SECTION TWO

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Jim Peterson
Red Cloud, Nebraska

Lexington and Ft. Sumter

Address Delivered By L. H. Blackledge Before Red Cloud High School on April 19th, 1912.

In making preparation for this little address, I have discovered that in one thing, I am like a great man.

It is related of President Lincoln that during the civil war at a time when Mr. Stephens, for the Confederacy, was in conference with Lincoln looking toward the procurement of peace by the withdrawal of Union forces, he used as an argument a reference to Charles I in his treatment with rebellious subjects.

To this Lincoln replied: "I am not strong on history. I depend mainly on Sec'y Seward for that; all I remember about Charles is, that he lost his head."

I am not strong in history. But, I have no one to depend on for it. I therefore, have done something in the way of preparation, that I may speak with accuracy as to times and places and men.

The one cause I have for regret is, that the wonderful subjects assigned me should need to be disposed of in the limited time at my command, having reference both to the preparation and delivery of this talk.

I take up a book, which I find to be a biography of Washington, Hamilton, Adams, or of Lincoln, Grant, Sherman or Lee, remarkable histories of great national characters—yet by comparison these were simply the chess men on the board in two games of the nation, in the great tournament of national life which was and is, and is to be.

And we deal this morning not with incident or epoch in the lives of great characters, but with two great crises in the life of our beloved country, wherein men, however great, are but as grist to the mill the gods do grind. Whereas, as in finance, we have been accustomed to think and speak in terms of dimes or dollars, we must now think in terms of millions or of inexhaustible mines. We must think of our country as one big living creation; as a child from the hand of God, in the process by which He peopled the earth; as having a birth, a life to live and, possibly, a death to die.

We come into the world having certain capacities, and tendencies and surrounded by certain conditions none of which are within our control. As we acquire the faculties of reason and judgment, we learn to make decision. The decision once made, affects, to a greater or less extent, our whole life and character. The more important of these may be termed crises. They were, though we knew it not at the time, and could not forsee the end, the "turning point," as we say in our life. A crisis is preceded by certain conflicting emotions, desires, purposes and influences. The decision once made, the step taken, the die cast, we rally our forces and shape our course according as we have chosen. The causes we know or learn when the crisis comes. The decision is well or ill at the time it is made accordingly as it is based upon principles of right and justice or the contrary. The demonstration comes with following time and events.

It is to two great crises in our national life that our attention is this morning directed. The one in its infancy, the other in mature years.

'Tis nothing for me to say that the Battle of Lexington occurred on April 19, 1775, or that Fort Sumter was fired upon April 13, 1861. I had as well refer to the chronology of the Almanac, giving "this date in history" where I find in one opposite the date of April 18, that "Paul Revere exceeded the Massachusetts speed limits 1775."

In order to know these things in their true light, we must know them in connection with, and relation to, other events. In my personal experience, nothing has helped me so much toward a remembrance of certain of the acts and characteristics of Napoleon as the reading of the historical novels, "Old Fritz and the New Era" and "Napoleon and the Queen of Prussia."

April has been an eventful month, in the life of this nation, as you shall see.

"Listen my children and you shall hear, of the midnight ride of Paul Revere. On the eighteenth of April in seventy-five," etc.

A hurry of hoofs in a village street,
A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in
the dark,
And beneath, from the pebbles, in
passing, a spark,
Struck out by a steed, flying fear-
less and fleet.
That was all; and yet,
Through the gloom and light,
The fate of a nation was riding that
night.

Lexington was a little town in Middlesex Co., Mass., situated eleven miles northwest of Boston. Here was the first battle in the first great crisis in our national life. Not important in the number engaged, for they were few, nor because of its duration, for it was short; nor in the number killed, for they were less than a hundred of the colonists and about two hundred and fifty British regulars.

But it was the climax—the breaking of bonds between the old and the new. All the things which you find set down in the Declaration of Independence had taken place. The Colonists were sorely tried, the binding cord was ready to break under the strain, the magazine needed but the application of a match. Truly as our poet has said, "The fate of a nation was riding that night." And who was this Paul Revere, the herald who ushered in that memorable first shedding of blood? Is he simply a poet's fancy or did he really live?

