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Pennsylvania Legislature.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

EVENING SESSION.

The House re-assembled at 7 o'clock, p. m.

STATE OF THE UNION.

Agreeably to order,

The House resemed the consideration of the joint resolutions submitted by Mr. ARMSTRONG.

Mr. ARMSTRONG moved that the further consideration of the resolutions be postponed until after the joint resolutions of the Senate relative to the appointment of Commissioners to a Convention of States is disposed of.

The motion was agreed to.

VIRGINIA'S PROPOSITION FOR A CONVENTION OF STATES.

The House then resumed the consideration of the joint resolutions of the Senate, entitled Joint Resolutions to appoint Commissioners to a Convention of States.

The first resolution was read, as follows:

Resolved, *By the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in General Assembly met*, That the invitation of the Legislature of Virginia to her sister States for the appointment of Commissioners to meet in the city of Washington on the 4th of February next be and the same is hereby accepted, and that the Governor be and he is hereby authorized to appoint seven Commissioners for the State of Pennsylvania, whose duty it shall be to repair to the city of Washington on the day designated, to meet such Commissioners as may be appointed by any other States which have not authorized or sanctioned the seizure of the Forts, Arsenals or other property of the United States, to consider, and if possible to agree upon, suitable measures for the prompt and final settlement of the difficulties which now exist: *Provided*, that the said Commissioners shall be subject, in all their proceedings, to the instructions of this Legislature.

The resolution was agreed to.

The second resolution was read, as follows:

Resolved, That in the opinion of this Legislature, the people of Pennsylvania do not desire any alteration, or amendment to, the Constitution of the United States, and any recommendation from this body to that effect, while it does not come within its appropriate and legitimate duties, would not meet with their approval: That Pennsylvania will unite with the other States of the Union in the adoption of any proper Constitutional measures adequate to guarantee and secure a more strict and faithful observance of the second section of the fourth article of the Constitution of the United States, which provides among other things that "the citizens of each State shall be entitled to all privileges of citizens of the several States," and "that no person held to labor in one State, escaping into another, shall in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up on the claim of the party to whom such service or labor shall be due.

The preamble was read, as follows:

WHEREAS, The Legislature of the State of Virginia has invited a meeting of commissioners from the several States of this Union to be held in the city of Washington on the 4th day of February next, to consider, and if practicable agree upon, some suitable adjustment of the unhappy differences which now disturb the business of the country and threaten the dissolution of this Union:

And, whereas, in the opinion of this Legislature, no reasonable cause exists for the extraordinary excitement which now pervades some of the States in relation to their domestic institutions; and while Pennsylvania still adheres to, and cannot surrender the principles which she has always entertained on the subject of slavery, this Legislature is willing to accept the invitation of Virginia, and to unite with her in an earnest effort to restore the peace of the country, by such means as may be consistent with the principles upon which the constitution is founded.

Therefore:

The preamble was agreed to.

The title was read, as follows, and agreed to:

"Resolutions to appoint Commissioners to a Convention of States."

The rules were dispensed with, and the resolutions were read a third time by their titles.

Mr. WILLIAMS. I have waited in vain, Mr. Speaker, with the expectation that some of the gentlemen of this House, who think these resolutions proper and necessary in the present exigencies of the country, would state at large the reasons which they had to offer in favor of their passage. I have already signified to the House that I thought there were very formidable objections to their adoption; and that I should probably present some of those objections. It seems to be a foregone conclusion, so far as I can judge, that these resolutions shall pass, either with or without reason. I have no desire, of course, to throw myself in the way of the general sentiment of this body. As a good Republican, I always feel bound to defer to that sentiment, unless there be something involved in the expression which I regard as at war with sound opinion. It seems to me that there are such objections in this case; and I feel that it is my duty to state them as they have occurred to me. I shall therefore take the liberty of explaining in a very few words the reasons which I think ought to induce this Legislature to refuse to accept the invitation which has been tendered to it, and to decline to send Commissioners, as requested, to meet those of the other States.

