

A CONFEDERATE CATECHISM

by Lyon Gardiner Tyler

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Preface

The court of history admits only the same evidence as the courts of law. What a friend says in praise, or an enemy says in detraction has very little weight, unless supported by the record or other and disinterested evidence. The evidence freely admitted is the record and the confessions of the party under investigation and his friends, and the testimony of disinterested persons — all contemporary. It is on this kind of evidence that this Catechism is based. There has been no idle abuse or praise. The truth is everything.

A Confederate Catechism

1. What was the cause of secession in 1861?

It was the yoking together of two warring nations having different interests which were repeatedly brought to the breaking point by selfish and unconstitutional acts of the North. The breaking point was nearly reached in 1786, when the North tried to give away the Mississippi River to Spain; in 1790, when the North by Congressional act forced the South to pay the Revolutionary debts of the North; in 1801, when they tried to upset the presidential ticket and make Aaron Burr President; and in 1828 and 1832, when they imposed upon the South high protective tariffs for the benefit of Northern manufactures. The breaking point was finally reached in 1861, when after flagrant nullification of the Constitution by personal liberty laws and underground railroads, resulting in John Brown's assassinations, a Northern President was elected by strictly Northern votes upon a platform which announced the resolve never to submit to a decision of the highest court in the land. This decision (the Dred Scott Case, 1856), in permitting Southern men to go with their slaves into the Territories, gave no advantage to the South, as none of the territorial domain remaining was in any way fit for ag-

riculture, but the South regarded the opposition to it of the Lincoln party as a determination on the part of the North to govern the Union thereafter by virtue of its numerical majority, without any regard whatever to constitutional limitations.

The literature of those times shows that such mutual and mortal hatred existed as, in the language of Jefferson, to “render separation preferable to eternal discord.”

2. Was slavery the cause of secession or the war?

No. Slavery existed previous to the Constitution, and the Union was formed in spite of it. Both from the standpoint of the Constitution and sound statesmanship it was not slavery, but the vindictive, intemperate anti-slavery movement that was at the bottom of all the troubles. The North having formed a union with a lot of States inheriting slavery, common honesty dictated that it should respect the institutions of the South, or, in case of a change of conscience, should secede from the Union. But it did neither. Having possessed itself of the Federal Government, it set up abolition as its particular champion, made war upon the South, freed the Negroes without regard to time or consequences, and held the South as conquered territory.

3. Was the extension of slavery the purpose of secession?

No. When South Carolina seceded she had no certainty that any other Southern State would follow her example. By her act she absolutely shut herself out from the Territories and thereby limited rather than extended slavery. The same may be said of the other seceding States who joined her.

4. Was secession the cause of the war?

No. Secession is a mere civil process having no necessary connection with war. Norway seceded from Sweden, and there was no war. The attempted linking of slavery and secession with war is merely an effort to obscure the issue — “a red herring drawn across the trail.” Secession was based (1) upon the natural right of self-government, (2) upon the reservation to the States in the Constitution of all powers not expressly granted to the Federal Government. Secession was such a power, being expressly excepted in the ratifications of the Constitution by Virginia, Rhode Island, and New York. (3) Upon the right of the principal to recall the powers vested in the agent; and upon (4) the inherent nature of all partnerships, which carries with them the right of withdrawal. The States were partners in the Union, and no partnership is irrevocable. The “more perfect Union” spoken of in the Preamble to the Constitution was the expression merely of a hope and wish. No rights of sovereignty whatever could exist without the right of secession.

5. What then was the cause of the war?

The cause of the war was (1) the rejection of the right of peaceable secession of eleven sovereign States by Lincoln, and (2) the denial of self-government to 8,000,000 of people, occupying a territory half the size of Europe. Fitness is necessary for the assertion of the right and Lincoln himself said of these people that they possessed as much moral sense and as much devotion to law and order as “any other civilized and patriotic people.” Without consulting Congress, Lincoln sent great armies to the South, and it was the war of a president elected by a minority of the people of the North. In the World War,

Woodrow Wilson declared that, “No people must be forced under sovereignty under which it does not choose to live.” When in 1903 Panama seceded from Colombia, the United States sided with Panama against Colombia, thereby encouraging secession.

