

REPUBLICAN NOMINATIONS.

SPEECH

OF

CARL SCHURZ,

AT THE

MILWAUKEE RATIFICATION MEETING,

ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, MAY 30, 1860.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN :

As one of the delegates who had the honor to represent the Republicans of Wisconsin in the National Convention, I feel called upon to give you a brief account of our doings and of the views which guided us in our course. We have faithfully endeavored to do our duty, as we understood it, and I am bold enough to assume that our understanding of it did not differ from yours.

We went there not only for the purpose of subserving the interests of the party, but above all of promoting the interests of our *cause*.

The question to be solved at Chicago, as we understood it, was not only how we could beat the Democracy, but whether a defeat of the Democracy would be a victory of Republicanism. We do not forget that there are triumphs which are no victories, and that such triumphs, dangerous and treacherous as they always will be, may become even worse than defeats; for, being the triumphs of politicians instead of the cause, they will loosen the moral bonds which hold a party together, and substitute in their place the mere cohesive power of public plunder.

We are well aware, that for some time previous to the meeting of the National Convention, in some Republican newspapers, in speeches and private circulars, an extreme tenderness was shown for the prejudices and susceptibilities of those, who had never acted with us, while much less regard was paid to the feelings and preferences of the Republican masses. We expected to see this policy urged upon the National Convention, and we were determined to present to it a bold and unflinching opposition. For, we thought we appreciated the true element of our strength. We knew that mere drill and discipline, and party dictation would never drive the Republican masses into silent obedience to the mandates of that convention, if those mandates run contrary to the popular conscience. We kept in mind that the Republican party had sprung from the indignation of the people

aroused by a flagrant breach of trust, and had gained its strength by the uprising of the popular heart for great positive ideas; that it is a party of volunteers held together not by drill and command, but by the moral power of a great common cause, that by joining the Republican organization, not one of us gave up his moral and political independence; that we did not deed away our conscience in inscribing our names upon its roll; that its claims on our support depend on the hold it has on our convictions; that its tenure is on good behavior, and that it cannot and shall not be ruled by the wily arms of secret diplomacy.

I have heard it said that in consequence of all this, the Republican party is a very difficult party to be managed—but nothing in the world can be easier, as long as the simple but great truth is kept in view, that the masses will remain true to the Republican party, as long as the Republican party remains true to itself. It was our conviction, that if the Convention had fallen into the fatal error of attempting to change the faith and policy of the party, as we would change our dress, it would quickly have found out that the Republican party is essentially the party of independent men, that its power rests upon public opinion, and that it can do no wrong with impunity.

With these ideas uppermost in our minds, we went into that Convention, determined to preserve in its purity the original idea upon which the party was founded; determined never to sell out the moral character and the great future of the Republican cause for the treacherous glitter of plausible combinations, brought about by trade and compromise, determined rather to risk a defeat than to lose our own identity in the chase after a delusive phantom of party success; in one word, determined to have a Republican platform, and upon it a Republican candidate. I leave it to the people of Wisconsin to decide whether they were misrepresented by their delegates.

By the partiality of our delegation, I was placed upon the committee on platforms and resolutions. The spirit which animated that committee was that the standard of Republicanism should not be lowered one single inch. We endeavored to lift the creed of the party far above the level of mere oppositional policy. The platform gives it a positive character. The Republicans stand before the country, not only as the Anti-slavery party, but emphatically as the party of free labor. While penning up slave labor within the limits which the legislation of sovereign states has assigned to it, we propose to plant free labor in the territories by the Homestead bill, and to promote free labor all over the land by the encouragement of home industry. In throwing its shield over the eternal principles of human rights, the platform presents the Anti-slavery policy of the party in its logical connection with the great material interests of the country. "To man, his birth-right; to labor, freedom; to him that wants to labor, work and in independence; to him that works, his dues." This is the Republican platform.

It affords me special satisfaction to state, that the resolutions, the passage of which was recommended by the Republican State Convention of Wisconsin—I mean those concerning the Homestead bill, and the rights of naturalized citizens, were successfully advocated, and form part of our national creed.

