

Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War



PATRIOTIC RECOLLECTIONS

Copperheads Under the Heel of an Illinois Farmer New York, 1863

On the last day of the Illinois Legislature, in February, 1863, Mr. Funk, a Senator from McLean County, delivered a speech, which is thus described and reported by the Springfield correspondent of the Chicago Tribune:

A great sensation was created by a speech by a Mr. Funk, one of the richest farmers in the State, a man who pays over three thousand dollars per annum taxes towards the support of the Government. The lobby and gallery were crowded with spectators. Mr. Funk rose to object to trifling resolutions, which had been introduced by the Democrats to kill time and stave off a vote upon the appropriations for the support of the State Government. He said;

Mr. Speaker, I can sit in my seat no longer and see such by-play going on. These men are trifling with the best interests of the country. They should have asses' ears to set off their heads, or they are traitors and secessionists at heart. I say that there are traitors and secessionists at heart in this Senate. Their actions prove it. Their speeches prove it. Their gibes and laughter and cheers here nightly, when their speakers get up to denounce the war and the administration, prove it.

I can sit here no longer and not tell these traitors what I think of them. And while so telling them, I am responsible, myself, for what I say. I stand upon my own bottom. I am ready to meet any man on this floor in any manner, from a pin's point to the mouth of a cannon, upon this charge against these traitors.

I am an old man of sixty-five; I came to Illinois a poor boy; I have made a little something for myself and family. I pay three thousand dollars a year in taxes. I am willing to pay six thousand, aye, twelve thousand, aye, I am willing to pay my whole fortune, and then give my life, to save my country from these traitors that are seeking to destroy it.

Mr. Speaker, you must please excuse me; I could not sit longer in my seat and calmly listen to these traitors. My heart, that feels for my poor country, would not let me. My heart, that cries out for the lives of our brave volunteers in the field, that these traitors at home are destroying by thousands, would not let me. My heart, that bleeds for the widows and orphans at home, would not let me. Yes, these traitors and villains in this Senate are killing neighbors' boys now fighting in the field. I dare to say this to these traitors right here, and I

am responsible for what I say to any one or all of them. Let them come on now, right here. I am sixty-five years old, and I have made up my mind to risk my life right here, on this floor, for my country.

These men sneered at Colonel Mack a few days since. He is a small man, but I am a large man, I am ready to meet any of them in place of Colonel Mack. I am large enough for them, and I hold myself ready for them now and at any time. Mr. Speaker, these traitors on this floor should be provided with hempen collars. They deserve them. They deserve hanging, I say, the country would be the better of swinging them up. I go for hanging them, and I dare to tell them so, right here to their traitorous faces. Traitors should be hung. It would be the salvation of the country to hang them. For that reason I must rejoice at it.

Mr. Speaker, I beg pardon of the gentlemen in this Senate who are not traitors, but true loyal men, for what I have said. I only intend it and mean it for secessionists at heart. They are here in this Senate. I see them gibe, and smirk, and grin at the true Union men. Must I defy them? I stand here ready for them, and dare them to come on. What man, with the heart of a patriot, could stand this treason any longer? I have stood it long enough. I will stand it no more. I denounce these men and their aiders and abettors as rank traitors and secessionists. Hell itself could not spew out a more traitorous crew than some of the men that disgrace this Legislature, this State, and this country. For myself, I protest against and denounce their treasonable acts. I have voted against their measures; I will do so to the end. I will denounce them as long as God gives me breath; and I am ready to meet the traitors themselves, here or anywhere, and fight them to the death.

I said I paid three thousand dollars a year taxes. I do not say it to brag of it. It is my duty, yes, Mr. Speaker, my privilege, to do it. But some of these traitors here, who are working night and day to put their miserable little bills and claims through the Legislature, to take money out of the pockets of the people, are talking about high taxes. They are hypocrites as well as traitors. I heard some of them talking about high taxes in this way, who do not pay five dollars to the support of the Government. I denounce them as hypocrites as well as traitors.

The reason they pretend to be afraid of high taxes is, that they do not want to vote money for the relief of the soldiers. They want to embarrass the Government and stop the war. They want to aid the secessionists to conquer our boys in the field. They care about high taxes! They are picayune men, anyhow, and pay no taxes at all, and never did, and never hope or expect to. This is an excuse of traitors.

Mr. Speaker, excuse me. I feel for my country, in this her hour of danger, from the tips of my toes to the ends of my hair. That is the reason I speak as I do. I can not help it. I am bound to tell these men to their teeth what they are, and what the people, the true loyal people, think of them.

Mr. Speaker, I have said my say. I am no speaker. This is the only speech I have made, and I do not know that it deserves to be called a speech. I could not sit still any longer and see these scoundrels and traitors work out their hellish schemes to destroy the Union. They have my sentiments; let them, one and all, make the most of them. I am ready to back-up all I say, and I repeat it, to meet these traitors in any manner they may choose, from a pin's point to the mouth of a cannon.

I never before witnessed so much excitement in an assembly. Mr. Funk spoke with a force of natural eloquence, with a conviction and truthfulness, with a fervor and pathos which wrought up the galleries, and even members on the floor, to the highest pitch of excitement. His voice was heard in the stores that surround the square, and the people came flocking in from all quarters. In five minutes he had an audience that packed the hall to its utmost capacity. After he had concluded, the Republican members and spectators rushed up and took him by the hand to congratulate him. The Democrats said nothing, but evidently felt the castigation they were receiving most keenly, as might be seen from their blanched cheeks and restless and uneasy glances.

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