Democrat and Sentinel.

THE BLESSINGS OF GOVERNMENT, LIKE THE DEWS OF HEAVEN, SHOULD BE DISTRIBUTED ALIKE, UPON THE HIGH AND THE LOW, THE RICH AND THE POOR.

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GREAT SPEECH OF Hon. D. W. VOORHEES, OF INDIANA,

Delivered in the House of Representatives, May 21st 1862.

Mr. SPEAKER, the financial policy of a government has always been considered by statesmen of reflection as second only in importance to national honor and national existence. Indeed, no nation can long maintain even a dishonorable existance which makes an unwise or a dishonest use of the resources of its people. It is a fundamental principle of constitutional liberty that the citizen shall own and enjoy the wealth which the labor of his hand extorts from the bosom of the earth and that only to that portion which he may freely be called upon to pay for the protection of government and the blessings of social order. He has this dominion over the product of his toil by divine right, and when this right is invaded by the Government, whether impolicy or fraud, and the citizen is robbed under the forms of law, it becomes his highest duty to repel the invasion and redress the wrong. In a free Government this is done through the peaceful instrumentality of the ballot-box, and a change in the policy of the people who are responsible for unnecessary oppression. In despotisms, where the popular voice has no weight and cannot be heard, the toiling millions, when they can endure no more, enforce justice with the sword.—But the right to a man's labor under all circumstances, is an inherent right, and human nature has held it sacred in all ages, and enforced it in every form in which the human will can assert itself.

I have been led to these observations by what I humbly conceive to be the unsound, unjust and ruinous system of finance which has been imposed upon the people of this country within the last twelve months, and which I have not the claims of age or extended experience, yet I beg to be candidly heard by the House and the country while I submit my views in that regard. The wants, the wishes, the hopes, the fears, the feelings and the thoughts of the laboring classes are familiar to me. I was born one of them, and lived in their midst, and partook of their toils.

I represent such a people on this floor, and I feel my heart swell with pride when I look to my mind the honest, the loyal, the intelligent, and the industrious constituency whose interests and whose equality before the law in the distribution of the burdens of the Government shall be my theme to day and with solemn reverence I here say that I shall prove faithful to them to the utmost of my ability, and thus promote the welfare cause of American prosperity and glory may God, in his mercy, deal with me and mine.

Sir, during the past year we have been engaged in a most stupendous war. It assumed from the first, proportions of the most horrible magnitude. Any eye could see at the opening stages of this conflict that the struggles of this Government to maintain its authority within its lawful jurisdiction was to be one of the most terrible and protracted that ever shook the world. Courage, chivalry, patriotism, devotion to the Union and the laws, all came forward and still stand ready in an inexhaustible quantity. The country has glowed from end to end, and throughout all its vast extent with a fervid love for the Government and its talisman made it. But, solid and practical as it may seem to some, one of the great elements of war is money, plain money. Without it armies do not move and navies do not float, and the purse of the nation is to be found in the pockets of the people.

Sir, in view of these facts, what has been the course of those in authority since the war commenced in regard to the great question of national economy? Have our resources been carefully husbanded? Have the public moneys been strictly guarded from the hand of the plunderer? Have our public officers been held to a rigid accountability in their use of the hard earned revenues of the country? Has financial integrity marked the conduct of those in whom the people placed their trust when the present administration came in to power? Has honesty been observed by those who won their way to popular confidence by their fierce denunciations of the alleged corruptions of former Administrations? I ask not as a partisan nor in the spirit of party. I trust I can rise above all such considerations; but these are questions in which the people of all parties have a deep and overwhelming interest, and they are questions, too which all men in every part of the country who desire an honest administration of our public affairs are now asking with serious and startling emphasis. The answer which must come, and of which impartial history will make an everlasting record, is one which bows the head and burns the cheek of every lover of his country's good name with humiliation and with grief.

Let us look calmly and carefully at a few facts, not of alluring and captivating beauty, but figures of cold and repulsive reality. The vail which a pleasing and hope-inspiring sophistry weaves around its object with intent to beguile the people into a slumberous sense of security must be torn away. Nothing should be hid from the honest eye of popular scrutiny. It is the duty of the representative to fully portray those facts of vital importance on which the governing power of this free country, the people, will soon be called upon to act.

