THE ATTITUDE OF VIRGINIA LEADERS TOWARD SLAVERY AND SECESSION

PART II

Failing to see, or refusing to care, that the violent agitation at the North was embarrassing the friends of emancipation in the South, and that it had a powerful influence in defeating the measures of 1831-32 for emancipation, the lawless element of the Abolitionists of the North now increased their attacks upon the slave-holders of the South. Laws adroitly drawn had long since been passed in New England that after specified dates the offspring of female slaves in those states should be deemed free. In this way ample time was given for getting rid of the slaves by sale; and the opportunity was not neglected.35 "No law can be found on the statute book of any Northern state which conferred the boon of freedom on a single slave in being. All who were slaves remained slaves."36 The records of manumission in Virginia and in New England, when compared, do not leave Virginia in an apologetic attitude, to put the case mildly.

This lawless element among the Abolitionists could not find sufficient adjectives with which to condemn those who owned slaves. These slave-holders, the large majority of whom had inherited the slaves, and many of whom wished to free them if a way could be found to do it without injuring the freedmen, were denounced as "man stealers," as "thieves," and in other such gentle terms. One can readily see the great handicap thus put upon the friends of emancipation in the South. If it be said that this is the partisan opinion of a Southerner, my reply is that in 1837 Abraham

Lincoln, then a member of the Illinois legislature, said the same thing; and repeated the statement in stronger terms in 1852, when he declared that the Abolitionists "would shiver into fragments the Union of the States." And William E. Channing of Massachusetts said in 1835 that the Abolition "influence at the South had been almost wholly evil. The Abolitionists," he said, "proposed to convert the slaveholders, and approached them with vituperation, and exhausted upon them the vocabulary of reproach." And Daniel Webster of New Hampshire said in 1850, "Everything that these agitating people have done has been to bind the faster the slave population of the South." Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois denounced the Abolitionists in scathing terms for the same thing.

Mr. Munford brings out the fact that there now—in 1831-32—began a growth in the number of those who sought to justify slavery, this growth increasing pari passu with the growth of the violent Abolition movement in the East and North, led by the abusive and intemperate Garrison. He states that those who now began to assert that slavery was good in itself, and that it was sanctioned by religion, constituted a "new school." He does not justify this "new school," and neither do I, but one can sympathize with the human nature of it, while one deplores the evils resulting therefrom.

I have mentioned William Ballard Preston and William H. Broadnax as two Virginians who were foremost in the Virginia Assembly in their efforts for emancipation. You will pardon me for stating that these gentlemen were alumni of Hampden-Sydney College. And will you permit me just here to mention a few other Hampden-Sydney alumni who were leaders in this movement?

³⁵Alexander H. H. Stuart, Robertson, p. 165.

³⁶Idem, p. 173.

³⁷ Virginia's Attitude, Munford, p. 49.

Edward Coles of Albemarle County, class of 1805, inherited a large number of slaves. In 1819 he took them to the Territory of Illinois, gave them their freedom, and established them there in their own homes, giving each head of a family 160 acres of land. From a pecuniary standpoint this was a great loss, but in addition to this he brought upon himself the ill-will of citizens of Illinois Territory. Nicolay and Hay, in their biography of Abraham Lincoln, state that Edward Coles "was indicted and severely fined (to the amount of \$1,000) for having brought his own freedmen into this State (Illinois) and having assisted them in establishing themselves around him upon farms of their own."38

Coles ran for governor of Illinois, chiefly upon the issue of emancipation, and in opposition to the effort to change the constitution of Illinois so as to permit slavery in that state, and was elected.39 Later, when Virginia was forced either to secede or to be herself enslaved, Edward Coles's son came back to Virginia and gave his life in her defense.

