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A STUDY OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN VIRGINIA DURING THE CIVIL WAR

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of History

University of Richmond

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

David Mason Armbrister

August 1958

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PREFACE

To one interested in that phase of American History which deals with the Civil War period it can be said, probably needlessly, that there certainly exists no lack of historical interpretations, romantic novels, or other works pertaining to this period. The flood of books and articles on this subject in the past few years has truly been astounding.

Yet, amidst this vast treasure of writings, there appear to be very few concerned with the question of political parties in the Old Dominion during these years of domestic war. Were parties active as before the war or absent because of the weight of the crisis? These are questions this writer has undertaken to answer.

One word of caution must necessarily be offered so as not to mislead any judgment that may be rendered. Although most of the information contained in the product has been drawn from original source materials, the measure of such information has resulted in a view that is much more public in character than private. Added material of a private nature would be effective in serving to render a certain desired balance, but further extended research failed to extract but a limited amount of this type of material.

The purpose in writing this paper is to advance an

opinion, one cushioned by actual factual findings brought forth in the course of research and study. This opinion holds that with the emergence of the Confederate States of America, and the ultimate inclusion of the state of Virginia in this confederation, political parties, as such, were stamped beneath the feet of marching soldiers and a patriotic, zealous citizenry, which was too concerned with the immediate state of war and their desire to secure independence from the "yankee" tyrants under their "dictator" Lincoln, to devote attention to matters of political differences. However, as will be pointed out in the course of the discussion, the cause did not always completely overcome men's passionate desires to cling to the past and dabble in matters which called forth old party intrigues and differences. The author's opinion declared, nevertheless, that it was really only after the Southern banner ceased to wave over the long ranks of grayclad warriors and the two sections began to labor to mend the ugly gash that had been opened in the nation, that political parties once again assumed their old places in the lives and affairs of Virginians.

It shall be the writer's plan to offer the reader the idea that Virginia's people concentrated their thoughts on the qualities and capabilities of men when considering whom they should nominate for the various public offices rather

than lining up behind these men solely because they were Democrats, Whigs, or some other party adherents.

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CHAPTER I

A BACKGROUND PRESENTATION

I. THE ELECTION OF 1860

Certainly the bonds of party allegiance had been as secure in Virginia in the years before the war as in any of the other states of the Union. The national presidential election of 1860 received special attention in this state as it did elsewhere in the South, and although the rail splitting Kentuckian, "Abe" Lincoln, could be assured of only a limited number of supporters among the people south of the Mason-Dixon line, the candidates of the other parties did succeed in dividing the total vote among themselves. The Review of Charlottesville labeled four parties in this contest: the Northern Republican party, "buoyant and stretching forth to enjoy the victory which seems already achieved"; the Southern Breckinridge group; the Northern Douglas party; finally, the Constitutional Union party, "equally diffused over the North and the South." Yet, in the light of all sound reasoning, the writers of this paper ventured to say that only Lincoln really stood a chance of election before the entire population.[1] An editorial entitled "Party Hate"

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[1] The /Charlottesville, Virginia/ Review, June 29, 1860.

brought to the surface the attitude of the Democratic party, which, although frightened by the grave threat of Lincoln's election to the presidency, refused to veer from a course in full support of their own candidates and offer backing to the Bell-Everett ticket, the Constitutional Union party.[2]

II. UNION VERSUS SECESSIONIST SENTIMENT

Yet, perhaps even at this period which preceded the actual outbreak of hostilities, the emphasis was being placed on the matter of union as opposed to secession. From a senator in the state legislature at the outset of this period and even as early as late December of 1859, one is able to gain some idea of the then prevailing situation. Senator John Claiborne, writing in a book dealing with his life in Virginia, declared that "the question was not now one of Whig or Democrat, but of the autonomy of the state, how its sacred rights, guaranteed by organic law could be preserved . . ." In essence, his words spoke of the main topics of discussion at this time, union or disunion, secession or revolution. Three parties, at least so called parties, became active at the dawn of these new and momentous days: (1) the Unionists, wholly devoted to the preservation of the Union; (2) a second Unionist element, devoted to the Union

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[2]Ibid., July 13, 1860.

just as long as equal rights, protection, and state autonomy could be secured by further guarantees of national compact; (3) the Secessionists, altogether committed to separation from the Union. This contest eventually narrowed down to a clear and definite struggle between the men resolutely Unionist in sentiment and the Secessionists.[3]

Senator Claiborne delivered a speech in the Senate Chamber on January 19, 1860 which held special significance in some of its lines.[4] Supporting the bill sponsored by Governor John Letcher to reorganize the state militia, enlarge the Virginia Military Institute, and authorize the purchase of munitions of war,[5] he said:

> Sir, the people of this state have set aside party prejudices and sectional disputes here at home, and they will rebuke the kindling of old fires of discord here. They desire to stand before the world with united front, in unbroken lines, and they will not be distracted by the quarrels of jealous leaders . . .[6]

The Review represented a genuine union sentiment as revealed by its constant and persistent appeal to its readers to go to the polls as lovers of a house that would stand

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[3]John Herbert Claiborne, Seventy Five Years in Old Virginia (New York and Washington: The Neale Publishing Company, 1904), p. 143.

[4]Ibid., p. 147.

[5]Ibid., p. 146.

[6]Ibid., p. 148.

firm upon its foundation, an unbroken union. In an extra edition which appeared on the day of election, the paper asked the question of the voters whether they came to the polls as "intelligent freemen--self conscious, thoughtful, capable men," or as Democrats, Whigs, or Americans. This particular vote, it asserted, held far deeper meaning than the old party ties which once controlled the people, and the issue of the day deserved the designation of "most momentous" since the question of aligning the state with the Confederacy posed the problem. Where would Virginia stand in this matter? Democrats were not being urged to vote for the man Bell, but for the preservation of the union. Disunion would bring with it certain consequences, as would the subsequent disruption of Civil War and membership in the Southern Confederacy. As the paper chose to regard it, the election of Lincoln would be disastrous enough in itself, but disunion would create ruin.[7]

III. LINCOLN ACHIEVES VICTORY

As students of history well know, Lincoln became the sixteenth president of the United States in 1861. The South failed to provide the vote that made possible his election, but the division of sentiments which prevailed among the

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[7]The Review, November 6, 1860.

population in regard to the other candidates aided greatly in spelling defeat for the cause of the South. The Review recorded the vote in Virginia as 74,681 for Bell, 74,323 for Breckinridge, 15,375 for Douglas, and only 1,929 for Lincoln with a total vote of 167,308.[8]

IV. VIRGINIA'S DILEMMA IN 1860

The rising tide of secession took on even greater proportions with the election to office of a man, whom the South considered dangerous, a great threat to their very way of life. The states of the deep South, led by South Carolina, were to launch the boat of secession, while those regions of the upper South were left with a most pressing issue to decide. The Review presented a very good portrait of the Old Dominion at this time, situated in that territory which served as a line of separation between the two hostile sections. Here is this portrait in words:

> Old Virginia, like a sober matron, is grave and silent--apprehending alone the full meaning of the catastrophe. She feels the injury which has been put upon her, but she dearly loves that glorious country with whose fortunes she has been so long identified. She knows too when the work of dismemberment begins, the flag will be torn into a hundred fragments. She knows, if that bright galaxy is disturbed, star by star may swing from its mooring upon some undiscovered and trackless pathway.[9]

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[8] Ibid., December 7, 1860.

[9] Editorial in ibid., November 9, 1860.

Virginia had to decide which path she would follow in this hour of crisis. Her stubborn belief in the good of the Union had been demonstrated by the support that was given Bell in the 1860 election, despite the close margin that he held over Breckinridge. Now with renewed efforts assisted by an intense desire to effect some sort of harmony between the two contending forces, in the hope that the union could be preserved and held intact, she set out upon a course considered by her own statesmen to be the most likely one by which their hopes could be realized. However, she did not leave folded any of her notes, informing both sides of her position in this matter.

In a message delivered before an extra session of the state legislature, convened on January 7, 1861 the governor, John Letcher, recommended the calling of a convention of all the states for the purpose of discussing the questions in controversy. If an agreement could not be reached, then the matter of peaceful separation and adjustment of all questions related to the disposition of the common property between the two sections should be considered. He urged the legislature to enact resolutions to this end and to strive for the cooperation of the several states in the application proposed to be made to Congress. If those non-slaveholding states refused to agree or comply, then this would be an indication of their intention to continue their agitations

and attacks on the South. If there was a meeting but no results, this would be simply another form of Northern resistance, evidencing their determination to stand opposed to reconciliation. Virginia must look to her own interests with everything that was at stake, and in her position between North and South, there was every opportunity to enact the role of mediator. Yet, she would stand firm against any policy of coercion, whether it originated with northern or southern states. The blame for the then prevailing condition of public affairs rested with the non-slaveholding states and the fall of the union would attach to them full responsibility. Lincoln's "House Divided" speeech, delivered in 1858, had resulted in an aroused alarm and resentment in the South with its underlying implications. Letcher issued this warning: "I will regard any attempt to pass Federal Troops across the territory of Virginia for the purpose of coercing a southern seceding state, as an act of invasion which should be met and repelled . . ."[10] Thus did Virginia make known to those on all sides her position and her probable course of action, governed by circumstances as they developed with the passing of time.

