

THE EVENING NEWS.

Thursday, March 2, 1870.

SPEECH OF HON. THOMAS FITCH, OF NEVADA, ON THE "CULLOM BILL."

The following speech, delivered in the House of Representatives, February 23, 1870, by Hon. Thomas Fitch, of Nevada, will be perused with great interest by our readers. The speech needs no eulogium from us; it speaks for itself. Mr. Fitch is a rising statesman. He is one of the youngest men in the House; but he has already made his mark in that body, and is recognized as one of its most eloquent and able members.

The House resumed the consideration of the bill reported from the Committee on Territories, known as the "Cullom Bill," and Mr. Fitch arose and said:

Mr. Speaker, the provisions of this bill reported by the Committee on Territories, rigidly enforced, would put an end to polygamy in Utah. It is intrinsically probable. That the destruction of polygamy is a wise and laudable purpose may be readily conceded; and if such destruction were all that is involved it would be my duty to advocate this measure. I am not, however, in favor of knowing something of the Mormon country, and something more of the peculiar character and motives of the people inhabiting that country, I am impelled to the conviction that this bill, if enforced as law, would provoke consequences most prolific of mischief and entail results altogether unapprehended.

Among these results may be included, first, the temporary obstruction, if not the complete destruction, of the great overland railroad. Next, Utah would be returned to the desolation which once reigned supreme upon her soil. Again, the growing industries of a vast country would be checked, and the development of the Pacific coast seriously retarded. Beyond all this, thousands of brave men would be slain, and millions of treasure expended. Notwithstanding the opinions of the gentlemen who appeared before the Territorial Committee, I fear that the people of Utah would regard the passage of this bill as a declaration of war, and would prepare with all the fury and earnestness and zeal of fanatics to enter upon a contest as bitter, protracted and bloody. The result of such a contest no man can doubt. One hundred and forty thousand people, however self-sustaining, however isolated, however favored by position and circumstances, could not maintain themselves against the power of the Government. The Mormons would be exterminated or driven out of Utah. But, with polygamy thus destroyed, adultery thus delocalized, concubinage thus scattered, with virtue and desolation reigning supreme in a waste where only the lagoon of the savage disturbed the stillness, the rebuking verdict of a tax-burdened people would be that the result accomplished was not worth the sacrifice involved.

I agree with the distinguished gentleman from Illinois, the chairman of the Committee on Territories, that we ought not to shrink from the expense of a just and necessary war, waged for an adequate cause. But I ask gentlemen now the question, with which the country will vex them when through the operations of this bill a Mormon war should have been precipitated upon us: what is there in such a contest appealing to either the judgment, the conscience, or the patriotism of the people? Does it not lack all the elements which inspire men to go forth to battle? I am not unmindful of the deep disgrace to the nation that the barbarous social practices of the Asiatic should be unblushingly pursued among a Saxon people in this noon of the nineteenth century. I condemn this folly of the Mormon creed. I am filled with amazement and pity at the voluntary degradation of the Mormon women. I am compassionate while I abhor that spirit, but a spirit of sensuality or of sacrifice, which ignores and repudiates that holiest gift of God, our nature, that sweetest gift of God, that sacred passion which no man can feel at once for two women, which no woman can entertain for him she does not believe to be exclusively her own.

But the question we consider is a practical and not a sentimental one, and we must deal with facts as they exist. This polygamic community has been nursed into strength by the tolerance of this Government. We have given them title to their lands; we have recognized them in various ways; we have permitted them without restriction or warning to collect adherents and gain recruits from all parts of Europe. Their numbers have swelled beyond our apprehensions. History nowhere makes mention of a colony of equal age more industrious, more united, more powerful, or more self-sustaining. They have towns containing thousands of people, with newspapers and telegraph lines, factories and foundries hundreds of miles south of Salt Lake City. They are industrious, thrifty, temperate; they are free from every vice comparatively, except polygamy, and that according to their creed is no vice, but a religious duty.

They believe in their faith as deeply as the Mohammedan believes in his Koran or the Christian in the crucifixion of his Redeemer. As all that faith with armies and you will consolidate and strengthen and infuse them with more ardent zeal. The gentlemen from Illinois [Mr. Cullom] believes that they will make no resistance. Sir, have they faced the storm and the savage, the desert and disease, to be turned from their tenets or driven from their convictions by an act of Congress? Would any sentiment less earnest than passionate, zealous, fanatical belief have induced a people to go to such a distance from the centers of civilization, to accept such contumely and undergo such sacrifices and such toll? Gentlemen are in error if they suppose that no other purpose than unbridled indulgence in gross animal sensuality carried the Mormons to a life of privation and labor in Utah. If such alone had been their purpose perhaps they might have achieved it at less cost, less effort, and less unpleasant notoriety, without crossing the Mississippi river. The tree of degraded sensuality does not bear the fruits of thrift and industry and temperance.

I do not intend to apologize for the unlawful acts of that people, but I desire that the House shall understand exactly what we will undertake if we pass this bill. It is attempted to enforce its provisions there will be war. If it is enacted as a law there will be extensive preparations for war. I know that such is not the opinion of the witnesses upon whose testimony the committee have predicated their action. But I appeal to the judgment of gentlemen, I appeal to that history which some one has well said is "philosophy teaching by example," if it is not probable that a people who believe in their religion as devoutly as do the Mormons will fight, and if need be die in the effort to preserve it from annihilation, and so determined, shall we expect them to await our action or hope that they will postpone hostilities until the first company of the forty thousand troops provided for in this bill reach even the borders of Utah? Sir, they are a practical people. Independently of their peculiar religious views they are perhaps the most practical people on earth. They have made social science a study; their industries are co-operative; their self-abnegation and voluntary submission to discipline are unparalleled; their organization and aptitude for toil are only equalled by the honey-makers, whose dwelling place and whose habits furnish the symbol and the motto for their territorial coat of arms—a beehive, with the legend, "By industry we thrive."

