

CHAPTER II. THE CRISIS OF '61

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In the dark times which preceded the crisis of '61, gloomy shades, as of the last days of the Republic, stealthily attempted to draw their weird forms across the land. {1899 PTM, PRUS 20.1}

The Civil war between the North and the South was a struggle over principle. In the famous Gettysburg address, Abraham Lincoln stated this principle in immortal prose as follows:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 20.2}

"Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. {1899 PTM, PRUS 20.3}

"Now we are engaged in a great Civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. {1899 PTM, PRUS 20.4}

"But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow, this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note or long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth." {1899 PTM, PRUS 20.5}

The proposition that all men are created equal was on trial in the Civil war. The struggle was to test whether the government conceived in liberty was so to endure. The brave men who shed their blood, shed it in behalf of liberty and equality. They courted death, and flocked to its arbitrary and despotic arms, in order that the nation of liberty and equality might live. {1899 PTM, PRUS 20.6}

Every principle of the Declaration of Independence was at stake; and as the principles of the Declaration were the vital life of the nation, it logically followed that if those principles were abandoned, the ruin of the young Republic was assured. Lincoln's whole effort was one in behalf of the Declaration-for liberty and equality. {1899 PTM, PRUS 21.1}

On the part of the champions of slavery a plea was set up that the Declaration did not mean just what it said; that the clause, "all men are created equal," was not a self-evident truth, but on the contrary, a "self-evident lie." It was held that the framers of the great charter of our liberties never intended to include the negro in the meaning of the word "all" in the clause above quoted. In fact, every kind and description of cringing sophistry and counterfeit logic was used to prove that what was said in the Declaration was not true; or that if it was true, it was limited to the time of the Revolution, and that it did not contain great general principles applicable to all places, all times, and all peoples. It was against these arguments that Lincoln expended his strength and his life. {1899 PTM, PRUS 21.2}

In a speech delivered at Springfield, Ill., June 26, 1857, we find the following noble defense of true principles:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 21.3}

"In those days [the days of the Revolution], our Declaration of Independence was held sacred by all, and thought to include all; but now, to aid in making the bondage of the negro universal and eternal, it is assailed, and sneered at, and construed, and hawked at, and torn, till, if its framers could rise from their graves, they could not at all recognize it. All the powers of earth seem rapidly combining against him. Mammon is after him, ambition follows, philosophy follows, and the theology of the day is fast joining the cry. They have him in his prison house; they have searched his person, and left no prying instruments with him. One after another they have closed the heavy iron doors upon him; and now they have him, as it were, bolted in with a lock of a hundred keys, which can never be unlocked without the concurrence of every key; the keys in the hands of a hundred different men, and they scattered to a hundred different and distant places; and they stand musing as to what invention, in all the dominions of mind and matter, can be produced to make the impossibility of his escape more complete than it is. . . . Judge Douglas finds the Republicans insisting that the Declaration of Independence includes all men, black as well as white; and forthwith he boldly denies that it includes negroes at all, and proceeds to argue gravely that all who contend that it does, do so only because they want to vote, and eat, and sleep, and marry with the negroes! He will have it that they can not be consistent else. Now I protest against the counterfeit logic which concludes that, because I do not want a black woman for a slave, I must necessarily want her for a wife. I need not have her for either. I can just leave

her alone. In some respects she certainly is not my equal; but in her natural right to eat the bread she earns with her own hands without asking leave of any one else, she is my equal, and the equal of all others. {1899 PTM, PRUS 21.4}

"Chief Justice Taney, in his opinion in the Dred Scott case, admits that the language of the Declaration is broad enough to include the whole human family; but he and Judge Douglas argue that the authors of that instrument did not intend to include negroes, by the fact that they did not at once actually place them on an equality with the whites. Now this grave argument comes to just nothing at all, by the other fact that they did not at once, or ever afterwards, actually place all white people on an equality with one another. And this is the staple argument of both the chief justice and the senator for doing this obvious violence to the plain, unmistakable language of the Declaration! {1899 PTM, PRUS 22.1}

"I think the authors of that notable instrument intended to include all men: but they did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments, or social capacity. They defined, with tolerable distinctness, in what respects they did consider all men created equal-equal with 'certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' This they said, and this they meant. They did not mean to assert the obvious untruth that all were then actually enjoying that equality, nor yet that they were about to confer it immediately upon them. In fact, they had no power to confer such a boon. They meant simply to declare the right, so that enforcement of it might follow as fast as circumstances would permit. {1899 PTM, PRUS 22.2}

