

SARAH TRYPHENA PHILLIPS LECTURE IN AMERICAN  
LITERATURE AND HISTORY

THE DEBATE ON THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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FOR over two years the people of the United States have been celebrating battles, skirmishes, and political events concerned with the Civil War which began in April 1861. It is true that many of these celebrations seem to recall show business rather than a great national reconsideration and assessment. The celebrations have been accompanied by a flood of literature, some of it of very little value from any point of view, some of it highly tendentious, some of it scholarly and wise. But even if we discount the amount of artificiality in this re-fighting of the Civil War we must, I think, accept the fact that for the American people the 'Civil War' or the 'War Between the States' or the 'War of the Rebellion' is still *the* war.

Despite the recent ordeal of the Second World War, the only war the United States has ever fought remotely comparable in scale to the Civil War, it is the Civil War which is always present in the American mind, conscious and unconscious. It is the Civil War which is the occasion for the memorial statues, for the pageants, for the attempts to recall and to understand the ordeal of a century ago. First of all, it was an American war fought by Americans on both sides. Its glories and its shames are part of the national inheritance. Except for the most bigoted partisans, its heroes are heroes to both sides. It was a Congress dominated by political leaders from the South which celebrated in 1959 the 150th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth, and it was a Senator from Texas, Leader of the Senate Lyndon Johnson, now President of the United States, who began his speech by saying, 'I am a child of Appomattox.' In a sense all Americans are children of Appomattox and children of what went before. The present government of the United States is what it is because the North or, if you prefer it, the Union triumphed. And since all or nearly all Americans now treasure

the Union, the ordeal of the war is seen as being justified by its final success. Most Americans can say with Walt Whitman:

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,  
The ship has weather'd every wrack, the prize we sought is won.

But the captain who had brought the vessel safe in port was dead when Whitman wrote his poem and the ship he had brought into port was badly battered.

A second reason why the Americans are preoccupied with the Civil War is that, although it is now accepted that the national cause triumphed, it triumphed at a very great price. It triumphed at a very great price in money, many thousand millions of dollars. It triumphed with the impoverishment of a great part of the country, an impoverishment from which the South took at least a generation to recover. It triumphed after the loss of near 600,000 lives: which means the United States suffered between 1861 and 1865 greater losses relatively than we suffered between 1914 and 1918, and of course far greater than either the United States or Britain suffered in the Second World War. But with this great price the American people bought the survival of the Union and, almost incidentally, the freeing of the slaves.

Then and since, there have been people who thought the price of either of these good things was too high and the good things could have been attained by less violent means. And, though this is not a matter susceptible of strict academic proof, I am convinced that the American people suffered a blow to their self-esteem and to their innocent confidence in the future from which, in a way, they have not yet recovered. The passions that we see overflowing in Birmingham, Alabama, are passions fed in the South by memories of a great disaster. That for the South the 'Civil War' or the 'War Between the States', as they put it, was a catastrophe cannot be doubted. So distinguished a scholar as Professor David Potter, no friend of Southern intransigence although himself a Mississippian, has again raised the question of whether the abolition of slavery at such a price was not an extremely expensive method of ending a great abuse. He is not as convinced as many historians of today are that the war was inevitable, and could not have been evaded, at any rate for some time.

Those who despise the advantages of a stopgap peace will point out, of course, that the Civil War did settle the basic issues. It saved the Union, and it freed 4,000,000 slaves. Certainly this is true, and it is important. But it can hardly be said that these immense values were

gained at a bargain. For every six slaves who were freed, approximately one soldier was killed; for every ten white Southerners who were held in the Union, one Yank or one Reb died. A person is entitled to wonder whether the Southerners could not have been held and the slaves could not have been freed at a smaller per-capita cost. Certainly few would have purchased these gains at the time if they had known the price, and the mere fact that it has already been paid is not a reason for historians to let it go without questioning now.<sup>1</sup>

It is not only, however, because the war was so bloody that it was a traumatic experience for the Americans, North and South. It ended what had seemed to be a resistless movement to wealth and power, an increasingly visible superiority of democratic institutions over the effete monarchies of Europe. All, or nearly all, travellers in the United States before the war—Tocqueville, Dickens, Harriet Martineau—noted the immense self-satisfaction with which most Americans regarded their institutions and their eagerness to have their self-satisfaction confirmed by the praise of Europeans, who could withhold the praise only for ignoble reasons of selfishness and envy.

In a sense, of course, the Civil War justified the United States, for the United States survived despite the scepticism of 'top people' in London and Paris—survived after a demonstration of military strength as impressive as anything known in the wars of the French Revolution and Empire. Lincoln's question asked in the Gettysburg Address was answered affirmatively. More than that, what many or most Europeans considered the great moral stain of slavery was formally removed. The triumphant republic of the United States was no longer also the republic of 4 million slaves, the republic whose flag was so often used to cover the infamies of the African slave trade. But 'the war came', as Lincoln was to put it in the Second Inaugural, and that reflected something very rotten indeed in the American political and social organization. The hundreds of thousands of families who had lost fathers, brothers, sons could not take the war casually, and the United States in 1865 was obviously a very different country from the United States of 1860. Though not all saw it, the farmers' republic, dear to Jefferson and Jackson, was dying. A new industrial giant was appearing. New social problems, as urgent if not as ignominious as the problem of slavery, were appearing too; and despite the heroism of both victors and vanquished the post-war years in America were not

<sup>1</sup> *Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis*, David M. Potter, 1962 ed., pp. xx-xxi.

edifying. We can read in one of the most famous of American books, *The Education of Henry Adams*, the disillusionment of the period after the Civil War when 'the new birth of freedom' seemed an ambiguous benefit. This was the era of graft, of plunder, of the debasement of standards in public and business life; it was what Mark Twain called 'the gilded age'. Was it for this that so many tens of thousands of young men 'had given the last, full measure of devotion'?

In the South, of course, the situation was worse. The South was very much poorer, so the amount of plundering was smaller, but it was if possible more odious because it was done in part through the exploitation of the newly freed slaves. Fallen from their high estate the Southern whites, especially the old Southern planter aristocracy, could only contemplate with bitterness the revolution which the North had imposed on them. This was the world in which William Faulkner's aristocratic families like the Sartorises began to go down while families like the Snopes began to climb. It is not necessary to believe all the Southern legends of this period or to sympathize with all Southern complaints; but we are here facing a state of mind, and the South had a deeply felt conviction that the war had been imposed on it, and, under cover of imposing the Union, the South had been conquered for base ends.

The triumphant North had not the same reasons for speculation as to the origins of the war. It was bound to think that it had right on its side—or otherwise how could it justify a war fought so tenaciously, won at such a terrible price? So on both sides the 'quarrel over the Civil War' took in the first place the form of an argument over war guilt. Of course, from the beginning leaders, North and South, explained that the guilt of starting the war lay with the other side, and that it was impossible, or almost impossible, for an honest man to doubt which was the side that had fought for the Right.

War-guilt controversies we always have with us. There is one waging now about the immediate origins of the Second World War; but the American war-guilt controversy is a peculiar one because it is a controversy over the origins of a civil war and a controversy (that was formally conducted in highly legalistic terms) over the interpretation of the Constitution of the United States. The Germans after 1918 were arguing that there had been a breach of faith by the victorious Allies, were arguing against the charge of war guilt in the narrow sense, the charge that Imperial Germany had planned and launched the First

World War. But all this took place between independent nations appealing not to a narrow specific legal document but to what may be called general good faith and good manners, and to the verdict, if such there can be, of historical scholarship. The American problem was different.

