


## ALFRED IVERSON

LFRED IVERSON, an American politician and Southern secessionist, was born in Burke Co., Ga., Dec. 3, 1798, and died at Macon, Ga., March 4, 1873. Graduating in 1820 at Princeton College, he studied law and subsequently practiced his profession at Columbus in his native State. He sat several times in the Georgia legislature, and for seven years was a judge of the superior court for the Columbus circuit. In 1847, he was returned to Congress as a Democratic representative, and in 1855 passed from the House to the Senate, where for a number of years he was chairman of the committee on claims. Iverson was a leader of the Secession movement, declaring in Congress on one occasion that the South would never tolerate any compromise in the matter of its institutions that did not fully recognize, not only the existence of slavery in its present form, but also the right of the Southern people to emigrate to the common Territories with their slave property, and their right to Congressional protection while the Territorial existence lasted. With his colleague, Toombs, he withdrew from Congress after the passage of the Secession ordinance by Georgia in January, 1861. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Iverson entered the Confederate army as colonel of a regiment raised by him, and in 1862 was commissioned brigadier-general.

### SPEECH ON SECESSION

DELIVERED IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE, DECEMBER 5, 1860

**I** DO not rise, Mr. President, for the purpose of entering at any length into this discussion or to defend the President's message, which has been attacked by the senator from New Hampshire. I am not the mouthpiece of the President. While I do not agree with some portions of the message, and some of the positions that have been taken by the President, I do not perceive all the inconsistencies in that document which the senator from New Hampshire has thought proper to present.

It is true that the President denies the constitutional right of a State to secede from the Union; while, at the same time, he also states that this federal government has no constitu-

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tional right to enforce or to coerce a State back into the Union which may take upon itself the responsibility of secession. I do not see any inconsistency in that. The President may be right when he asserts the fact that no State has a constitutional right to secede from the Union. I do not myself place the right of a State to secede from the Union upon constitutional grounds. I admit that the constitution has not granted that power to a State. It is exceedingly doubtful even whether the right has been reserved. Certainly it has not been reserved in express terms. I therefore do not place the expected action of any of the southern States, in the present contingency, upon the constitutional right of secession; and I am not prepared to dispute, therefore, the position which the President has taken upon that point.

I rather agree with the President that the secession of a State is an act of revolution taken through that particular means or by that particular measure. It withdraws from the federal compact, disclaims any further allegiance to it, and sets itself up as a separate government, an independent State. The State does it at its peril, of course, because it may or may not be the cause of war by the remaining States composing the federal government. If they think proper to consider it such an act of disobedience, or if they consider that the policy of the federal government be such that it cannot submit to this dismemberment, why then they may or may not make war if they choose upon the seceding State. It will be a question of course for the federal government or the remaining States to decide for themselves, whether they will permit a State to go out of the Union, and remain as a separate and independent State, or whether they will attempt to force her back at the point of the bayonet. That is a question, I presume, of policy and expediency, which will be con-

sidered by the remaining States composing the federal government, through their organ, the federal government, whenever the contingency arises.

But, sir, while a State has no power under the constitution conferred upon it to secede from the federal government or from the Union, each State has the right of revolution, which all admit. Whenever the burdens of the government under which it acts become so onerous that it cannot bear them, or if anticipated evil shall be so great that the State believes it would be better off—even risking the perils of secession—out of the Union than in it, then that State, in my opinion, like all people upon earth has the right to exercise the great fundamental principle of self-preservation and go out of the Union—though, of course, at its own peril—and bear the risk of the consequences. And while no State may have the constitutional right to secede from the Union, the President may not be wrong when he says the federal government has no power under the constitution to compel the State to come back into the Union. It may be a *casus omissus* in the constitution; but I should like to know where the power exists in the constitution of the United States to authorize the federal government to coerce a sovereign State. It does not exist in terms, at any rate, in the constitution. I do not think there is any inconsistency therefore between the two positions of the President in the message upon these particular points.

