

## "The Character of the War,"

Philadelphia (PA) *North American and United States Gazette*, October 3, 1862

<https://stampedes.dickinson.edu/document/philadelphia-pa-north-american-and-united-states-gazette-character-war-october-3-1862>

### THE CHARACTER OF THE WAR.

Tell us no more that America is without a history on which to rear a national literature or art. In less than two years the nation has made for itself a history, as full of interest, glory and romance as any on record. Now it seems to be reaching a climax, in the proclamation of freedom to the slave. What vista is that mighty deed destined to open before us? Many argue that the proclamation will be a nullity. But with or without the proclamation, the work of exterminating slavery is steadily progressing. Here, for instance, is an extract from the Richmond, Va., Dispatch of September 27:

"The Federal invasion, especially in its relations to negroes, has thus far been a John Brown raid on a grand scale. Wherever the Federal armies have advanced the negroes have been swept off as clean as the eastern locusts sweep a field of grain. Not one green or black thing is left in the line of the Yankee march, nor in the whole country for many miles around. The Piedmont, the upper valley, the peninsula, the country watered by the Rappahannock and the Potomac, have been stripped of their negro population. This war has assumed the character of a grand negro hunting expedition. Of victories the Yankees have gained few—negroes many. What becomes of the game it is impossible to say, nor is that a matter of much consequence. The loss, however, is so valuable an element of strength, and prosperity is a matter of such moment that the Legislature of the State ought at once to take measures for the prevention of similar calamities in the future. This can only be done by a law providing for the removal of negroes from all the threatened districts to the interior. It will not do to leave this to the discretion or judgment of the master. In some cases they are too indolent to take the proper precautions for the security of their property; in others they are deluded by implicit confidence in the fidelity of their servants, and, notwithstanding the experience which the war has furnished that the neighborhood of a Yankee army creates as complete a stampede among negroes as the approach of a locomotive among cattle, there are thousands of masters who continue to believe that their servants will not run under similar temptations, and foolishly to expose them to temptation. It is clear, therefore, that there is no security for the negro property of the State, unless the Legislature makes the removal of the negroes from districts exposed to invasion compulsory. We trust the necessary action will be taken promptly, for the State has already suffered enormous losses from this cause, which, by precautionary legislation, might all have been prevented.

This was before the issue of the proclamation, and while yet no effort at general emancipation had been recognized by our generals in active service or carried into effect by our armies. Wherever the latter appeared, slavery seemed to disappear as if by magic. In Missouri this was well known to be the case along the Kansas border, but in the rest of that State it was restrained by the fact that the Missouri slaveholders were wise and patriotic enough to save their property by being loyal. In Kentucky and Western Virginia the case has been the same, and there, thus far, slavery survives the ravages of war, showing conclusively that the war would not have touched the property of slaveholders, even in the cotton States, had they been loyal. But Eastern Virginia, South Carolina, Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi have suffered in their slave interests by the march of our armies in such a way as they are not likely soon to forego.

In this view of the case, it is the idlest of all notions to fancy that this proclamation will be worthless. Let the above extract from the Richmond Dispatch show the manner in which it will operate. We need not apprehend servile insurrections, because the slaves will be kept down by the immense military forces of the south stretching along the whole frontier. But wherever our armies are, there slavery will end, as the Dispatch says. Notwithstanding the loyalty of the Missouri slaveholders it has been estimated that fully one half of the slaves in that State have either run away or been liberated by the war.

The tidewater region of Virginia, before the breaking out of hostilities, was the densest slave district in the Union. It is now about half stripped of its slaves, for the rebels having carried off the white men as soldiers or teamsters, and the lands having been in many cases utterly desolated by the military operations, families have fled, and the slaves left without owners have sought refuge within our lines or gone north. So general has been this movement, that were the war now to close by a restoration of slavery to its former status, the pursuit of fugitive negroes would make the whole north one vast hunting ground, with owners, spies, informers, speculators and bogus claimants tracking the poor creatures everywhere.

Let conservatives, as they call themselves, imagine, if it suits them, that the old regime will come back. They will find themselves in error. The war cannot undo what it has done, and peace would be powerless to achieve any such result. What has been effected is the consequence of no

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fanaticism, but of the inevitable and irresistible tendency of events. When the United States army landed at Port Royal, and every planter fled to the interior, leaving his slaves without even the means of subsistence, could we or should we have still held those poor negroes for their rebel masters? Would any requirement of reason or justice compel us to such an act? This case fairly illustrates the condition of things with regard to slavery wherever our armies march in the south. The white population is hostile; the slaves are our friends. Shall we continue these friends in bondage out of regard for these enemies?

Western Virginia has thus far escaped desolation by being loyal, but the rebels at Richmond are making great preparations for a formidable invasion of it, which if undertaken will involve such a war as will leave very little slavery remaining there. Ruin follows the tread of armies, and slaves cannot be held by their owners where lands, horses, goods, crops, live stock, all are swept by the besom of desolation. The valley of Virginia, which, under the lead of politicians, had become one of the worst nests both of rebellion and slavery, is reaping the retribution in this war it has deserved. As the Dispatch truly observes, crops and negroes alike disappear *before the march of our armies, for our men have suffered too much at the hands of the people in the valley to feel much commiseration for them*. Kentucky, saved in her slave interests by our armies, has been ruined by rebel guerrillas and armies, and slavery is disappearing there, to

While slavery is thus approaching its doom, the war is horribly slaughtering the able-bodied white males of the south. Rebel armies have fought battle after battle, losing countless thousands of brave soldiers, and still they go on forcing the conscription and seeing men grow scarcer, until the Richmond Enquirer, in a tone of despair, say

"The only way that the war can end is by the exhaustion of the north or the extermination of the south. The north has determined to subjugate or annihilate us. It gives us only this alternative: 'The Union or death.' That, in sum and substance, is all that its most conservative politicians propose. It is in vain that some of them deny the cruel determination that we have indicated. Is there one of them, conservative Republican or conservative Democrat, who will proclaim that he prefers the sacrifice of 'the Union' to the extermination of the south? The Union is the god of all parties alike, except the ultra-abolitionists, who, strange to say, are the only men in the

north willing to 'let it slide.' The war has been carried on from the beginning by the conservative classes, and scarcely an abolitionist is to be found in its armies."