Our platform, adopted without opposition and almost without discussion, adopted amidst the most spontaneous and sublime outbursts of enthusiasm human eye ever witnessed, is before the people. It is the boldest, plainest, the most liberal ever presented to the nation by a political party, and the

enthusiastic shouts of millions from Maine to the Rocky Mountains, have already sanctioned it with their approval.

Mr. President, the delegates of this state were instructed to cast their votes for the nomination of William H. Seward. It was certainly not for reasons of availability that Mr. Seward's name was brought forward. But we were accustomed to look up to him as the intellectual head of the political anti-Slavery movement. From him we received the battle-cry in the turmoils of the contest; for he was one of those bold spirits who sometimes will go ahead of public opinion, instead of tamely following its foot-prints. He would compress into a single sentence—a single word—the whole issue of a controversy; and those words became the inscriptions on our banners, the pass-words of our combatants. His comprehensive intellect possesses the peculiar power of penetrating into the interior connection, and grasping the general tendency of events and ideas, things and abstractions; he charms our minds with panoramic views of our political and social condition, and the problems to be solved; his telescopic eye seems to pierce even the veil which covers future developments; and while all his acts and words are marked by a thorough-going and uncompromising consistency, they are at the same time adorned with the peculiar graces of superior mental culture.

The same qualities which made him the object of the fiercest and most acrimonious hostility on the part of our opponents, could not fail to assign to him, in the hearts of his friends, a place which hardly another man in the nation could fill. But a popularity like this, is not apt to become general. He was one of the earliest champions of our cause. He fought for it, sometimes single-handed and alone, standing firm and unmoved in the storm of fanaticism and vituperation. He fought for it when he was unpopular, and all the prejudice that existed against his principles, all the odium that was cast upon his doctrine, centered upon his person. He was the bugbear with which political children were frightened, and a great many were accustomed to couple with the name of Seward all that was detestable and dangerous. His principles emerged from that cloud of prejudice, but his name did not, and although a daily increasing number of friends gathered around him, yet a great many could not divest themselves of their early impressions.

And so this became one of the instances, which you so frequently meet with in the history of mankind, that individuals have to pay a tribute of self-denial to their own greatness. The success of the cause they serve is apt to bring with it the disappointment of their personal aspirations. This is a melancholy fate, but it is no less glorious and sublime, for even the highest positive merit may receive a still higher lustre from the divine appointment of self-sacrifice. History does not judge men by the outward emblems of power and preferment. The greatest names are those who need no title in order to be great. Seward has lost nothing in the Convention. He is to-day what he was yesterday. He can hardly stand higher; he certainly does not stand lower.

We, the delegates from Wisconsin, voted for him to the last. I may say that a few hours after my arrival at Chicago I saw that Seward's nomination was very improbable. I do not lay claim to any particular sagacity and foresight for that, for it was a plain arithmetical problem. The causes which brought about his defeat I will not detail; suffice it to say, that they were not of a futile nature. But we stood by him, determined to carry his

name as high as possible. Nor did we follow the example of those who changed their votes after the decisive ballot, before the final result was announced; not as though we had been opposed to Mr. Lincoln, than whom there is no truer man in the nation, but because we thought we owed it to our old chieftan, that, if fail we must, he should withdraw with the honors of war, surrounded by an unbroken column of true and devoted friends. So New York, Wisconsin, Michigan and some delegates from other States, stood together to the last. Thus was this debt of honor discharged; we considered it honestly due, and it was honestly paid.

I need hardly, say, sir, that when the motion was made to make Mr. Lincoln's nomination unanimous, we seconded it without any sacrifice of feeling, and when it was carried, we heartily joined in the general enthusiasm. We had not gone there, to have our candidate nominated or none; but with the royal intention to subordinate our individual judgment to the judgment of the majority, provided the convention asked of us nothing inconsistent with our consciences as anti-Slavery men, and the dignity of the Republican cause. And I do not hesitate to say, that if Gov. Seward had not been in the field, Mr. Lincoln would, unless I mistake the temper of our people, in all probability, have been the first choice of Wisconsin. Although Gov. Seward failed, Mr. Lincoln's nomination nailed the good old Republican banner to the mast as boldly and defiantly as ever.

