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Richmond's reaction to Abraham Lincoln : from November 1860 - March 1881

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RICHMOND'S REACTION TO
ABRAHAM LINCOLN: FROM NOVEMBER, 1860-MARCH, 1861

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of Richmond
Department of History

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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June 1965

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
1. Background Events and the Conventions . . .	1
2. Reaction in Richmond and Virginia From the Conventions to the Election . .	11
3. The Election and Conclusion	28
4. Reaction and Solidification	37
5. A Capstone for the Secessionists.	56
6. The Road to Secession	67
Bibliography.	71
Appendix.	77

Preface

I have endeavored to give an account of Richmond's reaction to Abraham Lincoln from his election in November, 1860, to his inauguration on March 4, 1861. I have also tried to emphasize the reaction in Richmond because it represented not only the attitude in Virginia but in many respects the upper South as a whole.

The paper is divided into two principal parts, each divided into three chapters. The first area concerns the effect of Lincoln's election on the people of Richmond. This is discussed in three chapters; the first, a study of the background events leading up to the nominating conventions and the conventions themselves; the second, a survey of the reaction in Richmond and Virginia from the results of the conventions to the election; and the third, the results of the election and a general conclusion.

The second area is concerned chiefly with the development and spread of the secessionist faction. The conclusion is reached that the majority of Virginians were reconciled to the fact that secession was necessary and proper by the time of Lincoln's inauguration. The fourth chapter deals with the course of action taken by Virginia after Lincoln's election and the ultimate unification and expansion of the dissolutionist faction. The fifth chapter relates the continued increase and triumph by the secessionists as a result of the failure of efforts at mediation and other factors.

The final chapter discusses the reaction to Lincoln's inaugural address and a conclusion.

Throughout the paper I have referred to several terms which perhaps need clarification. The use of the word "radical" pertains to secessionists. This term has been used primarily in connection with newspapers. In referring to secessionist groups or factions, I have sometimes called them "forces," and this should not be misinterpreted as a military force.

I would like to acknowledge those libraries and thank those individuals who have been most helpful in enabling me to obtain many pertinent sources; the Boatwright Memorial Library of the University of Richmond, the Virginia State Library, the Virginia Historical Society, the University of Virginia Alderman Library, the McCormick Library of Washington and Lee University, and the Library of Congress. I would also like to thank Dr. William Gleason Bean, Historian Emeritus at Washington and Lee University, for his kind assistance in suggesting some very helpful references; Mr. John Rutherford of the Library of Congress who was most helpful in obtaining many needed articles; and Mr. William Rachal, editor of The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, for revealing valuable primary sources. In addition, I would like to thank my adviser, Professor Joseph C. Robert, for his guidance and direction.

CHAPTER 1

Background Events and the Conventions

The election of 1860, to the general student, appears as any other; however, to the historian it can easily be seen as a labyrinth. No other election in our history has had such broad ramifications, not only in this country but in the world as well. If one considers the direct and indirect results of the election, one can say that this election really altered the entire political, social, and economic aspects of the United States. It is impossible to study the election without understanding the previous events which helped mold both the Northern and Southern minds by 1860.

If one is careful, he could probably trace the beginning of Northern and Southern antagonisms from the Compromise of 1820, or even with the framing of the Constitution. However, it is not until the Nat Turner Insurrection in Southampton County, Virginia, in 1831, that a continuous and concentrated attitude is projected and molded both in the North and the South.¹ This, I believe, is the embryonic state of Southern determinism which helped set the pattern of belief in slavery

1. Clement Eaton, A History of the Old South (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 267.

as an economic and social good and an avid adherence to state rights. At approximately the same time, although actually earlier, the North began to develop into a hard core section vehemently opposed to slavery, and wholeheartedly advocating free labor. At first, both these respective views were in the minority but as certain important events arose, these beliefs became augmented until it appeared that the two sections were two independent nations diametrically opposed to each other.

By the time of the American Revolution slavery was, according to many historians, on the decline. However, with the opening up of new lands in the southwest and the invention of the cotton gin, the need for labor became greatly increased. These events helped to brand the mark of slavery on the South for good. This increased demand for slave labor also thwarted scattered attempts by isolated individuals to put an end to slave labor, such as the colonization efforts. It is my contention that the expansion of slavery into the new areas is one of the paramount reasons for the conflicts between the two sections.

Beginning with the expansion of slavery into Missouri and down to the fight over "bloody Kansas," the country became involved over the extension of slavery into the territories. Time and again we will soon see that the underlying fear on the part of the majority of the Southerners in the election of 1860 was the question of the right of the extension of slavery into the territories, and the protection of that institution in the states where it previously existed.

Instead of these ultimate incidents acting as a warning of what was to come, they seemed only to furnish the needed ammunition for the radical abolitionists of the North and the "fire eaters" of the South. Such events as the Wilmot Proviso, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, the Lecompton Constitution, the Dred Scott decision, and the John Brown raid only brought about temporary appeasements rather than warnings that level-headed statesmanship was needed to prevent future disaster. It is important to remember that with each of these events the radical element of the two sections became increased while the moderate and conservative forces declined.

Thus by 1860 the nation appeared to be completely divided, politically, economically, socially, and religiously. Since 1854 the Republican party had made tremendous strides, and to the South it appeared that this party of the "Black Republicans" was the mouthpiece for the entire North, especially after the Congressional elections in several of the key Northern states in 1859. These elections persuaded the Southern people to believe that the North was one homogeneous section clearly bent on the destruction of its most cherished institution—slavery. This generally was the situation in the South at the time of the political conventions of 1860. However, it should be remembered that generalizations are not always accurate, and this applies especially to the South.

The South, it is true, had many common characteristics, such as climate, an agricultural society, and the use of slave labor. However, at the same time it possessed many different aspects, and, in general, the South is really many Souths.

While the lower South was primarily an agricultural area, the upper South exhibited signs of diversification. Industry, while not the dominant phase of the economy, was more prevalent, and as a whole the upper South enjoyed a closer economic tie with northeastern and midwestern states. Not only was the presence of industry more pronounced, but also diversification in agriculture was extended. However, despite these dissimilarities it should always be kept in mind that the South was united on at least one principal aspect--the defense of the institution of slavery--and because of this the upper South would come to the aid of her sister states. It is with this basic attitude that the Southern representatives at the Democratic convention in Charleston, South Carolina, met and ultimately altered the history of the South and the United States.

When the Democratic convention met on April 6, 1860, in Charleston, the Virginia delegation was almost unanimously in favor of the nomination of Robert M. T. Hunter for the Presidency.² Their loyalty can be seen in the fact that they voted for him solidly the fifty-seven times ballots were taken, with the exception of two members who cast their votes for Douglas.³ The supporters of Hunter felt that they would have to gain the support of a united South or their candidate would lose. At the same time they could not afford to antagonize the Douglas delegates from the North. They hoped to keep the

2. Emerson David Fite, The Presidential Campaign of 1860 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 267.

3. Henry Harrison Simms, Life of Robert M. T. Hunter (Richmond: The William Byrd Press, 1935), p. 144.

representatives of the lower South quiet on the discussion of the platform, which was their concession to the North, and to win the nomination for a Southern man; consequently, they would have the nomination first.⁴ However, their plan soon met with defeat because the Yancy-Rhett faction and the Northern extremists were determined to fight out their platform differences before making nominations.

After a week of debating over the platform the committee on resolutions reported three resolutions. The first was the "majority report," which endorsed the Cincinnati platform of 1856 with the addition of the principles of the Dred Scott decision. The second, the "minority report," which likewise advocated the Cincinnati platform, but with the stipulation of a promise to abide by any future decision of the Supreme Court as regarding slavery in the territories. The third, and last report, which was signed only by Benjamin F. Butler of Massachusetts, reasserted the Cincinnati platform, without any additions or alterations.⁵ By a vote of 165 to 138 the majority report was rejected and that of the minority substituted in its place.⁶ Thus it appeared that popular sovereignty was triumphant, but in all actuality the victory was so shallow that Douglas never reaped any fruits from it.

As soon as the vote was announced the Alabama delegation, led by Yancey, arose and left the hall. They were soon followed by delegates from Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Florida,

4. Henry F. Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861 (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1934), p. 105.

5. Fite, loc. cit.

6. Ibid.

South Carolina, Georgia, and Arkansas. It is this type of rash action which was characteristic of events between the two sections from 1850 to the outbreak of the Civil War. By the respective states' actions it appeared that the delegates were "instructed not to submit to the nomination of Douglas; but in such an event, to withdraw from the Convention. . . ." ⁷ The remaining delegates proceeded to a fruitless balloting for President through fifty-seven tiresome ballots, in which Douglas was always far in the lead of the other candidates, including among others, James Guthrie of Kentucky, R. M. T. Hunter of Virginia, and Andrew Johnson of Tennessee. However, the Douglas forces never attained the requisite number of votes to give him the nomination. Therefore, the convention passed a resolution requesting the seceding states to fill up their vacant delegations, and adjourned for six weeks, to meet again in Baltimore on June 18. ⁸

The seceders in the meantime gathered in Charleston where they issued a separate platform of principles and then adjourned to meet in Richmond on June 11. ⁹ A letter published in the Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser by ex-Governor Wise of Virginia, who was a pro-secessionist and who vied with Hunter for the Virginia delegates' support for the nomination of president, reflects the moderate and realistic attitude of

7. Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser, April 20, 1860, p. 2.

8. Fite, op. cit., p. 107.

9. Ibid.

Virginians during the convention crisis. However, Mr. Wise's attitude was soon to change. He said:

Let Virginia be a unit as to the nomination, let her adhere to her constitutional principles, unit or not, and let the harmony of the Democratic party be preserved.¹⁰

This plea was likewise endorsed by his rival, R. M. T. Hunter, at the Charleston convention.¹¹

With the commencing of the Baltimore convention, the expected happened, an irreconcilable quarrel over the contesting Southern delegations. On this important question, by the very act of secession of the Southerners themselves at the Charleston convention, the entire decision lay with the Douglas men. South Carolina and Florida sent their delegates only to Richmond; the Mississippi and Texas members, which were sent to both Richmond and Baltimore, were finally admitted after a bitter contest but were refused their preferred seats; the original delegates from Arkansas and Georgia, sent to both adjourned conventions, were admitted at Baltimore and took their seats; from Alabama and Louisiana alone, the "bolters," commissioned to both June conventions, were rejected at Baltimore and their seats given to the Douglas delegates.¹²

The delegates then proceeded to nominate a President and Vice President. The results were the nomination of

10. Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser, April 21, 1860, p. 2.