I look at the terms of the invitation. I find it suggested there, that difficulties of a very serious nature exist amongst the several States of this Union. I do not know whether I am prepared to affirm that proposition. I have already said in this House, and I reiterate it now, that I know no States as distinguished from this Union. This is not a federation; it is not a mere league; it is a nation.

Now, what are we asked to do? The State of Virginia tells us that the interest which she represents—not the interest of liberty, but the interest of slavery—requires additional guarantees. She desires something that is not in our Constitution now. She desires a new Constitution. She names a day for the assembling of a Convention. That day is the 4th of February next Monday next. We are expected to act upon the invitation, as my friend from Jefferson (Mr. GORDON) has suggested, "in a hurry." Nothing can be done in a hurry, let me say, was ever done right. But we are to act under this pressure. Why? Because upon the 4th of March next the will of the people of the free States—and of the Union, I may say—as declared by a very large majority of their votes, is to be carried into effect by the inauguration of the President of their own choice. Now, in plain English, the proposition from the South is this: "You have submitted to our rule and to our policy; we are unwilling to submit to yours, except on certain conditions—that you shall afford new guaranties—that you shall adopt a new Constitution." Therefore it is that the fourth day of February is indicated as the period for the assemblage of this extraordinary convention.

I call it an extraordinary Convention. It is a Congress of Ambassadors from hostile States which we are expected to recognize, and to which we are expected to send representatives. It is, Mr. Speaker, a tribunal unknown to our Constitution and our Laws. I have suggested that this is not a federation, a league between States, but a nation. The idea involved in the proposition is an old and favorite one amongst the Southern States—that we are not a nation but a league of sovereign States, equal in all respects, without regard to our population or our resources, or our respective strength. That is the idea. I thought it had been exploded in this region many years ago. But it is now revived, and we are expected to recognize it. The right of a State to separate from this nation when she feels herself aggrieved, without recourse to its tribunals or to the authorities constituted under it to settle all differences amongst us, is asserted here.

The invitation of the State of Virginia implies that we are in a state of revolution—that our relations as members of the Federal Government have ceased—that we stand upon our original character of independent sovereignties—that a new Constitution is to be formed under these peculiar circumstances—and this is the price of the privilege of inaugurating a President elected by the choice of the people under the forms of the Constitution.

This is what we are asked to do. Are gentlemen here prepared to recognize that all this is right—to admit that we are not a nation—to ignore the government which we have erected for our common protection—to say that we are but an ill-compacted and ill-assorted league of States, in a condition to separate from each other at our own pleasure, whenever we may think proper to feel and declare ourselves aggrieved?

I beg gentlemen to look at the considerations which I have suggested. What have we to say to Virginia? I know no State, as I have already said, as contradistinguished from this Union. We are not in a condition to treat with States that approach us in such a character. I do not care what the question may be, their rights, if any, and their remedies, if any, for grievances, which they may have sustained, are in the Union; and we have so declared by the resolutions adopted a few days ago in this House. I beg gentlemen to refer to those resolutions; and it seems to me that their memories are short when they propose to pass the resolutions now before us, that they are entirely oblivious of what has already occurred. I beg them to refer to the fact that we have made a solemn declaration upon our record by a joint resolution of the two Houses of the Legislature of Pennsylvania, that for all grievances of which any State may think herself entitled to complain, the remedy is in the Union, and the means of redress are adequate under the provisions of the Constitution of the United States. But now gentlemen seem disposed to ignore this proposition which they have thus solemnly endorsed. It is said that that there are grievances. I do not undertake to say what they are; the slave power wants additional guarantees; it alleges that it has suffered wrong at our hands. Under the resolutions to which I have referred, its remedy is in the Union. But we are asked to go outside the Union to treat upon the question of redress; and we seem willing, without debate, without consultation—I was about to say, and I may say—without consideration—to do it. Shall we do it?

