

THE CRISIS

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The Crisis by Anonymous

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THE Constitution of the United States of America is an interesting document in many respects, and affords ample matter for speculation to reflecting men who love to occupy themselves with Politics. But now, when the use of its name is in the mouth of every man that speaks, and in the pen of every man that writes,—when it is applied indifferently, and made to serve contradictory purposes—to protect and justify both parties in the unhappy quarrel which distracts the country, and shakes her government from its very foundations,—one is tempted to re-read that Instrument, and give utterance to one's own thoughts upon it,—even one who does not wish to meddle in Politics. Nor is there any wonder if he yields to the temptation; as none there is, if, living in the midst of a plague, a man catches the contagion, or, rather, the contagion catches him.

Only he labors in vain. Being no politician himself,—having no personal acquaintance, nothing at all to do in the political world,—what chance has he of being attended to? If he speaks, his voice is drowned in the general cry—“*The Constitution!*”—a cry that fills the air, and sounds like to many waters. If he writes, there is no leisure to look at his writing, were it even good, and to the purpose; which I cannot say mine is. But people have got no time for reading, except journals and novels: they leave unread papers digested by their own penmen, or even those of the adverse party; though duty and self-interest would urge them to it.

Two years ago all the Southern States, South Carolina excepted, were still represented in Congress at Washington, and in a state of anxiety and suspense, waiting, before resolving themselves what to do in that memorable juncture, that the incoming administration should plainly declare what course she intended to pursue in regard to the old, all-absorbing controversy, whose critical moment was now come; and when by that declaration, which was solemnly made and repeated, they could no longer doubt what the North's intentions were, and that she was determined to carry them by all means into execution, the Louisiana representatives, in a joint letter addressed to their constituents on January 14, 1861, said: "*The time for argument is passed; that for action has arrived;*"—which sentence, I regret to say, has been ever since acted upon by both parties with unexampled energy and animosity, to the desolation of this country, and the utter ruin of the largest, most unoffending portion of its inhabitants.

In December, 1859, Mr. Helper published a book entitled "*The Impending Crisis;*" as if he knew what should soon come to pass! Perhaps he knew it not; or the event maybe has something more in it, or something less, than he anticipated. But, far from giving him the credit of a prophet, I regard those his words, not as a prediction of what now occurs, but as a preparation to it,—a means, a help to bring it about.

Prophet I would rather call somebody else, and especially Mr. Buchanan, who, twenty-seven years ago, said in the Senate, "*that the Union would be dissolved at the moment an effort would be seriously made by the Free States in Congress to pass such laws,*"—namely, interfering with Slavery. It is true, that when some of the slaveholding States had actually dissolved the Union on that account, he denied them the right to secede, which might seem a contradiction; but perhaps, in 1836, he meant that, even in that case, the Union would have been dissolved without just cause; or, in 1861, that those States have not waited

till the passing of such laws as he contemplated. He spoke, however, only of *an effort to pass* them.

I write now "*The Crisis*." By and by—and I hope soon—somebody else will write "*The Past Crisis*;" and thus I connect the present with the past and the future.

By the beginning of the last century, under the reign of Queen Anne, when the struggle between Whig and Tory was most fiercely raging in England, Richard Steele, esquire, wrote a pamphlet styled also "*The Crisis*;" and Dr. Swift wrote another to make fun of it. I apprehend nothing of this. As I am not Steel, but only Iron, so it is not a Swift that might answer me, but only a Slow.

To secede from the Union, the slaveholding States invoked the Constitution. To prevent them from seceding, or compel them to re-enter the Union, the Free States invoke the Constitution.

Is it possible this Instrument contains the *Yes* and the *No* for the same thing? and such a thing! If it does, I hesitate not to affirm, the Constitution of the United States of America is good for nothing but mischief, and that would make it bad enough. If it does not—and surely it does not—then the fault or mistake must be found in its interpreters on the one or the other side. Now, which of the two is wrong? It is not possible they should be both right; although they might be both wrong. In many a contest, and especially in war, the two parties do fight unjustly, though not from the same causes. In the present instance, however, the wrong may indeed be common to both sides in regard to some contingencies, or incidental branches of the controversy; but with regard to its substance and the main thing, I believe one of them to be right—the other wrong, of course.

