“On The Rebellion Of 1861”
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Kalamazoo College, Class of 1863

Transcribed by William Schlaack, Class of 2012
On the Rebellion of 1861

The present contention of arms is called by some a civil war. We of the North do not however consider it in such a light, not withstanding the strife is between portions of the same nation, which usually defines a civil war. Indeed, this ought not to be called a war of any kind, much less a civil war. It is emphatically a rebellion. The North, on the one hand, assert that the South are in rebellion against a just and magnanimous government. They of the South, declare, on the other hand, that they are striving for a glorious revolution and are fighting for liberty. The difference between the two terms “rebellion” and “revolution” is, as I understand them, something as follows: Revolution signifies a material change in the constitution of government. Hence should Jeff. Davis be successful, the Southern uprising would be called a Revolution; but if, - which is more probably [sic] – he is unsuccessful, it would be forever called a Rebellion. This is the world’s distinction between success and failure. So whether a Rebellion be right or wrong, and is only successful, it becomes a Revolution, since a radical change has been effected in government. So we say if the maddened] fire-eaters of the South wish a change in government why let them effect it if they can; [Page 2] but if not let them expect the doom of traitors.

Before taking up arms the South, by their Ordinances of Secession, declared themselves absolved from all allegiance to our government, also asserting that they had the right to withdraw at pleasure from membership in the U. States. We deny that right and claim that no state or states have a right to secede from the General Government. The question, if it were to be debated, then presents itself thus: “Has a state the right to secede”? The South has taken the affirmative and declare [sic] that any state may secede at pleasure. As I understand their arguments they are briefly these: “All states came voluntarily into the Union; therefore if they choose they may withdraw.” Their next argument is this: “We - of the South - are not receiving the rights due us from our sister states - they withholding them, and we, being dissatisfied with the course they pursue towards us, do, therefore, declare, that we have a perfect right to perform the act of secession”. On the negative of this question stands the north, and in a few words I will endeavor to state, as I understand it, the position which our people take. In relation to the first argument of the south we acknowledge their statement that all states came voluntarily into the Union, but we affirm and insist upon it that it does not follow therefrom [sic] that a state may at pleasure withdraw from the Union. An example from every-day affairs will suffice to show the validity of our objection. Suppose six or eight men enter into copartnership having equal capitals and equal rights. The writings are drawn and signed, nothing being said about dissolution. The firm goes smoothly on for several years until at length two or three of the partners become dissatisfied and, withdrawing the general consent, withdraw from the concern [sic] taking with
them all the property which was in their hands, though much of it firm property, and also leaving all of the company’s debts to be discharged by the remaining members. Would this be just or right? Certainly not. Now in the case of the South they have a vast amount of U. States property which they refuse to give up to proper owners. They likewise withdraw without the general consent, in violation of oaths given years ago, to stand by the government. Moreover there is a strong objection against secession which cannot be raised the dissolution of a firm. It is this: Should one state or number os states be allowed to secede, any state with such a precedent, hereafter performs the same act. Hence in a short time our country would probably be composed of numerous petty governments [Page 4] which would keep the country in a constant state of anarchy. And again if secession be allowable [sic] in the South what would be the national credit of the remaining states be worth. It would most certainly be worthless as our creditors would have no security against future dissolutions. For these various reasons our government considers the first argument in favor of secession wholly unresound. The answer to the second plea for secession, namely: That they have not been receiving the rights due them [sic] from other states, our people say: If you had grievances you should have presented them before the whole people in a meeting of the states which might have been called for that purpose where you could have justice meted out to you. But instead of doing this you have gone off with our property and without our consent and also in violation of your oaths. Therefore we demand that you lay down your arms, give up our property and your leaders and return to your former allegiance.” No sentence in the Declaration of Independence gave that document such validity and rendered it so perfectly unanswerible as did the clause in which it is stated that the Colonies had not neglected to frequently and humbly present their grievances to the English Sovereign. Had our forefathers neglected to inform the mother country [Page 5] of the injuries to which they were subject, with what degree of reason could they have expected redress.

Advocates of Secession further assert that it is the avowed policy of the present administration to interfere with the “peculiar institution” of the South. This is not the fact as anyone at all versant in the declarations and course of the President must well know. And that this is not a war upon slavery Mr. Lincoln’s late instructions to Gen. Fremont shows conclusively. And this fact, just mentioned, is well known to the leaders of the southern rebellion, but with baseness and wickedness seldom if ever before equaled, they have been and are continuing to misrepresent to the common mass at the South the course and intentions of the Northern People. These gross misrepresentations together with their late loss of power when the free states elected a President, appear to be the true causes of the rebellion. With but one or two exceptions the South have ruled this country, almost since the days of Adams and Jefferson, and now the loss of that power is the main-spring of their late movement.
Again the South claim it as their a right that they should be let alone in their secession. For the granting of this request they can give no good reason but present a mis-erable [sic] plea for state rights and a general right to do as they please. This last right the Southerner seems to think was especially designed for a Southern gentleman. But they will find that to whip a Yankee requires a little more muscle than to flog a poor negro. What would accord more closely with the wishes of an absconding member of a firm than to be let alone or what suit a thief or robber better than to be left unpursued? On the whole, the plea of the South too closely resembles the plea of a fugitive from justice.

