

H. W. Beecher's Sermon at the raising of the Union flag over Fort Sumpter

Capt. J. S. Davis

Capture of Jeff Davis

# Junjata



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## THE OLD FLAG AT SUMTER!

### A THRILLING ORATION

BY  
REV HENRY WARD BEECHER.

NOTE.—On the 14th day of April, 1861 the United States flag was taken down from Fort Sumter, and on the 15th day of April, 1865, the old flag was raised over the ruins of the fort. There was a large party at this celebration, and Henry Ward Beecher delivered the following thrilling address, which is destined to live as the grand and greatest oration made during this war. Let every one carefully read and preserve it.

On this solemn and joyous day, we again lift to the breeze our fathers' flag, now, again, the banner of the United States, with the fervent prayer that God would crown it with honor, protect it from treason, and send it down to our children, with all the blessings of civilization, liberty, and religion. Terrible in battle, may it be beneficent in peace. Happily, no bird or beast of prey has been inscribed upon it. The stars that redeem the night from darkness, and the oceans of red light that beautify the morning, have been united upon its folds. As long as the sun endures, or the stars, say it were ever a nation neither enslaved nor enslaving. Once, and but once, has treason dishonored it. In that issue hour when the guiltiest and bloodiest rebellion of the time hurried their fires upon this fort, you, sir, (turning to General Anderson) and a faithful band, stood within these now crumbling walls, and did gallant and just battle for the honor and defense of the nation's banner.

In that hour of fire this glorious flag peacefully waved to the breeze above your head, unconscious of harm as the stars and skies above it. Once it was shot down. A gallant band, in whose care this day it has been, plucked it from the ground, and raised it again—cast down but not destroyed. After a vain resistance, with trembling hand and sad heart, you withdrew it from its light, closed its wings and bore it far away, sternly to sleep amid the tumbling of rebellion and the thunder of battle. The first act of war had begun. The long night of four years had set in. While the giddy traitors whirled in a maze of exhibition, dim horrors were already advancing, that were to bring to fill the land with blood.

Today you are returned again. We devoutly join with you in thanksgiving to Almighty God, that he has spared your life and vouchsafed to you the glory of this day. The Heaven over you are the same; the same shores are here; morning comes, and evening, as they did—All else now changed. What grim battles crowd the hardened shores! What scenes have filled this air and described these waters! These shattered heaps of hopeless stone are all that is left of Fort Sumter. Desolation broods in ponderous, solemn, threatening, hath avenged our dishonored banner! You have come back with honor, who departed hence four years ago, leaving the solitary with ignominy. The surging crowds that pulled up their frenzied shouts as the flag came down, are dead, or scattered, or silent; and their habitations are desolate. Rain sits in the cradle of treason. Rebellion has perished. But, there lies the same flag that was insulted. With steady eyes it looks all over this bay for that banner that supplanted it, and sees it not. You that then, for the day, were huddled, are here again, to triumph once and forever. In the storm of that assault this glorious ensign was often struck; but, memorable fact, not one of its stars was torn out by shot or shell. It was a prophecy.

Isaid: No one State shall be struck from this nation by treason! The fulfillment is at hand. Lifted to the air, today, it meditates that after four years of war, "Not a state is blotted out!"

Hail to the flag of our fathers, and our flag! Glory to the banner that has gone through four years black with tempests of war, to pilot them on back to peace without dismemberment! And glory to God, who, above all hosts and banners, hath ordained victory, and shall ordain peace!

Wherefore have we come hither, pilgrims from distant places? Are we come to exult that Northern hands are stronger than Southern? No; but to rejoice that the hands of those who defend a just and beneficent government are mightier than the hands that assaulted it! Do we exult over fallen cities?—We exult that a nation has not fallen.—We sorrow with the sorrowful. We sympathize with the desolate. We look upon this shattered fort, and yonder dilapidated city, with sad eyes, grieved that men should have committed treason, and glad that God hath set such a mark upon treason that ages shall dread and shun it.

We exult, not for a passion gratified, but for a sentiment victorious; not for temper, but for conscience; not as we devoutly believe that our will is done, but that God's will hath been done! We should be unworthy of that liberty entrusted to our care, if, on such a day as

this, we sailed our hearts by feelings of aimless vengeance; and equally unworthy, if we did not devoutly thank Him who hath said, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord*, that he hath set a mark upon arrogant Rebellion, ineffacable while time lasts!