She took the initiative in summoning the other states,

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[10]The Daily /Petersburg, Virginia/ Express, January 8, 1861.

those whose views coincided with hers in their outlook at this troubled situation and who wished for a friendly and peaceful settlement of the issues confronting the nation to send commissioners to Washington on February 4, 1861 for the purpose of holding a Peace Convention or Peace Congress. She extended her efforts even more greatly by sending commissioners to South Carolina, the leader in the secession movement and a consistent trouble maker in this crisis, and other seceded states to seek to persuade them to abstain from any course of action that might hamper and make ineffective the work of the Peace Congress.[11] To this meeting in Washington, Virginia sent William Rives, Whig adherent, James A. Seddon, Secessionist, George W. Summers, Democrat, John Tyler, Secessionist, and John W. Brockenbrough, who was as close to one party as the other.[12] This Peace Congress was a valiant effort to stem the force of the rolling stone of secession, but it was effort spent for naught.

At the same time that the Peace Convention was meeting in the nation's capital, Virginia was holding a special convention of her own within the chambers of the capitol building

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[11]Landon C. Bell, The Old Free State; a Contribution to the History of Lunenburg County and Southside Virginia (Richmond: The William Byrd Press, Inc., Printers, 1927), I, 559.

[12]John Minor Botts, The Great Rebellion: Its Secret History, Rise, Progress, and Disastrous Failure (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1866), p. 185.

in Richmond. On February 4, 1861 an election called the qualified citizens of the state to the polls to select men to represent them at this particular assembly. Candidates "representing the different shades of thought" were put forward for the vote. There was the group which desired immediate secession, a second element which clung tenaciously to the bonds of union, and finally, a third class which favored secession, only if every effort to save the union failed. The campaigning revealed a high spirit among the people, while issues were discussed with a range and ability of unusual caliber. The public showed a keen interest in this election.[13]

The election saw the contention between Union men and Secession men, not Whig, Democrat, or any other previously known political party. From a writer of Augusta county history, we learn that certain men were selected as Union men to represent the county in this convention.[14] From another report we discover that in Norfolk, Virginia, on January 24, "secession citizens" met to nominate a candidate for the election.[15] On February 4, the day of the election,

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[13]Bell, op. cit., p. 566.

[14]Joseph A. Waddell, Annals of Augusta County, Virginia from 1726 to 1871 (second edition; Staunton, Virginia: C. Russell Caldwell, Publishers, 1902), p. 456.

[15]H. W. Burton, The History of Norfolk, Virginia (Norfolk: Norfolk Virginian Job Print, 1877), p. 42.

the Union candidate emerged victorious over his Secession opponent. The writer continued on to comment that throughout the entire state on this special occasion a majority of the delegates were elected as Union men.[16] The Rockingham Register of February 8 acknowledged the fact that research and study brought out time after time, in regard to the over-all picture of political activity during the period, when it stated that "politics were ignored in the canvass." In politics before the war the delegates of this particular location stood two Democrats and one Whig.[17]

The convention remained in session during the months of February, March, and April of 1861, representing a state which was almost wholly in favor of maintaining a Union. Only in Richmond itself did secession sentiment hold sway in any great proportion, and one writer has declared that the capital city was a "hot-bed for secession." It witnessed wild and prolonged excitement, a rising crescendo of demand for separation from the non-slaveholding areas. Yet, there were only thirty-two men in the convention who were in sympathy with these demands; the rest lined up in a reasonably

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[16]Ibid., p. 43.

[17]John W. Wayland, A History of Rockingham County (Dayton, Virginia: Ruebush-Elkins Company, 1912), p. 132, citing the Rockingham Register of February 8, 1861.

determined manner behind the American flag and the unity it symbolized.[18]

V. A CHANGE IN SENTIMENT

As days passed and new factors made their appearance in the issues that held the public mind and eye, the Union sentiment began to lose its vitality and solid core of support as one resounding rebuff after another seemed to strike down and push to the side any effort on the part of the South to come to an understanding and agreement. The Richmond Whig, leading Union newspaper in the state for as long as it remained loyal to the cause, gradually shifted to a different type of leadership, warning quite sincerely against any hand of coercion from the North and pointing to the consequences that would grow out of such a course. This change of attitude caught or reflected a general change of attitude among the people. Mass meetings became a common part of activities and resolutions went into effect declaring to the representatives of the state in the convention that whereas the people had looked to a Union intact, now they considered a break with the general government as the sole honorable road to travel.[19]

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[18]John H. Moore (Mrs.), Memories of a Long Life in Virginia (Staunton: The McClure Company, Inc., 1920), pp. 52-53.

[19]Bell, op. cit., p. 574.

The people were aroused as they watched the turn of events, aroused to the point that they were willing to lay aside party ties and devote attention to the more pressing needs of the day. At a meeting of the citizens of Nottoway county in January, the people showed that they were ready to defend their homes and property, if necessary, for they made arrangements and arms to provide a means of defense. They wished to use force to repel any hostile foe that might attempt to cross state territory to coerce a seceding state. A Presbyterian minister in charge of the churches of his faith in the county, speaking before this assembled group, declared that he had never attended a mere party meeting, or one held for partisan purposes since he had been in the county, nor would he ever do so. He confided, however, that on this occasion he reasoned that no such purposes were contemplated, and therefore he felt free to express his views on the questions that had drawn this crowd together. He held that it was the duty of every son of Virginia to step out and put forth his finest effort in behalf of the cause, a cause of right and justice.[20]

In Gloucester a group assembled at a later date, but for much the same purpose and reason as the people of Nottoway. However, the Virginia convention was in session at

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[20]The Daily Express, January 14, 1861.

this time, and because those people felt that this body had hedged too much on the question of secession and not committed itself one way or the other, it should be encouraged to take a stand for disunion. The group passed a resolution to this effect so as to let the convention know its position in the matter. A second resolution stated that Virginia would consider any attempts by the general government to collect the revenues, or enforce the laws of the old nation in any of the seceded states as an act of aggression and coercion. Resistance would be offered if any such moves were made.[21]

The die was cast when President Lincoln issued the call in April of 1861 for 75,000 troops, requesting that Virginia contribute her share of these men. This represented a well marked policy of coercion, to a land southern in its characteristics and traits and in outlook, a policy which her people were not ready to tolerate under any circumstances. The principle that guided her course prior to this disrupting demand can well be summed up in these words of one writer: "While Virginia did not doubt her right to secede, she did not believe it wise or expedient to do so."[22] Now she considered that the cards had been placed on the table, and she

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[21] Ibid., March 11, 1861.

[22] Bell, op. cit., p. 584.

was ready to proceed with her own hand. The convention went into secret session and on the seventeenth of April issued a message to the people of Virginia and the nation as a whole, announcing that as of that time the state looked upon the constitution of the United States as repealed in her sight. Virginia was no longer tied to the states that remained under this document as she considered herself free and independent.[23]

VI. VIRGINIA, THE LEADER OF OLD, BECOMES A LEADER IN A NEW EXPERIMENT

Thus had Virginia attached her fortunes and misfortunes to a new kind of experiment, a venture into the unknown. She was to assume the leadership in the Confederacy, and her example was to set the pace throughout the years to follow. As one Virginia citizen of this period asserted, "The most lucrative employments were cheerfully abandoned, the widest fields for enterprise were unnoticed and neglected, in the spirit of patriotism which incited our population to action."[24]

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[23] "Monthly Record of Current Events," Harpers New Monthly Magazine, XXIII (June, 1861), 121.

[24] [Sallie A. B. Putnam], Richmond During the War (New York and Washington: G. W. Carleton and Company, Publishers--S. Low, Son, and Company, 1867), p. 28.

CHAPTER II

POLITICS IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE WAR

I. AN UNWRITTEN PLEDGE OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES

Secession gave the promise of new and exciting experiences, the romance of an investment in a future vested with broad horizons. The perpetuation of Unionism meant "little more than the continuation of the evil days which had beset the South for a generation." In the very earliest days of the Confederacy it became what E. Merton Coulter, in his volume The Confederate States of America, 1861-1865, referred to as a "widespread obsession" that there should be no further conflicts of a sectional nature and that political parties of the prewar period should be completely obliterated in the life of the newly born country. The old party distinctions of Democrat and Whig, somewhat buried in the movement leading up to secession, should remain below the surface of men's thinking in dedication to the cause, at least until victory could be achieved.[1] One source has stated that political parties had no organized existence in the Confederate States, and yet it is difficult for this author to

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[1] E. Merton Coulter, The Confederate States of America, 1861-1865 (Vol. VII of A History of the South. 10 vols.; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), p. 55.

stand in full agreement with the assertion that because of the absence of organized parties, there was no influence laboring "to perpetuate old schemes for achieving and maintaining party advantages."[2] This subject is to be dealt with later.

