

**NORTHERN OPINION OF  
APPROACHING SECESSION:  
OCTOBER,  
1859-NOVEMBER, 1860. VOLUME  
III. NUMBER 4. PP.191-255**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649325467

Northern Opinion of Approaching Secession: October, 1859-November, 1860. Volume III.  
Number 4. pp.191-255 by Lawrence Tyndale Lowrey

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**LAWRENCE TYNDALE LOWREY**

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# Northern Opinion of Approaching Secession

October, 1859-November, 1860

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By LAWRENCE TYNDALE LOWREY

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Political  
Science, Columbia University

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[This essay consists of the introductory chapters of a somewhat comprehensive study of Northern opinion at the outbreak of the Civil War. The large work was well on the way to completion when the author was unexpectedly called to the military service of the nation. Under the circumstances it was thought a matter of simple justice that he should be permitted to present for his degree such part of the study as had taken final form and exhibited some measure of unity. The work will be completed as soon as the demand of the nation for the author's services shall have been satisfied.—*The Department of History.*]

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Reprinted from *The Smith College Studies in History*, Volume III  
Number 4, Northampton, Mass.  
1918

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The four chapters included herein cover only the period from the John Brown raid through the presidential election of 1860. These are to be the opening chapters of a longer work—*Northern Justification of Secession, from the John Brown Raid to the Fall of Fort Sumter*—which I am preparing as a doctoral dissertation in Columbia University. My use of the word “Northern” in the title is not precise, as opinions are given only from New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, except in a few cases where outside opinions are approved in these localities. My reason for treating these States only is that another writer is soon to issue a monograph covering similar views in what was known as the Northwest, including the States from Ohio westward.

Although the incidents treated in this essay may fairly be considered as a distinct phase of my general subject, two difficulties have been encountered, for which I must ask toleration and patience of the reader: first, closing the discussion with what would be Chapter IV of the larger work gives the matter a rather abrupt ending; second, in this partial treatment full justice cannot be done to all the sources quoted, mainly because some of the republican newspapers later opposed the use of force to hold States in the union—as is foreshadowed in the latter part of this discussion—and almost all of the democratic journals came finally to an ardent support of the government in preserving the union. This will be shown with some fullness in later chapters of my larger work.

The use of italics and capitals for emphasis in the quotations in every case follows the original.

L. T. L.

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## Northern Opinion of Approaching Secession, October, 1859-November, 1860

### CHAPTER I

#### AFTER THE JOHN BROWN RAID

The most influential abolitionist newspaper ever published in this country, *The Liberator*, was founded in 1831. Less than ten years after that, one of its readers, John Brown, told his family that the sole purpose of his life was to make war by force and arms on African slavery in the southern part of the United States.<sup>1</sup> In 1859, Brown planned to seize the national armory and arsenal in the little village of Harper's Ferry, Virginia, to arm all the negro slaves in the vicinity, and to help them gain their freedom. He, therefore, secured a fund of several thousand dollars from sympathizers in the North, with which he purchased a large supply of weapons. On the night of October 16, 1859, Brown, with eighteen heavily-armed followers, seized the armory and arsenal and took several prominent citizens of Harper's Ferry as hostages. By the morning of the 18th, militia companies from neighboring towns, aided by armed citizens and a small force of United States marines, had killed ten of the party of nineteen, and captured five, including Brown himself. The other four escaped. Of the citizens, militia, and marines, five were killed and nine wounded.

It would be impossible to describe the full effects of this event on the minds of the people of Virginia, and, indeed, of the whole South. The raid had been a total failure so far as freeing the slaves was concerned, since the few to whom weapons were given declined to use them against their masters, and were

<sup>1</sup> Most of the facts regarding the raid are taken from J. F. Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*, vol. ii. See also, *John Brown, 1800-1859, a Biography Fifty Years After*, by Oswald Garrison Villard.



glad to be allowed to return unhurt to their homes. But how wide-spread was the conspiracy? Who had furnished the money and weapons? Who had inspired the attack? Were any prominent persons implicated? To what extent did the people of the North approve of such an expedition? These and numberless similar questions occupied the minds of the white men living in the slave-holding States. The "irrepressible conflict" so forcibly presented by Senator Seward had entered a new phase.

The news of this most spectacular of all attempts to liberate the slaves had not reached the farthest bounds of the nation before the press, the pulpit, and the platform were ringing with condemnation or praise of the band of would-be liberators. There was unanimity on this point only: the plan by which Brown and his followers had hoped to accomplish so much was foredoomed to certain failure; for it was an attack not only upon the State of Virginia, but upon the national government as well.