11. Richmond Semi-Weekly Enquirer, May 22, 1860, p. 2.

12. Fite, op. cit., p. 108.

Stephen Douglas of Illinois for President and Senator Fitzpatrick of Alabama for Vice President. Later Senator Benjamin Fitzpatrick declined the nomination and it was conferred upon a Georgia moderate, Herschel V. Johnson.¹³ At the same time the seceders convened in the same city and nominated the current Vice President, John C. Breckenridge of Kentucky, for President and Joseph Lane of Oregon for Vice President; and thus a third party, the Constitutional Democratic party, was placed in the field. The Richmond convention, attended by the South Carolina delegates, unanimously ratified the nominations of Breckenridge and Lane.¹⁴

Between the adjournment of the Charleston convention and the commencing of the Baltimore convention, the Republican party met in Chicago to chose their candidates. Nomination for the Presidency was not going as the party leaders had planned at Chicago. After three ballots a little-known Senator from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, was nominated for President. Seward's association with the "higher law" doctrine and the "irrepressible conflict" acted against him rather than in his favor. A typical reaction from the people of Virginia can be seen in an article from the May 16 Winchester Virginian. It mentioned that:

It is well for the people occasionally to revert to the terms in which Mr. Seward in his Rochester speech, places the North and the South in "irrepressible conflict" with each other. Can anything

13. Ibid., p. 109.

14. J. G. Randall and David Donald, The Civil War and Reconstruction (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1961), p. 129.

be more dangerous or infamous than his proposition as stated in his own language? Then we have the declaration of the fanatical Seward, that the war against negro slavery is to be waged until the system of slavery or the system of freedom be exterminated.¹⁵

Lincoln's success at Chicago was due to the fact that he was better able than any other candidate to attract the support from the old line Whigs and the crusading abolitionists, and also the fact that the convention was held in his home state.¹⁶

Before discussing the reaction of the people in Richmond and Virginia to the nomination of Lincoln, a fourth political organization must be mentioned. Composed primarily of Southerners who distrusted both Douglas and Breckenridge, this group formed what became known as the Constitutional Union party or opposition party. This party realized the present danger that the Union was faced with, and its platform, therefore, completely ignored the issue of slavery. Their one plank platform was based solely on the preservation of the Union, the Constitution, and the enforcement of the laws.¹⁷ Meeting at Baltimore, they chose John Bell of Tennessee as their Presidential candidate, and Edward Everett for Vice President. Its platform and nominees appealed especially to the border states of the South, and it was believed that Bell had a good chance of election, if the election was thrown into the House of Representatives.

15. Winchester Virginian, May 16, 1860, p. 2.

16. Randall and Donald, op. cit., p. 131.

17. Eaton, op. cit., p. 572.

With four parties in the field it appeared obvious to many Virginians from the outset that the election of Lincoln would be impossible to prevent unless some successful unifying attempt could be made. All four candidates professed a devotion to the preservation of the Union; however, the association of candidates with the radical lower South and the abolitionist North tended to overshadow this devotion. The stage was clearly set for what was to become the most tragic election in the history of the United States. The unwillingness of both the North and the lower South to listen to the moderate pleas of the border states brought forth an utterly complex and misunderstood position. The cotton states believed that the election of Lincoln meant the end to Southern freedom and rights, and to many Republicans the election appeared as a mandate for Republican party principles, whether radical or not.

CHAPTER 2

Reaction in Richmond and Virginia From the Conventions to the Election

The majority of newspapers, even the most conservative ones, exhibited some type of fear with the nomination of the Republican candidate. However, very few papers, or individuals, really believed that the election of Lincoln necessitated the dissolution of the Union. Perhaps the attitude of John Minor Botts of Dumfries, Virginia, clearly reflects the basic attitude of those Virginians who saw no immediate need for alarm if a "Black Republican" was elected President. Botts maintained that the Senate would be against him for the next four years and also the United States Supreme Court, even if the House aided him. He went on to say:

I would go to the Supreme Court. I would there proclaim that Congress had no power to interfere with slavery, and demand that justice and right be done me. But if the Supreme Court refused me redress, then I would say the time has come for revolution, and let him take the lead who will, I will follow.¹

Mr. Botts was an anti-secessionist, who had been a Whig until 1854 when the party virtually collapsed. He then joined the Know-nothings. He ran for Congress in 1854 but was defeated because of his continued antagonism against the South and the Democratic party.² With this defeat he returned to the law

1. Clyde C. Webster, "John Minor Botts, Anti-Secessionist," Richmond College Historical Papers, Vol. 1, (Richmond, 1915), pp. 25-26.

2. Ibid., p. 22.

profession where he set up practice in Richmond. His intelligent and sober views appear as a minority in a sea of rash and uneducated interpretations.

Another example of conservatism was Senator R. M. T. Hunter of Essex County. However, it should be remembered, like many Virginians, though a compromiser by nature and environment, he shared the aggressive attitude of Jefferson Davis and Robert Toombs regarding the property rights of slaveholders in the common territories.³ Although ultra-Southern on the slavery question, and basically a typical Southern Democrat, that is anti-tariff and anti-homestead law, he was not without caution and prudence.⁴ A letter from him to his sister, Jane, clearly illustrates this point. Written just prior to the election, he said:

The South is not aware of its own position, and can only be warned by degrees. I believe that even twenty men in this body who would act as I am disposed to do could—I will not say save the country, but at least act as a solutary check upon the excesses of the two great parties who are distracting our country.⁵

In general it can be said that while Mr. Hunter was not one of the eager secessionists who would have hastened to leave the Union without parley, his hesitation ended with the withdrawal of Virginia from the Union.

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3. Charles Henry Ambler (ed.), "Correspondence of R. M. T. Hunter, 1826-1876," Annual Report of the American Historical Association, Vol. 11 (Washington, 1918), p. 9.
 4. D. W. Bartlett, Presidential Candidates (New York: A. B. Burdick, 1859), p. 245.
 5. Martha T. Hunter, A Memoir of Robert M. T. Hunter (Washington: Neale Publishing Company, 1903), pp. 113-114.

In almost direct contrast to Hunter on the election crisis was ex-Governor Henry Wise. Wise was radical in his views on the slavery question. He demanded the fullest protection from the courts and Congress for the protection of the institution. Bartlett has drawn an interesting comparison between Hunter and Wise. He maintains that while Wise was voluble, Hunter was reticent; while the ex-governor was rash, Hunter was cautious and prudent; and while Wise was a reformer in his way, Hunter was an "old fogey" in politics.⁶ The ex-Governor proclaimed that the election of Lincoln "will be actual war-- and will leave us but one resort--the Blood and Fire and Revolution."⁷ The following excerpt from The Review of Charlottesville clearly illustrates the radical beliefs which he nurtured in regards to the election:

The moment it is ascertained that Abraham Lincoln is elected President of the United States, a general Convention of delegates from each county is to convene in Richmond, to determine upon measures for protecting our own safety and honor as a people. . . .⁸

In trying to sample the reaction of individuals in regards to the crisis, one cannot overlook the views of Edmund Ruffin of Hanover County. This Virginian "fire eater" ranks high on such a list of Southern radicals. Ruffin clearly revealed his views towards the crisis in a letter to Yancey of October 29, 1860. He said:

According to all present indications the result . . . will give the election to the avowed

6. Bartlett, op. cit., p. 244.

7. Charlottesville Review, November 6, 1860, p. 2.

8. Ibid.

abolition candidate . . . I cannot doubt that you will view this result as I do, of the clear and unmistakable indication of future and fixed domination of the Northern sections, its abolition policy . . . and the beginning of a sure and speedy progress to the extermination of negro slavery and the conquest and utter ruin of the prosperity of the South. I cannot doubt that you see the one passage for escape from this impending and awful danger and calamity by secession. . . .⁹

Despite the avid secessionist views of Wise and Ruffin, and others like William C. Rives and Frank V. Winston of Louisa Court House, there were many Virginians who expressed a wait-and-see attitude. There were such men as John S. Pendleton, who believed that Virginia's duty was first to herself and then to the North as well as the South; William M. Blackford of Lynchburg, who favored waiting for an overt act, but at the same time letting the North realize the serious danger in Virginia; and professor John B. Minor of the University of Virginia, who took a firm Union stand.¹⁰

Perhaps the views expressed by Governor Letcher in his address to the General assembly on January 7, 1861, illustrate the general attitude of most Virginians. He maintained:

The ties of brotherhood have been severed; and though living under the same institution, the sections seem to be as hostile . . . as if their citizens belonged to unfriendly governments. . . . We must wisely improve the present; correct its errors; reform its abuses; reunite the several

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9. Avery Craven, Edmund Ruffin, Southerner (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1932), p. 190.
 10. Ollinger Crenshaw, "The Slave States in the Presidential Election of 1860," The John Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Vol. LXIII (Baltimore: The John Hopkin's Press, 1945), pp. 131-133.

ties of affection; and unkindle anew the fires of patriotism; if we would recover all that has been lost.¹¹

However, Letcher also made it clear that while he was opposed to immediate secession and coercion by either the North or the lower South, he would favor division if an overt act warranted it. He was opposed to slavery politically and socially, but not morally, and continued to respect the value of slave property.¹² His defense of slavery was amply revealed in his address to the Assembly when he said:

Their /Northern/ systematic and persistent warfare upon the institution of domestic slavery . . . have done much to create the present state of exasperation existing between the two sections of the Union.¹³

Letcher's continued devotion to the preservation of the Union can be seen in his founding of the Lexington Valley Star newspaper, which was the mouthpiece of Douglas, whom he supported.

This wait-and-see attitude was the view which the majority of newspapers in Virginia endorsed. However, there were certain ones which advocated quick and immediate action. The two most prominent in the state were the Richmond Daily Examiner and the Richmond Enquirer, both voices of the Constitutional Democratic party candidates, Breckenridge and Lane. Other prominent newspapers which gave support to the

11. William F. Ritchie, Message of the Governor of Virginia and Accompanying Documents (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printers, 1861), pp. 4-5.

12. "To the People of Virginia! John Letcher on His Antecedents, Read and Circulate," Political Pamphlets, Vol. XXXVII (Richmond: Whig Book and Job Office, 1859), p. 6.

13. Ritchie, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

thesis that secession was the only solution were the Petersburg Bulletin, Winchester Virginian, and the Rockbridge Democrat. Since these newspapers championed the minority view in Virginia and Richmond, more emphasis will be placed on the more moderate and conservative papers.

The most outstanding moderate paper in Richmond, and probably in Virginia, was the Richmond Daily Whig. This paper, which endorsed John Bell and Edward Everett, continuously advocated support for the Union and accurately evaluated the election crisis to the people of Richmond. Other papers which took a similar stand were the Review of Charlottesville, the Richmond Daily Dispatch, the Lexington Gazette, the Lynchburg Virginian, and the Lexington Valley Star. In studying the reaction of the newspapers to the election, it is extremely important that one realizes that many of these papers reflect the sentiment of their editors and not necessarily those of the people.

