

**SLAVERY THE MERE PRETEXT FOR
THE REBELLION; NOT ITS CAUSE.
ANDREW JACKSON'S PROPHECY
IN 1833. HIS LAST WILL AND
TESTAMENT IN 1843**

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Slavery the Mere Pretext for the Rebellion; Not Its Cause. Andrew Jackson's Prophecy in 1833.
His Last Will and Testament in 1843 by John Pendleton Kennedy

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JOHN PENDLETON KENNEDY

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SLAVERY

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ANDREW JACKSON'S PROPHECY IN 1833.

HIS LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT IN 1843.

BEQUESTS OF HIS THREE SWORDS:

HIS SOLEMN INJUNCTION TO WIELD THEM "IN SUPPORT OF OUR GLORIOUS
UNION" AGAINST ALL ASSAILANTS, WHETHER "FOREIGN
ENEMIES OR DOMESTIC TRAITORS"

PICTURE OF THE CONSPIRACY.

DRAWN IN 1843.

BY A SOUTHERN MAN.

PHILADELPHIA:

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1863.

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THE SLAVE QUESTION

A PRETEXT

TO LEAD THE MASSES ON TO REVOLUTION.

Southern Ambition—The Climax Rebellion.

THE aspiration of Southern ambition which has reached to the climax of rebellion, was not the growth of a month or a year. Those who have watched the course of public events and noted the development of opinion in the South for years past have seen many signs of the coming peril; and, if the country was not prepared for it, it was not for want of an occasional warning. Everybody knew there were restless spirits in the South who would rejoice in the opportunity to destroy the Union, and that these were endeavoring to create a sectional sentiment that might favor the accomplishment of their wish. But the common faith of the country in the patriotism of the people of the South, and the profound conviction of the whole North, and we may say also of the larger part of the Southern communities, that no motive existed which could possibly stir up the people of any State to the mad enterprise of assailing the integrity of the Union, dispelled every apprehension on this score. The public generally regarded the danger as a chimera. Even the Government, which ought to have been distrustful enough to put itself on guard, seemed to be utterly unconscious of the gathering trouble. Never was a country taken so much at unawares.

The year 1860 was one of great prosperity. The nation exhibited something more than its customary light-heartedness, and had risen into a tone of hilarity from the peculiar excitements of the year. The spring was occupied with the celebrations of the

advent of the Japanese Embassy, which signalized the enlargement of our commerce with the East, and autumn was filled with pageants to welcome the heir of the British throne, whose visit was regarded as an event of national congratulation that promised long peace and happy fellowship with the world—a token of new strength and greater influence to the Republic. It was a year distinguished by public demonstrations of faith and hope in the future destiny of the country. Few persons were willing to believe, or allowed themselves to think, that, whilst we were thus increasing the popularity of the nation abroad and inaugurating an era of remarkable promise to the advantage of our foreign and domestic interests, there was any considerable party amongst us who could harbor the parricidal design of crushing these brilliant hopes in the destruction of the country itself; or that the band of political agitators, to whom the public was accustomed to impute such a design, could so infatuate their followers as to prevail with them to attempt it. It was in this state of confident security, and in the very midst of these peaceful manifestations, that the storm broke upon the country. Never was a nation so utterly unprepared for such an event.

Notwithstanding this dissonance between the tone of public feeling at that time, and the terrific incident which grated upon it with such inopportune discord, the rebellion was a predestined fact which came at its appointed day. The year, the month, almost the week of its explosion had been determined in councils held long before; and the plot had no regard to the barometer of national sentiment, indifferent alike to the good will which delights in establishing peace, or that more congenial mood which promotes quarrel.

It was foreordained that the Presidential election of 1860 should furnish, not the occasion, but the day of dissolution.

Let us endeavor to extract from the history of the times and our own observation of the character of our people what we can find to solve this problem. It has grown to be almost a universally accepted fact on the northern side of Mason and Dixon's line that slavery is the cause of the rebellion. This is so broadly received that the corollary derived from it seems, at this time, to be the axiom upon which the special friends of the Administration are endeavoring to direct the conduct of the war to put

the rebellion down. Slavery being the cause of the rebellion, the war, it is said, must be aimed at the extinction of slavery. With them it would appear to be no longer a point to compel the insurgents to submit to the laws and return to their allegiance; but rather to act on the assumption that no peace is desirable which leaves slavery an existing institution.

Slavery not in danger.—The Leaders knew it.—The Masses were Deceived.

I think this view of the origin of our troubles requires some qualification. Slavery, of itself and for itself, is not the cause of the rebellion. I do not believe that there was one intelligent, leading, and thinking man in the South, when this rebellion broke out, who imagined that slavery was in any kind of danger either from the action of the National Government or the State Governments; nor that it could be successfully assailed by the hostility that was exhibited against it in the public or private opinion of Northern society. I think that astute Southern statesmen were and are perfectly convinced that the Government of the United States, embracing both National and State organizations, afforded an impregnable security to the institution of slavery, which no power on this continent, in its lawful course of administration, could disturb. And, moreover, that the guarantees which these organizations combined offer to that institution are not only entirely adequate to its protection, but are such as no government ever before supplied; and such also as no government, of the same scope of jurisdiction and power, would ever again agree to make. It is the merest sham and make-believe for any Southern man to pretend that the institution of slavery was ever brought into peril before this rebellion exposed it to the dangers that now surround it. I can hardly suppose that any man of sense in the South could believe otherwise than that a war, once provoked between the States, would be the only effective agency which could destroy or impair it against the will and without the co-operation of the Slave States themselves.