Since this flag went down on that dark day, who shall tell the mighty wees that have made this land a spectacle to angels and men? The soil has drunk blood, and is glutted. Millions mourn for millions slain, or, envying the dead, pray for oblivion. Towns and villages have been razed. Fruitful fields have turned back to wilderness. It came to pass, as the prophet said: *The sun was turned to darkness, and the moon to blood.* The course of law was ended. The sword of chief magistrate in half the nation; industry was paralyzed; morals corrupted; the public weal invaded by regime and anarchy; whole states ravaged by avenging armies. The world was amazed. The earth reeled. When the flag sank here, it was as if political night had come, and all basis of prayer had come forth to devour.

That long night is ended! And for returning day we have come from afar, to rejoice and give thanks. No more war—no more secession! No more slavery, that spawned them both!

Let no man misread the meaning of this unfolding flag! It says, "Government hath returned hither." It proclaims, in the name of vindicated government, peace and protection to loyalty; humiliation and pains to traitors. This is the flag of sovereignty. The nation, not the States, is sovereign. Restored to authority, this flag commands, not supplicates.

There may be pardon, but no concession. There may be amnesty and oblivion, but no honored compromises. The nation today has peace for the peaceful, and war for the turbulent. The only condition of submission, is to submit! There is the Constitution, there are the laws, there is the Government. They rise up like mountains of strength that shall not be moved. They are the conditions of peace.

One nation under one government, without slavery, has been ordained, and shall stand. There can be peace on no other basis. On this basis reconstruction is easy, and social order, architecture engineer. Without this basis no engineer or architect shall ever reconstruct these rebellious states.

We do not want your cities or your fields. We do not envy you your profile, nor hearken for personal sumner. Let agriculture level here; let manufactures make every stream twice useful; build fleets in every port; improve the arts of peace with genius second only to that of Athens; and we shall be glad in your gladness, and rich in your wealth.

banner but had a father who would have died for it. Is memory dead? Is there no historic pride? Has a fatal fury struck blindness or hate into eyes that used to look kindly toward each other; that read the same Bible; that hung over the historic pages of our national glory; that studied the same Constitution?

Let this uplifting bring back all of the past that was good, but leave in darkness all that was bad.

It was never before so wholly unspotted; so clear of all wrong; so purely and simply the sign of Justice and Liberty. Did I say we brought back the same banner that you bore away, noble and heroic sir? It is not the same. It is purer and better than it was. The land is free from slavery, since that banner fell.

When God would prepare Moses for emancipation, he overthrew his first steps, and drove him for forty years to brood in the wilderness. When our flag came down, four years it lay brooding in darkness. It cried to the Lord, "Wherefore am I deposed?" Then rose before it a vision of its sin. It had strengthened the strong, and forgotten the weak. It proclaimed Liberty, but trod upon slaves.

In that seclusion it dedicated itself to Liberty. Behold, to day, it fulfils its vows! When it went down four million people had no flag. To day it rises, and four million people cry out, "Behold our flag!" Hark! they murmur. It is the Gospel that they recite in sacred words: "It is a Gospel to the poor, it heals our broken hearts, it preaches deliverance to captives, it gives sight to the blind, it sets at Liberty them that are bruised." Rise up, then, glorious Gospel Banner, and roll out these messages of God. Tell the air that not a spot now sullies thy whiteness. Thy red is not the blush of shame, but the flush of joy. Tell the dew that wash thee that thou art pure as they. Say to the night, that thy stars lead toward the morning; and to the morning, that a brighter day arises with healing in its wings. And then, oh glowing flag, bid the sun pour light on all thy folds with double brightness while thou art bearing round and round the world the solemn joy—a race set free! a nation redeemed!

The mighty hand of Government, made strong in war, by the favor of God of Battles, spreads wide to-day the banner of Liberty that went down in darkness, that arose in light; and there it streams, like the sun above it, neither parcelled out nor unparcelled, but flooding the air with light for all mankind. We sostered and broken, ye wounded and dying, bitten by the fiery serpents of oppression, everywhere, in all the world, look upon this sign, lifted up, and live! And ye homeless and homeless slaves, look and ye are free! At length you, too, have part and lot in this glorious ensign, that broods with impartial love over small and great, the poor and the strong, the hand and the feet.

In this solemn hour, let us pray for this quick coming of reconciliation and happiness, under this common flag.

The august convention of 1787 framed the Constitution with this memorable prayer: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain this Constitution for the United States of America."

Again, in the awful convention of war, the people of the United States, for the very ends just received, have debated, settled, and ordained certain fundamental truths, which must henceforth be accepted and obeyed. Nor is any State, or any individual, wise who shall disregard them. They are to civil affairs what the natural laws are to health—indispensable conditions of peace and happiness.

What are the ordinances given by the people, speaking out of fire and darkness of war with authority inspired by that same God who gave the law from Sinai and thunders and trumpet voices?

