


JOHN PARKER HALE

 OHN PARKER HALE, American statesman, was born at Rochester, N. H., March 31, 1806, and died at Dover, N. H., Nov. 19, 1873. He was educated at Dartmouth College, and after studying law was admitted to the Bar in 1830. He entered the legislature of his native State in 1832, and from 1834 to 1841 was United States district attorney for New Hampshire, and a Democratic representative in Congress from 1843 to 1845. He was nominated for reelection, but having announced that he should not vote for the annexation of Texas, his name was dropped. A coalition of Whigs and Independent Democrats subsequently made him speaker of the House, and in 1847 he was chosen senator. He was an earnest opponent of slavery extension, and for that reason became, in 1852, the presidential candidate of the Free-Soil party. Leaving the Senate in 1853, he returned to it in 1855, and was as conspicuous as formerly in his opposition to the Slave power, a theme which always absorbed him. He possessed a pleasing voice and agreeable manners, and his speeches exhibited both wit and pathos. He continued in the Senate until 1865, when he received the appointment of Minister to Spain. He was recalled in 1869, and died in his sixty-eighth year.

SPEECH ON SECESSION

DELIVERED IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE, DECEMBER 5, 1860

MR. PRESIDENT,—I was very much in hopes, when the message was presented, that it would be a document which would commend itself cordially to somebody. I was not so sanguine about its pleasing myself, but I was in hopes that it would be one thing or another. I was in hopes that the President would have looked in the face the crisis in which he says the country is, and that his message would be either one thing or another. But, sir, I have read it somewhat carefully. I listened to it as it was read at the desk, and if I understand it, and I think I do, it is this: South Carolina has just cause for seceding from the Union; that is the first proposition. The second is that she has no right to secede. The third is that we have no right to prevent her

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from seceding. That is the President's message, substantially. He goes on to represent this as a great and powerful country, and that no State has a right to secede from it; but the power of the country, if I understand the President, consists in what Dickens makes the English constitution to be—a power to do nothing at all.

Now, sir, I think it was incumbent upon the President of the United States to point out definitely and recommend to Congress some rule of action, and to tell us what he recommended us to do. But, in my judgment, he has entirely avoided it. He has failed to look the thing in the face. He has acted like the ostrich, which hides her head and thereby thinks to escape danger.

Sir, the only way to escape danger is to look it in the face. I think the country did expect from the President some exposition of a decided policy, and I confess that, for one, I was rather indifferent as to what that policy was that he recommended, but I hoped that it would be something; that it would be decisive. He has utterly failed in that respect.

I think we may as well look this matter right clearly in the face, and I am not going to be long about doing it. I think that this state of affairs looks to one of two things; it looks to absolute submission, not on the part of our Southern friends and the southern States, but of the North, to the abandonment of their position,—it looks to a surrender of that popular sentiment which has been uttered through the constituted forms of the ballot-box, or it looks to open war.

We need not shut our eyes to the fact. It means war, and it means nothing else; and the State which has put herself in the attitude of secession so looks upon it. She has asked no council, she has considered it as a settled question, and she has armed herself. As I understand the aspect of affairs, it looks

to that, and it looks to nothing else except unconditional submission on the part of the majority.

I did not read the paper—I do not read many papers—but I understand that there was a remedy suggested in a paper printed, I think in this city, and it was that the President and the Vice-President should be inaugurated (that would be a great concession!) and then, being inaugurated, they should quietly resign! Well, sir, I am not entirely certain that that would settle the question. I think that after the President and Vice-President-elect had resigned there would be as much difficulty in settling who was to take their places as there was in settling it before.

I do not wish, sir, to say a word that shall increase any irritation, that shall add any feeling of bitterness to the state of things which really exists in the country, and I would bear and forbear before I would say anything which would add to this bitterness. But I tell you, sir, the plain, true way is to look this thing in the face—see where we are. And I avow here—I do not know whether or not I shall be sustained by those who usually act with me—if the issue which is presented is that the constitutional will of the public opinion of this country, expressed through the forms of the constitution, will not be submitted to, and war is the alternative, let it come in any form or in any shape.

The Union is dissolved and it cannot be held together as a Union if that is the alternative upon which we go into an election. If it is pre-announced and determined that the voice of the majority, expressed through the regular and constituted forms of the constitution, will not be submitted to, then, sir, this is not a Union of equals; it is a Union of a dictatorial oligarchy on one side and a herd of slaves and cowards on the other. That is it, sir, nothing more, nothing less.

If this discussion is proceeded with I shall take occasion, by the indulgence of the Senate, once more to address myself to that phase of this controversy which is so constantly, so perseveringly, so continuously held up—that the northern States of the Union are the aggressors in producing this unhappy state of things. The northern States of the Union are the aggressors in one sense; we have a set of presses and a set of politicians among us traitorous to the public voice and the public interests, ministering to a diseased appetite, that lend their energies to the dissemination of aspersions and slanders upon the people among whom they live and upon whom they feed, and I very much fear that our friends upon the other side have listened too much to their aspersions of their fellow citizens, rather than to their own convictions of what the truth is.

I desire, if this discussion proceeds, to show up what I conceive to be the true character of this position of things so far as relates to the alleged aggressions of the northern States, but I do not pretend to speak for the northern States; I have no right to do so; they did not send me here; I was not elected by the northern States; I am only here to speak for one, and let me say, sir, that I have no fear, not the slightest, no doubt, not the minutest, let the result of this unhappy controversy be what it may; let it be settled in any form it may; drenched in blood, if it may—I have no fear—no doubt, that that little State which I have the honor in part to represent on this floor, will stand acquit—not before posterity; I do not care so much about that—but will stand acquit before the tribunal of the civilized world; will stand acquit before the verdict of Christendom of to-day; will stand acquit before the impartial and independent judgment of the men of to-day.