"They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly labored for; and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere. The assertion that 'all men are created equal' was of no practical value in effecting our separation from Great Britain; and it was placed in the Declaration, not for that, but for future use. Its authors meant it to be as, thank God, it is now proving itself, a **stumbling-block** to all those who, in after times, might seek to turn a free people back into the hateful paths of despotism. **They knew the proneness of prosperity to breed tyrants,** and they meant when such should reappear in this fair land and commence their vocation, they should find left for them at least one hard nut to crack. {1899 PTM, PRUS 23.1}

"I have now briefly expressed my view of the meaning and object of that part of the Declaration of Independence which declares that all men are created equal. {1899 PTM, PRUS 23.2}

"Now let us hear Judge Douglas's view of the same subject, as I find it in the printed report of his late speech. Here it is:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 23.3}

"No man can vindicate the character, motives, and conduct of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, except upon the hypothesis that they referred to the white race alone, and not to the African, when they declared all men to have been created equal; that they were speaking of British subjects on this continent being equal to British subjects born and residing in Great Britain; that they were entitled to the same unalienable rights, and among them were enumerated life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The Declaration was adopted for the purpose of justifying the colonists in the eyes of the civilized world in withdrawing their allegiance from the British crown, and dissolving their connection with the mother country.' {1899 PTM, PRUS 23.4}

"My good friends, read that carefully over some leisure hour, and ponder well upon it; see what a mere wreck-mangled ruin-it makes of our once glorious Declaration. {1899 PTM, PRUS 23.5}

"They were speaking of British subjects on this continent being equal to British subjects born and residing in Great Britain!' Why, according to this, not only negroes, but white people outside of Great Britain and America, were not spoken of in that instrument. The English, Irish, and Scotch, along with white Americans, were included, to be sure; but the French, Germans, and other white peoples of the world are all gone to pot along with the Judge's inferior races. {1899 PTM, PRUS 23.6}

"I had thought the Declaration promised something better than the condition of British subjects; but no, it only meant that we should be equal to them in their own oppressed and unequal condition! According to that, it gave no promise that, having kicked off the king and lords of Great Britain, we should not at once be saddled with a king and lords of our own in these United States. {1899 PTM, PRUS 24.1}

"I had thought the Declaration contemplated the progressive improvement in the condition of all men everywhere; but no, it merely 'was adopted for the purpose of justifying the colonists in the eyes of the civilized world in withdrawing their allegiance from the British crown, and dissolving their connection with the mother country.' Why, that object having been effected some eighty years ago, the Declaration is of no practical use now- mere rubbish-old wadding left to rot on the battle-field after the victory is won. {1899 PTM, PRUS 24.2}

"I understand you are preparing to celebrate 'The Fourth' tomorrow week. What for? The doings of that day had no reference to the present; and quite half of you are not even descendants of those who were referred to at that day. But I suppose you will celebrate; and will even go so far as to read the Declaration. Suppose, after you read it once in the old-fashioned way, you read it once more with Judge Douglas's version. It will then run thus: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all British subjects who were on this continent eighty-one years ago, were created equal to all British subjects born and then residing in Great Britain.' {1899 PTM, PRUS 24.3}

"And now I appeal to all,-to Democrats as well as others,-are you really willing that the Declaration shall be thus frittered away? thus left no more at most than an interesting memorial of the dead past? thus shorn of its vitality and practical value, and left without the germ or even the suggestion of the individual rights of man in it?" {1899 PTM, PRUS 24.4}

All of this is good doctrine. It is the best kind of civil government gospel. It is the enunciating of principles which are immortal, and which will stand as long as time itself. And it can never be remembered too often, that it was in defense of these principles so ably told by Abraham Lincoln that tens of thousands shed their blood upon the field of battle in the Civil war. This was clearly seen and recognized by the leaders at that time. The blare of battle and reek of carnage seem to last longer in the minds of most men than the principles over which the battles were fought. Nevertheless it is the principles which should interest all, for they are of vital importance to all. {1899 PTM, PRUS 24.5}

In another speech delivered in Chicago, Ill., July 10, 1858, Lincoln further amplified his comments upon the Declaration of Independence as follows:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 25.1}