It appears to the author that Virginia entered wholeheartedly and with a maximum of determination into this unwritten pledge to give consideration to the man for the job and not to which party the man belonged in the old Union. Certainly, the spirit of devotion to the cause for which the South was engaged in a civil war could be detected at the very outset. A September, 1861 issue of the Richmond Whig, referring to the forthcoming congressional elections, declared:

> . . . now the public demand grave, sensible, earnest men--men who comprehend the importance of their position and have the talent and manliness to meet it. They want patriotic men, who will devote themselves to the public interests, instead of scheming politicians who spend their days in manoevering for their own advancement, and their nights in debauchery, reveling, and faro-banks.[3]

The article continued in this same spirit as it stressed the important duties that would confront the new

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[2]William M. Robinson, Jr., "A New Deal in Constitutions," The Journal of Southern History, IV (November, 1938), 457.

[3]Editorial in the Richmond /Virginia/ Whig and Public Advertiser, September 20, 1861. Hereafter referred to as the Whig.

and permanent government and the need for such men as the Jeffersons, Masons, Pendletons, Randolphs and Lees of the Revolutionary period to meet the serious demands of the times. Men of such stature and character might even have to be summoned to service; therefore, the people should take the matter into their own hands since they did possess "a right to command the services of their wisest and purest men." In addition, as the message stressed, old party issues had become obsolete and party lines of the past had been erased. No consideration of personal or partisan prejudice or partiality should be allowed to interfere with the "discharge of this high duty." The banner of patriotism should serve to blot out all remembrance of the happenings of old. The people must think and act for themselves, unmoved by the selfish and designing pleas of certain individuals. In a single sentence the article made a point that probably provoked thoughtful consideration of the issue at hand. The people were to act for the public as they would for themselves.[4]

II. EVIDENCE POINTING TO VIRGINIA'S CONCERN FOR THE BEST MAN

This summons to a new way of life, a path cleared of all of the relics of the past, seemed to take hold in the

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[4]Ibid.

minds of men who were considering candidacy for public office. Candidates throughout the state submitted to the press their ideas concerning the importance of the crisis and the need to refrain from entering a contest between parties. The responses differed in many ways; some were brief and to the point, while others were rather lengthy and geared to assert definite opinions and considerations of the writer. One individual, having received a call from the public, announced his intention to become a candidate for a seat in the First Congress of the Confederate States under the permanent constitution, adding simply that he did so at "the solicitation of a number of gentlemen, of different parties, throughout the district."[5] At the same time a second person declared his intention to run for public office "in compliance with the invitations of friends in different portions of the district . . ." His duties in camp served to prevent him from engaging in a canvass of this district, but even if these responsibilities did not stand in the way, he would not regard it as the proper move to arouse and stir up the public mind by working in a canvass at a period when "all the thoughts and energies of the people" were directed toward the "vigorous prosecution of a just and holy war . . ."[6]

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[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

In another case, in sponsoring a particular gentleman for a position in public office, a supporter referred to the fitness of the individual whom he recommended. This person was so well known in the district that it really seemed unnecessary to have to announce him as a worthy candidate. The writer of this notice added that he had made the recommendation without the knowledge of his fellow citizen, without even being aware of whether he desired the position. Then, he quickly created his own defense by asserting that he was, nevertheless, satisfied that his friend possessed too much patriotism to withhold his services from his country in the midst of such demanding times. These final remarks reflected the very principle to which the author was seeking to give added weight.

> . . . We have never agreed in politics--he has always been a Democrat and I a Whig--these old party questions are buried never to be revived. The only inquiry now to be made, should, I think be, is the candidate honest, capable, and true to the South?[7]

One way by which the people often made known their preference for a particular individual for a certain office was to address him through the press, as for instance in the case of James Lyons, who was requested by "Many Friends of Richmond" to declare himself a candidate for the Confederate Congress. Perhaps, the friends did give allegiance to a

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[7] Ibid., September 24, 1861.

definite party, but the indication is not in this direction.[8]

In connection with the contest in the Richmond district for a seat in the permanent Congress there appeared an article in the Whig which urged the re-election of Mr. John Tyler and Mr. William H. McFarland, both of whom were delegates to the temporary Congress. The writer expressed the feelings that probably the latter would step aside to allow Mr. Tyler, as the more qualified and experienced person, to serve as the candidate and gain the office by successful election. Political canvass had no place in this matter since neither time nor inclination would allow the people to engage in such things.[9] Mr. McFarland did not choose to withdraw, however, for his name, along with that of the aforementioned James Lyons, appeared in the field of candidates for the representative to congress from this particular district.[10] Despite the presence of competition in this area, there seemed to exist no real political maneuvering as suggested by the voicings of both McFarland and Lyons. The former declared that his intention to run stemmed from the fact that he could not stand indifferent to the summons from the various districts to offer himself as a candidate in the forthcoming

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[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Lyon G. Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers (Richmond, Virginia: Whittet and Shepperson, 1885), II, 662.

elections.[11] Lyons allowed for his commitment by speaking these words:

> The Inquiry now should not be whether one was a Breckinridge man, a Douglas man, or a Bell and Everett man, but should be, "Is he honest, is he capable, will he be faithful to the Constitution of the Confederate States, determined to stand or fall with the South--her conflict for liberty?"[12]

If the other men who had been designated candidates for the office would agree to leave the field and turn the candidacy over solely to Mr. Tyler, he would follow their example and cheerfully withdraw.[13] This is an admirable attitude which hardly bears any taint of personal or partisan consideration.

Ex-president Tyler, in expressing his personal feelings to the people on this occasion, commented that, in the midst of such a great conflict, he held it an axiom that no one was at liberty to decline any position which the state or its people might "by their unsolicited suffrages" confer upon him. He went on to add that while he neither sought nor aspired to anything for his own personal gain, he would not reject any service which Virginia, or any part of her people, might call upon him to render. The following statement constituted his closing words:

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[11] Whig, October 1, 1861.

[12] Ibid., October 10, 1861.

[13] Ibid.

> . . . If however, either of my distinguished friends--for whom I entertain the highest regard--who have been announced as candidates shall be elected, I shall be quite content, and shall give to his useful and patriotic labors in the holy cause that engages us my most hearty applause and approval.[14]

It appears that Mr. Tyler's attitude reflected a genuine concern for the most plausible and practical pursuit of affairs rather than for personal advantage, an attitude expressed by others in Virginia. For instance when a vacancy occurred in the Virginia Senate because of the resignation of a member, it became necessary to hold an election for the purpose of selecting a man to fill this seat. John R. Garnett declared his intention to become a candidate, saying in a message to the people that he followed this course "at the solicitation of many gentlemen, heretofore of different political parties." If elected he would lay aside all party feeling or prejudice "to the establishment of Southern independence and the promotion of the best interest of our noble old commonwealth."[15]

A letter to the editor of the Whig in September, 1861, gave support to the newly championed idea of non-partisan candidates. The message stressed disregard of parties, influences of party managers, and intrigues of politicians, and the selection of the best men to occupy the government posts.

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[14]Tyler, op. cit., p. 662.

[15]Whig, September 24, 1861.

Indeed it should be "with an eye single to their [candidates] peculiar fitness and fixed and determined purpose to elevate none to office without the old Jeffersonian qualification" that men made their selections. This writer continued on to point out that should bitter party feuds be instigated and a "dirty scramble" for office pattern be followed with a motto of "no man, but one of our own party," as the guiding force, then the history of the Confederate States of America would be a brief and sad one.[16]

A candidate announced his acceptance of nomination to be a candidate and declared that as pertaining to the issues which "formerly defined political parties among us," he had nothing to say. The occasions that had given rise to such issues had passed and the divisions should accompany them into oblivion. He proceeded to cite the injurious effects of politics to the cause behind which the whole populous had united, expressing his thoughts on the subject with these words:

> I hold him to be the worst enemy of the country who would recur to past political diversities, and in this hour of trial stimulate afresh those domestic diversities out of which already so much injury has been wrought, and by which alone our cause can now suffer shame.[17]

In the words of one individual who had accepted his

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[16] Ibid., September 27, 1861.

[17] Ibid., October 1, 1861.

friends' call to be a candidate, it was no time for "popular harangues" when the people were engaged in a struggle with an "unscrupulous, vindictive, and powerful adversary, for national and individual happiness."[18] Yet another Virginian expressed his feelings on the matter in similar terms when he stated that there should be no presumption of the desire by or expectation of the people of an "excited" canvass of the district with a consideration of the "present unhappy condition of affairs" when every patriot heart pounded with prayerful anxiety for the future of the country. A third man would not consent to enter a canvass which might, in the least, cause the people to divert their attentions and energies from the prosecution of the "holy war" in which they were engaged.[19]

The October 11 issue of the Whig contained a letter to the editor, a letter which dashed a cold stream of disapproval on any expression of party ties. He made this particularly positive statement in the letter:

> Our government is too new, and the troubles of the country too engrossing just now to invite or even justify political dissensions and party divisions. That the free and independent people of the Confederate states will, sooner or later, organize themselves into separate parties, with opposing principles, arising from an inevitable conflict of opinion, neither the teaching of

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., October 11, 1861.

> history nor reflections upon causes and consequences will permit us to doubt--But while party spirit, involved in the very essence of our Republican institutions is an incident to the elective franchise as is the agitation of the air to the elements that comprise it, there are bounds beyond which, instead of promoting the blessings of Constitutional liberty, it begins to pervert and destroy them. Those bounds are the delicate and dangerous lines of distinction between principle and prejudice.[20]

This gentleman went on to urge unity in the council chambers as well as on the battlefield, invoking the people to have no parties until there was some legitimate basis for an opposition of principles. He declared that the disruption of the union erased all party issues among the Southern population. It became a force which acted to unite them in a defense of the liberties which had been secured by the blood and transmitted by the wisdom of the valiant fathers of the "first American Revolution."[21] These lines did not mark the end of his statements, but the essence of those left unmentioned was in harmony with the thoughts of the excerpts used.

