

AMERICA'S "SOLID SOUTH"

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YEARS ago, before economic madness had set the two Anglo-Saxon countries of this continent cutting each other's throats commercially, when Nova Scotian vessels traded with their natural markets, the millions of the Atlantic ports, exchanging our native commodities for the necessities of life and industry, my father went on occasion to southern ports. He was in Richmond, Virginia, when the first gun was fired on Fort Sumter and when they executed John Brown. The stirring tales he told us of those exciting times left me with an insistent wish to know the inside of things, and this was increased by frequent references of the press and public men to the "Solid South".

What was behind it all? Was it slavery? Was that the only menace and preface to war? My father had attended the slave markets, had seen men and women marched out one by one to be exhibited like a horse or mule at the auction mart, "some of them almost as white as I am." It is this aspect which precludes any moral defence of slavery; but as in most things that arouse public sentiment to an acute stage, it is tactical in discussion to submerge extenuating circumstances in the most repugnant and indefensible aspects of the thing attacked. We refer to slavery as though it had but one form and one meaning, which is a far reaching error.

A man or a people need not be put up to the auction block to become essentially a slave, and the lines which Dr. Johnson inserted in Goldsmith's *Traveller*:

How small of all that human hearts endure,
That part which kings or laws can cause or cure

were probably the most erroneous that he ever wrote.

Both of these unrestrained have been a chief source of the miseries of the human race. Let it not be forgotten that slavery was an institution inherited from away back. Gladstone at one time defended slavery. If we are to take the salient defects of an institution and judge it by these alone, we submit it to a test that no institution can stand. The more repugnant aspects of slavery were not the normal but the exceptional ones. It would appear to be a fact that Lincoln tried to induce Congress to buy

out the slaves, and compensate the slaveholders for inevitable and ruinous conditions which would follow emancipation. The entire industry of the South had grown up with slavery. To wreck it by war was to destroy industry and slavery alike, and to leave the South an economic desert, in which the plight of the slave was, in the majority of cases, worse than before. One may take the evidence of the oldest negroes who were born in slavery. In a country walk I was in the habit of accosting some of these old men, bent and leaning on their walking sticks. "Well, Uncle Gabe, how goes it? You are an old timer?" "Yes I'se old." "You must remember the slave days." "Yes, but I was powerful young sah." "Yes, but you know how it has worked out. You have lived through conditions since the slaves were freed. What do you say about it? Are your people better off than under their old masters?" "No, not so good. Is you from de norf?" "Yes I am from Nova Scotia. How old are you?" "Oh, I'se very old man sah." "And you think the old days, when your masters took care of you and fed you, were better than the way you are living now?" "Yes dem was good days fo some." And there the old negro put in the finishing touch.

The attitude of the southerner toward the negro is not always pleasing. He is isolated. The railway stations have two waiting rooms, one marked "White", the other "Colored". Street cars are partitioned in the centre for the color line. The laundry company sends out its white vans bearing in large letters: "We wash only for white people." Regulations, as a whole, tend to humiliate the negro. These may be natural enough, but the reflex on the negro mind is none the less potent for bitterness. It is argued that the generation of free negroes will not work beyond a degree which gives a bare subsistence, that it is difficult in many sections to hire them to work with the certainty that they will put in an appearance as they agreed. But in all these things there are exceptions, and a sweeping assertion is rarely right when applied individually. I said to a prominent lady who knew the South, "You curse the negro in all moods here, but what would you do without him? Your white people will not work." Her response was that she thought my statement a little overdrawn with regard to their attitude toward the negro, that there is a vast number of them well trained and good servants, and that they are always kindly treated. I could quite admit that, for there were countless slaves who, when freed, refused to leave their old masters till circumstances compelled them to go. With it all, when we come to an area

of the South in which half the population is colored, with its concomitant illiteracy, notwithstanding that the State furnishes free schools and competent teachers, it is a problem which has to be faced.