A clear example of pro-secession sentiment is seen in an article of the May 22, Richmond Daily Examiner. The Examiner was edited by William Old, Jr., who avidly supported R. M. T. Hunter at the Charleston Convention. In regard to Lincoln's nomination the Examiner proclaimed:

He [Lincoln] is a far more dangerous opponent of all conservative parties for he can carry Seward's strength and other forces, which that more noted and hated man could never have commanded. . . . In such a condition of affairs, we see but little hope as to the election, except to unite the South to take immediate action after the fact of the election of the Chicago ticket is ascertained.¹⁴

14. Richmond Daily Examiner, May 22, 1860, p. 2.

It is interesting to note that while the majority of papers reserved a sense of hope and moderation until after the election, both the Examiner and Enquirer expressed immediate action in the form of alignment with the lower South. The Examiner opposed Bell primarily because he voted against the annexation of Texas, because his tendencies in general were pro-northern, and the belief that he caused a wide split in the Democratic party. The Examiner joined with other secessionist papers in opposing Douglas' squatter sovereignty thesis. The Examiner opposed his thesis because it could refuse "judicial decisions and Congressional legislature."¹⁵

The Examiner clearly summed up the radical interpretation of Bell and Douglas when it said:

The friends of Bell and Douglas, the other opponents of Lincoln, have not only no such distinct antagonism with him /Lincoln/ on principle and policy, but they have unhappily approached too near to his own ideas to make their success a condemnation of him.¹⁶

The Examiner went on to state more clearly in a later issue the underlying fears of most Virginians in regard to Lincoln's election.

It /the effect of voting for Bell and Douglas/ will be to render Lincoln's election most probable, and to make his administration most injurious to the South. Let it be remembered that Lincoln's avowed principles and known feeling will lead him to use all the power of the Government to prevent the extension and cause the extinction of slavery.¹⁷

15. Ibid., October 22, 1860, p. 2.

16. Ibid., October 24, 1860, p. 2.

17. Ibid., October 29, 1860, p. 2.

In the same issue the Examiner maintained that a vote for Breckenridge "will be to give the strongest opposition directly to the election of Lincoln, and it will, if anything can, restrain the aggressive character of his administration."¹⁸

A typical example of the irrational interpretations by the radical papers of Lincoln's election is the November 2 issue of the Examiner. It proclaimed:

He will have at his back the whole legislative power of the Government. He will have in his hands the Executive power of his Union. He and his party will have the power to tax your property, your capital, your industry, directly and indirectly. He and his party will have control of the Federal Treasury of the country. He and his party will have control of the public domain, the lands of the United States. All these can and will be used against your most valued property [slavery], to the destruction of the very society on which your lives, peace and prosperity are dependent. To this Lincoln and his party are publicly pledged.¹⁹

If one recalls the sentiments of John Minor Botts he will clearly see the absurdity in the above statement. At this point one must ask himself, what was Lincoln's attitude toward the "peculiar institution?" Generally it can be said that in the background of most Virginians, and Southerners as well, lurked a common fear, which John C. Calhoun expressed when he said, the "great body of the North is united against our peculiar institution."²⁰ In a speech at Cincinnati in 1860

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., November 3, 1860, p. 2.

20. Quoted in Arthur C. Cole, "Lincoln's Election an Immediate Menace to Slavery in the States?" The American Historical Review, Vol. XXXVI (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), p. 742.

Lincoln unequivocally stated his views toward slavery. While opposing the spread of slavery, he time and again guaranteed the protection of the institution in the states where it already existed.²¹

If an understanding of Lincoln's position on slavery is to be comprehended at all, if that is possible to achieve, one will always have to keep two pertinent facts in mind. The first is that Lincoln was actually an emancipationist by compulsion. As Arthur G. Cole purports, "Lincoln was made a saint and liberator in spite of himself, . . . he did not voluntarily rise up, he was floated upon the restless will of the people. . . ." ²² The second is that his belief in the arrestment of the further extension of slavery into the territories meant a "defiance of right and justice and of a spirit of our fundamental law" to the majority of the Southern people.²³ Thus a general conclusion can be drawn that Lincoln, at the time of his election, was not in favor of the dissolution of slavery, and that pre-conceived interpretations of Lincoln's ideas by both the North and the South were unjustly accepted as definitive.

The Richmond Enquirer time after time expressed the belief that the election of the "Black Republican" meant the extinction of Negro slavery. In the May 22 issue it maintained:

The success of this party, flushed with victory, starving for the spoils, not only of office, but

21. Ibid., p. 741.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p. 761.

of the fair land and virgin soil of the sunny South, would be destructive of negro slavery everywhere in states and territories.²⁴

The Enquirer, which was edited by avid secessionists such as Ritchie and Wise, continuously attempted to force upon the people the belief that the success of the Republican party in November would mean the disruption of the Union. For example, in an August 10 issue it stated:

It is folly to discuss this question . . . whether they [the Republicans] will be justified in breaking up the Union. . . . The probability is that they will do it right or wrong, and it is this danger which we must face if we cannot avert it.²⁵

The Enquirer took the stand that the South had no obligation to the Union and therefore had no official contract to observe, especially since that contract was broken by the North. In a July 10 editorial the paper clearly put forth the doctrine of secession when it stated:

If the Southern States are to be ruined by 'missiles' hurled by the hands of Lincoln and his followers . . . with the power and patronage of the Federal Government, against the institutions and lives of the people of the Southern States, it will be a matter of small consequence whether that ruin follow the effort at independence or comes as the natural consequence of a servile submission to black Republican rule.²⁶

Similar in many ways to the Enquirer and Examiner was the Winchester Virginian, which was edited by J. J. Palmer,

24. Richmond Enquirer, May 22, 1860, p. 2.

25. Ibid., August 10, 1860, p. 2.

26. Quoted in Dwight Lowell Dumond (ed.), Southern Editorials on Secession (New York: The Century Co., 1931), p. 118.

revealing similar attitudes of irrational and hasty judgments, the Virginian likewise expressed the possibility of rebellion if Lincoln were elected. The Virginian maintained that:

He [Lincoln] is a black republican fanatic of the deepest dye, who will descend to do any filthy work his party may require of him. With the Presidency in the hands of such a man, there can be no peace and quiet in the country and the dangers of rebellion and disunion are staring us in the face.²⁷

Although the majority of Virginians, and Southerners as well, believed eventually that with the split in the Democratic party the victory of Lincoln was greatly enhanced and most probable, the Virginian expressed a prediction which was typical of the radical papers early in the campaign. It stated that "Breckenridge will carry in all probability all the Southern States, while Lincoln will in all probability carry all except one or two Northern States," and thus, they believed, Breckenridge would be elected.²⁸ This belief, of course, proved to be completely unsound.

Just prior to the election, the Virginian published an article which reveals not only unsound interpretation and judgment, but also utterly false accusations. An excerpt from the article reads as follows:

All that is needed to save the day is for every man who is not for Lincoln to come to the polls and vote for Breckenridge. . . . Then you can go to your pillows at night calm in consciousness that, whether the Union stand or fall, you have done your duty, and that you have not contributed by your vote, directly or indirectly, to raise to the Presidency of the United States and the

27. Winchester Virginian, May 21, 1860, p. 2.

28. Ibid., October 3, 1860, p. 2.

guardianship of your liberties to the men who
subscribed fifty dollars to buy the rifles
John Brown brought to Harpers Ferry.²⁹

This type of statement reveals two principal aspects which are characteristic of radical publications at the time; one, it shows that even resorting to the distortion of facts was used to enhance the chances of their candidate and discourage any possible chance of victory for the Republican party; two, that the radical papers would rather preach disunion, based on false truths if necessary, than submit to moderation or conciliation. There was no middle ground in their views--either submission or disunion, and the latter would by far be the better choice.

The journalism of the moderate papers, which was in the majority, revealed a definite uniqueness. And it is this uniqueness that should be kept in mind. This peculiar characteristic was that at no time did they endorse the Republican candidate or disfavor the institution of slavery. It is interesting to note that it was these same conservative papers which later sanctioned Virginia's decision in regard to secession and her place in the Confederacy. The significant point to remember, however, is that in time of crisis they were calm, conciliatory, and astute.

The Richmond Daily Whig, which endorsed the Constitutional Union candidates John Bell and Edward Everett, wholeheartedly supported the candidate from the party's formation. The Whig

29. Ibid., October 30, 1860, p. 2.

maintained that by the lower South supporting the candidacy of Breckenridge it was favoring the dissolvment of the Union. In an article of July 31 it stated:

In the twelfth issue, we published an article charging that a cold-blooded deliberate, heartless conspiracy existed in certain quarters, to break up the Union of the United States, to revolutionize the government and establish a Southern Confederacy. We dated the conspiracy with the meeting of the Southern Convention in May, 1858, at Montgomery, Alabama, . . . and connecting it with the candidacy of Mr. Breckenridge for the Presidency.³⁰

In a later issue it lucidly, and for the most part honestly, interpreted the supporters of Breckenridge. "We believe," it proclaimed, "the great bulk of the supporters of Breckenridge, especially in the Cotton States, are rabid disunionists."³¹

Many of the papers who supported Breckenridge tried to discourage support for Bell by maintaining that the latter opposed slavery. To disprove not only this point and to also illustrate the point that the Whig, as other conservative papers, also zealously supported slavery, the Richmond Daily Whig had this to say about their candidate:

. . . experience, and observation, and reflection . . . have taught Mr. Bell, as they have taught the whole South, together with large numbers of the North, that slavery in the South is a fixed and unalterable, necessary, and beneficial institution. . . .³²

As the election approached, the Whig realized that the only chance of defeating Lincoln would be by unification with the

30. Richmond Daily Whig, July 31, 1860, p. 2.

31. Ibid., September 10, 1860, p. 2.

32. Ibid., October 11, 1860, p. 2.

Douglas forces. In regard to the Bell and Douglas forces and their role in the election, it said this:

We stand side by side, and shoulder to shoulder, in defense of the Constitution and the Union of the country, and in opposition to the many disunion projects of the Yancey-Breckenridge faction. . . . The only issue involved in the coming election is the momentous and paramount issue of the preservation of the Government itself.³³

Another ardent supporter of the Bell-Everett ticket in Richmond was the Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser, a semi-weekly branch of the Richmond Daily Whig. An article in the May 25 paper illustrates the typical point of view held by the conservative papers in regard to the election. It said:

We regret that our neighbor of the Examiner intends counseling a dissolution of the Union, in the event of the non-election of a Democratic President in November next. . . . With all due deference to his better judgment, we do not and cannot think that the defeat of the Democratic candidate in the coming election would justify a dissolution of the Union of the States.³⁴

The unscrupulous attempts on the part of the radical papers to arouse the passions of the Southern people against the North, and their intimidation of the people is illustrated in the following excerpt from the November 2 issue of the Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser. It stated that:

The Breckenridge-Yancey party loudly protest they are not for disunion; that the charge is a slander, yet they not only never utter one word in defense of the Union, but they stigmatize every man that utters a word against disunion, as a 'submissionist,' a 'Union Shrieker,' etc. . . . Every Breckenridge editorial is a studied effort to

33. Ibid., November 2, 1860, p. 2.

34. Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser, May 25, 1860, p. 2.

inflame the passions and arouse the prejudices of the people of the South, and cause them to regard the Union as a curse instead of a blessing.³⁵

The Lexington Gazette, which was edited by Alphonso Smith, accurately evaluated the increased chances of Lincoln's election because of the split in the Democrat party. It maintained that:

An avowedly sectional party has just held a convention in Chicago and nominated candidates for the Presidency and Vice Presidency, with every prospect of success if the conservative strength of the country continues cut up in parties and factions as it now is.³⁶

This mouthpiece of the Bell-Everett ticket again expressed almost certain fear of the election of the Republican candidate in the November 1 issue. The Gazette proclaimed that:

During the whole canvas we have feared the election of Lincoln, and as the election day approaches there is little to encourage us that he may be defeated.³⁷

The Charlottesville Review, another supporter of Bell and Everett, revealed the same candidness. "There is only one man," the Review believed, "who stands any chance of an election before the people, and that's Abraham Lincoln."³⁸ Editors Green Payton and J. C. Southall of the Review accurately evaluated the would-be results of a union between the Breckenridge and Douglas forces. "They are both confessedly sectional" the Review maintained, "and the conservative

35. Ibid., November 2, 1860, p. 2.

36. Lexington Gazette, May 24, 1860, p. 2.

37. Ibid., November 1, 1860, p. 2.

38. Charlottesville Review, June 29, 1860, p. 2.

element at the North could not be drawn into a support of Breckenridge, as the same element at the South would not sustain Douglas."³⁹

On the eve of the election the Southern Churchman of Alexandria issued a short but pertinent article in regard to the election crisis. It reflects not only the general attitude of the people of Richmond, Virginia, the upper South, but also of the clergy in these respective areas. It read as follows:

It is not therefore highly proper and desirable that the Christian people of the Commonwealth of Virginia, so deeply and peculiarly interested in the maintenance of the Union, should observe a day of fasting and prayer to Almighty God that he would so influence and overrule the minds of our fellow-citizens, and so order the counsels of those who they depute to act for them, so that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety which have hitherto been established among us, may be perpetuated through all generations.⁴⁰

Thus, by the day of the election we see that Richmond and the state of Virginia were divided into two principal factions, those supporting Breckenridge and those endorsing Bell. The former, as we have already seen, advocated immediate action if a Republican was elected to the Presidency, secession if necessary. However, the latter showed signs of strength and astuteness in times of crisis. The Breckenridge forces made many accusations and predictions, but as all things which rely heavily on false principles and ideals, their aspirations were

39. Ibid., July 6, 1860, p. 2.

40. Southern Churchman, November 2, 1860, p. 2.

to end in utter failure. The capital of Virginia and the Old Dominion were not ready to submit to the belief of Yancey and Rhett, especially not until all attempts at conciliation had been tried.

CHAPTER 3

The Election and Conclusion

The results of the election on November 6 reflected two basic attitudes; one, the conservative belief that the election did not necessitate immediate withdrawal from the Union; and two, the radical contention that this definitely meant that war was inevitable and that Virginia and the South should unite to protect itself from Northern aggression. However, there was one common belief in all the peace-loving Virginians, and that was that the election of Lincoln, while being expected, shattered their hopes that something might happen to bring about the defeat of the "Black Republican" candidate.¹ Even Union men, though they hated to admit it, believed that the election was a matter of little consequences, the victory of a "Black Republican" being inevitable any how.²

A letter from R. Tonsill to R. M. T. Hunter of March 22, 1860, denotes the radical reaction to the election. "If the South," Mr. Tonsill maintained, "should ever be so unwise as to submit to the election of an abolition President, her degradation will be complete, her end that of St. Domingo."³

1. James C. McGregor, The Disruption of Virginia (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922), p. 99.

2. Ibid., p. 98.

3. Charles Henry Ambler (ed.), "Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter, 1826-1876," Annual Report of the American Historical Association, Vol. II (Washington, 1918), p. 306.

It is interesting in this quotation how the terrible fear of a servile insurrection is equated with the election of Lincoln. Even Senator Hunter himself expressed a fear for the institution of slavery with the election of Lincoln. In a letter to James R. Micoru and others, he said:

For the first time since the Union was formed we have seen a President of the United States nominated and elected, so far as the popular voice is concerned, by a sectional party, a party founded in hostility to the institutions of African slavery. . . .⁴

An immediate need for protection is clearly revealed in a letter from James Murray Mason to Nat Tyler. Mason proclaimed that:

The election of President is made, and nothing remains but formally to count and then cast the electoral vote. There are those who believe, and I am one of them, that no safety remains to the Southern states and their people, but such as shall be vindicated by a stern purpose of self-protection.⁵

This desire for self-protection is illustrated again in the fact that upon hearing of the election the commandant of the state armory left for Washington to buy military stores.⁶

An article in the Richmond Semi-Weekly Examiner on November 20 also proclaims not only of the need for self-protection but also secession. It reported:

Let the people of Virginia remember that if they join not the other Southern States in an effort

4. Ibid., p. 337.

5. Margaret Kean Monteiro, "The Presidential Election of 1860 In Virginia," Richmond College Historical Papers, Vol. II, (Richmond, 1915-1917), p. 257.

6. McGregor, op. cit., p. 99.

to provide some security against it [Northern aggression] the power of taxing their property, controlling the price of products, and deciding whether they shall be at peace or war. . . .⁷

A consistent evaluation of the situation of the United States by the radicals is found in an editorial in the Richmond Daily Examiner. "The Government of the Union," it believed, "is in the hands of the avowed enemies of one entire section. It is to be directed in hostility to the property of that section."⁸ The fear of many Virginians of the possible extinction of slavery in the states where it presently existed was a paramount concern. The Examiner amply illustrated this point when it said:

It is not the elevation of a man, nor the temporary success of a political party, but it is the deliberate declaration of principles and policy adverse to the rights and interests of the property holders in the South. . . .⁹

Another pertinent topic of discussion by the radical papers was the urging of Virginia to join her sister states in the form of an independent confederacy. The Richmond Enquirer clearly summed up the attitude of the anti-Unionist papers, in regard to the role which Virginia should play in the future, when it said:

What will Virginia do? That is a question for the people of the State; as for ourselves, and speaking for very many others, who agree with us, we are for a united South—in the Union, if possible which we much prefer—but if that be denied us, then we are for a united South as

7. Richmond Semi-Weekly Examiner, November 8, 1860, p. 2.

8. Ibid., November 7, 1860, p. 2.

9. Richmond Enquirer, November 16, 1860, p. 2.

the only means of preserving Southern rights and Southern institutions.¹⁰

On the question of mediation, the Enquirer had this to say:

When we talk about dilatory measures for the sake of 'pacification' or 'mediation', they are only adopting the shortest and easiest plan to tie the hands of the people of Virginia altogether, and thus to absolute submission.¹¹

The interesting point to note about these two disunionist papers is that from Lincoln's nomination to his election there was a steady emphasis on secession. Although this was evident in other papers in the state who supported Breckenridge, after the Republican party's victory their attitude changed to one of caution and conciliation. The Winchester Virginian was such a paper. On November 21 it proclaimed:

While our sympathies are with South Carolina, we are free to say, that we do not approve her hasty action. Before taking such a responsible and hazardous step, she should afford time for a free conference with all her sister states.¹²

The Virginian went on to say:

We are a friend of the Union; and the man who says we are a secessionist or disunionist without just cause is slander. But we are opposed to such an Union as Black-Republicanism wants--an Union that is to rob the South of her rights and property. . . .¹³

A much clearer picture of calmness and moderation can be seen in the editorials of the Richmond Daily Whig. This

10. Richmond Enquirer, November 16, 1860, p. 2.

11. Ibid., December 4, 1860, p. 2.

12. Winchester Virginian, November 21, 1860, p. 2.

13. Ibid.

paper, as many of the other conservative papers in the state, continuously published accurate and intelligent articles. Their writings reflect the sentiment of the majority of Virginians in this crisis. On the right of secession the Whig had this to say:

Of all forms of union ever devised, that existing between the States of this Republic is the firmest, the least dissoluble. . . . To suppose that a single State could withdraw at will is to brand the statesmen of the Revolution, convinced of the weakness and certain destruction of the old confederation of the States, of laboring to perpetuate the evil they attempted to remedy.¹⁴

In regard to the future, the Whig had this sage advice to give Richmonders and Virginians alike:

In a word, let the true and patriotic people of Virginia, instead of indulging in hasty commitments, or adopting any rash and ill advised policy, patiently and dignifiedly await the development of events. The action of Virginia should at all times--and especially in critical times like these--be calm, deliberate and enlightened.¹⁵

The Lexington Gazette, the conservative mouthpiece of Rockbridge County, published views very similar to those previously mentioned by the Whig. In an article of November 15, the Gazette urged Virginia, and the South, to wait for an unconcealed attack before hurrying out of the Union. It went on to say that:

As many of our President's before, he is opposed to the institution of slavery, but if he will do his constitutional duty surely the South should be satisfied. We do not intend to be understood or apologizing for his position, but we insert

14. Richmond Daily Whig, November 9, 1860, p. 2.

15. Ibid.

the extracts, alluded to above for the purpose of showing that the South should not hurry out of the Union.¹⁶

The Charlottesville Review also urged Virginians to be calm.

Pertaining to the crisis of secession it said:

We trust that in Virginia no steps of any sort /toward leaving the Union/ will be taken without calm consideration. . . . We for our part, mean firmly to urge the Union of these States. We believe, as we have said all along, that, whatever South Carolina may choose to do, Disunion is no remedy for it.¹⁷

I believe it is evident to anyone who reads a few of the articles from Union papers, similar to the ones previously mentioned, that they clearly reflect the attitude of the majority of Virginians. It is interesting to note that the sentiments of the Whig and the City of Richmond are primarily those of the entire state. The election returns reveal very interesting facts regarding the urban and rural voting of Virginia. The results in Richmond showed that Bell had obtained 2,401 votes to 1,167 for Breckenridge, and 754 for Douglas.¹⁸ In Virginia, Bell carried everyone of the large cities, and a combined tabulation with the Douglas votes reveals an overwhelming majority in almost every city.¹⁹

However, a Breckenridge rural trend was clear in Virginia, while a marked preference for Bell and Douglas characterized

16. Lexington Gazette, November 15, 1860, p. 2.

17. Charlottesville Review, November 9, 1860, p. 2.

18. Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser, November 9, 1860, p. 2.

19. Olinger Crenshaw, "Urban and Rural Voting in the Election of 1860," Historiography and Urbanization, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1941), p. 58.

the city vote in the state. Breckenridge failed to poll as high as 40% in a single Virginia city, but he was consistently the leading candidate because of his rural popularity.²⁰ Thus it seems clear that the city vote enabled Bell to carry Virginia in the election. It is interesting to note that even in many of the large Northern industrial cities, when the combined votes of Breckenridge, Bell and Douglas are compared to Lincoln's, the latter falls far behind. Such scholars as James G. Randall have attempted to evaluate this in terms of economic interests.²¹ There is much to be said for this thesis. As the New Orleans Commercial maintained, "the Bell campaign stressed the importance to the city's economic life of the preservation of the Union."²² It is my contention that this view can also be applied to the cities of Virginia and also to the entire upper South.

In observing the election, in brief, we find that Douglas' votes came chiefly from three sections, namely, two counties of the Valley within the bounds of the Tenth Legion, and the old Democratic counties of Monongalia and Cabell in the northwest.²³ Douglas' votes also came in counties where the press broke the chain of political custom by supporting him. This can be seen in Richmond where the Richmond South endorsed him.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., p. 63.