An editorial, appearing two months earlier in this Richmond paper, had already developed this same opinion. There had been reports that there were intimations in some quarters of alleged schemes for creating parties, mostly in

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

states other than Virginia. Once again there sounded in very clear tones the appeal of "no party" in the era of crisis that prevailed. The existence of party certainly had a sound basis in a system of free government, but in the midst of such times there was no surplus of resources to waste on party feuds. The combined energies of the nation were needed for its salvation and should be devoted to that end.[22]

The opening year of the war drew to a close. There appeared in two December issues of the Whig, articles which dealt with the matter of politics. To the first of these the writer directs the attention of the reader. A letter to the editor gave backing to Mr. Robert M. T. Hunter for a senate seat in the Confederate Congress. The writer of the letter emphasized the need for the "best, wisest, purest, and most experienced men in the councils," to steer the destiny of the yet unshaped permanent policy of the government. Mr. Hunter, as "representative man in this revolution" would certainly fill the bill at this time. The climax of the letter came with the voicing of these lines:

> . . . I love Old Virginia, and esteem her welfare and honor beyond all things else. The success of this or that man is nothing to me. . . . I am not a party man, and certainly not a Democrat; for, of the few votes I have at rare intervals cast during my life, all were for

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[22] Ibid., August 9, 1861.

> Whigs. I know Mr. Hunter not at all intimately, but I believe him to be a pure and patriotic man, an able and experienced salesman, and as such I desire to see him once more in the Senate . . .[23]

The second article, concerned with the governmental idea of majority rule and the overriding of minority rights and clearly referring to the South as the minority and the North as majority, offered these significant statements.

> We of the Southern Confederacy are engaged in laying the foundation of another, and we hope, a better Republic. No parties exist among us; when they arise, none of us can tell which of us will be in the minority . . .[24]

In his annual message delivered before the men of the legislature of the state, Governor Letcher included these lines as a closing thought:

> You assemble, to enter upon your legislative duties, at a period of unusual interest and importance to the state, and not less important and interesting to the Confederacy. I congratulate you upon the agreeable fact that the antipathies and prejudices engendered by the partisan contests through which we have annually passed, while members of the old government, have almost died away and have been succeeded by an 'era of good feelings'. You meet together as Virginians to inaugurate and adopt such measures of legislation as will advance the prosperity of our people, and strengthen and multiply the ties that bind together the states comprising the Confederacy. It becomes patriots to cultivate a kind and fraternal spirit to the end that our counsels may be harmonious and our action united.[25]

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[23] Ibid., December 27, 1861.

[24] Ibid., December 31, 1861.

[25] The Daily [Petersburg] Express, December 3, 1861.

III. THE SPIRIT OF UNITY CARRIES OVER INTO THE NEW YEAR

The old year became a part of the past, but the spirit that had held the people firmly to their convictions lived on. The Whig of January 28 declared that "the people have manifested their application of the crisis--of the importance of enlisting the combined energies of all, by totally ignoring party differences."[26] Emphasis still rested upon the qualities of a candidate. Consider, for instance, the plea to vote for James Lyons as representative to the Confederate Congress on the basis of his "superior qualifications" coupled with the call to "forget party and prejudice engendered during times of high party excitement, forget Whigs, forget Democrats, and vote Lyons."[27] In another instance there was the summons to an individual to place himself in the circle of candidates for Congress because he represented the choice of the people. They had utmost confidence in him and his ability to declare their interests, because he did not seek office.[28]

In a different way, but certainly in no less positive a manner, did the person who voiced his support for William Rives indicate the absence of party machinery in elections

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[26] Whig, January 28, 1862.

[27] Ibid., February 7, 1862.

[28] Ibid.

of this time. His words, spoken through the press at this time, were as follows:

> I am no partizan of Mr. Rives. I owe him for no favors, past, present, or future, but I am painfully impressed with the awful magnitude of the crisis in which we are placed, and I would implore the appointing power to select a man, for this one time, with reference to the party politics of the Old Union /Italics not in the original/.[29]

For one to have inaugurated "party tactics" at this period of struggle for existence as a nation, it would have constituted the stamping of stigma on the man or men who might reach out to take hold of such "ignoble plans" which no length of time would efface.[30] The Whig contended that because there was danger very much in evidence, it was no occasion to "proscribe any when he is known to be true, able, and reliable, because of old party issues or to promote any on party or personal grounds." The only valid test was merit. "Let this be disregarded and mere placemen, or personal favorites, or party fuglemen supersede the proper men, and all will be lost . . ."[31]

The people received the praise of one candidate when he spoke of the withdrawal of party politics from the scene in the midst of the war then raging. Instead of political

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[29] Ibid., February 11, 1862.

[30] Ibid., February 14, 1862.

[31] Ibid.

attachments the "great popular heart" of the nation responded alone to the "calls of patriotism."[32] Thus did the chords of harmony reverberate throughout the land, not without discord on occasion, and as will be noted in another part of this paper, but certainly in a most creditable way for Virginia.

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[32]Editorial in ibid., April 15, 1862.

CHAPTER III

ELECTIONS AT THE MIDWAY MARK--1863 AND THE CLOSING YEARS OF THE WAR

I. GENERAL SENTIMENT

Midway in the period of war there were major elections which secured an important place in the eyes of the public. The most significant election was concerned with the matter of who would succeed John Letcher in the office of governor. Actually this would mark the first gubernatorial election held under the stress of wartime for Letcher had entered upon his duties as chief official prior to the outbreak of fighting. The May election was also to witness the election of representatives to the Confederate Congress and Senators and Delegates to the Virginia assembly.[1]

These were perilous days and the issues at stake were not personal. They were national and because of this undeniable fact, they deserved serious attention. Both the press and the public gave careful attention to the task of engraving upon the mind and heart of each person the importance and meaning of this election. As early as December, 1862, men were looking ahead to the upcoming event, and

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[1] Daily Richmond Examiner, May 27, 1863.

already several names had been suggested for this office. An editorial expressed satisfaction with the possibility of a number of candidates running for this post, and the fact that the people would be left for once "to choose whom they please, without a caucus, canvass, or combination of any sort." The grave state of the times ought to be sufficient "to impress the minds of the people with the necessity of choosing the ablest and truest man the state affords," without reference to party associations that once played a large role in such affairs.[2]

The thoughts of many of the voters probably slipped back over the years to the 1859 election when the issue of slavery loomed so prominently in the contest. Charges were directed at Letcher for his alleged connection with the pamphlet drawn up by a man named Ruffner.[3] These charges, in essence, held that the candidate favored dismemberment of the state and expressed anti-slavery sentiment, an extremely bad position for anyone in the South at the time and especially one seeking office.[4] The denounced Letcher sought to explain his position in the matter. His friends readily

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[2]Editorial in the Whig, December 16, 1862.

[3]E. B. Prettyman, "John Letcher," The John P. Branch Papers of Randolph Macon College, III, No. 4 (June, 1912), 331.

[4]Ibid., p. 332, citing the Richmond Enquirer of June 28, 1858.

accepted the explanation, but his opponents refused to be so willing, preferring instead to launch a lashing assault directed at weakening this gentleman's chances of election.[5] Mr. Prettyman, author of an article entitled "John Letcher," termed the campaign of this year as "one of the bitterest in the history of the state," coming at a period when Virginia herself was torn by political and sectional strife and differences.[6] Nevertheless, Mr. Letcher weathered the wave of accusations flung at him and won the election, taking office on January 1, 1860 as a Union Democrat.[7]

A united front appeared to mark the scene in 1863 when the life line of Virginia and the entire confederacy was in extreme danger of being snapped. Yet, undesirable elements were uncovered in the midst of the struggle. The April 9 issue of the Daily Richmond Examiner pointed to the presence of unwelcomed forces and indicated that party was not dead in Virginia. It was referring to the Whigs who were said to continue to vote in a body while the Democrats were represented as putting cause before all else and entering the election with the avowed intention of putting aside party

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[5]Ibid., p. 332.

[6]Ibid., p. 335.

[7]John Herbert Claiborne, Seventy Five Years in Old Virginia (New York and Washington: The Neale Publishing Company, 1904), p. 145.

considerations. The paper viewed the Whigs as planning to labor for the election of their own adherents to Congress, governorship, and legislature and to strive to persuade the voters to turn against the secessionists and those who persisted in urging withdrawal from the Union. The final portion of the article maintained that if the Whigs were to act in a way aimed at defacing the Democrats, they might triumph once, but "it will be at the expense of honor, patriotism, and of all character and chance of success as a party in the future."[8]

On the following day this paper followed up the theme of the previous day, asserting that although the Whigs might not be engaged in a completely dedicated movement to insert party differences in the race, their vote in many local elections for municipal officers and the use of party machinery as they gave attention to the May election quite definitely revealed their intentions. The Examiner clearly announced that its remarks were not directed at any Whig candidate or the party itself, but rather were made in the "spirit of friendly warning, and to prevent, as far as temperate expostulation can do, the enactment in Virginia of a great public scandal."[9]

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[8]Editorial in the Daily Richmond Examiner, April 9, 1863.