There was, as I shall try to show later, some discussion of war guilt in the narrow terms of the timing of messages, of bargains made and broken, of the kind of diplomatic history with which we are so familiar in the discussions of the summer months of 1914 and 1939. But although this controversy goes on, the real controversy goes deeper. The real controversy is over the question, did the American Constitution justify the right of secession, or alternatively did it justify the use of force by the government of the United States against the seceding States? Of course, as Tocqueville pointed out, because of the institution of judicial review and the political rule of the courts, American politics had always been conducted in peculiarly legalistic terms. But now the stakes were so great that the legal argument was deeply embittered, and a great part of the quarrel over the American Civil War is a quarrel of interpretation and a quarrel which (I believe) cannot be settled in the way it has for the most part been discussed. Behind the argument about the meaning of the American Constitution or the role of the Supreme Court or the ambiguity of phrases of the Constitution, like 'We the people of the United States', lie deep social forces and deep passions. But it is impossible to read the controversies of the time, North and South alike, without believing that they did in fact think very largely of the quarrel over the nature of the Union as a quarrel to be settled as a kind of lawsuit. So the Civil War becomes a kind of ordeal by battle, although the losing South did not accept, and does not yet accept, the legal justice of the decision.

It is my opinion that a great deal of the cogent and learned discussion of the character of the United States Constitution as drafted in 1787 is beside the point. No one could foresee in 1787 the future course of American history. No one was certain that it had a future history. No one could foresee in 1787 the role of the steamboat and the railroad which did at least as much to transform the Union as any Act of Congress or decision of the Supreme Court. It is possible, as even Jefferson Davis seems to have suspected, that the Constitution was deliberately ambiguous, and certainly close reading does reveal ambiguities which have cost a great deal of judicial reasoning and a great deal of blood to clear up.

From quite early on, two theories of the character of the Constitution were advanced. One was the so-called 'strict construction' view in which the powers of the Federal Government were limited to those specifically given in the document. From the very beginning of the new government this doctrine was preached, and preached by some men of great eminence. The Constitution had been drafted and designed by men who at that time wanted as strong a government as the States would stand. Later the chief architect of the Constitution, James Madison, shifted his ground and became less of a nationalist under the pressure of Jefferson's political leadership and the changing tone of Virginia politics. And by 1798 Madison and Jefferson, in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, had advanced views which would have made the effective government of the United States extremely difficult, had they been applied successfully when one was President and the other Secretary of State.<sup>1</sup>

But the most restrictive definition of the Union was given by the great Southern dialectician, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, in justifying his State's attempted nullification of the Federal tariff. Calhoun argued against the claim that the Union was more than an agent of the States:

The error is in the assumption that the General Government is a party to the constitutional compact. The States, as has been shown, formed the compact, acting as sovereign and independent communities. The General Government is but its creature; and though, in reality, a government, with all the rights and authority which belong to any other government, within the orbit of its powers, it is, nevertheless, a government emanating from a compact between sovereigns, and partaking, in its nature and object, of the character of a joint commission, appointed to superintend and administer the interests in which all are jointly concerned; but having, beyond its proper sphere, no more power than if it did not exist. To deny this would be to deny the most incontestable facts and the clearest conclusions.<sup>2</sup>

The opposing view was put with great force by the great Chief Justice John Marshall in *M'Culloch v. Maryland*. He stated

<sup>1</sup> The greatest living Jeffersonian, Professor Dumas Malone, has recently argued that Jefferson retreated from the extreme position he advanced in 1798: 'Never again did he say or imply that an act of the federal government was unconstitutional because the legislature of a single state declared it so.' *Thomas Jefferson as Political Leader*, 1963, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *Reports and Public Letters of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Richard K. Crallé, 1857, vol. vi, p. 73.

the view of the State of Maryland (which was roughly the view to be put forward by Calhoun), and attempted to refute it:

The creation of a corporation, it is said, appertains to sovereignty. This is admitted. But to what portion of sovereignty does it appertain? Does it belong to one more than to another? In America, the powers of sovereignty are divided between the government of the Union, and those of the States. They are each sovereign, with respect to the objects committed to it, and neither sovereign with respect to the objects committed to the other.<sup>1</sup>

For the next generation and, indeed, down to the present day, there has been a great deal of discussion, most of it very sterile, about the meaning of sovereignty, about the problem of whether it can be divided and, if so, how the allocation of sovereignty is made. It was a favourite asseveration, not necessarily backed up by argument, of Southern leaders like Jefferson Davis, that sovereignty could not be divided, that consequently it lay with the original founding States. This was also the basis of the argument of Alexander Stephens, who always protested against the view that the right of secession was embodied in the Constitution. It was not: the right of secession was an indispensable part of the sovereignty of the States, and the States alone were sovereign. We have heard an echo of this doctrine as recently as 1963 in Alabama and Mississippi.

It seems to me, to jump ahead, to be a question settled not only by the Supreme Court but by the ordeal by battle. There are now no sovereign States in the United States and if sovereignty is located anywhere it is located in the Federal government. The limits of its power are to be defined by the Supreme Court, and not by the independent action of States. But I do not, in fact, think that the question of sovereignty, the question of the relative powers of the Union and the States, the question of the right of secession can be settled by the narrow legalistic arguments seen at their best in Calhoun and at their worst in Alexander Stephens.

It is not a question to be settled by mere acuteness, and both Calhoun and Stephens were acute, even if Jefferson Davis was not. The Constitution of the United States, drafted in 1787, coming into effect in 1789, begins with a declaration, 'We the People of the United States . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America', and since the

<sup>1</sup> *Documents of American History*, ed. Henry Steele Commager, 4th ed., 1948, vol. i, p. 216.

new Constitution promises 'a more perfect Union' than the Articles of Confederation of 1777, which described themselves as 'Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union', it has been assumed that if the old Constitution was to be perpetual, the new Constitution must be more perpetual. But against this has to be set the fact, as was often pointed out, that the government under the Articles, which did not come into effect till 1781, lasted less than ten years, and if it could be dissolved by the action of the majority of the States, why could not the government under the new Constitution be so dissolved?

I think the historical situation is not much illuminated by these arguments. No one knew in 1789 that a new Constitution would succeed any better than the old. No one knew whether the Union would survive the threatened pressures of Britain and France, or whether the territories to the west could be held in union with the older States of the east. Most of the sponsors of the new Constitution hoped for the best. Some were more pessimistic than others, and it is conceivable that but for the coming of the steamboat and the railroad the Union could not have stretched effectively across the Mississippi and still less to the Pacific. For a section of the old Union and some of the new States at various times talked of 'interposition', 'nullification', and 'secession', all of which they defended as legal means of resisting the domination of the Federal government by hostile sections. No section, North, South, West, has a record of perfect loyalty to the Constitution of 1787. If the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions were a political sin, the activities of the New England States in the War of 1812 were a still greater political sin. If South Carolina attempted to nullify the tariff, the Northern States attempted to nullify the Fugitive Slave Act. But, at the same time, the habit of living together, the intermingling of economic interests, the movement of population were creating a 'more perfect Union'. And there was building up all over the Union, even in the South, a kind of American patriotism. None of the attempts to minimize or evade the doctrine of federal supremacy by which federal legislation and federal treaties were 'the Supreme Law of the Land' was generally accepted. North and South, people felt themselves Americans and more and more rejoiced in and were proud of what seemed to be the immense success of a new experiment in republican government.

Right down to the Civil War itself this sentiment was strong, and it was seriously threatened only by another problem not soluble by the political devices which had been adequate to deal



with the other threats to the unity of what was beginning to be called a nation.

