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Will give prompt attention to all business entrusted to him. mar 29 -4

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Speech of Gen. R. B. Elliott, AT PUBLIC RECEPTION, THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 19, 1874.

FELLOW CITIZENS—I can hardly find words wherewith to adequately express the sense of gratitude that my heart at this moment feels for the many kind sentiments of approval that have been uttered by you as to my course as your Representative in the National Legislature. I am equally destitute of the power to summon forth to my aid appropriate language wherewith to testify to my heartfelt appreciation of your many manifestations of friendship, towards, and deep confidence in, my humble self. I must, therefore, content myself with the mere common-place expression of sincere, genuine thanks, and my earnest assurance that I shall ever strive to be worthy of your confidence. Indeed, fellow-citizens, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you:

Three years ago, after a sharp and venomous contest, it became my good fortune to be chosen by you as a Representative to the most august parliamentary body on this continent, the American Congress. It was, indeed, a highly distinguished honor, an honor of which I was sensibly proud.

But, fellow-citizens, amid the exultations incident to my success, I was deeply impressed with the importance of so high a station, and the tremendous responsibilities that rested upon me in the discharge of its functions. I felt then, as I feel now, that as one of the joiners in the national arena of a race just emerged from a long and gloomy night of American bondage—a race still weighed with heavy burdens—I would be required to bring something worthy wherewith to propitiate the judgment of mankind. Robbed with the "tags" of a Representative, I at once realized how much was expected of me as a natural deputy of a people but recently enfranchised as a new element into the polity. While I could scarcely hope to fill the measure of public expectation, I nevertheless determined, in order to justify my ability, the wisdom of that beneficent policy which struck from the hands of four millions of human beings the galling chains of slavery, and from their low estate lifted them before the eyes of the world to the proud position of American freemen. I resolved to contribute my humble share in illustrating the capacity of the negro for self government, and in justifying the conduct of those of my white fellow citizens who thought it no disgrace to vote for colored men.

The condition of affairs in our State at the time of my first election must still be fresh in your memories. Organized crime was dominant in many of our counties; murder, unabashed, stalked abroad; inoffensive men, women and children were being subject nightly to outrage; many were falling victims to midnight assassination; many were writhing under the sting of the pitiless lash; while many others, hunted for opinion's sake, were fleeing to our capital as their "city of refuge." At such a time and amid such scenes, I hastened to Washington to assume the duties of my office. Shortly after, it became me, in the line of my duty, to invoke the exercise of the national power for the protection of American citizens domiciled in our State.

During the consideration of the "enforcement bill," that great measure of protection, I had the privilege of taking part in the discussion. I shall never forget that day, when, rising in my place to address the House, I found myself the centre of attraction. Everything was still. Those who believed in the natural inferiority of the colored race appeared to feel that the hour had arrived in which they should exult in triumph over the failure of the first man of the despised race whose voice was about to be lifted in that chamber. The countenances of those who sympathized with our cause seemed to indicate their anxiety for my success, and their heartfelt desire that it might prove equal to the emergency. I cannot, fellow-citizens, picture to you the emotions that then filled my mind.

Uppermost and beyond all, I remember that my cause was just. How well that argument was sustained, with what credit I acquitted myself, let the flattering comments of the New York Tribune, the New York Herald, and

other leading journals of the country, answer. Suffice it to say, that even where sympathy was withheld respect was freely accorded.