[9]Ibid., April 10, 1863.

This type of situation had been the subject of an editorial at the beginning of the year. The Examiner expressed concern over the rumored intentions of placing William C. Rives, a Whig, in the Confederate Senate on the basis of an even bargain and trade of places between "two old party organizations that melted away when Virginia shivered the bonds that bound her to the late Union." Indeed, at a time when the general masses of people were concerned with self-sacrifice to serve the public interest, politicians engaged in maneuvers that reeked of the past. "The politicians refuse to recognize the fact that the Whig and Democratic organizations have ceased to exist, but persevere in preserving and perpetuating the division." Were these representatives to go against the general public sentiment and be guided by the past?[10]

Other papers joined the chorus demanding the discarding of old party associations. The Sentinel regarded the approaching election as one in which greater consideration than ever should be devoted to the election of suitable men. The voters ought to vote for men, "not for what they have been as party men but for what they are as good and useful citizens, and as possessing talent for public service." In days past when there were parties and party issues existed,

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[10]Ibid., January 8, 1863.

each party should, by all means, have been represented. The divisions were superseded. Therefore, the public was urged to look solely to the personal qualifications and merits of the candidates. Democrats were being asked to by-pass their friends, solely on the basis of friendship and to accept men who had opposed them previously.[11]

The Richmond Dispatch contained a card which cited the importance of selecting legislative candidates who were "men of the times, equal to the crisis; not men of words and speech, but men of action; not contractors who having filled their coffers, seek any easy seat to aggrandize the same."[12] The Enquirer called attention to a people indifferent to the result of the election. It noted that "the war, the war" was the only theme to which they gave ear. Again there sounded the need for stress on ability and quality.[13]

Finally the Whig added its sentiment in regarding the great need for a special consideration of the May 28 election. The paper stated that

> . . . as never before were those so imperilled, so never before was there occasion for the people to employ such effort to secure the election of their most sagacious, experienced, and trustworthy men for the posts to be filled.

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[11]Editorial in The Sentinel, May 21, 1863.

[12]The Richmond Dispatch, April 16, 1863.

[13]Editorial in the Richmond Enquirer, May 22, 1863.

Any reason for voting for some individual beyond the belief that this man represented the worthiest and best of the circle from whom the choice must be made would be "criminal," so declared the writer.[14]

II. GUBERNATORIAL CONTEST

Within the commonwealth the spotlight undoubtedly maintained a steady ray upon the gubernatorial contest and its place of chief concern in public affairs. Several men entered the arena to vie for this esteemed and highest ranking administrative position in the state, yet probably not without a clear understanding of what the holder of such office would have to face in these trying days. An issue of The Dispatch, in the month preceding the election, contained an editorial which dealt with the number of aspirants in the field. In answering the contention of certain elements that the presence of a large number of candidates reduced the contest to a "scrub race," the paper took an opposite view of the situation, looking upon this election as "novel and refreshing" with greater strength in the range of selection. After all, parties were passive and party feelings submerged amidst the "din and turmoil of war." Each division of the state had put forth its worthiest man as a "fit ruler of the

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[14]Whig, May 14, 1863.

Old Dominion in this trying period."[15]

One of the candidates for governor was George Munford. In a card addressed to this individual and appearing in The Enquirer, the author claimed that the times demanded a governor "of no ordinary qualifications." Because he felt that Munford possessed certain desirable qualities, he hoped that his favorite's name could be added to the list of nominations.[16] Another supporter entered upon a full presentation of Munford's character, qualifications, experience, terming this person unambitious "except to serve and be useful." His training qualified him for this office, "at a time when Virginia needs the best talents and the experience, skill and counsel of her truest and most devoted sons . . ."[17] Munford received backing through the Examiner also, for in a letter to the editor, an interested individual dwelled upon the experience, qualifications and past service of the colonel. This letter closed by stating that the election represented no party contest. Certainly, there was the knowledge of Democrats who intended to vote for Whig candidates and of many devoted Whigs of old who meant to stand squarely behind

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[15]The Richmond Dispatch, April 27, 1863.

[16]Richmond Enquirer, March 3, 1863.

[17]Letter to the Editor of The Sentinel, March 17, 1863.

Munford.[18]

General William Smith became a very popular figure in the race for governor. As one supporting remark went, in glancing over "Virginia's long catalogue of able and experienced statesmen," this booster could select no one more competent to occupy that honored position of governor than "Honorable William Smith of Fauquier."[19] By another, he was said to qualify for this post in an eminent degree, holding those qualities so essential to this seat of prominence--ripe intellect, mature judgment, great experience in the Councils of the State, in the Congress of the Old Union and Confederacy, and in the chair of the chief executive. Moreover, he had demonstrated his outstanding military ability in active service on the field.[20] A second person, in corresponding with The Sentinel, asserted that "in weighing the qualifications and claims of each, with kindly feelings for all, I have a very decided preference for one--and that one is Gen. Wm. Smith." The person further added that in all of the civil positions that he had held, Smith had been the "bold, fearless, and able champion of the rights, honor, and interests of the South and especially of Virginia . . ."[21]

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[18]Daily Richmond Examiner, May 9, 1863.

[19]Letter to the Editor of the Whig, January 13, 1863.

[20]Letter to the Editor of The Sentinel, April 4, 1863.

[21]Ibid., April 9, 1863.

The white haired old soldier, handsome and colorful in military array, answered in the affirmative the call of those who urged his acceptance of nomination. He spoke these words in a card addressed to the people:

> With no parties to divide us, with but one great impulse, that which seeks to protect our liberties and establish our independence, we surely can work together with one will to realize this vital consummation. At any rate, if elected, I shall seek to deserve your confidence by devoting to the duties of my position all the powers of mind and body which I possess.[22]

Opposition to Smith's candidacy arose in certain quarters and for certain reasons. Assuming the position of what might well be termed a defense counselor for the army man, one individual, making his approach through a letter addressed to the editor of The Sentinel, felt that the attack on the general came as a result of his popularity and the fear of his election. Whereas these attacks would probably not have any really harmful effects upon Smith himself, they were instruments that served to "revive the old feuds of party, and degrade the reputation of the State of Virginia," and as such, they deserved the attention of the people. One of the points of argument against the general's candidacy was his previous position as governor. The argument maintained that one man should not hold this post too often. It ought to be shared.[23] This is a rather weak assertion since

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[22]The Sentinel, April 28, 1863.

[23]Ibid., May 26, 1863.

it had been several years earlier that Smith had held the position.

A second wedge of contention centered around the issue of Smith's service in the army and as a member of Congress at the same time. Very quickly his defender declared that the general devoted his entire time to the service of Virginia and refused to accept compensation but for one office. A third and final objection was the reference to Smith's political ties before the war. It was not to be denied that he did belong to one of the parties, the Democratic party, in fact, when organized groups existed, but now when parties were no longer alive, the sole party being that of nation, efforts were being extended to defame General Smith simply because he happened to live and do as other men in the past.

Once more there sounded the plea bidding the people to disregard and hold criminal these attempts to revive party spirits, and to look beyond party to the best man and truest patriot. If Munford or Flournoy were to be elected, the interests of the state would still be safe and Smith would not be less devoted to the cause.[24] Smith proceeded to act in his own defense as well, having nothing to say against his opponents but rather speaking their praises:

> . . . Indeed, I would prefer to magnify their worth, for if either of them should be preferred by you, I would

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[24] Ibid.

like for my own sake, if for no other reason, to be able to say in the language of Zanga--"Great let me call him, for he conquered me".[25]

The third candidate to enter the field was Colonel Thomas Flournoy. A card addressed to the colonel informed him that at large public meetings, composed of both Democrats and Whigs, held in the northeastern section of Virginia, the people, in repudiation of old party ties, had unanimously nominated and recommended him for governor. The general sentiment of the people represented at these gatherings was that this action would be approved and accepted throughout the state, that old party feuds were buried, and that harmony would prevail in the May election, leading men of every party to vote in a way that would serve to promote the best interests of the Confederacy.[26] One supporter declared that Flournoy's own section which had always opposed him in matters that divided the old parties, appreciated him and had in public meeting, without distinction of party, unanimously recommended him.[27]

A meeting held in Campbell county also, without distinction of party, produced a list of men who these people felt, if elected, could do much to help erase the remains of

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[25]Ibid., April 28, 1863.

[26]Ibid., March 31, 1863.

[27]Letter to the Editor of the Whig, February 26, 1863.

old party jealousies among the citizens of Virginia. Flournoy headed the list as the nominee for governor, while appearing alongside of his name were those of Henry A. Edmundson for Lieutenant Governor and J. Randolph Tucker for Attorney-General. This group could more than likely bring about harmony and good feeling among all classes of men at such a time in the crisis.[28]

Flournoy penned his acceptance to his followers, revealing that he had withheld acceptance for a time because of an uncertainty on his part as to whether the call issued from a few personal friends, or a large enough segment of the people to satisfy his feelings that he was needed. Under the existing circumstances there was no need to make pledges and profession of political faith. His efforts would be devoted to the war cause and to the completion of the struggle in favor of the Confederacy. Political bickerings of old now took on the appearance of struggles pursued in childhood. If he were to lose the contest, then as he said, "I have no ambition which will be shocked and no ardent hopes which will be blasted."[29]

For the office of Lieutenant Governor, Samuel Price and J. W. Imboden were to be the chief contenders, although

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[28]The Sentinel, March 18, 1863.