22. Ibid., p. 52.

23. Charles Henry Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910), p. 330.

Lincoln received no vote at all in Richmond and the few that he did receive, which were a total of 1,929, came almost entirely from the northwest and regions where Northerners lived, especially in the Pan Handle.²⁴ Breckenridge's votes came from the northwestern and southwestern counties while Bell's came from counties of the Valley north of Roanoke and east of the Blue Ridge mountains, and, as we have already noted, the urban areas.²⁵

If the election revealed anything, it was that Virginia was not ready for secession, and at the same time that she would not consider dissolution of the union unless all efforts at redress had failed. An astute observation was made by Edward A. Pollard when he said:

The election of Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency of the United States might have precipitated the Secessionary movement of the Southern States, but it certainly did not produce it.²⁶

Shortly after the Civil War ex-Governor Henry A. Wise, in his book, Seven Decades of the Union, gave a candid interpretation of the election and the war which shortly followed. "The election," he proclaimed, "itself was not the cause of the convulsion or of the revolution. The cause had accumulated from 1819."²⁷ The interesting point here is that this once

24. Ibid.

25. Henry F. Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861 (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1934), p. 115.

26. Quoted in Arthur C. Cole, "Lincoln's Election an Immediate Menace to Slavery in the States?", American Historical Review, Vol. XXXVI, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), p. 765.

27. Henry A. Wise, Seven Decades of the Union (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1872), p. 248.

avid secessionist, who once claimed that the election of a "Black Republican" would necessitate war, had completely recanted his view.

Virginia was not ready for secession. Her economic interests, strategic geographic position, and her previous great leaders who played such a key role in the founding and supporting of the Union were some of the reasons which cautioned her to take the position she did. Her principal concern was for the welfare and safety of her state and second for the Union. As a result of the election she made a solemn promise that she would not act hastily or irrationally unless some overt act was committed. She kept her promise, and in the meantime offered counsel and conciliation. However, when the overt act came, the bombarding of Fort Sumter and Lincoln's call for troops, her decision was to come to the aid of her sister states. Thus it was not the election of 1860 that brought Virginia, or the rest of the South, into conflict with the North, but an accumulation of causes which were evident since the framing of the Constitution.

CHAPTER 4

Reaction and Solidification

The period of Lincoln's election in November to his inauguration was one of great complexity. These few months witnessed a dissipation of the Unionist forces and at the same time a strengthening of the secessionist faction, which ultimately gave the disunionists a majority in the state convention. Despite the opinion held by an eminent historian on this period of Virginia's history, the month following the election was not one of "comparative quiet."¹ The month of December witnessed the rise in town and county meetings by various citizens to determine what should be done; continued radical action by the disunionist press; tendering of service by many Virginians in the United States Army; Governor Letcher's attempts at military preparedness for Virginia; the development of "minutemen" militia on the part of local citizens; and, of course, on the national scene, Senator John J. Crittenden's proposal for compromise on December 18, 1860, and the formation of the Committees of Thirty-three and Thirteen, in the House and Senate respectively.²

Many historians have tended to overlook Governor John Letcher's role in this period of crisis. Letcher outwardly

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1. Henry T. Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861 (Richmond: Garrett and Massie Inc., 1934), p. 124.
 2. Clement Eaton, A History of the Old South (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), pp. 576-578.

appeared as a Unionist, but in reality he played a significant part in keeping Virginia constantly leaning toward secession, and inwardly favored separation from the Union. In 1859 the John Brown raid caused the mind of many Virginians, including the Governor, to doubt Virginia's place in the Union. In a letter to Robert L. Montague, Letcher said, in regards to the Brown raid:

When I entered Congress eight years ago, I was so thoroughly a Union man, that I did not regard its dissolution as possible. I soon saw, however, that this opinion was erroneous, and subsequent events annually occurring, have tended to strengthen the belief that dissolution is not only possible, but highly probable.³

In the same letter, Letcher revealed that his administration would be based solely on state rights, and that he believed that a collision between the Federal Government and Southern states was not an improbable event during his administration.⁴ With the election of a "Black Republican" in 1860, he did not believe that the South would submit to his inauguration, "nor did I think it ought to submit to it."⁵

Governor Letcher did not look upon the election crisis as a complete moderate. His position, as well as that of his state, was one of armed neutrality.⁶ The Governor had

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3. Letter from John Letcher to Robert L. Montague, November 15, 1859, Robert L. Montague Papers, 1844-1880 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).
 4. Ibid.
 5. Ibid.
 6. Letter from Edward G. Palmer to Governor John Letcher, November 22, 1860, Letcher Papers, November 1860 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

authorized a contract with the Tredegar Iron Company for the manufacturing of arms and ammunition around the time of the election. A letter from James H. Burton to the Tredegar Company revealed the Governor's desire for necessary military preparedness. Burton set forth certain procedures which were to be followed. He stressed to Mr. Anderson, the owner of the company, the importance of beginning work immediately in certain areas. Burton proclaimed that:

In order to progress without delay with your contract with the State of Virginia for the machinery and for the armory it will be very desirable that good progress should be made with the necessary buildings, etc.⁷

However, the Tredegar Company soon realized that the funds initially allotted for the production of certain machinery were not sufficient. Joseph R. Anderson urged Governor Letcher to provide adequate funds, or else the production would not be maintained. He also asked Letcher to issue a proclamation to the Adjutant General for the shipment of old muskets. The guns were to be sent to the Tredegar Company for repair and then resold to the lower South, South Carolina in particular.⁸

Shortly thereafter the Governor called the General Assembly into special session on January 7, 1861, and he helped push through an important bill to further prepare

7. Letter from James H. Burton to Joseph R. Anderson, December 10, 1860, Letcher Papers, December 1860 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

8. Letter from Joseph R. Anderson to Governor John Letcher, January 28, 1861, Letcher Papers, January, 1861 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

Virginia for armed conflict.⁹ The House of Delegates passed this important defense bill on January 18, and the Senate, with minor modifications, on January 23.¹⁰ The "Housebill Number 58," as it became known, provided approximately one million dollars for the defense of Virginia. The bill was comprised of three resolutions. First, it authorized the future Colonel of Ordnance to purchase or have manufactured eight-hundred thousand dollars worth of arms, munitions, and equipment of war. Next, the Governor was to appoint an engineer for the purpose of planning and constructing coastal, harbor, and river defenses. Finally, the bill was to provide two-hundred thousand dollars for such purposes mentioned in the preceding section.¹¹ Only two days after the adoption of "Housebill Number 58," Letcher also approved a bill to create an Ordnance Department. This department was to consist of "one Colonel of Ordnance . . . appointed by the Governor . . . and subordinate officers not exceeding six. . . ."¹²

The above examples illustrate Governor Letcher's desire for military preparedness. In addition he approved the formation of local military organizations and allotted money for their use. By the latter part of December, military

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9. David M. Potter, Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), p. 306.
 10. Housebill No. 58, January 23, 1861, Letcher Papers, January 1861 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).
 11. Ibid.
 12. Bill Creating the Ordnance Department, January 25, 1861, Letcher Papers, January 1861 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

preparations were so far along that an exhibition was held in Richmond on December 20, 1860. Approximately five-hundred cavalry assembled on the Agricultural Fair Grounds and displayed various maneuvers in the art of war.¹³

It is interesting to see how a moderate and devout Unionist had changed. Though Letcher still remained conservative until Lincoln's call for troops, perhaps his conscience told him that collision was inevitable. It cannot be said that Virginia was not without reason for war preparations. With the secession of South Carolina on December 20, 1860, and the failure of the various peace conferences, Letcher's conservatism gradually began to diminish. The Governor still favored mediation, but realizing that the North was unwilling to make any concessions to the South's demands on the slavery question, he decided to prepare for the worst. However, his desire for the defense of Virginia came at a crucial time. Not only did it meet with the consent of the secessionist, but it also discouraged Southern sympathizers in the North and the members of the various peace conventions.

I have endeavored to explain Governor Letcher's role in the crisis, but perhaps the best way to understand the months of December and January will be to discuss the events which occurred both in Virginia and the nation. They have been briefly mentioned in the first paragraph of the chapter. After a careful analysis of these occurrences, it will be clearly seen why these two months were truly a period of

13. Letter from Colonel John McRae to John Letcher, December 20, 1860, Letcher Papers, December 1860 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

turmoil and solidification. This was a period of time in which discussion, debating, and arguing between conservatives and secessionists transpired, finally ending with a crystalization in the minds of Virginians toward disunion. To understand this change one must take note of these uncontrollable events.

The months of December and January, particularly the former, witnessed an unceasing effort on the part of the secessionist papers to press their views on the people of Richmond and Virginia. Though Richmond was carried by the Union candidate, Bell, in the late election, the majority of eastern Virginia demanded immediate action to deal with the secession crisis. The west, however, proposed an extra session of the General Assembly as well as a constitutional convention.¹⁴ A study of contemporary Richmond papers will suggest that much of eastern Virginia demanded immediate action.

Shortly after the election, the Richmond Daily Enquirer submitted a questionnaire to approximately ten prominent political leaders in Virginia. These leaders were asked to give their views as to what position Virginia should follow as a consequence of the election of a "Black Republican." The question was presented not only to dissolutionists, but to Union men as well. The first of these letters appeared on December 3, 1860, and was written by Robert E. Scott, a moderate of Fauquier County. Even at this early date a plea for a state convention was made by conservative men. This was

14. J. G. Randall and David Donald, The Civil War and Reconstruction (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1961), p. 136.

also the early and constant cry of a majority of the secessionists.¹⁵ Scott endorsed the right of secession, and said this concerning South Carolina's threat of withdrawing from the Union:

The common interests of the slave-holding States are . . . so strong as to bind them to a common destiny; and to necessitate intimate relations among them The withdrawal of some of the States may compel us to the same, for whatever may be our opinion as to the same, for whatever may be our opinion as to the peril of present evils, or the efficacy of the proposed remedy, we would be left to a narrow alternative.¹⁶

This view most accurately expressed the belief of the majority of Virginians. It should be pointed out, however, that the radical papers, by this I mean those papers which endorsed secession and immediate action, such as the Enquirer and the Examiner, gave very little space, if any, to Unionist views. Even the letters submitted by moderate men gave endorsement for immediate action. Unlike the Richmond Whig, these papers constantly emphasized the need for such a proceeding. This unrelenting viewpoint played a key role in winning support for the disunionists.

Articles signed "Junius" were frequent in the Enquirer, and expressed radicalism at its worst. These views were typical of those appearing in the December 3 issue. The following passage was representative of the rash views which papers similar to the Enquirer printed. It said:

15. Charles Henry Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910), p. 337.

16. Richmond Enquirer, December 3, 1860, p. 2.

The ultimatum of submission is reached. Secession by the whole South, or submission and utter degradation, is now, the only portion which must fill the cry for your lips. These are the only alternatives. May the God of nations seal the former and avert the latter.¹⁷

The conservative George William Brent, a Douglas elector from Alexandria, expressed his sentiments to the Enquirer's question on December 4. He, like Scott, urged an immediate call for a state convention and supported the right of a state to leave the Union. However, he desired that Virginia should appeal to the lower South to "forbear all hasty and precipitate action."¹⁸ Brent proposed this form of action for Virginia:

Let them the united South move in one serried column. Let them appeal calmly, but firmly, and with determination, to their brethren of the North, to retrace their steps and repeal all their unjust laws tending to injure the South and assail her rights and acknowledge such guarantees as will . . . remove all cause for agitation. . . .¹⁹

If this plan failed, Brent added, Virginia would then have the right to secede. Brent's proposal was typical of the majority of the conservatives. In brief, it was to make every effort possible at conciliation, and if this failed, then secession would be justifiable. One must ask himself, however, why these conservative leaders at this early date desired an immediate convention? Perhaps the principal reason was the election. It was true that Virginians endorsed the Union candidate, Bell, but the nearly unanimous Northern support given to Lincoln greatly diminished their hopes of reconciliation in the Union.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., December 4, 1860, p. 2.

