

“The North the Aggressor - - The South on the Defensive” Article, October 4, 1860

The enemies of Southern institutions are accustomed to deride Southern statesmen on the alleged ground that they cherish a morbid feeling on the subject of slavery. From the rampant Abolitionist to the wily Freesoiler, the stereotyped accusation against the South is that its leaders thrust the slavery issue where there is no necessity for its presence. “The encroachments of the South” is the text from which reverend agitators weekly preach. Mr. Seward delivers lay discourses upon the same theme. The *New York Tribune* affects anxiety for deliverance from the monotonous dispute. Mr. Bell’s party seek to conceal their Know-Nothingism under the same pretence. And Mr. Douglas, since he left the Democratic party to consort with disappointed office-seekers and anti-slavery fanatics, starts in every speech from the same point. The great recommendation of Squatter Sovereignty, if he is to be believed, is, that it will dispose of “the negro question;” in which view we should be disposed to concur if the triumph of abolitionism could be regarded as a result likely to be acquiesced in by the great body of the American people.

These attacks upon the South pass muster only in quarters in which gross ignorance prevails with regard to our national politics or in which prejudice or personal animosity refuses to accept the truth. The Congressional history of the last twenty-five years leaves no room for controversy upon this head. It only vindicates the South from the aspersions heaped upon it, but fixes upon the North the stigma of having wantonly originated, and unceasingly maintained, the excitement in relation to slavery. The systematic petitioning in support of abolition which John Quincy Adams fostered – what was that but a gratuitous provocation – an insult which had not even appearances to justify it? The territorial contests growing out of the Mexican war - what were they but so many struggles by Northern politicians to deprive the South of lawful advantages? Was not the Wilmot Proviso an aggressive act on the part of the North, designed to curtail the constitutional rights of the South? What has been steady resistance to the operation of the fugitive slave law but an attempt to rob Southern citizens and to keep alive unpleasant feeling in the border States? The repeal of the Missouri Compromise was not an exception to the rule, since its object was but to restore to the South its rightful claim to common territory; though even this measure of justice has been thwarted by the organized movements of the Abolitionists in Kansas.

We purpose [sic] not to sketch with minute precision the eventful struggles between the North and South during the period to which we allude. The most casual references suffices to indicate the unreasonableness of those who hold up the South to odium as a constant aggressor, and to convict the North, which now pretends to desire a speedy settlement of the slavery question, of having done all that could be done to invest it with its present alarming importance. Throughout the South has sought simply the perfect enjoyment of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution, and which enter into the basis of the Union. Southern statesmen have contended simply that their people shall pursue their course unmolested, that their institutions shall be allowed to work unmolested, that in the future of this country they shall have their lawful heritage without let or hindrance. To stigmatize this as aggression, agitation, or greed, is to display an ignorance of the English language, or a determination to pervert everything for partisan ends. The North cannot put forth the same honest boast. With full control over its own institutions, it has persistently attempted to control the institutions of others. It has battled for the privilege of imposing its ideas upon a section that will have none of them. It has manoeuvred [sic] and struggled and scolded to reduce the South to subjection, and to carve and pare and interpolate the Constitution to render the process more easy and complete.

The difference between the parties thus engaged in political strife is distinctly marked. To the North the question is one of sentiment, and nothing more, and that sentiment, and nothing more, and that sentiment hollow, unreal, morally and logically worthless. The plea of philanthropy, which is sometimes urged in its support, degenerates into hypocrisy in view of the moral and social condition of Northern cities, and the status of labor in their midst. Economically considered, the matter is even worse. The North would soon be crippled without the South as a customer. Northern trade and commerce have nothing to hope for from the change for which anti-slavery politicians contend; whilst they have much to fear from any change calculated to disturb the harmonious relations which the Union, honestly worked, could not fail to engender. The aggressiveness of the North, therefore, may be characterized as peculiarly offensive, because wholly uncalled for by anything to be found in or out of its own region. Far otherwise is the case with the South. Its material and moral interests

(sic) are both involved. The foundation of its society; its enormous accumulated wealth, its diversified industry, its very existence as a country, are all imperilled (sic) by an agitation which, originating an opinion, has never risen above the low level of a reckless fanaticism. The wonder is, not that the South now displays sensitiveness under attack – not that it bids aggressors mind their own business, or prepare for the penalties of intermeddling – not that it insists that the annoyances, the insults, the losses it has suffered shall come to an end; for, in truth, the Southern people would be more or less than human if these manifestations were withheld. The wonder is, not that the South now displays sensitiveness under attack - not that it bids aggressors mind their own business, or prepare for the penalties of intermeddling - not that it insists that the annoyances, the insults, the losses it has suffered shall come to an end; for, in truth, the Southern people would be more or less than human if these manifestations were withheld. The wonder is, that after all this provocation, and in the presence of menacing hosts, they are still content to demand only the plain and just protection which the Constitution provides for their benefit. They ask for their States equality under the Union and no more. They seek for their property protection under the Constitution, and nothing else. And the world will hold them justified in insisting upon these terms, with secession as their alternative.

Nor will the adoption of a bullying tone, whether by a Douglas or an Andrew, a Lincoln or a Know-Nothing, remove the necessity that exists for meeting this issue frankly in the pending contest for the Presidency. The Black Republican army of Wide Awakes will not be equal to the task of dragooning the South into submission to the invasion of its rights. Though Mr. Douglas be Mr. Lincoln's right-hand man, the threat to coerce the South into compliance with whatever Black Republican law-givers dictate, will but nerve the Southern people to sterner resolves and more energetic action. Abstract reasoning about "the right of secession" amounts to nothing. The only thing requisite for us at present to know is, that the South will not submit to a diminution of its rights, in the Territories or in the States, and that the people of the South are able to take care of themselves when the General Government shall be converted into a symbol of hostility.