He was a silver smith, or what would now be termed a jeweler—a worker in fine metals and copper plate engraver. He actually made the ride as described by the poet Longfellow, and he was, at the time, about forty years of age. He lived nearly forty years after the Revolution, dying 1818 at the age of eighty-three.

The real purpose for which the eight hundred regulars had been sent out was to arrest Samuel Adams and John Hancock, then hiding in Lexington. They were known to be leaders of the people in organizing and drilling militia or minute-men, and in the whole movement among the people then going on in defiance of the recent special acts of Parliament.

There was really no organization—just bands of men with a common purpose and accepting a common leadership. There was no government with authority to issue a call to arms, but the little Battle of Lexington was the torch that fired the magazine. Two thousand minute-men had gathered, before night fall, when the British found shelter with the ships in the harbor. Within two weeks Boston was beset by an untrained army of sixteen thousand men. The whole country was aroused. From New York to Georgia the news spread, and nearly every royal government in America then fell.

Off in the wilderness of Kentucky some pioneers were building a settlement. They heard the news, and they named this settlement Lexington. Exactly three weeks following Lexington, the fortress Ticonderoga, was surrendered to the command of Ethan Allen, "in the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress," as he led less than a hundred "Green Mountain Boys."

Remember that these things happened more than a year before the great Declaration, but they were the beginning; and the end was not to be for eight long years of privation, starvation, and sickness and death and all the horrors and all the glory of the war.

Exactly eight years later, April 19, 1783, Washington proclaimed the war at an end, eighteen months after the surrender at Yorktown, and the first great crisis in our national existence was passed.

There grew then, for nearly seventy five years, a great new nation, expanding, developing, progressing. The great men, by whose courage and wisdom, under the hand of God, the nation had been clothed and fed, were laid aside as worn out tools, and a new scene comes to us in the life of this young hero country in which are new people, new forces, new issues.

On the body of the tree of liberty had grown two great blights—the doctrine of the supremacy of the state over the Union, and the practice of slavery. These had their advocates and opponents and, as before, the tension grew so great that it seemed the house of the nation must divide against itself.

The rumblings and mutterings were heard for many years.

And here I want to pause to pay some tribute to a character to whom tirbute is, in my judgment, due, but is not generally given. We read of him as a great General but not as a great President. We know him as a South Carolinian, but not as one who by his wise acts and decision, saved the breaking of the bonds of Union for at least thirty years.

His native state, afterwards the first to secede, had passed what was called a Nullification Act, declaring certain acts of congress of no force or validity in that state. It was on the occasion of the Jeffersonian banquet, April 13, 1830, just thirty-one years before the surrender of Ft. Sumter, when the toasts and speeches, among them that of Calhoun, were almost open advocacy of secession. The president had been put in this crowd for the purpose of drawing him out and, if possible, committing him to a recognition of the claimed right of secession.

And in the face of that wave of secession, and the powerful influence which had then drawn away three members of his cabinet, not forgetting the state whose son he was, in the dignity of manhood, the majesty of greatness, and the spirit of prophecy, he announced as his toast, "The Federal Union. It must and shall be preserved."

Such was Andrew Jackson, the man of decision; and it is said that afterwards one approached him with the remark that "I am about to return to the state," and enquiring whether the President had any message to his South Carolina friends:

"Yes; I have a message for my friends of South Carolina. Their state is a part of the Union and a part of the Union it shall remian. You may tell them that if one South Carolina finger be raised in defiance of this government that I shall come down there; and once there, I'll hang the first man I lay hands on to the first tree I can reach."

Not for thirty years did South Carolina recover from the presidential set back.

Meantime the issues tightened and the tension increased.

Slavery was the primary topic. The great Lincoln and Douglas debates had made the rail splitter widely known, and he was elected president. For an interesting history of these stirring times, in just as interesting story form I recommend you to "The Crisis" by Winston Churchill.

Each element held back from the delivery of the first blow, the shedding of the first blood. Before Lincoln was inaugurated South Carolina had adopted its secession act, the first of the states so to do.