But, fellow citizens, it is unnecessary for me to recall at this time the incidents connected with the other occasions on which I had the honor to address the Forty-second Congress. I am admonished of the fact that you are assembled to do me honor more particularly for my recent effort in the present Congress in favor of equal civil rights. It is, indeed, pleasant to me to know that my remarks on that question, on the 6th of January last, have met with the highest commendation throughout the country. It is gratifying to know that my utterances on that memorable occasion have been endorsed, not only by the five millions of people that are most directly concerned in the result of the issue, but by a vast majority of the dominant race. That pleasure is increased tenfold by the warm and flattering manner in which those whom I have the honor more directly to represent have signified their approval. My gratification is also increased when I remember that in our own Legislature the Conservative Senators and Representatives, with but two exceptions, recorded themselves in favor of a resolution instructing the Senators and requesting the Representatives from this State in Congress to vote in favor of the Civil Rights Bill, and expressing sympathy for the National Convention of the colored race. With this fact before us, who is there among us that can fail to understand the signs of the times? Which of us can refuse to go forward cheered and inspired with renewed hope and confidence in the complete triumph of true Republican principles in our State, prominent among which are these cardinal points: liberty, fraternity, justice, civil and political equality?

Who among you can reasonably doubt that the Anglo-Saxon and the Anglo-African races, who are here bound together by the ties of a common destiny, whose hearts have been inscribed by the "G-dgeen Jan" kindred feelings of fellowship, will yet live together in contentment and happiness, and mutually enjoy the victories of peace?

In the recent debate on the Civil Rights Bill, the privilege of replying to the elaborate, legal and constitutional argument of Mr. Beck, of Kentucky, and more particularly of the Hon. Alexander H. Stephens, of Georgia, was by general consent, accorded to me. This privilege, of course, brought with it the highest responsibility. It was felt by all our friends that this was an occasion on which it became the colored race to be represented by one of its own members. It was felt, too, that the legal and constitutional arguments must be fully met and answered. With a profound sense of my responsibility to my race, to my immediate constituents, and to my own reputation as a Representative in Congress, I addressed myself to this great task. No man could have had a more inspiring theme, or a more exciting occasion. I must speak under the eyes of crowded galleries, in the presence of a full house and of many distinguished strangers, attracted by the novel interest of such an occasion.

I may confess to you, fellow citizens, that I trembled for the result. That result I need not attempt to describe. It has more than filled the measure of my ambition. The praises of that effort, as you all have observed, have been numerous and wide spread. Friends have been delighted and enemies have been forced to concede that the Vice President of the Southern Confederacy—a man acknowledged to be of the greatest intellectual force, and long public experience—has been met in debate, and that his sophistries have been exposed, and his constitutional arguments overthrown, by one of that race which, twelve years ago, he described as fit only to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" to the dominant white race. This triumph I do not chiefly value as a personal one. If it be a triumph, it is a triumph for you as well as for me—a triumph for our whole race. Aye more than that, a triumph for justice, which Sir James McIntosh has so freely said, "is the common and permanent interest of all men in all ages."

Let me not fail on this occasion, and all occasions, to do full honor to my worthy colleagues from this State on the floor of Congress, as well as those other Representatives of our race who occupy seats in the National Legislature. You know with what discretion and ready zeal the Honorable J. H. Rainey has entered the debates which have arisen from time to time upon the subject of our civil rights. His just, though caustic, rebuke of Mr. Cox is fresh in your memory. The Honorable A. J. Ransom has proved himself to be your zealous and able champion in Congress, as you have long known him to be in other places. The effort of Honorable R. H. Cain, in reply to Mr. Robbins, of North Carolina, has commanded the attention of Congress and of the country, and has added to the well earned laurels of this distinguished champion of our rights. Long may you be represented by men of equal ability, zeal, prudence and fidelity. With such Representatives to sustain our cause, victory cannot be long delayed.

But, fellow-citizens, not only have we national interests, and national duties, but we have home interests and home duties. The guarantee of the fullest measure of civil rights by the national Congress is not all that we need. That will give us the opportunity only to prove our fitness to possess and use those rights.

I should fall short of my duty on this occasion if I did not draw your attention to the immediate and commanding necessity of a change in the character of our administration of the public affairs of this State.