The only fault I have to find with the message of the President is the inconsistency of another portion. He declares that, as the States have no power to secede, the federal government is in fact a consolidated government; that it is not a voluntary association of States. I deny it. It was a voluntary association of States. No State was ever forced

to come into the federal Union. Every State came voluntarily into it. It was an association, a voluntary association of States; and the President's position that it is not a voluntary association is, in my opinion, altogether wrong.

But whether that be so or not, the President declares and assumes that this government is a consolidated government to this extent: that all the laws of the federal government are to operate directly upon each individual of the States, if not upon the States themselves, and must be enforced; and yet at the same time he says that the State which secedes is not to be coerced. He says that the laws of the United States must be enforced against every individual of a State.

Of course, the State is composed of individuals within its limits, and if you enforce the laws and obligations of the federal government against each and every individual of the State you enforce them against a State. While, therefore, he says that a State is not to be coerced, he declares, in the same breath, his determination to enforce the laws of the Union, and therefore to coerce the State if a State goes out. There is the inconsistency, according to my idea, which I do not see how the President or anybody else can reconcile. That the federal government is to enforce its laws over the seceding State, and yet not coerce her into obedience, is to me incomprehensible.

But I did not rise, Mr. President, to discuss these questions in relation to the message; I rose in behalf of the State that I represent, as well as other southern States that are engaged in this movement, to accept the issue which the senator from New Hampshire has seen fit to tender—that is, of war. Sir, the southern States now moving in this matter are not doing it without due consideration. We have looked over the whole field. We believe that the only security for the insti-

tution to which we attach so much importance is secession and a southern confederacy. We are satisfied, notwithstanding the disclaimers upon the part of the Black Republicans to the contrary, that they intend to use the federal power when they get possession of it to put down and extinguish the institution of slavery in the southern States. I do not intend to enter upon the discussion of that point. That, however, is my opinion. It is the opinion of a large majority of those with whom I associate at home and I believe of the Southern people. Believing that this is the intention and object, the ultimate aim and design, of the Republican party, the Abolitionists of the North, we do not intend to stay in this Union until we shall become so weak that we shall not be able to resist when the time comes for resistance. Our true policy is the one which we have made up our minds to follow. Our true policy is to go out of this Union now, while we have strength to resist any attempt on the part of the federal government to coerce us.

I can tell the senator from New Hampshire, as well as all of his friends, when they talk about South Carolina going out, that she is not the only State that is going out. Her destiny is beyond doubt fixed. She is determined, in the graphic language of her distinguished senator, not here to-day [Mr. Hammond], to go out high, dry, and forever; and there are other States that intend to follow her example. So far as my own State is concerned, she is the last one in the series of those who have ordered conventions to act upon the subject; but although she is the last one of the five States whose decision will be made I have the confidence to assert here upon this floor that she will not be behind her sisters in the boldness, decision, and firmness of her action.

I am satisfied that South Carolina will resolve herself into

a separate, sovereign, and independent State before the Ides of January; that Florida and Mississippi, whose conventions are soon to meet, will follow the example of South Carolina; and that Alabama,—proud daughter of my own State,—actuated by a patriotism and pride, will follow this noble example which South Carolina will set to her sisters and will go out of the Union on the 7th of January. Then the Georgia convention follows on the 16th of that month; and if these other surrounding sisters shall take the step, Georgia will not be behind; and, sir, before the 4th of March—before you inaugurate your President—there will be certainly five States, if not eight of them, that will be out of the Union and have formed a constitution and frame of government for themselves.