John B. Floyd, Secretary of War during most of the Buchanan administration, was considered a strong Unionist to most Virginians. In answer to the Enquirer's question, an article by Floyd appeared on December 6. Floyd's article is of interest because it shows the change in the attitude of Union men in Virginia. He blamed the country's tragic situation on the North, and their persistent agitation of the slavery question. The Secretary vividly summed up the principal fear of Virginians and the reason for the change in the minds of many moderates. He said:

The election of Mr. Lincoln is the result of the ultra and violent popular feeling of the North against the South. . . . Elected by a powerful, fanatical, unreasoning, reckless party, he is not the master of his own actions; their will must be his; his policy theirs.²⁰

Floyd went on to state that if a few of the Southern states should secede, then Virginia must sooner or later follow, and could not remain neutral between the North and South. Furthermore, he maintained that the legislature should be called immediately to discuss the perilous situation and the problems with which Virginia was faced.²¹

Not all of Virginia's leaders favored a calling of a state convention to attempt to redress grievances. Some favored confederations with other states. Such a man was R. M. T. Hunter. Hunter proposed an alliance with either the Northwest or the lower South, preferably the latter.²² He

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., December 6, 1860, p. 2.

22. Ibid.

also saw a constitutional right in secession, as did most Virginians, whether they were secessionists or Unionists. Another prominent proposal was that of Henry Wise's "fighting in the Union." Wise professed that Virginia could remain in the Union while at the same time seek redress of their grievances. He urged Virginia to prepare herself for the inevitable conflict with the abolitionist North.²³ As part of his plan for preparedness, Wise proposed the formation of minutemen organizations. Even prior to Lincoln's election, Wise stressed upon the people of Princess Anne County the need to adopt a committee of safety, in case a "Black Republican" candidate was elected.²⁴ The Virginian's plan was soon carried out by other counties, in the eastern area particularly. The desire for the formation of such committees can be seen in an article in the December 8 issue of the Enquirer. It purported:

The Minute Men of Norfolk held a meeting on Tuesday last, and passed a resolution inviting the Minute Men of Portsmouth City, and Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties, to meet in Convention on the nineteenth instant, "for the purpose of a more thorough organization, and the adoption of such measures as may seem best calculated to carry out their object."²⁵

President Buchanan, who has been criticized by some historians for vacillation and weakness during the crisis, addressed Congress on December 3.²⁶ Buchanan had a definite

23. Ibid., December 12, 1860, p. 2.

24. Ibid., December 15, 1860, p. 2.

25. Richmond Enquirer, December 8, 1860, p. 2.

26. Eaton, op. cit., pp. 575-576.

policy to create a political atmosphere conducive to compromise and reconciliation. While denying the right of secession, he also maintained that the Federal Government had no right to coerce a sovereign state. He proposed that Congress should make three amendments to the Constitution; firstly, that slavery should be recognized in the states where it now exists; secondly, it is the duty of the Federal Government to protect slavery in all the territories until the newly formed states should decide themselves whether to be free or slave; thirdly, that there should be strict adherence to the fugitive slave law and all state laws impairing this law should be considered unconstitutional.²⁷

Buchanan's message was a disappointment to all parties in Virginia. The Staunton Vindicator thought the views expressed in the address banished "all hope of an enlightened patriotism."²⁸ The Richmond Examiner best revealed the attitude of the more radical press. It maintained:

We see nothing in this letter [Buchanan's message to Congress] than we already have, so far as practical security is concerned. It leaves the provision for Southern safety to be construed and executed by a Northern majority. And thus it leaves the real difficulty unchanged, the sore unhealed, the security imperfect and worthless.²⁹

Soon after the President's message, definite action was taken in Washington to avert a national crisis. At the suggestion of Representative Boteler of Virginia, a "Committee

27. Richmond Daily Examiner, December 6, 1860, p. 2.

28. Quoted in Shanks, op. cit., p. 132.

29. Richmond Daily Examiner, loc. cit.

of Thirty-three" was formed.³⁰ Composition of the committee would include a member from each state, whose duty it would be to bring harmony between the two sections. The reaction to this "grand committee" was favored by such Union papers as the Whig, although secessionist papers like the Examiner reacted with hostility. The Examiner believed that since the North had a majority in the committee no satisfactory conclusion could be reached. The following statement decidedly denotes the reaction of such attempts to avert disunion. It maintained:

The only effect of these abortive efforts at Executive and Congressional adjustments, will be to drag on the time until the two sections are brought face to face on another issue demanding more decision of action.³¹

In the Senate the efforts toward compromise were centered in a "Committee of Thirteen," composed of such qualified men as Crittenden of Kentucky, Seward of New York, Toombs of Georgia, Douglas of Illinois, Davis of Mississippi, and Wade of Ohio. As the "Committee of Thirty-three" failed to adopt any measures, the Senate committee met the same fate. Crittenden addressed the Senate on December 18, and introduced his famous proposed amendments to the Constitution.³² Briefly, he proposed the following constitutional amendments: One, that slavery be permitted and protected by the Federal government below the line of 36°30'; two, future states north

30. Randall and Donald, op. cit., p. 148.

31. Richmond Daily Examiner, December 8, 1860, p. 2.

32. Dwight Lowell Dumond, The Secession Movement, 1860-1861 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), p. 159.

of the line should be permitted to come into the Union free or slave as they wish; three, Congress should be restrained from abolishing slavery in districts surrounded by slave states; four, the United States should compensate the slave owner when intimidation prevents the capture of fugitive slaves; and five, fugitive slave laws should be enforced and personal liberty laws repealed.³³

Crittenden's proposal met defeat in the Senate because of several reasons. The responsible Republican leaders in Congress, such as Seward, refused to accept any compromise which did not recognize the Wilmot Proviso. The Southern extremists refused the proposal for it failed to satisfy their demands. The words of President-elect Lincoln also aided in the defeat of the proposal. Lincoln, no doubt, had great influence on the Republican members of Congress. His influence was evident in a letter of December 11 to congressman Kellogg of Illinois, when he said, "The tug has to come, and better now than later."³⁴

These setbacks at compromise not only hurt the cause for the safety of the Union, but also greatly enhanced the strength of the secessionist faction in Virginia. It created a greater desire for a state convention and a more audible cry for immediate action and disunion. Roger A. Pryor, an anti-Union Senator from Virginia, best expressed the secessionist sentiment among many Virginians concerning the issue of

33. Randall and Donald, op. cit., p. 150.

34. Ibid., p. 149.

compromise. He said:

I see no chance of preserving the Union. . . .
It is evident that the North will give us no
guarantees. They are mending their hold; and
the Committee of thirty-three is more likely
to report a plan of coercion than a system of
pacification. . . . Virginia should at once
assume an attitude of armed expectation. . . .
The only safety of the South is in the union
of the slaveholding States.³⁵

Even the citadel for conservatism and moderation, the Richmond Daily Whig, under the editorship of Marmaduke Johnson, expressed apprehension over the results of the two committees in Washington. In a letter from conservative William C. Rives to Representative Boteler, the former felt that compromise might not be successful. Rives maintained that, "unless a very different spirit . . . can be successfully invoked, the prospect would be gloomy indeed."³⁶ While the Whig avidly endorsed practically all the compromise proposals by the two committees, it too saw that chances were now slim after the two committees reached no favorable decision. The Whig proposed that every state should send recommendations for amendments to the Constitution. However, the great organ of conciliation also saw the possible need for secession. It said:

And if they [the newly proposed assemblage of mediators] cannot agree, let them then consider, and recommend to the country, the terms, and mode in which the States that choose may best separate from the Union, and resume their independent sovereignty.³⁷

35. Richmond Daily Examiner, December 22, 1860, p. 2.

36. Richmond Daily Whig, December 15, 1860, p. 2.

37. Ibid., December 25, 1860, p. 2.

Thus with the failure of the Committees of Thirty-three and Thirteen and the secession of South Carolina on December 20, disunionist sentiment was decisively augmented. After the election of Lincoln, Virginians quickly became divided among themselves. The number of true Unionists decreased and the moderates' demands became more in unison with those of the dissolutionists.³⁸ The preceding events, plus continued aggressive action by the secessionist press, the inactive role of Governor Letcher, and the lack of vigorous efforts by the Unionist papers all helped to enhance the cause of the separationists. The subsequent change in attitude due to the failure at efforts to compromise was highlighted by the increase in town meetings to discuss what further action should be taken, and the tendering of service to Virginia by Virginians in the United States armed forces.

The calling of local meetings and the forming of militia groups became increasingly necessary after the December failure at peace in Washington. It should be noted, however, that such action on the part of local citizens was far more noticeable in the eastern counties than in the west. Typical of such meetings was that of Elizabeth City on January 1, 1861.³⁹ The results of the meeting was the issuance of three resolutions. The people of this county expressed the belief in the right of secession, and supported South Carolina's withdrawal

38. Richard N. Current, Lincoln and the First Shot (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1963), p. 31.

39. Proceedings of Elizabeth City County, January 1, 1861, Letcher Papers, January 1861 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

from the Union. They proclaimed that they desired peace but would go to war if necessary to resist Northern aggression. In addition, they stressed the importance of the need of the people of Virginia to organize themselves into military groups to protect their cherished institutions.⁴⁰ These meetings grew with the passage of days until practically every county had organized a local militia or had taken steps toward some sort of military preparedness.

