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FRIDAY MORNING, OCT. 5.

"The Negro in American Politics,"

SPEECH

BY HON. THOMAS WILLIAMS,

Delivered at Lafayette Hall, Saturday Evening, Sept. 29th, 1860.

FELLOW CITIZENS:—I trust it will not be supposed that my appearance here to-night has anything to do with the accidental fact that I am myself a candidate for an office which I have not sought—which I do not want—which involves great labor and a responsibility which you have never before cast upon the shoulders of a representative—which is moreover without reward—and which it will cost me more than the wages of a Congressman to accept. If there is any body here who suspects me of any difficulty in regard to myself, all I have to say to him is, that he can render me no greater personal service than by voting against me. If I had desired to advance my own cause I should rather have avoided, than sought an occasion like the present. Your Committee of arrangements was pleased to request it as a compliance with a usage which has come to address the great Convention which assembled on the Allegheny Common on Thursday last. The condition of my voice, as indicated by one or two previous experiments compelled me to decline the invitation. Feeling, however, that it was my duty as a citizen to contribute my quota of service, as heretofore, to a cause which has interested me so greatly and very naturally desirous, and had labored in the preparation, to have some share in the triumph, I signified my willingness to address the people at some other place, and I could make myself heard without injury, and I am accordingly here to-night. I am about to echo back with a redoubled joy the joyful shout—"there is a North." The peal the joyful shout—"there is a North." The peal of our captivity are numbered. Our long years of our captivity are numbered. Our long years of humiliation are about to terminate, and dreary pilgrimage is before us. In ten days more we Mount Pisgah is before us. In ten days more we scale its summit, and the promised land which has so long fled before us, is at our feet.

I predict this would come at the appointed time. When I abandoned the field of politics as I did, after the disastrous campaign of 1854, it was with the feeling that it was vain to struggle with the prestige of the successful party, and that the surest road to relief, although perhaps a very long and painful one, was to allow the excesses of unbridled power, and the full development and exposure of the principle which was so obviously animating the victors. For the result I waited with the faith and patience of the aged Simeon. It came at last in the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and culminated in the mortal struggle which, commencing on the plains of Kansas, was transferred to the Federal Hall of the people with treason, and dyed the floor of the Senate chamber with blood. The floor of the Senate chamber with blood. The field of politics was flooded with a new light from the blazing dwelling of the inhabitant of the prairies. That well had dropped from the fabric of the constitution which had been so long wrestling for empire under arbitrary names, had assumed its own face to its own visors up, in mortal embrace. The problem of American politics was now solved. The issue was at last directly made, and it brought along with it the indictment to renew it, and extricate, in the assurance which it furnished of a great deliverance. The time had now come to strike once more for freedom.

We failed, it is true, in the first of our struggles, because we were but a raw militia without organization, without discipline, without the knowledge of our strength, and under the influence of an unmanly terror inspired amongst the timid by the bloody menaces of our foes. It was such a failure, however, as taught them to respect our strength and courage, and taught us confidence in our ability to achieve our deliverance whenever we chose to will it. We are now about to strike again, with the assurance that the victory will be ours, and I propose to stimulate your zeal by pointing out the issues, as I understand them, and awakening you to a proper sense of the importance of the struggle which is before you.

The territorial question then, which stands at the head of the platform, has divided the Democratic party itself, and around which no less than three embattled hosts are now contending, is in itself but a false issue—a mere coverlid of a disease which has been lurking and fermenting in the bowels of the State, and was bound to find its way to the surface in some such eruption like this. That disease is human slavery, the property of man in man—of one man in the labor, the bones, the sinews and the muscles of another. Our ancestors found it in existence when they came to dwell on the soil. They saw and knew that its existence was at war with the very fundamental principles of the government which they were constituting; and that slavery was no question of complexion, and that the same logic which made a slave of the black man would be equally fatal to the freedom of the white. They were, however, practical men, and while they were studious to avoid the monstrous inconsistency of engraving the term "slave" upon the tables of their fundamental law, they endeavored to deal with the question in such a manner as would secure the conventional rights of the master during the brief period for which the anomaly was expected to endure. There was not one, I think, of all that illustrious band of patriots and sages that framed the Constitution, who looked forward to its perpetuation, or regarded it otherwise than as a great and unmitigated evil—a standing reproach to our institutions, and a lasting impeachment of the sincerity of the men who framed them. That it should ever come to be regarded as a national blessing—as a great instrument of civilization, or as a mighty agent in the Christianization of the heathen people, is an idea which was reserved for the progressive era that has first dawned upon ourselves. Our ancestors thought, that they could reconcile the two great antagonistic conditions of humanity, and so bind them together as to wield a cohesive power. They were mistaken. The task was one which exceeded their powers. The great law of liberty was not to be thus compromised with impunity. There was an avenging Nemesis at the call of the immortal gods. The result has shown that William Pinkney was right when he lifted up his voice, half a century ago, in the Legislature of Maryland, in bitter reprobation of the whole system. Randolph, of Roanoke, had uttered those memorable words which are still so familiar to the ear of boyhood—"The rose and the bramble may grow in mutual contact, but liberty and slavery delight in separation":

I do not say that the institution of slavery is not consistent with the love of liberty, and with the highest development of that lofty and chivalrous spirit which is the best guarantee for the independence of nations. The annals of history teach us, on the contrary, that the proudest and most jealous of governments were precisely those where the people were divided into the two great classes of masters and slaves. Those governments, however, though republican in name, were but oligarchies in effect, with oligarchies and irresistible tendencies in the direction of absolutism—which broke up the power of the monarchies of mediæval Europe, and despoliated their territories and impoverished their soil by the ravages of serfdom or villenage. And God, I undertake to say, are precisely the fruits of this patriarchal institution in all those parts of our confederacy where it still prevails. It has produced a race of men of great wealth, of high culture, of indomitable pride and of undoubted courage, who are the aristocracy of the State. It has produced an aristocracy of the most intense democracy, however, which is only fitted for a condition of thraldom; and that is not a black race, but a white one. Where labor is the badge of servitude it is held honorable for freemen—just as it has ennobled involved a forfeiture of rank amongst the French noblesse two hundred years ago—and, as a consequence, a distinction is established between the poorer classes and the slave himself, which is only known in such a State. The problem of American politics was now solved. The issue was at last directly made, and it brought along with it the indictment to renew it, and extricate, in the assurance which it furnished of a great deliverance. The time had now come to strike once more for freedom.

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