old charters are revived, life is given worn-out and fanciful grants, and with apparent attempt by indirection to revive a munificent grant of this government. There is running through the entire bill evidences of the want of title and covenant, surely things of interest to this people.

It was the intention of the American people to enjoy this rich heritage given to them by the States and held in trust by the federal government for so many years. If there be no doubt on this subject, the covenant of the government binds it. Let this question go to the courts, where my learned friend, the chairman of the judiciary committee, can be

heard and the legal and just rights of the parties can be fairly adjudged.

This is scarcely a question for a popular assembly. This is not the place to decide a question serious as the one under consideration. We perform our duty by maintaining that the grant has lapsed by the failure of the corporations to perform the covenant they made. This question can be settled by the calm deliberation of the courts provided by the constitution. When the court sits upon the question involving the rights of American freemen I trust, sir, the judges will put on ermine that will be spotless. And if the courts decide that the contract with the companies is of such character and requires this means for its fulfilment, I say the American people will bow in submission to the decision. I repeat, "Keep thy covenant;" but if the court should find that there is management and artifice and indirection in the attempt to acquire title to this land, then decree back to the people of this country the lands that belong to them.

Mr. Speaker, the amount of money invested in railroad corporations in the United States is upward of \$7,000,000,000 and that does not include the land granted by Congress. In contrast to that the taxable property in the United States is something more than \$17,000,000,000, not including the property free from taxation by this government and many of the States. Of the 200,000 miles of railroad in the world we have 120,000 in the United States; we are grid-ironed with railroads.

Who is sensible to the fact that they have advanced the national power and consequence and contributed to the ease and comfort and happiness of our people, united jarring interests, afforded facilities for the interchange of commodi-

ties, promoted trade and commerce and the social intercourse of our people?

If the railroad system of the United States prior to 1860 had extended their lines to the south, instead of the west, on the isothermal lines, I doubt if we would ever have had that terrible and unhappy war in which so many of our people perished and which left so large a part of our rich country in poverty.

It is fortunate for this country that the vast amount of capital invested in railroads and the enormous wealth of the few men who own most of the capital stock cannot combine together and make common cause in the government of this country. The citizens who control the railroads of this country are generally enlightened men. They know too well the value of this government in the protection of their interests to attempt such a thing. If they should combine they could control this government and mold its destinies for the future. They could say who should sit in this chamber and in the august body at the other end of the Capitol, and what citizen should occupy the palatial residence at the other end of the avenue; and who should be upon the benches of the courts; and, if united, with their vast power they could say who should compose the court of last resort of the American citizen, a court that has power to interpret laws, a tribunal that in power and influence is to the individual American citizen next to his God.

Who would be the keeper of an insane asylum if the inmates could combine; who would undertake the task? But, sir, they cannot combine because reason is dethroned and the inmates madmen; nor can the railroad companies combine to dominate this country by their wealth, the number of people connected with them, or their power. Ambi-