Local inhabitants often donated money in their efforts for preparedness. An article in the January 8 Richmond Daily Whig told of such a happening in Halifax County. It stated:

We learn that under a movement set on foot in Halifax County, by the Honorable Thomas S. Flournoy and others, for arming that county \$4,000 have been subscribed, and the sum is expected to reach \$10,000.⁴¹

In Rappahannock County similar action was taken. On February 11, Captain John S. Green, commander of the "Old Guard" cavalry corps, asked Governor Letcher for permission to form a "select volunteer corps of 10,000 men or more, for the defense of the state."⁴² Secessionist and Unionist papers alike supported these endeavors. On January 15, the Whig wholeheartedly endorsed such procedures. It maintained:

The move which has been inaugurated in several of the counties, to provide by subscriptions for the arming, and equipping of the volunteers of the respective counties, is a timely and

40. Ibid.

41. Richmond Daily Whig, January 1, 1861, p. 2.

42. Letter from Captain John S. Green to Governor John Letcher, February 13, 1861, Letcher Papers, February, 1861 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

proper one, and should be cordially endorsed and sustained by the people.⁴³

In a brief letter to Governor Letcher, E. C. Robinson stressed that he was pleased that the Governor and the government of Virginia were not idly discussing the turn of events, and that there was a definite plan for military preparedness. Robinson's letter further revealed the apprehension of citizens in coastal towns concerning the need of protection. "I have just forwarded to the Adjutant General," Robinson stated, "a requisition for arms and ammunition."⁴⁴ He continued, "there is a great deal of excitement about Fortress Monroe . . . and at Norfolk."⁴⁵ In an earlier letter from Leonard Lamb to the Governor, the danger of United States troops being moved from Fort Pickens, Florida, to Fort Monroe was expressed. He asked Letcher to prevent such action and urged him to take the fort for the Commonwealth of Virginia at once.⁴⁶

As previously mentioned, a large amount of withdrawals from the United States armed forces had taken place after the failure of the Committees of Thirty-three and Thirteen to settle differences between the two sections of the country. Tendering of service actually began with the election of

43. Richmond Daily Whig, January 15, 1861, p. 2.

44. Letter from E. C. Robinson to Governor John Letcher, January 14, 1861, Letcher Papers, January 1861 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

45. Ibid.

46. Letter from Leonard Lamb to Governor John Letcher, January 29, 1861, Letcher Papers, January 1861 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

Lincoln, but continued at a steadier rate from January to Lincoln's call for troops and the Sumter crisis in April, 1861. This period saw many young men, school boys, college students, and military men offer their services to the state of Virginia.

A letter from Thomas H. Burke to his father illustrates the response which school children held of the crisis. Burke was a student at Hanover Academy, and in writing his father, he expressed his desire to enlist if the present situation did not improve.⁴⁷ The response from college students was similar. Early in November, ex-President Tyler wrote his nephew, William Waller, a cadet at West Point, not to resign. "I would not think of resigning . . .," said Tyler, "until Virginia had distinctly and plainly mapped out her course after the election."⁴⁸ Typical of the letter from servicemen desiring to offer their services was that of Lieutenant Thomas W. Jones. In a letter to the Governor, he said:

Should Virginia in her present crisis require the services of her sons--while I cannot offer her the services of a veteran in experience, such as they are, I most cheerfully and gladly offer mine to her.⁴⁹

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47. Letter from Thomas H. Burke to his father, January 12, 1861, Burke Family Papers, Caroline County (MSS in the Virginia State Library).
48. Letter from President John Tyler to William Waller, November 5, 1860, John Tyler Papers, 1860-1861 (MSS Virginia Historical Society).
49. Letter from Lieutenant Thomas W. Jones to Governor John Letcher, January 1, 1861, Letcher Papers, January 1861 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

The majority opinion of Virginians was expressed by O. H. Maury in a correspondence to Governor Letcher. He said:

I assure you that Virginians . . . in this territory /New Mexico/ will promptly resign their Commissions when their State leaves the Confederacy. I can see no evidences of a purpose in the North to yield us our constitutional rights.⁵⁰

By early January definite forces acted on the people of Virginia, which had important consequences in the future. The period from November to early January was not one of relative inactiveness. It was a period of time, a few months, in which the future position of Virginia was determined. The secessionist groups rapidly increased, moderates gradually began to take the side of the disunionists, and Union men began doubting the future of the Confederacy. The door to Virginia's future was opened during these months, and a study of the next two, January and February, will reveal her flight through that door and on to the road of secession.

50. Letter from D. H. Maury to Governor John Letcher, March 8, 1861, Letcher Papers, March 1861 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

CHAPTER 5

The Road to Secession

A careful analysis of the months of January and February reveal a more numerous and more confirm conviction on the part of the secessionist forces. These crucial months witnessed the last real attempts by the moderates to save the Union. The month of January revealed the continued agitation by the disunionist press and a call for a state convention. February was more significant because it witnessed the failure of the Washington Peace Conference. The constant growth and unification of the dissolution faction continued because of this failure, and consequently a majority of non-Unionist delegates were elected to the convention. Thus by the time of Lincoln's inauguration the mind of Virginians had definitely made a complete turn--from wait-and-see and moderation to preparedness and thoughts of disunion. The desire for secession became even more prevalent after Lincoln's inaugural address. By the first of March Virginians had determined their course of action.

The Richmond secessionist papers, the Enquirer and Examiner, continued their relentless attack on the moderate Unionist factions in the city and the state as well. Characteristic of these was an article from the Richmond Semi-Weekly Enquirer, a division of the daily Enquirer, on January 4. In regards to attempts at preserving the Union, it said:

All hope of preserving the present Union has been abandoned by the people of Virginia; and while they earnestly desire that its dissolution may be peaceable, and that reconstruction may speedily follow, they will not be unprepared for war, if that dread alternative is tendered by the North.¹

The Semi-Weekly Enquirer went on to denounce those Congressmen and others who remained in Washington to attempt to solve the present crisis. It stated:

No Southern man, of any part, should remain in Washington, where his presence, by making a quorum, may involve his own people in the horrors of civil war. The Northern Democrats . . . should also vacate their seats. . . .²

The Enquirer published a letter by ex-President Tyler on January 18. This letter is significant because it clearly illustrates the change in the mind of Union men. Tyler proposed a reconstructed confederation, and maintained that it would restore public confidence. "It would indeed," he added, "be a retrograde movement if any State should be contained by force to remain in a Union which it abhorred."³ In regard to compromise proposals the Enquirer accurately evaluated the attitude of most Virginians by the end of January. It purported:

We have no faith in amendments, since we have no reason to suppose that States meaning the North which have proven themselves faithless to the present Constitution would be true to it when amended.⁴

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1. Richmond Semi-Weekly Enquirer, January 4, 1861, p. 2.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid., January 18, 1861, p. 2.
 4. Ibid., January 29, 1861, p. 2.

The Richmond Semi-Weekly Examiner was equally opposed to attempts at conciliation. It perpetually degraded the various peace conferences which met at Washington for reconciliation. In an article dated February 12, it stated the cooperation that the people of Virginia and the South would get from the Republicans. It asserted that:

No Black Republican man of any weight proposes to accede to any compromise offered by the South. So far as we can see, they do not propose to consent to any modification of any proposition from the South which could be accepted without degradation.⁵

William Old, Jr., in his last article as editor of the Examiner expressed the true view of secessionists in the state at that time. He justifiably predicted the course of Virginia when he said:

But I am sure I see in the certain and now not so distant future the uprising of the honest and true-hearted lovers of liberty in this great Commonwealth, who, seconding, and at last coming abreast, with their noble brothers of the South, will add glory to the illustrious renown of Virginia and consign the treacherous and vile tradugers of the Southern people to their merited family.⁶

The Examiner avidly stressed the importance of Virginia's seceding and joining the lower South. The paper believed that had Virginia joined South Carolina when she left the Union, the remainder of the slave states would have quickly followed. The paper also contended that by Virginia's supporting the various peace conferences, she was only adding power to

5. Richmond Semi-Weekly Examiner, January 12, 1861, p. 2.

6. Ibid., January 22, 1861, p. 2.

Lincoln's party and making "his hostile administration more severely injurious to the slaveholding States. . . ."7

On January 7, 1861, the state legislature was called into special session by Governor Letcher.⁸ In Letcher's address to the assembly, he stressed the desire for a hopeful settlement of differences between the two sections. However, he also made it known that Virginia would not stand idly by and be forced to remain in the Union by coercion. He further desired a calling of a convention to determine Virginia's course of action. Thus the cries of the secessionists for an immediate convention to determine Virginia's place in the Union was answered. The Governor set forth four principal points which he felt the North must recognize if peace was to prevail among the two sections. These proposals were, briefly, one, the repeal of the personal liberty laws; two, protection of slavery in the District of Columbia; three, equality for both sections in the territories; and four, that the transmission of slaves between slave-holding states must not be interrupted.⁹ To many Letcher's address appeared conservative; but it did, however, open the door for further steps toward secession. Outwardly, it appeared that moderation still prevailed, but in all actuality it was an opportunity to enhance the aspirations of the disunionists. Their desire for a convention was met; it was now up to them

7. Ibid.

8. Richmond Daily Whig, January 1, 1861, p. 2.

9. Ibid., January 8, 1861, p. 2.

to bring the desire for Virginia's withdrawal from the Union to fruition.

The General Assembly lost no time in passing a resolution which provided for a special state convention. The House of Delegates approved a bill for a convention and sent it to the Senate on January 12.¹⁰ After amendment it was returned to the House of Delegates. The bill was then passed by the House. The bill proposed that the election of delegates to the convention should be held on February 4, and at the same time a census was to be taken of the voters' opinions concerning their desire to remain in the Union.¹¹ The bill also declared that the delegates were to meet at Richmond on February 13, "and proceed to adopt such measures as they may deem expedient for the welfare of the Commonwealth."¹²

Before the election of the delegates on February 4, the secessionist press stressed the necessity of electing members who were sympathetic with their beliefs. At the same time, they ridiculed such Union men as John Minor Botts. On February 1, the Examiner unmercifully denounced the Unionist candidate. The Examiner maintained,

But this man is now a candidate to represent the people of the metropolis /Richmond/ of this State in a Convention to sit in judgment on the conduct of the Northern and Southern people. Can any man in the South hope for even an impartial judgment for himself when a Northern Unionist is his antagonist? . . .

10. Richmond Semi-Weekly Enquirer, January 15, 1861, p. 2.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

Above all, can the free people of the South hope for even a decent hearing, if they complain of their Northern aggressors, before a tribunal over which John Minor Botts is to have any influence? He must either be your enemy or your judge.¹³

Two other important forces acted on the minds of Virginians in general, and in particular the assembly and the Governor: one was the secession of the states of Mississippi on January 9, Florida on the 10, Alabama on the 11, Georgia on January 17, and Louisiana on January 26.¹⁴ The secession of these states, and the failure of the peace groups created a growing amount of sympathy with the lower South's cause. Governor Letcher's approval of ambassadors from the seceding states for the purpose of urging Virginia to leave the Union also did much to influence the people.

The second force, the results of Northern state conventions, increased Virginia's apprehension of peace by mediation. Letcher read to both Houses the resolutions passed by the General Assembly of Ohio on January 12, 1861. The state of Ohio resolved that the President of the United States should have the necessary power to coerce and subjugate the seceding states.¹⁶ Letcher touched upon the tender question of the personal liberty laws when he said:

13. Ibid., February 1, 1861, p. 2.

14. Clement Eaton, The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 384-405.

15. Clement Eaton, A History of the Old South (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 585.

16. Governor Letcher's Speech to the House and Senate, January 21, 1861, Letcher Papers, January 1861 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

I would further suggest that as "no enactment" of the State of Ohio "has clothed the Governor with authority to surrender to another state fugitives from its justice, seeking refuge" in Ohio, it would be well to enact such laws, and thus "fulfill in good faith all their obligations under the constitution of the United States according to the spirit and intent thereof."¹⁷

The state of Michigan's resolutions were even harsher and more straightforward. They maintained that it was the "determination of the Northern people to resist, even unto death, every demand of the Slave Power."¹⁸ It went on to say that:

. . . the people will repeal all "Fugitive Slave Laws," and will enact and execute, too, all manner of Personal Liberty Laws . . . will give aid and comfort to every Nat Turner who rises insurrections against his tyrant master. . . .¹⁹

Thus, the secession of the cotton states, the influence of representatives from these seceded states, and resolutions passed by Northern state conventions had a tremendous effect on the course of Virginia's action.