The only persons who offered unbounded praise were the abolitionists. Most of the republicans—of whom there were none in the far South and but few in any slave-holding State—condemned the whole scheme; but scattered throughout the North, especially in New England, were found other persons who honored the attackers as highly as abolitionists honored them. The members of the democratic party everywhere were as strong in their censure as the abolitionists in their approval, though many democrats, especially in the North, opposed slavery itself as much as anyone. But they did not approve of the methods used by abolitionists and by some republicans who wished to get rid of it in the States where it existed. Besides, all shades of opinion were held by persons belonging to none of the political parties mentioned.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>The principal political beliefs of the time were, briefly, as follows: The republicans maintained that the national government had a right to interfere in the territories to prevent slavery, and that this prerogative should be exercised in the broadest manner; the democrats were divided; those who shared the view of Senator Stephen A. Douglas, of Illinois, in his "Freeport Doctrine," that Congress could not force slavery upon a territory against its will, were commonly known as anti-Lecompton democrats; and the Lecompton democrats—a name derived from

Few truths in American history are better known than the fact that in States in all parts of the nation, from Washington's administration to Buchanan's, threats had been made to secede from the union or to nullify laws of congress. Perhaps the chief instances of a threatened withdrawal were: the New England States at the Hartford Convention in 1814; Massachusetts alone, in connection with the annexation of Texas; and a number of southern States at the Nashville Convention in 1850. Among the leading examples of nullification and defiance were: the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798-9; Pennsylvania's refusal to carry out orders of the supreme court in 1808; South Carolina's opposition to the tariff laws, 1828-33; Georgia's repudiation of United States Indian treaties, 1828-32; and Wisconsin's resolution, through her legislature in 1859, that the supreme court should be defied. As Charles Francis Adams pointed out in a recent lecture before the University of Oxford, "Evidence . . . is conclusive that, until the decennium between 1830 and 1840, the belief was universal that in case of a final, unavoidable issue, sovereignty resided in the State, and to the State its citizens' allegiance was due."<sup>3</sup>

Even as late as 1860, one of the most common ways of re-

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those who supported President Buchanan's policy of admitting Kansas as a slave State under a constitution made at Lecompton, Kansas—held with the republicans that congress might interfere in the territories with respect to the status of slavery, but, as against the republicans, that under the constitution the interference should be to uphold slavery instead of to prevent it. A fourth and evanescent political division was known as the constitutional union party; it had no platform other than "The constitution, the union, and the enforcement of the laws." Most of the abolitionists, in 1860, voted with the republicans. The expression, "the opposition," in this work will be used to refer collectively to the chief opponents of the republicans; that is, to all the democrats together with the constitutional-unionists:

<sup>3</sup>C. F. Adams, *Trans-Atlantic Historical Solidarity*, p. 45. See the following by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge: "It is safe to say that there was not a man in the country, from Washington and Hamilton, on the one side, to George Clinton and George Mason on the other, who regarded the new system [i. e., the nation as established under the Constitution] as anything but an experiment entered upon by the States, and from which each and every State had the right peaceably to withdraw, a right which was very likely to be exercised." *The Americana Encyclopaedia*, in article "Confederate States of America."

ferring to the United States was to designate it as "the Confederacy," indicating thereby the belief that what we now think of as a nation was only a kind of league, or an alliance. Just after South Carolina had passed her ordinance of secession, for instance, a resolution introduced in the New York State Assembly at Albany, looking to the appropriation of ten million dollars to arm the State, contained the words, "the United States of the Confederacy."<sup>4</sup> A considerable proportion of the newspapers in the North at some time during 1860 made use of the same expression.

There was no novelty, therefore, in statements in many Southern newspapers, during the weeks immediately following the John Brown fiasco, that the Southern States should consider the expediency of withdrawing from the union. They argued somewhat as follows: For thirty years the abolitionists have kept up an unceasing warfare upon our domestic institutions; even twenty years ago such persons were rare in the North, but they are now numerous, and their numbers are increasing with alarming rapidity; their emissaries in the South have scattered abolition literature among our slaves, in some cases urging them to murder their masters if necessary to effect their escape, and by means of the Underground Railway they have caused us to lose many thousands of dollars worth of property in slaves; they refuse to allow our servants to accompany us into Northern States, and deny that slave-holders have the same right to take their slave property into the common territories as Northern people have to take their property there; when our slaves escape into free States, they are seldom returned in accordance with the fugitive slave law, but are frequently aided in evading capture; we are abused and denounced in the strongest language because we are slave-holders; our territory is invaded and our peaceful citizens captured and killed; and now a great political party, which originated little more than four years ago, and which countenances much of the above, has grown to such proportions that it controls most of the Northern States: if it

<sup>4</sup> *New York Weekly Day-Book*, January 5, 1861.