Here we come to the question which, as no one doubted at the time of the Civil War, lay at the roots of the increasingly violent dissent between the South on the one hand and the North and West on the other. It was slavery, and slavery alone, that angered people enough, that threatened people enough, to induce them to run the great risk of civil war, and that induced them to carry on that war for four bloody years. Lincoln, in the Second Inaugural delivered on 4 March 1865, when the war was visibly coming to an end with a complete and unconditional triumph of the Union, states as a truth not to be denied: 'All knew that this interest [slavery] was, somehow, the cause of the war.'<sup>1</sup> If the slavery question could have been dealt with or ignored, if slavery had been on the way to possible extinction, as many people had hoped at the beginning of the nineteenth century, or if it could have been ignored simply as what the South called 'the peculiar institution', a system of organizing labour, there would have been no Civil War. For and against this institution, and alone for and against this institution, were Americans willing to begin a fratricidal strife.

No historical controversy in modern Britain has been fought with the intensity and acrimony that has been revealed in the dispute over the role of slavery in the causation of the Civil War. The whole idea of historical causation has been debated<sup>2</sup> with great acuteness. The character of the slave system has been debated; its economics as well as its politics discussed with great learning. From roughly around 1832 the two, or to be more accurate the three, sections involved—the South, the North, and the West—discussed the slavery question in what were comparatively normal terms. The South was forced to recognize that the great Founding Fathers—for example, Washington and Jefferson—had condemned slavery; that it had had very few friends even in the next generation until the controversy was revived, according to one theory by the virulence of Northern attacks; or slavery itself was made more amiable and respectable by the sudden explosion of the cotton industry made possible by Whitney's cotton gin. The South began not only to resent criticism, but to resent discussion inside the South or inside the North of what was beginning to be called 'the peculiar

<sup>1</sup> *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. viii, ed. Roy P. Basler, 1953, p. 332.

<sup>2</sup> See *Daedalus*, Summer 1962.

institution'. From being an evil from which a way of exit was not immediately feasible, slavery became a positive good. Indeed, in the years immediately before the war, a counter-attack was being launched in which the benefits of slavery as a method of organizing economic life, disciplining and providing for that necessary class who did the repellent and boring labour, were stressed.

What a Southern orator called the 'mudsill' of society had to be provided somehow. In the South it was provided by the regimentation of a naturally inferior race, the Negroes, whose condition was not only better than that of their savage ancestors, but better than that of the wage-slaves in English and American industrial cities. The most consistent and aggressive of these propagandists, George Fitzhugh, was a kind of Virginian Marx, and he and other Southern propagandists were glad of the aid they got from the authoritarian writings of Thomas Carlyle. The alleged improvement in the condition of the Africans due to their transportation into a Christian society was used in the agitation for the reopening of the slave trade. Although the slave trade had been condemned by people who accepted the existence of the slavery system in the States where it was part of the social structure, although the slave trade had been illegal in the United States since 1808, in practice till just before the Civil War the American government was an obstacle to the effective suppression of what was, by current international and domestic law, piracy. And there could be no doubt that the increasingly vehement defence of slavery as a good thing in itself, and the increasingly aggressive attitude taken towards Northern and still more Southern critics of the institution, angered and alarmed many people in the North who might have been willing to let sleeping dogs lie and who hoped for the gradual extinction of slavery under the dual influence of Christianity and economic pressure.

But this view of the causes of the intensifying of the slavery controversy could be and was reversed. 1832 was taken as the climactic year because that was the last time that the abolition of slavery was seriously discussed in a Southern State in a public body, in the Virginia Convention; and this discussion took place although the year before there had occurred the most formidable slave rebellion of the nineteenth century, Nat Turner's rising in that very State of Virginia. The explanation given then and since by Southern sympathizers was that the aggressiveness of the Northern Abolitionists, their refusal to discuss seriously the

problems of emancipation, and their denunciation of all slave-owners as sinners to whom no Christian sympathy was due, destroyed the moderate anti-slavery movement in the South and placed the whole region in a state of siege, at first psychologically and then physically. Reckless Abolitionists, from mere theorists like William Lloyd Garrison to fanatical buccaneers like John Brown, both alarmed and angered the South. Reason was impossible in these circumstances. At the same time the follies of Northern criticism encouraged the so-called 'fire-eaters of the South', who were not only polemical writers like George Fitzhugh but politicians like Rhett. Unreason came in the years just before the Civil War to dominate, or at any rate to appear to dominate, the politics of both sections.

The most recent version of the controversy from this point of view is that put forward by Professor Avery Craven and later by Professor J. G. Randall in his great life of Lincoln. The thesis is that if the men on both sides had been wiser, more moderate, less doctrinaire in morals and politics, more concerned with 'real' issues, the crisis of the Civil War might have been avoided. Slavery would sooner or later have evaporated without a civil war, as it did in Cuba and Brazil. But for the malignant folly of the fanatics on both sides, the tragedy could have been averted. Professor Randall's view has been subjected to a number of very acute analyses, for example by Professor Allan Nevins in his great study of the Civil War period and in an article by Professor Pieter Geyl of Utrecht, now reprinted in his *Debates with Historians*. Geyl makes the point—one, I should have thought, obvious enough—that we cannot really tell the past what they should have debated.

If they were willing to debate with such savagery and fight with such heroism, there must have been something more at work in the American situation in the period between 1830 and 1860 than the efforts of agitators on both sides, none of them leaders of the great national parties, none of them figures of real national weight. Why was it possible to cause this excitement, to cause this passion? To take the Southern side first, as many people have pointed out, and as was pointed out at the time by people like William Ellery Channing, many of the enemies of slavery in the North made no effort to put themselves in the position of the Southerners, who had not only the problem of slavery to face but the problem of what were called the slaves—the problem we call today the race problem. Many people made the calculation (Professor Nevins has done it recently) of what a bargain it would

have been to have shared with the South the cost of emancipating the slaves, a view which Lincoln shared. But all that the extreme Abolitionists in the North, all that the more moderate Free Soilers proposed to do, was to keep slavery out of the North and out of the territories of the Union, and to hope to see it collapse in the Southern States where its constitutional position was quite impregnable. To what would happen after that they devoted no thought. In this way, as Lincoln hints in his Second Inaugural, all sections, North and South, had their share of war guilt.

But it does not follow that the Abolitionists, if less righteous than they thought they were, were wrong or could, in fact, have been prevented from having their influence by any statesmanship or by any system of ingenious dodges. No doubt the statesmen of the ten years before the war were inferior, all of them, except for an obscure politician in Illinois, ex-Congressman Lincoln, very inferior in ability as successors to the great triumvirate of Clay, Calhoun, and Webster. Even the best of them, Stephen Douglas, was not, I now think, a really great man although he was a very remarkable politician. But as we look at the recurring crises over the place of slavery in the Union, over the rights and wrongs of the admission of new States which would be slave States, over the schemes for the annexation of Cuba and the extension of American power into Mexico and over the Caribbean—above all, over the status of slavery in the territories ruled, as had been thought up to 1850, by Congress, which was empowered to permit or prohibit slavery as it thought fit, it is for me impossible to believe that any of the great statesmen I have mentioned above could have avoided the catastrophe. That the catastrophe came is not, of course, a proof that it had to come, but it is surely a very strong indication that the avoidance of the catastrophe required more than tact and discretion. Is not Professor Geyl right in asking with what right Randall

tells the speakers of 1858 what subjects they ought to have treated. Is it not the historian's more obvious line simply to conclude from their choice, and from the enormous impression they made, that the country's mood was strained to the utmost by the Kansas-Nebraska complication?<sup>1</sup>

But why did slavery create such excitement, increasing year after year, ending in the Civil War? It has been argued with a good deal of plausibility that since people around 1800 thought slavery would die out peaceably, there was less excitement than

<sup>1</sup> *Debates with Historians*, Pieter Geyl, 1955, p. 226.

there was later, although Jefferson was profoundly alarmed by the violence of the controversy over the admission of Missouri as a slave State. By 1840 it was obvious that slavery was not dying out but was spreading into new areas like Mississippi and western Georgia and Alabama. Indeed, it was held by some, including that very acute Irish economist Professor Cairnes, that slavery had to extend territorially or to die. This theory has not been established, but is not implausible.