The alert visitor to the South will encounter much of the sentiment of its people, and the general attitude toward the North. The bitterness of the civil war still lingers. Discussing in a general way with the head of an educational institution, I remarked my surprise at some of the expressions which I had heard levelled at the North. "Yes, and you will hear them one hundred years from now" was his reply. Coming from such a source, it made a deep impression. Dig to the bottom, and you will find that the South had a case, even a stronger one after the war. This feeling is perpetuated by the U.D.C. (United Daughters of the Confederacy). They preserve many of the old colonial homes of southern officers, civil and military, and of their president, Jefferson Davis. These are the memorials of an embittered age, and it is a fact that an organization of this kind in the hands of the southern women is a powerful factor in shaping the attitude of the southern people.

There seems to be but one impression—that the war was uncalled for and a tragedy. It was the North which declared war, not the South. Repeatedly one hears the statement that Lincoln urged the Congress to buy off the slaves and give fair compensation to the slaveholders. But the North was ablaze with fanaticism. Henry Ward Beecher, of the famous Plymouth congregation, told his people that in dealing with slaveholders "Sharp rifles are better than bibles" and that "It is a crime to shoot at a slaveholder and not kill." Seward said "Smallpox, strychnine, mad dogs are a nuisance, so are slaveholders." The whole vocabulary of invective and bitterness was invoked.

It is stated, with a good deal of force, that the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, by Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, gave a tremendous impetus to the abolition movement. To the flaming and bitter orations of public speakers they added a religious potency which swept through the North winged by fanaticism. The poem has been called one of the finest examples of militant and passionate poetry to be found in American literature. A few lines give the key to its strength and character:

He has sounded forth the trumpet, that shall never call retreat.
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat.
Oh, be swift my soul to answer Him, be jubilant my feet,
Our God is marching on.

A writer in *Blackwood's* says that after the war closed, Lincoln demurred to signing the Emancipation decree till pressure was brought to bear. Even so, it would be directly in line with his wish that compensation might still be assented to: the hope that now the war was won, passion might subside and the South be saved from absolute ruin. It would not in the least compromise Lincoln's integrity. There was more than slavery. After war had actually begun, President Davis sent a message to Lincoln by the latter's representative, "Tell Mr. Lincoln we are not fighting for slavery but for independence. We will be pleased to discuss peace, but it must be on the basis of independence alone." "We ask to be let alone that those who never had power over us shall not attempt to subjugate us by arms." "The claim that the South went to war to perpetuate slavery is false."

One should not fall into the error of believing that the question of slavery was the only factor involved in the brooding storm. Other questions did not lie on the surface as slavery did, and for that reason the semi-religious zeal, inflamed and militant, saw only that issue in its most repugnant aspects.

The clean-cut demand of President Davis to President Lincoln was for independence—the right to secede—from the Union. Probably ninety per cent of people on this side of the line believe the war was rebellion against constitutional authority, and in defence of slavery. It was not. Let us clear up this sentimental rubbish.

At the declaration of the South to secede from the Union, Montgomery, the capital city of the State of Alabama, became the capital of the Southern Confederacy. On Dec. 14, 1819, that State had entered the Federal Union voluntarily. The right to secede from that voluntary compact was assured under the constitution of the United States. "The principle of secession", stated John W. Daniel of Virginia, "had been preached upon the hustings, enunciated on political platforms, proclaimed in the Senate and the House of Representatives, embodied in our literature, taught in our schools and colleges, interwoven with the text of our jurisprudence, and maintained by scholars, statesmen and all constituents in all States and sections of the country from the beginning of the original compact." It is here that come to the surface the machinations of those sinister forces clamouring for war against the South, cloaked under the habiliments of freedom. For these forces secession meant the end of exploitation and of legalized plundering of the South.

