

the very highest development of the States' rights theory.

Now, sir, *quantum mutatis*, we were not satisfied with that; we adopt the theory of consolidation, and instantly, upon the adoption of that theory, comes, as a necessary consequence, coercion. If you have all power over these States of course you must enforce it when they recalcitrate. Three brief years, and we have expended, I believe, more money, or created more debt than we did in all the seventy-two before. We have burdened our posterity, not to speak of ourselves, with an almost crushing weight of debt. We have overturned all the principles upon which our Government has been, heretofore administered. We have set aside every guarantee that surrounded property; we have destroyed the habeas corpus, we have rendered the bill of rights of Maryland a nullity, and we have submitted to despotism in every form in which it can be exercised—to the cruellest of all despotisms, that of mean and contemptible subordinates, who are responsible to nobody, and from whose oppression you can have no relief. We have in Maryland sounded the lowest depths that any people can sound, in the practice of oppression and the practice of tyranny.

But to take a broader field of view than that. What have we now under the new theory and practice of the Government? We have a country divided, distracted, ruined, devastated. I know the evils that have sprung from this, and appreciate them.

Mr. SANDS. Will the gentleman allow me to ask him a question?

Mr. BELT. Not now. I feel as the gentleman from Baltimore city (Mr. Cushing) who spoke of it has said he feels. He spoke of the horrors of this war, as shown in the treatment of prisoners. It is horrid if true; I mourn over it and weep over it. If true it is a disgrace to human nature. But that is not the only evil consequence that has resulted from this system. My tears also flow when I recollect that that portion of the mother of States, the mother of Presidents, the great originator of the very principles which we hold most dear as the very substratum of constitutional liberty in the known world—that portion of Virginia which stretches from Washington to the Rapidan, embracing Mount Vernon and other classic spots is this day a howling wilderness; that outside of the town of Fredericksburg there is scarcely a tenement to be seen standing, scarcely a tree that is not uprooted. When I think of the horrors resulting from this war, I bring to memory the defenceless women and children who have been driven from their homes, and who, as they have paused upon the adjacent hills, have witnessed the fires that consumed the places where they were born, the homes of their ancestors for upwards of a century.

I look on the houseless babes turned out, the fatherless children sent upon a cruel world, under circumstances of deprivation, and nearly of starvation in the restricted condition of the South, these houseless people, these suffering women and the weeping children, that were as much entitled to mercy as prisoners of war were entitled to it, because they were in your power; they were within your lines; you destroyed their country. There are two sides to this question of horrors.

We are asked, and I am amazed at the apparent sincerity with which gentlemen ask the question, whether we have any reason to believe that peace would ensue, if a proposition were made. You do not try it. You say that we shall not try it. If we suggest it, you say we are traitors. We are traitors here to-day, on your theory, unless we endorse the doctrine that nobody is ever to propose peace. In other words, it is to be war all the time. Try peace. They who have proved themselves so terrible in conflict, are cunning in counsel also. If we cannot suggest the means by which peace can be secured, perhaps they can. Perhaps they can indicate the terms upon which they are willing to restore the Constitution and a common government in all the States. Why not try it? Why proceed in this wild destructive scheme? Why are these armies confronting each other for a week at a time in deadly conflict, strewing the whole earth with corpses? Can nothing be done? Is no proposition to be made? Cannot the stronger party in the fray be generous enough to propose a cessation of strife—an armistice? Nobody knows the result that would come from it. You take it for granted that no terms will be offered, or that they will be inadmissible, and therefore you do not make the offer. You have no right to take that for granted.

I plant myself here to-day, independently of all party prejudices, independently of all constructions of the Constitution, all powers and all rights, in favor of peace; because it is the primary essence of any liberty, any government, or the enjoyment of any right which a freeman is interested in having. I want peace, and not the sword. I want a cessation of this horrid conflict. I do not presume to say who is right and who is wrong about it. Doubtless, both are wrong in a measure. I say, stop this strife, which is pursued in violation of the theory of government established by Washington, that we have no right to subjugate a portion of the country. Recall these armies, and have an armistice declared. I have a hope, if nobody else has, that it will be possible, after this exhaustion, bloodshed, suffering and demoralization, after this humiliation of ourselves in the eyes of our consciousness, and in the eyes of foreign nations, for arms to cease to clash,