

**THE BORDER STATES: THEIR
POWER AND DUTY IN
THE PRESENT DISORDERED
CONDITION OF THE COUNTRY**

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The Border States: Their Power and Duty in the Present Disordered Condition of the Country by
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JOHN P. KENNEDY

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BY

Senator

HON. JOHN P. KENNEDY.

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THE BORDER STATES.

THE country is now, or, from all the tidings that reach us, must soon be compelled to accept the fact that South Carolina has seceded from the Union.

Whatever may be the right of secession, it is about to become a practical fact. South Carolina has announced her purpose, as far as it is in her power, to dissolve the Union. Other States belonging to that series which has lately assumed the designation of the Cotton States—as expressive of a peculiar affinity in interest and policy—are likely to follow her example. Alabama, which is, in some sense, the offspring and pupil of Carolina, has shown herself already too eager to precipitate herself into revolution to leave us any hope that she will hesitate to array herself on the side of her teacher. Perhaps we may still find some encouragement to a better augury, in the good sense and prudence of Georgia and the other States which have not been wholly possessed and fevered by that extraordinary contagion of frenzy which Carolina has spread through the lowlands of the South. But I confess my fears. The signs are against it. The chances are—for this event is not under the control of the sober judgment and wise estimate by which all matters of State should be directed—the chances are that passion will rule the hour, and that the revolution will move onward, swayed by the same rash impulses as those in which it originated.

We of the Border States, therefore, cannot too soon take counsel together, touching our own interest and duty in the new condition of affairs which is about to be forced upon us.

The question that now concerns us is—What position are we to assume in the beginning of the strife; where are we to place ourselves at the end of it?

Is it not very obvious that Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, North Carolina, and Maryland cannot, with any respect for their own dignity, with any regard for their own welfare, or with any security for their own peace, suffer themselves to be dragged into that track of revolution and civil war, of wild experiment and visionary project into which Carolina is endeavoring to force them? These States are quite able to determine for themselves what griefs they suffer and what redress they require; they want no officious counselor nor patronizing friend to tell them what it becomes them to do, either for the maintenance of their own honor or the promotion of their own advantage; they can hear with quiet scorn the taunt that they "have placed the Union above the rights and institutions of the South"—and hold at what it deserves the offensive rebuke "that no Southern State intent on vindicating her rights and preserving her institutions would go into conference with them."*

Every substantial hope of a successful issue out of the afflictions of the country, produced equally by the wickedness of Northern fanaticism, and the intemperate zeal of secession, depends upon the calm and earnest wisdom of the Border States. That they will be true to the duties of the crisis, no one who has studied their character can for a moment doubt.

However the lowland States may now slight their counsels and disparage their patriotism, it is a most weighty and significant truth, for the consideration of the leaders of the projected revolution, that the Border States are at this time the most authentic representatives of the conservative power of the Union. Their various and equal relations to the North,

* See the Charleston Mercury of November 19, where this language is held to Virginia and the other Border States, in the editorial headed "Southern Conference—too late."

the South, and the West, their social organization for the support of every interest connected with good government and permanent peace, their internal strength, and, above all, their healthful tone of opinion toward the preservation of constitutional right and resistance against wrong, point them out as the safest and best arbiters in the present difficulties of the country. Whatever there is of real vigor in the slaveholding communities, exists in *them* and is derived in greatest degree, by others, from *their* sympathy and alliance. Without them, we may affirm, that no confederacy of Slave States, at all worthy of respect and consideration as an independent power, can possibly be formed.

The attempt, whenever made, will speedily prove itself to be a most unhappy failure.

The Border States have a better right to claim a hearing, just now, than any other member of the Union. Indeed, until *they* have spoken, it would almost seem to savor of an unbecoming officiousness on the part of any other State to put itself in the van to raise an outcry of wrong or to dictate the measure of remedy.

While these States have always manifested a just and becoming sensibility to their rights, connected with the employment of slave labor, and have shared in the common indignation of the South against the malignant hostility of certain sections of the Northern people; while they have been the chief and almost only sufferers from the inroads of organized abolitionists, who have stealthily abstracted their slaves in numbers whose value may be reckoned at little less than a million of dollars a year; while, indeed, it may be said, that these States are the only portions of the slaveholding region which have any direct, immediate or definite interest, worthy of special consideration, in the vexed questions touching the present or the future of slavery in the United States—that is to say, in the question of emigration to the territories, the rendition of fugitives, and the organization of new States—they have, nevertheless, shown themselves in all contingencies,

the confident and considerate assertors of their rights in the mode ordained by the Constitution, and at all times the determined friends of the Union. They have never yet felt an aggression which they did not believe more effectively to be repelled by the due exercise of the power of the government, than by retreat before the aggressor and resort to a covert revolution that seeks to legalize its action by taking the name of secession.

They certainly cannot be expected now, with the painful conviction which passing events are creating in their minds—that the Union itself is the chief grievance which stirs the hostility of those who are most active in raising a banner of revolt, and that the assaults upon the property of slaveholders, of which they, the Border States, have so much cause to complain, are but the pretext to cover a concealed design of portentous mischief—they cannot be expected now, with such a conviction, to renounce the wisdom of their accustomed trust in the law, and allow themselves to be persuaded or beguiled into a desertion at once of the Constitution which they have always respected, or of the Union which they have always revered. Their course is too plainly marked out to them by the incidents of the day to admit of any such fatal aberration as that. They are not blind to the fact that the present crisis has been forced upon the country with a haste that allowed no halt, chiefly because its contrivers feared the sound of that voice from the Border States, which they knew would speak peace to the troubled waves in strife, and would reach the heart of hosts of loyal citizens in the very bosom of the commotion,—citizens, alas! now bereft of their loyalty by the force of the tempest of revolution that has swept over them.

If thus Carolina and her comrades are lost—all is not lost. There is space for arbitrament still left which may at least secure an opportunity for mediation, and I would hope an eventual settlement that may, perhaps, include even those who are at present the most resolute in their recusancy. Carolina now repeats defiantly that all chance of her return is gone

forever. I would fain believe that affairs may be conducted into such a channel as to awaken in her a better view of her own future.

It is very important that the country should consider the true character of the danger that threatens it. The public mind is sadly at fault upon this point. There has been a singular concurrence of accident and design to lead even sensible and observant men off from the perception of the real causes of this disturbance; and a not less singular exhibition of practiced skill in the address with which the popular masses in the region of the commotion have been enlisted in an enterprise of the scope and consequences of which they had neither the leisure to examine nor the temper to comprehend.

The public for the most part believe that the impending revolution grows out of the organization of the Republican party, and that the recent election presented the culminating point at which that organization could no longer be endured with safety to the Southern States.

Unfortunate as that election is, not only in its results, but in all the stages of its progress from the day of the Chicago Convention down to that of its consummation—unfortunate for the tranquillity of the country, and for the predominance it has given to certain men and certain political sects—it is not less unfortunate for the opportunity it has afforded to the accomplishment of designs long nourished, which have been held in suspense only to await a juncture favorable to their success.

The graver and more thoughtful portions of the community have recognized with no little pain, the steady growth in some sections of the South, for many years past, of a disposition in the leaders of Southern opinion to undervalue both the strength and the beneficence of the Union. It belongs to the school of doctrine of which South Carolina is the head, to imbue the people with the idea that the State Sovereignty has the first claim to the allegiance of the citizen, and that no more is due to the National Sovereignty than may be found