“Sympathy for the negro”, says the South with biting sarcasm, “when your Federal Chief Justice declares that a slave is a slave anywhere in the United States!” The puritanical North gave the fugitive slave no protection, no shelter, no freedom, no sympathy. “Strident and transparent hypocrisy.” The dissertations from uninformed platforms and pulpits, repeated till they pass as currency, that war was waged by the North with an altruism drawn from the wells pure and undefiled, untainted by the profane, and single only to the liberation of the slaves, are among those stories which appeal to a sympathetic credulity, too inert to verify what it hears and repeats. The fanatical and semi-religious denunciations of the South by the northern abolitionists ignored the fact that the whole of the North had been slave States, and the system of white bondmen was also in existence there. They were sent to New England, as well as to Virginia, from Britain, adult bond-servants, bound to serve four to seven years. It was the method of getting labour in the North, as well as the South, and thousands were sent in this temporary bondage. Poor boys and girls were required to serve till of age.

Outside of the slave question, the economic conditions imposed by the majority upon the minority in Congress—the North upon the South—had embittered to the point of hostility the relations between the two. Vicious and oppressive legislation was passed by the dominant North. Southern industry was clogged by distance of transportation, railway freights, tariffs amounting to a semi-blockade, sufficient in themselves to destroy the progress and industry of any people. The South was exploited to the limit. It was to put an end to this that they demanded independence. It is not difficult to believe that had that been accorded on condition of the release of the slaves, it would have been accepted by the South.

The history of industry throughout this continent is that of an attempt by the manufacturing interests to strangle natural growth, to block the channels of trade and development wherever they fail to contribute to the exploitation of the masses of the people. It was the North, not the South, which declared war. That the South was suffering from economic disabilities imposed by the North is beyond dispute, nor did the process cease after the war. State rights were involved with the slavery question. There were Territories in the West not yet admitted as States, and Southern slaveholders coming in claimed the right to bring their personal property with them—slaves included.

They contended that the Territories were the common property of the United States. This was resisted by the citizens of the Territories: there was bitter opposition, and then violence, and the Abolition Society was formed.

The moving power of these societies was William Lloyd Garrison. He began a great political movement by publicly burning the Constitution of the United States, and declared in a speech after,—“No act of ours do we regard with more constitutional approval than when, in the presence of a great assembly, we committed to the flames the Constitution of the United States.” On another occasion he declared—“This Union is a lie: the American Union is an imposition, a covenant with death and an agreement with hell. I am for its overthrow: up with the flag of disunion.”

Wendall Phillips, following, declared: “The Constitution of our fathers was a mistake, tear it to pieces and build a better one.” An Abolition convention passed the resolution: “Resolved that the abolitionists of this country should make it one of their primary objects to dissolve the American Union.”

Nothing could say more plainly than this, that so far as constitutional rights were concerned, the position of the South was unassailable. Both slavery and secession were valid under the Constitution. If the document was ill framed and designed, it was not the fault of the South. It is fair to state here, whether we like it or not, that the system which exploited the South has been repeated in the northern half of this continent, where for half a century an economic blockade of the Maritimes by the dominant powers in Canada has made impossible their access to their natural and geographical trading areas of the Atlantic Coast and West India ports. It has been, and is, nothing less than a guerilla war of economic coercion to force the sea-girt provinces off the sea into a ruinous and detestable barter with the back of the continent.

It seems correct to say that whatever antagonisms exist in the South are not so much against the Union and national solidarity as against the economic conditions which were perpetuated for years after the war. Here is a typical item—Congress, controlled by the North, levied a tax of fifteen dollars per bale on all cotton produced, and cotton was produced only in the South. The levy was purely vindictive, amounting, as the South declared, to confiscation of their crop under cover of law. This tax was due from the time the cotton was baled, and was a lien on it wherever it was. It was an edict against the

cotton growers alone: the exports of no other section of the country were taxed. The exasperated people, roused to their position, white slaves to the North, were more embittered still when they saw the U. S. treasury paying to the manufacturers of cotton fabrics and yarns three cents per pound for all exported. This amounted to exactly the \$15.00 per bale tax on the grower, proving it was not levied as revenue, but a bonus for the manufacturer. The price of cotton may have dropped to low or ruinous prices, the tax was specific, there was no escape. This declaration of economic war by Congress against a section of its own people was more repugnant and indefensible than anything against which the American Colonies rebelled.