I have no such distrust of the position that State occupies,

that I wish to appeal from the present to the future. No, sir. I say that the State which I have the honor in part to represent here, upon the constitution, upon the record, and upon the truth of history, will stand to-day and forever fully acquitted of every charge that can be brought against her of looking to the infraction, on her part, of the constitution or any of its provisions, be they onerous or otherwise.

Let me say further, sir, that if there are gentlemen who look to the settlement of this controversy by further concessions from the North, I think they miscalculate and mistake. I believe the difficulty has been that we have conceded too much; we have compromised too much, and we have got to that position of things that whenever any fault is found the ever-recurring remedy to the minds of patriots and statesmen is still further concessions from the North.

I agree—I have said it here, I have said it to my own people at home, I am willing to repeat it here—I agree that under the constitution of the United States you are entitled to demand and to have an honest and a fair discharge of that obligation which is imposed on all the States in regard to the rendition of fugitive slaves, and I am willing, perfectly willing, that there shall be an honest, fair, and faithful performance of that pledge.

I listened to the senator from North Carolina yesterday and I agree in very much that he said—more in what he said as general truths than in the particular application that he wished to make; but I can tell that honorable senator if he will sum up every case of injury, of suffering, of aggression by the whole of the free States upon the right that they have to recapture fugitive slaves and put it all down in its darkest colors; draw the image as hideous as truth and fancy can make it; when the sum is all told I can show him aggres-

sions upon the rights of citizens of the free States—upon the constitutional right which is conferred on the citizens of each State in every State—I can show cases of aggression against that right that will infinitely outweigh and outnumber everything that can be brought in the way of aggression by the free States upon the rights of the South in regard to the recapture of their slaves.

Sir, we are trying an experiment. I believe we are in its crisis. I have never been of that number who have been disposed to sympathize with 4th of July orators, who have been in the habit, for the last half or three quarters of a century, of glorifying this country and telling what great things she had done. I have uniformly said, when I have had occasion to address the public on the subject, “We have done nothing; we are but at the beginning of a great experiment.”

We talk of our republic! Why, sir, it has not yet outlived the ages of the soldiers who fought its battles and won its victories; but yet we are boasting of our victory. Sir, I think Rome existed as a republic for six hundred years, and they might well boast of something that they had done; but that republic passed away. We have not yet survived the lifetime of the men who fought the battles of liberty, or of the patriots and sages who formed our constitution of government. What we have obtained we have obtained by a great effort and a great price. It was not the mere price of the American Revolution; it was not the mere price of the patriot blood that was shed, or of the patriot counsels that formed the constitution; but away back, centuries upon centuries in English history, where power and principle contended against each other with alternate success and defeat—in all those centuries there had been going on the contest which is culminating in our experiment here; and no patriot

blood that was poured out on the battle fields in the civil wars of England has been insignificant in relation to this conflict.

Now, sir, I have said nearly all that I propose to say, unless I am provoked by and by to say more, which I hope I shall not be; but, sir, I will add this: we shall present a most humiliating spectacle to the world if at this time, when by the acknowledgment of the President of the United States the blessings of heaven have descended upon this people in all the channels of their efforts and their business to an unexampled degree; when the bounties of heaven have been showered down upon us with no niggard hand; at a time, too, when by the confession of a senator from Georgia, not now in his seat [Mr. Toombs], made last year on the floor of the senate—I cannot quote his very words, but I can his sentiment—this general government was faithfully performing all its functions in relation to the slave States, and in relation to every State, never more faithfully than at the present time; I say, if under such circumstances, with a faithful government, and, I will add, a subservient judiciary, with the blessings of Providence coming down upon us as they are, if at such a time this confederacy should burst, this glorious fraternity of States be dissevered, and we try by the doubtful contingencies of separate State action to carry out the great experiment of human liberty, we shall present a most humiliating spectacle.

Why, sir, the very day, the very hour, that we are coming to such a result and thus developing our experiment, the States of Italy that for centuries have gone through the baptism of fire and blood, groaning beneath the iron heel of despotism, one under this and another under that, are throwing off the yoke and uniting together—I say that at such a time when the classic States of Italy, taught by the bitter ex-

perience of centuries, are seeking by a consolidated constitutional government to come together and unite their energies for liberty, for independence, and for progress, if we, untaught by all the past, reckless of the present and blind to the future, should madly dash ourselves upon this dark ocean whose shores no eye of prophecy or of faith can discern, we shall present a sad spectacle to the world.

Sir, I do not know what is to be the future; but I do hope that if we cannot settle this difficulty in the spirit in which it ought to be settled, we shall at least have the courage and the manhood to look it straight in the face and understand what it is.

I know nothing, sir, about the policy of the incoming administration. I have never passed a word by mouth or by letter with the President-elect since he has been nominated for the high office to which the people have elected him. It has been my fortune since I have had a seat upon this floor to find myself uniformly, constantly, and perseveringly in the opposition to the administration. I am far from certain that I have not got to take the same position in regard to the incoming administration—very far. One thing is certain; if that administration shall quail in the performance of its duty, if its head shall hesitate, as Mr. Buchanan has done, to look the thing clearly in the face and mark out a policy consistent with honor and patriotism, he certainly will not find me among the number of his supporters.