

"The incentive to undertake the work now offered to the public was the desire to correct misapprehensions created by industriously circulated misrepresentations as to the acts and purposes of the people and the General Government of the Confederate States. By the reiteration of such inappropriate terms as "rebellion" and "treason," and the asseveration that the South was levying war against the United States, those ignorant of the nature of the Union, and of the reserved powers of the States, have been led to believe that the Confederate States were in the condition of revolted provinces, and that the United States were forced to resort to arms for the preservation of their existence."

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Preface

[...]

At the period to which this review of events has advanced, one State had already withdrawn from the Union. Seven or eight others were preparing to follow her example, and others yet were anxiously and doubtfully contemplating the probably impending necessity of taking the same action. The efforts of Southern men in Congress, aided by the coöperation of the Northern friends of the Constitution, had failed, by the stubborn refusal of a haughty majority, controlled by "radical" purposes, to yield anything to the spirit of peace and conciliation. This period, coinciding, as it happens, with the close of a calendar year, affords a convenient point to pause for a brief recapitulation of the causes which had led the Southern States into the attitude they then held, and for a more full exposition of the constitutional questions involved.

The reader of many of the treatises on these events, which have been put forth as historical, if dependent upon such alone for information, might naturally enough be led to the conclusion that the controversies which arose between the States, and the war in which they culminated, were caused by efforts on the one side to extend and perpetuate human slavery, and on the other to resist it and establish human liberty. The Southern States and Southern people have been sedulously represented as "propagandists" of slavery, and the Northern as the defenders and champions of universal freedom, and this view has been so arrogantly assumed, so dogmatically asserted, and so persistently reiterated, that its authors have, in many cases, perhaps, succeeded in bringing themselves to believe it, as well as in impressing it widely upon the world.

The attentive reader of the preceding chapters--especially if he has compared their statements with contemporaneous records and other original sources of information--will already have found evidence enough to enable him to discern the falsehood of these representations, and to perceive that, to whatever extent the question of slavery may have served as an \_occasion\_, it was far from being the \_cause\_ of the conflict.

I have not attempted, and shall not permit myself to be drawn into any discussion of the merits or demerits of slavery as an ethical or even as a political question. It would be foreign to my purpose, irrelevant to my subject, and would only serve--as it

has invariably served, in the hands of its agitators--to "darken counsel" and divert attention from the genuine issues involved.

As a mere historical fact, we have seen that African servitude among us--confessedly the mildest and most humane of all institutions to which the name "slavery" has ever been applied--existed in all the original States, and that it was recognized and protected in the fourth article of the Constitution. Subsequently, for climatic, industrial, and economical--not moral or sentimental--reasons, it was abolished in the Northern, while it continued to exist in the Southern States. Men differed in their views as to the abstract question of its right or wrong, but for two generations after the Revolution there was no geographical line of demarkation for such differences. The African slave-trade was carried on almost exclusively by New England merchants and Northern ships. Mr. Jefferson--a Southern man, the founder of the Democratic party, and the vindicator of State rights--was in theory a consistent enemy to every form of slavery. The Southern States took the lead in prohibiting the slave-trade, and, as we have seen, one of them (Georgia) was the first State to incorporate such a prohibition in her organic Constitution. Eleven years after the agitation on the Missouri question, when the subject first took a sectional shape, the abolition of slavery was proposed and earnestly debated in the Virginia Legislature, and its advocates were so near the accomplishment of their purpose, that a declaration in its favor was defeated only by a small majority, and that on the ground of expediency. At a still later period, abolitionist lecturers and teachers were mobbed, assaulted, and threatened with tar and feathers in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and other States. One of them (Lovejoy) was actually killed by a mob in Illinois as late as 1837.

These facts prove incontestably that the sectional hostility which exhibited itself in 1820, on the application of Missouri for admission into the Union, which again broke out on the proposition for the annexation of Texas in 1844, and which reappeared after the Mexican war, never again to be suppressed until its fell results had been fully accomplished, was not the consequence of any difference on the abstract question of slavery. It was the offspring of sectional rivalry and political ambition. It would have manifested itself just as certainly if slavery had existed in all the States, or if there had not been a negro in America. No such pretension was made in 1803 or 1811, when the Louisiana purchase, and afterward the admission into the Union of the State of that name, elicited threats of disunion from the representatives of New England. The complaint was not of slavery, but of "the acquisition of more weight at the other extremity" of the Union. It was not slavery that threatened a rupture in 1832, but the unjust and unequal operation of a protective tariff.

Chapter X. False Statements of the Grounds for Separation

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Jefferson Davis *The Rise And Fall Of The Confederate Government* (1881)