

THE NEW YORK PRESS. EDITORIAL OPINIONS OF THE LEADING JOURNALS UPON CURRENT TOPICS.

COMPILERS EVERY DAY FOR EVENING TELEGRAPH.

Was the Confederacy a Rebellion?

The Richmond Enquirer, in discussing the new proposition of some Southern men for an adjustment of the difficulties of the present situation, announces itself as willing to yield on some points, if necessary, to quiet distrust and uneasiness at the North. It especially speaks of the supposition of danger to the public debt from the votes of Southern men for its repudiation, and admits that an explicit affirmation would quiet these fears, it would be wise to make it. It adds, however, that "the language employed should be inoffensive, and such as honorable men will recognize as applicable," from which general statement we apprehend no one will differ.

Now the language of the proposition in question on the subject is as follows:— Section 2. The public debt of the United States, authorized by law, shall never be held sacred and inviolate; but neither the United States nor any State shall be held liable for any debt or obligation incurred in aid of insurrection or rebellion against the Government or authority of the United States. What could be thought of any man who should declare in this language an offensive or inapplicable? Ought he not to be stigmatized as one who was unable to look at the question in a fair spirit, or unwilling to accept the result of the late struggle, and as one desirous of keeping up the present war, rather than of securing peace and quiet by a reasonable submission?

Yet this is the ground which the Enquirer takes. It does not, indeed, in express words describe the section as offensive, and yet it is quite plain that the language is so well understood by the majority of the Northern people as waging a "cruel and unjust war upon our society." If any justification were needed for the adoption of stringent measures against the South, it would be found in the prevalence of just such a spirit as is indicated by these words. The great question of the war was whether the Confederacy was a rebellion or not, and the verdict of arms, which tribunal the appeal was taken, was emphatically that the American nation had decided that it was a rebellion, and that the majority of the Northern people as waging a "cruel and unjust war upon our society." If any justification were needed for the adoption of stringent measures against the South, it would be found in the prevalence of just such a spirit as is indicated by these words.

What if it had been a question to be determined before the Courts, and the final judgment had been given that it was a rebellion, and the defeated party had coolly told the victor that he was willing to pay any debt, and that it must be on terms that were not "offensive," and that anything which spoke of it as a rebellion would be binding on him? Would not the successful party be rather surprised to find that the other side insisted in this way on still retaining the subject of the controversy, he would try to see what the powers of the Court would accomplish in carrying out its decree? These people at the South may as well understand that the American nation has decided that the Confederacy was a rebellion, and if they propose to be a part of the nation, it must be accepted as such by them. They must allow it to be spoken of as such in the laws and public documents of the nation, and not content themselves with an appeal to be offensive. They must understand that when the nation speaks of rebellion, it refers to the Southern Rebellion just as much as to Shay's rebellion or the Whisky Insurrection. The relation with the Southern gentlemen, who came to Washington to consult the President, had digested the plan which the South is about to propose as a compromise. That plan was intended to be kept secret until the Southern States had acted upon it, but premature disclosure by a Richmond paper put the radical Congressmen in possession of it, and they immediately set their wits at work to head it off. The new bill has been begotten and born since the Southern plan came out. It takes its language and recognizes by its very words, in their words, what we wish of their hearts that it were different. We do not, of course, mean that forms of words alone will restore harmony between the divided sections; but we do say that they will assist powerfully; and that on the other hand, to persist in a mode of speech which is appropriate only to an opposite result from the actual one, is to prolong the discord and postpone the harmonious reunion of the nation.

The New Bill for the South—The Right Beginning at Last.

The right beginning is half the battle, and Congress, in beginning at last at Appomattox Court House, gets at the right end of the thread of Southern restoration. The new bill from the Joint Committee of Fifteen, like the pending Constitutional Amendment, covers the difficulty. Chaos reigns from the Potomac to the Rio Grande. Over all that unconquered region the Dred Scott decision against "niggers" and poor Union whites fearfully prevails. Under Mr. Johnson's State establishment the civil authorities too often wink and connive at the doings of ruffians and outlaws; and when a military officer undertakes their punishment, he is stopped by a revocation of his orders. Hence, the new bill providing temporarily to divide the territory of the ten outside Rebel States into five military districts, each under a General, and all under the supervision of General Grant, and the laws and regulations of a military government. This, in wiping out all the unauthorized doings of Mr. Johnson, is going back to the point of Lee's surrender, and beginning the work de novo, and the authority and the power are with Congress, and the occasion justifies its proposed action.

The opposition fire-eaters of the House of course regard this bill as a terrible Chinese dragon that to devour us all without pepper or salt. "The devil-smell of civil liberty," "military despotism," "right for our virtues," "rampage of the Constitution," "rock the land like an earthquake," "fire, sword, and destruction," and all such trash, twaddle, and fustian, are the staple of their arguments. Give them bromine and molasses, moonshine and green cheese, doughnuts and gingerbread, and you have them. We have described the bill. It is a simple, reasonable, lawful, and practical measure of legislation. It only proposes to give Mr. Johnson the divided States of the United States concerned for a short time, and to put them under the care of General Grant. We think this a capital idea.