As the senator from New Hampshire very properly remarked, it is time to look this thing in the face. The time is rolling rapidly to the consummation of these great objects; and in my opinion there is nothing this side of heaven that can prevent their consummation. You talk about concessions. You talk about repealing the personal liberty bills as a concession to the South. Repeal them all to-morrow, sir, and it would not stop the progress of this revolution. It is not your personal liberty bills that we dread. Those personal liberty bills are obnoxious to us, not on account of their practical operation, not because they prevent us from reclaiming our fugitive slaves, but as an evidence of that deep-seated, widespread hostility to our institutions, which must sooner or later end, in this Union, in their extinction. That is the reason we object to your personal liberty bills. It is not because that in their practical operation they ever do any harm. But, sir, if all the liberty bills were repealed to-day the South would no more gain her fugitive slaves than if they were

in existence. It is not the personal liberty laws; it is mob laws that we fear. It is the existence and action of the public sentiment of the northern States that are opposed to this institution of slavery and are determined to break it down—to use all the power of the federal government as well as every other power in their hands to bring about its ultimate and speedy extinction. That is what we apprehend and what in part moves us to look for security and protection in secession and a southern confederacy.

Nor do we suppose that there will be any overt acts upon the part of Mr. Lincoln. For one, I do not dread these overt acts. I do not propose to wait for them. Why, sir, the power of this federal government could be so exercised against the institution of slavery in the southern States that, without an overt act, the institution would not last ten years. We know that, sir; and seeing the storm which is approaching, although it may be seemingly in the distance, we are determined to seek our own safety and security before it shall burst upon us and overwhelm us with its fury when we are not in a situation to defend ourselves.

Now, sir, we intend to go out of this Union. I speak what I believe upon this floor, that, before the 4th of March, five of the southern States at least will have declared their independence; and I am satisfied that three others of the cotton States will follow as soon as the action of the people can be had. Arkansas, whose legislature is now in session, will in all probability call a convention at an early day. Louisiana will follow. Her legislature is to meet; and although there is a clog in the way of the Lone-Star State of Texas in the person of her governor, who will not consent to call her legislature together and give the people of that State an opportunity to act, yet the public sentiment in that State is so

decided in favor of this movement that even the governor will be overridden; and if he does not yield to public sentiment some Texan Brutus will arise to rid his country of the hoary-headed incubus that stands between the people and their sovereign will.

We intend, Mr. President, to go out peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must; but I do not believe, with the senator from New Hampshire, that there is going to be any war. If five or eight States go out they will necessarily draw all the other southern States after them. That is a consequence that nothing can prevent. If five or eight States go out of this Union I should like to see the man that would propose a declaration of war against them, or attempt to force them into obedience to the federal government at the point of the bayonet or the sword.

Sir, there has been a good deal of vamping on this subject. A great many threats have been thrown out. I have heard them on this floor, and upon the floor of the other House of Congress; but I have also perceived this: they come from those who would be the very last men to attempt to put their threats into execution. Men talk sometimes about their eighteen million who are to whip us; and yet we have heard of cases in which just such men had suffered themselves to be switched in the face and trembled like sheep-stealing dogs, expecting to be shot every minute. These threats generally come from men who would be the last to execute them. Some of these northern editors talk about whipping the Southern States like spaniels. Brave words; but I venture to assert none of those men would ever volunteer to command an army to be sent down south to coerce us into obedience to federal power.

But, sir, there is to be no war. The northern States are controlled by sagacious men like the distinguished senator

from New York [Mr. Seward]. Where public opinion and action are thus controlled by men of common sense, who know well that they cannot succeed in a war against the southern States, no such attempt of coercion will be made. If one State alone was to go out, unsustained by her surrounding sister States, possibly war might ensue, and there might be an attempt made to coerce her, and that would give rise to civil war; but, sir, South Carolina is not to go out alone. In my opinion she will be sustained by all her southern sisters. They may not all go out immediately; but they will in the end join South Carolina in this important movement; and we shall, in the next twelve months, have a confederacy of the southern States, and a government inaugurated, and in successful operation, which in my opinion will be a government of the greatest prosperity and power that the world has ever seen. There will be no war in my opinion. Such an effort would be fruitless and men of sense know it.

There are but two instances in modern history in which a nation has been overcome by a foreign power. Hungary, with only eight million, was conquered by Austria, but it required the aid of the colossal power of Russia. Even then she would not have been conquered but for the treachery of one of her own sons. Mexico was conquered by the United States; but Mexico is a feeble nation, and her councils were distracted and her energies weakened by divisions among her people.