1. That these United States shall be one and indivisible.
2. That States have no absolute sovereignty, and have no right to dismember the nation.
3. That universal liberty is indispensable to Republican Government, and that slavery shall be utterly and forever abolished!

Such are the results of war! These are the best fruits of the war. They are worth all they have cost. They are foundations of peace. They will secure benefits to all nations as well as to ours.

Our highest wisdom and duty is to accept the facts as the decrees of God.—We are exhorted to forget all that has happened. Yes, the wrath, the conflict, the cruelty, but not those overruling decrees of God which this war has pronounced.

As solemnly as on Mount Sinai, God says, "Remember! remember!—Here it to-day. Under this sun, under that bright chiding of the sun, our banner, with the eyes of this nation and of the world upon us, we repeat the syllables of God's Providence and recite the solemn deers:

**NO MORE DISUNION!**  
**NO MORE SECESSION!**  
**NO MORE SLAVERY!**  
**Let this civil war begin!**

We do not wonder that European statesmen failed to comprehend this conflict, and that foreign philanthropists were shocked at a murderous war that seemed to have had no moral origin, but like the brutal fights of beasts of prey, to have sprung from ferocious animosity. This great nation filling all profitable latitudes, crawling between two oceans, with inexhaustible resources, with riches increasing in an unparalleled manner, by agriculture, by manufactures, by commerce, with schools, and churches, with books and newspapers thick as leaves in our own forests, with institutions sprung from the people, and peculiarly adapted to their genius; a nation not stingy, but active, used to excitement, practiced in political wisdom, and accustomed to self-government, and all its vast outlying parts held together by a federal government mild in temper, gentle in administration, and beneficent in results, seemed to have been formed for peace.

centered in their hands the whole government of the South, and had finally governed the country.

Upon this polished cultured, exceedingly capable and wholly unprincipled class, rests the whole burden of this war. Forced up by the bottom-heat of slavery the ruling class, in all the disloyal States, arrogated to themselves a superiority not compatible with republican equality, nor with just morals. They claimed a right of pre-eminence. An evil prophet arose who trained these wild and luxurious shoots of ambition to the stately form of a political philosophy.

By its agents they precipitated drugery to the bottom of society, and left at the top what they thought to be a clarified fluid. In their political economy, labor was to be owned by capital.—In their theory of government, a few were to rule the many. They boldly avowed; not to the fact alone, that, under all forms of government, the few rule the many, but their right and duty to do so. Set free from the necessity of labor, they conceived a contempt for those who felt its wholesome regimen. Believing themselves lorded to supremacy, they regarded the popular vote, when it failed to register their wishes, as an intrusion and a nuisance. They were born to a garden, and popular liberty, like free trees overgrowing their looks, but covered their dainty walks and flowers with slime and mud—of democratic voters.

When, with shrewd observation, they saw the growth of the popular element in the Northern States, they instinctively took in the inevitable events. It must be controlled or cut off from a nation governed by gentlemen! Controlled, less and less, could it be, in every decade; and they prepared secretly, earnestly, and with wide conference and mutual connivance to separate the South from the North.

We are to distinguish between the pretences and means, and the real causes of this war.

To inflame and unite the great middle class of South, who had no interest in segregation and no business with war, they alleged grievances that never existed, and employed arguments which they, better than all other men, know to be specious and false. Slavery itself was cared for only as an instrument or power, or of excitement. They had unutterably fixed their eye upon empire, and all was good which would secure that, and but which hindered it.

Thus, the ruling class of the South—an aristocracy as intense, proud, and inflexible as ever existed—not limited either by customs or institutions, not recognized and adjusted in the regular order of society, playing a reciprocal part in its machinery, but secret, discounting its own existence, civilized with ostentatious names of democracy, obligations to the people for the sake of governing them; this useless, lurking aristocracy, that ran in the blood of society like a rash, not yet come to the skin; this political tapeworm, that produced nothing, but lay coiled in the body, feeding on its nutrient, and holding the whole structure to be a servant set up to nourish it—this aristocracy of the plantation, with firm and deliberate resolve, brought on the war, that they might cut the head off, and clearing themselves from incorrigible free society, set up a sterner, sterner empire, where slaves worked that gentlemen might live at ease. Nor can there be any doubt that though, at first, they meant to erect the form of republican government, this was but a device; a step necessary to the securing of that power by which they should be able to change the whole economy of society.

That they never dreamed of such a war we may well believe. That they would have accepted it, though twice as bloody, it only thus they could rule. None can doubt that knows the temper of these worst men of modern society. But they miscalculated. They understood the people of the South; but they were totally incapable of understanding the character of the great working classes of the loyal States. That industry which is the foundation of independence, and so equity, they stigmatized as stupid drugery, or as mean avarice. That general intelligence and independence of thought which schools for the common people and newspapers breed, they reviled as the excitement of unsettled zeal, running easily into fanaticism.