"We are now a mighty nation; we are thirty, or about thirty, millions of people, and we own and inhabit about **one-fifteenth** part of the dry land of the whole earth. We run our memory back over the pages of history for about eighty-two years, and we discover that we were then a very small people in point of numbers, vastly inferior to what we are now, with a vastly less extent of country, with vastly less of everything we deem desirable among men; we look upon the change as exceedingly advantageous to us and to our posterity, and we fix upon something that happened away back, as in some way or other being connected with this rise of prosperity. We find a race of men living in that day whom we claim as our fathers and grandfathers; they were iron men, they fought for the principles that they were contending for; and we understood that by what they then did it has followed that the degree of prosperity which we now enjoy has come to us. We hold this annual celebration to remind ourselves of all the good done in this process of time, of how it was done, and who did it, and how we are historically connected with it; and we go from these meetings in better humor with ourselves, we feel more attached the one to the other, and more firmly bound to the country we inhabit. In every way we are better men in the age and race and country in which we live, for these celebrations. {1899 PTM, PRUS 25.2}

"But after we have done all this, we have not yet reached the whole. There is something else connected with it. We have, besides these men descended by blood from our ancestors, among us, perhaps half our people, who are not descendants at all of these men; they are men who have come from Europe,-German, Irish, French, and Scandinavian,-men that have come hither and settled here, finding themselves our equals in all things. If they look back through this history to trace their connection with those days by blood, they find they have none, they can not carry themselves back into that glorious epoch, and make themselves feel that they are part of us; but when they look through that old Declaration of Independence, they find that those old men say that 'we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal;' and then they feel that that moral sentiment, taught in that day,

evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all moral principle in them, and that they have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote the Declaration [loud and long continued applause]; and so they are. That is the electric cord in that Declaration that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together-that will link those patriotic hearts as long as the love of freedom exists in the minds of men throughout the world. [Applause.] {1899 PTM, PRUS 25.3}

"Now, sirs, for the purpose of squaring things with this idea of 'don't care if slavery is voted up or voted down,' for sustaining the Dred Scott decision, for holding that the Declaration of Independence did not mean anything at all, we have Judge Douglas giving his exposition of what the Declaration of Independence means, and we have him saying that the people of America are equal to the people of England. According to his construction, you Germans are not connected with it. Now, I ask you in all soberness, if all these things, if indulged in, if ratified, if confirmed and indorsed, if taught to our children, and repeated to them, do not tend to rub out the sentiment of liberty in the country, and to transform this government into a government of some other form? {1899 PTM, PRUS 26.1}

"Those arguments that are made, that the inferior race are to be treated with as much allowance as they are capable of enjoying; that as much is to be done for them as their condition will allow, what are these arguments?-They are the arguments that kings have made for enslaving the people in all ages of the world. You will find that all the arguments in favor of kingcraft were of this class; they always bestrode the necks of the people, not that they wanted to do it, but because the people were better off for being ridden. That is their argument, and this argument of the Judge is the same old serpent that says, You work, and I eat; you toil, and I will enjoy the fruits of it. Turn it in whatever way you will, whether it come from the mouth of a king as an excuse for enslaving the people of his country, or from the mouth of men of one race as a reason for enslaving the men of another race, it is all the same old serpent; and I hold, if that course of argumentation which is made for the purpose of convincing the public mind that we should not care about this, should be granted, it does not stop with the negro. I should like to know if, taking this old Declaration of Independence, which declares that all men are equal upon principle, and making exceptions to it, where will it stop? If one man says it does not mean a negro, why not another say it does not mean some other man? If that Declaration is not the truth, let us get the statute book in which we find it, and tear it out! Who is so bold as to do it? If it is not true, let us tear it out! [Cries of 'no, no.'] Let us stick to it, then; let us stand firmly by it, then. {1899 PTM, PRUS 26.2}

"It may be argued that there are certain conditions that make necessities and impose them upon us; and to the extent that a necessity is imposed on a man, he must submit to it. I think that was the condition in which we found ourselves when we established this government. We had slaves among us; we could not get our Constitution unless we permitted them to remain in slavery, we could not secure the good we did secure if we grasped for more. But having by necessity submitted to that much, it does not destroy the principle that is the charter of our liberties. Let that charter stand as our standard. {1899 PTM, PRUS 27.1}

"My friend has said to me that I am a poor hand to quote Scripture. I will try it again, however. It is said in one of the admonitions of our Lord, 'As your Father in heaven is perfect, be ye also perfect.' The Saviour, I suppose, did not expect that any human creature could be as perfect as the Father in heaven; but he said, 'As your Father in heaven is perfect, be ye also perfect.' He set that up as a standard, and he who did most toward reaching that standard attained the highest degree of moral perfection. So I say in relation to the principle that all men are created equal, let it be as nearly reached as we can. If we can not give freedom to every creature, let us do nothing that will impose slavery upon any other creature. Let us then turn this government back into the channel in which the framers of the Constitution originally placed it." {1899 PTM, PRUS 27.2}