I presume, sir, that at this time no one can, with entire accuracy, estimate the amount of our public debt. It is one of the alarming signs of the times that either from confusion and incapacity, or from the shrinking dread of recognizing an appalling truth, we have an unusual silence in official quarters in regard to the extent of Government liabilities. We are, however, relieved in a great measure upon that point, by the statements which have been made from time to time on this floor, and especially by the chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, [Mr. Stevens,] who has a right to speak on that subject as one in authority. From that source we learn that our expenditures have, for many months past, exceeded the enormous sum of $3,000,000 per day. One year's expense at this rate reaches the sum of $1,095,000,000. That our indebtedness at this moment is equal to that vast amount will hardly be denied by any intelligent and candid person who has had the opportunity to observe the profusion and recklessness with which the resources and the credit of the Government have been used since this most unnatural strife fell like a blight upon the land. A little more than one year ago we beheld the inflamed and wrathful visage of civil war for the first time disturb, like a baleful comet, the peace of this Republic. Since then battles have been fought, equal in numbers engaged, in heroism of conduct, and in the ghastly heaps of the slain, to the renowned conflicts of ancient story. Victory, too, under an overruling Providence, has chosen the standard of the Government, and our armies are steadily penetrating that intense scope of country in which the banner of revolt has been reared.

But assuming that the smiles of fortune will continue to rest upon our arms, and that no reverses are in store for our troops, yet nothing is plainer to the thinking mind which resolves the future by considering the past than the fact that the expenses of this Government for the ensuing year will fully equal, and most likely surpass, what we have witnessed in the year that has just closed. As our armies push forward their columns into the distant parts of a desolated and impoverished and hostile country, the difficulty and cost of their support will rapidly multiply. The value of transportation will almost double the price of the stores transported. There has been much undigested and crude declamation on this floor in regard to subsisting our forces on the products of the country we invade. This, however, is simply one of these unsubstantial theories which, unhapily for the country, have so plentifully abounded in this body since our national calamities came upon us. All the great authors on the art of show war its absurdity, and our own experience has already exploded it. It has already been found that where one army has swept over the country, but a barren reception awaits another; and especially is this the case when a retreating army is impelled by the strongest military reasons to leave nothing for the subsistence of its victorious pursuer. Destruction then marks every field, and war, with iron-mailed hand, scourges the bosom of nature herself into sterility. Attila, the fierce barbarian conqueror, at the head of his ravaging hordes, announced to affrighted Europe that grass would never grow again where the hoofs of his war horse had left their mark. Scarcely less blighted will be the track of defeated and retreating southern armies, when no longer able to meet us in general engagements. But little will be left after their own wants are met, and that little will be destroyed. Our supply trains will have to move with our armies from the loyal States, thus augmenting the public expenditures at every step. It is safe, then, to conclude that the year that is to come, and on which we are just entering—the second year of war—will swell the indebtedness of this Government to the alarming sum of $2,000,000,000. This amount will have accrued about the time the toiling citizen is fairly called upon to commence the weary task of meeting its awful proportions by taxation. It is a task, sir, that no eye which now beholds the sun will ever see completed. The child is not born, and will not be for more than a hundred years, who will escape the visits of the Federal tax gatherer in the incessant labors of future generations to wear away the steady droppings of a perpetual tax this mountain of debt. This is no high wrought or extravagant statement, but a sad and melancholy truth, as each succeeding year of the approaching future but will but too truly bear witness.

It is said, however, here and elsewhere throughout the country, that we are a nation of inexhaustible resources, almost fabulous wealth, and that burdens which would cause other Governments to reel and stagger, are as light as feathers to us. This is a pleasing tribute to our national vanity; it sounds well in our self-complacent ear. We have been so long exalted in happiness over all other people, so long blessed in every enjoyment above what God has ever vouchsafed to any other nation, that we are even now unwilling or unable to realize the fact that the hand of affliction has at last fallen upon us with a force almost as cruel as that which visited Jerusalem when Titus encamped before her walls. It is true, however, that we abound in wealth. It is true that our lap has been filled with treasure; but things in this world exist principally by comparison. That which constituted immense wealth a little more than a year ago, in view of a public debt of less than fifty millions, diminishes rapidly when brought to bear on a debt of forty times that amount.