Slavery may be said to be the cause of the rebellion only in the same sense in which we may affirm that cotton and sugar are the cause of it, or that Southern character, habits, climate, and social life are the sources out of which it has sprung.

The Agitation of the Slave Question a pretext.—Its Operation on the Excitable Masses of the South.

The agitations of the slave question were only ostensibly the motives to rebellion. They were the means made use of to give pretext and consistency to the scheme. With the unthinking or excitable masses of the South, it is true, these agitations were the principal incentives to revolt. They furnished them a ready argument, and made the threat of breaking up the Union familiar to the Southern mind, and, to a certain extent, popular. They had something of the same effect upon portions of the people of the North; for the aversion to the Union was not alone harbored in the South. I have no doubt that the extreme opinions on this subject, preached and written by a sect in New England, had a most pernicious influence in extending the thought of dissolution through the South. There was an equal fanaticism on both sides, quite as evident in favor of slavery in one section as against it in the other. Secessionists and abolitionists, in the ultra phases of their respective demands, were in full accord as to the ultimate remedy of the grievances they imagined themselves to suffer. It was curious to see how, in ascending the gamut of their opposite extravagances, the two parties kept pace with each other on the scale of which the highest note on each side was disunion. Both North and South were, at the beginning, in harmony in admitting slavery to be a social evil which was to be considerably dealt with, and abandoned when that could be done without injury to existing interests. From this point Southern enthusiasts diverged in one direction, Northern in another. With one, slavery rose to be asserted successively as a harmless utility, as a blessing, a divine institution, and, finally, as "the corner-stone rejected by the builders," upon which a new dynasty was to be constructed, and our old cherished Union to be dashed into fragments. With the other, always comparatively few and insignificant in point of numbers and influence it is true, slavery, passing through equal grades, was declared to be a disgrace; a great national sin; a special curse of Heaven, and, at last, a stigma that made the Union "a covenant of hell:" which, therefore, should be shattered to atoms to give place to another order of polity. The two opposite lines thus converged in the same point, that of

dissolution. This is the extreme boundary to which a passionate monomania has at last conducted the agitations of thirty years of the subject of slavery. The irritation produced by this persevering and angry reverberation of the question, from side to side, undoubtedly prepared the people of the South for the explosion of 1860, and equally prepared the people of the North for a prompt resentment against it; and thus misled the popular opinion on both sides to regard the slavery question as the immediate source of the attempt at revolution. But the contrivers, the heads and leaders of the scheme, had a much deeper purpose than the redress of any imagined danger to the security of the institution. They only took advantage of the common sensibility of their people on this subject to aid them in a design of much wider import.

We may find a guide to our investigation of this design in a review of the composition and character of Southern society.

Southern Character Analyzed.

It is not always a gracious task to analyze national character, and particularly when our own countrymen are in question. If, therefore, I should be thought too "candid" in what I am about to write, I hope I shall find my warrant in the sincere respect I entertain for the many excellent traits of Southern character, and still more in the esteem with which I cherish the memory of many personal friends in whom I have found everything to admire and really nothing to blame—except, indeed, the facility with which they have yielded to the delusion which carried them into this rebellion.

If I were asked to describe in a word the primal source or germ out of which this commotion has sprung, I would say it was the egotism of Southern character. There are no people in the world who have a higher opinion of themselves and of their surroundings than the inhabitants of certain districts of the South. They are accustomed to speak of themselves as possessing the very highest type of civilization; as pre-eminent in all the qualities of generous manhood; as hospitable, frank, brave beyond all other people; quick to resent dishonor; keen in their perception of what is great or noble; refined and elegant in manners. They claim, besides, superior talent, more acute insight, and higher

energy than their neighbors. They are prolific in statesmen, orators, and politicians. They are manly, truthful, and *chevaleresque*. This is the portrait they draw of themselves.

How and Why they Hate the Yankees.

Now, I do not mean to dispute these pretensions. The South possesses, in marked degree, many of these excellent qualities, and I would not disparage their claim to any of them, because I think that the very assertion of such a claim is the proof of an appreciation of these virtues, which in itself is a merit of good omen. It shows the tendency of their aspirations, which is one good step towards success in accomplishing them. But, on the other hand, we may remark that this self-esteem, whilst it exalts its possessors, is apt in the same degree to breed opinions derogatory of all other people outside of their boundary. The South accordingly has its aversions, and amongst these nothing is more conspicuous than the dislike of the common masses of the Southern people—I speak more particularly of the untravelled portion of them—to the natives of the New England States. This dislike is as old as the colonial era. Even in the Revolutionary war of 1776, if it did not impair the sturdy union of effort which won the victory, it bred minor dissensions and vexatious jealousies. The application of the word "Yankee" was even then, as it is now, an expression of the derision with which the man of the South regarded the man of New England. It signified at that day, and long afterwards, in the vulgar apprehension, a shrewd, cunning chapman, who invariably outwitted the credulous Southron in a bargain. It has lost something of this significance in these later times, since the credulous Southron has grown more worldly, and developed some of the qualities of an expert chapman himself. It now rather indicates the hatred engendered by jealousy of New England growth and prosperity.

In a sober estimate of all these characteristics, which it is hardly necessary to say are not to be attributed to the most cultivated and liberal men of the South, we may set down both the self-esteem and the aversion I have described to the account of that provincial vanity and prejudice which are always observed in isolated communities, and which, I think, are also, in some degree, distinctive of a simply agricultural people.