Mr. President, I had the honor to be a member of that committee who were to carry to Mr. Lincoln the official announcement of his nomination. The enthusiasm with which we were received at Springfield was boundless. There we saw Mr. Lincoln's neighbors, and it became at once apparent that those who knew him best, loved and esteemed him most. And then I saw Mr. Lincoln again, for I had met him before in that memorable senatorial campaign in Illinois, when he, as a man of true and profound convictions, although discountenanced and discouraged by many leading Republicans, who thought it good policy to let Mr. Douglas return to the Senate without opposition, threw himself forward for the imperiled purity of our principles, grasped with a bold hand the Republican banner, which was in danger of sinking into the mire of compromise and unnatural combinations, and held it up proudly aloft in one of the fiercest struggles the country ever witnessed. I met him then, in the thick of the fight, when he bearded the lion of demagogism in his den, when the brilliant sallies of his wit and sarcasm drew shouts of delight from the multitude, when the thunderbolts of his invective rattled triumphantly against the brazen front of Stephen A. Douglas, when the lucid, unanswerable logic of his arguments inspired every patriotic heart with new confidence in the justice of our cause, and when under his powerful blows the large Democratic majority of Illinois dwindled down to nothing. There I saw him do what perhaps no other man in the nation would have done. There I learned to confide in the patriot and the defender of profound convictions, to esteem the statesman and to love the man.

And, now, I saw him again, surrounded by the committee of the national convention who had come to lay in his hands the highest honor and the greatest trust which a political party has to bestow—an honor which he had not thought of in his hard fought battles, which he had not craved and had hardly been sanguine enough to expect. There he stood silently listening to the address of our chairman; his eyes downcast; in his soul, perhaps, a feeling of just pride struggling with the overawing consciousness of respon-

sibility. Then he answered, thanking them for the honors bestowed upon him and accepting the leadership in the great struggle, not with the exulting tone of one who has achieved a personal triumph; not with the pompous airs and artificial dignity of one who is conscious of standing upon the great stage of the world, but with that unaffected modest simplicity of a man who is strong in the consciousness of his ability and his honest intention to do right.

Many of those who now surrounded him had voted for other candidates in the convention, and some, still laboring under a feeling of personal disappointment, had come there not without some prejudice unfavorable to Mr. Lincoln. But when they saw a man who had worked his way from the humblest station in life to his present eminence, not by fast speculations or adventurous efforts, not on the wing of good luck, but by quiet, steady labor, unswerving fidelity to principle and his private and public duties, by the vigor of his genius and the energy of his character—the man who had won the confidence of the people and was now lifted upon the shield of a great national party, not by ingenious combinations and adroit management, but by the popular instinct—unfettered by promises, unpledged to anybody and anything but the people and the welfare of our country, his hands free to carry out the honest dictates of his pure conscience, a life behind him, not only above reproach, but above suspicion, a problem before him, for the solution of which he was eminently fitted by the native virtues of his character, the high abilities of his mind, and a strong honest purpose, then they all felt, with this pure and patriotic statesman, all those great qualities would return to the white house, which makes republican government what it ought to be—a government founded upon virtue. And an Eastern delegate, who had voted against him in the convention, whispered to me in a tone of the highest satisfaction: “Sir, we might have done a more daring thing, but we certainly could not have done a better thing.”