They more thoroughly misunderstood the profound sentiment of loyalty, the deep love of country which prevailed the common people. If those who them best had never suspected the depth and power of that love of country which threw it into an agony of grief when the flag was here huddled, how should they conceive of it, who were wholly disjoined from them in sympathy? The whole land rose up, you remember, when the flag came down, as if inspired unceasingly by the breath of the Almighty, and power of omnipotence. It was as when one pierces the tanks of the Mississippi for a rivulet and the whole raging stream plunges through with headlong course. There they calculated, and miscalculated!

personal brawls, who are so protected by society as to have dismissed all thought of self-defence, the whole force of whose life is turned to personal pursuits. These arrogant conspirators, and government, with Chinese vanity believed that they could blow away these self-respecting citizens as chaff from the battle field. Few of them are left alive to ponder their mistake!

Here, then, are the roots of this civil war! It was not a quarrel of wild beasts, it was an infection of the strife of ages, between power and right between ambition and equity. An armed band of persistent conspirators sought the nation's life. Her children rose up and fought at every door, and room, and hall to forest out the murderers, and save the homes and household. It was not legitimately a war between the common people of the North and South. They honored the common people with lies, with sophistries, with cruel deceptions and slanders, to fight for as great objections which they abhorred and against interests as dear to them as their own lives.

I charge the whole guilt of this war upon the ambitious, educated, plotting, political leaders of the South. They have shed this ocean of blood. They have desolated the South. They have poured poverty through all her towns and cities. They have banished the imagination of the people with phantasms, and led them to believe that they were fighting for their homes and liberty, whose homes were threatened, and whose liberty was in no jeopardy.

These arrogant instigators of civil war have renewed the plagues of Egypt, not that the oppressed might be free, but that the free might be oppressed. A day will come when God will reveal judgement, and arraign at his bar these mighty miscreants; and then, every orphan that their bloody game has made, and every widow that she sorrowing, and every maimed and wounded sufferer, and every bereaved heart in all the wide regions of this land, will rise up and come before the Lord to lay upon these chief culprits of modern history their awful witness.—And from a thousand battlefields shall rise up armies of aye witnesses, who, with the memory of their awful sufferings, shall confront these miscreants with stripes of fierce accusation; and every piteous and starved prisoner shall raise his skinny hand in judgement. Blood shall call out for vengeance, and tears shall plead for justice, and grief shall stately beckon, and have, hear-smitten, shall wait for justice. Good men and angels will cry out, "How long, oh Lord, how long, wilt thou not avenge?"

And then, these guiltiest and most remorseless traitors, these high and cultured men with might and wisdom, used for the destruction of their country; these most advanced and decorated of all criminals, that have droned a continuous in needless blood and restored the foundations of their time with black clouds, fall of voices of vengeance and lurid with unmission, shall be whirled aloft and plunged downward for ever and ever in an endless retribution; while God shall say, "Thus shall it be to all who betray their country!" and all in heaven and upon the earth will say "Amen!"

But for the people misled, for the multitudes drafted and driven into this civil war, let not a trace of animosity remain. The moment their willing hand drops the musket, and they return to their allegiance, then stretch out your own honest right hand to greet them. Recall to them the old days of kindness. Our hearts wait for their redemption. All the resources of a renovated nation shall be applied to rebuild their property, and smooth down the furrows of war.

Has this long and weary period of strife been an unmingled evil? Has nothing been gained? Yes, much. This nation has attained to its manhood.

Among Indian customs is one which admits young men to the rank of warriors only after severe trials of hunger, fatigue, pain, endurance. They reach their station not through years, but through deeds. Our nation has suffered, and now is strong.

The sentiment of loyalty and patriotism, next in importance to religion, has been rooted and grounded. We have something to be proud of, and pride helps love. Never so much as now did we love our country.

But four such years of education in ideas, in the knowledge of political truth, in the love of history, in the geography of our own country, almost every inch of which we have probed with the bayonet, have never passed before. There is half a hundred years' advance in four.

We believed in our institutions and principles before; but now we know their power. It is one thing to look upon artillery, and to be sure that it is loaded; it is another thing to prove its power in battle. We believe in the hidden power stored in our institutions; we had never before seen this nation thundering like Mount Sinai at all those that worshipped the calf at the base of the mountain.

A people educated and moral are competent to all the exigencies of national life. A vote can govern better than a crown. We have proved it. A people intelligent and religious are strong in all

Continued on Third Page.