This Convention, sir, as I have already remarked, is an extraordinary assemblage. It is new in our history. I do not recollect any precedent or example of the kind. Is it not in conflict with the terms of the Constitution? Is it in correspondence with its spirit? It violates the latter. It is not merely the law that all grievances which may be fairly complained of on the part of any State may be redressed within the government, but we have in the Constitution of the United States the declaration that treaties, compacts and agreements between States shall not be tolerated amongst us. Have gentlemen forgotten the terms of the Constitution? I beg leave to refresh their memories upon this point.

I quote the terms of the Constitution upon this question. Section tenth of the first article of the Constitution provides:

"No State shall enter into any treaty, alliance or confederation."

Again: "No State shall, without the consent of Congress, lay any imports or duties on imports or exports, except what may be absolutely necessary for executing its inspection laws."

"No States, without the consent of Congress, shall lay any duty on tonnage; keep troops or ships of war in time of peace; enter into any agreement or compact with another State, or with a foreign power, or engage in war, unless actually invaded, or in such contingent danger as will not admit of delay."

"No State shall, without the consent of Congress, enter into any agreement or compact with another State."

This is precisely what it is expected that we shall do now.

I do not think it necessary for me to affirm here that the convention or convocation of a Congress of ambassadors of this kind is in conflict with the letter of the Constitution of the United States, as just quoted by me; but I do say, and I think I may challenge an answer, that it is at war with the spirit of that instrument. The Constitution intended to tie the hands of these supposed sovereignties—to make them subject to the Federal Government, and to deny to them the power of meeting together either for purposes hostile or, as I take it, friendly, in their results to the Government of the United States. The Constitution recognizes no States as independent sovereignties for purposes like those involved in the motion here contemplated. It was the *people* and not the States by whom this Constitution was enacted; and we now propose to ignore the Union itself, the Government of the United States, and recognize the fanciful and groundless notion of State sovereignty which has prevailed amongst our Southern brethren.

What are the circumstances under which we are asked to do this thing? And what is to be the moral effect, if it be done? It will do no harm, it is said. The gentleman from Jefferson (Mr. GORDON) suggests that if it do no good, it can do no harm. Action of this sort, in matters of State, cannot be indifferent in its results. Nothing is indifferent which it becomes the Legislature of a great State to pass upon. If these resolutions be intended as a mere juggle, then I think that such a proceeding is unworthy of us. If they be designed as a cheat, I think that the understandings of men on whom they are expected to operate, are greatly underrated.

The thing might be harmless in itself, but what, I ask again, is to be the moral effect? If we take this action now, it is done under menace. It is not to be denied that it is because these States have threatened to go out of the Union, as others profess to have done already, that we are now called upon to send ambassadors to treat with them, upon terms on which they shall be retained. It is because they threaten that we yield. Is this wisdom?

I am not, however, tenacious of my opinions. I do not say what I utter now from mere pride of opinion. I would make as large sacrifices as any man to secure the peace of the nation. But, I say to the gentleman now, as I said before, there is no peace in that direction. Concessions have never brought it, and never will. In affairs of State, when we undertake to deal with the interests of a great nation like this, there is no policy which can be called the policy of wisdom, but firmness, decision, determination, and that expressed in such a manner as shall be intelligible and unmistakable. Shall we purchase peace?—What do gentlemen propose? What is the meaning, I ask again, of this intended mission — this appointment of Ambassadors?—Can any man deny that it is to purchase the privilege of inaugurating the President who is the undoubted choice of this nation?—Will it do it? What declaration have we from the Southern States of the Union upon this question? What is it that they ask of us? Nothing, except that we shall meet them in Convention to reorganize our government—to reconstruct it—and that as a condition precedent to their submission to the laws. Instead of compelling that submission, we are to purchase it by sending ambassadors to treat with them in regard to its terms. They are not to submit under the Constitution, but we are to buy from them the privilege of doing what the Constitution itself has authorized. Now, sir, is this wisdom? Is it the true policy of a nation? Is it the means by which nations are sustained and preserved on occasions of a great crisis like the present? I think it is a very short-sighted policy.