Let us state the terms of the case as they were in March, 1861, when several of the Southern States had already seceded; when the contending parties not yet had come to blows, but stood face to face with drawn swords in their hands, waiting only for the fatal sign to thrust them into

each other's body. The fatal sign we feared, has been given indeed, and not once only, but numerous, almost numberless times, and never in vain. For the present purpose, however, we must forget, if possible, all that has happened since that time, and think, not of the consequences, sad though they are, but of the principle whence they proceeded. We must begin with the beginning, if we wish to institute a reasonable inquiry into the matter, and judge of it with the conviction that our judgment rests upon solid ground.

The North wants to abolish Slavery; the South wants to keep it. Yet this is not the immediate cause of the present quarrel.

By words and facts, accompanied with circumstances of the most aggravating character, the North has for a long time constantly irritated the South to the very last extremity, and finally has brought her to that point which is past endurance. If the expression were proper, one might say she has driven her to madness. But in her career against the South she seemed to pause, and even move some steps backwards.

Confining her opposition within some bounds, she professed not to seek the *abolition* of Slavery any longer, but only to prevent its *extension*. She allowed it to remain as it was, where it was, in the old States, but contended it must go no farther: namely, it must not be introduced in the territories belonging to the Confederation which are as yet uninhabited, but whose several portions might, and probably would, have settlers, be formed into distinct communities, and in time be duly admitted as States into the Union. To these States in embryo, or expectation, she does now restrict her exclusion of Slavery, and says she has the right to exclude it thence by the Constitution.

True it is the Emancipation lately proclaimed by the President, although it is conditional and under certain limitations, might give one reason to suspect that, by moving some steps backwards, the North meant only to get a start

to spring ahead on a sudden, and reach at a greater distance forwards. But, first, that measure is perhaps disapproved by the bulk of the Republican party herself; in which case it would not represent her intentions; for it may have been forced, so to speak, upon the President by some few in that party, who are far from having the concurrence of the rest.

I may even suppose he has issued that proclamation in order to content those few, and thus get rid of their importunities; well knowing, however, in his own good sense, that it would have no effect, as is fairly presumed it will have none. Things of that sort are occasionally done by governments. Though announced with the greatest solemnity, and having all appearance of earnest, they are from the beginning intended to remain a dead letter nevertheless.

Neither is it impossible that measure has been suggested, as it were, by despair. Seeing that, after eighteen months' hard fighting, with such an immense loss of life and money, affairs presented no better—perhaps a worse—aspect than they did before, the President may have proclaimed that conditional emancipation as an extreme remedy, hoping by this means the Southern States might possibly come to some terms.

I presume not to inquire into the merit, legality, or policy of such a measure. This emancipation, however, may be looked upon as a sort of confiscation, although the value of the confiscated property should not, as in ordinary cases, go into the government's coffers; which is owing to its destination as well as to the quality of the property affected. Had this been of a common kind, the President saw the confiscation would have been proclaimed to no purpose. The Southern States would have given our government the same answer which Proxenes, one of the generals in the army of the ten thousand Greeks, gave to Phalynus, when, after the battle of Cunaxa, in which Cyrus the Younger was slain, he brought them from King Artaxerxes the order to deliver up their arms: "*Come and take them.*"

As the affected property, however, is of an extraordinary kind,—one that has understanding, and will, and legs, and therefore is able to run away by itself, if it chooses, or even turn against its owner,—the President may have imagined that the people of the Southern States, rather than run the risk of such a loss, or worse, would prefer to desist from fighting. But perhaps there is no risk to run, as that property may have better reasons quietly to remain where it is, than attempt to avail itself of the great privilege tendered by the proclamation.

But laying these and other considerations, or conjectures aside, it appears that this emancipation,—it being of so recent a date, and a consequence of the war (for, otherwise, it should have been proclaimed soon after the secession had taken place),—cannot change the position which the Republican party occupied two years ago towards the South. And whether we regard her intentions, as expressed by other her representatives, or by Mr. Lincoln himself, every good rule obliges us to believe what they said in the beginning of 1861, and not what they may have said at the end of 1862, or any time afterwards.

This emancipation measure is apparently one of the effects of the war; the war is said to have been the effect of secession; and secession has certainly been the effect of something else. This something must needs be found in the position held by the North towards the South at the time when the secession took place. And as that is the real cause which has produced all these effects, so it is that we must try to ascertain, without regarding either the consequences of the war or the war itself.

During these twenty months last past, many and great battles have indeed been fought, with various success on either side; although, whichever party wins upon the field, the country is equally the loser,—she mourns her dead. And this fighting, besides the long train of its other evils, has also furnished new occasions, or pretexts, for reciprocal attempts and injuries calculated to make the already wide