[29]Ibid., March 31, 1863.

there was support for the present man in office, Robert L. Montague. A letter to the editor of the Whig as early as mid December, 1862, stated that Montague was the perfect man to hold this office once again. He held the qualifications which were peculiarly fitted for the job and had handled the task very capably during his term in office. The writer went on to add these words:

> In such an hour as this, it is to be hoped we shall hear nothing of Whig or Democrat, whether with reference to the past, present, or future. Those party terms are obsolete now. Let party feelings lie buried with them. Robert L. Montague knows Virginia well--her necessities and her resources, what she is and what she should be. . . . The right of the people, and the sovereignty and dignity of the State will be safe in his hands . . .[30]

Price, in a letter of reply to a friend who had written urging him to become a candidate, wrote that he was gratified when he learned that his friend had been requested "by many gentlemen, formerly of both political parties," to see whether he (Price) would run for office.[31] Imboden, accepting the invitation to become a candidate, asserted that he was unaware of any public questions that called for a declaration of opinion. "Thank God, we are a united people. I have all a Virginian's devotion to my native state--my life, my all are hers."[32]

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[30] Whig, December 16, 1862.

[31] Letter to The Sentinel, April 4, 1863.

[32] The Sentinel, April 23, 1863.

An important matter that deserves attention is concerned with the position of William Goggin in the race for governor. His name was among the others mentioned until his sudden withdrawal which brought comments from observant individuals. A letter written to the paper disclosed what appeared to be a sudden decision to leave the camp of nominees. The Sentinel, commenting upon the matter, declared that probably he withdrew so as to avoid carrying party into the election. Such a move would more than likely be a well-delivered blow to the vulnerable areas of the party scheming body. The young and "generously spirited" would not uphold the attempt to follow through with party maneuvers, but perhaps, some of the older men might elevate party above patriotism, indeed, those who apparently had not "caught the noble spirit of the present hour." The paper said, in effect, that the scheme of the politicians ought to be rebuked and met with firm resistance for "this is Virginia; and this is the third year of our separation from Northern politics and Yankee Tricks." While the patriotic element looked to the election of a governor qualified to handle the delicate responsibilities of office, intensified by the seriousness of the day, party managers worked to secure party triumph. "Let all the people say, Shame upon them, and confusion upon their attempt!"[33]

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[33]Editorial in ibid., May 25, 1863.

The Whig challenged The Sentinel's interpretation concerning the reason for Goggin's withdrawal from the race. This paper maintained that rather than party friends, it was the party enemies of whom Goggin complained as attempting to impress upon the canvass a party aspect. The letter written by Goggin seemed to indicate that he was proscribed because he was an old line Whig. His departure from the field thus left an unbalanced trio of two Democrats and one Whig, according to prewar nomenclature.[34] It appears that in some manner political ties did unseat Goggin from his candidacy since his position as a Whig in prewar days was definitely a certainty. In fact, he had represented the Whig party in the 1859 gubernatorial contest. In a meeting held in Petersburg in February of 1860 and to which the press expected a large assembly of delegates, including such notables as John J. Crittenden of Kentucky, General P. B. Starke and William A. Lake of Mississippi, William C. Rives, Alex R. Boteler, and John Minor Botts of the Old Dominion, Goggin received recognition for his leadership in the '59 campaign in the form of a set of silver service valued at approximately $1,600 bedded in a handsome black walnut case lined with velvet.[35]

The Whig received special notice from other papers

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[34]Ibid., May 27, 1863.

[35]The Daily Express, February 22, 1860.

because of a so-called over-prominence of communications urging the election of Flournoy, a Whig. Immediately this paper took a stand that it was not for party reasons that this particular coincidence happened, but rather for the expressed purpose of showing that party was lifeless and only qualifications and worthiness counted. The Sentinel could not accept this explanation for it felt that the Whig editors could have backed Smith or Munford just as well.[36] Nor could The Enquirer accept this opinion of the Whig in regard to the necessity of Flournoy's election to demonstrate the absence of party spirit. As the editor declared, he was not able to consider the election or defeat of any man as evidencing the retention of old spirit of party. "Men will vote according to their own views; and though some may be influenced by old prejudices, yet the number will be small."[37]

On June 1, after the day of election had passed, The Sentinel issued a report that pointed to the narrowing down of the race for governor to a contest between Smith and Flournoy. The paper commented that the vote had been closer to a party one than was expected, probably because of the maneuverings of the final few days of the canvass.[38] By

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[36]The Sentinel, May 27, 1863.

[37]Editorial in the Richmond Enquirer, May 22, 1863.

[38]Editorial in The Sentinel, June 1, 1863.

June 8, Smith's total majority, as indicated by the slowly incoming returns, ran a little over nineteen hundred, while Price's majority in the race for Lieutenant Governor totaled two thousand plus.[39] In the 1859 election, the Democrats led by Letcher had carried the state by a vote of 77,650 as compared with the 72,321 accumulated by the Whigs headed by Goggin. Letcher had gained majority votes in seventy-seven counties, while his opponent had carried seventy-six.[40]

William Smith, "Extra Billy," as he was popularly known, became the new governor of Virginia. Smith was, in political nomenclature, "a Democrat" of the "most straitest sect," as well as in the broadest sense of the term.[41] Yet, party played no role in this election. As one individual so aptly expressed it, "his election as Governor was a summons from the field to the capital, with the plaudit of 'well done' by his people . . ."[42]

Another writer, Mrs. Sallie A. B. Putnam, a contemporary of Smith and resident of Virginia during the Civil War period, commented on the election in her book, Richmond

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[39]The Richmond Dispatch, June 8, 1863.

[40]The Review, November 2, 1860.

[41]John W. Bell, Memoirs of Governor William Smith of Virginia (New York: The Moss Engraving Company, 1891), p. 27.

[42]R. W. Hunter, "General (Governor) William Smith at Gettysburg," in Memoirs of Governor William Smith of Virginia, p. 53.

During the War:

> He [Governor Smith] had the confidence of the people, which was increased by the brave and patriotic address delivered on this occasion. In Virginia the people were not divided by party spirit and happily demogogism was almost wholly unknown. The best man for the position, the one who would most truly and impartially support and sustain the cause of the South, was the one who secured the suffrages of the people.[43]

She went on to say that the terms Whig and Democrat, Federalist and Republican were almost unheard, and that where there was any competition in the South, it was between Unionist and Secessionist. She closed her remarks concerning this matter by adding that the Unionist was a "comparative nonentity" and that in the "undivided feelings, there were no bickering of politics or party strife."[44] Thus in the midst of a land that held the smell of gunpowder and the sounds of human struggles, when the people were being hard pressed from every side, "it was," as one writer has said, "universally acknowledged that Governor Smith was the right man in the right place . . ."[45]

III. OTHER PHASES OF THE ELECTIONS

With the gubernatorial race completed, one should give

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[43] [Sallie A. B. Putnam], Richmond During the War (New York and Washington: G. W. Carleton and Company, Publishers--S. Low, Son, and Company, 1867), p. 269.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Hunter, op. cit., p. 56.

attention to the other phases of the May, 1863, election. There were many and varied comments made by the candidates themselves concerning the occasion as well as by those who approached possible candidates through the press. The general sentiment which prevailed was one of no party attachment and service to state and nation. One candidate, in declaring his intention to seek re-election to the next Congress of the Confederate States, expressed his feelings in this manner: "Now, as before, I can promise you nothing, but a determined purpose to do my duty, at a time I know; if times ever did call for services, which are not nominal, but real."[46] A recently discharged soldier agreed to run for the Virginia legislature but could conduct no canvass. His pledge was to promote the prosperity of Virginia, to use the facilities of the state to enable the Confederate government "to carry us safely and successfully through the struggle in which we are engaged."[47]

A soldier who had been discharged as a result of being wounded in the battle of Chancellorsville sought the support of the people of Bedford County. He declared, however, that if there arose one in whom the voters placed greater confidence and whom they considered as a more competent person for

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[46]The Sentinel, March 26, 1863.

[47]Ibid., April 15, 1863.

the position at stake, then no one would be in more complete agreement with this selection than he himself.[48]

One group of interested people made known their intention to vote for a particular gentleman to represent the Fourth District in the Congress, because they had considered the need for the best talent at the time and in their consensus of opinion they felt that their choice for delegate held the desired requirements.[49] Major J. Richard Smoot found an enthusiastic following that sought his acceptance to announce his candidacy for the Virginia House of Delegates to represent Alexandria county. They informed the major that a belief in his devotion to the interests of the people and the great cause, for which he and they felt "so much solicitude," along with his qualities of integrity and manly firmness influenced them in their decision.[50]

A card directed to one George Dabney Wootton for the purpose of soliciting a response to a call to accept candidacy led to this type of response:

> In the present crisis of our national life, it becomes the duty of every lover of his country to lay aside his petty prejudices which formerly controlled the people, and to choose alone for their legislators those in whose patriotism and good sense they can confide, and who are

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[48]Extra of the Lexington Gazette, April 29, 1863.