By the census report of 1860 we find that the assessed value of all the real and personal property of the entire United States, both loyal and rebellious, is $12,006,756,585. Thus it will be seen that our public debt is now equal to one twelfth of all the taxable property of the Government, and that in one year from now it will be equal to one sixth of everything the people possess. No cunning and studied speeches made to mislead and deceive can hide the naked fact that this is the people's debt, and that they will have it pay. Every sixth acre of land, every sixth ox, every sixth horse, every sixth sheep, every sixth hog, and every sixth dollar, under the financial mismanagement and fraud of the party now in power, will, in one year from to day, be covered and swallowed up by the amount of the Government debt. It will be equal to an interest on every taxable substance in the land of sixteen and two-thirds per cent. Every business man knows that in the private transactions of life such a rate of interest is a speedy prelude to individual ruin in him who pays it; and the nation on which such a weight is imposed is on the brink of overwhelming bankruptcy. In this estimate it will be seen that I have taken the figures of the census report as they were made when the unruffled calm of peace and prosperity gave to property its highest value. To what extent the ravages of war have depreciated this value it is impossible to calculate; but that the property of the people of the United States is to-day worth more than two-thirds of what it was one year ago, will not be pretended; and to the extent of that depreciation is the proportion which the public debt bears to it increased.

But again. By the census report from which I have just quoted we find that the population of the United States in the year 1860 was a little more than thirty millions. Of this population about five millions are voters. A moment's calculation in the simplest rules of arithmetic shows that each individual voter of these five millions is in debt to-day $200 on account of his proportion of the annual expenses, and that one year hence he will be in debt $400 on the same account.

The liability of my own great State of Indiana, according to the rule of taxation which has been enacted against her by the present Congress will be $100,000,000, of which enormous sum, the people of the district which I have the honor to represent will stand charged with something over twelve millions of dollars.

Where, sir, in all the dreary history of profligate nations were ever such burdens as these imposed on the shoulders of any people in so short a time? The mourning children of Israel, captives in the brick-yards of Egypt, were scarcely more slaves to their Egyptian masters than the American people will be to the constant demands and exactions of the national debt. It will come upon them like the lean and hungry kine rising from the river of Pharoh's dream to devour the well favored and fat fleshed cattle of all the land. Tell me not of the blessings of a public debt. That cry is simply the cheat and falsehood by which men who have abused their authority seek to cover up the outrages which they have inflicted on a confiding people. It is as old, too, as crime in high places, or the principles of base cupidity in the heart of man. The Pharaohs of Jerusalem over their hoarded gains, the kings Babylon on their couches of gold, Alexander at his gorgeous banquets, the Sultan in the midst of his soft dalliances of expensive love, corrupt, effeminate Roman senators in their villas of marble magnificence, the Bourbons of France surrounded by the splendors of the Tulleries, the Stuarts of England clinging to the maxims of kingcraft, lustful tyrants, debauched princes, and dishonest statesmen of all ages and every clime have all talked wisely and profoundly of the sweets and comforts which flow to the people from that fountain of bitter waters—*a great public debt.* If they can convince the people that this monstrous heresy is right, then all check and restraint on extravagance and wasteful indulgence at once are withdrawn, and avarice and corruption are left free to prey with unbridled license on the substance of the nation. It is alarming, sir, that this fatal doctrine is found creeping into the debates of the American Congress. Has it come to this? Has this great nation, so famed for its wealth and pecuniary responsibility, been driven so soon to seek refuge in the mischevious principle that it is a national benefit to be sunk in indebtedness? It becomes the people, before it is too late, to arouse themselves against this baleful dogma of despotism, an prove to the world that they are worthy of the freedom which they as yet possess. Let them seek wisdom and warning on this vital subject in the teachings of that great founder of American Democracy, Thomas Jefferson. Discussing this question, 1813, he said:

"At the time we were funding our national debt, we heard much about 'a public debt, being a public blessing;' that the stock representing it was a creation of active capital for the ailment of commerce, manufactures and agriculture. This paradox was well adapted to the minds of believers in dreams, and the gulls of that size entered *bona fide* into it.