6. Did the South fight for slavery or the extension of slavery?

No; for had Lincoln not sent armies to the South, that country would have done no fighting at all.

7. Did the South fight for the overthrow of the United States Government?

No; the South fought to establish its own government. Secession did not destroy the Union, but merely reduced its territorial extent. The United States existed when there were only thirteen States, and it would have existed when there were twenty States left. The charge brought by Lincoln that the aim of the Southerners was to overthrow the Government was no more true than if King George III had said that the secession of the American colonies from Great Britain had in view the destruction of the British Government. The government of Great Britain was not destroyed by the success of the American States in 1783. Nor would the government of the United States have been destroyed if the Southern States had succeeded in repelling the attacks of the North in 1861-1865. Had the North refrained from conquest, its example would have been felt by Germany and there would have been no World War costing millions of lives. A group of Northern States in 1861-65 assumed the imperialistic attitude of Great Britain in 1776 and Germany in 1914, and substituted the armed fist for the American principle of self-gov-

ernment. Universal peace will never ensue till the principle of self-government, which requires no armies to maintain it, is recognized throughout the world.

8. What did the South fight for?

It fought to repel invasion and for self-government, just as the fathers of the American Revolution had done. Lincoln himself confessed at first that he had no constitutional right to make war against a State, so he resorted to the subterfuge of calling for troops to suppress “combinations” of persons in the Southern States “too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary” processes. It is impossible to understand how the Southern States could have proceeded in a more regular and formal manner than they did to show they acted as States and not as mere “combinations.” It shows the lack of principle that characterized Lincoln when later he referred to the Southern States as “insurrectionary States.” If the Federal Government had no power to make war upon a State, how could it be called insurrectionary?

9. Did the South in firing on Fort Sumter begin the war?

No. Various hostile acts had been committed before this took place. The first hostile act was committed by the Federal Government when Major Robert Anderson secretly removed his garrison at night from Fort Moultrie, a weak fort in Charleston harbor, to Fort Sumter, a very strong fort. Shortly after, the government, under James Buchanan, sent the *Star of the West* with troops and supplies to Fort Sumter, but she was driven off. If South Carolina had a right to secede, she had a right to all the public buildings upon her territory, saving her responsibil-

ity for the cost of construction, which she readily recognized. She took over Fort Moultrie and other buildings and she was joined by other Southern States. Nevertheless no one was hurt, there was no war, and Virginia interposed with her Peace Conference, originated and presided over by John Tyler.

After Lincoln came in, the peace apparently continued for four or five weeks, but secretly Lincoln took means to bring on war. Despite the assurances of Seward, the Secretary of State — assurances made with Lincoln's full knowledge¹ — that the status would not be disturbed at Fort Pickens, and in violation of a truce existing there between the Federals and Confederates, Lincoln sent secret orders for the landing of troops, but Adams, the Federal commander of the squadron before Fort Pickens, refused to land the troops, declaring that it would be a breach of faith to do so, and that it would bring on war. This was before Fort Sumter was fired on, and it was fired on only when an armed squadron, prepared also with great secrecy, was dispatched with troops to supply that fort also.

But firing upon Fort Sumter did not in any case necessarily mean war. No one was hurt by the firing, and Lincoln knew that all the Confederates wanted was a fort that commanded the Metropolitan city of South Carolina — a fort which had been erected for the defence of that city. He knew that they had no desire to engage in a war with the United States. Not every hostile act justifies war, and in the World War this country submitted to having its flag filled full of holes and scores of its citizens destroyed before it went to war. Lincoln, without any violation of

1. See J.C. Welling, *New York Nation*, Volume XXIX, page 383.

his views of government, had an obvious alternative in putting the question of war up to Congress, which could have been called in ten days. But he did not do it, and assumed the powers of Congress in making laws, besides enforcing them as an executive. By his mere authority he enormously increased the Federal army, marched it to the South, blockaded Southern ports, and declared Southern privateersmen pirates. Every clause of Jefferson's tremendous indictment against King George in 1776 was true of Lincoln in 1861-1865.