[49]The Sentinel, April 24, 1863.

[50]Ibid., May 9, 1863.

untrammeled by the bonds of old parties.[51]

John Goode, Jr., planning to enter the race for re-election to Congress, discovered that he was to face an opponent who expected to enter upon a canvass. Goode looked with disdain upon such a move in the critical state of the times. If the people showed a preference for the other man and regarded him as a better representative, then he would cheerfully abide by such a decision. Yet, in his thinking, there should be no resort to the Yankee practice of rotation in office merely for the sake of change. It puzzled him as to what issues his competitor could use as a basis for agrument in a canvass. The old questions that had occupied such an important place in the minds of men up to the outbreak of war were settled with the establishment of the government under a permanent constitution. "Members of both the old political organizations are now in the ranks pouring out their blood in one common stream, and fighting side by side, and shoulder to shoulder against the common foe." Goode maintained the belief that with the exception of a limited number who still clung to old alliances, the greater body of the people had completely forgotten the memories of past party squabbles. His own stand was one minus any party "but the great party of the South," since the election of Lincoln

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[51]The Richmond Dispatch, May 22, 1863.

in 1861.[52]

D. C. DeJarnette, candidate for re-election to Congress to represent the Eighth Congressional District comprising certain counties in eastern Virginia, would make no promises in regard to the future. His total efforts would be concentrated on achieving the single objective of the war --the accomplishment of Southern independence. Without question the past had been marked by differences of opinion in matters of public policy. It was now a "living present" characterized by a unity of purpose, that of sweeping from the sacred soil of Virginia the "desolating tread of a foe, more unprincipled and remorseless than even the accursed Vandal or Hessian." The seeds of party might well be planted in the future, and great parties, "destined in course of time to contend for supremacy in shaping and directing the policy of our new Confederacy, might arise." Yet, it was one party and one cause at this time whose aim was well known to all.[53]

Other candidates voiced similar views. One said that if he were elected, he would devote his efforts to the people's interests and the good of the state, irrespective of party.[54] A second person claimed ties with no party in

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[52]The Sentinel, April 24, 1863.

[53]Ibid., April 30, 1863.

[54]Daily Richmond Examiner, April 4, 1863.

his candidacy for a seat in the Virginia House of Delegates, saying that "Whigs and Democrats have all fought alike; all share in the glory of a white man's Government; hence let bygones be bygones; let the dead bury the dead."[55] William W. Harris desired his name to be issued in the list of candidates, wishing to answer communications directed to him "without regard to past political distinctions."[56]

James M. P. Newby decided to withdraw from the area of contention, for he regarded the opposition as too great. He explained that "in looking to the vitality of our diseased condition, I am admonished by love of country not to squabble over and after office." There was still another withdrawal on the basis that a careful survey of the situation brought forth the judgment that there were a number of worthy men already admitted to candidacy. He did not care to add to this number and thereby contribute "even so little to divert attention from the far more important considerations," that demanded the concern of the country.[57] A third party declined nomination for Congressman for the simple reason that he wished to continue his service in the military phase of the war since it was in this area that he felt he could render

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[55]The Sentinel, May 18, 1863.

[56]Whig, May 9, 1863.

[57]The Sentinel, May 25, 1863.

greatest service. Moreover, he thought it his duty to be a soldier. He preferred to share in such a life.[58] Thus sounded the triumphant peals of patriotism, rolling across the land to blot out the remembrances of struggles of a political nature in days gone by.

IV. EXAMPLES OF PATRIOTISM IN 1865

As the third and fourth years rolled by and the sounds of war became more pronounced in a land hard-pressed by the Northern troops, patriotism still found a place in the hearts and minds of men in the Old Dominion, now broken and lying in smoldering and wrecked shambles. In addressing the voters of a particular Congressional district; as an approach to soliciting their support at the polls on election day in 1865, Beverly A. Davis applied to the situation this type of thinking:

> I now hope all will look in the right direction and act and govern themselves accordingly, and whether I or some other may be the choice of the people, I hope all will be done that is possible toward securing the greatest amount of good and removing the greatest amount of evil.[59]

From the considerations of one planning to run for the state legislature came these words:

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[58] Richmond Dispatch, April 28, 1863.

[59] Beverley A. Davis, "To the Voters of the 25th District," (Broadside in the Virginia State Library Archives, Richmond, Virginia, August 25, 1865). Photostat.

> In the present conditions of the State, I think it would be impolite and unwise to raise exciting issues in discussing impossible measures. If a majority of you shall honor me with your suffrages, I shall go to the legislature to represent all your interests, and believing that our paramount interest just now is a reorganization of the civil law, I shall lend all my energies to that end . . .[60]

W. T. Clark, with ambition for a seat in the House of Delegates declared that it would be useless to make any pledge of a particular course of action, with circumstances as they were. He concluded his message by urging that "any man whom you could trust as worthy of the place must of necessity act upon his judgment when cases are presented."[61]

These men appeared to be expressing the spirit which had captivated the people of Virginia, but as will be brought out in the following chapter, the scene was not totally devoid of clashes of some nature over the question of party or of conflicts which indicated party spirit.

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[60] D. C. Ragsdale, "To the Voters of Pittsylvania," (Broadside in the Virginia State Library Archives, Richmond, Virginia, September 15, 1865). Photostat.

[61] W. T. Clark, "To the Voters of Pittsylvania," (Broadside in the Virginia State Library Archives, Richmond, Virginia, [1865]). Photostat.

CHAPTER IV

PARTY STRUGGLES

In studying political activities during the Civil War, it is sometimes difficult to determine in which situations the rumblings of party spirit are to be detected, but in the course of this investigation certain instances of these expressions of attitude were uncovered. For instance, as early as December 1861, the Whig called attention to an article which appeared in the Fredericksburg Herald, an article that dealt with certain practices in political areas in the light of commitment to a definite policy. It asserted that even though all partyism was "rightly eschewed" at that time, there appeared to be a curious sidestepping of and aversion to any citizens "from President down to the trivial offices, except to one who was formerly a supporter of the Breckinridge and Lane Presidential Ticket." The Herald went on to comment that such a situation as this could scarcely be the result of accident. Indeed, it bore the "strong resemblance of intention."[1] The Whig responded with the declaration that the people who used to be Whigs composed a large majority of the voters of the state. Certainly the reason for the old parties, except as mere office might

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[1]Editorial in the Whig, September 24, 1861.

justify them, no longer held true, and that since it had nothing to do with offices, the existence of parties was ignored.[2]

In an October issue of this same paper there appeared a case of open opposition of one candidate to another running for the same office from the same district. A certain Fayette McMullin quite pointedly stressed the failings of his competitor, Walter Preston, and his poor record in the past. McMullin urged particular attention to the fact of Preston's ignorance of the Constitution and his alignment with the old Federal Whig and Know Nothing Party doctrine that the rich and well-born should hold the seats of government. This statement found basis in the fact that Preston, himself rich and well-born, had heretofore been among those party men in the state legislature.[3]

An interesting editorial entitled "Party Feeling" merited a place in the November 29 issue of the Whig. It dwelled on the subject of partisanship in the national government, referring to the comment of a Lynchburg, Virginia, resident indicating the party attitude behind the appointment of Bragg as Attorney General. The Richmond paper remarked that it was unable to see eye to eye with this view and to

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Whig, October 1, 1861.

believe that partisanship was practiced because this gentleman sought the support of members of the "late Democratic party" whom he knew so well. The paper ventured to add that it had gone uninformed concerning any outstanding individual of the Whig party desiring a position in the cabinet. What everyone wished, declared the writer, was that the public cause would be vigorously, wisely, and honestly served. It was not a question of political attachment. Closing lines expressed these thoughts:

> It can be said, with truth that never did a Government have less cause to remember past differences of opinion, or to perpetuate their existence, than in the present case. From the organization of the Government all the high functionaries were received with open arms by the whole body of the people, and the only competition was as to who should do most for the common cause.[4]

The Examiner stressed the fact that public opinion in the Confederate states, "guided by a sense of public danger," had destroyed all traces of the old party lines and would not allow their resurgence. Whether a man was Whig or Democrat a year before no longer stood as a pertinent question. Yet, there was one party that continued to exist in Virginia. It would not die, and could not hide its identity. The paper referred to "that submissionist party which ruled the State from the Assemblage of the Convention till the arrival of President Davis." This party had attempted to secure control

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[4]Ibid., November 29, 1861.

of the Confederate government but had failed in the attempt. "Hatred to the South and appetite for office were the animating sentiments of that party . . ." Existing circumstances caused this element to seek concealment but certain means, "a species of free masonry," enabled them to make contacts whenever the question of office arose. The Examiner offered the statement that this party was preparing for the next political campaign, setting forth its slogan that the Confederate government was hostile to Virginia.[5] The author steps out from a place of observation and reasons that this party to which the paper referred was merely a Unionist group ready to spring into favorable positions whenever and wherever possible in order to turn the steering apparatus of the state and direct her back into the Union.