As I stated before, they would regard the passage of this bill as a declaration of war, and panoplied by a purpose only less dear to them than life itself they will hasten to fortify and provision and arm themselves. They will promptly proceed to cut off all means of communication with the outside world. With their facilities for organization they could destroy hundreds of miles of the great overland railroad in a week. They could maintain a contest for months, perhaps for years. Of course we could finally conquer them, because we could exterminate them. But it would cost us millions upon millions of treasure; it would cost us thousands upon thousands of lives; it would cost us the interruption of that travel which is permanently growing in importance, and which promises, if undisturbed, to fulfill the dream of Columbus and make America a new highway to the Indies. Sir, the suppression of polygamy would be purchased at too great a cost. I appreciate the argument of the gentleman from Illinois, [Mr. Cullom], that the honor of the nation should be preserved at whatever risk, and the majesty of its laws vindicated at whatever cost. These are heroic sentiments, and claim a share of our reverence whenever we may deem that the honor of the nation is in jeopardy. But I conceive that the moral exigencies of Utah call for no such acquiescence in blood and treasure as seems to be involved in the conditions of this bill. Polygamy, while it is bad enough, offers no challenge except to the educated sentiments of a people. It makes no interference with the controlling power, nor asks the nation to be responsible for its existence, its advancement, or its destiny. It assails no human right; it assails no human privilege.

If the question of national unity or human freedom were involved I would stand here, as did the Representatives of the people in the Thirty-Seventh and Thirty-Eighth Congresses, and vote money in countless millions and men in numberless hordes. But this is a question of no considerable importance at least, though we have sometimes sought to make it appear so. It represents a religious magistr which has assumed an obnoxious form, but which contains the elements of its own destruction, which interferes at least with the tastes and prejudices rather than the interests of mankind, and which does not rise to the dignity of a political question. It is simply the case of a handful of men and women who choose to govern themselves in their own way, and who with one odious exception, more grievous to themselves than to us, seem to have made of their method an undoubted success. We might make diligent search to find a community more peaceful, industrious, or thrifty than these Mormons. We might look in vain elsewhere than in Utah for cities without a brothel or gaming-house.

Polygamy and slavery have sometimes been called "twin relics of barbarism." That was a taking phrase in the Chicago platform of 1860. It had a resonant rhyme; it made a good rallying cry. But while polygamy and slavery may have been twin relics of barbarism in the sense that they were of equal antiquity, and were both capable of being sustained by scriptural authority, they were not equal in present importance or in possible consequences. Slavery rested upon compulsion and drew its vitalizing force from oppression; polygamy depends upon persuasion and leans upon its own distorted interpretation of the divine philosophy. Slavery was incorporated into the civil, political and social framework of fifteen States; polygamy is a parish which has fled to the desert for a home. Slavery was the basis of a vast industrial system; polygamy is an excrescence upon a promising industrial experiment. Slavery prevented a free press and prohibited free speech; polygamy is unable to prevent the publication of an anti-Mormon paper in Salt Lake City, and anti-polygamy meetings are held within sight of the residence of Brigham Young. Slavery, grown arrogant by tolerance, assailed the nation and defied its laws; polygamy, feeble and subject, obeys every statute, except that which threatens its existence, and seeks obscurity beyond the reach of civilization.

All laws of the United States and of Utah are obeyed in Utah except the anti-polygamy act. The very witnesses upon whose testimony the committee have framed this bill averred that in all criminal or civil actions where polygamy was not involved he never met a fairer people; that in suits between Mormons and Gentiles Mormon juries do impartial justice. The truth is that our system of government is unfit to deal with a problem such as the Mormon question presents. Our government rests upon the virtue and intelligence of the people. Our government is conducted in public. Ours is a government of opinion framed into law, and laws maintained by opinion are apt to remain unenforced. Every county of every State and Territory is in some extent self-governed and independent. If the people of any county tacitly agree that a particular crime shall not be considered a crime if committed within that county, what is to be done about it? If grand juries persistently refuse to find indictments, or petit juries regularly return verdicts

of "not guilty" for that particular crime, there is no way to reach the matter or punish the offenders through the ordinary processes and means permitted under a republican form of government. There is no power vested in executive or judge to take offenders beyond the limits of their State for trial. Cases of this character can be reached only by finding such evidence of an armed and general conspiracy to resist the laws as to authorize the suspension of civil authority within the infected district and the interposition of military rule. The remedy is expensive, and its frequent use most dangerous to republican government. It should never be resorted to except in extreme and desperate cases. I do not believe that the present is such a one. But, it may be asked, shall we do nothing? Shall we allow this defiance of the authority of the United States to continue? Shall we permit Brigham Young and his followers to pursue the practice of polygamy with any earnest effort to suppress it? I answer, sir, that I believe polygamy has run its course. I believe that the railroad which deprived the Mormons of their isolation has struck it a mortal blow. Every locomotive bell resounding through the gorges of the Wasatch mountains is sounding its death-knell. I believe in the persuasive power of progress and the logical force of attrition. I believe that for want of the invigorating element of truth the institution will fall to decay. I do not believe that a practice which is at war with the interests of society, hostile to the spirit of the age, and opposed to the instincts of human nature, can, even when sustained by religious convictions, maintain itself against the silent, insidious, persistent, resistless assaults of the social forces arrayed against it.

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