We must transport ourselves, in mind and spirit, if not in body, back to those days of strife in order that we may imbibe even a little of the spirit which animated them. We must feel and know and understand in our innermost and truest selves something of the intensity of feeling which inspired the breast of the immortal Lincoln and the brave men who stood with him. Let all understand that the principles of the Declaration of Independence were the main issue under consideration in those momentous times. They were not a mere side circumstance. They were the all and in all. It seems as if human language could make these truths no plainer than Lincoln made them. That he said exactly what the noble instrument itself said is perfectly plain. And that he was also correct in his estimate of the ideas of the Fathers concerning their position on the negro question is a fact which no honest man can reasonably dispute. {1899 PTM, PRUS 28.1}

An interesting little incident in the history of James Madison clearly evidences this. In the year 1783 one of his slaves escaped, and was afterward found by Madison himself in Philadelphia. But he did not force him back into slavery; on the contrary he wrote to his father that he had "Judged it most prudent not to force Billey back to Virginia, even if it could be done;" and that he could not "think of punishing him by transportation merely for coveting that liberty for which we have paid the price of so much blood, and have proclaimed so often to be the right, and worthy the pursuit, of every human being." {1899 PTM, PRUS 28.2}

But the advocates and champions of an extension of slavery were not easily downed. Not one of them, however, came out openly and said that an extension of slavery was what was desired. But every move they made, every act they did, and every speech they made showed beyond the shade of a shadow of a doubt that this was the focal point, the ultimate end which they desired. {1899 PTM, PRUS 28.3}

It seems astonishing that men could so suddenly depart from the glorious gospel of liberty and equal rights for which their fathers had struggled in the Revolutionary war. It would seem that the remembrance of those things, yea, verily the warm breath of them, ought to have still been in and upon their souls. It seems almost incredible that men could rise up and make such sweeping denials of the principles which had won for them their own freedom just a few short years before. But passion and prejudice were doing their deadly work; and once

these two foul demons have taken possession of the temple of the soul, facts are treated as a mere bagatelle, the truth is trampled in the dust, and naught is thought of or cared for but the end so ardently desired. {1899 PTM, PRUS 28.4}

The evidence that the great Revolutionary leaders were opposed to slavery is monumental and beyond dispute. The famous words of Thomas Jefferson, "I tremble for my country, for I know that God is just," were spoken with reference to slavery. At the federal convention, Mason, compressing the observation of a long life into a few burning words, made the statement, "This infernal traffic originated in the avarice of British merchants; the British government constantly checked the attempts of Virginia to put a stop to it. . . . Slaves produce the most pernicious effects on manners. Every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant. **They bring the judgment of heaven upon a country. As nations can not be rewarded or punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence punishes national sins by national calamities.**" And the Constitution limited the importation of slaves to the year 1808; and when that year broke, the importation of slaves had ceased. This was the best that could be done; but there were many who would fain have seen slavery abolished altogether at the time of the birth of the nation. {1899 PTM, PRUS 29.1}

Said Madison, in a paper addressed to the country:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 29.2}

"An unhappy species of population abounds in some of the States, who, during the calm of the regular government, are sunk below the level of men; but who, in the tempestuous scenes of civil violence, may emerge into the human character, and give a superiority of strength to any party with which they associate themselves." {1899 PTM, PRUS 29.3}

It is a true principle of history that a free people can not long govern subject provinces and still retain their own freedom. Exceptions can not be made to principles without the exceptions destroying the principle itself. If a principle of government is violated to day in one portion of a nation's domain, it will not be long until that violation, like a deadly leprosy, will have eaten its way to every acre of territory in the national domain. {1899 PTM, PRUS 29.4}

Lincoln clearly saw and understood this, and expressed it in a speech delivered at Springfield, Ill., June 16, 1858:- {1899 PTM, PRUS 29.5}

"A house divided against itself can not stand.' I believe this government can not endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved; I do not expect the house to fall; but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South." {1899 PTM, PRUS 30.1}

In the Civil war the principles of the Declaration of Independence were triumphant. It was settled, for a time at least, that the nation was to endure as the fathers had designed, true to its conception in liberty, and still dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.