Mr. Speaker, I set out with the remark that, it was not for me, supposing this to be a foregone conclusion, to set myself against the judgment of the House. I do not hope to change the opinions of gentlemen here, or the majority of them, by anything that I can say. I do not know the considerations that have operated upon their minds. I have reason to believe that this question has been prejudged. I think I have seen the evidences of such prejudgment. But I felt it my duty to state the reasons why I thought this action should not be taken—why I thought such action unwise. If it is the will of the party with which I act, to do this thing, perhaps no great harm may result. Gentlemen who insist upon doing this act, admit that no great good will follow. If, therefore, it be indifferent, we clearly ought not to do it. That is my judgment and I shall vote accordingly. If it shall be the pleasure of the House, however, to send ambassadors to these States, to treat with them upon the general reconstruction of the government, as the condition upon which the laws shall be executed, those gentlemen who support the movement will take the responsibility. I do not feel authorized to assume it. I am persuaded that no good will come of such a step.

I trust, however, that if the House shall do this thing, they will do it in such a way as will enable them to represent in that Congress the prevailing sentiment of Pennsylvania. If a compromise, or anything of the sort, is expected, that sentiment must be represented. If it is not, no report which may reach us from that body will have any effect in the State of Pennsylvania. I think that the two Houses of the Legislature ought to control this question; I think it belonged to them. I trust, at all events, if they insist on passing these resolutions, that they will see that the sentiment which rolled up the majority in this State, which carried all the free States at the recent elections, shall be fully represented in this convention. If it be not, the work of that body must go without results—as it will, I think, at any rate.

Mr. Speaker, I should not have said anything this evening (looking to what I supposed to be the disposition of the House on this question, with which I have no fault to find,) if I had not indicated this morning that I thought there were good and sufficient reasons that ought to prevail here in inducing this House to abstain from doing an act of this sort. We are not sovereigns. If we do it, we recognize the idea to which I have already referred, and which is so prevalent in the Southern States of this Union, that we are independent of the General Government. We admit that this government is in a state of revolution and that this Union is dissolved. In the Union, we have no existence for purposes of this kind. If we assert such a thing, we ignore the Union; we confess that the state of things exists which the extreme Southern States themselves declare to be existing.

I have asked the question, what good is to come of this step? Why is it to be taken? Can you appease in any way these border States? What is the language of their own public men? How many days is it since a man of great notoriety and distinction among them declared upon the floor of Congress that the time for concession had passed away? Is there any concession that will satisfy them? Have they indicated what they desire? Will you now, under the present circumstances, bargain with them for the privilege of inaugurating your own man in the office of President of these United States? Was the battle in which we conquered merely for the spoils? Was it the instinct for plunder that governed and directed us throughout that contest? Are we ready now to sacrifice all that we have achieved upon a mere menace on the part of these States? I do not distinguish between them and their Southern allies, who are generally denominated as the cotton States. They tell us that while they deprecate the departure of those States as an act of revolution, still they will not allow us to exercise the ordinary measures of compelling obedience to the laws, on their part. When they hold this language, it is not merely the language of menace; it is the language of treason. If it is not treason, it is at least what lawyers call misprision of treason. It is an offence, I believe, in which all are principals. If the border States stand over the seceding States and threaten us, declaring their determination to interfere for the purpose of preventing the enforcement of the laws, they are equally guilty with those in open rebellion. We are not in a condition to treat with those who encourage the rebels that have seized our fortresses, and now stand with arms in their hands to resist the laws of this nation.

What is to be the result of the action on our part which is now proposed? What will be its moral effect? Will it win us friends? Are gentlemen sure that this is what is wanted by the border States? Who has said so? Is it the language of such men as Etheridge and Clemens? I think not; I may be mistaken, but I have no recollection that they have indulged in any expression or sentiment of that sort. It is my solemn judgment—fortified, too, by the testimony of distinguished citizens of those States—that the aid they want is the expression of a determination on the part of the free States, and of the General Government, to enforce the laws of this Union. When we adopt that policy the crest of rebellion will go down, and not till then.