But if slavery was not dying, what was the United States as a whole, and what were the free States, to do about it? And this brings us to the very heart of the question, the moral character of slavery. The question cannot here be debated at length. I think it is sufficient to say that by the middle of the nineteenth century slavery, in a country as advanced as the United States, was intolerable morally as well as economically. There is no doubt that the blackness of the slavery system was exaggerated by Abolitionist propagandists. This is revealed in the recent elaborate work by Professor Dumond,<sup>1</sup> this is revealed in a number of special studies of slavery in various States—some of which also reveal the possibilities of outrageous cruelty which the system provided. It is revealed in the history of the internal slave trade as well as the still more odious African slave trade. There were many good, kind, Christian masters. But there were many casual and some cruel masters; and all masters were under the threat of an economic system which could produce and often did produce sudden financial crises that led to the break-up of even the most paternal slave plantation. After all, in the most famous tract on slavery, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the contrast is between the patriarchal life of the plantation in Kentucky where Uncle Tom grew up and the hell in Louisiana to which financial, not moral, failure sent him. It is, indeed, impossible to discuss the origins of the Civil War without mentioning the most famous of all American novels. 'So this is the little woman who made this big war':<sup>2</sup> thus Lincoln is said to have addressed Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe in the White House in 1862. As the chief constitutional grievance of the South against the conduct of the Northern States was the refusal to implement the constitutional guarantee of the return of fugitive slaves, it was not at all unimportant that two years after the Compromise which put the power of the Federal government behind such returns the most

<sup>1</sup> *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America*, D. L. Dumond, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> *Runaway to Heaven*, Johanna Johnston, 1963, p. 357. There are variations on the exact phraseology of this anecdote.

dramatic episode in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the conversion of a Senator when he is confronted with the fugitive Eliza. For the South, after *Uncle Tom* it was 'never bright confident morning again'. The South was finally on the defensive. All the literature on the other side, whether it undertook to show the idyllic character of slavery or the infamous character of industrialism, failed before this most potent tract.

Several distinguished Southern historians have done their best for 'the peculiar institution', notably the late Ulrich Phillips. It seems to me the bias of current historiography, exemplified in Kenneth B. Stampp's *Peculiar Institution* and, though less completely, in Professor Allan Nevins's great work, is rather for Mrs. Stowe and for that other female critic of Southern society, Fanny Kemble, whose journal<sup>1</sup> was not in fact published until the war had broken out, but provides an *ex post facto* justification for profound criticism of the slavery system. Other points could be made which suggest that Mrs. Stowe, second-hand as her knowledge was, in some ways was kinder towards the Southern system than was altogether justified. It was not true, for example, that slave-dealers were uniformly despised as belonging to the lower classes in the South. But it is necessary to be brief and so dogmatic, and I can only say that it is my opinion that slavery as a system was doomed and deserved to be doomed, although the manner of its destruction was, as Professor Potter suggested, probably excessively expensive.

Something ought to be said, for completeness, of the theory which made the clash between North and South a clash between two 'races', two social groups divided not merely by geography and social institutions but something that we can call national character. That there was a difference was noted, as Professor William R. Taylor has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> and Mrs. Stowe herself in *Augustine St. Clare* has shown the more attractive side of Southern gentility and hinted that it had many points of superiority over the business aristocracy of the North-East. But the fluidity of American society, the mobility of the population, the common political institutions, the common traditions make the theory of two nationalities destined to clash highly implausible—as implausible as the Southern theory that they were Cavaliers or Normans and the Northerners Roundheads or

<sup>1</sup> *The Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation, in 1838-1839*, Frances Anne Kemble; first pub. 1863; new ed., ed. John A. Scott, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character*, William R. Taylor, 1963.

Saxons—theories owing more to Sir Walter Scott than to history.

The case against the idea of peaceful secession was put with great force by Daniel Webster in his famous—or notorious—speech of 7 March 1850. This speech, which did him so much damage in the North, was in a sense a plea for the South, but it was not a plea for secession, which Webster believed was essentially a revolutionary right, if it was a right, and could not be justified under any legal forms. He also believed that secession must and would produce war:

Peaceable secession! Peaceable secession! The concurrent agreement of all the members of this great republic to separate! A voluntary separation, with alimony on one side and on the other. Why, what would be the result? Where is the line to be drawn? What States are to secede? What is to remain American? What am I to be? An American no longer? Am I to become a sectional man, a local man, a separatist, with no country in common with the gentlemen who sit around me here, or who fill the other house of Congress?<sup>1</sup>

I have already suggested that I believe a great deal of the discussion over the legal justification for secession or its absolutely illegal character is beside the point. The framers of the Constitution hoped it would be, so far as such things can be, eternal, that it would be a more perfect and a perpetual Union. But no doubt they had their fingers crossed and each section, if it could have foreseen some of the extensions of federal power, might well have hesitated to enter the new union. New England was to know the rigours of the Jeffersonian embargo, South Carolina was to know the oppression, as that State thought it, of the federal tariff, Virginia was to know the dangers, as that commonwealth thought it, of the extension of federal judicial power under the leadership of that great Virginian, Chief Justice Marshall. Had all these things been foreseen there might have been no new Constitution, and if there had been no Constitution there would soon have ceased to be a United States of any kind. But I find it hard to believe there was any right of secession under the Constitution or that, in any sense I can accept, the States retained all their sovereignty. The most important aspects of sovereignty were transferred to the new Union—the right of peace and war, a very wide and general power of taxation, a uniform system of federal courts with steadily increasing jurisdiction.

<sup>1</sup> *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, National Edition, 1903, vol. x, p. 93.

And of course the mere creation of this great free-trade union fostered national as apart from sectional or States' Rights biases. One can see the difficulties of any other theory of the Federal Union by the difficulties confronting the Confederate States of America which did admit the right of secession, did admit the overruling sovereignty of the States composing the Confederacy, and suffered greatly—perhaps fatally—from their constitutional theory. Even Jefferson Davis had doubts as to the efficacy and relevance of strict States' Rights theory in a political organization so direly threatened as was the Confederacy. Contemplating the damage done to the chances of the South in the Civil War by its own constitutional theories, one is tempted to apply to it Mary Queen of Scots's 'In my end is my beginning'. To say of a constitutional theory that it will not work in practice seems to me a condemnation, although I do not hold that to say a constitutional theory will work in practice is adequate justification.

Yet it was in the name of this constitutional theory of State sovereignty that in the beginningsix States left the Union on the election of Lincoln, and finally eleven States did on the theory that Lincoln's calling up the militia was an act of aggression against the sovereign States. (According to Confederate theory, thirteen States left the Union, but Missouri and Kentucky were never controlled by the Confederacy and their secession governments were ephemeral and impotent.)

How deep the illusion of peaceful secession went can be seen by looking at the correspondence of Jefferson Davis as the Confederacy was crumbling into dust, and still more by contemplating the actions at this time of the Governor of Georgia and the Governor of North Carolina, who were apparently more insistent on the rights of the States than on the success of the cause to which they had not pledged 'the last full measure of devotion', to quote from Lincoln's Gettysburg speech.