I cannot find words strong enough to designate the silliness of those who sneeringly affected to see in Mr. Lincoln but a second or third rate man, who, like Polk and Pierce, had been taken up merely for the purpose of expediency. Let them ask Mr. Douglas, from whose hands he wrested the popular majority in Illinois; let them ask those, who once felt the magic touch of his lucid mind and honest heart; let his detractors ask their own secret misgivings, and in their own fears they will read the cause of the joy and assurance of his friends. They whistle in order to keep up their courage; but, methinks it is a doleful sound. So, then, we stand before the people, with the platform of free labor, and upon it a true representative of free labor, as a candidate for the presidency. On this attitude we challenge our enemies to the battle.

On our flank we are threatened by the Constitutional Union—non-descript; by that party of dry hearts and dead weights, who recently assembled at Baltimore, and, conscious of their inability to make a platform, adopted a sentence from a fourth of July oration as their common creed, and will in all probability circulate Mr. Everett's Mount Vernon papers as their principal campaign documents. They know no north, no south, no east, no west, no anything, and least of all they know themselves. See them march on, ready to charge, gently and with forbearance, lest they step upon somebody's toes, and slowly and noiselessly, lest their own soldiers, frightened by their own impetuosity, suspect themselves of sinister designs—for theirs is an army which by the accidental explosion of a percussion cap might be thrown into the most frightful disorder. It is said that one of

their candidates contemplates declining the nomination. Let him well ponder what he is doing. Let him not, with his accustomed rashness in political matters, skip over so awful a responsibility; upon his resolution so or so may depend a difference of five or ten votes at the next national election.

In front we face the Democracy. Thanks to the restless impatience of Mr. Douglas's ambition, and to his unscrupulous duplicity, the Democratic party is fast falling to pieces. Indeed we are greatly indebted to that man. When, by the Nebraska bill, and the invention of the popular sovereignty dodge, he tried to gain the favor of the south, he helped build up the Republican party in the north; and when by refusing to acknowledge the logical consequences of his own position, he tried to retrieve his fortunes at the north, he disorganized the Democratic party at the south. And even lately he demonstrated the existence of the irrepressible conflict more clearly and forcibly, with due deference to Gov. Seward be it said, than ten Rochester speeches could have done. He is like the fellow who, in order to get at the apples that hung rather high, cut down the tree. Yes, that man has done much of our work, and he did it voluntarily, gratis, for nothing. Let us be honest enough to confess it; for, sir, I really do not see why the church should refuse to acknowledge its obligations to the devil.

It is not owing to his laudable exertions that the Democracy have opened the campaign with two platforms and *many* candidate? In fact, when taking all his kind services into consideration, I am almost sorry of ever having said anything against that man. But the thing is done, and Mr. Douglas must be satisfied with as humble an apology as I am able to offer.

The first attempt of the Democracy to unite upon a platform and to nominate a candidate failed. It could not but fail so long as some of them insisted on laying down a party creed that meant something. A Democratic platform, in order to be satisfactory, must mean nothing and everything, as the Cincinnati platform did. But they will try again to repress the irrepressible conflict which rages in their own ranks, and as the day for doing so they have with great propriety chosen the 18th of June, the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo. What the result of that Convention will be, whether one of the contesting factions will carry the day, or whether they will succeed in uniting them, by conceding to one the platform, and to the other the candidates, thus cheating each other in attempting to cheat the people, is to me a matter of supreme indifference. The Democrats undoubtedly thought they had done a very smart thing in adjourning their Convention without nominating a candidate, so as to deprive us of the supposed advantage of knowing what antagonist we had to deal with. Without being aware of it, they have indeed done a great thing for us; for they have obliged us to rely for success upon the positive strength of our cause, instead of the accidental weakness of an opposite candidate. And in this noble and manly attitude we stand before them the only united National party in the land.