Have we not had experiments enough upon the subject of concession? How many concessions have we made? Our whole Legislative history has been nothing but a series of concessions to the slave power; and at every successive concession of this sort that power has increased in arrogance and risen in its demands. The South now think that we are poltroons; they believe that we fear them. Let us teach them that we do not, and they will respect us. Show that it is your determination to lend your aid in supporting the Federal Government, so far as your means and resources will go, and (my life on it) in that way, and in that way only, you secure the peace of this nation. You will never do it by convocations of this description not within the spirit of the Constitution, but in direct violation and infraction of that instrument. You will do it by teaching them (and it is the only position which you as men and statesmen can now safely occupy) that you will insist upon the Constitution as it is, and that, if there are any bargains to be made, they are to be made after they shall have laid down their arms and returned to their duty. That is my judgment. If there are legitimate subjects of complaint; let them be submitted to those tribunals which the Constitution has provided for redress; and, so far as it is in our power, this remedy shall be administered. Until they have returned to their duty, I think it would be unwise. I feel that it would be unsafe and impolitic to yield to their demands.

Mr. HILL. The gentleman who has just spoken, has delivered the sentiments which he expressed in this House on a previous occasion, that the differences now existing in the country should be settled in no other manner than by the sword. The disposition which this House has manifested to settle the existing difficulties by conciliation, meets my hearty approval. I approve of the resolutions which we have now before us, and I propose to vote for them on their final passage. But it strikes me that there are some amendments by the adoption of which the resolutions may be approved and made more effective. I now propose the same amendment which I offered this morning and subsequently withdrew.

Mr. PIERCE. I would ask whether the gentleman can offer an amendment at this time, without the unanimous consent of the House.

The SPEAKER. No, sir. The amendment cannot be offered without unanimous consent. The gentleman can move to go into Committee of the Whole for the purpose of general or special amendment.

I move, then, that the House resolve itself into Committee of the Whole for general amendment.

The motion was not agreed to.

Mr. TRACY. I have no hope, Mr. Speaker, that anything which I may say, or could say, will have an *iota* or weight with the majority of this House. When I asked to-day the poor boon of having these resolutions laid over until to-morrow, so that they might be printed, my request was promptly refused. Therefore I have no expectation but that this proposition will be at once pushed through, without the slightest modification or amendment. Yet, I am constrained to say that in the main I agree with my friend from Allegheny, (Mr. WILLIAMS,) that this proposition is a strange and improper one, and fraught, as I think, with pernicious results. It involves a proceeding unknown in the legislative history of our country, and one which, in my judgment, is of very doubtful Constitutionality. If it is supposed that these Commissioners, or ambassadors, or whatever you please to call them, are to have any powers, and can take any effectual action, then, sir, the proceeding is clearly in direct contravention of the Constitution of the United States. On the other hand, if this is a mere idle mission—such a mission as was sent from this capital somewhere down South the other day—an embassy without any powers—then, although it may not be unconstitutional, it is a proceeding in which I think the dignity of this House should not allow it to engage. Is it becoming us in this solemn manner to send out an embassy destitute of all power to act—a mere informal body of citizens? Such a proceeding is certainly altogether new and, as I think, extremely unwise.

But it is fully understood that this proposition, in its present shape, is to be forced through this body, and forced to-night. Mr. Speaker, it is a grave proposition. It opens an untried path. In my opinion, these resolutions involve a dangerous proceedure, and I shall be constrained, whatever other gentlemen may do, to oppose any such experiment. I believe that we have a Constitution, which, with the laws enacted under it, furnishes a safe and sufficient form of government. I consider it a dangerous concession to the rebellion of the South to say that we will thus treat—that we will thus disregard what I conceive to be the plain provisions of the Constitution of the United States—that we will now admit that we are a mere confederacy of States, held together by the individual volition of each member, that we have no government able to sustain itself. I believe, sir, that we have a government competent to maintain itself. I believe that by all concessions of this kind we will get farther and farther into trouble.