It was such acts as this that shot the roots of bitterness deep into the soil of the South and endowed them with a tenacious vitality. In these days a portion of the southern press points to the North and says: "That is where your fifth columns are bred, not here in the South." And there is no rebuttal, no response. The dross of the melting pot is in the hands of alien gangsters.

Nor are things moving smoothly under the surface. National unity, in the face of war, is one thing; social and economic conditions, which react to the disadvantage of the South, are quite another. It is not confined to class. The railway corporations, the press, and industry protest. Going into a railway waiting room, one sees a quantity of leaflets printed in large type and placed for distribution to the public. They read in part:

The steady march of railway progress is vital to agriculture, industry and the nation. It cannot continue if railways are burdened with laws and regulations increasing their cost of operation and handicapping them in competition for business.

This was signed by officials of the "Association of American Railroads." We have not to go south for examples of federal governments intruding into every detail of the people's prerogatives. We have it in the Maritimes of both the Atlantic and Pacific.

Turning to the leading press, one finds an editorial headed "The Slighted South." It states:

There is discrimination against sections of the country, the South included. The distribution of 13 billions in defence contracts reveals most dramatically the degree to which the concentration of economic power and wealth has proceeded in

America. Four States, California, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, received forty per cent of the defence work, while 32 States received twelve per cent.

The committee of Production Management found that "forty-five per cent of the contracts went to closely interrelated corporate groups." "The disadvantaged States of the South must implacably insist upon receiving a share of industry and industrial contracts which the natural resources and population unconditionally warrant."

Or again:—Senator Bankhead, of the State of Alabama, says: "The Government should seek to spread industry throughout the country, instead of further concentrating it in one section. This section is agricultural, not because of a desire to remain in that lamentable condition, but because government agencies continue to play into the hands of eastern manufacturers. If discrimination shall continue to be the fruits of remaining in the Union, it would have been better had secession been more successful."

A conference of the governors of eleven southern States was held recently at New Orleans. The central theme was the part the South was allowed to play in the defence industries. The conference drew up a resolution, "condemning the unsound and dangerous policy of those in charge of national defence preparedness, alleging failure to effect further decentralization of industry, in the interests of national security and post-war economy for all sections of the country."

These protests are not from factions, but from railroad directors, senators, governors and the outstanding press. One could continue at length, but it is not necessary. Behind the powers of centralization are the powers of domination. They move together in a full-fledged menace to the State. Three generations after the civil war, a senator from the South declares that "discrimination is the fruit of remaining in the Union: it would have been better if secession had succeeded."

The city of Montgomery in the State of Alabama was the capital city of the Southern Confederacy. Around its legislative Statehouse still cluster poignant memories of the bitter war. It is here that one gets the full impact of sullen silence, the far-flung organizations of the Daughters of the Confederacy, the monuments, some of them magnificent, to the memories of southern soldiers and their leaders and statesmen, their old homes intact and beautified as objects of veneration. On certain

days the Statehouse is open to the public, a couple of civilian guards only. The fine lines of the dome, the columned portico, mark its architectural refinements. They might be called classic. One reaches the portico by a flight of steps reaching wide on either hand. Everything reveals the marks of time, tense and relentless.

I entered the room where the State Congress sits. The first thing that appealed to me was the similarity of the galleries and their supporting columns to those of the Province Building at Halifax. Portraits of southern men, soldiers and statesmen, hung upon the walls. Moving up toward the front, I came near to an old man gazing intently on a life-size portrait which hung immediately on the right of the President's chair. He was absorbed, motionless, he had come there to pay his oblations to the form before him. A glance told he was struggling with his emotions, that his mind was back down the years. He turned and saw me near him, approached and extended a friendly greeting. "You are a stranger?" Somehow he knew. "Yes, a visitor." "From what part?" "Nova Scotia." "Oh, from Nova Scotia: may I show you?" "I will be delighted." Then he turned again to the portrait: "I come here to look at it: he was one of President Davis's strong men, a friend who never forsook him, he was one of our family. I like to look at it. But come, I want you to come up to the chair."