In the great debate in the Virginia Assembly of 1831-32, William H. Broadnax said, "That slavery in Virginia is an evil and a transcendent evil it would be idle and worse than idle for any human being to doubt or deny."40 Broadnax was a slaveholder, and like many others, wished to find a way to free his slaves without injury to them or to the whites. Philip A. Bolling, another Hampden-Sydney man, and a large slave-holder, said in the same debate:

"It is vain for gentlemen to deny the fact that the feelings of society are fast becoming adverse to slavery. Moral causes which produce that feeling are on the march and will go on, until the groans of slavery are heard no more in this else happy country."41

38 Abraham Lincoln, a History, Vol. I, p. 145. 39 Virginia's Attitude, Munford, p. 67.

Dr. James Jones of Nottoway County, Virginia, was a member of Congress from a district in which there were many slaveholders. His opposition to slavery was well-known. He was a large slave owner, and in his will he made ample provision for the manumission of his slaves and for their transfer to Liberia in case they wished to go there. After his death his widow carried out the provisions of his will.42 This

Captain Samuel Morgan of Nottoway County, a slave owner, was opposed to the institution, and in 1831, when on a business trip to New York City, he wrote a letter to his wife, in which he said, "I feel proud that I have this opportunity of putting my foot in a State where the shocking shame of slavery does not exist."43 This ownership of slaves and opposition to slavery in the same person is inconsistent to shallow minds; not to others.

Thomas Poague Hunt of Charlotte County, Virginia, after his graduation in 1813, inherited slaves. It was all the property he had. His father and mother were slaveowners. At the daily family prayers, when he was a boy, his mother's earnest supplications to God for wisdom in the care and final disposition of her slaves, led him to liberate all he inherited, and to send them to Liberia.44

In February, 1837, in the United States Senate, William C. Rives of Virginia replied to the position taken by Senator John C. Calhoun that slavery was a beneficent institution. I wish I had time to quote his great speech in full. Among other things he said:

"I have the satisfaction of reflecting that I follow the example of the greatest men and purest patriots who have illustrated the annals of our country-of the Fathers of the Republic itself. It

⁴⁰ Virginia Slavery Debate, 1832, White, Speech

of W. H. Broadnax, p. 10.

⁴¹ Idem, Speech of Philip A. Bolling, p. 15.

⁴²⁰ld Homes and Families in Nottoway, Turner, p. 90.

⁴³Idem, p. 10.

⁴⁴Cub Creek Church and Congregation, Gaines,

never entered into their minds while laying the foundation of the great and glorious fabric of our free government, to contend that domestic slavery was a positive good, a great good. Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Marshall, the brightest names of my home State, are known to have lamented the existence of slavery as a misfortune and an evil to the country, and their thoughts were often anxiously, however unavailingly, exercised in devising some scheme of safe and practical relief, proceeding always, however, from the States which suffered the evil."45

Notice that concluding statement, "Proceeding always, however, from the States which suffered the evil."

John Holt Rice, the great Presbyterian divine, an advocate of the education of all the children of all the people, and an earnest, though tactful, opponent of slavery, implored Northern ministers to influence the people of the North to allow the people of the South to solve the problem of slavery in peace. In 1827, while living at Hampden-Sydney, he wrote:

"I am fully convinced that slavery is the greatest evil in the South, except whiskey. I take the case to be just this: as slavery exists among us, the only possible chance of deliverance is by making the people willing to get rid of it. At any rate it is this or physical force. The problem to be solved is to produce that state of the public mind which will cause the people to move spontaneously to the eradication of the evil."46

And in the same year, in another letter, he said:

"I am confident that already material injury has been done in the way of impeding the progress of feeling in this country [Virginia] against slavery. There is a morale of opinion on this subject which, if uninterrupted, at no distant date will annihilate this evil in Virginia. Mischief from indiscreet agitation of the subject (from the outside) is much to be deplored."47

How easy it is today for those who think little, and know less, to decry the inconsistency of those slave-holders who expressed themselves as favorable to emancipation, but who in many cases did not free their slaves. Ripley, in his "Believe It or Not,"

called attention to the inconsistency, as he thought it, of Patrick Henry, who had slaves, and who said, "Give me liberty or give me death." Yet in a large number of instances the freedmen were worse off than the slaves. I have time to mention only two or three instances: Richard Randolph of Prince Edward County, a large slaveowner, freed his slaves and settled them, well provided for, near his home. They soon went all to pieces: abjectly poor, abjectly wretched, abjectly inefficient. John Randolph of Roanoke attempted to settle his 400 slaves, as freedmen, in Mercer County, Ohio, where they were forcibly prevented from making a settlement by a portion of the inhabitants of that County. At that very time, Ohio citizens, in harmony with New England citizens, were agitating for the immediate abolition of slavery in the South. They greatly loved the Negro-at long distance.

