

SPEECH OF
HON. GEO. R. LATHAM,
AT THE
**Semi-Centennial Celebration of West
Virginia Statehood**
HELD AT
WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA,
JUNE 20, 1913.

The 20th day of June is the most important day in the history of Virginia and of West Virginia. On the 20th day of June 1861, 52 years ago, the Government of Virginia was rehabilitated with Frances H. Pierpont as Governor.

He served, as such, two years to a day with the seat of his Government at Wheeling. June 20th 1863 the new state was born, and Arthur I. Boreman inaugurated its Governor.

Thus the territory embraced within the limits of the new state slipped out from under the seat of the restored Government which was transferred, same day, to Alexandria, where it remained until May 1865, about one month after the capture of Richmond and the surrender of Lee, when it was moved to Richmond and its authority thence extended over the whole state, and that is the Government of Virginia today, for Appomattox wiped out the last vestige of the Letcher Government.

When we read the history of the Continental Congress and of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, and consider the far reaching consequences of their labors, we are constrained to say—"There were Giants in those days," and when sufficient time shall have elapsed for "distance to lend enchantment to the view," our Great Grand children, in studying the history of the Western Virginia Conventions of 1861-2, and their far reaching consequences, will be constrained to say, "There were Giants in those days."

I consider that the first convention which met in Wheeling on the 13th day of May 1861 accomplished more than

any other legislative body that ever met in the history of the world in the same length of time considering the environments and the difficulties to be overcome. This convention was composed of 422 delegates from 27 counties, determined men, impelled together by the purest patriotism, prepared to dare and do what, upon consultation, might seem necessary to preserve to us and our posterity the heritage bequeathed to us by the sacrifices, the treasures and blood of our Revolutionary Fathers. And they paid their own expenses to and from Wheeling and their hotel bill while in Wheeling. When they first met possibly no two were agreed as to what ought to be done or could be done: and yet so determined and so electrified by pure patriotism were they that in three days this vast assemblage agreed, with but two dissenting voices, upon thirteen resolutions, embodying the true principles of representative Republican Government, which formed the basis of all subsequent action leading to the rehabilitation of the Government of the state of Virginia and the creation of the state of West Virginia.

And the second Convention which met on the 11th day of June, and continued in session 12 days composed of 98 delegates from 33 counties struck a blow right in the face of the Rebellion from which it never recovered, by restoring the Government of Virginia and bringing it back into harmony with the Government of the United States, During the rebellion there were two Political Military agencies put forward which were of supreme importance, viz: The restoration of the Government of Virginia and the Emancipation Proclamation. I have not time now to discuss and compare the merits of these agencies, but will just state that, in my opinion the restoring of the Government of Virginia added more strength to the Union cause than the Emancipation Proclamation, especially coming as it did two years earlier in the contest and giving to the Union cause 36,000 as brave soldiers as ever wore the Blue. The influence of the restoration of the Government of Virginia was national and material; that of the Emancipation Proclamation was world-wide and moral, but could not add a man to the army or a dollar to the

exchequer of the country, because the Government had full power over them without it.

And the creation of the state of West Virginia added nothing to the ability of the Government in putting down the Rebellion, because it occupied territory only, which, under the restored Government of Virginia, was already giving its full strength for that purpose. The importance of the creation of the state of West Virginia was local—the adjustment of a quarrel which has existed between the East and the West of the state of Virginia, with respect to taxation and representation, since Colonial days—of importance and value to its own citizens only, and they have made magnificent use of it.

In the creation of the state of West Virginia there was no mistake made. Every act, from its inception to its admission into the Union, was in perfect accord with the Constitution and laws of the country, as was the creation of Kentucky out of territory of Virginia in 1792, and Maine out of territory of Massachusetts in 1820.

Now, Fellow Citizens: I have no doubt we will agree that "There is a Divinity which shapes our ends, rough-hugh *how* them as we may." The Creator of the Universe govern human affairs through human instrumentalities, and He never imposes responsibilities without inspiring the agencies to meet them. When he determined to drown the wickedness of the world with a deluge, he did not catch Noah and his family up in the clouds and hold them there until the waters should assuage and then let them down to "multiply and replenish the Earth," but imposed upon Noah the work of bulding an Ark to save himself and family. When the time came to deliver His chosen people from Egyptian bondage, he did not send the Angel Gabriel with a flaming sword to lead them out, but put the humble and lowly Moses in training for that purpose. When the time approached to erect on this Continent a Government to be a model to the nations of the Earth, he put the young Washington in training.

And as the time approached when the falsehood in the Declaration of Independence should be rectified and the shackles be struck from the wrists of 4,000,000 slaves he

put the humble and low born Lincoln in training for the work. But my Fellow Citizens, it required the men behind the guns and on the firing line, Saratoga and Yorktown to give lasting effect to the Declaration of Independence and to secure to Washington the title of "First in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen,"

And it required the men in blue behind the guns and on the firing line, Gettysburg and Appomattox, to give lasting vitality to the Emancipation Proclamation, to confirm to West Virginia her title to statehood, and give to us a united country—united not in name only, but in interest and sympathy—a World Power, with more influence in the Congress of Nations than any other nation on earth. And if there are any present, I care not from what state or section they come, who wore the blue and stood behind the guns and on the firing line in the 60's, they are entitled to seats of honor on this occasion.

Now, Comrades of 50-52 years ago, civil and military! Our ranks are thin and thinning. But a stricken few remain. The vast majority have answered the last roll call on this side the river, and are camping on the other side, and we too must soon join them.

The time and place which now knows us will soon know us no more forever, but our work will last and its influence will be felt while time endures. As matter is indestructible, so an influence launched on the sea of human activities is never lost.

If we have borne true and faithful allegiance to the sovereignty of our Country, let us remember that there is a higher sovereignty to which we owe a more exalted type of allegiance. The sovereignty of the King of Kings—the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, and "so live that when the summons comes for us to join the innumerable caravan which moves to that mysterious realm where each shall take his chamber in the silent halls of death, we go not like the galley slave at night, scourged to his dungeon, but sustained and soothed by an abiding trust, having fought a good fight and finished our course, we approach our ends as one who draws the drapey of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams."