The Centre Democrat.

BELLEFONTE, PA.

BLACK ON DAVIS

The Great Jurist on the Ex-President.

Davis' Twenty Years Silence—Black's Opinion of the Union and of Slavery—The Proclamation he Desired.

In the Philadelphia *Press* of Monday, F. A. Burr gives a long and interesting account of his last interview with Judge Black, in which the latter referred at length to Jeff Davis' attack upon him. From Mr. Burr's account of what Judge Black said we make the following extracts:

"It has taken Mr. Davis more than 20 years to bring me to the block. His effort is as amusing as were the antics and sayings of Rip Van Winkle to the plain country people among whom he awoke after his 20 years' slumber. He brings news to the American people in the charge upon which he arraigns me. If, as he says, I violated my oath of office because I denied the right of secession, urged the president to protect government property in the south and punish all offenders against the laws of the land, I am glad of it. I should do the same thing again, if called upon to act in a like emergency. But what does Mr. Davis say of his acts? If they can now meet the approval of his conscience they must have an elastic one. He was a senator of the United States while he was in the conspiracy to destroy the government. He was pleading for peace while he was planning war. It is too late now for him to exhibit his ingenious arguments in the senate for a peaceful solution of the difficulties while he was playing the president with pernicious advice and endeavoring to influence him to disregard the constitutional obligations. His judgment must have entirely let go its hold on his passions when he penned that charge, or he may have been trying to be funny. If it was a violation of my oath, or even a straining of the proprietics of my position, that I fought by night and by day the schemes of the Secessionists, Mr. Davis has done me a great service by proclaiming it. I wish I could bring some charge against him, touching his conduct in that crisis, that would be as much to his credit. If his conclusions in this his last paper were as sound as his attack upon me is vicious, I might say he is a great and good man. He has struck so wildly, however, that

'His passions and his virtues lie confused
And mix'd together in so wild a tumult
That the whole man is quite disfigured in him.'

THEIR SUPREME IMPUDENCE.

"If there was anything at that time that illustrated the supreme impudence of the Secessionists, it was their demand that Major Anderson should not be permitted to leave Fort Moultrie. He acquits the president of the responsibility of granting permission to Major Anderson to occupy Sumter in case his judgment so dictated, and lays the charge at my door. I father the responsibility, if responsibility is necessary, as cheerfully now as I did in the heat of that controversy. If it was an insult to the people of South Carolina for the executive to strengthen the hands of that little band of federal soldiers in Charleston harbor, I cannot see it so. Whether the president intended that the orders to Major Anderson should be so framed as to give him the right to move into Sumter, I cannot say. But when I wrote the order, such was my intention, and I have no excuse to offer for that act. If it provoked war, as Mr. Davis declares it did, it was because those who were then wilfully menacing the Federal government made it a pretext for the crime of revolt. In the mighty events then chasing each other in rapid succession, I played no part which has the more cordial approval of my conscience to-day than in framing that order that carried Major Anderson from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter. What Mr. Davis says about the commissioners from South Carolina proceeding upon some sort of assurances from the executive, is ridiculous. The president had no right to treat with these people as the commissioners of a state and he declined to do so. They were simply three respectable gentlemen whom the president treated civilly, and they assumed an importance never justified by the facts.

"It will not do at this day for Mr. Davis to write about the 'peaceful intentions' of himself and his fellow Secessionists. Their assault upon the government was deliberate and predetermined, and their cries of peace, while they were for war unless they could have their own way, were only the vapor with which they hoped to envelop their real purposes. Mr. Davis began early after Mr. Lincoln's election to urge his views upon the president and he was recognized among the Secessionists as their most important agent. Cobb was one of the worst Secessionists I ever knew and one of the ablest men. Thompson, a southerner, a man of integrity and superior powers. Floyd had little influence. Mr. Davis was called to Washington from Mississippi by his southern friends in the cabinet, that they might have their most potent advocate near the executive while the message was being prepared. He did the work of his clan most faithfully, and because he did not succeed he assailed the president after the message was read, and never until now, that I have heard of, appeared as his defender. That Mr. Buchanan was strong enough to resist the appeals of Davis and his fellows, brave enough to defy their arrogance, and clear headed enough to escape the traps with which they surrounded him is to his lasting credit. They did him great injustice then, and they have never repented that I know of. They enveloped him in an atmosphere and gave a coloring to some of his acts that the facts did not justify. They furnished the ammunition by which he has been successfully slandered from that day to this. Mr. Davis calls himself the old friend of Mr. Buchanan. This, indeed, is the acme of sarcasm.