It would be easy, if one had the time, to mention many instances, between 1830 and 1860, of outrageous treatment of Negroes in Connecticut, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana—instances where they were mobbed and where they were denied opportunities for an education. But why be disagreeable?

What were the difficulties in the way of emancipation in the South?⁴⁸

1. Philip A. Bruce, than whom there is no greater authority on this whole question, states that the value of the slaves in the South in 1860 was approximately \$2,000,000,000. There were three forms of property in the South: land, Negroes, and live stock. To destroy the right of property in Negroes was to wipe out at once one-third of the accumulated wealth of the South. The Abolitionists of the East and North were demanding emancipation with-

⁴⁵Congressional Debates, Vol. XIII, part 1, p. 717.

⁴⁶Memoir of John Holt Rice, Maxwell, p. 306-7. 47Idem, p. 312.

⁴⁸For an able and dispassionate treatment of this question, see *Robert E. Lee*, American Crisis Biographies, Philip A. Bruce, pp. 70-83.

out compensation—a policy that would not have caused them to lose a penny. When Great Britain passed her emancipation laws, she paid a fair value to the owners of slave property.

2. This loss of capital by the South, insisted upon by the Abolitionists, would not have been all the loss that would have followed. In Jamaica, emancipation had resulted in the Negro losing his industry when he became free. If this followed in the South, land would immediately decline in value, and the few remaining interests in the South would of course shrink in proportion. Sudden and violent emancipation would result in bankruptcy.

3. Slavery was not wholly an economic system. It was interwoven with the whole social life of the southern people. To destroy it suddenly and violently "was to destroy a social fabric consecrated by all their historic memories, domestic traditions, and intimate personal affections," says Dr. Bruce.⁴⁹

4. If the slaves were liberated, what was to be their new status in the communities in which they lived? To quote Dr. Bruce again:

"There could be no social amalgamation without the disappearance of the white; there could be no common enjoyment of political rights without the degradation, if not the destruction, of all the foundations of order. . . . Could any country hope to flourish which numbered among its inhabitants millions of emancipated Africans, who were naturally averse to labor, and who, by withdrawal of the personal influence of their former masters, would tend to sink back, as had the negroes of Jamaica and Hayti, into their original state of barbarism?"50

I fully agree with Dr. Bruce when he says that although the situation was one full of perplexity, and although the difficulties and dangers of emancipation were great, "there seems now no room for doubt that ultimately Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland, Tennessee, North Caro-

lina, and perhaps Arkansas would have freed their slaves, had not the intemperate spirit of the Northern Abolitionists provoked a strong revulsion of feeling."51

Virginia's influence over the other Southern States, prior to 1861, was almost invincible. Beyond a doubt they would have followed her example. And there is a growing belief among students of history that if Virginia had been let alone, or if she had been encouraged in her efforts towards a solution of this difficult problem, instead of being attacked, there would not have been a slave in this country in 1865, and there would have been no war. That war was not necessary.

It may be said just here that the safety of the domestic institutions of the South. among them slavery, had been guaranteed by the United States Constitution, yet William Lloyd Garrison and other Abolitionists were openly in favor of ripping the Constitution to pieces. The people of Virginia knew that they were less responsible, and the other Southern people knew that they were no more responsible, for slavery than were the people of New England, who had been owners of slaves and, finding them unprofitable, had sold them, and who, as the records show, were "the chief carriers in the wretched traffic in human flesh and blood,"52

I have mentioned eminent Virginians up to 1831-32, and later, who were in favor of emancipation. I might have mentioned Patrick Shields, a class-mate of William Henry Harrison and Dr. James Jones at Hampden-Sydney, who was a member of the Constitutional Convention of Indiana, and who had a clause inserted in the Constitution forbidding slavery in that state. Of a later day were Jesse Burton Harrison, Matthew F. Maury, Bishop William Meade, Henry Ruffner, R. R. Howison, and scores

⁴⁹Robert E. Lee, Bruce, p. 72.