Once again the issue reverted to certain thinking that partisan considerations were holding sway in the President's choice of men for various governmental posts and the military organization, as only a few Whigs were ever selected.[6]

When the death of William B. Preston created a vacancy in one of the Virginia Senate seats in the Confederate Congress, the Virginia legislature received the

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[5]Frederick S. Daniel, The Richmond Examiner During the War or The Writings of John M. Daniel (New York: /n.n./, 1868), p. 43.

[6]Editorial in the Whig, March 18, 1862.

responsibility of filling the vacancy. One person spoke in behalf of Governor Letcher as a good choice for the position, and urged abstinence from any personal or party predilections.

> Every patriot should desire the ablest and most experienced statesman in the Senate at this unfortunate crisis of our country, come he from the East or the West, or whether he belongs to the late Whig or Democratic party.[7]

Apparently the call of this gentleman, both for Mr. Letcher's selection and restraint in party feelings, failed to attract suitable attention at this particular time. The Whig, in giving attention to the election, maintained that William Rives appeared to be the only candidate especially and bitterly assailed. It further added:

> . . . He happens to be the only Whig in nomination, which has created the suspicion, that the great Revolution by which we are convulsed has wrought no change in the feelings of men--that we are no more tolerant, forbearing, and magnanimous than of yore, and that the heartless proscription of former times is to be continued with unabated malignity to judgment day.[8]

The following day this same paper announced the removal of Mr. Rives from contention, commenting that the pretense for opposing him, "by many who professed a wish to preserve the understanding of last winter that each of the old parties should have a Senator," was simply that he happened to be on the wrong side of the fence.[9] The Magnolia

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[7]Letter to the Editor of the Whig, January 13, 1863.

[8]The Whig, January 16, 1863.

[9]Letter to the Editor of the Whig, January 17, 1863.

magazine, following the completion of the heated contest, spoke of the outcome in this fashion: "After a most untimely display of partyism and contention, the mantle of the deceased senator fell upon the shoulders of Allen T. Caperton of Monroe . . ."[10] The Whig closed out this episode by uttering conciliatory words to the effect that Mr. Caperton was a younger man than any of the other contenders and without the experience of these men. Yet, he was a "high toned gentleman" and would make an active and useful member of the Senate.[11]

In viewing the events preceding the forthcoming May election of 1863, the Whig commented that the most capable member of the Virginia delegation in Congress was the only one "whose reelection is opposed with something of the virulence of old party contests."[12] James Lyons encountered opposition in his bid for a seat in Congress, a matter which disturbed the men of the Richmond Enquirer and led them to declare that a "more persistent effort to find an opponent was never made in the days of the old political parties."[13]

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[10]"Virginia State Legislature--Senator to Confederate Congress," The Magnolia (January 24, 1863), p. 2.

[11]The Whig, January 19, 1863.

[12]Ibid., May 16, 1863.

[13]Richmond Enquirer, May 29, 1863.

Because he stood originally as a secessionist, anti-secession forces had pushed for his defeat and backed Colonel William C. Wickham, an advocate of the Old Union. Continued efforts to condemn both Lyons and John Goode, Jr. because of this situation constituted disapproval of the action of the entire Commonwealth and offered encouragement to the North.[14] The Daily Richmond Examiner declared that there would probably be extended efforts to defeat Lyons in the Metropolitan district, representing a large constituency who desired more done for them than was possible. There was some question concerning Wickham's loyalty to the cause of the Confederacy since he had been a late entrant into the ranks of the secessionist camp.[15]

There was very definitely some politics involved in the situation which one senator explained to the electors in the Senatorial District of Rockbridge, Bath, and Highland counties, a situation which made necessary his canvass and address. He had filled an unexpired term of office, actually serving in this capacity for a total of four sessions. He desired to return to his home and private life. Yet, in the last session of the Assembly, he had provoked the anger of a public functionary in his county. This person had written

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Daily Richmond Enquirer, May 28, 1863.

to him a letter of rebuke, saying that, among other things, he was guilty of personal slander against the people of the county. The Virginia Military Institute, he declared, was bent on lining up an opposing candidate for the Senate. He explained his willingness to vote for hospital supplies, medicines, and other items, but not for new or additional buildings because of the existing circumstances. Then, too, he had failed to see the Superintendent of the institute at the time of his election. He would not allow anyone to dictate this course that he followed nor would he become the "mouthpiece" of anyone. He had not desired the office of senator for his own sake. He said:

> When I first yielded my consent to serve you in this capacity, it was done purely in a spirit of sacrifice to the common cause which is so dear to the heart of every one of us, and of every patriot in the whole South . . .[16]

Ambition did not blur his vision for he had long ago put aside such thought or illusion of youth. His selection came as a result of qualifications that suited the citizens --education, early training, and legislative experience.[17]

War was unable to silence fully the sounds of political agitation as evidenced in the preceding material presented. The current of past convictions did turn men's heads on occasion, but as this writer concludes in his final summary

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[16]Lexington Gazette, April 29, 1863.

[17]Ibid.

chapter, political activity of an extensive nature, like that which characterized prewar days and that which was to spring up once again following the war, was almost non-existent.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The question of political parties in Virginia during the war period may well be given greater attention, but the author believes that the evidence supports the conclusion that party affairs were subordinated to the cause of war. The issues that marked the prewar scene rose to the surface on occasion, especially when men were eager to throw stones at each other for mistakes that hurt the war cause. Then irate editors would write strong reprimands for such unpatriotic behavior, and they would be joined by a chorus of citizens who were employing the press as a medium of communication. It would have been difficult to maintain any adequate party machinery, for, as an article in the Journal of Southern History declared, "the chance of reaching the masses through normal associations and contacts was small indeed . . ."[1]

Certainly anyone who claimed to be a Republican would probably be seized, for those professing allegiance to this party were actually considered as having more of a part in a conspiracy against the South than an organized political

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[1]James W. Silver, "Propaganda in the Confederacy," The Journal of Southern History, XI (November, 1945), 503.

party that would be recognized in the South.[2]

T. C. DeLeon, a contemporary of great Civil War notables, related in his account of the situation of that period that the spirit which prevailed among the people of Virginia was such as to prompt the feeling of "the cause--not us."[3] E. A. Pollard made this statement concerning Virginia's place in the Confederacy and in the War in his Southern History of the War:

> No embarrassment of party politics, no indecent bickerings of demagogues, chilled the zeal of Virginia, or divided her efforts in the War. From the beginning she had poured out a lavish stream of contributions to every necessity of the national government.[4]

Neither the Old Dominion, nor the other states were silent on matters, for as DeLeon stated it, the people of the South were keenly democratic and had their own views which they expressed with "energy and vim--on all subjects during the war."[5] The Whig supported such a declaration when it made reference to the comments of the Confederacy in regard to parties. The Confederacy remarked that it was glad

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[2]E. Merton Coulter, The Confederate States of America, 1861-1865 (Vol. VII of A History of the South. 10 vols.; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), p. 88.

[3]T. C. DeLeon, Four Years in Rebel Capitals (Mobile, Alabama: The Gossip Printing Company, 1890), pp. 109-10.

[4]E. A. Pollard, Southern History of the War (New York: Charles B. Richardson, 1886), II, 113.

[5]DeLeon, op. cit., p. 129.

to see discussion in Congress, and throughout the press, as the very fact that all men were not afraid to speak their minds, even at such a time as existed, offered a good outlook and provided hope.[6]

If the people of Virginia did speak their minds, they, in turn, kept their party lines disconnected in their concentration upon the war effort. The war constituted a vital issue with them, as it did with their fellow secessionists. As one writer has put it in referring to the entire group of states comprising the Confederacy, they did mark party distinctions before the war, "but Whig, American, Democrat, were forgotten in the struggle, and all made common cause."[7] Virginia fulfilled her responsibility in this stand for the man and not the party, as she assumed the role of leader throughout this bitter contest between North and South. Organized parties did return when fighting halted, and men began to experience the hard and undesirable task of reconstruction. In February, 1866 the Unionists in the state devoted attention and efforts to this end of reorganization. They held a meeting for the preliminary work. In May the "Unconditional Union Convention" convened at Alexandria, and

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[6] Whig, January 22, 1864, citing the Confederacy, [n.d.].

[7] J. L. M. Curry, Civil History of the Government of the Confederate States (Richmond: B. F. Johnson Publishing Company, 1901), pp. 160-61.

it was here that the "Union Republican party of Virginia" was formed under the guidance of John Minor Botts. This convention provided suffrage for both races and disfranchisement of Confederates.[8]

Prior to December, 1867 the Republican party held the reins as the only organized political party in the state since the war. Then the Conservative party came into being to seek to remove the government from the hands of carpetbaggers and Negroes and restore it to the white citizens. Leaders of the old Whig and Democratic parties organized this group. A convention went into session in December and witnessed an attendance of eight hundred of Virginia's ranking people as delegates. Alexander H. H. Stuart served as president.[9] Politics were a guiding force once again, but Virginia had honored the pledge to act apart from such considerations and had provided the rest of the Confederacy a good example throughout the period of war.

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[8]Clyde C. Webster, "John Minor Botts, Anti-Secessionist," Richmond College Historical Papers, I, No. 1 (June, 1915), 32.

[9]Herndon Cary, Some Observations on Political Parties in Virginia (Richmond: [n.n.], 1921), p. 12. Booklet.

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