He led the way to the rostrum, ascended by a half dozen steps and stood before it. "There is the very chair in which President Jefferson Davis sat. I want you to sit in it." I took the seat, and drew on my imagination for an assembly of men embittered beyond anything the present generations have known on this continent, or since these sat here in the flesh. They were not wholly right, nor were they wholly wrong. The South had offended in one thing only, the North had violated half the Decalogue, under cover of law. "Feel of this table, look at it: it is the table on which President Davis signed the first order to fire on the northern forces."

We moved down, and out to the Senate chamber, similar in design to the first. He related incidents in its history, and we moved on, when he abruptly changed the theme, stopped, and said to me: "I was in cotton." "That was when cotton was king, I presume." "Yes," he said, and his voice seemed charged with painful recollections: he seemed to be debating whether he had better carry the story further. He did not, and I hesitated to profane the holy of holies where we have no right to walk. Somewhere behind the veil, the story slept. Then he

gave me his name as we passed out to the portico. "But I want you to come here before you go," and he led me to a brass plate directly between two columns at the top of the entrance steps. "Come and stand on that: that is the spot where Jefferson Davis stood when he addressed a great assembly of the South at the declaration of war." It was a warm hand-shake he gave me there, and I have wondered if, by some occult sense, he knew—. I turned again to look at this structure, of which the State Department tells us, "It is rated as one of the few examples of architectural perfection in existence." I was mingling with the spirit of the South incarnate.

To the left and across the square, as one makes his exit, stands the residence of the President, now maintained as a memorial, and open to the public certain days of the week. To-day it was open: I followed the multitude and was asked to register. The lady in charge read the words, "Nova Scotia", extended a smiling and cordial welcome. The house was entirely in charge of women, and I surmised, rightly or wrongly, that the Daughters of the Confederacy were directing, if not maintaining, it. All doors were open, but a semicircular polished railing was fixed across the openings allowing sufficient entrance to see the room in detail.

Rugs, furniture and ornaments were faultless, bed rooms as though just vacated. In one, the well-used armchair, the hat-box and silk hat, the slippers on a chair, the travelling bag casually disposed, the bed with its post greeting the ceiling, and supporting the draperies around it. Within and without was order, harmony.

The problem of the South is its agriculture, and it clings tenaciously to cotton. The "New Deal" takes over the crop from the grower, but the Government finds it easier to pay a bonus for each acre left fallow than to carry the load of about ten million bales. The bonus is supposed to represent the profit to the grower had he planted the area left fallow.

Did the Government fix its buying price on the basis of an assumed profit, whether it was there or not? We come to the essence of the "New Deal". I went out to the little church in the oaks and pines, where the registration official meets the growers, and adjustments are made and signed. In due time notices are posted that distribution of cheques will take place, and the little church hears good-natured banter aplenty, but they know that at the bottom something is wrong. I was standing outside taking note of men as they gathered in little

bunches, talking, debating, when one came to me and said, "I know who you are", and without formality spoke feelingly of the situation. "I don't know the end, but I believe that the people who are the least governed are the best governed." There are times when the common experiences of life lead men to the discovery of profound and far-reaching truths. He had it right. One egregious wrong is committed in the economy of things, and the whole machinery is twisted and wrecked till it has to be propped and patched by legislative monstrosities.

The supporters of the President's "New Deal" contend that this is the thing he is striving to remedy; that this, with like conditions in other domains, lies behind the President's conception of economic reform on a far-reaching basis, and that this has its political reflex in the politics of the "Solid South". It is difficult for any country to work outside of its adaptations of soil, climate, physical conditions, and endowments. Sum it up in the one word—Environment.