MR. BUCHANAN'S FIRST ALARM.

"Just after the election of 1860—even before any southern state had taken a decided step toward secession, one of the senators from South Carolina left the capitol in a huff, declaring the election of Mr. Lincoln meant civil war, and that he would no longer serve in the senate. This was the first significant act pointing to secession, and it made an impression upon Mr. Buchanan's mind. Very soon after it occurred he took occasion to say to me:

"'Judge, have these people any right to secede? Do you find any warrant in the constitution for a state's withdrawing from the Federal Union?'

"'None on earth,' I replied. 'This Union can never be destroyed, except by fire and sword.'

"'I am glad that your opinion is in exact accord with mine upon that subject,' said he. 'I have been giving this matter a great deal of thought, and now that you agree with me I am convinced that my conclusions are sound. The Union is indissoluble.'

"'This union,' said I, 'is perpetual. Of course it may be broken up by revolution, but not by peaceful methods. If there is anything settled by argument it is that the compact between the states is in no sense like a business partnership, that may be dissolved by the action of either party, or by appeal to a court of equity.'

"We discussed the subject in this vein for a few minutes, and Mr. Buchanan expressed himself with great frankness, all the time assuming that the peaceable secession of a state was not possible. Finally he turned to me and said:

"'Ought not the executive to state his conclusions upon this subject, so that the people may know the exact attitude of my administration?'

"'Most assuredly,' I replied, 'you should do so clearly and forcibly. The country should understand that you occupy no equivocal position, but are severely opposed to secession.'

"MY MISTAKE."

"'How shall it be done—by proclamation or in the message to congress?' asked the president.

"'In the message' was my response. I spoke, perhaps, without proper reflection; but congress was soon to convene and the message was being prepared. A grave question was to be dealt with and a grave crisis to be met. Therefore my first impression was that it would be more dignified to deal with it in the message and so I answered. If I had said 'By proclamation' he would have undoubtedly said, 'Write it;' or, if he had written it himself the result would have been the same. A ringing document from the first line to the last would have been prepared, as was done in the Utah case. It need not have been half a column long. Such a paper could and would have stated conclusions so powerfully as possible to have stayed the madness of secession, then in its infancy. I do not say that it would have altered the course of the leaders, but it might have had a striking effect upon their constituency. The people then would not have pushed nor even followed them. I did not discover the breadth of my mistake until it was too late. When I said 'In the message' I had not weighed the powerful influence that was to surround Mr. Buchanan for the balance of his term. I do not mean to say that the influence was strong enough to alter his views upon secession or temper his fidelity to the Union, for he was as honest a patriot as ever lived. But the Secessionists were ever able and alert. They lost no opportunity to ply the president with their seditious arts, and when he came to write that feature of the message which dealt with the southern question they had possessed him with the idea that he should argue questions that had been settled since the foundation of the government, instead of stating conclusions that the humblest might have read and understood. Sound though his arguments were, they were liable to misconstruction, and the force of his views was lost, as finally presented in the message.