Fellow-citizens, I approach this subject from the stand point of a strict Republican. If there be any man here, or in this State, who can impeach or gait my Republican record, let him come forward. If there be any one who can show a longer, a more untiring or consistent service of the Republican party, I challenge him to appear. What I say to night, I say as a Republican, standing on the identical platform which the Republican party solemnly put forth to the world as the expression of the political faith of the Republican party of South Carolina, on the 23d day of August, 1872. Upon that platform I still stand. If others have wandered from it, I have not. The pledges contained in that platform are still binding on my conscience and honor. Those pledges I must and shall redeem.

Fellow-citizens, no man can exaggerate or overstate the critical character of our present political situation upon the fortunes of the colored race. For centuries our history has been marked by oppression, in all its forms, at the hands of the white race of this country. We were that stricken and pitiable people whom the world seemed to believe was brought into existence solely for the service of the white races of the earth. The pathetic miseries, the helpless subordinations of our race, have formed one of the most deeply tragic features of the world's history. At last, the instincts of humanity, the divine sense of human brotherhood, have recognized us as men, entitled to the rights of men, worthy to be clothed with the powers and responsibilities of self-governing citizens.

The vastness and rapidity of this change in our civil and political condition has no parallel. Many have, at every stage of our progress, predicted our failure. With what confidence did men foretell that the colored man of the South would not except under the spur of the task-master's lash. Yet the crops of the South, for the last four years, are more than equal in amount to the crops of any four years during the days of slavery. How confidently was it said that the colored man had no sense of prudence, no provision for tomorrow—idly basking in the sunshine of to-day, and laying up nothing for the morrow. Yet one of the most marked results of freedom has been the universal and unquerable desire of our race in these Southern States to secure homes and lands of their own. It has been our reproach with the white man that we were not content to pass all our years in tilling the lands of others.

Thus, one by one, the colored race have shown to the world their right to a place among men; and our claim to such a place has been conceded at each step. Our present claim to complete civil rights and privileges will, I firmly believe, be soon granted.

But, fellow-citizens, rights impose duties. We are not now, as once we were, without responsibility because without power, without duties because without rights. In the order of God's providence, the political power of this State is in our hands. Ten years ago without a vestige of political power, we were the absolute masters of South Carolina. Such a change is without parallel, not only in its rapidity, but in the momentous responsibilities it imposes upon us. Are we so ignorant as to imagine that God and the world will not hold us to account for our use of all these rights? Never was there a people on whom the eyes of the whole world were fixed with more interest than on the people of South Carolina to-day. This proud State—mother of statesmen, numbering among her sons the brightest and bravest hearts that our country can boast—has been confined to our keeping. Our former masters have predicted our failure. Admitting, as many of our slave holders do, our capacity for improvement in many directions, they have declared that here, in the highest test, the negro would fail; that he would be the victim of the cunning and unscrupulous white man, and the base slave of his own greed and dishonesty. I wish I had ten thousand voices with which to proclaim the great fact that they, the colored men of South Carolina, are now in trial before the whole country. The question is now to be decided—can the colored people of this State maintain and administer the government of this State upon the basis of self government and unrestricted suffrage? This is the tremendous responsibility which we are to meet. The power we have will be our condemnation, unless we arouse ourselves to our responsibilities and resolve to be governed by a constant and profound regard for the public welfare. Remember, my fellow-citizens, that no fact is more deeply engraven on all the tablets of history than this; that individual prosperity can only be secured by an unselfish devotion to the good of the whole community. That State or community is hastening to destruction when its citizens are no longer bound to each other by the great moral ligament of a constant regard for the welfare of the community as a whole. Self-preservation demands unselfish patriotism. If we make of the machinery of government anything else than a means of promoting the common good, we remove the very foundations of all our civil liberties. The former slave holder, who, perchance, still denies your right to freedom and sullenly opposes every civil right which you demand, is not half so dangerous an enemy as he of your own party who teaches you to regard the functions of a public officer as the means of merely securing your own personal aggrandizement. Nothing can save that people who have come to consider public position as a source of private advantage or gain. Your liberties, your civil rights—all that you now hold most dear, will be dust and ashes, unless you use them under a sense of your responsibility for good government and the general public weal.