10. Why did Lincoln break the truce at Fort Pickens and precipitate the war by sending troops to Fort Sumter?

Lincoln did not think that war would result by sending troops to Fort Pickens, and it would give him the appearance of asserting the national authority. But he knew that hostilities would certainly ensue if he attempted to reinforce Fort Sumter. He was therefore at first in favor of withdrawing the troops from that fort, and allowed assurances to that effect to be given out by Seward, his Secretary of State. But the deciding factor with him was the tariff question. In three separate interviews, he asked what would become of his revenue if he allowed the government at Montgomery to go on with their ten percent tariff. He asked, "what would become of his tariff (about 90 per cent on the cost of goods) if he allowed those people at Montgomery to go on with their ten percent tariff."² Final action was taken when nine Governors of high tariff States waited upon Lincoln and offered him men and supplies.

2. See authorities cited in Lyon Gardiner Tyler, *John Tyler and Abraham Lincoln: Who Was the Dwarf?* (Richmond, Virginia: Richmond Press, Inc., 1929), page 4.

The protective tariff had almost driven the country to war in 1833; it is not surprising that it brought war in 1861. Indeed, this spirit of spoliation was so apparent from the beginning that, at the very first Congress, William Grayson, one of our two first Virginia Senators, predicted that the fate reserved to the South was to be “the milch-cow of the Union.” The *New York Times*, after having on March 21, 1861 declared for separation, took the ground nine days later that the material interests of the North would not allow of an independent South!

11. Did Lincoln carry on the war for the purpose of freeing the slaves?

No; he frequently denied that that was his purpose in waging war. He claimed that he fought the South in order to preserve the Union. Before the war Lincoln declared himself in favor of the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act, and he once figured as an attorney to drag back a runaway Negro into slavery. When he became President he professed himself in his Inaugural willing to support an amendment guaranteeing slavery in the States where it existed. Wendell Phillips, the Abolitionist, called him a “slave hound.” Of course Lincoln’s proposed amendment, if it had any chance at all with the States, did not meet the question at issue. No one except the Abolitionists disputed the right of the Southern people to hold slaves in the States where it existed. And an amendment would not have been regarded by the Abolitionists, who spit upon the Constitution itself. The immediate question at issue was submission to the decision of the Supreme Court in relation to the Territories. The pecuniary value of the slaves cut no figure at all, and Lincoln’s proposed amendment was an insult to the South.

12. Did Lincoln, by his conquest of the South, save the Union?

No. The old Union was a union of consent, the present Union is one of force. For many years after the war the South was held as a subject province, and any privileges it now enjoys are mere concessions from its conquerors, not rights inherited from the Constitution. The North after the war had in domestic Negro rule a whip which England never had over Ireland. To escape from it, the South became grateful for any kind of government. The present Union is a great Northern nation based on force and controlled by Northern majorities, to which the South, as a conquered province, has had to conform all its policies and ideals. The Federal authority is only Northern authority. Today the Executive, the Cabinet, the Supreme Court, the Ministers at foreign courts are all Northern men. The South has as little share in the government, and as little chance of furnishing a President, as Norway or Switzerland.