Ft. Sumter was on an island in Charleston Harbor, garrisoned by about a hundred men under the command of Major Anderson, the only Union tree in that vast forest of secession. A vessel sent to carry supplies to the fort had been fired upon and turned back. Yet the break had not occurred. Seven states had left the Union, and seized U. S. property worth $30,000,000.

What a task had Lincoln!

Ft. Sumter was the key to the harbor of the chief seaport of the south, except New Orleans. The provisions were low, and if not relieved, Anderson must abandon it. The North could not yield the fort without acknowledging the independence of the Confederacy. The south intimated that any attempt to supply the fort would be considered an act of war. Lincoln finally caused the Governor of South Carolina to be notified of the shipment of supplies to the fort.

President Davis called a cabinet meeting, and both he and Lincoln now knew that war was inevitable.

At the cabinet meeting but one voice was raised in opposition. It was by Mr. Toombs, Davis' Sec'y of State, who said: "At this time it is suicide, murder and will lose us every friend at the north. You will wantonly strike a hornet's nest which extends from mountain to ocean, and legions now quiet will swarm out and sting us to death."

Other counsel prevailed, and at daylight April 12, 1861, the curtain was rung up on the great tragedy, but a shrieking shell from Sullivan's Island.

Like the shock of death, though the world expected it, the effect was magical throughout the north.

Emerson said: "Ft. Sumter crystallized the north into a unit and the hope of mankind was saved.

The surrender came on April 13, after 34 hours of bombardment. Like Lexington but few in numbers were engaged. The fatalities were less than Lexington, there being none at Ft. Sumter.

Two days later came Lincoln's call for 75,000 militia and a notable thing is that in the same newspapers and by side of the call was a statement by Stephen A. Douglas, Lincoln's lifelong and bitter opponent, even up to the very door of the white house. More than a million northern men looked to Douglas as their political leader. Aside from Lincoln, his was then the greatest influence in the north.

In an interview with Lincoln, he pledged his support and offered his services to the Uunion cause. And the statement of this interview was published beside the call for volunteers. Southern hopes of a divided north vanished like a mist and the great struggle between north and south was on.

The result you all know, and we have not time for more particulars. Just four years later, April 14, 1865, Major Anderson, now become General, raised over the ruined walls of Ft. Sumter, the identical flag he had been forced to haul down four years before. On that same day or evening in distant Washington the hand of an assassin, gave the death blow to our great war president, and into the midst of life came death.

These things are matters of history. And boys, remember this: When you read of the great and brave things that were done, of the Rock of Chickamauga, and the men who made it so, of Hancock at Gettysburg and the men he led, of Jackson and Lee, of Grant and Sherman and the rest, remember that of every five of those men who followed Sherman to the sea, and those who faced the hell of fire and lead at the Wilderness, at Gettysburg, at Shiloh, when they enlisted out of every five, four were boys of high school age not over eighteen; and of those fours, one in every twelve was under sixteen. And I recommend to you that when you meet those men on the street or elsewhere though some may be poor, and unlearned, and all are now old, that you show the respect that is due them for what they have been and done when as boys of your age, they became the nation's men, and went out and preserved for us, one and inseparable the best government and the fairest and freest land that "e'er the sun shone on."

Lexington and Sumter were the beginnings.

Yorktown and Appomatox marked the ends.

Between the two and out of the sacrifice of human life, there arose a great nation, and went down a great wrong, and God's purpose went on and on. And through the mists as we see the "broad stripes and bright stars," so gallantly streaming it is something and means something in this land we love.

Blue Hill Will Entertain in the Fall.

It is the general wish that Blue Hill put on a three or more days attraction this fall. When any good stunt comes to you, store it away where you can get hold of it later on. We want to something bigger, different and better than ever this year. Blue Hill is a town of considerable importance to a large territory, and when the people come here they always expect a little better time than shown them in other towns—and they have not yet been disappointed The people here wish it widely known that they are going to entertain this fall all who wish to to come. No hold up scheme about it—we will give you more even than you would expect, and it will be free. —Blue Hill Leader.

Wouldn't it be a good idea if the Red Cloud business men would get together and plan to attend this festival one day.