But, as I said to-day, I feel entirely unprepared to meet this question. As one of a committee on an important election case, I have been engaged this afternoon in listening to the arguments of counsel, who have come from Philadelphia, and whose arguments could not be postponed. In consequence of this engagement on the part of the committee, I implored the small boon of a postponement until to-morrow. But my friend from Jefferson (Mr. GORDON) says that our action cannot be postponed until to-morrow; it must be done to-day; it must be done hastily and speedily. Why? He says if we do not take this action, those States down there will go out. Let me ask the gentleman, does he think they will remain in if we take the action proposed?

My friend from Montgomery (Mr. HILL) has referred to the remarks of the gentleman from Allegheny (Mr. WILLIAMS) with whom I have said I largely sympathize; and he has quoted my friend from Allegheny as taking a position opposed to all compromise, and in favor of a resort to the sword. Mr. Speaker, I have not so understood the gentleman. I have understood him distinctly all along as taking a position in favor of maintaining the Constitution and the laws. Have I not apprehended his position correctly? I have understood the gentleman from Montgomery (Mr. HILL) to be in favor of yielding, in favor of reversing the decision of this country which has lately been so emphatically expressed at the ballot-box. Let me say to that gentleman, with all due respect and consideration for him, that I am not in favor of any such proposition.

What is written in our Constitution and what is enacted in our laws is, so far as I am concerned, to be obeyed. It is not for me, even if we are threatened with rebellion, even if our forts are taken possession of by a hostile force, it is not for me to say, in this storm of rebellion and insurrection, that I will forego the Constitution, that I will invalidate all the laws of the country, and initiate a proceeding such as is propose by these resolutions, a proceeding which has no parallel in the Legislative history of our country.

But, sir, I shall have to ask to be excused from meeting this question now, because I have never read the resolutions; my only knowledge of them is derived from the reading at the clerk's desk. It is not proposed to allow gentlemen to investigate the question; we are called upon to act speedily—to go it now, and to go it blind. Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that it has come to this.

Gentlemen say that if we do not act at once, our action will not be in time, that those people down South will rebel and will be out of the Union. Do gentlemen suppose that any mere paper resolutions which we may pass here will have any influence with those men who have rebellion in their hearts and arms in their hands? No, sir, our action can have no such tendency.

But this question is brought upon us precipitately. We cannot get a single day allowed for discussion; we cannot get any courtesy extended to us. If gentlemen think it proper to press these resolutions through in this way, they will do so; but for one, I shall go with my friend from Allegheny (Mr. WILLIAMS) not because he is for the sword, but because he is for the Constitution and the laws.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. Mr. Speaker, I had hoped that these resolutions would pass the House without the necessity of any discussion whatever. But I feel, sir, that after two so very able arguments, from that side of the House which chooses to differ from the majority here, it is proper that some one should express in a measure the views we entertain in voting for these resolutions.

And here let me utterly disclaim any intention to be wanting in courtesy to the gentleman from Bradford (Mr. TRACY) or any other member upon this floor. The resolutions before us provide for the appointment of Commissioners, who are to meet next Monday in Washington. It is a specific proposition, and if there were any delay, it would defeat the very purpose of the whole proceeeding. Even now it is doubtful whether the Governor has a whit more than barely time to make his appointment of the Commissioners and notify them of their appointment, so as to enable them to meet the other members of the convention in Washington next Monday. There is no discourtesy in pressing this matter to a conclusion at this time.

But, sir, it is suggested that this is an unconstitutional mode of proceeding—that there is no authority of law for any such assemblage as this resolution contemplates. I open the Constitution and I find that one of its articles provides:

"Congress shall make no law abridging the right of the people peacefully to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances."

How is this to be done? Can the people assemble *en masse* and present a statement of their grievances? In what form shall they assemble in order that a petition for redress of grievances may be presented? Simply by appointing these conventions, which shall take into consideration the subject matters of grievance, and present them in such a form to the constituted authorities that they can be acted upon judiciously and wisely.