It is in the light of these views of mine that I turn to the moment of crisis of the outbreak of the war. It is usually said, and rightly said, that war broke out on 12 April 1861 when General Beauregard opened fire on the Federal garrison in Fort Sumter. Strictly speaking, it was not the first time that the Union flag, 'Old Glory', had been fired on. The Buchanan administration after its reconstruction and the exit of its Southern members had made a feeble attempt to send supplies to Fort Sumter, but the *Star of the West* was fired on and turned away.

Much ingenuity and, if possible, less objective consideration has been spent on the period between Lincoln's inauguration on



4 March 1861 and the decision to send supplies to Sumter. From the Southern point of view, the South was simply asking for its rights, and South Carolina was asking for the restoration to its control of the island which it had ceded to the Federal government for the setting up of a fort while it was still in the Union. From a Federal point of view as construed by lawyers, and certainly as construed in the not very long run by the eminent lawyer who was now President, it was the duty of the Federal government to hold as far as it could all Federal property. Lincoln, at any rate, came to act on a theory which I call 'Republican legitimacy'. He alone had taken the oath laid down in the Constitution,<sup>1</sup> and he came to believe that this involved holding what was left (it was not very much) of Federal assets in the seceded States. Since the firing on Sumter enabled him to appeal to the profound sense in the North of the sacredness of the Union and of the flag, it was probably a mistake from the Southern point of view to prevent the delivery of supplies to Major Anderson and his garrison. Whether it was or not, the Southern leader did so. It was stirring up the hornets' nest, the hornets buzzed out, and a long and bloody war stung the Confederacy to death.

Jefferson Davis makes a good legal case for the action of South Carolina and for the support given to South Carolina by the other seceded States. But he does not make the most effective defence, which was based on the plea that there was some danger that, if the North left the South alone for a while, it would come back to the Union, not exactly with its tail between its legs, but settling for a great deal less than independence. Davis himself was suspected, as his latest biographer Hudson Strode admits, of being 'reconstructionist' and willing to come back to the Union on terms, and the real fire-eaters probably needed war to establish their control over Southern public opinion. As Lincoln was to put it in the Second Inaugural, 'and War came'.

I think it would have come in any event, possibly at Fort Pickens in Florida which the Union still held, possibly in the far West where the frontiers were extremely vague, possibly on the lower Mississippi where the problems of the economic relationship between the States on the upper Mississippi and the lower Mississippi were most difficult of solution. Possibly it would have come with a breakdown of negotiations—if any negotiations had really been carried on. For it seems to me that

<sup>1</sup> See *Documents of American History*, ed. Henry Steele Commager, 4th ed., 1948, vol. i, p. 143.

dissolution of the Union, not mere right of secession, was the basis of the Southern claim. For one thing, whatever may have been the validity of the theory of legal secession for the old States which had helped to make the Constitution, and for Texas which had entered the Union in 1846, indubitably as an independent republic, I have never been able to find any satisfactory legal theory for the 'resumption of sovereignty' by the State of Louisiana, holding the great, vital port of New Orleans, controlling the mouth of the Mississippi, and bought by the whole of the United States from the First Consul Bonaparte as if it had been a high-priced slave or a piece of valuable real estate. All the rights of the States made out of the Louisiana Purchase had derived not from any intrinsic sovereignty in bodies politic which had not existed until the treaty was made, but from the Constitution of the United States. Despite the very optimistic opinion of Professor Potter (among others), I agree with Daniel Webster that secession was bound to mean war, and, as I have already said, the real cause of the war was the clash of the slavery and free soil systems.

Because in the not very long run the firing on Sumter rebounded to the advantage of the North, it has often been asserted with a good deal of ingenuity that Lincoln planned to provoke the South into attacking Sumter. The old maxim of Indian hunting, 'the bleating of the kid excites the tiger', has been applied to the negotiations that went on in the six weeks between Lincoln's inauguration and the outbreak of the war. That in the conversations between the 'Sovereign States' and Secretary of State Seward there was bad faith or at any rate evasiveness on Seward's part, I am quite prepared to believe. That there was hesitation on Lincoln's part I am very prepared to believe; that, faced with the threat of the destruction of the Union and the threat of war, many people in the North hesitated, I am quite certain. Jefferson Davis was able to point out to the highly belligerent Greeley that he had not, in fact, been in favour of the armed coercion of the South in the period immediately before the outbreak of the war.

Since it was a theory advanced by Charles and Mary Beard, and later repeated in various forms, that the Civil War was basically an economic conflict between two different economic systems, that slavery was only the formal and not the real occasion of the clash, it is perhaps right to point out that business in the North was as alarmed by the threat of war as was business in a port like New Orleans. It is easy to see, looking back after

the war, that the war was a great catalyst, that it precipitated the 'take-off', to borrow Professor W. W. Rostow's famous metaphor. The North, as it emerged in 1865, was far more industrialized, far more centralized, far more ready to be the victim of a take-over bid by big business than it is likely the United States would have been without the Civil War, although I think it was only a question of time before industry took the place of agriculture as the basic economic force in the United States. But this was the result of a war which, again to refer to Lincoln's Second Inaugural, lasted far longer than anyone anticipated, and cost far more than anyone anticipated or, perhaps, would have been ready to pay in money and blood if the price had been known in 1861.

The Civil War was, among other things, a great social revolution. The United States could never be the same again, despite the extraordinary illusions that, at the very end of the war, Southern leaders still entertained. No lengthy war ever ends quite as the victors anticipate—and of course still less as the defeated anticipate. But the dominant business interests of the United States in 1861 did not know that 'business' would become the real force in American life so soon as the result of the war; moreover, the interests which became dominant inside the business world were not dominant in 1861. The war plus technology gave them their chance, or at any rate accelerated their victory. Indeed, as an example of the limited prevision of even great men, one of Lincoln's schemes for conditional emancipation would have allowed slavery to exist in the United States in a declining form till 1899: that is to say, long after the creation of the Standard Oil Company and just before the creation of the United States Steel Corporation—economic phenomena that no one could have anticipated, not even that spokesman for business, Daniel Webster.

Although it is not my purpose to discuss the actual history of the war in either its political or military aspects, I think it is necessary to say something about the causes of the final Northern victory, one of the most complete victories in history. It is not enough to say that the North had overwhelming material superiority. It had a great material superiority, but the South with its vast area and its highly military population, with its great advantage in the fact it had only to survive where the North had to conquer, was not by the mere fact of Southern or Northern power doomed to defeat. Swimming against the tide of current American military historiography, I still think that

the greatest soldier of the Civil War was Robert E. Lee and that, on the whole, Southern military leadership was superior to that of the North. One can see again and again chances of Northern resignation to the fact that it was impossible to conquer the South. In the summer of 1864 Lincoln thought this was the dominant mood in the North and that he would not be re-elected and that the Union might fail.

The great superiority of the North was political. It had, to begin with, a much more viable theory of what the Federal government was than the South had. This factor I have already briefly discussed. But because the South did not put its claim to resisting Federal power on the right of revolution, a right enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, it began and indeed fought the war in an astonishingly legalistic temper. Lincoln the lawyer was far less of a legalist than Jefferson Davis, the former professional soldier. Lincoln was quite prepared to break the Constitution of the United States in pursuit of his higher end, the preservation of the Union to which he was sworn by oath. Indeed, a great deal of the present immense power of the American Presidency comes from precedents laid down by Lincoln. Despite a general impression spread in England by sentimental biographers, Lincoln was not a soft-headed or in some ways a soft-hearted man, not, as I once put it, a mixture of St. Francis of Assisi and the Prince Consort. When he thought the situation called for it he could be as ruthless and, if you like, as unscrupulous as Bismarck, not to mention more recent leaders on the battlefield. On the other hand, the Southern leaders were more anxious, it now appears, to be right than to be victorious. This took pathological forms in the case of the Vice-President of the Confederacy, Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia, who up to the last moment had opposed secession, not because it was unconstitutional (later he wrote a long and tedious book to prove that it was not) but because it was unnecessary and unwise. Stephens was a politician and dialectician whom I have found it possible to respect but not to take seriously.