On February 4, Virginians went to the polls to elect their delegates to the special convention. While the "Precipitators" (secessionists) stressed the importance of electing candidates who would lead Virginia out of the Union, the Whig took the opposite view. The Richmond paper zealously endorsed the Union candidate, Botts. The basic views of the Whig and conservative men in the state are clearly illustrated

17. Ibid.

18. Extracts from the Proceedings of the State Convention Held in Adirion, Michigan, November 17-18, 1860, Letcher Papers, November 1860 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

19. Ibid.

in the following passage. The Whig proclaimed:

If the precipitators carry the day, Virginia will be hurried out of the Union, and plunged into the fearful vortex of revolution and civil war, in the course of a very few weeks or months at the farthest.²⁰

The Richmond Daily Whig also honestly evaluated the outcome of the election. There were eight candidates from the city of Richmond, and the Union candidate, Bell, was soundly beaten. The three successful candidates, William H. Macfarland, Marmaduke Johnson, the Whig editor, and George W. Randolph were elected. The first two supported Bell, and the latter Breckenridge in the recent presidential election.²¹

Governor Letcher sent a letter to Governor Andrew of Massachusetts on January 20, and listed the recent resolutions passed by the General Assembly. One of the resolutions read:

That on behalf of the Commonwealth of Virginia, an invitation is hereby extended to all such States, whether slaveholding or non-slaveholding, as are willing to unite with Virginia in an earnest effort to adjust the present unhappy controversies . . . to appoint commissioners to meet on the fourth day of February next, in the city of Washington.²²

Another resolution listed the commissioners from Virginia to be sent to Washington. The delegation included ex-President John Tyler, William C. Rives, John W. Brockenbrough, George W. Summers, and James A. Seddon.²³

20. Richmond Daily Whig, February 2, 1861, p. 2.

21. Ibid., February 5, 1861, p. 2.

22. Letter from Governor John Letcher to Governor Andrew of Massachusetts, January 20, 1861, Letcher Papers, January 1861 (MSS in the Virginia State Library).

23. Ibid.

During the month of February the Enquirer and Examiner continued to ridicule the peace conference's efforts, and to influence the newly elected delegates to the state convention. The Semi-Weekly Enquirer said this of the newly formed Washington Peace Conference:

Unless we are greatly mistaken, indications in certain quarters, point to another submission dodge, in the shape of a national Convention to adjust difficulties by amending the Constitution. This dodge first emanated from Mr. Seward in his "one, two or three years hence" settlement, and was designed to firmly fix the Black Republicans in power.²⁴

The conference sat until February 27 and adopted a plan for conciliation which resembled the Crittenden proposal.²⁵ John Tyler was chosen as the presiding officer. He went into the conference with high hopes. In a letter dated January 25 to an unknown individual in Washington, he said:

I firmly believe that if the people of the North and of the South could meet each other face to face in council where the demands of both could be distinctly stated, and the advantages and disadvantages of union and disunion be Discussed, and mature explanations be made; then Disputes which now disturb the Country might and would be arrived by settlement. . . .²⁶

However, Tyler's hopes and aspirations were never satisfied. Such states as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota failed to send delegates to the conference.²⁷ Republicans opposed

24. Richmond Semi-Weekly Enquirer, February 19, 1861, p. 2.

25. Eaton, A History of the Old South, pp. 579-580.

26. Letter from President John Tyler to Unknown Person, January 25, 1861, John Tyler Papers, 1860-1861 (MSS Virginia Historical Society).

27. Eaton, A History of the Old South, p. 580.

the conference's proposals, and the Southern border states, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas did likewise.²⁸

Why did this conference fail? One reason was lack of earnest support by the North. An excellent example of this can be seen in an article from the New York Tribune. It stated:

A majority of the men who compose it [the Washington Peace Conference] belong to beaten and broken down factions utterly rejected and thrust aside by the people, and without prestige or influence in nineteen of the most important States of the Union.²⁹

Another factor was the refusal by seceded states to send delegates. Also the stubbornness of Northern and Southern delegates in Washington added to the ineffectiveness of the conferences. When the conference failed even the moderates and Unionists began to see that war was inevitable. The Richmond Whig, the champion of moderation and caution, expressed a dubious attitude. When the proposed amendments to the constitution were rejected, the Whig expressed this point of view:

During the present Conference, propositions have been submitted for the settlement of the controversy. . . . Negotiations are still in progress in that body, for a peaceful adjustment. Peace is the probability—but war, nevertheless may be the fact.³⁰

28. Ibid.

29. Richmond Semi-Weekly Enquirer, February 12, 1861, p. 2.

30. Richmond Daily Whig, February 26, 1861, p. 2.

By the first of March to a majority of Virginians, efforts at reconciliation seemed lost. The failures at mediation in Washington during the months of January and February along with persistent agitation by the secessionist press decreased the number of Unionist supporters. The secession of the Lower South followed by the sending of their ambassadors to induce Virginia to leave the Union, and the hopelessness expressed by the Unionist press, all contributed to increase and unify the disunionist faction. All that remained was the overt act to bring Virginia into the arms of her sister states.

CHAPTER 6

A Capstone For The Secessionists

The first week in March was of the utmost importance to the future status of Virginia. Very few men expressed hope of conciliation after Lincoln's inaugural address. A sense of desperation was evident in most Union men since the Washington Peace Conference failed to reach any settlement. The best example of this can be seen in the March 4 issue of the Richmond Daily Whig. Concerning the failure of the conference, it said:

We have all along maintained that there was no hope of settlement of the pending controversy by the miserable politicians in Congress. The proceedings in Congress, and the Peace Conference settlement, sufficiently demonstrated the faction's temper and character of the wretched extremists of both sections.¹

The radical press, of course, zealously played up the failure of the conference. In analyzing the conference's proposals, the Examiner touched on the possibility of Virginia's having to fight fellow Southerners, if they approved the amendments. This was a delicate subject, to which Virginia would never submit. The Examiner stated:

You who accept this compromise to escape war, will, by your very act of acceptance, involve yourself in war. In what kind of war, and with whom? Why, in fratricidal war, with war home—civil, intestine war, war against your fellow-citizens of Virginia. Can you,

1. Richmond Daily Whig, March 4, 1861, p. 2.

submissionists, march unopposed and unharmed through Eastern and Southwestern Virginia to assail South Carolina?²

Lincoln was inaugurated on March 4, and the reaction to his address was widespread and hostile in many quarters of Virginia. As we have noted in the previous chapter, the Whig and other conservative thinking papers gradually joined the secessionist forces in the few months after Lincoln's election. Lincoln's address was the capstone for the secessionists. Save for the call for troops, no event gave the secessionists more strength than Lincoln's inaugural address. The Whig had this to say of his address:

Let Lincoln carry out the policy indicated in his Inaugural, and civil war will be inaugurated forthwith throughout the length and breadth of the land. The Gulf States, in our judgment, have acted rashly, unneighborly, and improperly; but, considering them erring sisters, entitled to our sympathies and our aid in an emergency, Virginia can never consent, and will never consent for the Federal Government to employ coercive measures towards them.³

As was expected, the secessionist press bitterly criticized Lincoln's speech. An excellent example of this is seen in the following passage:

Lincoln has hoisted the red flag right before their eyes [pertaining to the submissionists], ignominiously rejected all their terms of capitulation, and demands the most unqualified and abject submission.⁴

The Charlottesville Review, A Unionist Paper, called Lincoln's address a "swindle." The Review maintained that the speech

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2. Richmond Daily Examiner, March 2, 1861, p. 2.
 3. Richmond Daily Whig, March 6, 1861, p. 2.
 4. Richmond Daily Examiner, March 6, 1861, p. 2.

threatened civil war and suggested no other plan for compromise.⁵

It can be generally said that the majority of Virginians misinterpreted Lincoln's address. In truth, while it struck a note of gentle firmness, it also expressed a spirit of conciliation and friendliness.⁶ When Lincoln said that he would use all the power provided to "hold, occupy, and possess the property, and places belonging to the government," he was dealing with a delicate matter. Many Virginians misconstrued this as a threat of aggression, especially in regard to South Carolina and the question of the forts near Charleston harbor. However, there were some Virginians who more accurately evaluated the address. Such was James D. Davidson, an avid Unionist from Rockbridge County. Davidson maintained:

Nor did I think any reasonable Southern man, can draw any inference from it that Lincoln entertains any decided--determined purpose, under any circumstances, to collect revenue, or seize the forts, at the Southern ports.⁷

Lincoln's inaugural address was definitely an asset for the secessionists. This added to the gradual momentum which was moving on the side of the disunionists since Lincoln's election. No doubt the results of the election in November

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5. Charlottesville Review, March 8, 1861, p. 2.
 6. J. G. Randall and David Donald, The Civil War and Reconstruction (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1961), p. 164.
 7. Quoted in Bruce S. Greenawalt (ed.), "Unionists in Rockbridge County: The Correspondence of James Dorman Davidson Concerning the Virginia Secession Convention of 1861," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LXXIII (January, 1965), 89-92.

accurately measured the viewpoint of the majority of Virginians. They did not want to leave the Union. However, with the failure of the various peace conferences and attempts at compromises, their confidence in the future of the Union was vastly diminished. That Virginia did not play a leading role after the election to redress grievances between the two sections, is not completely true. This can be seen in the forming of the "Committee of Thirty-three" and the calling of the Washington Peace Conference. But this was not the dominant mood in Virginia during the three months after the election. Virginians were honestly beginning to see the course which they must and would take—unification with their sister states.

The minds of Virginians were made up by March 4. Since the election in November, faith in the Union decreased gradually to such a point where any possible solution seemed hopeless. If Lincoln had asked Virginia to send troops to South Carolina on March 4, the results would have been similar to the action taken a month later. Only diehard Unionists, such as James Davidson of Rockbridge County, remained loyal to the Union. The secessionists' plans had been answered and it would take only the overt act to exhibit their sentiment.

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Appendix

<u>Cities</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Breckenridge</u>	<u>Bell</u>	<u>Douglas</u>	<u>Bell-Douglas</u>	<u>Lincoln</u>
Richmond	37,910	27%	56%	17%	73%	
Norfolk	14,620	27	54	14	73	
Portsmouth	9,462	38	46	15	61	.2%
Petersburg	18,266	12	53	34	87	
Alexandria	12,654	37	55	8	63	.1
Wheeling	14,083	23	33	22	55	21
Rural Virginia		46	44	9	53	1

This table indicates the percentage of votes obtained by the various candidates in the urban and rural areas of Virginia. Note the large amount of urban votes obtained by Bell and the large rural ones by Breckenridge.¹

1. Ollinger Crenshaw, "Urban and Rural Voting in the Election of 1860," Historiography and Urbanization (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1941), p. 66.