Gentlemen say that by this proceeding we admit that this Union is only a confederation of States—that we have no government. Has it come to this, that because the people propose to exercise the right guaranteed by the Constitution, of assembling and petitioning for redress of grievances—grievances extending over this whole Union—because it is proposed that the representatives of the people shall assemble in convention, at the National Capital, to express what those grievances are—shall we be told that we are a confederacy only, and not a National Government? Sir, I utterly and totally disavow any such doctrine. We are a government, and a strong government, based purely and entirely upon the nationality of the people; we are a nation in oneness and entirety except within those specific limits in which the States retain a sovereignty. Do these resolutions propose to interfere in the smallest degree with the sovereignty of the Government? We cannot deny that the States are sovereign, within certain limits. We claim for Pennsylvania a limited sovereignty. Whilst we grant to the General Government a universal sovereignty, we claim a limited sovereignty for ourselves. These resolutions propose that the people of the United States, from all sections of the country, shall assemble, by their representatives, in Washington—for what purpose? Does any one suppose for a moment that it is proposed by this Legislature that that assemblage is to make alterations to our Constitution, that it is to do any more than simply to consider grievances from which this country is suffering, and to present them in proper form for consideration to that tribunal which can properly take measures for redress? This is all that is proposed. What degradation is there in this? What is there humiliating in this proposition, that a man of the nicest honor might not, with the utmost propriety and cordiality, adopt it? Nothing! Nothing!

We choose to send delegates to Washington, to confer with delegates from other States upon National grievances. Can any person upon this floor presume to say that there are no grievances? A part of the nation is already in open rebellion, and rebellion is threatened in other parts. Is it not because there are grievances to be met and to be answered? Sir, we should profit by the experience of history. Had Charles the First consented to hear and redress the grievances of the British people, there would have been no Regicides in England. Had Louis XVI consented to hear and redress the grievances of France, there would have been no French Revolution, and no Napoleon to rescue that revolution from the hands of a mob. Sir, let us profit by the experience of history, and let us not now thrust this country into the very jaws of civil war. When we have these grievances before us—when we propose to meet them and redress them by constitutional means, within the strict limits of the Constitution—is every proposition, looking to that end, to be cast aside? Gentlemen stand here professing an earnest desire to settle this question. When we ask them how we shall settle it, they answer, "enforce the laws." But how? I answer, by the sword, if it be necessary; but before that dreadful alternative is forced upon the country, let us endeavor, by every faithful effort, to avert so dire a calamity; so that if it shall ever come, we may stand before the country with clean heads and with consciences that shall acquit us of any failure in laboring by all peaceful means to arrest the evil.

Sir, to avert this calamity is not now beyond our reach. We have now the power; the exigency is not beyond our control. If Virginia and these other States are met with the proper spirit of conciliation, this Union may be saved. For, with Virginia, and Maryland, and Kentucky, standing with the conservative States of the North, this rebellion, as I had occasion to say recently, becomes inconsiderable in its magnitude, in its consequences, and in its moral effect.

But, sir, we cannot ignore these grievances; we must meet them. They will be redressed—if not peaceably within the Constitution, they will be redressed by that right of revolution which rises above all Constitutions, and which no power of civil government can ever control. The right of revolution is a sacred right which no Constitution presumes to control. Yet, sir, let it not be said that I am justifying revolution. Unsuccessful revolution is rebellion; and the present attitude of some of the States of the South is rebellion, for it cannot succeed, nor is it justified by any existing grievances or any circumstances of the present time, nor will it be justified by the result. But let us be careful, while we stand here to legislate upon these great national questions, that we do not precipitate a war, and in the attempt to arrest one evil, plunge ourselves into others which are infinitely greater.

Sir, I have the utmost regard for the people of the South, who are now attempting to stem the tide of revolution which is flooding the land. These men claim from us sympathy; they are entitled to it; and for one I stand here ready to give it to any extent that will not sacrifice my principles nor yield up those liberties which are dearer than life.