With Jefferson Davis we are in a different world, and yet the same curse hangs over his administration of the Confederate presidency as hung over the administration of various Southern States by their governors. Davis was a greater, more admirable, and more intelligent man than Governor Joe Brown of Georgia or Governor Zeb Vance of North Carolina, but he was crippled by his very serious intellectual limitations and by the doctrines by which he justified secession, for it must be remembered that,

although the most prominent Southern leader in the Senate, he had not been the most prominent leader of the secession forces. Indeed, he was suspected by people like Barnwell Rhett, who 'declared sourly in his paper, the *Charleston Mercury*: "Jefferson Davis will exert all his powers to reunite the Confederacy to the Empire".'<sup>1</sup> But once the die was cast, Jefferson Davis devoted himself with industry and in some ways with intelligence to the tasks of his office. But his industry, his good faith, his courage, and what, considering his health and natural temper, must be called his patience, were of no avail. A Southern historian has recently put his finger on what was wrong with President Jefferson Davis, and this was also wrong with the South:

Fundamentally, Davis always thought in terms of what was right, rather than in terms of how to win. There is no real evidence in all the literature that Davis ever at any time gave extended consideration to the basic question of what the South would have to do in order to win the war. He said almost nothing on this subject in his messages to Congress, which abounded in passages designed to prove the iniquity of the North and the rectitude of the South. By contrast, Lincoln wanted victory and wanted it so badly that in order to get it he was willing to co-operate with men who had shown they hated him.<sup>2</sup>

The South was rightly condemned by history (if this metaphor can be permitted) not so much because of the wickedness of slavery as because of the folly of its political theory and practice. It is therefore right for the American people and for most historians to see in Lincoln the greatest figure of the Civil War. No doubt, his exercise of power showed moral defects. He like other great statesmen occasionally had *les mains sales*, for example in his suppression, mild by present-day standards, of some civil liberties in the North and his use of military force to influence elections. Yet all through the war and in his plans for the peace his basic humanity and magnanimity shine out, and were revealed in what I think the noblest of political speeches, the Second Inaugural, given, it must be remembered, when the imminent triumph of the North was visible to everyone except the self-deluding Southern leaders. In the Second Inaugural there was no question of imputing war guilt to one side against the other. In the curious political Calvinism which was Lincoln's substitute for the evangelical religion of most of his neighbours,

<sup>1</sup> *Jefferson Davis, American Patriot, 1808-1861*, Hudson Strode, 1955, p. 405.

<sup>2</sup> *Why the North won the Civil War: 'Jefferson Davis and the Political Factors in Confederate Defeat'*, David M. Potter, 1960, p. 111.

he accepts the guilt of the North as well as of the South, and in that acceptance we can see what proved to be the empty promise of a magnanimous if completely victorious peace. And yet in the Second Inaugural he goes back to the cause of the war, the cause why the judgement of God had fallen on North and South alike:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.<sup>1</sup>

Accepting the common guilt, he looks forward to a common reconciliation: the common reconciliation, the start of a new life for the United States. If any man by his own decision decided that the Civil War would break out when it did, it was Lincoln, although I believe this imputation to him of special guilt is based on a simplified view of 'how the War came'. Six weeks after this appeal to his fellow countrymen, North and South, on Good Friday, the 12th of April—by a curious coincidence, the fourth anniversary of the firing on Sumter—Lincoln was murdered. Perhaps, had he survived, much of the bitterness which the defeated South came to feel, and, there is some evidence, feel more bitterly than it did in 1865, could have been avoided and a truer Union saved. *Dis aliter visum*. 'Untimelier death than his was never any.'

#### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

I should like to make plain that this is merely a bibliographical note. It is not even an attempt at a select bibliography. The materials for a study of the origins and character of the American Civil War are immense. It has been for a long time one of the most lavishly and carefully studied topics in historiography. Possibly only the rise of Christianity and the French Revolution have provoked so much writing. The object of this note is to call attention to certain books which were very much in my mind while I was writing my lecture and to books which are directly quoted or alluded to or are of special interest for some of the topics I discuss.

The order of the note is not alphabetical. It is only in a general sense topical. I have weighted the note on the side of recent writing because a good deal of modern American scholarly work on the American Civil War and its origins is little known in this country. I have not

<sup>1</sup> *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler, 1953, vol. viii, p. 333.

thought it worth while to note the classics of the topic, the histories by James Ford Rhodes and Allan Nevins and Professor J. G. Randall's lengthy and excellent though tendentious life of Lincoln.

As a guide to the difficulties of the subject, we have a good general survey by Thomas J. Pressly, *Americans Interpret their Civil War*, Princeton, N.J., 1954. Following on this general review I should like to note some basic collections of sources. The first is *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Roy P. Basler, New Brunswick, N.J., 1953. Another collection which I have used and emphasized is *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, National Edition, Boston, 1903. Even more important are *The Works of John C. Calhoun*, edited by Richard K. Crallé, New York, 1857 (especially volume vi). The State of Mississippi published a lavish and extremely useful edition of the works of Jefferson Davis under the title *Jefferson Davis: Constitutionalist, His Letters, Papers, and Speeches*, edited by Dunbar Rowland, Jackson, Mississippi, 1923.

Lincoln, of course, did not live to write his memoirs, and we may doubt if he would ever have done so. The literature on Lincoln is enormous. The latest bibliography contains more than 3,000 items. I should here like to draw attention simply to the best short life by Benjamin P. Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln*, New York, 1952, and to David Donald's *Lincoln Reconsidered*, New York, 1959.

Lincoln's opponent, Jefferson Davis, wrote an elaborate apologia *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, 2 vols., 1881 (I have used the London edition). This apologia is in many ways a useful book, but it is a deeply irritating book. Although Davis replies to, and sometimes refutes, his critics, all his pedantry, narrowness, and inability to see the character of the problem he had to deal with are made manifest. But Davis's book comes out extremely well in comparison with his Vice-President, Alexander Stephens's book. *A Constitutional View of the Late War between the States*, New York, 2 vols., 1868 and 1870, reveals a politician far inferior to Jefferson Davis in the necessary qualities of a politician. It is a work of the narrowest and most sterile legalism and unconsciously explains the totally negative role that Stephens played during the Civil War. These same defects are made evident in his later tract, *The Reviewers Reviewed: a Supplement to the 'War between the States'*, New York, 1872.

Three more or less contemporary Northern accounts of the origins and character of the Civil War may be referred to, not so much for their intrinsic merits as for the light they cast on Northern attitudes: *The History of the Rebellion: its Authors and Causes*, New York, 1864, was written by the veteran Abolitionist, Congressman Joshua R. Giddings, while the war was still raging, and is an admirable revelation of the spirit of the old Abolition districts in the North, in this instance of the Western Reserve of Ohio. *The American Conflict: a History of the Great Rebellion in the United States of America, 1860-'65*, by Horace Greeley, Hartford, vol. i, 1864, vol. ii, 1866, is an interesting hotchpotch by the famous and erratic editor of the New York *Tribune*, himself both a source of Northern

opinion and a witness to it. A less valuable work is *The History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, by Henry Wilson, 3 vols., Boston, 1875. Wilson had become Vice-President of the United States, and his book is full of sententious morality and reveals very well the self-righteousness of the triumphant Republicans.