⁵⁰Idem, p. 72-73.

⁵¹ Idem, p. 73.

⁵²Robert E. Lee, Bruce, p. 74.

of others. Robert E. Lee emancipated his slaves, inherited from his mother, several years prior to the War of 1861-65. His wife inherited slaves from her father, but it was stipulated in his will that they were to be freed at the end of the first five years following his death. This date fell in 1862, and General Lee freed all of them in accordance with the provision in the will. In 1858 Lee set forth his opinion in favor of emancipation, and expressed the belief that emancipation would certainly come by peaceful methods, if the people of Virginia were permitted to handle this problem without interference.

General Joseph E. Johnston of Virginia was opposed to slavery and never owned a slave. General A. P. Hill of Virginia owned no slaves. General J. E. B. Stuart of Virginia, the great cavalryman of the Confederacy, inherited one slave from his father's estate and purchased another. One of these he sold because she was very cruel to one of his children, and the other he sold to a purchaser who was to undertake to return the slave to his former owner, as the slave desired. General Fitzhugh Lee, the Virginia cavalryman, never owned a slave. Stonewall Jackson owned two slaves, whom he purchased because they asked him to do so; and then he arranged for them to purchase their freedom by paying them wages and assuring them that these wages could be used for this purpose. One of the slaves, a man, purchased his freedom; the other, a woman, declined to do so and remained as a servant in General Jackson's family, receiving wages as if she were free.

What does make so many human minds impervious to facts? Why does it seem impossible for the people of the North, East, and West to arrive at the truth that the Southern people did not take up arms for the continuance of slavery, or in defense of it? Prof. A. B. Hart of Harvard University says that "out of 12,500,000 persons in

the slave-holding communities in 1860, only about 384,000 persons—or one in 33—was a slave-holder."⁵³

Dr. Hunter McGuire, who was the medical director of the Stonewall Jackson Brigade, 1861-65, says of this Brigade: "I knew every man in it, and I am in proper bounds when I assert that there was not one soldier in thirty who owned or ever expected to own a slave."54

President Lincoln published a warning that in 90 days he would issue an emancipation proclamation, to apply to those states and communities which were still in arms against the United States Government, but not to apply to the states and communities not in arms against the United States Government. If the South was fighting for slavery, she could have saved it by laying down her arms when this warning was published. Fighting for the rights guaranteed them in the United States Constitution, the Southern States refused to lay down their arms.

It would have been incongruous indeed for the Southern soldiers, of whom at least 25 out of every 30 owned no slaves, to have fought for the preservation of slavery. It would have been equally incongruous for General U. S. Grant, a slave-owner until the close of the War, to have fought for the abolition of slavery. It would have been highly inconsistent in Mr. Lincoln, with his declared views on slavery, on the fugitive slave laws, on the colonization of the Negro, to have made war on the South for the purpose of abolishing slavery.

What were Mr. Lincoln's views on these questions? We will let him speak for himself. And, first, it may be said that he was in position to know in an intimate way the Southern viewpoint, for he had lived in the border state of Kentucky and had married

⁵³ Slavery and Abolition, Hart, p. 67.

⁵⁴The Confederate Cause and Conduct, in the War Between the States, McGuire and Christian,

the daughter of a slave-owner. His position in reference to slavery and in reference to the colonization of the Negro was similar to the position of the Virginia leaders whom I have been quoting, as were his views on abolition. When a member of the Legislature of Illinois in 1837, he said:

"The institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy, but . . . the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than abate its evils. . . . The Congress of the United States has no power under the constitution to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different states." 55

Speaking at Springfield, Illinois, in 1857, Mr. Lincoln said:

"Such separation, if ever effected at all, must be effected by colonization. . . . The enterprise is a difficult one, but where there is a will there is a way; and what colonization needs most is a hearty will." 56

At his first inauguration, Mr. Lincoln said: "I have no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists. believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so." Certainly thus far no conflict of views can be found between Mr. Lincoln and the Virginia leaders. Let us proceed further. In his eulogy on Henry Clay, at Springfield, Illinois, in 1852, Mr. Lincoln said that Mr. Clay lived at a time "when slavery was already widely spread and deeply seated," and added, "He did not perceive, as I think no wise man has perceived, how it could be at once eradicated without producing a greater evil even to the cause of human liberty itself." He said in the same address:

"Those who would shiver into fragments the Union of these states, tear to tatters its now venerated constitution, and even burn the last copy of the Bible, rather than slavery should continue a single hour, together with all their more halt-

ing sympathizers, have received and are receiving their just execration."57

In an address at Peoria, Illinois, 1854, Mr. Lincoln had said, "When Southern people tell us that they are no more responsible for the origin of slavery than we are, I acknowledge the fact. . . . If all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do as to the existing institution. My first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia-their native land. But. . . if they were all landed there in a day they would all perish in the next ten days. . . . What next? them and make them politically and socially our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this. . . . We cannot make them equals."58 What was therefore an easy solution in the eyes of Garrison and his kind, was not an easy one in the eyes of Mr. Lincoln. He was bound to know of the great efforts that were being made by the American Colonization Society, composed of men of the North and men of the South, and the very backbone of which was Virginia support. It seems to have dawned upon him by 1857 that colonization would be a good thing, and he saw that this could be done only on a national scale. In 1849, when a member of Congress, he introduced a bill for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, the abolition to be only with the consent of its voters and with compensation to the slave-holders. In this bill it was provided that fugitive slaves escaping into the District, should be arrested and delivered up to their owners. 59 Do we find any marked differences thus far between the attitude of the Virginia leaders and the attitude of Mr. Lincoln?

By 1861 (December), he was calling upon Congress for money with which to colonize the thousands of slaves which had

⁵⁵ Abraham Lincoln, A History, Nicolay and Hay, Vol. I, p. 140.

⁵⁶Abraham Lincoln, Speeches, Letters, and State Papers, N. and H., Vol. I, p. 235.

⁵⁷ Idem, Vol. I, p. 174.

⁵⁸Lincoln-Douglas Debates, p. 74.

⁵⁹ Abraham Lincoln, Speeches, Letters, and State Papers, N. and H., Vol. I, p. 148.

come into the custody of the Federal authorities.⁶⁰ With a view of carrying out this act of Congress, adopted in 1862, Mr. Lincoln invited a number of prominent Negroes to the White House in August of that year, and urged them to consent to his plans. In his address to them he said:

"You and we are different races. We have between us a broader difference than exists between almost any other two races. Your race suffers very greatly, many of them by living among us, while ours suffers from your presence. . . If this be admitted, it affords a reason, at least, why we should be separated. The aspiration of men is to enjoy equality with the best when free, but on this broad continent not a single man of your race is made the equal of a single man of ours. . . . I do not propose to discuss this, but to present it as a fact with which we have to deal. I cannot alter it if I would."61

Thus far we see a close parallel between the Virginia view and Mr. Lincoln's view. But the parallel stops here. Despite Mr. Lincoln's previously declared views, and in open violation of the United States Constitution, he called for troops, and practically declared war on the South, when Congress alone had the power to declare war; he helped to dismember Virginia, by extraconstitutional acts; and he resorted to forcible abolition in the states which were in arms against his Government, while protecting slave-owners in other states and communities.

There is not time to discuss the right of secession, or Virginia's attitude towards it, except to say this: the *right* of secession was never questioned seriously until 1861. The *wisdom* of it was questioned seriously throughout the country. New England had more than once threatened to secede. The young men at West Point, preparing to enter the United States Army, studied a textbook in which the constitutional right of secession was taught. Virginia distinctly put on record the reservation of her right

to withdraw whenever she deemed it proper to do so, and the Union would not have been formed except for the great influence of Virginia and except for the princely domain she gave in order that this Union of States might be effected.

When the question of secession became acute, a Convention was called, and the delegates to the Convention were elected by the people on the issue, whether Virginia favored secession or was opposed to it. The people of the state by a large majority voted against the policy—not against the right—of secession.