Mr. Speaker, I will not trespass longer upon the attention of the House; but I felt it due to that part of the Republican party with whom I am acting upon this floor, to express these views in order that it may not be said either that we have acted with discourtesy, or that we are attempting to establish principles which are as abhorrent to us as they can be to any others.

Mr. WILLIAMS. The argument of my friend from Lycoming (Mr. ARMSTRONG) rests upon the hypothesis of the existence of grievances, which are to be redressed by the means now proposed. I desire to inquire of that gentleman what are the grievances under the General Government of which any States of this Union are now complaining, and which it is proposed that we shall redress.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. I had occasion sometime ago to remark to the gentleman from Allegheny that he seems greatly inclined, when I rise to make remarks upon questions before us, to put me upon the stand, as if I were saying my catechism. However, I have no objection to answering the question which the gentleman has propounded.

I have thought, and still think, that neither the South, nor any part of the South, has any grievances against the General Government at this time of which they ought justly to complain. While this is my position, I must, at the same time, say that it is idle for the gentleman, or any one else, to pretend that there is not a general wide-spread uneasiness in the whole country, predicated upon the idea that there are grievances of which the people may justly complain. This proposition is only that they, by their representatives, shall meet in friendly council, for the purpose of understanding whether those grievances are well or badly founded, and, if necessary, what remedy may be applied to them.

Mr. WILLIAMS. The argument of the learned gentleman, if I understood him, was that this proposed Convention did not involve any violation of the spirit of the Constitution of the United States, because its object is to petition for redress of grievances, in conformity with the provision of that instrument to which he referred. I have asked him, therefore, (and the question was perfectly legitimate, and, as I think, very kindly and very properly put,) what are the grievances inflicted, or supposed to be inflicted, by the General Government which this proposition had in view. He has failed to show that there is any such grievance. He suggests that there is wide-spread disturbance and disaffection. I have not understood that this arises out of any action on the part of the General Government. That Government, in all its departments, has been throughout, and is at this day, in possession of the slave power. There is nothing, therefore, to authorize complaint; and nothing is now seized upon and employed as its pretext and its covering, except supposed or imaginary aggressions on the part of the States. How then does his argument apply to the case?

Mr. DUFFIELD. I move that the House resolve itself into Committee of the Whole for the purpose of special amendment. The amendment which I shall propose is to strike out, in the second resolution, the following words:

"That in the opinion of this Legislature, the people of Pennsylvania do not desire any alteration, or amendment to, the Constitution of the United States, and any recommendation from this body to that effect, while it does not come within its appropriate and legitimate duties, would not meet with their approbation."

Also, to strike out in the preamble the words:

"In the opinion of this Legislature, no reasonable cause exists for the extraordinary excitement which now pervades some of the States in relation to their domestic institutions; and while Pennsylvania still adheres to and cannot surrender the principles which she has always entertained on the subject of slavery."

The SPEAKER. The question is upon the proposed amendment.

Mr. COLLINS. Is not the question upon going into Committee of the Whole?

The SPEAKER. The question is upon going into Committee of the Whole for the purpose of special amendment, and if the motion be agreed to, the amendment will be adopted. Consequently the question is upon the amendment.

Mr. ABBOTT. This amendment proposes to strike out certain words in the preamble and also certain words in the second resolution. I would ask whether the question is divisible.

The SPEAKER. The question is upon going into Committee of the Whole for the purpose of special amendment which has been indicated. The question is not divisible.

Mr. ABBOTT. Then I presume that, in voting upon this question, there is no opportunity for discriminating between these two proposed amendments. When the resolutions were before us this morning I proposed to strike out the words of the second resolution which are now proposed to be stricken out by the amendment of the gentleman from Philadelphia (Mr. DUFFIELD.) I still adhere to my opinion in favor of striking out those words, although I shall be compelled to vote adversely to going into Committee of the Whole, if such action is to consummate both amendments which have been indicated—that is, to strike out words in the preamble, which I am disposed to retain, as well as that to strike out

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