I have maintained in my lecture that the root cause of the Civil War was slavery and that it is extremely difficult to see how the question could have been settled except by violence or by a total surrender of one side or the other. The question of 'war guilt' in the Civil War has been bitterly debated since the first shots were fired on Sumter. The controversy has continued right down to the present day with some but not complete abatement of passion. The question of historical causality in the war was raised in connexion with the origins of the Civil War in *Daedalus* in its summer number, 1962, in the article by William Dray, 'Some Causal Accounts of the American Civil War'. Mr. Dray's article provoked a number of replies which are interesting both for the immediate question of the Civil War and for the general question of historical causality.

There are really two questions involved. One is what I think the minor question of whether, with more candour or more foresight, the war could have been avoided in the spring of 1861, either by the South's not firing on Sumter or the North's not attempting to relieve the garrison. This seems to me a minor question, but I shall refer to one or two of the polemical interpretations of the events of the spring of 1861. The more important question is the role of slavery and the character of slavery. The character of 'the peculiar institution', as the Southerners preferred to call slavery before the war, has produced an immense literature, some of it of considerable value. The two most elaborate and, in intent, apologetic accounts of the slavery system from the Southern point of view are by Ulrich Bonnell Phillips. The first (and I think the better) is *American Negro Slavery*, New York and London, 1918. The more popular and more widely read book is *Life and Labor in the Old South*, Boston, 1929. The best critical account of American slavery (and incidentally critical of Phillips) is by Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*, New York, 1956. A very original book by Stanley M. Elkins, Chicago, 1959, is *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*. This is a somewhat paradoxical work, but it contains an extremely interesting investigation of the economic profitability of slavery. The classical contemporary account of the slavery system in general is *The Cotton Kingdom*, by Frederick Law Olmsted; this book was a conflation of Olmsted's separate studies of the regions of the South and was published in New York in 1861; it was also published in London, and it had a considerable effect upon British and American public opinion. The edition I have used is that edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger, published in New York in 1953.

There are a good many studies of slavery in particular States. Two



perhaps deserve special mention: one is *Slavery Times in Kentucky*, by J. Winston Coleman, Jr., Chapel Hill, 1940; this book contains an account of the horrible crime committed by Jefferson's young kinsmen in Kentucky, one of the great scandals of the slavery régime. *Slavery in Alabama*, by James Benson Sellers, University, Alabama, 1960, is the most recent study of slavery in a single State and is especially valuable for its account of the reactions in defence of slavery in that State in the decade before the outbreak of war. A special study of very great interest is *Slave-Trading in the Old South*, by Frederic Bancroft, Baltimore, 1931. Although this is a book not organized according to very recent standards of scholarship, it is of great value. It makes the point that slave-traders were not necessarily excluded from good society or regarded as an unpleasant but necessary aspect of the system. As Bancroft points out, one of the greatest slave-traders in South Carolina bore a name honoured equally in Charleston and Geneva, De Saussure.

A Northern author who accepted the Southern story of the untouchability of the slave-traders was Harriet Beecher Stowe, and by far the most important book on slavery before the war was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one of the most influential novels ever published. It was first published in 1852 and greatly helped to create the climate of opinion which made possible the foundation of the Republican Party and the opposition to the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. It has just been reprinted, in an admirable new edition edited by Kenneth S. Lynn, by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1962. The controversies provoked by this most famous of American novels led to violent attacks on Mrs. Stowe's veracity. She had hardly any first-hand knowledge of slavery, but she published a pretty effective defence of her book in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in New York and London in 1853. For this she drew very largely on the already abundant literature of the Anti-slavery Movement, especially on the works of Theodore Weld. She was not herself an Abolitionist in the strict sense of the term, but was very much indebted for her ammunition to the Abolitionists whose role is referred to below.

The latest life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Runaway to Heaven*, by Johanna Johnston, New York, 1963, does not add much to our knowledge of Mrs. Stowe, but it has some interesting material on the reception not only of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* but of her other anti-slavery novel, *Dred*, a book which had a very large sale although now nearly forgotten. The literary merits of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are discussed favourably by Mr. Edmund Wilson in his *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War*, New York and London, 1962. Mr. Wilson very successfully rehabilitates the literary merits of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, although his general introduction to the literature of the Civil War is much less impressive. The effectiveness of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in destroying certain types of Southern apologetics is brought out in an article in the *New England Quarterly*, March 1963, by Severn Duvall.

Two books based on a much more profound knowledge of the slavery system than any that Mrs. Stowe ever acquired, should perhaps be noted. The first is *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (first published in 1846—Cambridge, Mass., 1960, edited by Benjamin Quarles). Douglass was an escaped slave and was the leading Negro of his time and the chief spokesman for his race before and during the Civil War. His book is far less full of horrors than is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but it was nevertheless an effective demonstration of the evils of the slave system. Another book which reinforces Mrs. Stowe's criticism was Fanny Kemble's *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* (revised edition, New York and London 1961). This was not published until 1863, in the middle of the war, and consequently cannot be praised or blamed for helping to bring the war about; but it reinforced the increasingly popular Northern view that slavery was an intrinsically bad thing.

That slavery was a bad thing and driven by its own logic to expand into free territory was the thesis of *The Slave Power*, by J. E. Cairnes (2nd edition, London and Cambridge, 1863). Cairnes was a very distinguished Irish economist and dedicated this economic interpretation of the 'aggressive slavocracy' to John Stuart Mill. It was first published in London in 1861 and in a second and revised edition in 1863. The only book that aroused as much fear and detestation in the South as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was *The Impending Crisis of the South* (New York, 1858, London 1860), by Hinton Rowan Helper. Helper's book was a best-seller although, of course, not competing with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in its worldwide distribution in many languages. It was directed against the slave-owners of the South, not out of sympathy for the slaves but for the poor whites without slaves. By trying to demonstrate statistically that the people really robbed by the slave system were the whites, Helper threatened the unity of Southern society in face of 'Northern aggression'. The book was a favourite campaign weapon of the new Republican Party.

The history of the Anti-slavery Movement in the United States has been a field of great controversy for the last 30 or 40 years. The latest study of the case, with a very strong and sometimes uncritical bias in favour of the Abolitionists, has been made by Dwight Lowell Dumond in *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America and A Bibliography of Anti-slavery in America* (both Ann Arbor, 1961). Professor Dumond had already written on *Antislavery Origins of the Civil War*, Ann Arbor, 1939. There are two important collections of documents for the Anti-slavery Movement: *The Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857*, edited by Dwight L. Dumond, New York and London, 2 vols., 1938, and *The Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké, 1822-44*, edited by Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, New York and London, 2 vols., 1934. The stressing of the role of Theodore Weld in the Abolitionist Movement has been a feature of recent American historiography, as is exemplified in *Theodore Weld: Crusader for*

*Freedom*, by Benjamin P. Thomas, New Brunswick, N.J., 1950. There has been a very recent reassessment of the role of Weld's rival for the effective leadership of the Abolition Movement, William Lloyd Garrison, in *The Liberator*, by John L. Thomas, Boston, 1963.

Three figures, all playing important parts in the creation of the Republican Party, whose victory in 1860 was the formal cause of the war, have been the subjects of recent biographies. These are *Thaddeus Stevens: Scourge of the South*, by Fawn M. Brodie, New York, 1959; *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War*, by David Donald, New York, 1960; and *Charles Francis Adams, 1807-1886*, by Martin B. Duberman, Boston, 1961. Since the alleged threat of Southern censorship over every discussion of slavery was part of the raw materials for Northern agitation, attention might be paid to *Fettered Freedom: Civil Liberties and the Slavery Controversy, 1830-1860*, by Russel B. Nye, East Lansing, 1949.