Such a plaint as this could only have been wrung from men who see actually in progress the very extermination here spoken of. Those whites who can escape to the north or to Europe go only too gladly. Those who are forced into the army are sacrificed recklessly. Every march and every fight decimates them. Thus the south is in rapid process of exhaustion. All our soldiers and citizens who have visited any part of the south during the war bear witness to this fact. The able-bodied have been carried off everywhere. Mobile has sent more men into the field than her whole voting population. We have repeatedly called attention to the enormous levies of rebel troops in States like Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, exceeding in numbers even the wildest conceptions of such things. And of these immense masses of men two-thirds have perished by disease or wounds, or are maimed for life. Annihilation is not so much a dream as it might appear.

As this war proceeds, and the sufferings of the south increase, the tone of depreciation of the great republic dies away at Richmond. We have mentioned the phrase of the Richmond Enquirer, which speaks of the north as a "giant in power." The Dispatch, too, speaks of us as "a powerful nation," and in the rebel Congress the report made by Mr. Barksdale, from the Committee on Foreign Relations, said:

"There is no doubt that our whole confederacy ardently desires peace. We never wanted war. We did not make the war. We stood, and are standing, on our defence against a wicked aggression. We are fighting for peace; of course we wish for it. For ourselves, too, we look with much interest, not only for peace, but for such a division of the present northern republic as shall secure peace in the future. This division will surely come, and the earlier the better. Its territory presents a vast disproportion between its length and breadth. Its extremities front on two great oceans that look to different parts of the world; and they are separated from each by fifty-eight degrees of longitude, and an air-line of three thousand miles. This vast belt of territory is almost cut in two between Lake Erie and the Ohio, the connecting neck being only about one hundred miles wide. It is nearly sundered again by the vast desert plains that lie midway between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains. It is again intersected by the great Rocky Mountain range, which allows but a few doors of

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communication between its eastern and western bases."

Here we have a glimpse of the republic as it appears to the rebels. They abandon to us the whole vast territorial empire, the very bone of contention out of which grew this war. They give up Missouri. They restrict themselves within the limits where the rebellion rages, and view all the rest as ours. If the war had settled nothing else, surely this concession is worth all the blood and treasure it has cost. The south wants peace. No doubt of it. Her own resources she sees fast wearing out, while ours are inexhaustible. Nor are the rebels alone in their astonishment at the magnitude of this war. The *London Times* says:

"The battle of Marengo, at the point when it was considered a defeat by Napoleon, was turned into a

victory by the cavalry charge of Kellerman. Frederick the Great rode from the field of Mollwitz in dismay at the success of the Austrians, to be recalled next morning by the intelligence that his infantry had retrieved the fight. But these battles of a former time were affairs measured by hours. The turns of success were rapid, and the decisive moment came before the commanders had time to sit down and write long accounts of the operations. Some of Napoleon's brief three line bulletins were certainly reversed by results, but the more elaborate reports were forced into truth as to the issue. This is not the case with 'a week of battles' and the successive days of fighting with which the American war is making us familiar. Its conflicts cover such a surface of ground, and bring such immense numbers of men into collision, that many of the engagements of the era of Napoleon are dwarfed into skirmishes by the comparison. If an American general pauses to claim a victory on paper, he may be justified in doing so at the moment; but the battle may be only one of a series; the next day fortune may cancel her favor by a defeat, and the triumphant dispatch becomes, virtually, a falsehood."

The last sentence in this extract applies correctly enough to the battles of Pea Ridge, Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Fair Oaks, Bull Run No. 2, and Hampton Roads, in all of which the results of the first day were completely reversed by those of the second. The preceding sentence in the extract has reference to such a week of battles as those before Richmond under McClellan; those from the Rapidan to Washington under Pope; those in the Shenandoah valley under Jackson, against Banks, Fremont and Shields, in all of which cases the fighting and marching were so continuous and terrible as to excite the wonder of Europeans. Of this character also was the recent series of battles in Maryland under McClellan, against Lee and Jackson, in which we gained two victories, Middletown and Antietam, and sustained two reverses, Harper's Ferry and Sheppards-town.

This constitutes a prominent feature in the present war. Exertions like these, however, leave both armies exhausted at the close, and a pause must then take place to rest and recuperate. After the terrible battles in front of Richmond neither side was in a condition for action, and hence the delay which took place. When Pope closed his unsuccessful campaign an entire rearrangement of the army had to be made, and since the escape of Lee's army back into Virginia, both sides are compelled to rest and reorganize. But these rests afford time for the construction of new plans, which always involve a fresh series of battles.

In reading the European comments on our war, we recall sometimes the old slang which used to be so common whenever our countrymen were spoken of, that they had degenerated from the original races in the old world, and were physically an inferior people. This war will settle all that. Let the struggle go on, therefore. This winter we shall bear down upon the rebel States with a million of armed men. In Halleck we trust that we have found a new Carnot worthy to conduct the operations of such an army in such a war

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