At this very time a committee of Virginians was sent to Washington to urge Mr. Lincoln not to call out troops, but to give Virginia time to see whether she could reconcile the differences between the extremists on each side. It was understood by the committee that this request was granted. President Lincoln had asked the members of his Cabinet whether it would be wise to attempt to provision Fort Sumter. Five of the seven members of the Cabinet stated that the attempt should not be made either to provision or to reinforce the Fort, and expressed the opinion that an attempt to do this would probably lead to civil war.62

Mr. Munford pertinently says that "if such were the opinions of leading members of President Lincoln's Cabinet . . . can it be deemed unreasonable that the people of Virginia held similar views? . . . Men, not a few, will conclude that, if the explosion occurred at Fort Sumter, the mine was laid at Washington."63

Mr. Berkeley Minor has said:

"True statesmanship would have led him [Abraham Lincoln] to keep faith with the Virginia Convention, and repudiate the coercive measures urged upon him by Benjamin Wade and other war men in the North. Then Virginia and the

⁶⁰Messages and Papers of the Presidents, Vol. VI, p. 64.

⁶¹Life, Public Services, and State Papers of Abraham Lincoln, Raymond, p. 504.

⁶² Abraham Lincoln, Speeches, Letters, and State Papers, N. and H., Vol. II, pp. 11, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22.

⁶³Virginia's Attitude, p. 289.

other border states would have remained in the Union, and Lincoln's great talents might well have so guided the Republic as to win back in time the seceded states, with, or more probably, without, slavery; for slavery was already doomed; it was passing away even in South America, and must have come to an end in due time, under the pressure of a healthy public opinion, the slave states being left untrammeled and free from the fanatical threatenings, which had done so much to perpetuate slavery."64

The change of sentiment in Virginia was instantaneous. Knowing that she had done her utmost throughout all her history, first to prevent the entrance of slavery into her borders, and then to get rid of it; knowing that through her great influence the United States had become an entity; knowing that she had been the most potent influence in making the Northwest Territory forever free of slavery; knowing that the Louisiana Territory, and the control of the Mississippi River, had been added to the United States through the efforts and commanding influence of her mighty son, Thomas Jefferson; knowing that the vast empire of Texas had been wrested from the oppressions of the cruel Santa Ana, and his Mexican hordes, by the great Virginian, General Sam Houston; knowing that if a conflict of arms was precipitated, her soil would be the battle-ground and herself the greatest sufferer; knowing that whether the South won or lost, her own people were bound to undergo terrible sufferings-knowing all this, she did not hesitate a moment. Principle and honor were at stake; expediency or profit was not considered. Her soil was drenched with blood; the very flower of her manhood was martyred; her women and children were made to suffer in the extreme; her property was destroyed by forced emancipation, by the devastation of war, and by the ruthless and unpardonable destruction inflicted by General Sheridan and others.

Even this was not all: came those terrible years that followed the war—called

"the Reconstruction"; in reality years of devastation and humiliation—"The Tragic Era," as Bowers aptly calls it.

To me her history is one of tragedy. Having given more to the Union than any other State in the Union, she has suffered more than any other State because of that Union.

I bespeak for her a careful study of her history, a juster view of her motives.

J. D. EGGLESTON

WOT

HOW EDUCATIONAL IS FOOTBALL?

HE first time a college president ever spoke to me he said: "Addington, don't you think you'd like football? You seem to have a good amount of avoirdupois."

I stood on the campus walk and stared blankly at that man. He stared back a bit. Once I'd gained my power of speech, I said: "I didn't come here to play football." The president went his way and I went mine. Perhaps I gave him the wrong answer. I'm wondering. Perhaps I would now be a few steps further from primitive man if I'd played.

Then again I console myself by thinking that I have firm ankles, no shoulder that slips out of place when under a strain, no faulty collar bone; I do not limp when I walk; and I'm living—which some of the football fellows aren't doing because of a punch at the wrong place.

"Ah, well," folks argue with me, "those fifty who were killed in football last year—1931—shouldn't discourage us. People out walking fall down and get killed sometimes; folks go swimming and get drowned."

Now I believe that one's muscles as well as his emotions and his thinking apparatus should be educated. But does football do the trick as well as or better than any other bone-breaking blood-spilling method?

⁶⁴The Southern Churchman, Sept. 13, 1930.