The view that the crisis that ended in the Civil War could have been avoided if moderate men had been in control has been frequently advanced. It is the basic thesis of Randall's life of Lincoln. It is stated in Avery Craven's *The Coming of the Civil War*, New York, 1942, and in *The Course of the South to Secession*, by Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, New York and London, 1939. Professor Phillips, however, insists on the absolute necessity from the Southern point of view of keeping the South a 'white man's country' and his book had obvious overtones about contemporary race relations in the United States at the time he wrote. The view that anti-slavery agitation was a racket adopted by Northern business interests to ruin the South is stated with immoderate zeal in *The Slavery Controversy, 1831-1860*, by Arthur Young Lloyd, Chapel Hill, 1939.

The imputing of the blame for the war to fanatics on both sides is done with the most skill by Arnold Whitridge in *No Compromise! The Story of the Fanatics Who Paved the Way to the Civil War*, New York, 1960. The whole question is discussed, and the implication that all that was lacking to prevent the Civil War was a little wisdom attacked, in a critical essay by Professor Pieter Geyl, 'The American Civil War and the Problem of Inevitability' (*Debates with Historians*, Pieter Geyl, Groningen and The Hague, 1955).

The South, of course, replied in many ways to the attacks of the North on 'the peculiar institution'. There were a number of fictional replies to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and in any event novelists and men of letters had been picturing an ideal Southern society for a generation at least. A reply to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was not officially a fiction, was made by a Northern minister. The book shows signs of good faith but a curious lack of critical power and of curiosity (*A South-Side View of Slavery; or Three Months at the South in 1854*, by Nehemiah Adams, Boston, 1854).

But the South also defended its basic institution at a higher level. What would be called the sociological defence of slavery is described in *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South*, by William Sumner Jenkins, Chapel Hill, 1935. Some of the Southern propagandists were extremely

skilful in turning the tables on the North and on Britain. Perhaps the most effective of these counter-attacks is *Cannibals All! or Slaves without Masters*, by George Fitzhugh, first published 1856; new edition edited by C. Vann Woodward, Cambridge, Mass., 1960. Fitzhugh was an extremely able writer and he expounds a sort of proto-Marxian explanation of various ways of extracting surplus value. Of these, slavery is the best from everybody's point of view! The relationship of Northern capital to the slave system is examined in *Business and Slavery: The New York Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict*, by Philip S. Foner, Chapel Hill, 1941. One way of accounting for the breach between North and South, or more accurately between North and West on one side and the South on the other, was to assert that there was an ancient historical difference between the people who settled in New England and the Middle Colonies and the people who settled in the South. The population of the Southern colonies was either all Norman as against the Saxons of the North or Cavalier as against the Roundheads of the North: this thesis Mark Twain attributed in a famous diatribe to the nefarious influence of Sir Walter Scott. The question has recently been examined from two different aspects by Rollin G. Osterweis (*Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South*, New Haven and London, 1949) and William R. Taylor (*Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character*, London, 1963).

The lesser but equally bitterly debated problem of the origins of the Civil War refers to the immediate antecedents running roughly from the narrow election of Buchanan in 1856 to the election of Lincoln in 1860. It is possible to hold that there was what Seward called 'an Irrepressible Conflict' or to concentrate on the immediate day-to-day issues of the fateful years from the Dred Scott decision in 1857 to the firing on Fort Sumter in 1861. On the ideological origins of the War there is one recent and extremely ingenious study of the position of Lincoln, *Crisis of the House Divided: an Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, by Henry V. Jaffa, New York, 1959. But, as Lincoln was to say in the Second Inaugural in March 1865, 'The War came'. This is the title chosen by Professor Kenneth M. Stampp for his book on the immediate origins of the secession crisis (*And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis, 1860-1861*, Baton Rouge, 1950). This, with Professor Potter's book to be mentioned later, seems to me the best examination of the extremely complicated question of the immediate origins of the War. Still worth reading is *The Secession Movement, 1860-1861*, by Dwight Lowell Dumond, New York, 1911; but more valuable are Dumond's *Southern Editorials on Secession*, New York, 1931, and H. C. Perkins's *Northern Editorials on Secession*, New York, 1942.

An extremely interesting examination of 'war guilt' in its narrow sense can be found in *Why the Civil War?*, by Otto Eisenschiml, Indianapolis and New York, 1958. Dr. Eisenschiml is a very distinguished chemist and an extremely adroit writer of what may be called

historical detective stories. He may not convince his readers completely, but he certainly forces them to reconsider their own position. An extreme example of the view that Lincoln was immediately responsible for the outbreak of the War was advanced by John Shipley Tilley in *Lincoln Takes Command*, Chapel Hill, 1941; this book, which is like a prosecuting attorney's brief, tends to alienate all but devotedly Southern readers. One of Mr. Tilley's basic arguments has been destroyed by Professor David Potter in the new and revised edition of the admirable book he published in 1942, *Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis* (New Haven, 1962).

Two contemporary documents for the immediate crisis are worth examining: one is ex-President Buchanan's remarkably able apologia, *Mr. Buchanan's Administration on the Eve of the Rebellion*, New York, 1866. The other is a contemporary account of Washington at the time by Henry Adams, *The Great Secession Winter of 1860-61* (edited by George Hochfield, New York, 1958). The mechanics of Southern secession have recently been studied in two very learned Namier-like books, *The Secession Conventions of the South*, by Ralph A. Wooster, Princeton, 1962, and *Old Gentlemen's Convention: The Washington Peace Conference of 1861*, by Robert Gray Gunderson, Madison, 1961.

The other problem I have dealt with in my lecture was the political reasons for the failure of the Confederacy, which I believe to be as important as the military reasons. Professor David Donald has edited an admirable collection of essays under the title *Why the North Won the Civil War*, Baton Rouge, 1960. It is unfortunate that since Jefferson Davis's own apologia is very unsatisfactory he has been unlucky in his biographers. The latest biography shows that Davis was honest, industrious, and, in a narrow sense, competent (*Jefferson Davis: Confederate President*, Hudson Strode, New York, 1959). He was probably the best President the Southern political system could produce. But this is a condemnation of the system rather than a justification of Davis. A more kindly view of Southern political leadership is given in *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, Rembert W. Patrick, Baton Rouge, 1944; 2nd printing 1961. That the South was undone in great part by its own illusions and doctrines was the thesis of two very remarkable books by the late Professor Frank Lawrence Owsley (*State Rights in the Confederacy*, Chicago, 1925; *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 1st edition 1931, 2nd, revised by Harriet Chappell Owsley, Chicago, 1959).

A vivid insight into the difficulties of the Confederacy in general and the Confederate government in particular is given in the admirable *Diary from Dixie* by Mary Boykin Chesnut: this was first published in an expurgated edition in New York in 1905, and has been reissued in a very superior edition in 1961 in Boston, edited by Ben Ames Williams. Perhaps the two simplest ways of seeing the political inferiority of the Confederacy are to read the volumes of Jefferson Davis's works which cover his term as Confederate President and show the illusions not only

of himself but still more of his colleagues, and to contrast this with the inside view we have of the Lincoln administration given by the *Diary of Gideon Welles*. This diary, by Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy, was first published in a very unscholarly form in 1912. It has since been reissued in a very scholarly edition in 3 volumes edited by Howard K. Beale, New York, 1960.