

You cannot restore the old Union

Time! time! is the great arbiter that is to decide where Virginia is to go. What nonsense to ask the question where we are to go. Why, where are you? Is Virginia a boat, that you can put on the water, and row up the coast and down the coast? Is Virginia a waggon that you can put upon wheels, and cart North and cart South? No, sir, she is, blessed be God, *terra firma*—as immovable as earth, rock, mountain, river and lake can be made. She is here in the latitude, of 37 deg., South of Mason & Dixon's line, with 500,000 slaves. Yet slaveholding State as she is, and southern State as she is, she has been caught by the dead fall of this crisis in the trap of a Northern Confederacy, and you will keep her there if you can. And now all I have got to say is that you have got to do one of two things; you have got to accomplish one of two purposes before you can satisfy me. Restore the blessed old Union if you can. Sir, you cannot out-union me. There is not a man among you who is readier to die to restore the old Union than I am. Restore it, restore it if you can. You cannot restore it without restoring those wronged and offended sisters that have gone out. You cannot restore it without restoring hearts, without reclaiming the hearts and dispositions of the offending sisters of the North who have driven those of the South out of the family.

I will agree to no compromise, so help me God, so long as I live, that comes short of that end. I will fight to the end, aye, to the bitter end, against any and all propositions that will not restore the old Union as it was, that will not be acceptable to the South as well as the North. Is there a hope of that? I have none. None upon the face of the earth. But you have, and if you have, hope on; and hope ever. So long as there is hope, I will give you fair time and opportunity. Not an unlimited time, not a resort to all resources, because they are infinite— infinite. To say that you will exhaust all means is to say you will never leave the Northern Confederacy.

And when gentlemen talk about the Union! the Union! the Union! I beg them to remember that there are now three Unions, two existing, and one destroyed. You are now in a Union of a Northern Confederacy; that is not the old Union; that has been sloughed off, and we are left a hopeless minority in a Northern Confederacy. While in the old Union, with a united South, we could to some extent, restrain the majority and beat back our aggressors; but



Transcription

you are now in a Union where you are dwarfed, not only upon the slave question, but upon other questions, in my humble judgment, of ten times more potency with some gentlemen here than slavery; and we are in a Confederacy where they delight to be, in my opinion. As for me, if you will not, or if you cannot restore the old Union, I will not—I never will consent that my State shall remain a permanent part and parcel of this new Northern Confederacy.

Citation: Excerpt from the speech of Henry Alexander Wise in the Virginia Convention on March 25, 1861, printed in George H. Reese and William H. Gaines, Jr., eds., *Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1965), 2:304–305.