While the Union-savers did not dare to lay down a common party creed — while the Democrats, with unscrupulous duplicity, attempt to commit a new fraud upon the people — the Republican party has, with manly fearlessness, proclaimed its principles and nominated a candidate who fairly and honestly represents them. We have undertaken to defeat our opponents, not by concession and subterfuge, but by boldly and unequivocally reasserting the principles in which we believe. We have undertaken to disarm the prejudices that are against us, not by pandering to them, but by

opposing to them the language of truth. No greediness of a speedy party triumph has betrayed us into the abandonment of a single position; no desire to conclude advantageous alliances has betrayed us into a single compromise. I am proud to say we have disdained to purchase, at the price of a single article of our creed, the support of that small set of amphibious politicians who claim to hold the balance of power, and whose office it seems to have been, for years, to demoralize parties with their treacherous promises of support; of those heartless men who, when a whole continent is on fire, calculate with bloodless coolness from what side they can draw the greatest advantage.

They may feel big with the vain boast that they will be strong enough to defeat us—we have shown them unequivocally enough, that they will never be strong enough to corrupt us. We have, indeed, invited the support of all citizens, whatever their party affiliations may have been. But we will not gain it by false pretences. We will speak to them the language of great principles, we will appeal to their sense of right and justice, we will assault their understandings with irrefutable arguments, we will storm their hearts with solemn invocations, but we have disdained to descend to ambiguous tricks, which would make us unworthy of being supported by others.

Such is the Republican party of to-day. It is strong, for it seeks and finds its strength in the greatness of the cause it defends. It will be victorious, for it deserves success. Its success will be a decisive triumph of our cause, and if the worst should come, even a defeat would be a mere delay of certain victory. And so we are ready to give battle, armed with that scrupulous jealousy of principle, that will make us rather perish than compromise the right; with that honest pride of conviction which springs from a deep consciousness of good faith and a true devotion to a just cause. And the signs of the times show that even in politics honesty is the best policy, for all honest men who mean to do right, although they formerly stood against us, are fast flocking around our banner. Listen to me a single moment. Standing as we do on the threshold of great decisions, I cannot suffer my mind to be engaged in the walls of this house, or in the narrow lines of party interest and party policy, not even in the boundaries of this country. There is the wide world around us with its manifold races of nations and men, all of them for thousands of years engaged in the arduous struggle for happiness and freedom, now advancing with spasmodic force and rapidity, now falling back again exhausted and discouraged; always struggling to disentangle their feet from the treacherous coils of despotic rule, and always baffled in their efforts; so much noble blood spilled, so many noble hearts broken, so many noble aspirations turned into despair!

And in this world of strife and anguish there arose this Republic, a world of promise. It was the gospel of liberty translated into fact. It was to be the beacon of humanity. But alas! the oblivion of despotic rule did not work the abolition of the baser passions of human nature. But half a century elapsed and this free government is ruled by a despotic interest, the Republic sinks into the mire of Slavery and corruption, sinks deeper and deeper, and the hope of humanity sinks with it. The advocates of despotism predict its downfall from day to day, and proclaim with exultation that the great experiment of human self-government has failed. It is in vain that the best men of the nation, like the prophets of old, rise up against the growing demoralization. They are sneered at and persecuted, or, at best, their efforts remain isolated and apparently fruitless.

Suddenly a great startling outrage is perpetrated; the slave power, with its train of corruption and demoralization, shows itself in its naked deformity, and threatens to swallow down the whole future of the country in one gulp.

Now the popular conscience wakes up. The people of the North rise to a last great effort. The first attempt to rescue the development of the Republic from the grasp of that despotic power fails, but the movement grows in dimensions and intensity. We press on and on, and the day of deliverance is at hand. Oh, it comes at last! How we have longed to see it! How we counted every minute by the impatient throbbings of our hearts! We rally in formidable array; every fiber of our being trembles with eagerness for the greatest of struggles; every pulsation of our blood beats the charge! We place one of the purest, noblest and ablest men of the nation at the head of our army—victory is within our grasp!

No man in whose soul glows a spark of sympathy with struggling humanity, can now stand idle. No heart that was ever fired by the divine breath of liberty, can now remain cold.

Let Wisconsin stretch her hand across the great lakes and grasp that of New York. Let it be known that New York and Wisconsin, who stood together to the last for Seward in the Convention, will be the first and foremost in the battle for Lincoln and Liberty!