"They became a two edged sword, that cut deepest in the wrong direction. It was a serious misplay of judgment, both on his part and mine. I was not responsible for his final action for I did my best to induce him to pronounce judgment upon the heresy of secession rather than fill his state paper with profound arguments which the people would not read nor appreciate. I was at fault, however, for not taking the bull by the horns by advising a proclamation. Such a document would have reached the people, who nowhere at that time favored secession. The message reached only an unwilling congress and those who had already determined upon rebellion. It was an error of judgment rather than of heart; but I do not plead that in stay of execution. The administration should have reached the American people through a single blast on the threshhold of danger, that would have awakened them to the perils of the hour and strengthened the arm of the government in its pending struggle with both the Abolitionists and the Secessionists. But then,

The scales are rarely self adjusted
When self the wavering balance shakes.

"Perhaps most men would have done just what was done in this instance, for the Secessionists had not then shown their hands, and began hedging the president about with their insidious plottings. When they began, what they could not do by direction they were willing to do by indirection, and Mr. Davis was a leading actor in this game. He even assumed to speak for South Carolina in her attempt to negotiate with the president about the forts in Charleston harbor. By his own admissions he tried to induce the president to hand over the government property in the south to the men who had then stolen the best part of it, and when conspiring to destroy the government, and even then were openly and shamelessly defying its authority. This patriot pledged his life as a ransom for the care and preservation of the portable property in the forts of Charleston harbor provided the president would yield to the demand of the Secessionists and turn this property over to them. It was the most impudent proposition ever made by mortal man, to ask the executive of a nation to yield up a post capable of defence to the enemies of the government he represented. Once in cabinet meeting I said that there had never been a period in the history of the English nation when any minister could propose to give up to an enemy of his government a military post which was capable of being defended without being brought to the block. This was exactly what Mr. Davis solicited the president to do while he was a senator of the United States. Yet he now, as then, pleads his cunning words in stay of judgment and to prove his 'peaceful intentions.' They will not stand to his credit when contrasted with his acts.

"After I found that the president was convinced that it was his duty to argue these questions in the message I tried to recover lost ground. So, when he called upon me for my legal opinion upon this subject, I tried to prepare such paper as should have been issued as the proclamation. When the president saw it he found that its term were entirely too strong for him. He did not dissent from my conclusions, but he said if he followed them he would increase the bitterness between the factions. I recall an expression he made while discussing it, and it illustrates his position exactly. 'I desire' said he 'to stand between the factions like a daysman, with my hand on the head of each counselling peace.' We had our first real difference over this paper. He took it and insisted upon a formal legal opinion upon the right of secession. Thus I failed to impress upon his state paper of that year the strong views I knew he entertained on the subject of secession, but hesitatied to express for fear of further arousing the temper of both factions, who sat growling and ready to spring at each other's throat."

AGAINST SLAVERY.

"You speak of the Abolitionists and Secessionists in one breath."

"Yes, they were both alike. Neither had any respect for the constitution when it stood in the way of their schemes. One proclaimed it a league with death and a covenant with hell, and the other as grossly insulted the fundamental law of the land by asserting the right of secession. I reserve the constitution, and a profound respect for the law possessed my whole being. I have no patience with any man, north or south, who proclaims his disregard of the law. I always abhorred slavery but the law sanctioned it, and it was my duty to sustain the legal right.

"I would not have a slave to till my ground;
To carry me, to fan me while asleep
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews bought and sold have ever earned.
No, dear as freedom is, and in my heart's
Just estimate prized above all price,
I had much rather be myself the slave."

"These lines ever represented my feelings upon that institution. The constitution recognized it and I recognized its legal right. None of my family or relatives had any interest in slaves, except McDonald, of New Orleans, and he owned them only to preach to them."

"You surprise me, because I had always understood that you were proslavery."

"Never. I only tolerated the idea because the law recognized it. It should have been gotten rid of without violence and bloodshed, as was done in Pennsylvania and other northern states. I was always in favor of its abolition, but could never bring myself to look upon the Abolitionists in any other light than the enemies of the government, because I knew and saw in their acts and utterances pending revolution. Time and the mad occurrences of the past twenty years have confirmed my judgment."

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