"We are warranted, then, in affirming that this parody on the principle of a public debt, being a public blessing and its mutation into the blessing of private instead public debt, is as ridiculous, as the original principle itself."

And again, in a letter to Albert Gallatin, this profound statesman and political philosopher says:

"But if the debt should once more be swelled to a formidable size, its entire discharge will be dispaired of, and we shall be committed to the English career of debt, corruption, rottenness, closing with revolution The discharge of the debt, therefore, is vital to the destinies of our Government, and it hangs on Mr. Madison and yourself alone.

But, sir, I am well aware that I will be met here by the familiar cry that these terrible expenditures are necessary to maintain the existence of the Government and to carry on the war in which we are engaged. To this assertion I return a plain and explicit denial. From whatever quarter it comes, whether from high places or low places, it is not true. The public debt up to this hour, and to the extent of its fearful proportions, hasnot been the work of a national necessity, nor the creation of honest hands. The Mexican war though a foreign and distant one, in which we paid the soldier substantially the same that we pay him now, cost this Government, under the wise and honest administration of James K. Polk, in proportion to the numbers engaged—man for man—but little more than one-fourth the amount expended on a war waged at our very door steps. Of course, I do not deny that heavy expenses have been properly incurred; but that fraud and crime in their darkest hues have swollen to an overwhelming amount the pecuniary liabilities of the people, I stand ready to prove. I shall ask no man to decide without the evidence to sustain so serious a charge. I make it, sir, with no pleasure. I delight not in such things. I love to speak kindly of my fellow-man. I would rather praise than censure. Before my great Judge I can say that there is nothing in my heart which desires to drag down or wound any human being in the wide world. I would rather lift men up, if in my power, than abase them. I love, too, their approbation. But when these wishes and desires of my heart stand in the way of my public duty, they must all be suppressed. The duty, however ungracious and unpleasant, must be performed; and in the case now under consideration it seems, to my mind, that righteous justice demands the task before me. The authors of a grinding extortion from the weary hands of honest labors are enemies to the human race, and should be so treated.

Sir, as early as last July, when this Congress first met in extraordinary session, the taint of corruption was perceived in the atmosphere of the capital, and a committee, since so celebrated, was raised to investigate and to expose. The result of a portion of the labors of that committee is before the country in the shape of a volume of over eleven hundred pages. The majority of that committee are friends of the party now in power, and the evidence which they have furnished is entitled to full credit. Would that a volume of it could be placed in the hands of every tax-paying voter in the country! Its dark labyrinths of proven guilt ought to be explored by every intelligent mind. By the solemn testimony of this committee no branch of business connected with the military and naval affairs of this Government seems to have escaped the hungry grasp of unlawful avarice and peculation. From the smallest article of food which enters into the soldier's ration, to the purchase of cattle for an entire army; from the blanket on which the tired soldier sleeps at night to the vast fortifications for the defense of a city; from the pistol at the soldier's belt to the cannon at whose breech he stand in the day of battle; from the meanest transport sloop to the mightiest man of war afloat, everywhere and on everything we find the impress of favoritism and of fraud. The report of this committee is before me, and I submitted a few extracts in proof of my statement. Speaking of contracts for cattle made by the War Department during its management by Mr. Cameron, the committee say:

"We have here not only evidence of gross mismanagement, a total disregard of the interests of the Government, and a total recklessness in the expenditure in the funds of the Government, but there is every reason to believe that there was a collusion upon the part of the employees of the Government to assist in robbing the Treasury, for, when a conscientious officer refused to pass cattle not in accordance with the contract, he was in effect superseded by one who had no conscientious scruples in the matter, and cattle that were rejected by his predecessor were at once accepted.

"With such a state of things existing, if officers of the Government who should be imbued with patriotism and integrity enough to have a care of the means of the Treasury are ready to assist speculating contractors to extort upon and defraud the Government, where is the system of peculation to end, and how soon may not the finances of the Government be reduced to a woeful bankruptcy?"

Again, on the same subject:

"In this matter there is much evidence of gross mismanagement and culpable carelessness in making contracts, together with a reckless improvidence of the means of the Government. Evidence exist of large contracts for cattle having been made without any advertisement for bids, or any effort being made by the agents of the Government to satisfy themselves whether the prices to be paid were exhorbitant, or even extortionate."