To-day the North doubts whether we can maintain decent government in South Carolina. To-day they look to see whether we are capable of shaking off this monstrous burden of mal administration, and rising to a tolerable degree of regard for our common public interest. Mistakes, many and grievous, may be made without impairing the confidence of our generous friends abroad; but it is not our errors and inexperience which threaten to ruin us; it is the present reckless disregard of public interests, the prostitution of the machinery of the Government to personal ends, and the total lack of responsibility on the part of some of our public officers.

Our demand for complete civil rights, and the answer is, show us that you are capable of appreciating your rights, restore good government to South Carolina, use her revenues to public ends; build up her material prosperity; vindicate your right to full citizenship of the republic, and your demand will meet no denial from any source.

I confess, fellow-citizens, that with all my zeal for equal civil rights—and it is a zeal in which I am ready to lay down my life, if need be—I confess with sadness greater than I can express, that here, in South Carolina, we to-day present a spectacle which does not excite interest in our cause, a spectacle which dishonors our friends, paralyzes our best efforts for the complete civil protection of our people, and makes the name of this State a by word and an

proach to our race. Our danger is not from without but from within. It is not the Democracy that will overthrow us—it is our own party with its faithless leaders and their infatuated henchmen. Let us not look abroad for our enemies—they are here, members of our own party—officers elected by our own votes.

I have a hundred times lifted my voice before you in support of the principles and policy of the Republican party. Those principles, under all circumstances, I shall assert and maintain. They are the expression of the highest political wisdom of the world. But I say to you now, fellow citizens, we may shout our party shibboleths, we may repeat our party watch-words, we may discourse; ever so eloquently, upon the glorious principles of the Republican party, but all this will not save us from overthrow and defeat, unless we maintain good government in South Carolina. Party fidelity will never, in the long run atone for this willful disregard of public interests, or reckless extravagance in public expenditures. No party tie can ever be woven strong enough to hold together any party whose members are joined by nothing save the secret hand of a common hope of gain by public debauchery. Dissolution will follow pollution. Distrust is born of pollution. Discord is the child of fraud. Nothing but honor, honesty, patriotism, regard for the public interest, can preserve any party.

There may be some so thoughtless or so base as to charge that the utterance of these truths is an act of treachery to our party. Fellow citizens, the man who fails to speak in our real enemy. The man who hesitates to point out our true danger is the man of whom the Republican party must be aware. If what I say here to night is not true disprove it. If it is true, accept it, act upon it. I speak to night from a deep sense of the danger that confronts us—a danger springing not from the Democracy of this State, not from the Tax Payers Convention, nor from any external foe—but from the extravagances, the disregard of public interest, the subordination of public aims to private gains, manifested so conspicuously by some of the members of our own party.

Let me say here that I still have full faith in the honesty and good intentions of the masses of our people. I believe that whenever the question of honesty or dishonesty, of economy or extravagance, in public affairs, of patriotism or of debauchery, is fairly presented to them, they will be found on the right side. I believe the colored people of this State will respond promptly to such an issue as any people. What we need, what we must have, is an awakening of all the people to their duty. Each man who holds a vote must feel his responsibility for that vote, feel it as he feels his responsibility in his own personal affairs. For, after all, this misgovernment, of which complaint is made, this reckless extravagance which now characterizes and disgraces us, will rest in the end on the common people. The laborer in the end pays the penalty of bad government. Every mill of tax unnecessarily put upon the property of this State is a burden on the man who owns nothing but his own bare hands. If taxes are high, wages will be low. If taxes are heavy, roofs will be high. All interest suffer in the long run alike. Aside from the injustice that may be done, the adding of an unnecessary tax on the lands results in a reduction of the laborer's wages who tills that land or an increase of his rent. So that it is true that the poor man suffers as much, and more, from misgovernment than the rich man.