Mr. Johnson has blundered much worse in his efforts to set up again the divided States of the United States than in his unfortunate efforts to put them down. When General Grant took them in hand the kid-glove policy gave way to the naked bayonet, and Quaker knees were heard of no more. He saw that the only argument with the Southern Confederacy was a regular thrashing, and so he thrashed it out of the boots of Jeff. Davis into absolute submission. There never was a job so difficult so neatly and thoroughly done—never in all the world. Just at that point when those Rebel States and their chiefs and followers lay absolutely at the mercy of the Government, and were ready to comply with any terms—just then, had

Mr. Johnson not been blinded by his unexpected advancement to the White House, he would have convened Congress together and laid this whole business of reconstruction before the two Houses. That was his path of safety and success. In taking the opposite course, and in holding to it, he has brought himself at length to that pass from which he must back out or be cast overboard, like Jonah, into the depths of the sea, whole or no whole to pick him up.

Having forsaken until forsworn has ceased to be a virtue, Congress, assuming a more energetic and manly attitude, and cast aside all this clumsy, slipshod patchwork of reconstruction attempted by Mr. Johnson, and to give General Grant a trial. It is not the man for the task? Does he not thoroughly understand the necessities of the Rebel States on behalf of law and order, and do not the ruling politicians of those States thoroughly understand him? We dare say that under this bill, the very name of Grant will produce such a change in the Southern mind as to make the Rebel States, Yankees, native white loyalists, negroes, and all, that they will think the millennium is coming, and thank God for the end of "Andy Johnson's policy." Under his memorable administration the Southern politicians believe in the decisions that he has given them only their constitutional rights, and that the two Houses of Congress as they stand are illegal, and somehow or other will be compelled to give way. They stand (excepting Tennessee) as they stood with the surrender of the last of their Rebel armies, subject to the terms of Congress. Mr. Johnson having no authority to prescribe the terms of such a surrender, he has had to do it when he has done, in being at last repudiated by Congress, goes for nothing. Such, too, is their condition of general demoralization and confusion, from his blundering policy, that the efficient intervention of Grant is needed to restore the primary elements of law and order, and that he can soon achieve, and then the Constitutional amendment, and the supreme law by three-fourths of the States constituting the general Government, will without difficulty be made the basis of Southern restoration.

From Virginia to Texas. We care no more for this party or that party than the man in the moon. The Herald, regardless of Presidents, parties, or party leaders, aims to be the organ of that public opinion which gives shape to the measures of the Government, and the manifested destiny of this great Republic. So now we stand by the sovereignty of Congress as the law-making power of the Union, by the issues of the war and the ultimatum of the North.

The New Reconstruction Bill—Does it Mean what it Seem?

The bill for remanding the South to martial law and releasing General Grant from his military subordination to the President, aims at something different from what appears on its face. It is not possible that men of ordinary discernment should pass it with the expectation that it can be executed. It aims to repeal that part of the Constitution which declares the President Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and that part of it which forbids the habeas corpus to be suspended except in times of rebellion or invasion. To expect the Supreme Court to uphold a law repealing certain portions of the Constitution is preposterous. The suddenness with which the bill is introduced upon the country, as well as the crudeness of its provisions, indicates that it is an impromptu measure to meet an unexpected emergency.

There is no evidence that the idea of this bill occurred to any body but the Southern gentlemen, who came to Washington to consult the President, had digested the plan which the South is about to propose as a compromise. That plan was intended to be kept secret until the Southern States had acted upon it, but premature disclosure by a Richmond paper put the radical Congressmen in possession of it, and they immediately set their wits at work to head it off. The new bill has been begotten and born since the Southern plan came out. It takes its language and recognizes by its very words, in their words, what we wish of their hearts that it were different. We do not, of course, mean that forms of words alone will restore harmony between the divided sections; but we do say that they will assist powerfully; and that on the other hand, to persist in a mode of speech which is appropriate only to an opposite result from the actual one, is to prolong the discord and postpone the harmonious reunion of the nation.

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plan as the irresponsible proposal of usurping bodies of Rebels, of which our Government can do no more than expel. There is nothing but a brutalizing prolongation of our nature in the blow of an axe. "What right," asks the Enquirer, "have men to cut the throats of their fellow creatures?" It is true, it is true, how shall it be reconciled with the maxim that a man has no right to kill himself? But we do not intend to argue the injustice of the death penalty. The real wisdom of the world, always just, because it is humane, has declared equally that the fear of death, so far as such a sentiment exists in the despondent, is no preventive of murder, and that society can only be justified in imitating the murderer who it can do no better. It need not be said that in a country like our own we can make much better use of those who offend the law than by hanging them, and do less violence and shame to our own natures by becoming something else than the executioners. Let us heed the good example of Italy, now one step ahead of us in moral freedom.

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