Speaking of the employment of Alexander Cummings by Cameron, then Secretary of War, to fill an important contract by which the Government has lost large sums of money, the committee say:

"Mr. Cummings had no general acquaintance with business in New York. He had been a newspaper editor in Pennsylvania for twelve years, and had been in New York as the publisher of another paper for some eighteen months. He was the intimate personal and political friend of the Secretary of War, and acquainted with the internal arrangements and connections of the railroads of Pennsylvania, over which supplies are to be shipped, and he is invested with the control of $2,000,000 to purchase equipments for our army and charter vessels for transporting troops and supplies. He takes no oath, and gives no bond." * * *

* * "Such a system of public policy must lead inevitably to personal favoritism at the public expense, the corruption of the public morals, and a ruinous profligacy in the expenditure of the public Treasury, organizing an army of sappers and miners whose covert assaults on the nation would scarcely be less effective than the open assaults of its traitorous enemies."

Again, on this subject:

"Can the Secretary of War pretend that the national peril and the necessity for immediate action justified these responsible expenditures of the public money with no settlement for four months afterwards, even if there had been no responsible and experienced public officers in New York to perform the duties?"

On the subject of buying arms, as conducted by the late Secretary of War, the committee state a loss of over ninety thousand dollars to the Government in one transaction, and say:

"No Government that ever has existed can sustain itself with such improvidence in the management of its affairs."

In regard to the purchase of horses and wagons for the public service the committee sum up as follows:

"It appears from all the evidence which is detailed in the record of evidence accompanying this report, that the parties to these discreditable transactions had a perfect understanding with each other, and engaged in a system of corrupt pecuniary gains by means of requisitions and receipts signed in blank, and false invoices, at a time when the over-taxed finances of the Government and the confidence of a generous and patriotic people demanded the most rigid integrity."

Sir, in view of this dark record of atrocious guilt, it is no wonder that the chairman of that committee, [Mr. Van Wyck,] in his speech of February 7th, on this floor, should exclaim:

"The mania for stealing seems to have run through all the relations of the Government. Almost from the general to the drummer boy, from those nearest the throne of power to the merest tide waiter. Nearly every man who deals for the Government seems to feel or desire that it would not long survive, and each had a common right to plunder while it lived."

Again, the chairman says:

"While it is no justification, the example has been set in the very Departments of the Government. As a general thing none but favorites gain access there, and none other can obtain contracts which bear enormous profits." "The Department which has allowed conspiracies after bidding had been closed to defraud the Government of the lowest bid, and by allowing the guilty to reap the fruits of their crime, has itself become *particeps criminis.*"

And well might the able and fearless member of the committee from Massachusetts, [Mr. Dawes,] in view of these revelations, also assert, as he did before the House and country, that "startling facts have come to the notice of the committee and to the notice of the whole country, touching the mode and manner of the expenditure of the public money;" that "in the first year of a Republican Administration, which came into power upon professions of reform and retrenchment, there is indubitable evidence abroad in the land that somebody has plundered the public Treasury well nigh in that single year as much as the entire current yearly expenses of the Government during the Administration which the people hurled from power because of its corruption." And further, that those heavy measures of taxation which have been brought forward by the Committee of Ways and Means would "fall like a dead pall upon the public, unless before them goes his assurance, that these vast and extreme measures instituted to resuscitate and revive and replenish the Treasury, are not merely for means another and longer, as well as the already gorged pockets of public plunderers."

But, sir, passing on from the evidence of fraud and corruption in the mismanagement of our public affairs, as furnished by the proceedings of this House, I proceed to other fields. The result of the labors of this committee are before the country, and I can do no more in my brief hour than to extract a few conclusive sentences. But investigation of this kind has not been confined alone to this body. The other branch of Congress has had the subject of official delinquency also forced upon their attention. I hold in my hand a report of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, relating to one single transaction in which the Government suffered a loss of $70,000. I read from its concluding portions:

"It is said to be necessary, not only that justice should be done, but that the public should be satisfied that it is done; and in this view your committee regret that in the city of New York a man could not be found to transact the business for the Navy Department, out of the family connection of the Secretary, for however pure and honest his purpose may have been in the selection, it cannot fail to give rise to suspicions that other motives than a single purpose to subserve the public interests may possibly have influenced the choice that was made. The time, too, at which this arrangement was made by which such a vast a disproportionate amount of the public money was paid for so inconsiderable a service, was peculiarly unfortunate. The country was engaged in a war in which its very existence was at stake. The nation had been aroused, and was contributing men and money without stint to defend the national life, vindicate the national honor, and restore the rightful supremacy of the Constitution and the laws. The energies and the industry of the country were to be taxed as they never had been before, and the pressing necessities of the Government had compelled it to resort to new and untried sources of revenue. The hut of property and the mansions of wealth were alike called upon to aid in bearing the burden which rebellion and civil war had thrown upon the nation. All this was borne, and would have bee borne cheerfully, if the tax-payers had seen, or been convinced that their money was to be faithfully and economically applied to the purposes for which it was raised. But when they see immense sums lavished upon personal or political favorites for small and inconsiderable services, confidence in the Government is impaired, public credit is paralyzed, and the very existence of the nation is imperilled."

And in commenting on this alarming state of corruption in the Navy Department, a very distinguished Senator [Mr. Hale] used the following strong language:

"When the country was taxing itself as it never had before, when it was bleeding at every pore, when new and untried sources of revenue were resorted to, when you were taxing the necessaries of the humblest inhabitant of your land, and when the land was straining itself and all its citizens, and they were sending their young men, to the field and giving their money to the Treasury—at that time and in that hour when it seemed as if the very existence of the nation stood in the scale, doubtful which way it was to turn George D. Morgan, a merchant of New York, a brother-in law of the Secretary of the Navy, was receiving from the hard earning of this hard taxed people a compensation equal to about twelve thousand dollars a month."

He further says:

"I regret to see what has been stated in several of the papers, not that they believed this was an honest transaction, not that it was a fair one, not that it was one that deserved to receive the approbation and sanction of the Government; but the excuse is, that it is not half so bad as what has been done in other cases; and I have no doubt that is true. I have no doubt that if some of the Investigating Committees go on they will find that there have been transactions compared with which $70,000 was a small sum; and that it will be considered ungracious to call up one of these petty offenders that has only taken $70,000, and deal with him when there are others going off staggering under the load of hundreds of thousands.

"You are about to call upon this people for large taxes; you are about to call on them for a large loan, to maintain the public faith and to enable your armies to prosecute this war successfully. I ask you, Senators, with what face you can go home to your constituents when they see this thing which they all know and understand; when they see that $70,000 have been paid for the services of one man for less than six months at a time of such distress as this, and appeal to your own people and ask them to come forward and put their hands in their pockets and their shoulders to the wheel and forward this car? Sir, I do not know what other men may do; I cannot; I dare not. I should expect the finger of scorn from the hut of poverty to point me out as reckless and faithless for being here a member of the Senate, in this hour of our country's peril, if I had failed to rebuke profligacy in the expenditure of the public money, let it be when and where it may."

Again, this Senator exclaims, from his extensive knowledge of the management of our affairs:

"I do not know but I may over estimate, entirely over estimate, the character of this transaction; but I tell you, sir, I believe, and I declare it upon my responsibility as a Senitor of the United States, that the liberties of this country are in greater danger today from the corruptions and from the profligacy practiced in the various Departments of this Government than it is from the open enemy in the field."

Sir I might here pause and dwell upon this terrible accusation, coming from a quarter so high and so fully entitled to credit. A hostile army has been for a year in sight of this Capitol. Treason has usurped by far the largest portion of the territory of the United States; our rivers have been turned to blood; our mountains have become Golgothas; our valleys are the burial places of our first-born, slain in battle; the wail of mothers, wives, and daughters goes up from one ocean to the other as the voice of Rachael weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted because they are not; the very sun above our heads seems veiled in mourning over the funeral sorrows of this once happy people; and yet; amidst of these thickening signs of national calamity, it is announced by a Senator who helped to place this Administration in power, and emphasized by an appeal to his senatorial honor, that a more deadly evil than them all combined is now assaulting the existence of the Government—"that the liberties of this country are in greater danger to-day from the corruptions and from the profligacy practiced in the various Departments of this Government than it is from the open enemy