13. Could Lincoln have "saved" the Union by some other method than war?

Yes. If he had given his influence to the resolutions offered in the Senate by John J. Crittenden, the difficulties in 1861 would have been peaceably settled. These resolutions extended the line of the Missouri Compromise through the Territories, but gave nothing to the South, save the abstract right to carry slaves to New Mexico. But most of New Mexico was too barren for agriculture, and not ten slaves had been carried there in ten years. The resolutions received the approval of the Southern Senators and, had they been submitted to the people, would have received their approval both North and South. Slavery in

a short time would have met a peaceful and natural death with the development of machinery consequent upon Cyrus H. McCormick's great invention of the reaper, The question in 1861 with the South as to the Territories was one of wounded pride rather than any material advantage. It was the intemperate, arrogant, and self-righteous attitude of Lincoln and his party that made any peaceable constructive solution of the Territorial question impossible. In rejecting the Crittenden resolutions, Lincoln, a minority president, and the Republicans, a minority party, placed themselves on record as virtually preferring the slaughter of 400,000 men of the flower of the land and the sacrifice of billions of dollars of property to a compromise involving a mere abstraction. This abstraction did not even contemplate a real object like New Mexico, for Lincoln in a private letter admitted that there was no danger there. Lincoln stirred up a ghost and professed to find in the annexation of Cuba a pretext for imperiling the Union. It is needless to say that no such ghost could ever have materialized in the presence of Northern majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.³

14. Does any present or future prosperity of the South justify the War of 1861-1865?

No; no present or future prosperity can make a past wrong right, for the end can never justify the means. The war was a colossal crime, and the most astounding case of self-stultification on the part of any government recorded in history. The war itself was conducted on the

3. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: The Century Company), Volume I, pages 664, 669.

most barbarous principles and involved the wholesale destruction of property and human lives. That there must be no humanity in war was, according to Charles Francis Adams, “the accepted policy of Lincoln’s government during the last stages of the War.”⁴

15. Had the South gained its independence, would it have proved a failure?

No. General Grant has said in his *Memoirs* that it would have established “a real and respected nation.” The States of the South would have been bound together by fear of the great Northern Republic and by a similarity of economic conditions. They would have had laws suited to their own circumstances, and developed accordingly. They would not have lived under Northern laws and had to conform their policy to them, as they have been compelled to do. A low tariff would have attracted the trade of the world to the South, and its cities would have become great and important centers of commerce. A fear of this prosperity induced Lincoln to make war upon the South. The Southern Confederacy, instead of being a failure, would have been a great outstanding figure in the affairs of the world. The statement sometimes made that the Confederacy “died of too much States Rights,” as instanced the opposition to President Davis in Georgia and North Carolina, fails to notice that Lincoln’s imperialism did not prevent far more serious opposition to Lincoln in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. And yet at the time the South was under much greater pressure than the North.

4. Charles Francis Adams, *Studies Military and Diplomatic: 1775-1865* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), page 266.

16. Were the Southerners “rebels” in seceding from the Federal Union?

The term “rebel” had no application to the Southern people, however much it applied to the American colonists. These last called themselves “Patriots,” not rebels. Both Southerners in 1861 and Americans in 1776 acted under the authority of their State governments. But while the colonies were mere departments of the British Union, the American States were creators of the Federal Union. The Federal Government was the agent of the States for the purposes expressed in the Constitution, and it is absurd to say that the principal can rebel against the agent. President Jackson threatened war with South Carolina in 1833, but admitted that in such an event South Carolinians taken prisoners would not be “rebels” but prisoners of war. The Freesoilers in Kansas and John Brown at Harper’s Ferry were undoubtedly “rebels,” for they acted without any lawful authority whatever in using force against the Federal Government, and Lincoln and the Republican party, in approving a platform which sympathized with the Freesoilers and bitterly denounced the Federal Government, were rebels and traitors at heart.

17. Did the South, as alleged by Lincoln in his messages and in his Gettysburg speech, fight to destroy popular government throughout the world?

No; the charge was absurd. Had the South succeeded, the United States would still have enjoyed all its liberties, and so would Great Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, and all other peoples. The danger to popular government came from Lincoln himself. In conducting the war Lincoln talked about “democracy” and “the plain people,” but adopted the rules of despotism and