In a deeper sense than any political creed can express it, we were all brethren in the misfortunes, the burdens, the injustice, the distress which bad government brings in its train. None of us can escape these consequences. By the natural law of cause and effect, by the force of laws which no man can make or unmake we are bound for weal or woe to the fortunes of our State. Constituting a majority of the voters of the State, we are responsible before the world for her condition; her disgrace is made chargeable to us, and in all the evils which may threaten her we will be sufferers.

And now, fellow-citizens, I appeal to you in the name of our true friends everywhere, in the name of the Republican party, under whose guidance all our past progress has been achieved, in the name of the honor of self interest as a

race in the name of our Republican idea of self government, in the name of government by the people, of the people, and for the people, to arouse yourselves to these great, urgent, commanding and sacred duties. Appeal to my fellow Republicans of every race and nationality to arise in their strength and shake off the terrible incubus that weigh down our party, to strangle the poisonous viper that is sucking our life blood, to remove the corroding leprosy that is gnawing at the vitals of our body politic. It is to you more especially, my colored fellow citizens, that I first, this time appeal. Our salvation from this time will come from our own hands. Only those who see to it that they will deny the evils which I have spoken. Only those who refuse to squander the universal experience of the world can doubt that such a condition of affairs will come to an early and disastrous end, misgovernment works its own suicide.

I appeal to you all as Republicans. Our principles are true and undeniable. Within our own political organization, let us work out the needed reformation. At our side, aiding us with all the moral support of noble characters and the less lives, will be found the great leaders of the Republican party, the President of the United States, the great cabinet and great statesmen, true always to civil rights and to the colored race, who seek nothing so much as the true and lasting peace for our Southern States which comes from good government and the material prosperity of all our people—Charles Sumner, whose life long devotion to the cause of freedom entitles him to our undying gratitude, Henry Wilson, our Vice President, true always to the best interests of our race, Morton, Dawes, Butler, Lawrence, Hoar, all those honored names, who on the floor of Congress, and throughout the country, have ever been swift to vindicate our rights and to advance our welfare.

Fellow citizens, the voices of such men must be heard. They call on us to discard such of our leaders as are bringing disgrace and destruction on us. They bid us rise in our might, and put off our false and dangerous sense of security in our numbers. They beseech us to rally, one and all, to the great work of restoring good government to South Carolina. They tell us, in plain terms, that our own safety depends on reform in our State affairs, in cutting off those who have proved unworthy of the trust confided to their care, in recalling and reinstating honor and ability in our high places of public trust. They do not ask us to forsake the Republican party, but rather to be true to that party, to vindicate its fair name, to make it as it is, the party of progress, of intelligence, of public economy and good faith. They warn us, unless the Republicans of South Carolina take heed to their way, purify their administration of public affairs, select upright officers, expend the public good, the national Republicans will no longer recognize them as members of that party, or permit them to affiliate with the national organization.

I call upon you, therefore, fellow citizens, to look your safety, to take instant heed for the honor and perpetuity of our party.

Let us here resolve that South Carolina shall no longer be our reproach. Let us clear our skirts of the odium of governmental abuses. In such a good work our friends everywhere will join with us—the great Republican party will aid us throughout the nation.

Above all things, fellow citizens, as representing the colored race, let us remove this infeasible disgrace and stain from our record as a race. We may be ignorant, we may be poor—but we can be honest. There is to-day, within our party, intelligence and integrity enough to give to our State a good government. There are men in our party who may be called to the helm of State, and who will faithfully carry out the pledges made in our party platform. Pledges are good, but we must put men behind those pledges who will keep them to the letter and in the spirit. Honesty, economy, good government—in city, county and State—let this be our watchword, and our stern resolve. In this regard shall conquer, and with our victory will come a more cheerful acquiescence in our political supremacy, a more friendly and helpful spirit between our two races, a more rapid progress in all moral and a final vindication of the capacity of the colored race to preserve their own liberties, and to respect the rights of others. Let the accomplishments of such a work, I pledge my most earnest efforts. With one heart, one determination, let us move forward to the re-establishment of an honest, economical and responsible government in South Carolina, to