

ing train, wrote it out for *The Daily Chronicle*, in which it was published next morning, without the slightest revision by the reverend author. And I assert that never has any production been more logically and rhetorically exact. The voice of Dr. Breckinridge is weak, although he is not yet sixty-five; but his manner could not be more graceful. Every word dropped from his lips like a coin of gold, clear-cut, bright, and beautiful; and all his sentences were begun and closed with a higher than artistic skill. A few instances will suffice to prove this last assertion. Here is one:

You have to organize this party thoroughly throughout the United States. You have to put it into form, in whatever form your judgment may suggest, that will contribute all that wisdom, backed by energy and the most determined effort, can produce, to gain the victory which I have already said was in our power. More than that, you have to lay down with clearness and precision the principles upon which you will carry on this great political contest, and prosecute the war which is underneath them, and the glory of the country which lies before us, if we succeed. Plainly, not in a double sense, but briefly, and with the dignity and precision of a great people uttering by its representatives the political principles by which they intend to live, and for the sake of which they intend to die, so that all men everywhere may understand precisely what we need; to run your furrow so deeply and so clearly that, while every man who is worthy to associate with freemen may see it, and pass over it to us, every man who is unworthy may be either unable to pass or may be driven from us. We want none but those who are like us to be with us.

The way in which these sentences were enunciated showed the practical as well as the natural orator, and the master of his subject. But it was when he addressed himself to the moral issue at stake, that he rose to the dignity of his theme, and thrilled the vast audience, that almost hung upon his lips. Observe, after laying down the primary duty of serving the nation, how clearly and yet how originally, he discusses his idea of our relations to the Federal Constitution, and the relations to that charter of those who formed it. There is a rare philosophy in the following extract:

From among those principles—if you will allow me, for a moment, to say so—the first and most distinct is that we do not intend to permit this nation to be destroyed. [Great applause.] We are a nation—no doubt a peculiar one—a nation formed of States, and no nation, except as the States form it; and they are States, but they are no States except as they are States in that nation. [Applause.] Historically they never were, and they have no more right to repudiate the nation than the nation has a right to repudiate them; and neither of them have any shadow of such right, and we intend, God helping us, so to vindicate that truth that it shall never be disputed any more in the world. [Great applause.] It is a fearful alternative that is set before us, and yet there are great compensations for it. Those of you who have attended to this subject know, or ought to know, that from the foundation of the present Government—using that word in its

proper sense, this present Constitution—there have always, in every generation, been parties that had no faith in it. *The men who formed it were doubtful of its success.* The men who opposed its formation did not desire its success, and I am bold to say, without detaining you upon this point, that after all the outcry about our violation of the Constitution, *this present living generation and this present Union party are more thoroughly devoted to that Constitution than any generation that has ever lived under it.* [Loud applause.]

While I say that, and while I solemnly believe it—while I believe it is capable of the clearest historical proof—I will also add that it is a great error, which is being propagated in our land, to say that our Federal life—our national life—depends merely upon the existence of that Constitution. Our fathers made it, we love it, and we intend to maintain it. [Applause.] *But if it suited us to change it, we would change it* [applause], *and when it suits us to change it we will change it.* [Applause.] *If it were to be torn into a thousand pieces—broken all over—the nation would be as much a nation as it is to-day—as much a nation as it was before this particular Constitution was made;—a nation which always declared its independence as a people, and who have lived, united until now, a nation independent of the particular institutions under which they lived, and capable of modelling them precisely as the institutions of successive generations may require.* [Applause.] We ought to have it distinctly understood, both by friends and enemies, that while we love that instrument, and are in most respects satisfied with it, and will maintain it—and that we will, with undoubted certainty, put to death the friend or foe who undertakes to trample it under foot, *if we can get rid of them in no other way—yet, beyond a doubt, we will alter it to suit ourselves from generation to generation.* [Cries of “good, good,” and applause.]

I do not quote these passages to give a political aspect to this sketch, but to show the peculiar qualities of mind and conscience of a remarkable public character. While he was speaking he reminded me forcibly of his nephew, John C. Breckinridge. The tones of the two voices are wonderfully similar, and if it be, as it is to my mind invariably true, that the voice, like the features, may be traced through generations, the theory was strangely verified on this occasion. When the Doctor was told of this resemblance he replied that he had a son in the hall “who was the very spit of John.” An extraordinary family is this of the Breckinridges. They have all been leaders, either in politics or in the Presbyterian Church.

Fair and honest in their dealings, chivalric and courteous in their intercourse with others, it was reserved for the Rebellion to witness the first real difference on public questions between themselves. The eldest survivor of the name, the Chairman of the National Union Convention, just noticed, preserves the honor of its progenitors, while that young man, upon whom so many hopes were built when he entered Congress in 1851, and was chosen Vice President in 1856, driven, let us believe, more by association than by principle, forgets all the examples and teachings of his great

uncle, and sword in hand leads the embattled hosts of slavery. It is not difficult to suppose that the heroic clergyman feels the defection of his nephew most keenly. For, in truth let it be spoken, there was much to love in John Cabell Breckinridge. Never have I met a man more adapted by nature, by education and by rearing, to be a favorite among men and women. He was the type of manly beauty when I made his acquaintance fourteen years ago. At that time, if he had a conscientious feeling, it was hatred of slavery, and both of us, “Democrats” as we were, frequently confessed that it was a sinful and an anti-Democratic institution, and that the day would come when it must be peaceably or forcibly removed. How could it be otherwise with him, with such a parentage and such a schoolmaster as his uncle Robert? But the fascinating society of the Southern magnates were too much for young John. They saw that he had a bright future. And having taken the one wrong step, he was too proud to retract.

I shall never forget my last interview with John C. Breckinridge. It was on the evening of the 6th of August, 1861, being the last day of the memorable called session which was assembled on the 4th day of July of that year by Presidential proclamation. Widely as we had differed, our personal relations were unchanged. He knew how sincerely grieved I was when, as early as 1858, he allowed Mr. Buchanan and the extreme South to force him into the support of Lecompton, and how reluctantly, in the black and bitter years that succeeded, I felt constrained to denounce him. In the called session he had led the opposition to Mr. Lincoln with vehement, unjust, and unsparing ability. And now he was going to Kentucky. “Good bye,” he said; “Good bye.” “No,” I said, “not ‘Good bye,’ Breckinridge, but farewell. You will never again take your seat in the United States Senate.” He seemed to be surprised, as he said: “What do you mean? I will undoubtedly return to my post in December.” “No, my dear sir, you will follow your doctrine into the Confederate army; you will go there to show that you are with the enemies of your country.” To which he answered, and when he spoke the words I think he was honest: “If I go over the lines it will be to bring back with me my runaway son, Cabell, who has gone into the other army wholly against my will; but we shall meet, if we live, in the winter.” “I wish it could be so, my friend,” was my reply; “but still I feel that your good-bye will be a long farewell.” And this was the last of John C. Breckinridge. His oath to support the Constitution of the United States, like Hester Prynne’s scarlet letter, burns an eternal reproach on the record of the Senator. His sword is with Slavery and Rebellion.