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Charges against General O. O. Howard.

REMARKS

OF

HON. CHARLES M. HAMILTON,

OF FLORIDA,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MARCH 3, 1871,

On the report of the committee charged with the investigation of the charges preferred against General O. O. Howard.

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, it would not be possible for the tersest speaker in the most compendious argument to fully and fairly present to the House the result of what is known as the Howard investigation in double the length of time allotted for its consideration.

In the several minutes, therefore, allowed me out of the meager two hours, for which I am much indebted to my honorable friend from Pennsylvania, [Mr. TOWNSEND,] I do not know that I can better serve a good purpose than by presenting the impression which, as the trial progressed, grew into a painful conviction in my mind, as a member of the committee charged with the investigation of the accusations preferred against General Howard by the honorable gentleman on my left, [Mr. WOOD,] of the object of the attack and the character of the investigation.

The charges, the testimony, and the facts are before you in an impartial, full, and exhaustive report of the majority, signed by eight of the ten members of the committee. With no purpose to reflect in the slightest degree upon my honorable colleagues on the commit-

tee, I deem it but proper, if not necessary, to state that the province and prerogative imposed by the House upon the committee "to investigate all the charges therein [in the statement of Mr. WOOD] contained," were, in a great measure, surrendered by the committee into the hands of counsel retained by the respective parties interested, whose issue was joined and examination conducted before, but not really by, the committee. The "investigation," consequently and inevitably, thus assumed the character of a prosecution on the part of the distinguished member from New York [Mr. WOOD] on the one hand, and of a defense on the part of that Christian soldier, General Howard, on the other.

That this "investigation" became a prosecution of the most relentless, vindictive, and partisan character, I need but bring to the proof not only the *animus* of the prosecution exhibited on almost every one of five hundred and forty-nine pages of the report in my hand, which is in the possession of every member of the House, but also by the distinct announcement of that fact by the minority

of the committee itself, in their mischievous, malicious, and unwarrantable report, in the following unmistakable language, to wit:

"That the party which employed this bureau as an effective and valuable partisan agency should now hesitate to bring its agents to the bar of public judgment for their frauds and evil deeds, and should put obstacles in the way of those who desire to elicit the truth, is perhaps not a matter of great surprise. They, at least, did the party work well for which they were employed, and their peculations must now be covered up or winked at. But these evasions will not longer satisfy an indignant public. The people are tired of being plundered to keep any party in power; and those who have robbed the people of their hard earnings, and, in the name of humanity and Christian philanthropy, have first misled, duped, and debauched, and then swindled the ignorant negroes whom they pretended to befriend, cannot always escape a just retribution for their hypocrisy and their crimes.

"With these comments we commit to the House and to the country our views of the operations of the Freedmen's Bureau, which the majority of the committee has permitted to come before us in the way of public documents, and such testimony of witnesses as were produced.

"A generous and grateful people will thank Hon. FERNANDO WOOD for his single-handed and gallant attack upon the abuses and corruptions of the Freedmen's Bureau, of which they have so long complained, and which has been so successfully made in this investigation. We submit for consideration the following resolution, and ask its adoption."

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, "they (the minority) at least did their party work well, for which they were employed," and their partisan purpose and political gerrymandering "must now be covered up and winked at," at the desperate expense of the exalted reputation of a man than whom few if any in the land are more righteous, zealous, brave; who justly stands high in his country's confidence and esteem, and whose Christian character, wisdom, honesty, and ability in his faithful administration of the great trust of the Freedmen's Bureau shine as lustrously as the glory he won on the heights of Gettysburg, both of which have come forth from the Democratic furnace of this wanton persecution in the interest of a corrupt party organization brighter than ever before.

No, sir, "a generous and grateful people will" be very far from thanking the gentleman from New York, who so mysteriously assumed the "single-handed, gallant" championship; who became the eager partisan and self-constituted champion, as the record exhibits, "of an attack" as ridiculous and unprovoked as it was wanton and personal, which was instituted at the instance of those who wore not the livery of the prince whom they served, and prosecuted in the shameful interest of the rebel democracy.

I do not envy the gentleman's reputation, I do not envy that man's character who can, in cool blood, without a shadow of provocation, deliberately strike down any man, much less a man whose faithful services and personal sacrifices in the hour of his country's desperate need, whose noble, earnest, philanthropic devotion to the cause almost divine, of disenfranchising and elevating the millions of our new citizens, entitle him to the "thanks of a generous and grateful people." "I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity of the whole body."

Now for the resolution reported by this just, Christian-spirited, disinterested, and charitable minority:

"Resolved, That a copy of the testimony taken by the Committee on Education and Labor, in the investigation of the charges made by Hon. FERNANDO WOOD, of New York, against Major General Oliver O. Howard, be referred to the Secretary of War, with directions to order a court-martial for the trial of said Howard upon the charges so made."

Sir, that monstrous resolution, when read at the Clerk's desk at the close of the last session, fell like a thunderbolt upon the ears of the country. Though it mortified, it did not wholly surprise me. I expected it. It followed the premises of the spirit of the prosecution with syllogistical consistency. One word and I have done. That the judgment of the minority is utterly unwarranted by the facts elicited, unjust,

cruel, and outrageous, is as true as the other fact that not a single charge was sustained where criminality attached, and that the honest, patient defense was but two days in refuting the prosecution's fifty-eight days' persecution.

I ask the Clerk to read the resolution of the majority, signed by eight of the ten members of the committee, and at the same time I ask how two such resolutions could possibly come from the same committee? The hearts of men bear even less semblance to each other than do their countenances.

I conscientiously believe, sir, and I state it as a proposition, that there is as wide a difference in the nature, temperament, disposition, and

elemental constitution of a Republican and a Democrat as there is in anything in the moral or material universe.

I ask to have the resolution reported.

Resolved, That the policy pursued by the United States toward four and a half millions of its people suddenly enfranchised by the events of a great civil war, in seeking to provide for them education, to render them independent and self-supporting, and in extending to them civil and political equality, is a source of just national pride; and that the House hereby acquits Major General Oliver O. Howard of the groundless and causeless charges lately preferred against him, and does hereby declare and record its judgment that in successfully organizing and administering with fidelity, integrity, and ability the Freedmen's Bureau, which has contributed so much to the accomplishment of the first two of these great ends, he is deserving of the gratitude of the American people.

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