But, sir, the fifteen slave States, or even the five of them now moving, banded together in one government and united as they are soon to be, would defy the world in arms, much less the northern States of this confederacy. Fighting on our own soil, in defence of our own sacred rights and honor, we could not be conquered even by the combined forces of

all the other States; and sagacious, sensible men in the northern States would understand that too well to make the effort.

Besides, what would they gain if they conquered us? Would it be a union worth preserving which is maintained by force? No, sir. Like the President of the United States, no sensible man, no patriot, no one who is guided by proper counsels, will ever urge the policy of making war to bring back the seceding States at the point of the bayonet into the Union. I do not apprehend any war. But if the northern States or the federal government controlled by the counsels of the northern States shall attempt to coerce us, then war will come; and like the senator from New Hampshire, if he wants war, I say here to-day we are ready for it. We intend to prepare for war. We do not believe that war will ensue, but we are determined to prepare for it. A wise man will always prepare for any danger or contingency that may arise; and we are preparing for it. We will be prepared when the time comes. We will fight for our liberties, our rights, and our honor; and we are not a feeble race of Mexicans, either. I do not believe we shall have any treachery as Hungary had in her war with Austria and Russia. I believe we shall have a united people. United, as we shall be, in interest and in all that we hold dear, we do not dread war, except so far as the terrible consequences which always follow armed collisions. We know how much distress it brings.

But, sir, I apprehend that when we go out and form our confederacy—as I think and hope we shall do very shortly—the northern States or the federal government will see its true policy to be to let us go in peace and make treaties of commerce and amity with us, from which they will derive more advantages than from any attempt to coerce us. They cannot succeed in coercing us. If they allow us to form our

government without difficulty we shall be very willing to look upon them as a favored nation and give them all the advantages of commercial and amicable treaties. I have no doubt that both of us—certainly the southern States—would live better, more happily, more prosperously, and with greater friendship than we live now in this Union.

Sir, disguise the fact as you will, there is an enmity between the Northern and Southern people that is deep and enduring, and you never can eradicate it—never! Look at the spectacle exhibited on this floor. How is it? There are the Republican Northern senators upon that side. Here are the Southern senators on this side. How much social intercourse is there between us? You sit upon your side, silent and gloomy; we sit upon ours with knit brows and portentous scowls. Yesterday I observed that there was not a solitary man on that side of the chamber came over here even to extend the civilities and courtesies of life; nor did any of us go over there. Here are two hostile bodies on this floor; and it is but a type of the feeling that exists between the two sections. We are enemies as much as if we were hostile States. I believe that the Northern people hate the South worse than ever the English people hated France; and I can tell my brethren over there that there is no love lost upon the part of the South.

In this state of feeling, divided as we are by interest, by a geographical feeling, by everything that makes two people separate and distinct, I ask why we should remain in the same Union together? We have not lived in peace; we are not now living in peace. It is not expected or hoped that we shall ever live in peace. My doctrine is that whenever even man and wife find that they must quarrel and cannot live in peace they ought to separate; and these two sections—the North and South—manifesting, as they have done and do

now and probably will ever manifest, feelings of hostility, separated as they are in interests and objects, my own opinion is they can never live in peace; and the sooner they separate the better.

Sir, these sentiments I have thrown out crudely I confess, and upon the spur of the occasion. I should not have opened my mouth but that the senator from New Hampshire seemed to show a spirit of bravado, as if he intended to alarm and scare the southern States into a retreat from their movements. He says that war is to come and you had better take care, therefore. That is the purport of his language; of course those are not his words; but I understand him very well and everybody else, I apprehend, understands him that war is threatened and therefore the South had better look out. Sir, I do not believe that there will be any war; but if war is to come, let it come. We will meet the senator from New Hampshire and all the myrmidons of abolitionism and black republicanism everywhere, upon our own soil; and in the language of a distinguished member from Ohio in relation to the Mexican war, we will "welcome you with bloody hands to hospitable graves."