But the time for words has passed, - the South has manifestly declared her intention to maintain her independence at all hazards – peacibly [sic] if possible, by war-the sword if necessary. Our government has demanded her allegiance and is now making strenuous efforts to bring her back to her wonted loyalty. We have a powerful enemy whose leaders are well aware that defeat is death and who will make every effort, - use every means in their power to overthrow this – the best of earthly governments.

In this time of trial our government is obliged to use its every resource [sic], and it demands undoubted loyalty from every person in these northern states. It is well knows full well that a traitor here is two at the South, and alas! that that any can be found in the North who are at all disloyal. This however is the fact we do find traitors in our very midst, and what is worst of all they pretend to be loyal men when their conduct condemns them as traitors. In our state, we may be thankful we find but few whose actions may be called disloyal, but we have only to go into Ohio, N. York or Conn., to find alas too many whom we can call by no name other than traitors.

I will speak only of Ohio, where these traitors at heart were unfortunately members of a loyal party well known as the Democratic, and as members thereof called a convention of delegates at Columbus, and at the nomination of a party ticket, passed resolutions which would have done justice to Jeff. Davis himself. This convention, however, did not, of course, openly side with the South yet they had no sympathy to express, no support to offer to our government greatly embarassed under its present trials. But instead of this, they denounced it as partial, corrupt, dishonest, and guilty of violating in many ways the Constitution of the U. States. Although all this is not openly advocating secession doctrines yet such conduct cannot be expected from good Union men. The amount of injury that these resolutions have and will cause is very great, not only here at the North, but also at the South, where all such documents are rapidly circulating and greedily devoured. Want of confidence in our government will do us more injury than a thousand rebel soldiers.
It is well known that not long since the government caused the suppression of several newspapers in N. York City on the ground that they favored secession, or at all events, were injurious to the cause of the Union. Now this act any Union man will acknowledge is right, perfectly so, but the members of this convention, mentioned before, centured [sic] in strong terms the government for this act which they called “abridging the right of the Press.” They also had much to say about the abridgement of free speech and press and thought that act bespoke danger to the country. It did indeed bespeak danger in the country, but not in the sense which they meant it. In reply to the objection raised against newspaper suppression a prominent Union man has presented an answer like this: “Suppose,” says he, “Congress should pass a law prohibiting the woodsman from using his ax, we would immediately pronounce such an act as tyrannical [sic] and outrageous, but should 50 or 100 men arm themselves with this weapon and instead of chopping down trees should commence chopping off men’s heads, we should consider a law to prohibit the use of the ax for that purpose perfectly right and good.

[Page 8] Just so with the rights of the press and speech. When men begin to write and say things injurious to the cause of Union, then must they be stopped. This is not abridging the right of free press or of free speech. It is thus therefore that the so called “Peace Meetings” out to be and are broken up wherever [sic] they occur. But why not allow them to be held, for surely peace is desirable [sic]? Did we know nothing of what is done at these meetings, the simple fact that the advocates of this movement are with but few exceptions, men whose loyalty is with reason doubted, this, I say, would be sufficient to condemn them.

Another reason is this: These peace meetings, we have evidence to believe, are only another dodge of secessionists, a fact proven in various ways but especially by the confession of the Editor of one of the suppressed papers. He stated, under oath, that he had been receiving some of Jeff. Davis’ gold in payment for his aid to the South, and that the peace articles were furnished by secessionists of the Southern states. All this occurred in the City of New York. I farther learn from the Louisville Journal a strong Union paper of Ky. that the “peace” speeches of Valandingham of Ohio which were published in the Cin. Inquirer, a semi-secession sheet, were circulated throughout Ky. by secessionists as being favorable to the furtherance [sic] of their designs. This Union paper [Page 9] of Louisville further states that without doubt the above mentioned Cin. Inquirer with a few more of that stripe has done more harm to the Union cause in Ky. than all the rebels sheets of that states combined.

A word more and I am done. It is the opinion of good Union men that should the mass of the people coincide in their views with the advocates of these peace meetings there could not be another soldier raised to support the government. This then is the reason for the suppression of these rebel sheets and peace humbugs, and when any man will advocate and address peace
meetings, and allow a secession flag to be placed at his window, he must either mend his ways, leave the country, or be hung.

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James P. Cadman

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[#The allusion is to Dr. F. Pratt of Kalamazoo who has been democratic, anti-Maine Liquor Law and finally pro-slavery + anti-Union. A flag of the “Seceshers” hung from his window a few moments one afternoon. He came near receiving violence from our infuriated people] J.P.C.